

My Notes....

NATIONAL

INDIA RE-ELECTED TO IMO COUNCIL

India has been re-elected to the Council of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) under a category that represents nations with the largest interests in international sea borne trade. India was re-elected to the council under Category B at an assembly of the organisation at its headquarters in London. Indian High Commissioner to the UK Y.K. Sinha represented India at the assembly where India secured the second-highest number of votes (144) from member countries, just after Germany's 146 and ahead of Australia's 143.

What

1. The other countries to make the cut included France (140), Canada (138), Spain (137), Brazil (131), Sweden (129), the Netherlands (124) and the UAE (115).
2. India has been one of the earliest members of the IMO, having ratified its convention and joined it as a member-state in the year 1959.
3. India has been elected to the Council of the IMO ever since it started functioning, except for a two-year hiatus during 1983-1984.
4. The IMO Council plays a crucial role in deciding various important matters within the mandate of the IMO, in relation to the global shipping industry and its work strategy and budget.

International Maritime Organization

Assembly

- Consists of all member states
- Meets once every two years in regular sessions
- Responsible for approving the work programmes
- Votes the budget of IMO
- Determine the financial arrangements of IMO
- Elects the Council of IMO

KUMBH MELA AS INDIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

India's Kumbh Mela has been recognised by UNESCO as an "intangible cultural heritage of humanity", a tweet posted today by the international organisation said. Kumbh Mela just inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the UN body inscribed Kumbh Mela on the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" at its 12th session in Jeju, South Korea. The meeting, which opened on December 4, will end on December 9.

What

1. Kumbh Mela, considered the world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims, joins new elements from Botswana, Colombia, Venezuela, Mongolia, Morocco, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates on the list.
2. Kumbh Mela is considered to be the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, attended by millions irrespective of caste, creed or gender.
3. The inscription of elements on the list helps countries which are a part of UNESCO's convention for safeguarding cultural heritage to mobilise international cooperation and assistance for ensuring that communities continue to practise and transmit such aspects of their heritage.

4. **The Kumbh Mela, held in Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik**, represents a syncretic set of rituals related to worship and cleansing in holy rivers.
5. The **inscription of Kumbh Mela was recommended by the expert body** which examines in detail nominations submitted by Member States.
6. The Committee also took note of the fact that knowledge and skills related to Kumbh Mela are transmitted through the Guru-Shishya parampara (teacher-student relationship) by way of saints and sadhus teaching their disciples about traditional rituals and chants.

FIRST SCORPENE-CLASS SUBMARINES INDUCTED

Prime Minister has commissioned **Scorpene-class submarine INS Kalvari** into the Indian Navy in Mumbai, Maharashtra. **It is first of the six Scorpene-class submarines built under the strategic Project 75 built by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) with assistance and technology transfer from France's DCNS. INS Kalvari will be the first conventional submarine to be inducted into India Navy after more than 17 years. INS Sindhushastra was last inducted conventional diesel-electric submarine in July 2000 which was procured from Russia.**

What

1. **INS Kalvari is most modern non-nuclear stealth submarine** in India Navy.
2. 'Kalvari' is Malayalam word that **means deep-sea tiger shark**.

3. It reflects its agility, strength and predatory prowess.

4. **Its stealth capability is enhanced through mounting of equipment inside pressure hull on shock absorbing cradles.**

5. **Submarine Tactical Integrated Combat System (SUBTICS) suite** is heart of INS

Kalvari's weapons system which processes information from sonars on-board submarine in detecting targets which can then be engaged with torpedoes or missiles.

6. **It is designed to operate in all theatres**, including the tropics and can undertake multifarious types of missions typically undertaken by any modern submarine such as anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, intelligence gathering, area surveillance, mine laying etc.

In-depth look

The Navy is set to induct *INS Kalvari*, its first modern conventional submarine into the fleet on Thursday



What is a Scorpene?

A conventional powered submarine weighing 1,500 tonnes that can go up to depths of 300m. Built by the Naval Group, formerly DCNS, of France

The India connection

In October 2005, India signed a \$3.75 billion deal for six such submarines to be built by the Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai with transfer of technology. Additional deals were signed with Thales and MBDA for systems and weapons

What is the status of the deal?

After repeated delays over four years, the first submarine began sea trials in May 2016 and is set to be commissioned on Thursday. The second Scorpene Khanderi is undergoing sea trials and is expected to be commissioned by the year-end. All six submarines are expected to be inducted by the end of 2020

The Navy now possesses 13 conventional submarines and one nuclear attack submarine *INS Chakra* on lease from Russia

Power point

- Kalvari weighs about 1,600 tonnes

- Carries heavyweight wire guided surface and underwater target torpedoes

- For self-defence, it has mobile anti-torpedo decoys

- Has two 1,250 kW MAN diesel engines for rapid battery charging

- Kalvari borrows its name from India's first submarine *INS Kalvari*, which was commissioned on Dec. 8, 1967 and served till May 31, 1996

SETTING UP OF NNM APPROVED

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has **approved setting up of National Nutrition Mission (NNM)** with a three year budget of Rs.9046.17 crore commencing from 2017-18. **The NNM, as an apex body**, will monitor, supervise, fix targets and guide the nutrition related interventions across the Ministries.

The proposal consists of

1. **Mapping of various Schemes** contributing towards addressing malnutrition
2. Introducing a very robust convergence mechanism

3. ICT based Real Time Monitoring system
4. Incentivizing States/UTs for meeting the targets
5. Incentivizing Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) for using IT based tools
6. Eliminating registers used by AWWs
7. Introducing measurement of height of children at the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)
8. Social Audits
9. Setting-up Nutrition Resource Centres, involving masses through Jan Andolan for their participation on nutrition through various activities, among others.

Major impact

1. The programme through **the targets will strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies.**
2. It will **create synergy, ensure better monitoring, issue alerts for timely action,** and encourage States/UTs to perform, guide and supervise the line Ministries and States/UTs to achieve the targeted goals.

Benefits & Coverage

1. **More than 10 crore people will be benefitted by this programme.** All the States and districts will be covered in a phased manner i.e. 315 districts in 2017-18, 235 districts in 2018-19 and remaining districts in 2019-20.

Financial Outlay

1. An amount of Rs. 9046.17 crore will be expended for three years commencing from 2017-18.
2. This will be **funded by Government Budgetary Support (50%) and 50% by IBRD or other MDB.**
3. Government budgetary support would be 60:40 between Centre and States/UTs, 90:10 for NER and Himalayan States and 100% for UTs without legislature. Total Government of India share over a period of three years would be Rs. 2849.54 crore.

Implementation strategy and targets

1. Implementation strategy would be **based on intense monitoring and Convergence Action Plan right upto the grass root level.**
2. NNM will be rolled out in three phases from 2017-18 to 2019-20. NNM targets to **reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia** (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
3. Although the target to reduce Stunting is atleast 2% p.a., Mission would strive to achieve reduction in Stunting from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022 (Mission 25 by 2022).

Background

1. There are a number of schemes **directly/indirectly affecting the nutritional status of children (0-6 year's age) and pregnant women and lactating mothers.**
2. In spite of these, level of malnutrition and related problems in the country is high.
3. There is no dearth of schemes but lack of creating synergy and linking the schemes with each other to achieve common goal.
4. NNM through robust convergence mechanism and other components would strive to create the synergy.

NCM FORMS COMMITTEE

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has formed a **three-member committee to look into whether Hindus should get minority status in eight states** where they are not the dominant religious group. Led by NCM vice-chairman George Kurien, the team will speak extensively to lawyers and stakeholders and come back with a report in three months. NCM members discussed a petition of BJP activist **Aswini Upadhyay seeking minority status for Hindus in eight states: J&K, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Punjab.**

What

1. **Upadhyay had originally filed a petition in the Supreme Court.** The court declined to adjudicate, saying it is not something that the court can decide on. Upadhyay then approached the Commission with his plea.
2. NCM chairman Ghayorul Hasan Rizvi told: "We have formed an internal sub-committee of three members to look into all aspects."
3. **The committee will work for three months, talk to advocates** — two of members in the committee are lawyers themselves. Once they have submitted the report, the Commission will take a call and make a recommendation to the government. The committee will be assisted by NCM additional secretary Ajay Kumar.
4. **According to 2011 Census, Hindus are a minority in eight states....** But their minority rights are being siphoned off illegally and arbitrarily to the majority population because neither central nor state governments have notified **Hindus as a 'minority' under Section 2(c) of National Commission for Minority Act.**
5. Therefore, Hindus are being deprived of their basic rights, **guaranteed under Articles 25 to 30.**"

INDIA IS A MEMBER WA

India got a berth at the Wassenaar Arrangement, which controls the global commerce of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies. The **23rd annual plenary of the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA)** concluded in Vienna on 7 December 2017 after the members agreed to admit India as its 42nd member.

What

1. **Confirming that the existing membership criteria continue to apply**, participating states reviewed the progress of a number of current membership applications and agreed at the plenary to admit India, the Arrangement's **42nd participating state as soon as the necessary procedural arrangements** for joining are completed.
2. **As president of the WA this year and co-rapporteur of India's candidacy**, France warmly congratulates India for joining the Arrangement, after admission into **(Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR))** of the growing role India plays in today's world.
3. The WA is the second multilateral export control regime that opened up its door for India.
4. The **MTCR admitted India as a member in June 2016.** The MTCR's primary objective is to restrict the proliferation of missiles, complete rocket systems, unmanned air vehicles

Flashback

1. **The Wassenaar Arrangement** on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, commonly known as the **Wassenaar Arrangement is a multilateral export control regime (MECR).**
2. It is elite club of countries subscribing arms controls similar to NSG and MTCR.
3. **It was established in 1996** to contribute to regional and international security and stability by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, thus preventing destabilizing accumulations.
4. **It is headquartered in Vienna, Austria.** It has 42 participating states including India. All permanent members of UN Security Council except China are its members.
5. Every six months member countries of WA exchange information on deliveries of conventional arms to non-WA members that fall under eight broad weapons categories. These categories include battle tanks, military helicopters, armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs), military aircraft, large-caliber artillery, warships, missiles or missile systems, and small arms and light weapons.

- and related technology for systems capable of carrying a 500 kg payload for at least 300 km, as well as systems intended for the delivery of weapons of mass destruction.
5. India is also keen to **get the membership of Australian Group**, which governs the international trade of materials used to make chemical and biological weapons.
 6. China, however, has been persistently blocking India's move to enter the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which controls the international trade of atomic technologies and materials.
 7. Beijing has been maintaining that **the NSG should first "explore" through "an open and transparent"** process and reach agreement on a "non-discriminatory formula" to deal with the issue of granting membership to countries which have not signed the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**.
 8. Once the non-discriminatory formula would be adopted by the NSG, the cartel should move to the second stage to take up the "country-specific membership issues", argued China.
 9. The **NSG controls global nuclear commerce**. The guidelines of the organisation prohibit its members to enter into nuclear deals with countries that have not signed the NPT.
 10. India and Pakistan are not signatories to NPT.

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE FOR OPERATIONAL OCEANOGRAPHY

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the **establishment of International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography**, as a **Category-2 Centre (C2C) of UNESCO**, in Hyderabad. The purpose of this Agreement is to **establish a training centre towards development of capacity** for the countries on the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), African countries bordering the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, small island countries **under the framework of UNESCO**. The operational oceanography is an activity of conducting systematic oceanographic studies towards providing information services to various sectors viz. fisherman, disaster management, shipping, ports, coastal states, navy, coast guard, environment, offshore industries for conducting their day-to-day operations.

What

1. **The Centre will provide assistance in areas of capacity building** and training, knowledge sharing and exchange of information, and hence could represent a valuable resource for UNESCO and its **Intergovernmental Oceanography Commission (IOC)** by enhancing the impact and visibility of UNESCO's action.
2. The establishment of **UNESCO Category-2 Centre will provide an opportunity for India to emerge as a leading country in the Indian Ocean**.
3. This will also help India to forge cooperation and improve engagement among the countries of the Indian Ocean, including South Asian and African states bordering the Indian Ocean.
4. The establishment of the centre would respond to the worldwide increasing need to build technical and management capacity to address marine and coastal sustainability issues and prepare the region for and react efficiently to marine natural hazards.
5. **The Centre could contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal-14 (SDG 14)** related to building marine scientific research capacity in geographical area of the Centre responsibility which will also fulfill the commitments to support Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries.
6. **This C2C is intended to improve skill of students and other participants which will increase the employment opportunities within and outside India**.
7. The establishment of C2C is also expected to increase ancillary development leading to employment generation in India.

8. The centre is currently operational with the state-of-the-art facilities available at **Indian Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad**.
9. So far, over 681 scientists including 576 from India and 105 from 34 other countries have been trained at this centre in various aspects of operational oceanography.

TRIPLE TALAQ BILL CLEARED

The Union Cabinet on 15 December 2017 **cleared the triple talaq Bill** that makes **giving instant talaq a punishable offence**. The bill, which **gives women the right to seek maintenance in case of triple talaq**, is likely to be tabled in Parliament during the Winter Session that began.

What

1. **The draft law provides for three years in prison and a fine for a Muslim man wanting to divorce his wife by uttering “talaq” three times in one go.**
2. As per the draft, tripe talaq or talaq-e-biddat will be a **“cognisable and non-bailable”** offence punishable with three years imprisonment and the wife will be entitled to maintenance and the custody of children if they are minor.
3. **The Supreme Court had on August 22 struck down triple talaq**, calling the practice unconstitutional and in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution, which provides for equality before the law.
4. **The proposed law would only be applicable on instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat** and it would give power to the victim to approach a magistrate seeking “subsistence allowance” for herself and minor children.
5. The woman can also seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take a final call on the issue.
6. Under the draft law, triple talaq in any form — **spoken, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp** — would be bad or illegal and void.
7. The provision of subsistence allowance and custody has been made to ensure that in case the husband asks the wife to leave the house she should have legal protection.

ISA TO BECOME AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

In terms of its Framework Agreement, **with ratification by Guinea as the 15th country on 6th November 2017**, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) **will become a treaty-based international intergovernmental organization** on 6th December 2017. **The ISA, headquartered in India**, has its Secretariat located in the campus of National Institute of Solar Energy, Gwalpahari, Gurgaon, Haryana. **The ISA is an Indian initiative**, jointly launched by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi and the President of France on **30th November 2015 in Paris**, on the **sidelines of COP-21, the UN Climate Conference**. It aims at addressing obstacles to deployment at scale of solar energy through better harmonization and aggregation of demand from solar rich countries lying fully or partially between the Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn. As of date, **46 countries have signed and 19 countries have ratified the Framework Agreement of ISA**.

What

1. **Three programmes - Scaling Solar Applications for Agriculture Use, Affordable Finance at Scale, and Scaling Solar Mini-grids - have been launched.**
2. These programmes will help in achieving the overall goal of increasing solar energy deployment in the ISA member countries for achieving universal energy access and speeding up economic development.
3. In addition to the existing 3 programmes, ISA has initiated plans to launch two more programmes: Scaling Solar Rooftops and Scaling Solar E-mobility and Storage.

4. Further, **ISA has also been developing a Common Risk Mitigating Mechanism (CRMM)** for de-risking and reducing the financial cost of solar projects in the ISA member countries.
5. The instrument will help diversify and pool risks on mutual public resources and unlock significant investments. An international expert group has been working on the blue print of the mechanism and it will be rolled out by December 2018.
6. Another major initiative is establishment of Digital Infopedia which will serve as a platform to enable policy makers, Ministers and corporate leaders from ISA countries to interact, connect, communicate and collaborate with one another.
7. The interactive platform was operationalized on 18th May 2017. Digital Infopedia will have three heads: (a) Member countries counter for investment opportunities; (b) at least 1000 best practices on solar energy (audio/visual), and (c) Member countries of ISA and the ISA Secretariat audio and visual interaction.
8. **The Paris Declaration establishing ISA states that the countries share the collective ambition to undertake innovative** and concerted efforts for reducing the cost of finance and cost of technology for immediate deployment solar generation assets. This will help pave the way for future solar generation, storage and good technologies for each prospective member countries' individual needs, by effectively mobilizing more than US\$1000 billion in investments that will be required by 2030.
9. India has offered to meet ISA Secretariat expenses for initial five years. In addition, the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India has set aside US\$2 billion for solar projects in Africa out of Government of India's US\$10 billion concessional Line of Credit (LOC) for Africa. Government of France has also earmarked Euro 300 million soft loan for solar related projects in ISA member countries.

Signatory Countries (46)

Australia, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chile, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guiana, Fiji, France, Gabonese Republic, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, India, Kiribati, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Nauru, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Tonga, Togolese Republic, Tuvalu, UAE, Vanuatu, and Venezuela

Ratifying Countries (19)

India, France, Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Fiji, Guinea, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Nauru, Niger, Peru, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tuvalu

ISA Interim Secretariat has been operational as a de-facto organization since 25th January, 2016.

CATEGORY 8 INTO WASSENAAR ARRANGEMENT

If India got a seat at the Wassenaar Arrangement, **it was largely due to the "Category 8" -the latest inclusion in its export control list.** New Delhi substantially modified its **export control mechanism to meet the requirement of the Wassenaar Arrangement**, which regulates international transfer of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies. What however finally opened up the WA's door for India is the **"Category 8"** - a new inclusion in the roll of Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies, a.k.a. the **SCOMET list**.

What

1. **Since the goods and technologies included in the SCOMET list** can be used both for civil and military purposes, the government exercises strict control over their export from India. **The SCOMET goods and technologies can be exported only under licenses issued by the government.**
2. **India's SCOMET list included eight categories of goods and technologies** from Category 0 to Category 7 "till early this year.

3. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) on April 24 added the new **"Category 8" to the SCOMET list**, including in it certain special materials and related equipment, material processing, electronics, computers, telecommunications, information security, sensors and lasers, navigation and avionics, marine, aerospace and propulsion.
4. The Wassenaar Arrangement maintains two "Control Lists" - **one comprising dual-use goods and technologies and the other comprising certain munitions**.
5. The cartel's "participating governments" exercise stringent control on export of the items and technologies included in the two lists in order to prevent "unauthorised transfers or re-transfers".
6. **The items included in the new Category 8 of India's SCOMET roll** are the ones that the Wassenaar Arrangement also put on its control list of dual use goods and technologies.
7. The DGFT added the new **"Category 8" to the SCOMET list to "harmonise"** India's Export Control list with that of the Wassenaar Arrangement and thus to meet the membership criteria of the cartel.
8. **"Category 6" of the SCOMET list was kept "reserved"** till earlier this year. It was also populated with the same items the Wassenaar Arrangement put on its munitions list.
9. The items listed under **Category 0 of the SCOMET roll included "nuclear materials, nuclear-related other materials, equipment and technology"**.
10. **Category 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 includes toxin chemical agents** and other chemicals; micro-organisms and toxins; certain materials, materials-processing equipment and related technologies; nuclear-related other equipment, assemblies and components, test and production equipment and related technology that are not controlled under Category 0 and aerospace systems, equipment including production and test equipment, related technology and specially designed components and accessories respectively.
11. It was however the inclusion of the **"Category 8" in its SCOMET list** that made the **41 participating governments of the Wassenaar Arrangement** agree to admit India as the 42nd member in the annual plenary of the cartel in Vienna.

SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF AKASH MISSILE

The Surface to Air Missile AKASH with indigenous radio frequency seeker against target Banshee has been successfully launched from the Launch Complex-III at ITR Chandipur. The **Radars, telemetry and electro-optical systems** along the coast have tracked and monitored all the health parameters of the missile.

What

1. **SA to RM congratulated all the DRDO scientists** and Armed Forces for this success.
2. This missile is being inducted into Army as **Short Range Surface to Air Missile (SRSAM)**.
3. This is the first Surface to Air Missile with indigenous seeker that has been test fired.
4. With this success, India has achieved the capability of making any type of Surface to Air Missile.

FIRST STATE TO OFFER E-MAIL IDS IN HINDI

Rajasthan has become the first state in India to launch free email addresses in Hindi for its residents. The facility will be available at (in Devanagari script). The initiative aims **to ensure maximum participation of people towards e-governance** and ensure that maximum government facilities are available in vernacular language.

What

1. The project is being implemented by **state IT department** with partnership in form of in-sourcing with private IT companies.
2. **This initiative is small part of 'Rajasthan DigiKit'** which has seen enrollment of more than one crore people from the state.
3. The first e-mail ID from this initiative was created by Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje with id (in Devnagari).
4. All government personnel in state will soon have an email id in Hindi too. The Hindi email ID will be offered to all the Internet users.

SC TO EXAMINE ADULTERY PUNISHING

The Supreme Court on 8 December 2017 agreed **to examine the constitutional validity of a colonial-era law on adultery** which punishes only the man even though the woman, with whom he has had consensual sex, may be an equal partner. The top court also said if the husband gives consent for sexual intercourse between his wife and another man, then it nullifies the offence of adultery and turns the woman into a commodity, which goes against the principle of gender justice and the constitutional mandate of right to equality.

What

1. **Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code states** that “whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery.
2. The offence of adultery entails punishment of up to five years or with fine or with both. However, in such cases, the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor.
3. A bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud termed the provision a “prima facie archaic” and said this “tantamounts to subordination of a woman where the Constitution confers equal status”.
4. **It would examine the constitutional validity of the 157-year-old provision** and issued notice to the Centre, seeking its response in four weeks.
5. Secondly, the bench said it will examine if the husband of a woman gives his consent or connives for sexual intercourse with another married man, then does it not turn her into a commodity.
6. **Prima facie, on a perusal of Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code**, we find that it grants relief to the wife by treating her as a victim. It is also worthy to note that when an offence is committed by both of them, one is liable for criminal offence but the other is absolved.

INDIA'S 'FIRST' ENERGY-EFFICIENT RAILWAY STATION

Kacheguda has earned the distinction of being the first energy-efficient 'A1 Category' railway station in the country, the South Central Railway (SCR) said. **Kacheguda railway station** in Hyderabad division of the SCR, has achieved 100 per cent energy efficiency by replacing 1,312 conventional lights with light-emitting diode (LED) lighting, 370 ceiling fans with Brushless DC Electrical (BLDC) motors energy-efficient fans and 12 air conditioners with energy efficient **inverter type ACs**, the SCR statement said.

What

1. With these initiatives, it will save **about 1.76 lakh units and Rs 14.08 lakh per annum** with reduction of the connected load by 46.18 kW for Railways.
2. SCR general manager, Vinod Kumar Yadav, complimented divisional railway manager of Hyderabad division, Arun Kumar Jain, on the achievement.
3. The statement added that **Kacheguda is a “historic and the most beautiful”** railway station building on SCR and one of the landmarks of Hyderabad city.
4. This imposing structure was built in **1916 by the Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway** during the reign of Mir Osman Ali Khan.

INTERNATIONAL

INDIA STAND ON EAST JERUSALEM

India refrained from reiterating its long-held view that eastern part of the holy city of Jerusalem should be the **capital of Palestine** even as it declined to toe the **US line** to recognise the holy city as the capital of Israel. **India's position on Palestine is independent and consistent.** It is shaped by our views and interests and not determined by any third country.

What

1. On 6 December 2017, **US President Donald Trump formally recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel** and set in motion a plan to shift the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city.
2. The US move evoked sharp criticism not only from the Arab world but also from Europe. **India's ambassador to Israel, like the envoys of all other nations, is based in Tel Aviv.**
3. Though some nations maintain consulates in Jerusalem without recognising them as a diplomatic mission to either Israel or Palestine, New Delhi does not have any in the fiercely contested city.
4. But New Delhi carefully avoided **articulating its long-held position that Israel-Palestine conflict** should be resolved through negotiation "resulting in sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.
5. New Delhi's long-held view was last articulated in India's statement presented at a committee of the **United Nations General Assembly in New York on December 5, 2016.** India stopped calling for East Jerusalem to be the capital of Palestine this year.
6. His message on the occasion of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on November 25 last or India's statement to UN General Assembly on November 29 last, too, did not refer to the call for East Jerusalem to be the capital of Palestine.
7. **India was the first non-Arab country to recognise Palestine way back in 1988.**
8. But New Delhi's growing ties with Israel after the BJP's ascent to power in May 2014 fuelled speculation about India reviewing its position on Palestine.

INDIA, GERMANY SEAL VARIOUS LOAN AGREEMENTS

India and Germany on 4 December 2017 signed several agreements, including a €200 million funding pact for climate-friendly urban mobility project. The 'Government to Government **Umbrella Agreement**' concerning financial cooperation in 2016 (II) under the **Indo- German Development Cooperation** was formalised here. An amount up to €200 million for the financial cooperation in form of loan for project '**Climate Friendly Urban Mobility III**' and €11 million accompanying measures in form of grant for four projects," was signed, said an official statement.

What

1. In addition, four other agreements were signed Department of Economic Affairs with KfW, Germany under Indo- German Bilateral Development Cooperation.
2. One loan agreement is for the project '**Community based sustainable Forest Management** — Component I Manipur' It was signed with KfW for a loan of €15 million.
3. The broad objectives of the project are restoration of degraded forests in upper watersheds, reclamation of abandoned shifting cultivation areas, biodiversity conservation, water resources conservation and livelihood improvement of forest dependent rural tribal people in the project area.

4. The other agreements were for projects namely **Madhya Pradesh Urban Sanitation and Environment Programme**; Sustainable Urban Infrastructure Development Odisha — Phase II; and Green Energy Corridor — Intra-State Transmission System in Maharashtra.

INDIA AND CUBA SIGN MOU

India and Cuba signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for enhanced cooperation in the health sector. Terming it historic, Shri J P Nadda stated that the relations between **Cuba and India are historical and based on shared values of equality and justice**, common aspirations and convergence of interests on global issues. Shri Nadda further stated that the MOU on cooperation in the field of health and medicine between India and Cuba is important for exchanges in the health sector and to develop institutional framework for cooperation in the health sector between the two countries.

The main areas of cooperation include:

1. Exchange & training of medical doctors, officials, other health professionals and experts
2. Assistance in development of human resources, health services and setting up of health care facilities
3. Short term training of human resources in health
4. Regulation of pharmaceuticals, medical devices and exchange of information;
5. Promotion of business development opportunities in pharmaceuticals and others identified by parties
6. Procurement of generic and essential drugs and assistance in sourcing of
7. drug supplies;
8. Procurement of health equipment and pharmaceutical products;
9. Any other area of cooperation as may be mutually decided upon.
10. Procurement of health equipment and pharmaceutical products;
11. Collaboration in the prevention of NCDs of mutual interest, such as neurocardiovascular diseases, cancer, COPDs, mental health and dementia, with an emphasis on SDG3 and related factors;
12. Collaboration in the field of climate change impact on communicable diseases and vector borne diseases;
13. Nutritional aspects of food intake, including malnutrition (over-nutrition and under-nutrition) in the light of the SDG2 and organization of nutritional services;
14. Safety of production, transformation, distribution and food delivery;
15. Research and training of food industry operators;
16. Information and communication to citizens on hygiene and food safety and healthy eating habits; and
17. Any other area of cooperation as may be mutually decided upon.

MISSILE-TRACKING DRILLS START

The **US, South Korea and Japan started joint exercises to track missiles from North Korea**, Seoul's military said, following the nuclear-armed Pyongyang's longest-range test launch to date. The trilateral drill comes less than two weeks after **Pyeongyang test-fired a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)** and declared it had achieved nuclear statehood, escalating global alarm over its weapons push.

What

1. The two-day exercise—the sixth since June last year—kicked off in waters near the Korean peninsula and Japan. During the drill, Aegis warships from each country will simulate detecting and tracking down potential ballistic missiles from the North and sharing information. Two US ships are taking part, with one each from the two Asian countries.
2. Both South Korea and Japan have security alliances with the US, although their own relationship is marred by disputes over history and territory.

3. **Washington and Seoul staged their biggest-ever joint air drill** last week in a show of force against Pyongyang, which is subject to multiple sets of UN sanctions over its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programmes.
4. Tension flared anew in the flashpoint peninsula after the November 29 launch of the Hwasong-15 ICBM, which the North claimed could deliver a “super-large heavy warhead” anywhere on the US mainland.
5. Last month’s launch was the first test of any kind since September 15, and quashed hopes that the North may have held back in order to open the door to a negotiated solution to the nuclear stand-off.

ITALY ADOPTS LIVING WILLS

Italy’s Senate passed into law on 14 December 2017 a bill allowing severely ill people to refuse treatment that would prolong their lives. The bill passed 180 votes to 71 in the face of opposition from right wing parties. **It allows all adults to prepare a document to express their preferences** on how to be treated if they lose the faculty to choose or express their choice. **Some 10 years after legislation on patients’ rights** to choose what care to receive at the end of their lives was first proposed, the lower house of parliament approved the bill in April. **This will be one of the government’s last acts** before parliament is dissolved ahead of elections next year.

What

1. The ruling Democratic Party (PD) had pledged another civil rights measure, making it easier for the children of migrants to obtain citizenship, but this law now looks unlikely to pass.
2. Parliament’s decision makes everyone takes a step forward in terms of civilisation for the country and of human dignity,” Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, who is not a party leader and is unlikely to run in the election, said in Brussels.
3. By Italian parliamentary standards, the bill’s passage was relatively swift thanks to an agreement between two of the biggest parties – the PD and the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement – to vote it through.
4. **The deal was a rare example of cooperation between the two parties**, which are usually bitter enemies. The anti-immigrant Northern League, which vies with former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party for the most votes on the right, fiercely fought the bill. Forza Italia also opposed it, though less strongly.
5. **This law is a precursor to euthanasia. Final discussion of the bill coincided with the high-profile case** of a disc jockey paralysed and blinded in a road accident who went to Switzerland to be helped to die.
6. A Radical party member and **right-to-die activist who accompanied Fabiano Antoniani**, known as DJ Fabo, to the Swiss clinic, are currently on trial in Milan for aiding suicide. In the living wills, which can be recorded on video if the patient cannot write, food and water can be refused as well as medical treatment.

ECONOMY

WTO BUENOS AIRES MEET ENDS

The **11th ministerial conference at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)** ended without any **substantial outcome** as consensus eluded the **164-member multilateral body**. After the US **blocked permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes**, India toughened its stand on **new issues like e-commerce and investment facilitation**. Finally, consensus could not be reached on a ministerial declaration and the conference ended with a chair’s summary which is non-binding in nature.

Indian officials expressed disappointment as WTO failed to deliver on its promise for a permanent solution in this round, but expressed satisfaction that they were able to thwart moves by developed countries to introduce new issues in WTO agenda such

as e-commerce, investment facilitation, MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) and gender equality.

Key Takeaways

1. **The biggest takeaway from MC 11 was the commitment from members to secure a deal on fisheries subsidies** which delivers on taking commitments for paring IUU (illegal, unregulated, unreported) subsidies by 2019, said Susana Malcorra, **Argentinean Minister and chair of MC 11**.
2. Members also committed to improve the reporting of existing fisheries subsidy programmes. **"Buenos Aires will be remembered as the fisheries conference.** It is here that the talks that were deadlocked for 15 years got moving, she said.
3. Pushing back a commitment on curbing IUU subsidies to 2019, despite a number of **members's eager to have an interim solution with immediate cuts, is a victory for India**, the official said. India now has more time to ensure that there are adequate safeguards in place to protect artisanal fishers.
4. **A work programme on e-commerce was also adopted at the MC 11** which was exactly like the one proposed by India with the old work programme continuing and a two year continuation of the moratorium on e-commerce linked to the continuation of one on TRIPS and non-violation complaints.
5. **During MC11 India stood firm on its stand on the fundamental principles of the WTO**, including **multilateralism, rule-based consensual decision-making, an independent and credible dispute resolution** and appellate process, the centrality of development, which underlies the DDA, and special and differential treatment for all developing countries.
6. In addition, members took a number of other ministerial decisions, including extending the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions for another two years, and commitment to continue negotiations in all areas. "Development and inclusiveness must remain at the heart of our work. They certainly remain at the core of my priorities in everything we do, WTO DG Roberto Azevedo said at a press conference at the end of the three-day meeting.
7. Some large groups of members have come together **to advance issues of interest to them and to the global economy such as MSMEs**, investment facilitation and e-commerce.

IRAN'S CHABAHAR PORT OPENS

The **first phase of the Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman was inaugurated** by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, opening a new strategic route connecting **Iran, India and Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan**, and reflecting growing convergence of interests among the three countries. **The port in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich nation's southern coast** is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which is being developed with Chinese investment and is located at distance of around 80 kms from Chabahar.

What

1. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Minister of State for Shipping Pon Radhakrishnan represented India at the inauguration ceremony of the Phase 1 of the Shahid Beheshti Port at Chabahar which was also attended by ambassadors and senior officials of the region.
2. **An India-Iran-Afghanistan ministerial-level trilateral meeting on Chabahar** also took place today on the sidelines of the event where the three countries resolved to work towards integrated development of connectivity infrastructure including ports, road and rail networks to open up greater opportunities for regional market access and integration of their economies.
3. **The Chabahar port is being considered a gateway to golden opportunities for trade by India, Iran and Afghanistan** with central Asian countries besides ramping up trade among the three countries in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi.
4. "The routes of the region should be connected on land, sea and air," Rouhani said at the inauguration ceremony, according to his office.

5. India has been closely working with Afghanistan and Iran to create alternative, reliable access routes for trade.
6. Under the agreement signed between India and Iran in May last year, **India is to equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I with capital investment of USD 85.21 million** and annual revenue expenditure of USD 22.95 million on a 10-year lease.
7. The MEA, in a statement, said Radhakrishnan also represented India in the second India-Iran-Afghanistan ministerial-level trilateral meeting on Chabahar port in Chabahar today. Iran was represented by its Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi and Afghanistan by its Trade and Commerce Minister Humayoon Rasaw.
8. **In May 2016, India, Iran and Afghanistan had inked a pact which entailed establishment of Transit and Transport Corridor** among the three countries using Chabahar Port as one of the regional hubs for sea transportation in Iran, besides multi-modal transport of goods and passengers across the three nations.

15TH FINANCE PANEL HOLDS FIRST MEETING

The **newly set up Fifteenth Finance Commission held its first meeting** on 4 December 2017 holding preliminary discussions on its terms of reference. "It was an introductory meeting where they discussed various issues". The panel, **headed by former Revenue Secretary and former Rajya Sabha MP NK Singh** also met Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

What

1. **The Finance Commission was set up on November 27** with former Economic Affairs Secretary Shaktikanta Das, and adjunct professor of Georgetown University Anoop Singh as its full-time members and Chairman of Bandhan Bank Ashok Lahiri and NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand as part-time members.
2. **A statutory body under Article 280(1) of the Constitution**, it will prescribe the formula for devolution of taxes between the Centre and States for the five years commencing on April 1, 2020. It is expected to submit its report by October 30, 2019.
3. **It will review the impact of the Goods and Services Tax** and the current status of the finance, deficit, debt levels, cash balances and fiscal discipline efforts of the Union and the States and suggest a fresh fiscal consolidation roadmap.

Background

1. **India's large population, rapid urbanization and expanding industrial production have led to exploitation of available limited natural resources** with concerns regarding resource depletion and future availability becoming more pronounced.
2. Ensuring resource security requires and integrated, concerted and collaborative approach in order to fulfill the needs of a vast and growing population.
3. Also, **the environmental burdens emanating due to resource extraction, utilization and disposal**, including land degradation, biodiversity loss, as well as air and water pollution remain of great concern, Enhancing resource efficiency (RE) and promoting the use of secondary raw materials (SRM) is a pertinent strategy to address these challenges and reduce dependence on primary resource.

STRATEGY ON RESOURCE EFFICIENCY (RE)

NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union delegation to India has released the **Strategy on Resource Efficiency** at a function in Delhi. **The report included in action plan for promoting resource efficiency in India.** The strategy paper was unveiled by NITI Aayog.

What

1. NITI Aayog mentioned

that **sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment** and 11th Five year plan clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).

2. **Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals** and central principles for achieving sustainable development.
3. The EU mentioned that **it is evident the RE agenda in India** has gained not only national priority during the EU-India summit in October this year but also in the G 20 RE dialogue in Berlin, Germany on November 27, 2017.
4. EU will support the GoI, especially MoEFCC and NITI Aayog in implementing the RE strategy.
5. **This strategy is the first policy document to emphasize resource productivity in the country.** The RE Strategy emphasizes on **Sustainable Public Procurement (SSP) as an action agenda** which will be the market transformation tool to transform to a resource efficient economy.
6. The document is developed with the recommendations from the Indian Resource Efficiency Programme (IREP), launched by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Indian Resource Panel (InRP) in April 2017.

GOVT SETS UP PANEL TO ADDRESS NPAS

The government has set up a **high-level committee headed by NITI Aayog chief executive Amitabh Kant** to address the problem of stressed assets in **India's power sector. Non-performing assets (NPAs) in power generation accounted for around 5.9% of the banking sector's** total outstanding advances of Rs4.73 trillion, according to the **second volume of the Economic Survey 2016-17 released in August.** Tackling the issues that afflict the so-called stranded power assets will provide much-needed relief for **Indian banks weighed down by bad loans.**

What

1. **The committee** has held its first meeting and comprises secretaries in the **ministries of power, coal and department of financial services,** one of the two people cited above said on condition of anonymity. A second person, who also didn't want to be identified, confirmed the development.
2. Mint reported on 24 November about the government separately planning to investigate whether private developers inflated project costs to increase the debt component, thereby reducing their equity contribution.
3. **A total of 34 coal-fuelled power projects,** with an estimated debt of Rs1.77 trillion, have been reviewed by the government after being identified by the department of financial services. Issues faced by these projects include paucity of funds, lack of power-purchase agreements (PPAs), and absence of fuel security.
4. **The weak financial health of the state-owned distribution utilities** has led to slow progress in signing of long-term PPAs through competitive bidding, with only 1.4GW capacity tied up through long-term PPAs over the past three years, rating agency Icria Ltd said in a 23 November report.

WORLD'S LARGEST FTA

The **EU and Japan announced they have finalised terms for a giant free trade deal (FTA),** presenting it as a challenge to the **protectionism championed by US President Donald Trump.** The trade deal called its biggest ever, must still be signed and ratified by both sides who first agreed to its broad outlines in July. Once completed, it will forge an economic zone of 600 million people with 30 per cent of global GDP.

What

1. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hailed the imminent birth of what he called a **"gigantic economic zone"** when he confirmed the conclusion of the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreement.
2. **It sends a clear signal to the world that the EU and Japan are committed** to keeping the world economy working on the basis of free, open and fair markets with clear and transparent rules fully respecting and enhancing our values,

fighting the temptation of protectionism," the pair said in a statement released in Brussels.

3. **With the deal, the EU is seeking access to one of the world's richest markets**, while Japan hopes to jump-start an economy that has struggled to find solid growth for more than a decade.
4. Japan is also hoping to seize an opportunity after **the failure of the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal**, torpedoed in January by Trump.
5. Under the deal, the EU will open its market to the world-leading Japanese auto industry, with Tokyo in return scrapping barriers to EU farming products, especially dairy.
6. EU officials insist that the deal will be a major boon for European farmers who would gain access to a huge market that appreciates European products.
7. **The deals follow in the footsteps of last year's major EU-Canada trade deal**, that was completed even as EU-US trade talks stumbled.
8. The finalisation of the EU-Japan trade terms now paves the way for the signature, ratification and full implementation of the deal, which EU officials hope could be as soon as January 2019.

BITCOIN TRADE UNDER LENS

The **Income Tax Department on 13 December 2017 conducted survey** operations at **major Bitcoin exchanges across the country** on suspicion of alleged tax evasion. They said various teams of the sleuths of the department, under the command of the Bengaluru investigation wing, visited the premises of nine such exchanges in the country including in **Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi and Gurugram**.

What

1. The survey, **under section 133A of the Income Tax Act**, is being conducted for "gathering evidence for establishing the identity of investors and traders, transaction undertaken by them, **identity of counterparties**, related bank accounts used, among others".
2. The survey teams, sources said, are armed with **various financial data and inputs about the working of these exchanges** and this is the first big action against them in the country.
3. **Bitcoin, a virtual currency, is not regulated in the country** and its circulation has been a cause of concern among central bankers the world over for quite a while now.
4. The Reserve Bank of India has also cautioned users, holders and traders of virtual currencies, including bitcoins.
5. In March, the Union finance ministry **had constituted an Inter-Disciplinary Committee to take stock of the present status of VCs both in India and globally** and suggest measures for dealing with such currencies.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NEW FORM OF MATTER DISCOVERED

Scientists have proven the existence of **new form of matter called excitonium** – which was **first theorised almost 50 years ago**. Researchers from University of California Berkeley and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the US studied non-doped crystals of the transition metal **dichalcogenide titanium diselenide (1T-TiSe₂)**.

What

1. **Excitonium is a condensate** – it exhibits macroscopic quantum phenomena, like a superconductor. **It is made up of excitons, particles** that are formed in a very strange quantum mechanical pairing, namely that of an escaped electron and the hole it left behind.

2. It defies reason, but it turns out that when an electron, seated at the edge of a crowded-with-electrons valence band in a semiconductor, gets excited and jumps over the energy gap to the otherwise empty conduction band, it leaves behind a “hole” in the valence band. That hole behaves as though it were a particle with positive charge, and it attracts the escaped electron.
3. When the escaped electron with its negative charge, pairs up with the hole, **the two remarkably form a composite particle, a boson – an exciton.**
4. In point of fact, the hole’s particle-like attributes are due to the collective behaviour of the surrounding crowd of electrons. However, that understanding makes the pairing no less strange and wonderful, researchers said.
5. **Until now, scientists have not had the experimental tools to positively distinguish** whether what looked like excitonium was not in fact a Peierls phase. Peierls phases and exciton condensation share the same symmetry and similar observables.
6. Abbamonte and his team were able to overcome that challenge by using a novel technique they developed called momentum-resolved electron energy-loss spectroscopy (M-EELS).
7. **Since the 1970s, many experimentalists have published evidence of the existence of excitonium**, but their findings were not definitive proof and could equally have been explained by a conventional structural phase transition,” he said. The findings, published in the journal Science, holds great promise for unlocking further quantum mechanical mysteries.
8. It could also shed light on the metal-insulator transition in band solids, in which exciton condensation is believed to play a part. Beyond that, possible technological applications of excitonium are purely speculative.

IWPSD 2017

Solid State Physics Laboratory (SSPL), a premier semiconductor research laboratory of DRDO is organising the **19th International Workshop on Physics of Semiconductor Devices (IWPSD 2017)** jointly with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi in association with Society for Semiconductor Devices, Semiconductor Society (India) and Society for Information Display.

What

1. **The biennial event IWPSD is considered as a prominent international forum on Advanced Semiconductor Technologies.**
2. The event held in India provides an opportunity for Indian researchers to interact with internationally acclaimed experts. Scientists and academicians from international and national educational institutes, government laboratories and leading industries interact to discuss state-of-the-art in advanced semiconductor R&D.
3. The workshop has always received wide international participation and serves as the principal forum for dissemination of semiconductor research in South Asian region.
4. Semiconductor devices are used in the technological aids related to defence and space applications in addition to day-to-day consumer electronics.
5. **The four day workshop has a strong technical program covering most of the emerging semiconductor R&D fields** with five parallel sessions which will cover topics of current interest including VLSI technologies, Sensors, GaN (Gallium Nitride) Materials and Devices, Opto-electronics, Crystal Growth & Epitaxy, Photovoltaics, Display Technologies, 2D materials & Organic Semiconductors and Semiconductors for Quantum Computing etc. Special emphasis will be given on the role of semiconductor technologies in space, defence and civilian applications.
6. Many renowned scientists and technologists from **USA, Europe, Asia Pacific and other countries are participating in this event.**
7. Over 130 internationally acclaimed plenary/invited speakers will deliver talks on research in their field of expertise. In addition about 500 researchers from national Institutes like TIFR, NPL, IISc, IITs, NITs, CEERI etc. and other

prominent Central and State universities would be participating in the workshop and over 500 research papers will be presented.

UNICEF REPORT ON INTERNET

One in three Internet users in the world is a child, yet too little is done to protect them, **UNICEF's State of the World's Children report released** said. "For better and for worse, **digital technology is now an irreversible fact of our lives**. In a digital world, our dual challenge is how to mitigate the harms while maximizing the benefits of the internet for every child," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake.

What

1. **The report explores the benefits digital technology can offer the most disadvantaged children**, including those growing up in poverty or affected by humanitarian emergencies.
2. It also points out that around **one third of the world's youth — 346 million — are not online**, exacerbating inequities and reducing children's ability to participate in an increasingly digital economy.
3. It examines how the Internet increases children's vulnerability, including misuse of their private information, access to harmful content, and cyberbullying.
4. The ubiquitous presence of mobile devices, the report notes, has made online access for many children less supervised and potentially more dangerous.
5. Digital networks like the Dark Web and cryptocurrencies are enabling the worst forms of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking and 'made to order' online child sexual abuse.
6. **More than 9 in 10 child sexual abuse URLs identified globally are hosted in five countries — Canada, France, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and the United States.**
7. Only collective action — by governments, the private sector, children's organizations, academia, families and children themselves — can help level the digital playing field and make the internet safer and more accessible for children, the report says.
8. "Girls and boys in India have the unique opportunity to benefit from the connectivity that the digital world can provide. **India is famous as an IT Hub and no matter where they live**, every girl or boy should have a digital advantage, said UNICEF representative in India, Dr Yasmin Ali Haque.

BLACK HOLES HAVE WEAKER MAGNETIC FIELDS

Black holes – known for their intense gravitational pull capable of gobbling up entire stars – may have significantly **weaker magnetic fields than previously thought**, a study has found. **A 64-kilometre-wide black hole 8,000 light years from Earth named V404 Cygni** has yielded the first precise measurements of the magnetic field that surrounds the deepest wells of gravity in the universe.

What

1. Researchers from University of Florida (UF) in the US found **the magnetic energy around the black hole is about 400 times lower than previous crude estimates.**
2. The measurements bring scientists closer to understanding how black holes' magnetism works, deepening our knowledge of how matter behaves under the most extreme conditions – knowledge that could broaden the limits of nuclear fusion power and GPS systems.
3. Researchers developed **the measurements from data collected in 2015 during a black hole's rare outburst of jets.** The event was observed through the lens mirror of the 34-foot Gran Telescopio Canarias, the world's largest telescope, located in Spain.
4. Smaller jet-producing black holes, like the one observed for the study, are the rock stars of galaxies. Their outbursts occur suddenly and are short-lived, according to Yigit Dalilar and Alan Garner, doctoral students at UF.

5. **The 2015 outbursts of V404 Cygni lasted only a couple of weeks.** The previous time the same black hole had a **similar episode was in 1989.**

MOU ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Finnish telecom firm **Nokia and the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi (IIT-Delhi) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** in areas of data science, analytics and **artificial intelligence (AI)**. The collaboration will **allow IIT-Delhi to leverage Nokia's technological leadership and expertise in communications networking** to conduct research in these areas.

What

1. **The talented students and faculty of India's premier institute** will work in projects with Nokia's technical minds to explore ways to make networks more efficient and reliable, said a statement from Nokia.
2. IIT-Delhi research scholars from the applied mathematics, statistical and computer science fields will work with Nokia in India to develop software modules based on AI algorithms with machine learning, deep learning and predictive analytics.
3. **The aim is to help the company enhance its service delivery to be even more efficient and reliable.** The self-learning and pre-emptive capabilities will also help Nokia's service delivery to be 5G ready.
4. The MoU is part of the University Connect initiative of Nokia's Global Service Delivery which aims at helping global telecom operators to enhance the quality, efficiency and speed of their networks and services.

VOYAGER 1 FIRED UP

US space agency NASA has said a set of thrusters aboard the **Voyager 1 spacecraft**, the **only human-made object in interstellar space**, have been successfully fired up after 37 years without use. The spacecraft has been using small devices called "**attitude control thrusters**" to orient it so it can communicate with Earth, but the thrusters have been degrading since 2014. With these thrusters that are **still functional after 37 years without use**, we will be able to extend the life of the Voyager 1 spacecraft by two to three years," said Suzanne Dodd, project manager for Voyager at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

What

1. **The Voyager team assembled a group of propulsion experts** to study the problem and eventually agreed on an unusual solution that will try giving the **job of orientation to a set of four backup thrusters dormant since 1980.**
2. **Voyager engineers sent a command to fire the four "trajectory correction maneuver (TCM)" thrusters** and it took 19 hours and 35 minutes for the test results to reach an antenna in Goldstone, California.
3. The engineers "learned the TCM thrusters worked perfectly — and just as well as the attitude control thrusters," said NASA.
4. The plan going forward is to switch to the TCM thrusters in January.
5. It will likely do a similar test on the **TCM thrusters for Voyager 2**, the twin spacecraft of Voyager 1.
6. Voyager 2 is also on course to enter interstellar space, likely within the next few years, and currently, its attitude control thrusters are still functioning well.
7. **Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 were launched 16 days apart in 1977.**
8. Voyager 1 reached interstellar space, which NASA described as "the environment between the stars" in 2012.

MISCELLANEOUS

GUIDELINES TO CURB ROAD ACCIDENTS

The Supreme Court came out with a set of guidelines to tackle rising accidents, including addition of a chapter on road safety in school curriculum and audits of two most accident-prone stretches of highways/expressways in each state as a pilot programme. **The order came on a PIL by Dr Rajaseekaran**, chairman and head of orthopaedic surgery at a Coimbatore-based private hospital, in 2012.

What

1. Acting on the PIL, the court constituted a committee on road safety on **April 22, 2014, under the chairmanship of retired apex court judge Justice K S Radhakrishnan** and appointed advocate Gaurav Agarwal as amicus curiae to assist the court. The committee came up with 12 reports.
2. **The suggestions included framing of a road safety policy**, constitution of state road safety councils, establishment of a lead agency to act as the secretariat of the road safety council and coordinate all activities such as licensing issues, acquisition of road safety equipment such as cameras and speed governors.
3. The reports also sought strengthening of norms for crash testing of light vehicles. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways told the court it had already acted on most of the guidelines.
4. On the proposal for road safety audits, the ministry said though it agreed with the suggestion, **there was a deficiency of qualified auditors in road safety engineering**.
5. **Efforts are being made by the government to build capacity**, by way of organising workshops on road safety engineering, road safety audit certification courses etc.

WORLD AIDS DAY

The **World AIDS Day is celebrated every year** all over the world on **December 1** to raise the public awareness about **Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)**. It also seeks to remember those who have died of the disease by mourning. The theme selected by World Health Organization (WHO) for year 2017 is **'Right to health'**.

What

1. Under it, WHO will highlight need for 36.7 million people living with HIV and those who are vulnerable and affected by the epidemic, to reach the goal of **universal health coverage**?
2. Besides, **WHO under slogan "Everybody counts"** will advocate for access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines, including diagnostics and other health commodities.
3. It will also ensure health care services for all people in need and that they are protected against financial risks.
4. **The World Health Organization (WHO)** had designated 1st December as World AIDS Day **in 1987**.
5. Since then it is observed annually. It is one of the eight official global public health campaigns marked by the WHO.

HIV/AIDS

1. HIV/AIDS is a pandemic disease caused due to the infection of **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**.
2. **HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system**. If untreated, person's immune system will eventually be completely destroyed.
3. **AIDS refers to set of symptoms** and illnesses that occur at very final stage of HIV infection.

SHASHI KAPOOR DEAD

The last of that generation of Kapoors has gone. Shashi Kapoor, who underwent cataract surgery in 2012, was the **third and the youngest son of late actor-filmmaker Prithviraj Kapoor**. He was the **last one of the second generation of the illustrious**

Kapoor family to pass away. His brother Raj Kapoor died in June 1988 and Shammi Kapoor breathed his last in August 2011.

What

1. He went behind the camera with films like "**Junoon**", "**Vijeta**" and "**36 Chowringhee Lane**" as a producer. Later, he made his directorial debut in 1991 with "Ajooba".
2. Among his numerous achievements, he was honoured with awards like Dadasaheb Phalke Award and Padma Bhushan.

NAVY DAY

The **Indian Navy Day is observed every year on 4 December** to celebrate achievements and role of the naval force to the country. This year is **46th Navy Day**. Celebrations of Navy Day not only display India's technological progress but also the maritime achievements of India. **Indian Navy is one of most potent maritime forces in the world** and the most lethal in Indian Ocean. **It plays great role in securing marine borders of country** as well as enhancing international relations of country through foreign port callings, joint exercises, humanitarian missions and calamity relief.

Background

1. **The observance of the day commemorates the launch of Operation Trident** by the Indian Navy against Pakistan on 4th December, 1971.
2. **During 1971 India-Pakistan war**, the Indian Navy had played a significant role in the bombing of Karachi harbour, the stronghold of the Pakistani Navy.
3. In this attack, Indian **Navy sank four Pakistani vessels including PNS Ghazi** and ravaged the Karachi harbour fuel fields.
4. In this operation, three missile boats of the **Indian Navy, INS Nirghat, INS Nipat and INS Veer** had played a pivotal role.
5. Operation Trident had also resulted in first use of anti-ship missiles in the Arabian Sea region.

NATIONAL AWARD FOR DIVYANGJAN – 2017

On the occasion of **International Day of Persons with Disabilities' i.e. 3rd December, 2017**, the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind was presented the **"National Award for Divyangjan Empowerment-2017"** to Individuals, Institutions, Organisations, State/District etc for their outstanding achievements and work done towards empowerment of Persons with Disabilities at a function in Vigyan

Flashback

1. **The history of National Awards goes back to 1969**, when Awards in only two categories were instituted by the Government of India with the objective **to focus public attention on issues concerning persons with disabilities** and to promote their mainstreaming in society.
2. The **National Awards for empowerment of persons with disabilities have been notified in the year 2013**.
3. Now there are 14 broad categories for individuals and institutions consisting of 58 awards.
4. This year, an advertisement was issued by the Department in July 2017 with the last date up to 15th August.
5. The National Selection Committee met on two dates i.e. 10th November, and 16th November, 2017 to finalise the list.
6. **This year, 52 awards to individuals and institutions are being conferred.** The awards consist of a certificate to each, and medal or shield in some categories as also with cash component amounting to Rs. 43.50 Lakhs.

Bhawan, New Delhi. The function was organized by **the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.**

The National Awards Presented in **14 main categories as given below**

1. Best Employee/Self Employed with disabilities;
2. Best Employers & (b) Best Placement Officer or Agency;
3. Best Individual and (b) Best Institution working for the Cause of Persons with Disabilities;
4. Role Model;
5. Best Applied Research or Innovation or Product Development aimed at improving the life of persons with Disabilities;
6. Outstanding Work in the Creation of Barrier-free Environment for the Persons with Disabilities;
7. Best District in Providing Rehabilitation Services;
8. Best State Channelizing Agency of National Handicapped Federation Development Corporation;
9. Outstanding Creative Adult Persons with Disabilities;
10. Best Creative Child with Disabilities;
11. Best Braille Press;
12. Best "Accessible" Website;
13. Best State in promoting empowerment of persons with disabilities; and
14. Best sports person with disability.

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION DAY

The **International Civil Aviation Day** is observed every year on **7 December** across the world to generate and reinforce worldwide awareness of importance of international civil aviation to social and economic development.

What

1. It also seeks to highlight unique role of **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** in helping member states to cooperate and realize a truly global rapid transit network at the service of all mankind.
2. The theme for the year 2017 selected by ICAO is **'Working Together to Ensure No Country is Left Behind'**.
3. It highlights ICAO's efforts to assist States in implementing ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs).

Background

1. The **International Civil Aviation Day** was established in 1994 as **part of ICAO's 50th anniversary activities.**
2. **It was officially recognised in the UN system** by the UN General Assembly in 1996.
3. On this day in 1944, participants from 54 nations gathered in Chicago, US had signed Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known more popularly as the 'Chicago Convention'.
4. Since then, **the defining international agreement** has permitted global civil aviation system to develop peacefully, in manner benefitting all nations across the world.

DR. AMBEDKAR INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the **"Dr. Ambedkar International Centre"** at **15, Janpath, New Delhi**. He had laid the **foundation stone of this Centre in April 2015**. The **Prime Minister unveiled the statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the lawns** and another statue of Dr. Ambedkar in the atrium of the Centre.

What

1. Speaking on the occasion, **the Prime Minister expressed confidence that the Centre would play a key role in the dissemination of Dr. Ambedkar's teachings and vision.**
2. Noting that the **Dr. Ambedkar International Centre for Socio Economic Transformation is also part of this project**, the Prime Minister said that this will be an important centre for research on social and economic issues.
3. The Prime Minister said that thought-leaders and visionaries have shaped the direction of our country, at different points in time. He said the country is indebted to Baba Saheb, for his contributions to nation-building.
4. He said the Union Government wants more and more people, and especially the youth, to learn about his vision and ideas. That is why, he added, that important places related to Dr. Ambedkar's life have been developed as centres of pilgrimage.
5. In this context, he mentioned the **sites at Alipur in Delhi; Mhow in Madhya Pradesh; Indu Mill in Mumbai; Deeksha Bhumi in Nagpur;** and the house in London.
6. He said that this 'Panchteerth' is the today's generation's way of paying homage to Dr. Ambedkar. He said that the BHIM App for digital transactions is the Union Government's homage to the economic vision of Dr. Ambedkar.
7. Dr. Ambedkar International Centre (DAIC) has been constructed at an estimated cost of Rs. 195 crores. Scheduled for completion in January, 2018, the project has been completed well in advance of the scheduled date of completion. The foundation stone for DAIC was laid by the Prime Minister of India on 20 April, 2015.
8. **DAIC is built in an area of 3.25 acres with a total built up area of 117830.59 sq.ft.** In order to develop DAIC into a Centre of Excellence, it has been equipped with an extensive library, three state-of-art auditoriums, three conference halls with varying seating capacities and exhibition areas.
9. **The architecture of DAIC is a mix of modern and traditional styles with the Sanchi Stupa Toran as the main facade of the Centre in keeping with Dr. Ambedkar's love for Buddhism.** Red sandstone has been used for the Chaitya Arch and freizes in the interiors.

WORLD SOIL DAY

The **World Soil Day is celebrated every year on 5th of December** by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. It aims to communicate messages on the importance of soil quality for food security, healthy ecosystems and human well-being. The Theme for year 2017 is **'Caring for the Planet starts from the Ground'**. The theme seeks to highlight importance of soil in human livelihoods and increase in degradation of soil resources worldwide due to inappropriate management practices, population pressure driving unsustainable intensification and inadequate governance over this essential resource.

What

1. **Soil is the upper layer of earth.** It is mixture of organic and inorganic matter, in which plants grow.
2. **It is a finite natural resource.** On a human time-scale it is non-renewable.
3. According to FAO, soil holds three times as much carbon as atmosphere and can help to meet challenges of a changing climate.

Background

1. **The International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS)** had adopted resolution proposing 5th of December as **World Soil Day in 2002** to celebrate importance of soil as critical component of natural system and as vital contributor to human wellbeing.
2. Later in June 2013, the FAO Conference unanimously endorsed **World Soil Day** and requested official adoption at **68th UN General Assembly**.
3. In December 2013, 68th UNGA declared 5th of December as the World Soil Day.

4. 95% of our food comes from soil and 33% of global soils are already degraded.

INDIAN ARMED FORCE FLAG DAY

The **Indian Armed Forces Flag Day** is observed every year on **December 7** to honour the **soldiers, airmen and sailors of India** who fought on the borders to safeguard country's honour. To observe this day, **three branches of the Armed Forces** – Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Indian Navy organises variety of programmes to showcase their efforts towards national security.

What

1. The **Flag Day brings to the forefront country's obligation** of looking after the disabled comrades-in-arms, widows and dependents of those who have sacrificed their lives for the country.
2. **The day is dedicated for collection of funds** from people for welfare of Armed Forces personnel.
3. **The fund collected on the Flag Day** is used for the welfare of serving personnel and ex-servicemen and also to rehabilitate battle casualties.
4. **Small flags are distributed on this day in return** for voluntary contributions from people across India.
5. This year the Ministry of Defence launched the Armed Forces Week to conduct a digital campaign to bring together the entire nation to express solidarity with the Armed Forces personnel.

Background

1. After India attained independence, the Central government felt the need to constitute welfare fund to take care of **defence personnel**.
2. Hence, a **committee was set up in August 1949** that decided Flag Day shall be celebrated annually on December 7.
3. **The reason it was called flag day** was because small flags were distributed across country among general population which served two purposes – collection of welfare funds and creating a sense of camaraderie and harmony between Army and citizens.
4. Over the years, the observance of the day became a tradition. **The day also reminds citizens to care for living heroes** who were either wounded in action or retired from service at a fairly young age.

SAICON 2017

The **First International Conference on Sports Medicine and Sports Sciences SAICON 2017** was inaugurated in Delhi by the Minister of State (I/C) Youth Affairs and Sports Col. Rajyavardhan Rathore. Speaking on the occasion he said **India has made significant progress in Sports by winning medals in many international events** and standing behind each athlete is an expert team of coaches, physiologists, doctors, scientists and technical staff who aided in journey of this success of Indian players. Col. Rathore said Sports Science and Sports medicine has increasingly becoming important as it **plays an integral role in improving the performance of the sportspersons** and also in facilitating rehabilitation and recovery.

What

1. Sports medicine doctors and scientists contribute significantly to athletes' performance as they provide an edge to their talent and skills. **Contribution of Sports Science will become important under the Khelo India Programme launched by his ministry.**
2. He said in accordance with the intentions of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi of empowering youths, 'Khelo India' programme has been chalked out to tap talent at the school and college level.
3. **Under the Khelo India national school games would be organised from January 31 to February 8 next year for the less than 17 age group.** These

school games will act as a springboard. He said for the first time a sports broadcaster will broadcast live the national school games.

4. The Minister expressed the hope that **SAICON 2017 will promote scientific temperament in the country and inspire students**, researchers and educationists alike to take up sports science and research to the next level.
5. Organized by Sports Authority of India, the 3-day conference is being attended by about 1000 national and international delegates. Eminent Olympians Shri Gurbax Singh, Dr Paes, V. Bhaskaran, Shri Leander Paes, K. Malleshwari and Shri Yogeshwar Dutt were also present at the inaugural session of the conference.

WORLD ENERGY OUTLOOK REPORT, 2017

India is emerging as a “major driving force” in global energy trends, with all modern fuels and technologies playing a part, a senior official of the **International Energy Agency (IEA)** said. **The World Energy Outlook Report, 2017**, launched by the IEA, was relaunched in Delhi in association with **Delhi-based think tank The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)**.

What

1. **The IEA attaches great importance to close ties with India** and we were very pleased to welcome India into the IEA family earlier this year after it joined as an association member.
2. **With India, the IEA family now accounts for over 70 per cent of the world’s total energy consumption**, compared to less than 40 per cent just two years ago,” Gould was quoted as saying in a statement by the TERI.
3. Showing remarkable growth, **half a billion people have gained access to electricity in India since 2000**, almost doubling the country’s electrification rate. The pace has accelerated in the recent years, with an additional 40 million people gaining access every year since 2011,” he said.
4. These provide an option for addressing the issues of access to energy by millions in a sustainable way. What is required is appropriate and responsive policy-framework by the government concerned.
5. The **WEO-2017 series includes a specific focus on the issue of energy access**, including a detailed update on the scale of today’s problem, the positive developments in many countries — notably India — and the prospects for achieving universal access to modern energy by 2030.
6. This ground-breaking analysis explores how policies, cheaper technologies and innovative business models are brightening the outlook for access to electricity, while reliance on polluting fuels for cooking remains high, the TERI’s statement said.
7. **The IEA is an autonomous agency**, which seeks to promote energy security among its member countries through collective response to physical disruptions in oil supply, and to provide authoritative research and analysis on ways to ensure reliable, **affordable and clean energy for its 29 member countries and beyond**, it said.

PT. RAMNARAYAN SHARMA NATIONAL AYURVED AWARD

The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, presented the **Pt Ramnarayan Sharma National Ayurved Award for the years 2008-2014** at Rashtrapati Bhavan on December 4, 2017. It takes an integrated approach to the physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects of the human body, and their inter-linkages. Ayurveda and yoga are based on an exploration of the relationship between mind and body. **The idea of a healthy body being connected to a healthy mind or vice-versa is a powerful one.** We should motivate future generations to focus on both aspects of the human personality – mental and physical.

What

1. **Ninety per cent of the country’s medicinal plants** and herbs are obtained from forests. More than 5,000 types of herbs are found in our forests.

2. There is a need to preserve and protect this priceless resource. People should be sensitive to the protection of medicinal plants and herbs.
3. Addressing Ayurveda specialists present on the occasion, the President said that modern lifestyle-related diseases are affecting people rapidly, and the world is looking to alternative medicines from India.
4. The President said the specialists had a huge responsibility in establishing Ayurveda as a powerful medium for the prevention, treatment and management of such diseases.
5. **The Pt Ramnarayan Sharma National Award was instituted by the Ramnarayan Vaidya Ayurved Research Trust in 1982.**
6. It honours an eminent Ayurvedic scholar every year. The Award consists of a cash prize of Rs 2 lakh, a silver idol of Lord Dhanwantari and a citation.

27TH VYAS SAMMAN

Eminent Hindi writer Mamta Kalia will be honoured with **literary award Vyas Samman for year 2017** for her novel "**Dukkham Sukkham**", the K K Birla Foundation announced on 8 December 2017. A selection committee headed by **Sahitya Akademi director and author Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari** has decided to bestow the award upon Kalia for her novel "Dukkham Sukkham" published in 2009. The writer will receive an amount of Rs 3.5 lakh as the prize money.

What

1. With eminent literary critic and poet **Ram Vilas Sharma as the first recipient in 1991**, the Vyas Samman is given to a Hindi literary work published in the past 10 years.
2. Born in 1940 in Vrindavan, Kalia, 77, received MA in English from Delhi University before taking up lecturership at SNDT Women's University in Mumbai.
3. Since 1973, she headed a degree college in Allahabad before retiring in 2001.
4. Kalia is known for her works in Hindi and English including "Beghar", "Janch Abhi Jaari Hai", "Nirmohi", and "Bolne Wali Aurat".
5. The author has earlier received "Yashpal Katha Samman" from Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, "Sahitya Bhushan Samman" and "Ram Manohar Lohia Samman".

INDIA'S FIRST MILITARY LITERATURE FEST

India's first of its kind Military Literature Festival began in Chandigarh on 8 December 2017 with Punjab Governor V.P.S. Badnore hoping it would prove to be a powerful platform, especially for the youth, to learn about the country's glorious military legacy. A large number of military veterans, experts, scholars, writers, journalists, war correspondents, historians, artists, researchers and industrialists have come together to share their experiences.

What

1. The **Governor hoped the event would also provide an opportunity to children**, especially from remote areas, to interact with armed forces personnel and veterans.
2. Badnore congratulated Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, an ex-army captain, for staging the festival, which has showcased the indomitable spirit of Punjabis and their unparalleled contribution to India's freedom struggle.
3. He said it was Punjab that gave over a million people to fight for India's safety since its Independence in 1947.
4. **Badnore said courage and valour were common to all nations** as they all respect the brave and steadfast, but that "warfare, however, is not all about fighting but also its avoidance", as he reminded the audience of Chinese strategist Sun Tzu's dictum that the finest battle is one that is won without having been fought.

TIME MAGAZINE'S PERSON OF THE YEAR

The anti-harassment **#MeToo** movement has been named **Time** magazine's **Person of the Year**. In the wake of **sexual misconduct revelations** about Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey and dozens of other men, millions worldwide have shared their stories about being sexually harassed and assaulted. The movement began spontaneously in October after actress-activist Alyssa Milano followed on a suggestion from a friend of a friend on Facebook and tweeted: "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet."

What

1. The hashtag was tweeted nearly a million times in 48 hours. **The #MeToo movement was founded by activist Tarana Burke** on Twitter a decade ago to raise awareness about sexual violence.
2. Time's announcement was made **NBC's "Today" show**, where longtime host Matt Lauer was fired last week amid harassment allegations. "Today" host Savannah Guthrie acknowledged that this year's winner hits "close to home" and mentioned Lauer by name.
3. The two runners-up were Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump, he accused of sexual misconduct by numerous women. He has denied any wrongdoing.

BODHI PARVA INAUGURATED

Minister of State for Culture (Independent Charge) Dr. Mahesh Sharma has underlined the relevance of the message of peace and compassion of Lord Buddha in present time and said that it remains a unifying force among nations. Dr. Sharma, while inaugurating the **three days 'Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage' in New Delhi** on December 08, 2017 said that the message of Lord Buddha is as **relevant in the twenty first century** as it was two and a half millennia ago and has been a unifying force among nations. The values of peace, accommodation, inclusiveness, and compassion that are part of our societies can be attributed to the influence of the teachings of Lord Buddha and Buddhism.

What

1. **'Bodhi Parva' has entwined various threads of the Buddhist heritage into a beautiful melange** including an exhibition of international and Indian Buddhist art and architecture, discourses by eminent scholars and practitioners of Buddhism, guided meditation and chanting by Buddhist monks and choir, screening of film on Buddhism, dance and music performances, quiz show and a food trail. **These will help in building an awareness of BIMSTEC's rich and common heritage.**
2. As a regional organization comprising **seven Member States around the Bay of Bengal** that brings together about one – fifth of the world population and a combined GDP of over US \$ 2.8 trillion, BIMSTEC has a crucial role in development of the region. BIMSTEC leaders have imparted fresh momentum to the organization at the Leaders' Retreat hosted by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in Goa in October 2016.
3. India sees BIMSTEC as a natural platform to fulfil its **key foreign policy priorities of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'.**
4. A number of initiatives have been taken to promote cooperation in BIMSTEC under the focus areas of security, transport and communication, environment and disaster management, tourism, traditional medicine and people-to-people exchanges. Several others are in the pipeline. He said that events such as 'Bodhi Parva' would also help immensely in promoting 'Brand BIMSTEC'.
5. India is hosting the "Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage" from 8 to 10 December as part of celebrations of 20th anniversary of BIMSTEC.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GROUND WATER

An **International conference** is being organized on the **Ground water issues in the country** with a theme of “**Ground water Vision 2030- Water Security, Challenges and Climate Change Adaptation**” from December 11 to 13, 2017. The conference has been organized by the National Institute of Hydrology (NIH), Roorkee and Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) under the aegis of Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.

What

1. **Delegates from 15 countries are expected to participate in the conference** and 250 research papers will be presented, **including 32 Keynote papers.**
2. The **Conference is expected to take stock of present status** and challenges of Groundwater management in the country under the changing water use and climatic scenarios.
3. The Conference is taking place at a time when water scenario in the country, especially the ground water scenario, is getting worse day by day.
4. During the past decades, groundwater usage in the country has grown many folds and today **80% of the rural domestic needs** and **65% of the irrigation water requirement** and **50% of industrial** and urban water needs are sourced from our ground water resources.
5. Over exploitation of ground water has started threatening the sustenance of agricultural activities in many key regions in the country including **Punjab, Bundelkhand and Rajasthan** posing a grave threat to the food security in future.
6. Over exploitation of ground water has also started affecting the ground water quality in many areas from the geogenic source of contaminants such as arsenic.
7. The Conference will discuss **these burning issues in 10 focal themes** spread over three days. It is expected to look into the synergistic policy options between various sectors linked with water resources in the country and draw a roadmap to address **these challenges for the development goals of 2030.**

WORLD INEQUALITY REPORT 2018

Income inequality in India has risen over the last three decades and a half with the top 10% of earners cornering 55% of the national income in 2016, the worst level among major economic blocks, except West Asia, says a **report by global researchers.** The share of income of the top earners' group was a **tad over 30% in 1980.** The level of income inequality in India in 2016 matched that in sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil, where top earners accounted for a high share of income, according to the **World Inequality Report 2018** published on 14 December 2017 by **World Wealth & Income Database**, which tracks information on income distribution.

What

1. **Rise in income inequality has been more gradual in India since 1980** compared to Russia, where it has been abrupt and compared to China, where it was moderate, said the report.
2. That indicates **the role played by policies and institutions in evening out inequality**, said the report, which advocated “**tax progressivity**”—higher taxes on the rich—as an effective tool to address inequality. Income taxes are levied based on a person's ability to pay and the rate increases as income level progresses.
3. **India has been trying to tackle income inequality** with a combination of direct transfer of entitlements to the intended beneficiaries, drive against tax evasion and schemes meant to improve access to energy and finance by the poor.
4. The findings of the report come at a time when the central government has started working on **drafting a new direct tax code** which is likely to rejig the tax structure, while the state of **Jammu and Kashmir is set to make a bold experiment with a universal basic income scheme** from the next financial year.

5. The report authored by researchers Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman pointed out that rising income inequality can lead to political, social and economic consequences.
6. The report also advocated higher public spending in education to reduce income inequality and setting up an international registry of financial asset ownership for curbing tax evasion.
7. The report found **Europe as the best performing region**, where the top earners' group **accounted for 37% of national income in 2016**, followed by 41% in China, 46% in Russia and 47% in US-Canada. The report called **West Asia the frontier of income inequality** as this group accounted for 61% of national income.
8. One of the reasons for national governments' diminished ability to effectively tackle income inequality is the transfer of public wealth into private hands, says the report. Also, net public wealth (that is, public assets minus public debts) has declined in nearly **all countries since the 1980s**.
9. This arguably limits government ability to regulate the economy, redistribute income, and mitigate rising inequality. The only exceptions to **the general decline in public property are oil-rich countries** with large sovereign wealth funds, such as Norway.

SNMICON

Raksha Rajya Mantri Dr. Subash Bhamre inaugurated a **four day 49th Annual Conference of the Society of Nuclear Medicine – India SNMICON**. Dr. Bhamre said that advances in medical science have **led to significant improvements in our quality of life. Increase in life expectancy, cure of hitherto incurable diseases and the ability to understand the human body** can all be attributed to these advancements. He also added that the role of nuclear medicine has gained significant momentum over the past few years.

What

1. He said a dedicated research laboratory of **DRDO Life Cluster, Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS)** is making considerable contribution in the research of nuclear medicine, thereby exemplifying the peaceful use of nuclear energy.
2. **INMAS has always taken a lead with academic developments** in the areas of radiation and imaging sciences. The contributions of INMAS are a clear example of how research supported by the Ministry of Defence has significant benefits for society at large.
3. **Scientists of INMAS are active members for various SNM activities**, be it educational programmes, policy drafting or training activities. He called for furthering the close association of INMAS with SNM, hospitals and national universities along with industries and private players to advance nuclear medicine's diagnostic and therapeutic applications through research and training.

NATIONAL ENERGY CONSERVATION DAY

The **National Energy Conservation Day celebration was held in New Delhi, on 14th December, 2017**. The occasion was also be graced by the presence of Union Minister of State (IC) for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shri Raj Kumar Singh.

What

1. Hon'ble President of India gives away **National Energy Conservation Awards to industries** that have demonstrated measurable reductions in their energy use as part of the **National Energy Conservation Awards Programme**.
2. During the event, a short film on the Energy Efficiency achievements in the Industry Sector will also be shown.
3. Further, Shri Kovind will present the National Painting Competition Prizes and visit the exhibition of the prize -winning paintings.
4. This year, over 1.22 crore children, between 4th and 9th standards from across India, participated in the National Painting Competition and 322 industrial units and establishments from key sectors participated in the National Energy Conservation Awards 2017.

Flashback

1. **The Energy Conservation Day is organized on 14th December each year by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)**, under Ministry of Power, with an aim to demonstrate India's achievements in energy efficiency and conservation, while working for its ambition of holistic development as part of the nation's overall effort towards climate change mitigation.
2. As part of its awareness outreach, **BEE recognizes and encourages endeavours of industries** in reducing energy consumption by felicitating them with National Energy Conservation Awards.
3. In order to realize its development goals, **India's energy demand is expected to double between 2013 and 2030**, to approximately 1500 million tonnes of oil equivalent.
4. In the last 19 years (1999-2017) of the award scheme, the award participants have collectively invested over Rs. 48,000 crores in energy efficient technologies and processes, and saved nearly Rs. 38,000 crores through reduced electricity bills and avoided capacity generation.

LEGATUM PROSPERITY INDEX 2017

India was ranked 100th among 149 countries on the list of prosperous countries released as part of **The Legatum Prosperity Index 2017**. The index offers an insight into how prosperity is forming and changing across the world.

What

1. **Legatum Prosperity Index is an annual ranking** developed by the London-based Legatum Institute.
2. **It is world's leading global measure of economic and social wellbeing** that studies 104 indicators under these categories: Economic Quality, Governance, Business Environment, Personal Freedom, Safety and Security, Social Capital, Education, Health and Natural Environment.
3. The **Asia-Pacific region**, which includes China and India, has registered greatest improvement in business environment and worst performance towards natural environment.
4. The gap between China and India's prosperity has **narrowed by four ranks since 2016** and to quarter of what it was in 2012.
5. The rising trend in India's prosperity is

India's performance

1. Economic Quality- 56th rank
2. Business Environment- 65th
3. Governance- 41st
4. Education- 99th
5. Health- 109th
6. Safety & Security- 134th
7. Personal Freedom- 100th
8. Social Capital- 82nd
9. Natural Environment- 139th

significant in view of fact that India registered lower economic growth following **demonetisation and implementation of goods and services tax (GST) reform in 2017.**

PARLIAMENT ATTACK ANNIVERSARY

Parliament attack took place 16 years ago on December 13, 2001, and is considered to be **one of the most sensational terror incidents in India.** Five heavily armed gunmen stormed the Parliament in New Delhi and **opened indiscriminate fire, killing nine people instantly.** The victims included five Delhi Police personnel, a woman Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) trooper; two Parliaments watch and ward staff and a gardener. A journalist who was injured died later. **All five terrorists were also shot dead.**

What

1. The government initially accused Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed of involvement in the attack. However, Lashkar-e-Taiba denied any involvement in the incident.
2. At the time of the attack, more than 100 people, including politicians were inside the Parliament building. The gunmen breached the security around the parliamentary complex by using a fake identity sticker on the car they drove. **The terrorists carried AK47 rifles, grenade launchers, pistols and grenades with them.**
3. Two days after the attack, the Delhi police picked up Afzal Guru from Jammu and Kashmir for conspiring and sheltering the militants. He was later found guilty along with three others - SAR Geelani, Shaukat Hussain Guru and Afsan Guru. While Afsan Guru was let off, the other three were awarded death sentence by the trial court.
4. **In 2003, Jaish-e-Mohammad leader Ghazi Baba, prime accused in the attack,** was killed in an encounter with the Border Security Force (BSF) in Srinagar.
5. The Delhi High Court upheld Afzal Guru and Shaukat Hussain's death sentence, but **SAR Geelani was acquitted on October 29, 2003.**
6. In 2005, Afzal Guru's death sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court but Shaukat Hussain Guru's death sentence was commuted to 10 years of rigorous punishment.
7. A mercy petition of Afzal Guru was rejected by President Pranab Mukherjee on February 3, 2013 and **Afzal Guru was hanged in Tihar jail on February 9, 2013.**
8. Every year on Parliament attack anniversary, tributes are paid to remember the brave martyrs who lost their lives and dispelled the terror attack on the Parliament.