My Notes....

NATIONAL

INDIA'S FIRST SOCIAL AUDIT LAW

Meghalaya became the first state in India to operationalise a law that makes social audit of government programmes and schemes a part of government practice. Chief **Minister Mukul Sangma launched '**The Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017**', at a national convention in Shillong. The event was** attended by more than 200 people from state departments, citizens from audited villages and eminent citizens associated with social audits.

What

1. The legislation — applicable to 11 departments and 21 schemes — was passed on April 4, and was followed by pilot social audits for 26 schemes in 18 villages of the northeastern state.

2. So far, social audits of government programmes have been done at the initiative of civil society organisations. These social audits had no official sanction.

3. K N Kumar, Principal Secretary of Programme Implementation and Evaluation, the nodal agency implementing the social audit law in Meghalaya, cited three things as key in the Act.

FINANCIAL AUDIT	SOCIAL AUDIT
Performance data are collected by management/employees	Performance data are collected through interviews, observations/ and focus groups
Independent/external audit team reviews the data	Independent/external audit team reviews the data
Auditor/team issues a statement on whether the data are a fair presentation of the affairs of the business	Audit team submits a report on whether the data reflect the goal(s) of the project
Financial accounts	Social Audit accounts
Shareholders	Stakeholders

4. First, it will make it easier to correct course as the scheme is rolling along; the audit is not after all the money has been spent.

5. Two, it gives people a direct say in how money will be spent and fills an information gap for officers as they are directly in touch with the ground.

6. Third, social audits have been civil society initiatives rather than government-mandated. They are now part of the system.

7. A social audit facilitator will be appointed to conduct the audit directly with the people. He will present findings to the Gram Sabha, who will add inputs and the result will finally go to the auditors.

BILL AMENDING FOREST ACT PASSED

Parliament on 27 December 2017 passed a Bill to exclude bamboo from the definition of tree under the Indian Forest Act, claiming it would improve the earnings of tribals and dwellers living around forests. The Indian Forest (Amendment) Bill, which was adopted by the Lok Sabha on December 20, was passed by a voice-vote in the Rajya Sabha. Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Harsh Vardhan said the Bill to amend the 1927 Indian Forest Act would benefit the tribals, forest dwellers and farmers as their income would increase.

What

1. The Bill permits felling and transit of bamboo grown in non-forest areas. However, bamboo grown on forest lands would continue to be classified as tree and would be guided by the existing legal restrictions.
2. 26 states and union territories had responded on the Bill while 24 of them had supported it.
3. The Bill would not only increase rural income but also help in increasing green cover across the country.
4. Bamboo was used extensively in a variety of applications such as furnishing, yarn, pulp and paper, handicrafts, decoration and musical instruments.
5. The opposition leader alleged that the Bill was "trampling upon the rights of the Gram Sabha, which are enshrined in the Indian Forest Act".

DARPAN PROJECT LAUNCHED

The Union Ministry of Communications has launched DARPAN (The Digital Advancement of Rural Post Office for A New India) to improve quality of service, add value to services and achieve financial inclusion of un-banked rural population. DARPAN is Information Technology (IT) modernisation project aimed at realising financial inclusion of un-banked rural population. It offers core banking services to the account holders.
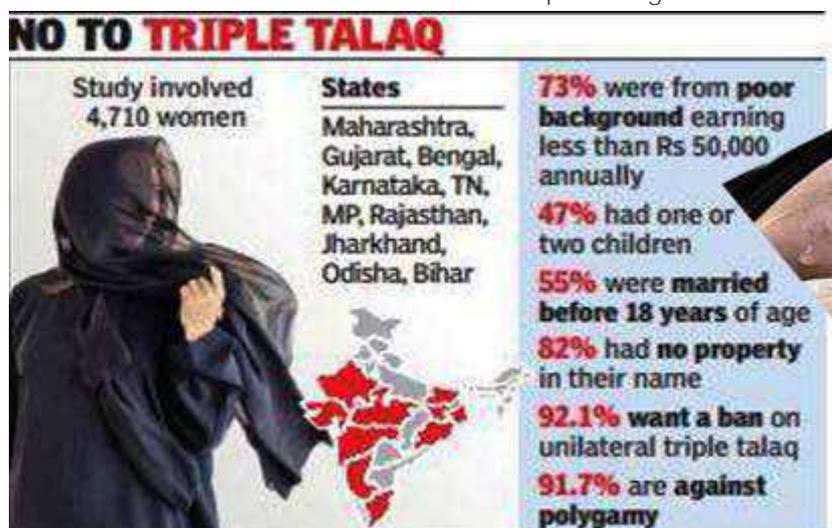
What

1. The project intends to provide low power technology solution to each branch postmaster (BPM).
2. This will enable each of approximately 1.29 lakhs branch post offices (BOs) to improve service delivery.
3. It aims to increase rural reach of Department of Posts (DoP) and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance and Cash Certificates.
4. It also aims to improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of article.
5. It will also increase revenue using retail post business and provide third party applications and make disbursements for social security schemes such as MGNREGS.

BILL CRIMINALISING TRIPLE TALAQ PASSED

After the Lok Sabha passed the 'triple talaq' Bill on 28 December 2017, the Narendra Modi government indicated it would be amenable to incorporating some of the amendments that the Opposition suggested when the Bill comes up for discussion in the Rajya Sabha. The government doesn't have a majority in the Rajya Sabha, and a combined Opposition can force the Bill be sent to a House Select Committee for further study.

NO TO TRIPLE TALAQ

Study involved 4,710 women

States: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bengal, Karnataka, TN, MP, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar

73% were from poor background earning less than Rs 50,000 annually

47% had one or two children

55% were married before 18 years of age

82% had no property in their name

92.1% want a ban on unilateral triple talaq

91.7% are against polygamy

What

1. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, which prohibits divorce by pronouncing instant talaq, or talaq-e-biddat, was passed with most of the leading parties in the Opposition, including the Congress, voting in favour of the Bill, but with caveats.

2. The Bill allows the victim to approach a magistrate to seek "subsistence allowance" for her and minor children. All kinds of instant triple talaq - spoken, in writing or by electronic means, such email, text message or WhatsApp - would be illegal and void.

3. The draft bill also has a provision of imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years, and a fine, for violators.

4. This law is for women's rights and justice and not regarding any prayer, ritual or religion.

5. The law minister added that Centre is looking at the bill through the lens of humanity and not politics, as alleged by the opposition parties.

6. He said that judiciary in various judgements have conveyed their concerns from time to time on this issue. We were expecting that after this judgement, triple talaq cases would come down and situation would improve...about 300 triple talaq cases happened in 2017 and 100 were reported after the Supreme Court's judgement.

7. Several countries particularly Islamic nations including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia and Tunisia have regulated this.

8. The law will give a big blow to those who want to keep women under the constant "fear and terror" in the name of talaq,it concerns the "pain and distress" of 9 crore Muslim women.

SCHEME FOR MAJULI ISLAND

The Union Government has launched new scheme for protection of Majuli Island in Assam from flood and erosion. The scheme was sanctioned by Government in March, 2017 and funding for it will be from Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

What

1. The scheme has been framed by Brahmaputra Board based on recommendations of the high level Expert Committee of Central Government that visits the **world's largest riverine** island at least twice a year to monitor and recommend anti-erosion measures.

2. Bank revetment with geo bags filled with earth/sand for a reach length of 27 km in 14 locations

3. RCC porcupine works in 41 locations

4. Construction of a sluice and

5. Construction of a Pilot channel of length of 3.50 km

Flashback
1. Majuli Island is largest river island in world and first island district of the country.
2. It is formed by Brahmaputra River in south and Kherkutia Xuti, another branch of Brahmaputra, joined by Subansiri River in north.
3. The area of Majuli island recordere in 1914 was aroung 734 sq km and in 2004, it was recorded to be 502 sq km.
4. The entire Majuli island is part of alluvial flood plains of the Brahmaputra river.
5. It is formed of soil consisting mainly of silt deposits which is without cohesion and susceptible to erosion.
6. The problem of erosion was exacerbated after 1950 disastrous earthquake and has become severe environment issue as it remains mostly uncontained.

Hamesha Vijayee

The Southern Command of Indian Army conducted major army exercise called **'Hamesha Vijayee' in deserts of Rajasthan** from December 16 to 22, 2017. The purpose of the exercise was to evaluate capability of armed forces to strike deep into enemy territory in an integrated air-land battle. The Southern Command (hearquaters Pune) undertakes such exercises at regular intervals to ensure high degree of battle readiness as well as validation of operational plans using modern weapons and equipment.

What

1. **The 'Hamesha Vijayee' exercise was conducted in battle** like conditions that aimed at fine tuning surveillance and destruction mechanisms to support precision strikes and manoeuvres by network enabled forces.

2. The exercise showcased high degree of synergy between Indian Army and Air Force along with new generation aviation assets of army which were reviewed to obtain inputs for further refinement of operational procedures.

3. The emphasis of the exercise was on joint operations to test robust sensor to shooter grids by employing vast array of surveillance and air assets networked with land based strategic and tactical vectors.

4. Besides conventional warfare, troops also rehearsed to operate in back drop of chemical and nuclear contingencies.

SUPERSONIC INTERCEPTOR MISSILE TEST FIRED

India successfully test-fired its indigenously developed Advanced Air Defence (AAD) supersonic interceptor missile, capable of destroying any incoming ballistic missile in low altitude, from a test range in Odisha. This was the third supersonic interceptor test carried out this year in which an incoming ballistic missile target was successfully intercepted, **within 30 km altitude of the earth's atmosphere by an interceptor**. It was a direct hit and grand success.

What

1. The earlier two tests were conducted on March 1 and February 11, 2017, as part of efforts to have a full-fledged multi-layer Ballistic Missile Defence system.

2. **Today's test was** conducted to validate various parameters of the interceptor in flight mode and it was all success.

3. The target missile– a Prithvi missile– was launched from launch complex 3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur.

4. After getting signals by tracking radars, the interceptor AAD missile, positioned at Abdul Kalam Island – previously known as Wheeler Island — in the Bay of Bengal, roared

India successfully test-fires Indigenously developed **Advanced Air Defence (AAD)** Supersonic Interceptor Missile | Capable of destroying incoming ballistic missile at low altitude

3rd supersonic interceptor test carried out in 2017 in which an incoming ballistic missile target was successfully intercepted, within 30 km altitude of the earth's atmosphere by an interceptor

Target missile launched from ITR at Chandipur near Balasore (Odisha)

Interceptor missile flew from its position at Abdul Kalam Island in Bay of Bengal

7.5-meter long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile

Equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and an electro-mechanical activator

Has its own mobile launcher, secure data link, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars

PTI GRAPHICS

through its trajectory to destroy the hostile target missile in mid-air in an endo-atmospheric altitude.

5. The interceptor is a 7.5-meter long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and an electro-mechanical activator.

6. The state-of-the-art interceptor missile has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

BILL CLEARS TO REPLACE MCI

Union Cabinet approved the National Medical Commission bill to replace the scam-tarnished Medical Council of India that regulates 479 institutions in the country. The government did not disclose aspects of the Bill likely to be tabled in the Parliament session, but the draft is prepared on recommendations of an expert panel formed by the NITI Aayog to revamp the medical education sector.

What

1. The Bill envisages creation of a 20-member National Medical Commission to manage four autonomous boards to regulate undergraduate and post-graduate medical education, evaluating colleges, supervising medical ethics and registering doctors.

2. Besides chairman and member secretary, the NMC will have four presidents who would head the autonomous boards and officials from Union Health Ministry, HRD Ministry, Department of Pharmaceuticals and Director General of Health Services as ex-officio members.

3. There will also be five additional members with expertise in management, economics, law, consumer rights, medical research, science and technology and patient rights.

4. A further five members from the states nominated by the Medical Advisory Council will also be part of the NMC.

5. The Commission would be guided by the Medical Advisory Council comprising 29 members nominated by states.

INDIA SELECTED OF KIMBERLEY CERTIFICATION SCHEME

India was selected as Chair of Ad Hoc Committee on Review & Reforms to look into various issues pertaining to the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPSC) at recently held KP Plenary Session in Brisbane, Australia.

Flashback

1. Kimberley Process is joint initiative of governments, industry and civil societies **to stem flow of 'conflict diamonds', rough** diamonds used by rebel groups to finance wars against legitimate governments.

2. It is also described in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

3. India is one of the founding members of KPCS.

4. At present, KPCS has 54 members representing 81 countries including EU with 28 members.

5. The KPCS came into effect from 1 January, 2003 through a United Nations General Assembly Resolution.

What
1. Angola will be the Vice Chair of this Adhoc Committee and will work with India and other members of Committee on reform issues related to changes in core document, expansion of scope of KP.
2. India was appointed as the Kimberly Process (KP) Vice Chair for 2018 & Chair for 2019 in the last plenary of KP held in Dubai in November, 2016.
3. The EU will be KP Chair for 2018.

6. It outlines the rules that govern trade in rough diamonds. It has evolved into effective mechanism for stopping trade in conflict diamonds.

7. It sets minimum requirements that each participant must meet. In India, the scheme is administered through Department of Commerce under aegis of the Union Commerce and Industry Ministry.

8. Conflict diamonds or blood diamonds are the rough diamonds used by rebel movements in the third world countries especially in Africa to finance (civil) wars with an aim to topple legitimate governments.

9. The KPCS completely bans import and export of rough diamonds without certification.

'GANGA GRAM' PROJECT LAUNCHED

Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation Uma Bharti on 23 December 2017 **launched the 'Ganga Gram' project as part of the government's clean Ganga mission**, named Namami Gange, for holistic sanitation development in 4,470 villages on the banks of the river.

What

1. The project was launched at the Ganga Gram Swachata Sammelan in Delhi which was attended by more than 1,400 delegates including 500 village heads from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, state government officials and Ganga Swachhta volunteers.

2. **At the launch event,"Development takes place only if adequate care and precaution are taken in the project to protect the environment of the Ganga."**

3. The Ganga Gram project **"depends on the commitment and resolve of the people living on its banks".**

4. Water Resources, Ganga Rejuvenation and River Development Ministry appealed to the village heads to pledge unconditional support for making the river and the villages on its banks clean.

NASEEM-AL-BAHR 2017

The 11th edition of Naseem-Al-Bahr (Sea Breeze) 2017 Naval exercise between India and Oman was held at Said Bin Sultan Naval Base, Wudam in Oman. The year marks 24 years of Indian Navy-Royal Navy of Oman bilateral exercises that has been a biennial feature since 1993.

What

1. The Indian Navy had deployed two naval ships – INS Trikand and INS Teg in this edition of bilateral exercise for the harbour phase.

2. In sea phase of the exercise, Indian Navy ships along with four Royal Navy of Oman ships Al Mubashir, Al Rasikh, Khassab and Al Bushra had sailed.

3. For the first time, an Indian Navy had deployed submarine as well as the versatile P8I, long range maritime aircraft are participating.

Flashback
1. Bilateral relations between both countries were formally established with signing of 1953 Indo-Oman Treaty of friendship, Navigation and Commerce.
2. It was first between India and Arab country.
3. The first exercise Indian Navy with Royal Navy of Oman was conducted in 1993.
4. The naval cooperation between both countries since then has gradually increased in scope and scale.

INDIA'S FIRST AC LOCAL TRAIN

In a Christmas gift to Mumbaikars, the country's first air-conditioned (AC) suburban train commenced its services on 25 December 2017, thus realising the long-awaited dream of lakhs of commuters. The train, operated by the Western Railway (WR), began its journey from the Borivali station to Churchgate in South Mumbai.

What

1. Initially, it was meant to be run on the Central Railway (CR) corridor. However, later it was decided to run it first on the WR corridor.

2. Subsequently, the WR conducted about 65 trial runs of the train before starting its services for the public today.

3. The train will make six trips daily (12 services per day) and from January 1 next year, it will run from Churchgate to Virar.

4. "The train will not operate on Saturdays and Sundays as it requires maintenance, the 12 services of the AC train will replace the existing 12 non-AC services.

5. The commissioning of this train is a 0testimony that the Indian Railways is trying hard to meet the demands of the passengers.

INDIA FIRST STATE'S LOGO

Bengaluru is the only city in the country to boast of a logo of its own. With this initiative of the Karnataka government, Bengaluru joins New York City, Melbourne, Singapore, and other global cities to have its own tourism logo. With universal appeal, **the logo, 'Be U',** is a mix of typography in English and Kannada. The first part of the logo is in English and the rest in Kannada. The uniqueness of the logo is that every one can associate with it, pronounce it easily, and also various gift-articles can be crated out of it.

What

1. The crowd-source-designed logo comes with an option of colours (green, red and yellow) depending on the occasion.

2. The logo now aims to make every person coming to the city to spend on memorabilia. Current best-sellers of Karnataka, such as Mysore silks or Chanapatanna toys, have no direct Bengaluru-recall to them.

3. The new logo, it is felt, will thus generate jobs in creating T-shirts, mugs, fridge magnets and other city-specific memorabilia.

4. The logo will help leverage **Bengaluru's identity bet**ter and create a brand value that could, in turn, stimulate the hospitality industry and create jobs by attracting more footfall.

Genesis
1. The idea of a logo for Bengaluru started when the realisation came that though the State gets a steady flow of international and domestic tourists, there was nothing to tell them about the experiences Bengaluru offered.
2. A report of the Legislative Tourism Subcommittee, comprising elected members from both Houses of the State Legislature, also said that though the city receives a good number of foreign tourists, there was no avenue to make them spend even $100 per person while smaller cities across the globe have successfully branded themselves as destination cities.
3. From this emerged the idea of exclusive marketing of Bengaluru and then a logo.
4. The idea of the logo is to integrate all experiences of Bengaluru online along with seamless offline solutions to ensure we are **India's first tourist**-centric city and gateway to South India.
5. As part of the logo launch, the Tourism Department held a Bengaluru Habba on the **city's unique culture and heritage, and** showcased the art, music, tradition, technology, and food that make Bengaluru a unique metropolis.

HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT IN J&K CLEARED

Setting in motion India's ambitious plan to utilise its share of water from western tributaries of the river Indus, an expert panel of the environment ministry has cleared the 800 MW Bursar hydroelectric project in Jammu and Kashmir. The Bursar is one of the three projects on river Chenab and its tributary which India wants to complete in a time-bound manner within the Indus Water Treaty (IWT). Under the 1960 treaty with Pakistan, India is permitted to construct storage capacities on the western rivers up to 3.6 million acre feet (MAF) for various purposes including domestic use.

What

1. The Bursar hydroelectric project is a storage project in which the flow of water can be regulated not only to the benefit of this project but all downstream projects such as Pakal Dul, DulHasti, Rattle, Baglihar, Sawalkotand Salal hydroelectric projects.

2. Though the environment ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) for River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects had in October deferred granting clearance to the Bursar project, it had finally cleared the project without a site visit early this month.

3.   Since the visit was not possible before June 2018 due to poor weather conditions, the panel granted its green signal without the site visit - an indication of urgency to expedite the country's ambitious project.

4.   The dam site of the project is located near village Pakal on river Marusudar which is one of the major tributary of river Chenab. The storage provided is intended to be used for additional power generation during lean flow months and releasing regulated flow in the downstream.

5.   Under the IWT, water of eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) are allocated to India while the country is under obligation to let flow the water of the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab) to Pakistan.

6.   India can, however, use the water from the western rivers for its domestic purposes, irrigation and generating hydro-electric power.

ISRO'S NAVIC SYSTEM

India's regional satellite navigation system (NAVIC), developed by the ISRO and **dedicated to the country's boatmen last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is** set to be applied to war**n Kerala's deep**-sea fishermen about changing weather patterns. In the aftermath of Cyclone Ockhi, in which over 70 fishermen lost their lives in Kerala alone, questions were raised about the safety and security of fisherfolk at sea. Now, with the application of NAVIC, warning signals and messages can be sent to the boats from the shore.

What

1.   On a pilot basis starting in January, around 500 satellite-enabled communication gadgets, manufactured **with ISRO's technology,** are set to be fitted in fishing boats and deep-sea vessels in the state.

2.   In the event of changing weather like strong winds or cyclone, fishermen, out at sea, can be warned about the same.

3.   This device has a **receiver, it doesn't have** a transmitter. So, it only allows now for one-way communication. It is an established and proven system.

GPS Vs NAVIC

- More accurate than the American GPS system.

- Unlike American GPS, Isro is recommending a small additional hardware in handheld devices that can receive S-Band signals from IRNSS satellites and inclusion of a code in the phone software to receive L-Band signals.

- Both these L and S-band signals received are being calculated by a special embedded software which reduces the errors caused by atmospheric disturbances significantly. This, in turn, gives a superior quality location accuracy than the American GPS system

4.   ISRO has promised to supply 250 communication sets by January 10 with the rest coming in later weeks.

5.   The ISRO has teamed up with Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) for the transmission of messages using the NAVIC system.

6.   A master control room, set up at Thiruvananthapuram, and six regional control rooms near main harbours such as Kochi, Kollam and Kozhikode will be a part of the warning system.

7.   Messages can be sent to fishermen up to 1500 kilometres. We will be sending daily updates of the sea state, current wave conditions and whether there will be extreme weather events, said Dr Balakrishnan Nair, a scientist at INCOIS.

BILLS TO REPEAL OBSOLETE LAWS PASSED

The parliament on 28 December 2017 passed two bills to repeal 245 obsolete and archaic laws, including the 158-year-old Calcutta Pilots Act of 1859 and Prevention of Seditious Meeting Act, 1911. Minister of state for law said the Centre was bringing reforms in the legal system by repealing all obsolete laws. He said the government has identified 1,824 laws that required repeal. The government is repealing 245 more obsolete laws through these two bills, he said.

What

1. Some of the old acts that have been repealed are the 'Hackney Carriage Act, 1879' which was legislated for regulation and control of hackney carriages; and the 'Dramatic Performance Act, 1876' when the theatre was used as a medium of protest against the British rule.
2. Another such old act repealed by the Parliament is the 'Ganges Tolls Act, 1867' which provided for collecting toll "not exceeding 12 annas" on certain boats and steamers plying on the Ganga to improve navigation of the river between Allahabad (UP) and Dinapore (Bihar).
3. Two-member panel was set up to look into the repealing of archaic laws, and the panel also consulted the Centre and the state government as well as administrative departments before recommending the legislations to be repealed.

EKUVERIN CONCLUDES

The two-week long eighth edition of the Indo-Maldives joint military exercise, 'Ekuverin', came to an end at Belagavi on 28 December 2017. The bilateral annual exercise was a 14-day joint military training between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), held alternatively in India and Maldives since 2009. 'Ekuverin' means 'friends' in the Maldivian language.

What

1. The seventh edition of the exercise was held at Kadhdhoo, Lammu Atoll, Maldives in December, 2016.
2. The closing ceremony to mark the culmination of joint training held at Maratha Light Infantry Regimental Centre at Belagavi, saw participation from marching contingents of both the countries, an official release said.
3. The exercise has honed individual and collective professional skills of participants by imbibing best practices of both the Armies. It has served to reinforce the close ties of friendship between the two countries," said the senior most military observer of the Indian Army, Brigadier Alok Khurana.
4. MNDF was represented by a team comprising two officers and 43 other ranks and the Indian Army by three officers, an equal number of junior commissioned officers and 39 other ranks belonging to a Gorkha Rifles Battalion (Sirmoor Rifles).
5. The exercise has further enhanced the military relations and cooperation between the two forces.

FREE CONVERSION OF PIO CARDS TO OCI STOPED

The people of Indian origin will have to pay fees in New Year if they wish to convert their identity cards to Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards as the government has stopped the scheme of free conversion effective on 1 January 2018, a Home Ministry official said. The scheme of converting the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) cards to OCI cards free of cost comes to an end as a decision has been taken not to give any more extension beyond December 31. However, the change of PIO cards to OCI cards would continue on payment of fees.

What

1. The deadline will not be extended further as the bulk of people - around 30 lakh - have already converted their PIO cards into OCI cards.
2. The Home Ministry had extended the deadline on four occasions. The fee is being worked out by the ministry and will be announced soon.

3. The PIO card was first implemented in 2002 as a benefit to foreign nationals who could establish at least a third generation tie to Indian origin.

4. The PIO card was valid for travel, work, and residence in India for a period of 15 years. The OCI card was implemented in 2005, carried more expansive benefits than the PIO card, and was valid for the holder's lifetime.

5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced in 2014 that the two types of cards would be merged and the Indian diaspora would be given the maximum possible benefits.

6. Simultaneous existence of PIO and OCI cards led to confusion among People of Indian Origin residing abroad.

PIO VS OCI

A PERSON OF INDIAN ORIGIN (PIO)

► Means a **foreign citizen** (except a national of Pakistan, Afghanistan Bangladesh, China, Iran, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Nepal)

► A **foreign citizen** whose one of the parents/ grandparents/ great grandparents was **born** and a **permanent resident** of India

► Who is a **spouse** of a citizen of India or a PIO

BENEFITS

1. PIO card holders **do not require a visa to visit India** for a period of 15 years from the date of issue of the PIO card.

2. They are **exempted from registration at FRRO/ FRO** if their **stay does not exceeds 180 days**, In case if the stay exceeds 180 days, they shall have to register with FRRO/ FRO within the next 30 days

3. They **enjoy parity with NRIs** in economic, **financial** and **educational benefits**

4. All **future benefits** that **would be exempted to NRIs** would also be available to the **PIO card holders**

OVERSEAS CITIZEN OF INDIA (OCI)

A **foreign national**, who was **eligible** to **become citizen of India** on **26.01.1950** or was a citizen of India on or at anytime after **26.01.1950** or belonged to a territory that became part of India after **15.08.1947** is **eligible for registration as Overseas Citizen of India** (OCI). Minor children of such person are also eligible for OCI. However, if the applicant had ever been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh, he/she will not be eligible for OCI.

BENEFITS

OCIs are **entitled to a multipurpose, multiple entry, lifelong visa** allowing them to visit India at any time, for any length of time and for any purpose

► **Exempted from police reporting** for any length of stay in the country

► Have also been granted all rights in the economic, financial and education fields in **parity with NRIs** except, the right to acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties
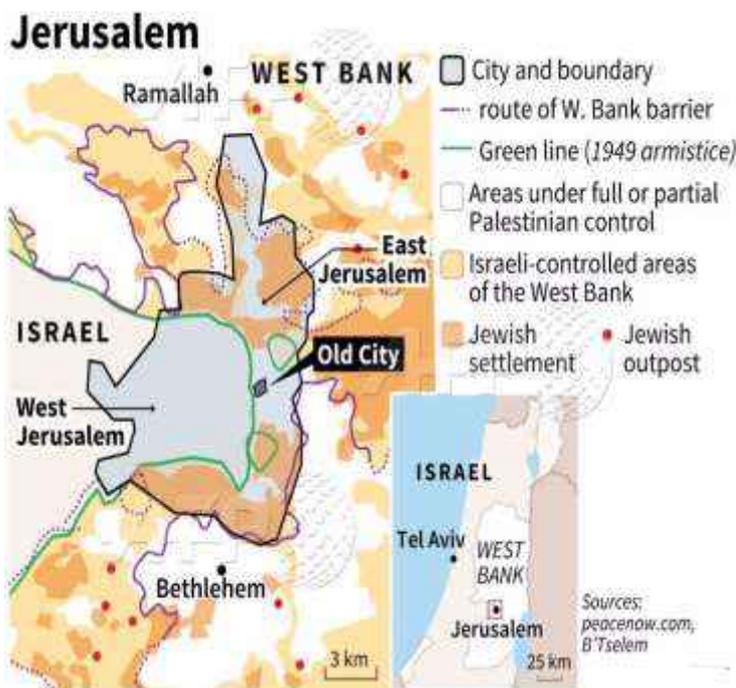
INTERNATIONAL

UN VOTES 128-9 OVER JERUSALEM

UN General Assembly on 21 December 2017 voted, 128-9, in favour of the UN resolution to declare the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital `null and void'. India voted in favour of the UNGA resolution calling upon the US to withdraw its recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

What

1. **Even America's closest** allies on the 15-member Council, the most powerful body in the UN system, voted for the resolution. They warned that Trump's announcement about Jerusalem, which upended decades of American policy, threatened to subvert the effort to solve one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

2. This was the first veto exercised by the Trump administration and the first one by the US in six years.

3. The fact that this veto is being done in defence of American sovereignty and in defence of **America's role in the Middle East peace process** is not a source of embarrassment for us; it should be an embarrassment to the remainder of the Security Council.

4. It is one more example of the UN doing more harm than good in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the draft resolution that would have called upon all states to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem.

5. The resolution calling on Trump to withdraw recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital was supported by close allies of the US — Britain, France and Japan.

6. Those who want peace do not recognise illegal actions and measures but rather recognise the rights of the Palestinian people as enshrined in international law, However, Israeli Ambassador Danny Danon said that Trump had merely stated a fact by recognising that Jerusalem was the capital of Israel.

WORLD'S LARGEST AMPHIBIOUS AIRCRAFT

China's domestically developed AG600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft, performed its maiden flight from an airport on the shores of the South China Sea, the latest step in a military modernisation program. China has stepped up research on advanced military equipment as it adopts a more muscular approach to territorial disputes in places such as the disputed South China Sea, rattling nerves in the Asia-Pacific region and the United States.

What

1. It had previously been scheduled to make its first flight earlier this year but it is unclear why it was delayed after ground tests took place in April.

2. State-owned Aviation Industry Corp of China (AVIC) has spent almost eight years developing the aircraft, which is roughly the size of a Boeing Co 737 and is designed to carry out marine rescues and battle forest fires.

3. State media has also noted its potential use in the South China Sea, where China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Brunei all have overlapping claims.

4. **The AG600's chief designer, Huang Lingcai**, was quoted in the official China Daily earlier this month as saying it can make round trips without refueling from the southern island province of Hainan to James Shoal, claimed by China but which is located close to Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo.

5. The AG600 can carry 50 people during maritime search-and-rescue missions, and can scoop up 12 metric tons of water within 20 seconds for fire fighting trips, according to state media.

6. The aircraft has received 17 orders so far from Chinese government departments and Chinese companies. It has a maximum flight range of 4,500 km (2,800 miles) and a maximum take-off weight of 53.5 tonnes.

7. China is in the midst of a massive military modernization program, ranging from testing anti-satellite missiles to building stealth fighters and the country's first indigenous aircraft carrier, to add to an existing one bought from Ukraine.

CHINESE BAN ON IVORY SALES

China's complete ban on ivory trade went into effect on 31 December 2017, a major step forward in Beijing's efforts to rein in what was once the world's largest market for illegal ivory. The ministry added that the ban also applied to online sales and souvenirs purchased abroad. According to the Xinhua state news agency, a partial ban had already resulted in an 80 percent decline in seizures of ivory entering China. Domestic prices for raw ivory are down 65 per cent. The total domestic ban was announced at the end of last year.

What

1. By this March, 67 factories and shops involved in China's ivory trade had closed. The remaining 105 were expected to close on 31 January 2017.

2. China had previously banned imports of all ivory and ivory products acquired before 1975, after pressure to restrict a trade that sees thousands of elephants slaughtered every year.

3. African ivory is highly sought after in China, where it is seen as a status symbol, and used to fetch as much as USD 1,100 a kilogramme.

4. Poaching in Africa has seen the elephant population fall by 110,000 over the last 10 years to just 415,000, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

5. Despite an overall fall in poaching, Africa's elephant population has declined in part because of continued illegal killing, said a report this year by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

UN APPOINTS NEW UNICEF HEAD

UN chief Antonio Guterres has appointed former senior US government official Henrietta H Fore as the new executive director of UNICEF, the world body said. Fore (69), has worked to champion economic development, education and health, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief for the most vulnerable in the international and developing world.

What

1. She was the first woman to be appointed Administrator of the US Agency for International Development and Director of US Foreign Assistance in the Department of State, she held these positions between 2006 and 2009. From 1989 to 1993, she was working as the USAID Assistant Administrator for Asia and for Private Enterprise.

2. Currently CEO of Holsman International, a manufacturing and investment company, Fore also served as Undersecretary of State for Management, the Chief Operating Officer for the United States Department of State.

3. In addition, she was member on the boards of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

4. Welcoming her appointment as UNICEF head, State Department Spokesperson **Heather Nauert said that Fore will be a "powerful" voice on behalf of the world's** children in her new position with the UN. She will succeed Anthony Lake.

5. Henrietta Fore will bring a wealth of ex**perience to UNICEF's work for children**.

6. Fore will become the seventh Executive Director on January 1, 2018. The Trump **administration has welcomed the UN's decision.**

ECONOMY

AMENDMENTS TO BANKRUPTCY CODE PASSED

The Lok Sabha on 29 December 2017 passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill 2017, paving the way for tightening loopholes in the existing code and making the resolution process more effective. The bill replaces an ordinance that was brought in last month seeking to bar wilful defaulters, defaulters whose dues had been classified as non-performing assets (NPAs) for more than a year, and all related entities of these firms from participating in the resolution process. The bill has diluted some of the stringent provisions of the ordinance and seeks to strike a balance in the trade-off between punishing wilful defaulters and ensuring a more effective insolvency process.

What

1. The bill allows defaulting promoters to be part of the debt resolution process, provided they repay the dues in a month to make their loan account operational and the resolution happens within the overall time frame specified in the code.

2. This will help promoters who had submitted resolution plans before the ordinance barred them from taking part in the resolution process of companies.

3. The bill also allows asset reconstruction companies, alternative investment funds (AIFs) such as private equity funds and banks to participate in the bidding process.

4. Many of these entities acquire distressed assets and the classification of these assets as NPAs would have disqualified them from the bidding process.

5. Similarly, banks opting to convert their debt into equity under the Reserve Bank of **India's** scheme for sustainable

> The amendments aim to correct these anomalies.
> 1. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code was enacted in 2016 to find a time-bound resolution for ailing and sick firms, either through closure or revival, while protecting the interests of creditors. A successful completion of the resolution process was expected to aid in reducing rising bad loans in the banking system.
> 2. The bill has also sought to bring any individual who was in control of the NPA under the ambit of the insolvency code. It lays out that the individual insolvency law will be implemented in phases. It also allows guarantors of insolvent firms to bid for other firms under the insolvency process.
> 3. The experience with the resolution process so far had triggered the need for introducing an ineligibility criteria to ensure that defaulting promoters are not able to regain control of their companies after the resolution process, leaving only the creditors poorer.
> 4. There are countries in the world that allow defaulting creditors to bid. But we have a situation in India where we have to take a decision (to keep these promoters out).
> 5. The high levels of NPA at present are due to window dressing and due to evergreening of loans. This situation has arisen because loans were restructured and not classified as NPAs.
> 6. The problems were shoved under the carpet and these came to light because of the asset quality review initiated by RBI in 2015.

structuring of stressed assets would have inadvertently become promoters of these insolvent companies and thereby been barred from the resolution process.

COMPANIES (AMEND) BILL, 2017 PASSED

Parliament on 19 December 2017 passed the Companies (Amendment) Bill 2017 with as many as 40 amendments in the Companies Act 2013 to safeguard the interest of shareholders, strengthen corporate governance standards and improve the ease of doing business. Among other things, the amended law removes the restrictions on number of layers of investment companies; it also removes the restrictions on number of layers of subsidiaries of a company.

What

1. It allows independent directors to have pecuniary interest in the company to up to 10% of their income. The amount may be modified by the central government as opposed to the Companies Act of 2013, which debarred the independent directors from having monetary relationship with the company.

2. The bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in March 2016, and then referred to the Standing Committee on Finance. After taking into consideration the recommendations of the panel, the Cabinet had cleared a revised bill in March this year.

3. The members raised apprehensions that the government was not doing enough to ensure that the companies comply with corporate social responsibility provisions.

4. Former finance minister P Chidambaram opposed the amendment to delete Section 195 and 196 that provide for prohibition of insider and forward trading.

5. Chidambaram also sought separate law for small and medium companies. He said the bill had noble objectives to benefit the medium and small companies but relaxations given to such companies under this legislation will be applicable to large companies as well since there was only one Companies Act.

6. Certain changes proposed by the Company Law Committee in relation to residence requirement of directors were not included in the bill. This implies that the provision under the 2013 Act that requires a person to be a resident of India for being eligible to be appointment as a whole -time director of a company, stays in the new bill.

7. A resident is defined as someone who has stayed in India for a continuous period of 12 months before he is appointed as a director.

FSSA REPORT

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) has released the Financial System Stability Assessment (FSSA) and Financial Sector Assessment (FSA) respectively. It was second comprehensive Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP) of Indian financial system undertaken by the joint IMF-World Bank team conforming to the highest international standards.

Highlights of 2017 FSAP

1. The FSAP assessment acknowledges **India's strong growth in recent years in both** economic activity and financial assets.

2. It also acknowledges many efforts undertaken by India like tackling Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), recent recapitalization measures for banks and introduction of special resolution regime, formalization of National Pension System (NPS) and making the pension sector regulator statutory.

3. **It also acknowledged India's efforts towards** passing of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and setting up of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) and **initiatives such as 'no frills' account (under** Jan DhanYojana) and introduction of unique biometric identification number (AADHAR).

4. **It also acknowledged RBI's substantial** progress made in strengthening banking supervision by introducing of risk-based supervision in 2013 through comprehensive and forward-looking Supervisory Program for Assessment of Risk and Capital (SPARC) and Asset Quality Review (AQR) and strengthening of regulations in 2015 leading to improved distressed asset recognition.

Flashback
1. FSAP is joint program of IMF and WB involved in developing countries and region only.
2. It undertakes a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of a **country's financial sector.**
3. It is conducted every five years. Last FSAP for India was conducted in 2011-12 and the report was published by IMF in January 2013.

5. It also acknowledged **RBI's Basel III framework and other international norms** have been implemented or are being phased in.

6. **It acknowledges RBI's move of establishing new Enforcement Depart**ment and revising Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework that incorporates more prudent risk-tolerance thresholds.

7. It has recommended that governance and financial operations of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) can be improved by developing strategic plan for their consolidation, divestment, and privatization.

CABINET CLEARS NEW CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL

The Union Cabinet on 20 December 2017 approved a new Consumer Protection Bill that seeks to give more teeth to the mechanism to safeguard consumer rights. The Bill, expected to be tabled in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session, also has provisions to deal with misleading advertisements and ban celebrities from endorsing such products.

What

1. In August 2015, the Centre had introduced the Consumer Protection Bill in the Lok Sabha to repeal the 30-year-old Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
2. A parliamentary standing committee had also submitted its recommendations in April 2016.
3. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs has brought a fresh bill as there were many amendments to the Bill introduced in 2015.
4. The new Bill seeks to enlarge the scope of the existing law and make it more effective and purposeful.
5. It seeks to establish a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce consumer rights.
6. It has provisions for post-litigation stage mediation as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism. The Bill also provides for product liability action.

RBI BEGINS PCA

Bank of India said on 20 December 2017 that the Reserve Bank of India has initiated 'prompt corrective action' (PCA) against the lender over high bad loans. High net non-performing assets (NPA), insufficient common equity tier 1 (CET1) capital and negative return on assets (ROA) for two consecutive years have prompted the action.

What is PCA
1. To ensure that banks don't go bust, RBI has put in place some trigger points to assess, monitor, control and take corrective actions on banks which are weak and troubled.
2. The process or mechanism under which such actions are taken is known as Prompt Corrective Action, or PCA.

What

1. The RBI issues a PCA to spur lenders to deal with bad debts, as one of the measures intended to tackle the menace of bad debt that has plagued Indian banks.
2. The bank had a net non-performing assets ratio of 6.47 per cent as of end-September.
3. Shares of the bank dropped as much as 5.4 per cent to 171.45 rupees in afternoon trade in a Mumbai market that was trading 0.17 per cent higher.

Why the need for PCA

1. The 1980s and early 1990s were a period of great stress and turmoil for banks and financial institutions all over the globe.
2. In USA, more than 1,600 commercial and savings banks in sured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) were either closed or given financial assistance during this period.
3. The cumulative losses incurred by the failed institutions exceeded US $100 billion. These events led to the search for appropriate supervisory strategies to avoid bank failures as they can have a destabilising effect on the economy .

IMMOVABLE PROPERTY (AMENDMENT) BILL PASSED

A bill to amend the regulations governing compensation payable for acquisition of immovable property by the Centre for defence and security purposes, was passed by the Lok Sabha on 20 December 2017. The Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill, which was moved by urban development minister Hardeep Singh Puri, was adopted by a voice vote.

What

1. This is the 12th amendment and the amendment has been brought for limited and specific purpose, the minister said.
2. The bill seeks to amend a provision to allow the Centre to re-issue the notice of **acquisition in order to ensure that the property's owner gets an opportunity to be** heard.

3. State has the obligation that relates to compensation. The states want to pay compensation which is fair and just compensation, the minister said.

4. Putting at rest the apprehensions of the members of the house, the minister said the compensation was meant for an interim period and solely for the purpose of determining the date of compensation to be computed.

5. According to the government, there could be situations resulting in prolonged litigations and if the apex court quashes the notice of acquisition, there might be astronomical hike in compensation amount on account of market value appreciation.

6. Against this backdrop, the bill seeks to amend a section of the Requisitioning and **Acquisition of Immovable Property Act to "enable the central government to re-issue the notice of acquisition to the owner or such other person interested in the property, for the purpose of giving an opportunity of being heard".**

BND-4201

India Government Mint (IGM), a unit of Security Printing and Minting Corp of India Ltd has launched **India's first home**-grown high purity gold reference standard – Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya (BND-4201). The BND-4201 is reference material for gold of **'9999' fineness** (gold that is 99.99% pure with impurities of only 100 parts-per-million). It will be beneficial to the consumers and public at large to ensure purity of gold.

What

1. BND-4201, the high purity gold reference standard has been developed through collaboration between IGM, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) — Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-National Physical Laboratory (New Delhi) and National Centre for Compositional Characterisation of Materials (Hyderabad).

2. The gold reference standard is indispensable in gold and jewellery hall marking.

3. This reference will also be useful for Collection and Purity Testing Centres to certify purity of gold deposits under gold monetization scheme.

BILL FOR GST CESS HIKE PASSED

The Lok Sabha on 27 December 2017 approved a bill for GST cess hike on luxury cars from 15% to 25% with a view to enhance funds to compensate states for revenue loss following the rollout of goods and services tax. The GST (compensation to states) Amendment Bill, 2017, was passed by the lower House amid uproar by the opposition over controversial comments made by union minister Anant Kumar Hegde on secularism and the constitution.

What

1. The bill seeks to replace the ordinance which was issued in September to give effect to the decision of the GST council.

2. The ordinance provided for a hike in the GST cess on a range of cars from mid-size to hybrid variants and the luxury ones to 25%.

3. Finance minister Arun Jaitley said the funds collected following hike in cess on luxury vehicles will be used to compensate states for revenue loss on account of implementation of the GST.

4. GST council, which comprises state finance ministers, meets every month and takes decision on rationalisation of taxes in the backdrop of revenue collection. Participating in the discussion, members demanded that the GST rate should be reduced on a variety of items including sanitary napkins, agriculture equipments, handicrafts, handloom items and sports goods.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN SCIENTISTS DECODE GRAVITATIONAL WAVE

An Indo-US team of astronomers have decoded a mystery behind the most powerful gravitational wave detected so far. The discovery not only opened up a new window to look at the rare cosmic phenomenon, but also challenged an established theory, used to explain such events. A couple of months ago, the most powerful gravity wave, produced during a violent collision of two massively dense stars, known as neutron stars, was discovered.

What

1.   The strongest GW signal came from the smash-up of two neutron stars that are so heavy that a tea spoon-full of neutron star material weighs more than the Mount Everest.

2.   Now another group of scientists comprising several Indian astronomers provided a new insight into this violent celestial collision.

3.   Analysing the gravity and electromagnetic signals emitted from the merger, they showed a super-fast energy jet, launched from the two neutron stars as they collided, was slamming into the surrounding material and created a slower-moving, billowy cocoon.

4.   Only two special detectors in the USA and Europe captured the gravity wave signals, but several other telescopes from around the world, including India's Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope near Pune, picked up the electromagnetic signals in various frequencies.

5.   For the first time gravitational waves from neutron star merger have been detected, and for the first time electromagnetic counterpart from this merger has been detected.

6.   In this historical feat, GMRT has the credit to detect it at the lowest frequency ever! It is a proud moment for Indian astronomy, said Poonam Chandra, astronomer at the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics, Pune who is part of the team.

7.   The scientists got the clues from the radio signals. The radio emission-originally detected 16 days after the August 17 event and still measurable and increasing in strength as of December 2-tells a different story.

8.   If the jet had been fast and beam-like, the radio light would have weakened with time, as the jet lost energy. The fact that the brightness of the radio light is increasing, suggests the presence of a cocoon that is choking the jet.

9.   Gravity waves are a type of esoteric cosmic wave, whose existence was predicted by Albert Einstein more than a century ago, but the first one was detected only in September 2015.

WORLD'S LARGEST HUMAN GENOME RESEARCH PROJECT

China has launched world's largest human genome research project to document the genetic makeup of one lakh people to help generate the precision medicines for the future. **The project aims to provide references for China's** medical research, clinical diagnoses and treatments. It will detect genetic links between health and sickness and involve one person from different ethnic backgrounds and regions.

What

1.   The project will collect genetic data of Han ethnic majority people from all over the country and 9 other ethnic minority groups with a population of more than 5 million. There are about 25,000 human genes and project aims to decode hereditary information contained in each.

2.   The project includes four stages – collecting, sequencing gene samples, gathering data and sharing findings.

3.   Project will conclude all its gene sequencing and analysis within four years, making it the fastest genome engineering project in the world.

LIVING BACTERIA FOUND IN POLAR ICE

For the first time, scientists have discovered living bacteria in polar ice and snow – an environment once considered sterile – altering perceptions about which planets in the universe could sustain alien life. The research also shows that humans may be having an even greater impact on **levels of carbon dioxide (CO_2) in Earth's** atmosphere than accepted evidence from climate history studies of ice cores suggests.
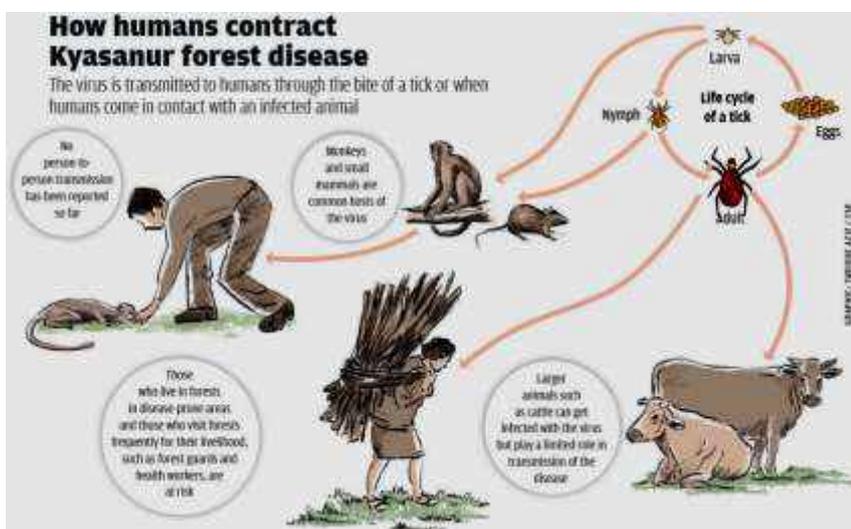
What

1.   Gases captured and sealed in snow as it compresses into ice can provide **researchers with snapshots of Earth's atmosphere going back hundreds of thousands** of years. Climate scientists use ice core samples to look at prehistoric levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere so they can be compared with current levels in an industrial age.

2.   This analysis of ice cores relies on the assumption that there is limited biological activity altering the environment in the snow during its transition into ice.

3.   The research, published in the Journal of the Royal Society Interface, revealed that the composition of small samples of gas trapped in the ice may have been affected by bacteria that remain active in snow while it is being compressed into ice – a process that can last decades.

4.   As microbial activity and its influence on its local environment has never been taken into account when looking at ice-core gas samples it could provide a moderate source of error in climate history interpretations.

5.   Respiration by bacteria may have slightly increased levels of CO_2 in pockets of air trapped within polar ice caps meaning that before human activity CO_2 levels may have been even lower than previously thought.

MONKEY FEVER AGAIN

Karnataka's Tirthahalli taluk has come under the grip of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever. So far, five positive cases, including one death, have been reported in humans. Moreover, deaths of 5 monkeys were reported in the forest of Ghantejanagallu near Suruvinakoppa village. In 2016-17, four persons died of KFD in Tirthahalli and 48 positive cases were reported.

What

1.   Kyasanur forest disease or monkey fever is tick-borne viral diseases caused by Kyasanur forest disease virus (KFDV), a member of the virus family Flaviviridae, which also causes dengue and yellow fever.

2.   It is endemic to South Asia and was first detected in 1957 in Kyasanur Forest of Karnataka.

3.   Monkey fever is so named because it primarily affects black-faced langurs and red-faced bonnet monkeysand result in their death.

4. KFD causes seasonal outbreaks between December and May along Western Ghats mostly striking farmers in Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

LIGO TO BE BUILT IN INDIA

A new LIGO gravitational wave detector to measure ripples in the fabric of space and time is set to be built in India by 2025, in collaboration with universities from across the globe. The new Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) detector will add to the two already operational in the US.

What

1. The LIGO detectors discovered the first gravitational waves produced by two giant merging blackholes last year.

2. The research won a Nobel Prize in Physics this year. The location for the new detector in India has been selected, and the acquisition has started, said Somak Raychaudhury, Director of the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) Pune. However, the site has not been revealed yet.

3. **"When the detector building is completed in 2025,** IUCAA will run it. The LIGO India partnership is funded by the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)through its Newton-Bhabha project on LIGO.

4. The mirrors and detectors required to build the system will be sent from the LIGO collaborators in the US. They had originally built the LIGO detectors in US, out of which two were installed. They wanted to install the third one in the other part of the Earth. A third LIGO detector will help pinpoint the origin of the gravitational waves that are detected in future.

5. The existence of these waves was first predicted by German scientist Albert Einstein 100 years ago in his general theory of relativity.

6. Massive accelerating objects – such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other – would disrupt space-**time in such a way that 'waves' of distor**ted space would radiate from the source. These ripples travel at the speed of light through the universe, carrying with them information about their origins, as well as invaluable clues to the nature of gravity itself.

7. An agreement was officially signed at the British Council offices in New Delhi between a consortium of universities in India, led by the IUCAA and a consortium of UK universities, led by the University of Glasgow.

8. This collaborative programme will enable Indian scientists to work with UK institutes for extended periods of time, with reciprocal visits to the India labs to develop infrastructure and provide onsite training, essential to build the capability to deliver a LIGO-India detector.

9. IndIGO, the Indian Initiative in Gravitational-wave Observations, is an initiative to set up advanced experimental facilities, for a multi-institutional Indian national project in gravitational-wave astronomy.

10. Since 2009, the IndIGO Consortium has been involved in constructing the Indian road-map for Gravitational Wave Astronomy and a strategy towards Indian participation in realising the crucial gravitational-wave observatory in the Asia-Pacific region.

11. The IndIGO Consortium includes Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER) and Delhi University, among others.

12. The California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US are among the 108 universities involved in the international collaboration.

ODORRANA ARUNACHALENSIS

Scientists from Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has discovered new frog species in the fast flowing streams in Talle Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The new species has been named Odorrana

arunachalensis after the state Arunachal Pradesh were it was found. It is one of the five frog species discovered in India in recent times and the 59th in the world.

What

1. Odorrana Arunachalensis belong to genus Odorrana (commonly known as the odorous frog).

2. Odorrana is a genus of true frogs (Ranidae) from East Asia and surrounding regions including India.

3. There are over 50 species of frogs belonging to the genus Odorrana.

4. Odorrana Arunachalensis is medium-sized green frog adapted for life in torrential waters of Arunachal Pradesh.

5. It dwells in moss and fern covered rocky section along hill streams in mixed wet tropical forest type

6. It has black band-like mark between the eyes which is its distinguishing character that separates it from all the other frog species of this genus.

7. This new species is majorly sighted during the wet season from April to September. They are not seen in the dry seasons.

'HOLIDAY ORNAMENT IN SPACE' SPOTED

Scientists at Nasa using the Hubble Space Telescope have spotted what looks like a colourful holiday ornament in space—a planetary nebula with glowing wisps of outpouring gas that are lit up by a central star nearing the end of its life.

What

1. When a star ages and the red giant phase of its life comes to an end, it starts to eject layers of gas from its surface leaving behind a hot and compact white dwarf. Sometimes this ejection results in elegantly symmetric patterns of glowing gas, but the nebula named NGC 6326 is much less structured.

2. This object is located in the constellation of Ara, the Altar, about 11,000 light-years from Earth. Planetary nebulae are one of the main ways in which elements heavier than hydrogen and helium are dispersed into space after their creation in the hearts of stars.

3. Eventually some of this out-flung material may form new stars and planets. The **picture was created from images taken using the Hubble Space Telescope's Wide Field** Planetary Camera 2.

4. The vivid blue and red hues come from material including ionised oxygen and hydrogen glowing under the action of the fierce ultraviolet radiation from the still hot central star.

STAR FOUND EATING PLANETS

Astronomers have discovered that a Sun-like star 550 light years from Earth is **slowly consuming its 'offspring'** – crushing one or more planets in its orbit into vast clouds of gas and dust. The distant star called RZ Picseum located in the constellation Pisces – **is an insatiable 'eater of worlds'. The discovery, published in the Astronomical** Journal, may shed light on a brief but volatile period in the history of many solar systems, including our own.

What

1. This is a very interesting phase in the evolution of planetary systems**, and we're** lucky to catch a solar system in the middle of the process since it happens so quickly compared to the lifetimes of stars.

2. Doomed worlds that fly too close to their sun – only to be ripped apart by its tidal forces – **are officially known as 'disrupted planets.'**

3. In the case of RZ Piscium, the material near the sun-like star is being slowly pulled apart to create a small circle of debris about the same distance from the star as the **planet Mercury's orbit is from our sun.**

4. **It seems either that we're seeing a fairly massive, gaseous planet being pulled apart by** the star, or perhaps two gas-rich planets that have collided and been torn apart.

5. Even solar systems whose planets are not lost to their sun are unstable in their early history, since newly born planets interact strongly with one another – as well as their sun – through gravity.

6. This discovery really gives us a rare and beautiful glimpse into what happens to many **newly formed planets that don't survive the early dynamical chaos of young solar** systems.

e-HRMS LAUNCHED

The Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions launched the electronic-Human Resource Management System (e-HRMS) on the occasion of Good Governance Day (25 December). The e-HRMS was launched as a step towards the ease of **governance and is in lines with Government's goal of minimum government, maximum** governance. 25 applications of five modules of the system were also launched.

What

1. e-HRMS is an online platform for central government employees to apply for leave and access their service-related information.

2. It will enable these employees to see all their details with respect to service book, leave, salary, GPF, etc. and also apply for different kind of claims and reimbursements, loan and advances, leave, leave encashment, LTC advances, tour etc. on a single platform

3. The system is designed in such a way to obtain all management-related inputs and reports through its dashboard.

4. It will enable senior authorities to check all pendency of data updating as well as claims, which will in turn instill more responsibility and accountability among all government servants.

5. The launch of e-HRMS is in the direction of fully automated human resource management system with target to bring all government employees on employee portal.

INDIA AHEAD IN DIGITAL PAYMENTS

India has the most evolved digital payments system among 25 countries including the UK, China and Japan, which were surveyed on parameters such as round-the-clock availability, adoption, and immediacy of payments, said a report released by FIS, a US-based banking technology-provider. The report titled Flavors of Fast used the Faster Payments Innovation Index (FPII) created in 2014 and aimed at evolving a comparative rating system where diverse payments systems across the globe could be compared and contrasted.

What

1. According to FIS, the FPII ranks different payments systems on a scale of 1-5, where level 1 reflects fast payments, level 3 reflects highly desirable featuresenhancing customer value such as universal access and 24x7 availability while level 5 payments systems have additional features for maximizing customer value such as remittance information, push and pull capability and aliases.

2. Out of the countries assessed, Taiwan was at level 1, Mexico, Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, Iceland, China, Korea & Sri Lanka were assessed at level 2. Level 3 was Chile, Sweden, South Africa, Bahrain, Japan, Level 4 countries were Spain, Kenya, Poland, Finland, UK, Singapore, Denmark Switzerland and Thailand.

3. **India's IMPS was the only system across the world performing at level 5**," said Ramaswamy Venkatachalam, regional managing director—India & South Asia, FIS, in an email.

4. The Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), launched by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in November 2010, is an instant interbank electronic fund transfer service that is available through mobile phones and internet banking

applications. NPCI is the umbrella organization for all retail payments in the country.

5. Along with IMPS, the study also revealed the popularity of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) which is a combination of real time payments with open interfaces with an intention to replace cash, point-of-sale and wallet, the report added.

6. UPI is a payments system launched by NPCI in August 2016 that facilitates instant fund transfers between two bank accounts on a mobile platform, without any **details of the beneficiary's bank.**

7. Transactions across UPI touched a new peak in November. The transaction volume was 105 million, up 37% from 76.8 million in the previous month, figures released by NPCI showed.

8. Transactions through UPI received a major stimulus from the government after Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) app on 30 December.

9. The report also highlighted that appropriate fraud prevention measures are vital for payment systems offering real-time clearing and settlement.

10. Fraudsters are moving toward the initiation point, rather than later in the process, so a lot of activity is needed to monitor and manage at the initial authentication and origination level.

NEW EXOTIC STATE OF MATTER DISCOVERED

Scientists, including one of Indian origin, have found an exotic state of matter where the constituent particles pair up when limited to two dimensions. The finding, published in the journal Science, may hold important clues to the intriguing phenomena of superconductivity, researchers said. Superconductors are materials through which electricity can flow without any resistance once they are cooled below a certain critical temperature. Researchers performed experiments in which they confined a gas of ultracold atoms in two dimensional traps which they created using focused laser beams.

What

1. In solid-state materials like copper oxides, there are many different effects and **impurities that make these materials difficult to study," said Puneet Murthy, a PhD** student at Heidelberg University in Germany. That is why we use ultracold atoms to simulate the behaviour of electrons in solids. This allows us to create very clean samples and gives us full control over the essential system parameters.

2. The technologically most relevant class of materials, with exceptionally high critical temperatures for superconductivity, is poorly understood so far. However, there is evidence that in order for superconductivity to occur, a certain type of particles – the fermions – must pair up.

3. Moreover, research has shown that materials which become superconducting at relatively high temperatures have layered structures. This means that electrons in these systems can only move in two-dimensional planes.

4. Using a technique known as radio-frequency spectroscopy, the researchers measured the response of the atoms to a radio-wave pulse.

5. From this response, they could tell exactly whether or not the particles were paired and in what way. These measurements were also performed for different strengths of interaction between fermions. In the course of the experiments, the researchers discovered an exotic state of matter. Theory states that fermions with a weak interaction should pair up at the temperature at which they become superconductive.

6. However, when the scientists increased the interaction between fermions, they found that pairing occurred at temperatures several times higher than the critical temperature.

MISCELLANEOUS

NEW VENUE SELECTED FOR ISC 2017

Manipur Central University, Imphal has been chosen to organise the 105th Session of the Indian Science Congress during March 18-22, 2018. A decision to this effect was taken at an Emergency Meeting of the Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) in Kolkata on 27 December 2017.

What

1. The session was to be held during the traditional January 3-7, 2017 dates at the Osmania University in Hyderabad. however, it was postponed by the ISCA last week as circumstances in the campus were found not conducive to organise it.
2. The decision to accept Manipur University was unanimous. The Osmania **University's efforts were appreciated** and the EC was responsive to the situation.
3. There were 7 Universities which came forward to host the Science Congress including Manipur, Andhra University, Lovely University etc.
4. However, Manipur was chosen because they could produce letters fro the Vice Chancellor, Chief Minister and the Governor.
5. This is only the second time in ISCA history that dates have been deferred. Earlier, the 101st Session it was held during February 3-7 , 2014 in Jammu University.
6. The Osmania University, which hosted it thrice earlier, lost out to do it in their Centenary year.

THIRD POWER-SURPLUS STATE IN NE

Mizoram had become the third power-surplus state in the North-East after Sikkim and Tripura, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said. The central schemes for the benefit of the North-East had gained momentum and that his government was committed to developing the region.

What

1. A significant milestone in the history of Mizoram with the completion and dedication of the 60-MW Tuirial hydropower project, the Prime Minister said, while addressing a public meeting after inaugurating it.
2. With the commissioning of the project, Mizoram became the third power-surplus state in the North-East.
3. The **hydropower project would produce "251 million units" of electrical energy** every year and boost the economic development of the state.
4. The completion of this project is a reflection of our commitment to completing ongoing projects and ushering in a new era of development in the North-East.
5. The Tuirial project, which was announced and cleared in 1998 by the then Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, was the first major central project to be successfully commissioned in Mizoram.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REPORT 2017

India tops the world in the number of migrants sent abroad and more than half of the 16.59 million live in the Gulf region, according to a UN report. The 2017 International Migration Report released showed that during this century's period of rapid globalisation, the number of Indian migrants doubled from 7.98 million in 2000. Mexico sent out 13 million migrants, the second highest number.

What

1. The definition of international migrants used in the report is broad, taking into account anyone living in a country other their own and includes refugees and economic migrants, both those immigrating officially and those who do so "irregularly", the chief of the Migration Section of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, who spoke to reporters after the report's release.

2. The numbers are not a count of people by national origin or ethnicity and, therefore, do not include children of migrants born in the countries their parents went to.

3. The United Arab Emirates has the largest number of Indian migrants, who number 3.31 million, up from 978,992 in 2000, followed by the US with 2.3 million, up from 1.04 million.

4. In all the Gulf countries together, Indians totaled 8.9 million, according to the report. Of them, 2.27 million were in Saudi Arabia, 1.2 million in Oman and 1.16 million in Kuwait.

5. The number of migrant from other countries living in India is 5.2 million, a fall of 1.22 million from 2000.

6. Most of the international migration takes place among developing countries with 60 per cent of the migrants from Asia going to other Asian countries.

Home away from home: Where Indians go

Rank	Country	No of Indians (in million)	% of total Indian diaspora
1	UAE	3.5	22.4
2	US	2.0	12.8
3	Saudi Arabia	1.9	12.1
4	Kuwait	1.0	6.4
5	Oman	0.7	4.5
6	UK	0.7	4.5
7	Qatar	0.6	3.8

Total 15.6 million

7. He said that about $400 billion is sent to developing countries by migrants and the remittances are used to finance education, housing and other activities that promote development.

8. In Europe, there are 1.3 million people from India, almost double the 665,105 in 2000, according to the report. Britain has most of them - 836,524, up from 452,144 in 2000.

9. Canada now has 602,144 people from India, an increase from 319,138 in 2000. Australia showed a huge jump of more than four times, from 90,719 people from India in 2000 to 408,880 now.

10. In the current political climate, "migration has become a toxic" topic, said Leonard Doyle, the spokesperson for International Migration Organisation's Director-General William Lacy Swing.

WORLD CHESS TITLE 2017

Chess grandmaster Viswanathan Anand (48) won World Rapid Chess Championship Title 2017 held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. In the final tie-breaker mini-match, Anand **defeated Russia's Vladimir Fedoseev by 2**-0 score to reclaim title he had won in 2003.

About him

1. **He became India's first grandmaster in 1988**. He is first Asian to win FIDE World Chess Championship from 2000 to 2002.

2. He had won World Champion in 2007 by defeating Vladimir Kramnik and again in 2010 by defeating Veselin Topalov and in 2012 by defeating Boris Gelfand.

3. In world Chess Championship 2013, he lost to challenger Magnus Carlsen of Norway and lost again to Carlsen in 2014.

4. He is the first recipient of Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award in 1991**, India's** highest sporting honour.

5. **In 2007, he was awarded Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award,** making him first sportsperson to receive award.

INDIA'S FIRST NRTU

The Union Cabinet has approved proposal of Ministry of Railways to set up first ever National Rail and Transport University (NRTU) in Vadodara to skill its human resources and build capability. The University will be set up as Deemed to Be University under de novo category as per UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2016. The first academic program is expected to be launched in July 2018.

What

1. The Ministry of Railways will set up a not-for-profit Company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 as Managing Company of proposed university.
2. The company will provide financial and infrastructural support to the university and appoint Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor of the university.
3. Board of Management of the company will comprise of professionals and academics.
4. It will be independent of Managing Company with full autonomy to perform its academic and administrative responsibilities.
5. The funding of the new University will entirely come from Ministry of Railways.
6. It will set up on existing land and infrastructure at National Academy of Indian Railways (NAIR) at Vadodara, Gujarat.

DEAL TO SUPPORT PROJECTS IN RAKHINE STATE

India on 20 December 2017 inked an agreement with Myanmar pledging to support development projects in the neighbouring country's Rakhine State the scene of a fierce ethnic conflict, which forced over 6,30,000 Rohingyas to escape to Bangladesh since August 25. Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar and Myanmar's Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, U Soe Aung, signed the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on New Delhi's support to Rakhine State Development Programme.

What

1. The projects India planned to support in the conflict-hit province include one to build pre-fabricated houses for the Rohingyas, who might return from refugee camps in Bangladesh.

2. Nay Pyi Daw and Dhaka on November 23 last inked an agreement for the return of the Rohingyas from the refugee camps in Bangladesh. The two nations formed a joint working group to coordinate and oversee the repatriation of the Rohingyas.

3. Suu Kyi's Government in Nay Pyi Daw, as well as the armed forces of Myanmar, drew flak from around the world for the latest wave of violence against the Rohingyas in Rakhine State of the country.

4. The MoU signed by Jaishankar and Soe Aung is the first inter-governmental agreement inked by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar Government with a cooperation partner for socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State.

5. The minority Rohingyas have since been victims of persecution in the Rakhine State, where Buddhists constitute the majority. They have been denied citizenship and most of them have been stateless, despite living for generations in Myanmar.

6. Myanmar's armed forces launched the latest military crackdown against the Rohingyas on August 25 after a militant outfit killed 12 security personnel in Rakhine. With hundreds of them killed and villages burnt down, over 630,000 Rohingyas, including children had to flee Myanmar and take refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh over the past few months. Not only the US Government, but the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees too termed the violence against Rohingyas as "ethnic cleansing".

7. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Transit Project is aimed at linking Mizoram state in northeast India to the Bay of Bengal through Chin and Rakhine State of Myanmar.

8. The project consists of a new jetty in Sittwe Port in Rakhine State, an inland water transport corridor to Paletwa in southern Chin State and a highway from Paletwa to India-Myanmar border.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

The United Nations (UN) International Migrants Day is observed every year on December 18 to rcreate awareness about the protection and safety of the migrants. It also recognize efforts, contributions and rights of workers and members of their families worldwide. **The theme for year 2017 is "**Safe Migration in a World on the Move**".**

What

1. In September 2016, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) had adopted set of commitments during its first ever summit on large movements of refugees and migrants to enhance protection of refugees and migrants.

2. These commitments collectively are known as New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (NY Declaration).

3. The New York Declaration reaffirms importance of international protection regime and represents commitment by UN member states to strengthen and enhance mechanisms to protect people on move.

Flashback
1. The UNGA had proclaimed 18 December as International Migrants Day after taking into account large and increasing number of migrants in the world in December 2000.
2. This day marks adaptation of international convention on the protection of the rights of migrant workers and members of their families by UNGA on 18 December 1990.

4. It paves way for adoption of two new global compacts in 2018: global compact on refugees and global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

GOOD GOVERNANCE DAY

The Good Governance Day (GGD) is celebrated every year in India on December 25 to mark the birthday anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The day was established by Central Government in 2014 to honor Vajpayee by fostering awareness among the people of accountability in government.

What

1. It aims to make people aware about government commitment for providing a transparent and accountable administration in the country.

2. It is also celebrated to enhance the welfare and betterment of the people.

3. It is celebrated to standardise government functioning and make it highly effective and accountable governance for the citizens of the country.

4. It also seeks to implement good and effective policies to complete mission of good governance in India.

5. It also seeks to enhance growth and development in the country through good governance. It also strives to bring citizens closer to government to make them active participants in good governance process.

NATIONAL AYURVED AWARD 2008-2014

President Ram Nath Kovind recently presented the Pt Ramnarayan Sharma National Ayurved Award instituted by Baidyanath founder for the years 2008-2014 to seven eminent Ayurvedic scholars at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

What

1. Vivekanand Pandey from New Delhi, (Late) Ramchandra Ballal Gogte from Pune, Jaiprakash Narayn from Bengaluru, G P Dube and Krushnachand Chunekar from Varanasi, Siddhinandan Mishra from Ranchi and Banwarilal Gaur from Jaipur are the recipients of the awards.

2. The President said that Ayurveda is a holistic medical system for healthy living. It takes an integrated approach to the physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects of the human body, and their inter-linkages.

3. He said 90% of the country's medicinal plants and herbs are obtained from forests, and that people should be sensitive to the protection of medicinal plants and herbs.

4. The Pt Ramnarayan Sharma National Award was instituted by the Ramnarayan Vaidya Ayurved Research Trust in 1982.

5. 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.

SAHITYA AKADEMI ANNOUNCES

The Sahitya Akademi, India's national academy of letters, on 21 December 2017 announced its annual awards, recognising the literary works of 24 writers who have written in 24 Indian languages. A total of seven books of novels, five books of poetry, five of short stories, five of literary criticism, and one book of play and essays have won the Sahitya Akademi Awards 2017.

What

1. The formal award ceremony will be held on 12 February 2018 during the Sahitya Akademi's next edition of 'Festival of Letters'.

2. Akademi secretary K Sreenivasrao announced that the theme of the festival in 2018 will be '70 years of Indian Independence and that a national seminar will also be organised on Literary Portraits in the 70 years of Indian independence.

3. Among the winners, Mamang Dai's has won the Sahitya Akademi award for his English novel The Black Hill, while Niranjan Mishra has won for his Sanskrit novel Gangaputravadanam, KP Ramanunni for Daivathinte Pusthakam in Malayalam, and Nachhattar for his Punjabi novel Slow Down.

4. The poets on the list of Sahitya Akademi winners in 2017 include Udaya Narayana Singh for his poems in Maithili, Shrikant Deshmukh , who has written in Marathi, Bhujanga Tudu who writes in Santhali, and Devipriya for Telugu language poems. The Sahitya Akademi will also be conferred, posthumously, on Tamil poet Inqualab.

5. In addition to the novel and poetry categories, five writers have been awarded for their short stories. Shiv Mehta for his stories in Dogri, Autar Krishen Rahbar in Kashmiri, Gajanan Jog in Konkani, Gayatri Saraf (Odia), and Baig Ehsas for his Urdu short stories.

6. The Sahitya Akademi has also recognised literary critics Ramesh Kuntal Megh (Hindi), TP Ashoka (Kannada), Urmi Ghanshyam Desai (Gujarati), Bina Hangkhim (Nepali), and Neeraj Daiya (Rajasthani) for their works, while Jagdish Lachhani who

writes in Sindhi has been recognised for his essays, and Rajen Toijamba (Manipuri) for his play.

7. The award, given for books published between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2015, includes a casket containing an engraved copper-plaque, a shawl, and a cheque of Rs 1 lakh.

8. On 21 December 2017 the Sahitya Akademi also announced the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize 2017 with the names of 24 translators. The prize carries a cash award of Rs 50, 000.

NEW CM OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Five-time BJP MLA Jairam Thakur will be the new Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh after he was elected as the leader of the BJP legislature party. Thakur's name was proposed by Suresh Bharadwaj and Mahender Singh and seconded by other members.

What

1. While former chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal had last night opted out of the race, Thakur, a MLA from Seraj in Mandi district, and Union minister J P Nadda were the frontrunners for the chief minister's office.

2. A lack of consensus among the newly elected MLAs had resulted in the two central observers -- Union ministers Nirmala Sitharaman and Narendra Singh Tomar -- returning to Delhi from Shimla to hold fresh consultation with the central leadership.

3. A two-member team of central observers, which was in the state on December 21 and 22, had taken feedback from members of the state BJP's core committee, MPs and some MLAs.

4. The BJP ousted the Congress from power by winning 44 out of the 68 seats.

'DIGMINE' SPREADING FAST VIA FACEBOOK

A new cryptocurrency-mining bot, named **"Digmine"**, that was first observed in South Korea, is spreading fast through Facebook Messenger across the world, Tokyo-headquartered cybersecurity major Trend Micro has warned. After South Korea, it has since spread in Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, the Philippines, Thailand and Venezuela. It is likely to reach other countries soon, given the way it propagates. Facebook Messenger works across different platforms but **"Digmine" only affects the Messenger's desktop or web** browser (Chrome) version. If the file is opened on other platforms, the malware will not work as intended.

What

1. **"Digmine" is coded in AutoIt** and sent to would-be victims posing as a video file but are actually an AutoIt executable script.

2. **If the user's Facebook account is set to log in automatically, "Digmine" will manipulate Facebook Messenger in order to send a link to the file to the account's friends.**

3. The abuse of Facebook is limited to propagation for now, but it is plausible for attackers to hijack the Facebook account itself down the **line. This functionality's code** is pushed from the command-and-control (C&C) server, which means it can be updated.

4. A known modus operandi of cryptocurrency-mining botnets and particularly for **"Digmine" (which mines Monero)**, is to stay in the victim's sys**tem for as long as possible.

5. It also wants to infect as many machines as possible, as this translates to an increased hashrate and potentially more cybercriminal income.

6. The malware will also perform other routines such as installing a registry autostart mechanism as well as system infection marker. It will search and launch Chrome then load a malicious browser extension that it retrieves from the C&C server.

NEPAL REJECTS TO RE-MEASURE MOUNT EVEREST

Nepal has rejected India's offer to jointly re-measure **the height of the world's** highest peak Mount Everest following the massive earthquake in 2015 and will carry out the exercise on its own, the top official of the Himalayan nation's survey department has said. Nepal will, however, seek help from India and China for getting crucial data for the exercise, Nepal's Survey Department's Director General Ganesh Bhatta told.

What

1. **China could be behind Nepal refusing India's proposal to jointly re**-measure Mount Everest as the peak is on the Sino-Nepal border. According to a statement by the Department of Science and Technology which comes under India's Ministry of Science and Technology, after the 2015 "Gorkha earthquake" that jolted Nepal, various doubts were raised by the scientific community over the height of the peak.

2. The 7.8 magnitude quake in April 2015 had devastated the Himalayan nation, killing more than 8,000 people and displacing lakhs of others.

3. The Survey of India, a 250-year-old institute under the DST, proposed re-**measuring Mt Everest as an** 'Indo-Nepal Joint Scientific Exercise' **with Nepal's** survey department. They have not responded to our proposal.

4. China had measured Mt Everest in 1975 and 2005 while Indian surveyors had carried out a similar mission in 1956. The SGI had also measured the Everest during the British era.

5. **India was the first country under Sir George Everest's leadership as the** Surveyor General of India to have declared the height of Mount Everest and establish it as the highest peak in the world in the year 1855.

6. India is being requested to provide the levelling data while China has been asked to provide the gravity data. The data will be very important to determine the height of Mt Everest.

SAKSHI MALIK QUALIFIES FOR CWG

Olympian Sakshi Malik on 30 December 2017 qualified for the 2018 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in the 62kg weight category. The CWG are scheduled to be held in Gold Coast, Australia between April 4 and 15, 2018.

What

1. The selection trial for the Indian women wrestling team for participation in the 2018 Senior Asian Wrestling Championship, Kyrgyzstan and 2018 Commonwealth Games was held in STC, Lucknow.

2. The others who qualified for the two tournaments are Vinesh Phogat (50 kg), Pooja Dhanda (57Kg), Babita Kumari (54 kg), Divya Karan (68Kg) and Kiran (76Kg).

3. Double Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar also qualified for the Commonwealth after defeating Jitender Kumar in the 74kg weight category.

BAN ON SOLO CLIMBERS FROM EVEREST

Nepal has banned solo climbers from climbing its mountains, including Mount Everest, the cabinet declared **revised regulations of the Himalayan nation's** mountaineering, where banning solo climbers from scaling its mountains was one of the key measures being flagged ahead of the 2018 spring climbing season. The cabinet also declared a ban on double amputee and blind climbers, even though Everest has drawn multitudes of mountaineers wanting to overcome their disabilities and achieve the formidable feat.

What

1. Earlier in April this year, an experienced Swiss climber Ueli Steck lost his life when he slipped and fell from a steep ridge. The climber was on a solo acclimatisation climb to Nuptse, a peak neighbouring Everest.

2. This ban is likely to irk solo mountaineers, who enjoy the challenge of climbing alone.

3. According to the report, the first double amputee to reach the top of the 8,848-metre (29,029-foot) peak in 2006 was New Zealander Mark Inglis, who lost both

his legs to frostbite. Blind American Erik Weihenmayer scaled Everest in May 2001 and later became the only visually-impaired person to summit the highest peaks on all seven continents.

4. A former Gurkha soldier and an aspiring Everest climber Hari Budha Magar, who lost both his legs when he was deployed in Afghanistan, said the ban was discriminatory.

5. **Nepal, a home to eight of the world's 14 peaks over 8,000** metres witnesses thousands of mountaineers each spring and autumn when clear weather provides good climbing conditions.

6. Last year, around 450 climbers that included 190 foreigners and 259 Nepalis, reached the summit of Everest from the south side in Nepal.