

## My Notes....

### NATIONAL

#### GANDHINAGAR DECLARATION

The 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP13) concluded on 22 February 2020 with the conference adopting Gandhinagar Declaration calling on the United Nations **Convention on Biological Diversity** that the latter's proposed post-2020 global biodiversity framework include a clear commitment for international, regional, bilateral and transboundary cooperation for its implementation and for improving ecological connectivity. The theme of CMS COP13 in India was, "Migratory species connect the planet and we welcome them home."

What

1. India hosted the CMS COP for the first time and with that, also formally assumed the role of CMS Presidency for the next three years.
2. CMS COP13 was the first of a series of international nature-related meetings in 2020, which will culminate in the UN Biodiversity Conference at the end of this year, when a new global biodiversity strategy for the next decade adopted - the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
3. CMS is uniquely positioned to address the conservation of migratory species and their habitats and to contribute to reversing the trends of species and biodiversity loss worldwide.
4. Ten new species were added to CMS Appendices at COP13.
5. Three of the species listed are from India – great Indian bustard, mainland Asian elephant and Bengal florican.
6. Seven species were added to Appendix I, which provides the strictest protection: the Asian Elephant, Jaguar, Great Indian Bustard, Bengal Florican, Little Bustard, Antipodean Albatross and the Oceanic White-tip Shark.
7. The Urial, Smooth Hammerhead Shark and the Tope Shark were listed for protection under Appendix II, which covers migratory species that have an unfavourable conservation status and would benefit from enhanced international cooperation and conservation actions.
8. New and extended Concerted Actions with targeted conservation plans were agreed for 14 species.
9. CMS COP13 also adopted the Gandhinagar Declaration, which will send a message to the first negotiating session of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020

#### Flashback

- The 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme.
- With CMS COP 13, India is now presiding over two UN conventions as last year in September, India was handed over the Presidency of UN Convention to Combat Desertification at COP 14 for two years.
- Representatives from 130 countries, eminent conservationists and international NGOs working in the field of wildlife conservation participated in the COP.
- The CMS COP 13 logo depicts migratory species is inspired by 'Kolam', a traditional art form from southern India.
- The mascot of this convention 'Great Indian Bustard' also closely draws attention towards its critically endangered status.

Global Biodiversity Framework convening in Rome.

10. The Declaration calls for migratory species and the **concept of 'ecological connectivity' to be integrated** and prioritized in the new Framework, which is expected to be adopted at the UN Biodiversity Conference in October.
11. The first ever report on the Status of Migratory Species, presented to CMS COP13, shows that despite some success stories, the populations of most migratory species covered by CMS are declining.
12. COP13 agreed that a more comprehensive review should be undertaken to better understand the status of individual species and the main threats they face.
13. CMS COP13 has given a clear mandate to prepare a flagship report on the status of migratory species which will give us a better idea of what is happening on the ground, and also provide a much needed tool for understanding where we need to focus our work.

## PERMANENT COMMISSION IN ARMY FOR WOMEN

In a path breaking verdict demolishing gender discrimination in Army, the Supreme Court on 17 February 2020 ruled that all women officers shall be considered for permanent commission and will also be eligible for command posting on par with male officers. A bench of justices D Y Chandrachud and Ajay Rastogi granted three months time to Centre to implement its order and slammed the Centre for denying equal opportunity to women officers by raising the ground of social norms, physiological limitations and family obligation associated with women.

What

1. The bench said that women officers must also be given permanent commission in Army and change of mindset is required on part of the government to put end gender discrimination in armed forces.
2. The SC said that the arguments of the Centre raising the issue of physiological limitations and social norms to deny opportunity to women officers is disturbing and cannot be accepted as women officers have performed exceptionally well and brought laurels.
3. It said the Centre showed scant regard to the order passed by the Delhi high court and the Supreme Court pertaining to permanent commission to women officers in the last one decade after the HC passed the order in 2010.
4. The top court said absolute bar on granting command posting to women officers in Army is irrational and against equality. It said it is indefensible to deny command posting to women officers and a blanket ban cannot be sustained in law.
5. The SC further added, "Women are not weaker sex and they should be treated on par with men officers in Army in non-combat services."

Women in Army

1. The induction of women officers in the Army started in 1992.
2. They were commissioned for a period of five years in certain chosen streams such as Army Education Corps, Corps of Signals, Intelligence Corps, and Corps of Engineers.
3. Recruits under the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) had a shorter pre-commission training period than their male counterparts who were commissioned under the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme.
4. In 2006, the WSES scheme was replaced with the SSC scheme, which was extended to women officers.
5. They were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years.
6. Serving WSES officers were given the option to move to the new SSC scheme, or to

- continue under the erstwhile WSES.
7. They were to be however, restricted to roles in streams specified earlier — which excluded combat arms such as infantry and armoured corps.
  8. While male SSC officers could opt for permanent commission at the end of 10 years of service, this option was not available to women officers.
  9. They were, thus, kept out of any command appointment, and could not qualify for government pension, which starts only after 20 years of service as an officer.
  10. The first batch of women officers under the new scheme entered the Army in 2008.

## CLAUSE 6 OF ASSAM ACCORD PANEL REPORT

The high-powered committee that the Centre constituted in July 2019 for the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985 submitted its report to **the State's** Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on 25 February 2020. Barring three leaders of the **All Assam Students' Union (AASU)**, all the members of the panel headed by retired former Gauhati High Court Biplab Kumar Sarma were present at the event. Clause 6 envisages constitutional, legislative and administrative measures to safeguard, protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. It also seeks to ascertain who fits into the definition of an Assamese.

### Assam accord

1. The issue of illegal immigrants is old in Assam. It was a raging issue soon after Independence forcing the government to bring the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act in 1950. A National Register of Citizens (NRC) was to be prepared on the basis of Census 1951. The NRC finally came up earlier this year.
2. The issue of illegal immigrants fuelled massive protests for six years beginning 1979, when a Lok Sabha bypoll was to be held at Mangaldoi seat.
3. Various outfits with All Assam Students Union (AASU) forming the nerve centre of the protests complained about foreigners - mainly Bangladeshis - having been included in the voters' list.
4. The Indira Gandhi government continued to engage with the protesters between 1980 and 1984 but without reaching an agreement.
5. After her assassination, the Rajiv Gandhi government signed an agreement with the protesters - AASU and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad - bringing the agitation to an end.
6. The agreement between the Centre and the protesters is called the Assam Accord. It was signed on the Independence Day in 1985. In the 15 clauses of the Assam Accord, the key focus areas were: Foreigners issue, Economic development, Restricting acquisition of immovable property by foreigners, Prevention encroachment of government lands, Registration of births and deaths.
7. This was done to ensure the protection of political, social, economic and cultural identity of the local people.

### Clause 6 of Accord

1. Clause 6 is another often quoted provision of the Assam Accord to challenge the new amendment in the Citizenship Act.
2. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord says that constitutional, legislative and administrative steps will be taken by the Centre to "protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people".

## INDIA IN SUSTAINABILITY AND CHILD FLOURISHING INDEX

India ranked 77th on a sustainability index that takes into account per capita carbon emissions and 131st on a flourishing ranking that measures the best chance at survival and well-being for children, according to a UN-backed report. The report was released on 19 February 2020 by a commission of over 40 child and adolescent health experts from around the world. It was commissioned by the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The Lancet medical journal. In the report assessed the capacity of 180 countries to ensure that their youngsters can survive and thrive. India has ranked 77th on the Sustainability Index and 131 on the Flourishing Index.

### Flourishing Index

1. Flourishing is the geometric mean of Surviving and Thriving. For Surviving, the authors selected maternal survival, survival in children younger than 5 years old, suicide, access to maternal and child health services, basic hygiene and sanitation, and lack of extreme poverty.
2. For Thriving, the domains were educational achievement, growth and nutrition, reproductive freedom and protection from violence.

### Sustainability Index

1. Under the Sustainability Index, the authors noted that promoting today's national conditions for children to survive and thrive must not come at the cost of eroding future global conditions for children's ability to flourish.
2. The Sustainability Index ranks countries on excess carbon emissions compared with the 2030 target. This provides a convenient and available proxy for a country's contribution to sustainability in future.

### The Report Said

1. The report noted that under realistic assumptions about possible trajectories towards sustainable greenhouse gas emissions, models predict that global carbon emissions need to be reduced from 39.7 giga- tonnes to 22.8 gigatonnes per year by 2030 to maintain even a 66 percent chance of keeping global warming below 1.5°C.
2. It said that the world's survival depended on children being able to flourish, but no country is doing enough to give them a sustainable future.
3. No country in the world is currently providing the conditions we need to support every child to grow up and have a healthy future, said Anthony Costello, Professor of Global Health and Sustainability at University College London, one of the lead authors of the report.
4. Especially, they're under immediate threat from climate change and from commercial marketing, which has grown hugely in the last decade," said Costello - former WHO Director of Mother, Child and Adolescent health.
5. Norway leads the table for survival, health, education and nutrition rates - followed by South Korea and the Netherlands. Central African Republic, Chad and Somalia come at the bottom.
6. However, when taking into account per capita CO2 emissions, these top countries trail behind, with Norway 156th, the Republic of Korea 166th and the Netherlands 160th.
7. Each of the three emits 210 per cent more CO2 per capita than their 2030 target, the data shows, while the US, Australia, and Saudi Arabia are among the 10 worst emitters. The lowest emitters are Burundi, Chad and Somalia.
8. According to the report, the only countries on track to beat CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly - within the top 70 - on child flourishing measures are: Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Vietnam.

9. More than 2 billion people live in countries where development is hampered by humanitarian crises, conflicts, and natural disasters, problems increasingly linked with climate change," said Minister Awa Coll-Seck from Senegal, Co-Chair of the commission.

## NATIONAL LAND RECORDS INDEX

Economic think-tank NCAER on 27 February 2020 said Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu are the top states in terms of digitisation of land records and their quality. Releasing the new NCAER Land Records and Services Index (N-LRSI 2020), the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said the data will energise land governance in India.

What

1. Scoring 60-75 points, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu were the five best-performing states on the N-LRSI.
2. West Bengal, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were the six states in the 50-60 points category.
3. Those trailing included Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, Chandigarh, Kerala, Assam, Manipur, Delhi and Bihar.
4. Over the years, different states have made significant progress in making their land records digitally available to citizens, NCAER said in a statement.
5. The N-LRSI aims to understand the extent of this progress and existing gaps and to identify measures to improve land records in each state.
6. The economic research body said access to land is a critical factor for economic growth and poverty reduction. For government, industry, and citizens to be able to use this asset effectively and to minimise disputes, it is important to have access to reliable land and property records.
7. The 2020 N-LRSI is based on data collected over 2019-20 on two aspects of the supply of land records — the extent of digitisation of land records and the quality of these land records.
8. This brings out the strengths and areas of improvement for the government agencies and makes very practical recommendations on the way forward.
9. The Central and state governments should pay utmost attention to the findings of the index and tailor their policies and programmes accordingly.
10. Established in 1956, **NCAER is India's** oldest and largest independent, non-profit, economic policy research institute. Six decades in the life of a nation is a long time.

### NCAER's work falls into four thematic areas:

1. Growth, Macro, Trade, and Economic Policy
2. Investment Climate, Industry, Infrastructure, Labour, and Urban
3. Agriculture and Rural Development, Natural Resources, and Environment
4. Poverty, Equity, Human Development, and Consumers

## NOW PMFBY AND RWBCIS ARE VOLUNTARY

The government on 19 February 2020 made its flagship crop insurance schemes voluntary for farmers with existing crop loans or those willing to take new ones, as it seeks to address the concerns raised by farmers' body and states in implementation of these programmes. The Union Cabinet has approved revamping of 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)' and 'Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS)' to address the existing challenges in implementation of crop insurance schemes. Under the PMFBY, which was launched in February 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, it is mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under this scheme.

What

1. The PMFBY provides comprehensive crop insurance from pre-sowing to post-harvest period against non-preventable natural risks at extremely low premium rate of 2 per cent for kharif crops, 1.5 per cent for rabi crops and 5 per cent for horticulture and commercial crops.
2. The Cabinet approved modification of certain parameters/provisions of ongoing PMFBY and RWBCIS schemes.
3. Currently 58 per cent of total farmers are loanee and the remaining 42 per cent are non-loanee. The number of farmers opting for these crop insurance schemes may drop immediately but the enrolment would eventually pick up.
4. The minister said the government would launch a campaign for creating awareness among farmers about the need to take a crop insurance policy.
5. These modifications will help in addressing the concerns raised about the PMFBY scheme by farmers organisations and states.
6. Among other modifications, Tomar said the allocation of business to insurance firms through tender process would be done for three years as against the current policy of one to three years.
7. Central share in premium subsidy to be increased to 90 per cent for north eastern states from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50 (Both PMFBY/RWBCIS).
8. States will not be allowed to implement these schemes in subsequent seasons in case of considerable delay in release of requisite premium subsidy to insurance companies beyond a prescribed time limit. Cut-off dates for invoking this provision for Kharif and Rabi seasons will be 31st March and 30th September of successive years, respectively.
9. The Cabinet also approved provisioning of at least 3 per cent of the total allocation for the scheme to be made by the Centre and implementing state governments for administrative expenses.
10. For estimation of crop losses/admissible claims in the PMFBY, two-step process will be adopted based on defined deviation matrix using specific triggers like weather indicators, satellite indicators, etc, for each area along with normal ranges and deviation ranges. Only areas with deviations will be subject to crop cutting experiments (CCEs) for assessment of yield loss.
11. Technology solutions like Smart Sampling Technique (SST) and optimization of number of CCEs would be adopted in conducting CCEs.
12. In case of non-provision of yield data beyond cut-off date by the States to implementing insurance firms, claims will be settled based on yield arrived through use of technology solution.
13. The central subsidy under PMFBY/RWBCIS to be limited for premium rates up to 30 per cent for un-irrigated areas/crops and 25 per cent for irrigated areas/crops. Districts having 50 per cent or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.

## ART (REGULATION) BILL APPROVED

The cabinet approved Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Regulation Bill, 2020 proposing a legal framework and code of conduct to keep a check on in vitro fertilisation, embryo transfers and sperm banks - another set of infertility related services and industry that is mushrooming rapidly in the country. The bill proposes a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh for anyone indulging in sale of embryo or trafficking at the first instance, and jail term of up to 12 years after that. It seeks to establish a national registry and registration authority which will be applicable to all medical professionals and clinics operating or providing services in the field of ART.



### What

1. The bill also envisages setting up a national board and a state board to help implement the legal framework. Besides, it proposes to create a Central database of all clinics and banks across the country.
2. The database will also include detailed information about services like the nature of the method through which the outcome is achieved, Minister for Women and Child Development (WCD) Smriti Irani said after the Cabinet meeting. The Central database will also be used for research purposes in this particular segment of health.
3. This Bill signifies that India has decided to respect reproductive rights of women and highlighting **that 2020 will indeed be the “decade of Indian women”**.
4. The Bill prohibits sex determination and sex selection. It also contains provisions to ensure confidentiality of the donor as well as the recipient of such services.
5. The nod for the ART Bill comes on the heels of the parliamentary committee recommendations on the Surrogacy Regulation Bill in Rajya Sabha and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020, that was approved by the Cabinet last month.
6. The Surrogacy Regulation Bill was sent to a 23-member select committee of the Parliament, headed by the BJP's Bhupender Yadav.

### CREATION OF 22ND LAW COMMISSION

The Union Cabinet approved setting up of the 22nd Law Commission, more than **five months after the end of the 21st Law Commission's tenure**. The commission will be formed for a three-year period with a chairperson, four full-time members, a maximum of five part-time members and secretaries of the Department of Legal Affairs and Legislative Department as ex-officio members.

### What

1. The Law Commission advises the government on legal issues, conducts research to review and reform the law or to bring new legislation.
2. Either through a reference made to it by the government or suo-motu, it researches laws and reviews existing laws in India to reform them, remove them or bring new legislations.
3. It also undertakes studies for reforms in the justice delivery systems. It is a non-statutory body constituted by the government every three years, with the first being formed in 1955.
4. The lack of a Law Commission was recently mentioned in the Supreme Court when the government told the court that the Commission could study and suggest solutions to address the issue of vacancies in higher judiciary.
5. The Law Commission is a non-statutory body constituted by the government from time to time. Originally constituted in 1955, it is re-constituted every three years. The tenure of the 21st Law Commission was up to August 31, 2018.
6. The various Law Commissions have been able to make an important contribution towards the progressive development and codification of law of the country and have so far submitted 277 reports.
7. The Commissions also consider and convey to the government its views on any subject relating to law and judicial administration that may be specifically referred to it by the government through the Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs), consider the requests for providing research to any foreign countries as may be referred to it by the Government through the Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs), take all such measures as may be necessary to harness law and the legal process in the service of the poor, revise the Central Acts of general importance so as to simplify them and remove anomalies, ambiguities and inequities.

## AMENDED SURROGACY BILL CLEARED

The Union Cabinet has cleared the amended surrogacy Bill incorporating the recommendations of a Rajya Sabha select committee, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said on 26 February 2020. The Cabinet has accepted all the recommendations of the select committee. The Bill seeking to regulate the practice and process of surrogacy was introduced and passed in the Lok Sabha in August last. The Rajya Sabha, however, referred it to the select committee.

What

1. Union Minister Smriti Irani said the Cabinet had decided to extend the surrogacy facility to widows and divorced women. **The surrogate could be a “willing woman”** not a close relative, as per the previous draft of the Bill.
2. Indian married couples, Indian-origin married couples, widows and divorced women who have medical need for surrogacy would be given the option.
3. The 23-member committee had suggested 15 major changes to the Bill. In order to protect the interests of the child born through surrogacy, it is recommended that the order regarding the parentage and custody of the child, issued by a magistrate, shall be the birth affidavit for the surrogate child.
4. The committee wanted to **delete the definition of “infertility” as the inability to conceive** after five years of unprotected intercourse on the ground that it was too long a period for a couple to wait for a child.

## REMCS DEDICATED TO THE NATION

Power Minister R K Singh on 28 February 2020 dedicated to the nation 11 Renewable Energy Management Centres (REMCS) for renewable energy integration. Singh also inaugurated the Northern Region Renewable Energy Management Centre (NR-REMC) at a function in New Delhi. On the occasion, the Minister dedicated to the nation, eleven REMCS, placing India among a league of few nations, which have state-of-the-art management centers for renewable energy integration, a power ministry said. Speaking on the occasion, Singh congratulated all those who planned the Green Corridors and REMCS and said that they are showing more vision than that shown by Europe and the US when they started renewable energy management.

What

1. The government's target of 175 GW renewable energy (RE) capacity by 2022 poses challenges to grid management due to intermittent and variable nature of RE generation.
2. The REMCS are equipped with artificial intelligence-based RE forecasting and scheduling tools and provide greater visualisation and enhanced situational awareness to the grid operators.
3. The REMCS are co-located with the State Load Dispatch Centres (SLDCs) in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan; and in Regional Load Dispatch Centres (RLDCs) at Bengaluru, Mumbai and New Delhi; and at the National Load Dispatch Centre (NLDC).
4. Presently, 55 GW of renewable power (solar and wind) is being monitored through the eleven REMCS.
5. The government had approved the implementation of the REMCS as a central scheme and had mandated PowerGrid, a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power, as the implementing agency.
6. These REMCS are being managed by the Power System Operation Corporation of India Ltd (POSOCO) at the regional and national level, and at the state level by SLDCs.
7. The minister also released a report by POSOCO on 'Analysis of Impact of Solar



Eclipse 26th Dec'19 on Indian Power System'.

8. The report covered various areas such as solar generation forecasting, ramp estimation and behaviour of PV plants during solar eclipse.

#### Flashback

1. Power System Operation Corp has now been set up into an independent company for ensuring the neutrality of the transmission system operations in 2014.
2. The government has decided to set up Power System Operation Corp (POSOCO) as an independent government company.
3. It was earlier part of central transmission utility Power Grid Corporation. The exercise of hiving off POSOCO was aimed at putting in place an independent, secure and reliable power system operation entity at the national level as mandated under the Electricity Act, 2003.
4. POSOCO operates the National Load Despatch Centre (NLDC) and Regional Load Despatch Centres (RLDCs) which are also responsible for operating the electricity market in the country.
5. It is also designated as the nodal agency for major reforms in the power sector such as the Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) Mechanism, transmission pricing, short-term open access in transmission, Deviation Settlement Mechanism, Power System Development Fund (PSDF), etc.

#### EXEMPTION OF IPGL FROM DPE GUIDELINES

The government on 26 February 2020 approved the exemption of India Ports Global Ltd from the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) guidelines for smooth execution of Chabahar Port project. The approval was given during a Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. IPGL was incorporated as a special purpose vehicle jointly promoted by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) and Deendayal Port Trust (DPT) for development and management of Shahid Behesthi Port of Chabahar in Iran.

What

1. Subsequent to the withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the external affairs ministry advised the shipping ministry on 29 October 2018 to exclude JNPT and DPT from possible impact of US sanctions.
2. Based on this and with the approval of empowered Committee all the shares of JNPT & DPT were purchased by 'Sagarmala Development Company Ltd' (SDCL) on December 17, 2018.

#### Flashback

1. The port of Chabahar is located on the Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, next to the Gulf of Oman and at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz.
2. It is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. Being close to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan etc., it has been termed the "Golden Gate" to these land-locked countries.
3. Chabahar is 700 km (430 mi) away from Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchistan province, 950 km (590 mi) away from Milak, the closest city to the Afghan border, and 1,827 km (1,135 mi) away from Sarakhs on the Turkmen border.

3. SDCL is a central public sector enterprise (CPSE) and therefore IPGL being a

- subsidiary of SDCL has also become a CPSE. As a result, guidelines of DPE are technically applicable on IPGL.
4. Since Chabahar Port is the country's first overseas port project with strategic objectives, there is an urgent need to allow IPGL to continue to function as a board managed company, duly following the instructions of the shipping as well as external affairs ministries without making the guidelines of DPE applicable to it for a period of five years.
  5. Accordingly, the shipping ministry has requested exemptions to IPGL from the applicability of the DPE guidelines, for smooth execution of the project.

## NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEXTILES MISSION

The government on 26 February 2020 approved setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission with a total outlay of ₹1,480 crore with a view to position the country as a global leader in technical textiles. The Mission will have a four year implementation period from financial year 2020-21 to 2023-24. The decision was taken at a meeting of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

### What

1. The Mission will aim at an average growth rate of 15-20% per annum taking the level of domestic market size to \$40-50 billion by the year 2024 through market development, market promotion, international technical collaborations, investment **promotions and 'Make in India' initiatives.**
2. It envisages export promotion of technical textiles, enhancing it from the current annual value of approximately ₹14,000 crore to ₹20,000 crore by 2021-22, and ensuring 10% average growth in exports per year up to 2023-24.
3. An Export Promotion Council for Technical Textiles will be set up for effective coordination and promotion activities in the segment.
4. The minister informed that she had requested the technology group established in the previous Cabinet meeting to work in tandem with the National Technical Textiles Mission.
5. The Mission will have four components including research, innovation and development with outlay of ₹1,000 crore; promotion and market development; export promotion; education, training and skill development.
6. Besides, the Mission will promote technical education at higher engineering and technology levels related to technical textiles and its application areas covering engineering, medical, agriculture, aquaculture and dairy segments.
7. Skill development will be promoted and adequate pool of highly skilled manpower resources will be created for meeting the need of relatively sophisticated technical textiles manufacturing units, the statement said.
8. Technical textiles are futuristic and niche segment of textiles, which are used for various applications ranging from agriculture, roads, railway tracks, sportswear, health on one end to bullet proof jacket, fire proof jackets, high altitude combat gear and space applications on the other end of spectrum.
9. In India, the segment is estimated at \$16 billion (about ₹1.14 lakh crore) which is approximately 6% of the \$250 billion (about ₹17.75 lakh crore) global technical textiles market.
10. The penetration level of technical textiles is low in India, varying between 5-10% against the level of 30-70% in developed countries.
11. The Mission will focus on usage of technical textiles in various flagship missions, programmes of the country including strategic sectors.
12. The use of technical textiles in agriculture, aquaculture, dairy, poultry, JalJivan

Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, Ayushman Bharat will bring an overall improvement in cost economy, water and soil conservation, better agricultural productivity and higher income to farmers per acre of land holding in addition to promotion of manufacturing and exports activities in India.

## INTERNATIONAL

### US, TALIBAN SIGN HISTORIC PEACE DEAL

The United States and Taliban on 29 February 2020 signed a historic peace deal to end the 18-year-long confrontation in Afghanistan. The signing was held in Doha of Qatar between US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and representatives of the Taliban. The new deal would see the two sides agree to the withdrawal of thousands of US troops from Afghanistan in return for insurgent guarantees. The US aims to withdraw all forces "within 14 months" as per the declaration. Meanwhile, Afghanistan government will have to release Taliban insurgents held in captivity. Pompeo urged Taliban to "keep your promises to cut ties with Al-Qaeda."

What

1. The deal comes after over a year of dialogue between the two sides, marred by back and forth negotiations and cancellations.
2. Kabul had sent a six-person task force to the Qatari capital to make initial contact with the Taliban political office, established in 2013.
3. The inking of the deal will come after a week-long, partial truce that has mostly held across Afghanistan aimed at building confidence between the warring parties and showing the Taliban can control their forces.
4. It is to be noted that the US, which currently has between 12,000 and 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, could draw that number down to 8,600 within months of the agreement being signed.
5. The development is being timed with President Trump's campaign for a second term in the White House. During the 2016 presidential bid, trump had called for cutting down the number of troops stationed overseas especially in Afghanistan, known as the graveyard of empires.
6. However, further reductions would depend on the Taliban's engagement with the

#### India in the midst

1. Indian Ambassador to Qatar represented India in the ceremony as the peace deal holds strategic and geopolitical implications for the country, which has invested in Afghanistan.
2. India's policy is to support all opportunities that can bring peace, stability and end violence in Afghanistan, MEA said on signing of the deal.
3. The deal also holds significance in terms of the strained relations with Pakistan which has interests in the region.
4. India remains committed to economic and human resource development partnership with Afghanistan. **Foreign Secretary reiterated India's** support for Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process which results in enduring and inclusive peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.
5. They agreed that sustainable peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan requires cessation of external support for terrorism and commitment to regional connectivity and integration, MEA said.
6. The Taliban's sheltering of Al-Qaeda was the main reason for the US invasion following the deadly 9/11 attacks. The conflict has cost the US taxpayer more than \$1 trillion in military and rebuilding costs since the US-led invasion of 2001.

government of President Ashraf Ghani, whom they have until now dismissed as a "US-backed puppet."

7. The deal is a result of three years of hard negotiations between the two sides over the civil-war torn country where the Taliban portrayed to have an upper hand.
8. Reports suggest that Pakistan also played a pivotal role in bringing the Taliban to the table amid "growing Indian presence in Afghanistan".

## PAKISTAN RETAINED ON GREY LIST OF FATF

**Pakistan has been retained on the "grey list"** of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for another four months, with a stern warning from the global watchdog that met in Paris (February 19-21) to complete the 27-point action plan it has been given by **June 2020 or face being put on the "black list"**. **All deadlines in the action plan have expired.** While noting recent and notable improvements, the FATF again expresses concern **given Pakistan's failure to complete its action plan in line with the agreed timelines and in light of the Terror Financing risks emanating from the jurisdiction.**

What

1. Pakistan was given a deadline of September 2019 to complete the tasks that included shutting down all access to funding of United Nations Security Council designated terrorist groups, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad and prosecuting their leadership for any access to finance, as well as tightening laws and banking security norms that deal with them.
2. In November 2019, after Pakistan was judged to have complied with only four points of the action plan, the FATF extended the deadline to February, where its statement noted it had been cleared of 14 points. The FATF urged Pakistan to "swiftly complete" the remainder of the list.
3. Otherwise, should significant and sustainable progress especially in prosecuting and penalising Terror Financing not be made by the next Plenary, the FATF will take action, which could include the FATF calling on its members and urging all jurisdictions to advise their Financial Institutions to give special attention to business relations and transactions with Pakistan.
4. A high-level team from Pakistan was present at the plenary to defend Pakistan's record, while delegations of security and diplomatic officials from the 39-member body, which includes India, attended the meeting.
5. **The "black list" refers to countries for who there has been a "call to action"** or strict banking and international finance sanctions, a list which at present includes Iran and North Korea.
6. **Pakistan is one of the 12 countries on the "grey list"** or "other monitored jurisdictions" that are being reviewed for actions to stop terror financing and money laundering.

### What is FATF?

1. Established in 1989, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body, which sets standards and promotes effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
2. It works with countries to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms.
3. The FATF's decision-making body, the FATF Plenary, meets three times per year.

## INDIA, MYANMAR SIGN 10 PACTS

India and Myanmar signed on 27 February 2020 ten agreements with a focus on the socio-economic development of the Southeast Asian nation as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held wide-ranging talks with Myanmar President U Win Myint. The Myanmar president, who arrived in India on 26 February 2020, received a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He and First Lady Daw Cho Cho were welcomed by President Ram Nath Kovind and PM Modi.

What

1. The prime minister and President Myint later held talks at Hyderabad House and 10 agreements were signed between the two countries. The focus of many agreements **was on development projects under India's assistance**, particularly in the conflict-torn Rakhine state.
2. **The agreements included an MoU on 'Cooperation for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons; Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking'.**
3. An agreement regarding Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIP) was also signed between the two sides.
4. Three agreements for development projects in the conflict-torn Rakhine state were **also signed during the president's visit.**
5. The Rakhine state has witnessed a lot of violence in the past and scores of Rohingyas had fled the state facing persecution. The Myanmar President and his wife also paid respects to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat.

## NEW PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

Malaysia's king named former interior minister Muhyiddin Yassin as the new prime minister on 29 February 2020 in a shock decision that sidelined old rivals Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim after a week of political turmoil. The decision came five days after the resignation of 94-year-old Mahathir, the world's oldest head of government, who broke an alliance with Anwar, 72, that swept the former ruling party from power in a 2018 election victory. Although Mahathir and Anwar announced on 29 February 2020 that they had joined hands again, the palace said in a statement the king made his decision on the basis that Muhyiddin Yassin possibly had the support of a majority in parliament.

What

1. Muhyiddin will be sworn in on 1 March 2020. Muhyiddin, 72, had the backing of the former ruling party United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), that was driven from power after six decades by the Pakatan Harapan alliance of Mahathir and Anwar on an anti-corruption platform. Former UNMO prime minister Najib Razak is on trial for corruption.
2. But UNMO's fortunes have risen since its 2018 defeat, with the Pakatan coalition losing five by-elections in the face of criticism from some Malay voters that it should do more to favour the country's biggest ethnic group of 32 million. Muhyiddin also had the backing of Islamist party PAS.
3. UMNO, which Mahathir led from 1981 to 2003 during a previous stint as prime minister, supports Malay nationalism.

## INDIA, US INK 3 PACTS

India and the US on 25 February 2020 inked three MoUs, including one in the energy sector, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the two countries have decided to take Indo-US ties to comprehensive global partnership level. The

unprecedented and historic welcome given to Trump in India will be remembered, Modi said and added that the relations between the two countries are not merely confined to governments but are people-driven.

What

1. Defence cooperation between the two countries is reflective of rising strategic partnership between India and the US. We also agreed on new mechanism to contain drug trafficking the Prime Minister said.
2. India and the US on 25 February 2020 finalised defence deals worth \$3 billion, and signed three MoUs, including one in energy sector.
3. In his brief remarks at the start of official talks, Modi said "Defence cooperation between the two countries is reflective of rising strategic partnership between India and the US. We also agreed on new mechanism to contain drug trafficking" the Prime Minister said.
4. The Trumps, who also paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi at his memorial Rajghat, arrived in Ahmedabad around noon on Monday for the first leg of their 36-hour India visit.
5. Visit has been unforgettable, extraordinary and productive, Trump added.

## ECONOMY

### FC SETS UP GROUP ON FARM EXPORTS

The Fifteenth Finance Commission (FC) has set up an eight-member group under ITC chairman Sanjiv Puri to suggest performance incentives for states to encourage farm exports and promote crops that would "enable high import substitution". The group will also recommend appropriate incentives for states for the five years through 2025-26 to accelerate reforms in the agriculture sector. The group will have to submit a report to the Commission in three months.

What

1. The high-level expert group on agriculture exports will also have seven members — Radha Singh, former agriculture secretary; Suresh Narayanan, CMD of Nestle India; Jay Shroff, CEO of UPL; Sanjay Sacheti, country head at Olam Agro India; chairman of APEDA; Sachin Chaturvedi, director-general at RIS; and a representative of the food Processing ministry.
2. Finance Commission chairman NK Singh had in October 2019 said that the panel was considering working out a model to incentivise states that undertake credible reforms in agriculture by easing or removing damaging rules and regulations.
3. He also favoured incentives to those states that improved rail connectivity, "designed specifically for the promotion of exports".
4. Farm exports have lagged potential in recent years, thanks to the absence of desired structural reforms, mainly by states and the Centre's frequent curbs on exports of items like onions.
5. According to **APEDA's agrixchange portal**, India's farm exports remained subdued at \$38.5 billion in FY19, against \$38.2 billion in the previous fiscal, underperforming an **almost 9% rise in the country's overall merchandise exports**.
6. In the April-December period of this fiscal, farm exports dropped to just \$26 billion, with analysts expecting the outbound shipments to touch only \$35 billion in FY20.
7. The terms of reference of the new expert group include **assessing "export and import substitution opportunities for Indian agricultural products and suggest ways to step up exports sustainably and reduce import dependence"**.



8. It will also “recommend strategies and measures to increase farm productivity, enable higher value addition, ensure waste reduction, strengthen logistics infrastructure etc. related to Indian agriculture, to **improve the sector’s global competitiveness.**”
9. The group has to identify the “**impediments for private sector investments along the agricultural value chain and suggest policy measures and reforms that would help attract the required investments**”.

#### Flashback

1. The Finance Commission is a constitutional body that determines the method and formula for distributing the tax proceeds between the Centre and states and among the states as per the constitutional arrangement and present requirements.
2. The constitution makers were aware of the financial requirements of the Centre and the states.
3. They devised an elaborate method, clearly demarcating the duties and responsibilities of the units of the Union and of the Union itself while allocating resources to perform those duties. To meet these requirements, the Finance Commission came into being.
4. Under Article 280 of the Constitution, the President of India is required to constitute a Finance Commission at an interval of five years or earlier.
5. The 15th Finance Commission was constituted by the President of India in November 2017, under the chairmanship of NK Singh, a former member of the Planning Commission.

## INDIA CSR REPORTING SURVEY 2019

More companies in India are complying with corporate social responsibility norms under the Companies Act, 2013, with 76 per cent firms having spent 2 per cent or more of their profits on such initiatives during 2019, according to a report. The findings of the ‘India CSR Reporting Survey 2019’, **compiled by KPMG in India, that** covered 100 companies also revealed a 150 per cent rise in the number of firms that have committed to carry forward 2 per cent of the unspent amount.

What

1. The Companies Act which came into effect from April 1, 2014 stipulates that firms with a net worth of Rs 500 crore or more, or a turnover of Rs 100 crore or more, or a net profit of Rs 5 crore or more during the immediately preceding financial year are required to spend 2 per cent of their profits on corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.
2. Eligible companies need to form a CSR committee, formulate a policy, and implement projects in alignment with Schedule VII of the Act.
3. CSR-related disclosures need to be made in the annual report in a format prescribed by the Act.
4. According to the report, there has been a 325 per cent increase in the number of companies that have disclosed details of outreach in annual report. Besides, 30 per cent firms studied in the report have had more than three CSR committee meetings.
5. While the overall CSR spending is increasing, it is also heartening to observe the increase in the number of companies going beyond the 2 per cent mandate and even companies who are not required to spend allocating budgets for CSR and spending.

## CENTRE APPROVES LEVY ON LOTTERIES

A 28 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) will be levied on

DELHI: VIJAY NAGAR 9717380832 & OLD RAJENDER NAGAR 9811293743 | JAIPUR: 8290800441  
 BENGALURU: KORMANGALA 7619166663 & CHANDRA LAYOUT 7619136663 | BHOPAL: 7509975361  
 PATNA: 7463950774 | INDORE: 7314977441 | RANCHI: 7463950774 | www.ksgindia.com

lotteries from March 1, according to a notification. The GST Council had in December last year decided to impose a single rate of 28 per cent on state-run and authorised lotteries. The revenue department notified the GST rate on supply of lotteries and amended its earlier Central Tax (Rate) notification.

What

1. Accordingly, the Central Tax rate for supply of lotteries has been amended to 14 per cent and a similar percentage will be levied by the states. This will take the total GST incidence on lotteries to 28 per cent.
2. This notification shall come into force on the 1st day of March, 2020, the revenue department notification said.
3. Currently, a state-run lottery attracts 12 per cent GST, while a state-authorised lottery attracts 28 per cent tax.
4. There were demands that a uniform tax rate should be imposed on lotteries following which a group of ministers were set up to suggest the GST rate. Following this, the GST Council in December voted for a single rate of 28 per cent on supply of lotteries.
5. Gambling in the form of Lottery has been allowed in a few states, where it has penetrated at grass root levels, now changing the tax rate from a prospective date would help the dealers in effectively implementing the new tax rate.
6. Uniform rate on lottery brings a parity between state-run and authorized lotteries; thereby aligning an equal footing for businesses in the same line.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### WORLD'S FIRST IN VITRO CHEETAH

Two cheetah cubs have been born through in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer to a surrogate mother for the first time, Ohio zoo officials announced on 24 February 2020. The male and female cubs were born to 3-year-old Izzy at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, the zoo said in a statement. A team observed the births through a remote camera and is continuing to monitor Izzy and the cubs.

What

1. The biological mother of the cubs is 6-year-old Kibibi who has never reproduced and is too old to easily become pregnant naturally.
2. **Kibibi's eggs were extracted and then fertilized** in a Columbus Zoo laboratory on Nov. 19. The early stage embryos were implanted into Izzy on Nov. 21, and an ultrasound revealed she was pregnant with two fetuses about a month later.
3. **Dr. Randy Junge, the zoo's vice president** of animal health, said this development could have broader implications for **managing the species' population in the future**.
4. It was the third time scientists had attempted the procedure and it was the first time it worked, according to zoo officials.

#### Flashback

1. In vitro fertilization (IVF) helps with fertilization, embryo development, and implantation, so you can get pregnant.
2. **It's one of the more widely known** types of assisted reproductive technology (ART).
3. IVF works by using a combination of medicines and surgical procedures to help sperm fertilize an egg, and help the fertilized egg implants in your uterus.

### WIND FLOW PATTERN ON MARS

NASA scientists have mapped the global wind circulation patterns in the upper atmosphere of Mars- 120 to 300 kilometers above the Red Planet's surface. The

researchers, including those from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) in the US, reprogrammed probes aboard NASA's Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) spacecraft to collect wind measurements on the Red Planet.

What

1. The reprogramming allowed an instrument called the Natural Gas and Ion Mass Spectrometer (NGIMS) aboard MAVEN -- that was normally stationary -- to "swing back and forth like a windshield wiper fast enough," the scientists said.
2. They added that this tweaking enabled them to gather data on the winds flowing across the Martian surface.
3. The study, published in the journal Science, was based on data collected by MAVEN two days per month from 2016 to 2018.
4. It's a clever re-engineering in flight of how to operate the spacecraft and the instrument," said Mehdi Benna, study co-author from NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) in the US.
5. And by doing both -- the spacecraft doing something it was not designed to, and the instrument doing something it was not designed to do -- we made the wind measurements possible.
6. The researchers said the wind flow patterns observed in the Martian upper atmosphere matched what was predicted from theoretical models. The study noted that the average circulation patterns from season to season were very stable on Mars.
7. However, the scientists said the shorter-term variability of winds in the upper atmosphere was greater than anticipated. On Mars, the average circulation is steady, but if you take a snapshot at any given time, the winds are highly variable.
8. Another insight gleaned from the study is that the wind hundreds of kilometers above the Red Planet's surface still contained information about landscapes below such as its mountains, canyons, and basins.
9. Benna explained that as the air mass flows over those features, "it creates waves-- ripple effects -- that flow up to the upper atmosphere," and can be detected by MAVEN and NGIMS.
10. On Earth, we see the same kind of waves, but not at such high altitudes. That was the big surprise, that these can go up to 280 kilometers high.
11. The researchers believe the wind waves on Mars, called "orthographic waves," last so long unchanged because of two reasons.

## FIRST ANIMAL TO SURVIVE WITHOUT OXYGEN

Scientists have discovered an animal that does not need oxygen to produce energy needed for its survival, a finding that **changes one of science's assumptions** about the animal world. The tiny, less than 10-celled parasite *Henneguya salminicola* lives in salmon muscle, according to the finding published on 25 February 2020 in the journal PNAS. As it evolved, the animal which is a relative of jellyfish and corals, gave up breathing and consuming oxygen — or became anaerobic — to produce energy, "Aerobic respiration was thought to be ubiquitous in animals, but now we have confirmed that this is not the case.

What

1. Some other organisms like fungi, amoebas or ciliate lineages in anaerobic environments have lost the ability to breathe over time, the researchers said.
2. The new study demonstrates that the same can happen to an animal — possibly because the parasite happens to live in an anaerobic environment, they said. **The researchers noted that the parasite's anaerobic nature was an accidental discovery.**
3. While assembling the *Henneguya* genome, Huchon found that it did not include

a mitochondrial genome. The mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell where oxygen is captured to make energy, so its absence indicated that the animal was not breathing oxygen.

4. Until the new discovery, there was debate regarding the possibility that organisms belonging to the animal kingdom could survive in anaerobic environments, the researchers said.
5. The assumption that all animals are breathing oxygen was based, among other things, on the fact that animals are multicellular, highly developed organisms, which first appeared on the Earth when oxygen levels rose, they said.
6. It may be drawing it from the surrounding fish cells, or it may have a different type of respiration such as oxygen-free breathing, which typically characterises anaerobic non-animal organisms.
7. It is generally thought that during evolution, organisms become more and more complex, and that simple single-celled or few-celled organisms are the ancestors of complex organisms.

## BIGGEST EXPLOSION SINCE BIG BANG

Astronomers have discovered the biggest explosion seen since the beginning of the universe, originating from a super-massive black hole. The blast, they said, is the biggest explosion seen since the Big Bang — the cosmological model to describe a rapid expansion of matter and energy that created the observable universe. The explosion reportedly released five times more energy than the previous record holder.

What

1. The blast occurred at the center of the Ophiuchus cluster of galaxies, some 390 million light years away. The cluster is a conglomeration of thousands of galaxies, hot gas and dark matter bound together by gravity.
2. Astronomers used **NASA's Chandra X-Ray** Observatory to make the discovery, as well as a European space observatory and ground telescopes. Scientists picked up the first sign of the explosion in 2016.
3. Chandra images of the cluster revealed an unusual curved edge, but scientists ruled out a possible eruption given the amount of energy that would have been needed to create such a large cavity of gas. The curvature was later confirmed to be a cavity.
4. According to ICRAR, the lead author of the study, Dr Simona Giacintucci from the Naval Research Laboratory in the United States, compared the blast to the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, which tore the top off the mountain.
5. The blast is believed to be over by now, and, according to the research team, more observations are needed in other wavelengths to better understand what occurred.

## MINIMOON FOUND ORBITING EARTH

In the early hours of February 15, two astronomers at the Mount Lemmon Observatory 9,000 feet above Tucson, Arizona, noticed a small asteroid-like object near the Earth. Kacper Wierzchos and Theodore Pruyne from the Catalina Sky Survey saw this object moving against the steady backdrop of the stars. Wierzchos said that the object near the Earth was not much different from an asteroid, except that it was not orbiting the Sun. It was orbiting the Earth. This minimoon has been named 2020 CD3. The discovery was announced by the Minor Planet Center. So far, the astronomers do not have enough data to establish what the minimoon is made of, the NYT report states. However, the astronomers are convinced that the object orbiting the Earth is not made of rocket debris or due to human activity.

Why is it called a minimoon?

1. 2020 CD3 is being called a minimoon because it is orbiting the Earth just like

the Moon does.

2. However, it is not actually a moon but an asteroid-like object, about the size of a car, with a diameter of 1.9-3.5 metres.
3. **The minimoon is temporary and will eventually break free from the Earth's orbit.**

When did the minimoon start orbiting the Earth?

1. The gravity in the Earth-Moon system captured the little asteroid-like body, which then started orbiting the Earth due to the pull around 18 months to a year ago.

What makes minimoon so rare?

1. Several primaevial objects are travelling around the solar system, mostly circling the Sun in the belt of asteroids between Mars and Jupiter.
2. Sometimes the gravitational force of Jupiter send these objects towards the inner solar system where they orbit near the Earth.
3. However, only rarely do any objects orbit the Earth. If the discovery holds true, the 2020 CD3 would only be the second minimoon to have been ever found.

**When is 2020 CD3 likely to leave the Earth's orbit?**

1. The 2020 CD3 is likely to leave the Earth's orbit in the next two weeks, the NYT report quoted NASA's Centre for Near-Earth Object Studies Director Paul Chodas as saying.
2. He added that the astronomers discovered the object close to its departure.

## WI-FI ON FLIGHTS ALLOWED

Wi-Fi on domestic flights will now be allowed upon permission from the pilot-in-command and the gadget is to be used in flight mode, with the government finally notifying rules for this. The amended aircraft rules have been published by the government in the official gazette on 29 February 2020 and they skip the mention of allowing mobile communication, which was mentioned in the draft rules published by the government on August 14 last year.

What

1. The pilot-in-command may permit the access of internet services by passengers on board an aircraft through Wi-Fi on board when laptop, smartphone, tablet, smartwatch, e-reader or a point of sale device is used in flight mode or airplane mode.
2. Provided that the director general shall certify the aircraft for usage of internet in flight through Wi-Fi on board subject to procedures as specified in this behalf.
3. The final rules notified say the pilot-in command may permit the use of cellular **telephones by passengers of a flight "after the aircraft has landed and cleared active runway, except when the landing takes place in low visibility conditions as may be determined by the director general."**
4. An additional explanation has been added in the new rules saying an aircraft shall be deemed to be in flight when all its external doors are closed following embarkation until the moment when any such door is opened for disembarkation.
5. The government in its latest notification has also said that it received no objections or suggestions from the public in respect of the draft rules.

## Flashback

1. Wi-Fi is the name of a wireless networking technology that uses radio waves to provide wireless high-speed Internet and network connections.
2. A common misconception is that the term Wi-Fi is short for "wireless fidelity," however this is not the case. Wi-Fi is simply a trademarked phrase that means IEEE 802.11x.
3. Wi-Fi networks have no physical wired connection between sender and receiver by using radio frequency (RF) technology -- a frequency within the electromagnetic spectrum associated with radio wave propagation.
4. When an RF current is supplied to an antenna, an electromagnetic field is created that then is able to propagate through space. The cornerstone of any wireless network is an access point (AP).
5. The primary job of an access point is to broadcast a wireless signal that computers can detect and "tune" into.
6. In order to connect to an access point and join a wireless network, computers and devices must be equipped with wireless network adapters.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### INDIA GETS CHAMPION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES AWARD

India was accorded Champion Plus status by the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species Wild Animals (CMS), a United Nations body, for its commitment to the small grants programme (SGS) for conservation of migratory species and for keeping its energy projects compliant with the guidelines of Energy Task Force, at the 13th conference of parties (COP13) which began in Gandhinagar on 17 February 2020.

What

1. At the Champion Night Award Ceremony organised as a pre-event to COP13 organised in GIFT city near Gandhinagar on 16 February 2020 evening, CMS executive secretary Amy Fraenkel presented the Champion Plus award to Prakash Javadekar, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
2. It is the first time that India has joined the migratory species champion programme of the CMS, a global organisation which functions under the aegis of the United Nations.
3. India has been conferred this award for joining the SGS 2020-2023 under which it would contribute a minimum of 20,000 Euros per year for supporting CMS programmes for conservation of migratory species and for keeping its energy projects ETF compliant and thereby wildlife-friendly.
4. India had contributed 80,328 Euros to the Trust Fund of the CMS. India, Germany, Monaco and Norway have collectively contributed 8.63 lakh Euro for supporting core activities of CMS in 2020.
5. Besides India, Germany, Italy, Monaco, Norway, Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi and the European Commissioner were also recognised with Champion Plus status.
6. Together these governments have committed over 6 million USD and in-kind support to the work of CMS since the last CMS COP was held in 2017, supporting a range of specific initiatives including wildlife conservation in Africa to implementing measures to preserve marine life.
7. While Germany has been recognised for supporting conservation of migratory species in Africa, Italy has been awarded for supporting development of a global



animal migration atlas for the period 2018-2020.

8. The government of the principality of Monaco has been recognised with the Champion Plus status for its commitment towards shark conservation for the period 2019-2021 and for marine species conservation for the period 2020-2022.
9. Norway has allotted grants to support sustainable development and migratory species conservation for 2020-2022 period, while Abu Dhabi has renewed its commitment towards the conservation of birds of prey in Africa and Eurasia for 2020-2023 and for the conservation of Dugongs and their habitats over the same period. Abu Dhabi also hosts a CMS office.
10. The European Commission has been acknowledged for strengthening national legislation for migratory species for the Period 2020-2023.

#### Flashback

1. The 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme.
2. Representatives from 130 countries, eminent conservationists and international NGOs working in the field of wildlife conservation participated in the COP.
3. The CMS COP 13 logo depicts migratory species is inspired by 'Kolam', a traditional art form from southern India.
4. The mascot of this convention 'Great Indian Bustard' also closely draws attention towards its critically endangered status

## SECOND PHASE OF SWACHH BHARAT MISSION

The Centre on 19 February 2020 approved the second phase of Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural), **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet project focussed on** sustainability of ODF and management of solid and liquid waste. The second phase will be implemented on a mission mode between 2020-21 and 2024-25 with an estimated central and state budget of Rs 52,497 crore, the Jal Shakti Ministry said in a statement. The rural sanitation programme was started on October 2, 2014, when the sanitation coverage in the country was reported at 38.7 per cent. More than 10 crore individual toilets have been constructed since the launch of the mission and as a result, rural areas in all states have declared themselves open defecation free (ODF) as on October 2, 2019.

What

1. The second phase will focus on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus), which includes ODF sustainability and solid and liquid waste management (SLWM).
2. The ODF Plus programme will converge with MGNREGA, especially for grey water management, and will complement the newly launched Jal Jeevan Mission. The programme will also work towards ensuring that no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet.
3. The 15th Finance Commission has proposed earmarking Rs 30,375 crores for rural water supply and sanitation to be implemented by rural local bodies for the upcoming financial year.
4. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) under the ministry has, however, advised all the states to reconfirm that there are no rural households that **still don't have access to a toilet.**

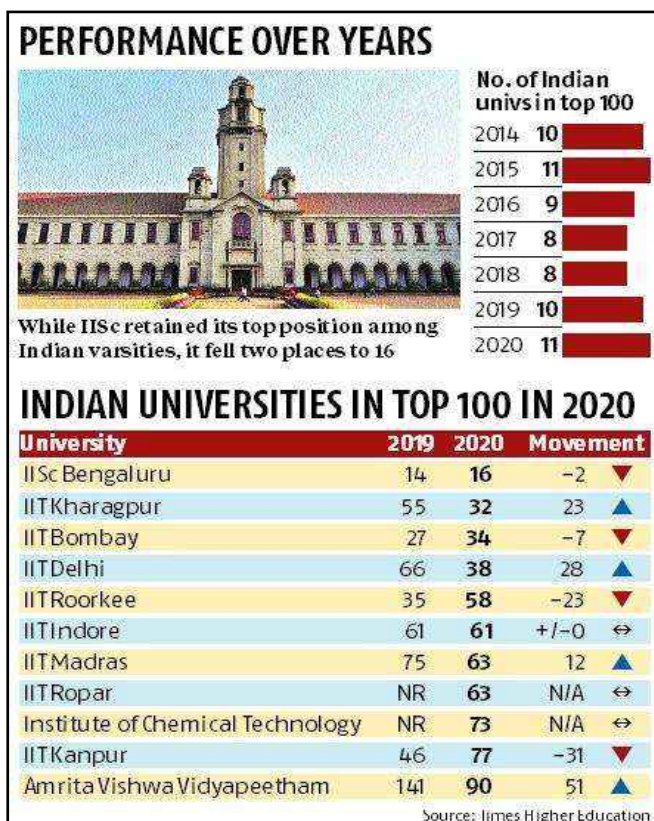
5. The department has also said that to provide the necessary support to any such identified households to build individual household toilets in order to ensure that no one is left behind under the programme.
6. The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and the States will be 90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K; 60:40 for other States; and 100:0 for other Union Territories, for all the components.
7. The ministry said the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin continue to generate employment and provide impetus to the rural economy through construction of household toilets and community toilets, as well as infrastructure for waste management such as compost pits, soak pits, waste stabilisation ponds, material recovery facilities, etc.

## TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION RANKINGS

With 11 universities getting ranked this year in the top 100, India has seen the highest representation since 2015 in the latest **Times Higher Education's (THE's)** Emerging Economies University Rankings 2020. The achievement marks the second time 11 Indian institutions have held top 100 positions since 2015 when an equal number of universities were ranked in the top 100.

What

1. According to THE, with 30 varsities, China has more universities in the top 100 than India, from a total of 47 countries and territories included in the ranking. Overall, 56 Indian universities appear in the full ranking of the 533 universities in total.
2. While it retained its top position among Indian varsities, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore fell by two places to 16, followed by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Kharagpur and IIT-Bombay at 32nd and 34th positions.
3. Further, one of the participating universities in the Ministry of Human Resources **Development's Institutes of Eminence** scheme, which was established in 2017 to influence the ranking data, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham broke into the top 100 for the first time, moving up a massive 51 places from a joint 141 in 2019. According to THE, Amrita declared improvements in almost all the ranking metrics, compared to 2019.
4. The other universities included in the Institutes of Eminence scheme that appear in the top 100 mark the biggest improvers in the ranking, with IIT-Kharagpur moving



up 23 places to 32, IIT-Delhi climbed 28 places to a joint 38, while IIT-Madras rose 12 places to a joint 63. Both IIT-Ropar and Institute of Chemical Technology, Mumbai, on the other hand, marked their debut with joint 63rd and joint 73rd positions in the top 100.

5. The Institutes of Eminence scheme provides participating universities with government funding and greater autonomy with the aim of moving them into the top **100 of the world university rankings, including THE's World University Ranking, over time.**
6. The government expects to achieve this through a number of changes, including an increase in foreign students and staff, offering online courses, and encouraging academic collaboration with top universities around the world.
7. There has long been a debate on the success of Indian universities in world rankings, and for too long they have been seen as underperforming on the global stage.
8. The Emerging Economies University Rankings 2020 suggests that real progress is being made by a number of institutions in a number of metrics across our robust methodology, and could mark an exciting turning point for Indian higher education, enabled in part by the Institutes of Eminence scheme, said Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer, THE.

## BIG ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY

A 4000-year-old urban settlement has been unearthed by a team of the Benaras Hindu University in Varanasi, which experts say is one of the craft villages mentioned in **ancient texts. The Benaras Hindu University's Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology** which did a preliminary survey of the site in Babhaniyav village, 13 km from Varanasi, said they had found remnants of one of the settlements that have been mentioned in various literature surrounding the holy city.

What

1. Initial survey of the site in Babhaniyav village in Varanasi district has found a temple dating back to the 5th Century AD through 8th Century AD, potteries which are 4000-year-old and walls which are 2000-year-old, said Professor A K Dubey of Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, BHU.
2. On the basis of the surface materials at the site, we can say that the structure is anywhere between 3500 to 4000-year-old, said Dubey, who is part of the team which will excavate the site from February 23.
3. He said that it gains significance because of its proximity to Varanasi, which according to legend was founded by the Hindu deity Lord Shiva 5,000 years ago, though modern scholars believe it to be around 3,000 years old.
4. The site at Babhaniyav could be a small sub-centre of Varanasi which also grew as an urban town, said Dubey. The latest findings in Babhaniyav village is significant as it could have been a satellite settlement and feeding centre of the Varanasi-Sarnath region, said B R Mani former Additional Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
5. He was invited by BHU during its initial survey and said the team has unearthed a 5-metre cultural deposit like the ones found in Sarnath.
6. While such crafts villages have been earlier unearthed in Sarnath, Tilmapur, Ramnagar and other areas, Babhaniyav is an addition.

7. They have also found a pillar with a two line text in Kushan Brahmi script which makes the findings at least 3500-4000 year old. **“Once the excavation is complete we will get a clearer picture of the findings, Mani, who now heads the National Museum, told.**

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY IN HARYANA

Sirsa, a district in Haryana, houses a mound which is believed to unravel some **clues about the ancient city ‘Sarishika’**. In order to study the ancient ruins, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has to relocate nearly 50,000 people residing on around 82 acres of land. The High Court had ordered 788 families to be rehabilitated three years ago and they still do not have access to basic amenities. As a result, the residents living near the archaeological sites are not willing to move from there. The report also said **that local residents have also accused the authorities for declaring Sirsa’s ‘Ther Mound’** under Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904.

What

1. The clash between residents and security personnel has led to many petitions in both Punjab and Haryana high courts.
2. The report said that the government is allegedly trying to see if the ASI can get a hold of the parts out of the protected zone, which is heavily inhabited.
3. According to the ASI Superintending Archaeologist Zulfequar Ali, who is in charge of the mound, ASI has found some antiquarian remains from many periods including Gupta and Mughal in three months.
4. But the area and time allotted to them was not enough and they are requesting more time. This was done after some people were evacuated in FY19. A court hearing on the matter is due this week.
5. The land is currently occupied by those who had moved to India after the partition. The people have also protested that the land under protection should only be 31 acres and not 82 acres.
6. The report also stressed that the people are not willing to move because some houses given by the government for people to move do not have healthy living conditions.

## WEARABLE DEVICES APPLICATION REJECTED

The **Indian Patent Office rejected Google’s** application on wearable electronic devices, observing that it lacks inventive steps and the use and the method by which it is to be performed is not fully described in complete specification. The company, in its patent specification, said that the invention comprises of electronic devices provided in shoes or **ankle bracelets**. The **patent application for ‘System and method for wearable electronic devices’**, filed in 2007, mentions various wearable models including a shoe that can communicate data to the user, electronic communication devices attached to clothes, wireless ear pieces and ankle bracelets that can transmit updated information from the body to the user.

What

1. The drawings the company submitted to the patent office also show the design of a shoe that can be a wearable electronic device.
2. The device mounted on the shoe includes a display to show time, caller ID

information, temperature, and pulse rate, and such wearables are expected to provide functions not present in existing devices such as cellular phones, and personal digital assistants, according to the application.

3. The wearable device has features like calendar information, satellite navigation receiver, motion sensing unit, camera, vibrator, temperature sensor, humidity sensor and air pressure sensor, among others.
4. One of the objections raised by the patent office was that the claims lack inventive step as required under the Indian Patent Act, as the claims of the apparel being used as personal devices to transmit data and display them on a personal device, was already known as per the available documents.
5. The claims relating to transmitting and receiving calls on a portable device worn the wrist are also known. There has also been lack of proper specification and disclosure as required by the Act, the patent office said.
6. In the order, the assistant controller of patents and designs, said that the **specification should** “disclose the best method of performing the invention”, for which the applicant can claim protection.
7. **The description should be sufficient to enable a person** “possessing average skill and average knowledge” **to work the invention** and obtain the results claimed for the invention.

#### Flashback

1. Google has been developing its own wearable ecosystem with Wear OS, which is used in smart watches for fitness tracking, messaging, among other things.
2. According to reports, Google acquired wearables maker Fitbit for \$2.1 billion late last year, with plans to expand its wearables offerings and “invest even more” on Wear OS.
3. Last year, there were reports that Verily Life Sciences, part of Google’s parent Alphabet, was working on health-tracking shoes to measure the movement and weight of users.
4. It has also showcased a prototype with sensors attached to monitor the movement of the person wearing the shoes, offering a wide range of uses for them.