

My Notes....

NATIONAL

INDIA IN CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2021

India's rank improved **one place to 85** among 180 countries in a **corruption perception index (CPI) of 2021**, according to a new report by **Transparency International** which, however, raised concern over the country's democratic status. The index, **which ranks 180 countries and territories** by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where **0 is highly corrupt** and **100 is very clean**.

According to the Report

1. Among those with weak scores are some of the **world's most populous countries** such as **China (45)** and **India (40)**, and other large economies such as **Indonesia (38)**, Pakistan (28) and Bangladesh (26).
2. **India's** score has **remained stagnant** over the past decade; some of the mechanisms that could help reign in corruption are weakening.
3. The report further alleged that **civil society organisations** that speak up against the government have been targeted with **security, defamation, sedition, hate speech** and **contempt-of-court charges**, and with regulations on foreign funding.
4. A concerning trend across some of these nations (with weak scores) is a **weakening of anti-corruption institutions** or, in some cases, absence of an agency to coordinate action against corruption.
5. **Denmark, Finland, New Zealand** and **Norway** topped the list with the highest score.

Background

1. This year's scores reveal that **all regions of the globe** are at a standstill when it comes to fighting public sector corruption.
2. In parts of Asia Pacific, **the Americas, Eastern Europe** and **Central Asia**, increasing restrictions on accountability measures and basic civil freedoms allow corruption to go unchecked. Even historically **high-performing countries** are showing signs of decline.
3. The **Corruption Perception Index** relies on sources like **Freedom House** and the **World Bank**, and surveys based on questionnaires answered by experts and businesspeople.

INDIA SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH ICAAP

India has signed an agreement with the **International Co-Operative Alliance Asia And Pacific (ICAAP)** intending to **assimilate and develop** further on the core strengths, experience, and institutional objectives in the interest of advancement of research, study, documentation, and training for **development of the cooperative sector**.

What

1. **India** has **more than eight lakh registered cooperative societies**, especially in the agricultural and agri-allied sector, banking, and housing sectors.
2. The **cooperative movement** in the country has regained focus after the Central Government recently created the **Ministry of Cooperation** to provide a separate administrative legal and policy framework for streamlining the cooperatives.
3. ICAAP president Dr Chandra Pal Singh Yadav and National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) president Dileep Sanghani jointly released a policy recommendation handbook '**Sahakar Pragma: Good Practices for Cooperatives**.'

4. A compendium of guidelines, resources, methodologies, key learning, case studies of the **best performing cooperatives in India** and abroad and the outcome and impact, the handbook would serve as an action plan that can help these entities to achieve the **goal of self-reliance**.
5. This handbook is expected **to help cooperatives in India and abroad** to innovate and adopt best models not only to stay competitive, but also distinguish themselves as successful commercial entities.
6. The cooperatives have **inherent advantages** in tackling the problems of **poverty alleviation, food security, and employment generation** -- a path to self-reliance. This has also been reflected during the Covid-19 times.

COUNTRIES REGAIN UN ASSEMBLY VOTING RIGHTS

The **UN General Assembly** said 24 January 2022 that **Iran, Guinea and Vanuatu** had **paid sufficient back dues** to the United Nations' regular operating budget **to regain their voting rights** in the 193-member world body. That leaves only two countries -- **Venezuela and Papua New Guinea** -- without the right to vote in the General Assembly.

What

1. The **UN Charter states** that members **whose arrears equal or exceed the amount of their contributions** for the preceding two full years **lose their voting rights**.
2. But it also gives the **General Assembly the authority to decide** "that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the control of the member" and in that case, a country can continue to vote.
3. Three of those countries -- **Sudan, Antigua and Barbuda, and Republic of Congo** -- paid enough of their owed dues last week to regain their right to vote.
4. The General Assembly decided that three **African countries on the list of nations** in arrears -- **Comoros, Sao Tome, and Principe and Somalia** -- would be able to keep their voting rights.

India in UN budget for 2022

1. **India** has paid **USD 29.9 million** in **UN regular budget assessments** for the year 2022.
2. **India joins the 2022 Honour Roll of 24 Member States** out of 193 that have paid their UN Regular Budget Assessments in full.
3. As of 21 January 2022, **24 Member States** have paid their regular budget assessments in full.
4. **India is currently a non-permanent member** of the 15-nation Security Council and its two-year term will end on 31 December 2022.

INDIA'S FIRST ONLINE PLATFORM FOR SPICES

The Government has launched the **country's first virtual platform** for **spice exports Spice Xchange India** at a hybrid event held in Kochi on 20 January 2022. Spices have contributed greatly to **India's export basket** despite the pandemic and the country presently enjoys a dominant share in the global spice market by **exporting 225 different spices** and spice products to **more than 180 countries**.

More about platform

1. Launched by the **Spices Board, spicexchangeindia.com** is a **3D virtual platform** aimed at **connecting India's spice exporters** with buyers from around the world.

2. The portal uses **artificial intelligence (AI)-based technology** to connect spice buyers with exporters in India.
3. The **buyers and sellers** can access the database to find the potential customers.
4. The portal works as an extended office enabling the subscribers to conduct virtual meetings.
5. The **Spices Board** said the **pandemic had forced** the board to conceptualize and create the portal, which would be relevant even after the pandemic period as **it easily connected exporters and importers**.

SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AAPDA PRABANDHAN PURASKAR FOR 2022

The **Gujarat Institute of Disaster Management (GIDM)** and **Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority's** Vice Chairman **Vinod Sharma** have been selected for the **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar** for 2022 for their excellent work in disaster management.

About GIDM

1. **GIDM** has been selected in the **Institutional category**; Sharma was named in the **individual category**.
2. The **GIDM was established in 2012** and since then it has been working to enhance the **disaster risk reduction (DRR)** capacity of Gujarat.
3. Through a series of strategically designed capacity building programs, the GIDM has trained more than 12,000 professionals on diverse issues concerning **multi-hazard risk management** and reduction during the pandemic.

About Vinod Sharma

1. **Sharma**, a senior professor at the **Indian Institute of Public Administration** and vice-chairman of the Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority, was the founder coordinator of the **National Centre of Disaster Management**, now known as the **National Institute of Disaster Management**.
2. He has worked tirelessly towards bringing **disaster risk reduction (DRR)** to the forefront of the national agenda.
3. Sharma's pioneering work in DRR in India gave him **international recognition** and he is a resource person to **Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA)** and **all Administrative Training Institutes (ATIs)** for disaster management.

About the Award

1. The central government has instituted the annual award -- **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar** -- to recognise and honour the **invaluable contribution** and **selfless service** rendered by individuals and organisations in India in the **field of disaster management**.
2. The award is announced **every year on 23 January**, the birth anniversary of freedom fighter **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose**.
3. It carries a cash prize of **Rs 51 lakh and a certificate in the case of an institution** and **Rs 5 lakh and a certificate** in the case of an individual.

GOVT. MANDATES STORAGE OF ISD FOR 2 YRS

The government has **mandated storage** of **international calls, satellite phone calls, conference calls** and messages made over normal networks as well as on the internet for a period of at least two years, according to circulars issued by the telecom department.

What

1. The move follows an amendment made in the **unified licence (UL)** in December by the **Department of Telecom (DoT)** which **extended storage of call data records** as well as **internet logs to two years** from earlier provision of one year.
2. **UL holders** are telecom companies like **Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio, Vodafone Idea, BSNL** for providing all kinds of telecom services, **except satellite phone services**.
3. The licensee shall maintain all commercial records, call data record, exchange detail record, **IP detail record** with regard to the communications exchanged on the network.
4. Such records shall be **archived for at least two years** for scrutiny by the licensor for security reasons and may be destroyed thereafter unless directed otherwise directed by the licensor.
5. The amendment applies to companies like **Tata Communications, Cisco's Webex, AT&T Global Network**, etc who have subscribed to these licences.
6. The DoT made amendments in **ILD licence** on 25 January which besides extending an additional one year for maintaining call detail records includes provision for storing details of international communications made using internet protocol.
7. A similar amendment has been issued for **licence issued to BSNL** for **providing satellite phone calls and data services** as well as for VSAT licence holders who provide satellite based services on 24 January 2022 mandating them to maintain call data and internet communications records for **at least two years**.

26TH STATE TO ALIGN WITH TELECOM ROW RULES

Tamil Nadu has become the **26th state** to issue **Right of Way (RoW) rules** for easing telecom infrastructure rollout in the state, in line with the guidelines issued by the Centre in November 2016, as per telecom industry bodies. **Delhi, Gujarat, Kerala** and the **union territory of Daman and Diu** are yet to align their rules with the guidelines issued by the Centre to **facilitate expeditious rollout of telecom networks**.

What

1. **Telecom industry body COAI** on 27 January 2022 appreciated the notification of the **Tamil Nadu Telecom Infrastructure Policy 2022** and said the bye-laws are applicable to all city areas, municipal councils, town municipal councils, town panchayats, etc and include **telecom towers and OFC (aerial and underground)**.
2. As per the policy, the state government has **fixed a one-time fee of Rs 10,000 per application** to meet administrative expenses for the installation of telecom tower deployment.
3. Telecom companies will be **charged Rs 1,000 per kilometre for rolling out optical fibre cable (OFC)**, be it underground or overground.
4. The policy **encourages the deployment of towers, OFC, cell on wheel**, micro sites, small cell, in-building solution etc that are essential to improve the digital connectivity across urban municipal corporations and other areas of Tamil Nadu.
5. The policy also supports the **regularisation of the existing telecom infrastructure** that will contribute towards the growth of the state.

SUPREME COURT ON UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

Supreme Court on 31 January 2022 came down heavily on the central government for **not taking a stand** on the issue of **Uniform Civil Code** and thereby imposed a fine of Rs 7,500 for its failure to file an affidavit. The top court dismissed Centre's response as an **"excuse which is difficult to accept."**

What

1. The Centre argued in court that the same could not be done **within the stipulated time granted by the court**, due to the Covid pandemic.
2. Earlier, a petition had said that the government **must publish a Uniform Civil Code draft** to end all confusion in the matter of **civil liberty, human rights, gender justice and gender equality**.
3. The plea further stated that **neither the Supreme Court nor the high court** can ask the government **to implement Article 44** (Uniform Civil Code), but they can direct the Centre to constitute a committee to prepare the draft.
4. **Uniform Civil Code means - uniform age of marriage, uniform grounds of divorce, uniform maintenance and alimony**, uniform adoption and guardianship and uniform succession and inheritance," he added.

INTERNATIONAL

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM'S DAVOS AGENDA'22

The theme-setting **World Economic Forum (WEF) Agenda** on the 'State of the World' will see government and corporate leaders talk about **critical global challenges**, with a special address by Prime Minister ahead of the Davos meeting.

Why is WEF important?

1. The **WEF summit** brings together the **who's-who of the political and corporate world**, including heads of state, policymakers, top executives, industrialists, media personalities, and technocrats.
2. Deliberations at the WEF influence **public sector and corporate decision-making**, especially on the issues of global importance such as **poverty, social challenges, climate change, and global economic recovery**.
3. The heady mix of **economic, corporate, and political leadership** in the Swiss ski resort provides an ideal opportunity for finding solutions to global challenges that may emerge from time to time.

What are the main initiatives?

1. **Agenda 2022** will see the launch of other WEF initiatives meant for **accelerating the mission to net-zero emissions**, on the economic opportunity of **nature-positive solutions**, and on cyber resilience.
2. **Bridging the vaccine gap**, strengthening the resilience of global value chains besides building economies in fragile markets through humanitarian investing will also be among the discussion topics over the next few days.
3. **How to use data solutions** to prepare for the **next pandemic** will feature in the discussions as well.

FIRST INDIA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Central Asia is **central to India's vision** of an integrated and stable extended neighbourhood, Prime Minister said on 27 January 2022 as he **hosted the first India-Central Asia Summit** in a virtual format. **All Central Asian Nations** are concerned about the **Afghan situation** and this makes cooperation between India and Central Asia all the more important for **regional stability and security**.

What

1. The virtual summit saw the participation of **five presidents** -- Kazakhstan's Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Uzbekistan's Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow and Sadyr Japarov of Kyrgyz Republic.
2. This is the **first engagement of its kind** between India and the Central Asian countries at the level of leaders.
3. The **first India-Central Asia Summit** is a reflection of the country's growing engagement with the Central Asian countries, which are a part of India's "**extended neighbourhood**".

Joint Working group for Chabahar Port

1. Leaders of **five central Asian countries** on 27 January 2022 welcomed **India's proposal** to **establish a joint working group** to boost **connectivity** to the region through the **Chabahar port** in Iran.
2. The leaders also stressed on making concerted efforts to **boost trade and investment** in sectors such as **medicine, healthcare, education, information technology, business process outsourcing**, infrastructure, agriculture and agri-processing, energy, space industry, textiles, leather and footwear industry, gems and jewellery.

Joint working group on Afghanistan

1. **India and five Central Asian countries** on 27 January 2022 discussed the **evolving situation in Afghanistan** and its impact on security in the region and decided to establish a **joint working group on Afghanistan** at the senior official's level.
2. The timing of the meeting is of particular significance as **India and Central Asia countries** are celebrating the **30th anniversary of diplomatic relations** with the 5 Central Asian countries this year.
3. The Leaders reaffirmed the importance of **UNSC Resolution** (2021) which unequivocally **demands that Afghan territory** not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts and called for concerted action against all terrorist groups, including those sanctioned by the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.

UN YET TO AGREE ON DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

UN member states have failed themselves by continuing to procrastinate on concluding a comprehensive **convention against international terrorism**, India has said, voicing concern that the global body has neither agreed on a **common definition of terrorism** nor crafted a **well-coordinated policy** to tackle the global scourge and dismantle its enabling networks.

What

1. **India proposed a draft document** on the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** at the UN in 1986 but it has not been implemented yet as there is no unanimity on the definition of terrorism among the member states.
2. The Indian diplomat further said that the effectiveness, relevance and longevity of any institution lie in its **dynamic character** and **ability to adapt itself to the changing times**.
3. As long as the key organs of the organisation remain anchored in a governance structure frozen in the past, the crisis of legitimacy and performance will persist, India said.
4. India welcomed the Secretary-General's continuing initiative **to modernise and reform the Secretariat** and make the United Nations fit for purpose, including streamlining the peace and **security architecture, achieving gender parity** and addressing the financial sustainability of the organisation.
5. In the last one year, India has joined the global efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Prime Minister call for **One Earth One Health' approach** underlines the country's continuing commitment, already evident in the **supply of medicines to over 150 countries**; and vaccines to many nations in the developing world.

UN USES 3D VIRTUAL DIPLOMACY FOR THE FIRST TIME

In a first “**virtual diplomacy**” of its kind, the **UN Security Council used virtual reality** for a **field trip to Colombia** that aimed to give the **15-nation top UN organ** an insight into the peace process in the South American country. **First time**, the UNSC went on a virtual field trip, **Norway**, which is the **President of the Council** for the **month of January**, said in a statement on 20 January 2022.

What is in virtual trip?

1. The **members visited Colombia** before a briefing” by Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Colombia and Head of the **United Nations Verification Mission** in Colombia and former combatant with the **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP)**.
2. **Counsellor in India’s Permanent Mission** to the UN **Pratik Mathur**, present for the virtual reality trip. **India** is a “**proud supporter of using Technology for Peace!**”
3. **First ever Security Council session** to use a virtual reality VR experience! Innovative solutions to better understand (world) **conflicts, peace keeping & Peace-building**, India said.
4. The **United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)** said that “Bringing the Colombian peace process closer to decision-makers in New York today and **having Colombian voices heard**.”

ECONOMY

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2021-22

The **Economic Survey 2021-22** was tabled in Parliament on 31 January 2022 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman soon after the **President's address to both Houses of Parliament**. The survey, presented a day before the Union Budget, **underlines the state of the economy** and **outlines suggestions for policy actions**.

Highlights of the Economic Survey 2022

1. **GDP growth rate** projected in the **range of 8-8.5%** for the next **fiscal 2022-23 (FY23)**
2. Growth projections **based on oil price projection** of \$70-75 per barrel next fiscal, against current price of \$90
3. **Agriculture least hit by pandemic**, sector to grow by 3.9% in 2021-22 after growing 3.6% the previous year
4. Inflation on everyone's mind: Eco Survey flags **global resurgence of inflation**, warns of **imported inflation**
5. The Survey also went into detail on the government's use of the **Barbell approach** to COVID-19, saying that this "helped make **it possible to target the vulnerable sections/businesses better**, keeping the pandemic's economic toll at much less than what could have been"
6. Pandemic, **job uncertainty continues to make people wary of EMIs**, with home loans registering 8% growth in November 2021, 0.4% below 2020
7. **Railways: Rs 65,157 crore capital expenditure** from April to November 2021; capex outlay in the ongoing financial year is at Rs 2.15 lakh crore, which is five times the 2014 level.

8. **Railways capex will increase further in coming years** and emerge as an engine of national growth.
9. **India has third largest startup ecosystem** in the world after US and China.
10. **Five sectors** capture around **83% of the aggregate pipeline value: Roads (27%), Railways (25%), Power (15%), Oil & Gas pipelines (8%) and Telecom (6%)**
11. **Climate finance** will remain critical to successful climate action by developing countries, including India.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE UNION BUDGET

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will on 1 February 2022 present her **fourth straight Union Budget** when she presents financial statements and tax proposals for fiscal year 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023).

Some budget trivia:-

1. **INDIA'S FIRST BUDGET** - The Budget was **first introduced in India** on 7 April 1860 when **Scottish economist and politician James Wilson** from East India Company presented it to the British Crown. **Independent India's first budget** was presented on 26 November 1947 by the then Finance Minister **R K Shanmukham Chetty**.
2. **LONGEST BUDGET SPEECH** - Sitharaman holds the record for delivering the longest speech when she spoke for **2 hours and 42 minutes** while presenting the Union Budget 2020-21 on 1 February 2020.
3. **MOST WORDS IN BUDGET SPEECH** - At **18,650 words**, **Manmohan Singh** delivered the longest Budget speech in terms of words **in 1991** under the Narasimha Rao government.
4. **SHORTEST BUDGET SPEECH - 800 words** was all that the then finance minister **Hirubhai Mulljibhai Patel** delivered **in 1977**.
5. **MOST NUMBER OF BUDGETS** - Former Prime Minister **Moraraji Desai** holds the record of presenting the most number of budgets in the history of the country. He had presented **10 budgets** during his stint as finance minister during 1962-69.
6. **LANGUAGE - Until 1955**, the Union Budget was presented in English. However, the Congress-led government later **decided to print the Budget papers in both Hindi and English**.
7. **PAPERLESS - Covid-19 pandemic** turned the Budget for **2021-22 was paperless - a first in Independent India**.
8. **FIRST WOMAN** - In 2019, **Sitharaman became the second woman** to have presented the budget **after Indira Gandhi**, who had presented the budget for the financial year 1970-71.
9. **RAILWAY BUDGET - Till 2017**, **railway budget** and Union Budget were presented separately. After being presented separately for 92 years, the **Railway budget was merged in the Union Budget in 2017** and presented together.

AIR INDIA ASSET TRANSFER AGREEMENT WITH AIAHL NOTIFIED

The government has **notified the agreement** between **Air India** and special purpose vehicle **AI Assets Holding Ltd (AIAHL)** for the transfer of non-core assets, ahead of the national airline's takeover by the Tata Group. The government had in October last year, **inked the share purchase agreement** with the Tata Group for the sale of national carrier Air India for Rs 18,000 crore.

What

1. The **Tata Group** take full control of the airline, it **founded in 1932**, on 27 January 2022. The **cash component of the deal** would come once the handover process is completed.
2. The Tata Group would pay Rs 2,700 crore cash and take over Rs 15,300 crore of the airline's debt. The deal also includes sale of **Air India Express** and **ground handling arm AISATS**.
3. The transaction was to be completed by December 2021, but the deadline was later extended **till January 2022**, owing to longer-than-expected time taken to complete procedural work.
4. This will mark the **return of Air India to the Tata fold after 67 years**. The Tata Group had founded Air India as Tata Airlines in October 1932. The government **nationalised the airline in 1953**.
5. As a precursor to the handover process, the **Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM)** on 24 January 2022 notified the **framework agreement** entered into by and between Air India Ltd and **AI Assets Holding Ltd (AIAHL)** for transfer of assets of the national carrier posts it ceasing to be a public sector company.

Flashback

1. **AIAHL was set up in 2019**, by the government for holding debt and non-core assets of the Air India group.
2. **Four Air India subsidiaries -- Air India Air Transport Services Ltd (AIATSL), Airline Allied Services Ltd (AASL), Air India Engineering Services Ltd (AIESL) and Hotel Corporation of India Ltd (HCI) --** along with non-core assets, painting and artefacts, and other non-operational assets, was transferred to the SPV.
3. In October last year, Tatas beat the Rs 15,100-crore offer by a consortium led by **SpiceJet** promoter Ajay Singh and the reserve price of Rs 12,906 crore set by the government for the sale of its **100 per cent stake in the loss-making carrier**.
4. Of the **141 Air India aircraft** that Tatas would get, **42 are leased planes** while the remaining **99 are owned**.

INCLUDE EVS IN RBI'S PSL GUIDELINES

NITI Aayog, Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), and RMI India on 21 January 2022 released a report, titled '**Banking on Electric Vehicles in India**', which outlines the **importance of priority-sector recognition** for retail lending in the **electric mobility ecosystem**. The report provides considerations and recommendations to inform the **inclusion of EVs** in the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) **priority-sector lending (PSL) guidelines**.

What the report said

1. The **banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)** in India have the potential to achieve an **electric vehicle (EV) financing market size of Rs 40,000 crore by 2025** and **Rs 3.7 lakh crore by 2030**. However, **retail finance for EVs** has been slow to pick up.
2. **Financial institutions** have an important role to play in **accelerating the adoption of EVs in India** and supporting the **decarbonisation of road transport**.
3. **RBI's PSL mandate** has a proven track record of improving the supply of formal credit towards areas of national priority. It can provide a **strong regulatory incentive for banks and NBFCs** to scale their **financing to EVs**.
4. **Priority-sector lending** aims to **expand financial access** and support employment opportunities in India.

5. In order to meet these goals, the Aayog has suggested in the report that the RBI may consider **various EV segments** and use cases based on **five parameters: socio-economic potential, livelihood generation potential, scalability, techno-economic viability, and stakeholder acceptability**.
6. The Aayog has suggested in the report that **electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and commercial four-wheelers** are early segments to prioritise under PSL.
7. Further, it suggests **recognition of EVs as an infrastructure sub-sector** by the ministry of finance and the incorporation of **EVs as a separate reporting category under the RBI**.
8. **To maximise the impact of the inclusion of EVs**, the report also recommends a clear sub-target and penalty mechanism for priority sector lending to renewable energy and EVs.

THREE R&D PROJECTS APPROVED UNDER I4F

Deliberating on widening the scope of **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F)**, the two countries have approved **three joint R&D projects** worth \$5.5 million and suggested measures to create a broader **India-Israel collaborative ecosystem**.

What

1. The projects are '**Centrally monitored IoT nano-sensors** for molecular diagnostics in healthcare and screening applications'; '**NoMoreMos**' - a **mosquito control biological solution**; and '**IoT enabled satellite communication** for real-time collection of agriculture and environment data across India'.
2. The **eighth governing body of I4F** ratified the minutes of the seventh governing body meeting on 18 January 2022, which was followed by approval of the **three joint R&D projects**, a release from the Ministry of Science & Technology said on 19 January 2022.
3. So far, the **priority areas have been agriculture**, security and other important areas.
4. There is further scope of increasing the **quantum of projects** received, which calls for the need to conduct more online meetings among the **startup eco-system of Israel and India**.
5. The members mutually decided on a **strategy for the new phase of I4F 2.0**, which also includes co-developing disruptive technologies in strategic sectors together with research performers involving academia as well.

INDIA TO EXPORT BRAHMOS SUPERSONIC MISSILES

India on 28 January 2022 **inked the \$375 million (Rs 2,770 crore) deal to export BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles** to the **Philippines**, which has had a running battle with China over **territorial claims in the South China Sea** in recent months.

What

1. This **first-ever contract** to export the **290-km range BrahMos missiles**, which India has developed jointly with Russia, will pave the way for more such deals with the Philippines as well as other Asean countries like **Indonesia and Vietnam**.
2. The contract is also **strategically significant** in the backdrop of **China's expansionism** and strong-arm tactics with its neighbours in the South China Sea.
3. The Philippines will get **at least three missile batteries** of the shore-based anti-ship systems of the BrahMos, a **deadly conventional (non-nuclear) weapon** that flies almost three times the **speed of sound at Mach 2.8**, apart from training for operators and the necessary integrated logistics support package.

4. This contract is for the **Philippines Navy for coastal defence**. The next could be a bigger contract for its Army. Similarly, talks for exporting the BrahMos missiles to Indonesia are in an advanced stage.
5. With an eye on **China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific**, India has been stepping up military ties with **Asean countries** through combat exercises, exchanges, training programmes and now increasingly weapon supplies under the "Act East" policy over the years.
6. India has also supported the **freedom of navigation** and overflight for all in the South China Sea in accordance with the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.

Flashback

1. The other countries that have shown an **interest in acquiring the BrahMos missiles**, which has emerged as the "**precision-strike weapon of choice**" for the Indian armed forces, include the **UAE, Saudi Arabia and South Africa**.
2. India also plans to sell the **indigenously-developed Akash missile systems**, which can intercept hostile aircraft, helicopters, drones and subsonic cruise missiles at a range of 25-km, to countries like **Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kenya and Algeria**.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DRONE CERTIFICATION SCHEME NOTIFIED

The **Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA)** on 26 January 2022 notified a **drone certification scheme** to **ensure minimum safety** and quality requirements as it will boost indigenous manufacturing. The drone certification scheme notified under Rule 7 of the **liberalized Drone Rules, 2021** will help in simpler, faster and transparent type-certification of drones.

What

1. Along with the **liberalised drone rules, airspace map**, the **PLI** (production-linked incentive) scheme and the **single window DigitalSky Platform**, this will help drone manufacturing industry in India, grow.
2. The MoCA had on 16 September last year approved a **PLI scheme for drones** and drone components with an allocation of Rs 120 crore spread over three financial years.
3. The PLI scheme came as a follow-through of the **liberalised Drone Rules, 2021**, released by the MoCA on 25 August 2021.
4. The objective of this **Drone Certification Scheme (DCS)** is to provide the minimum requirements for airworthiness -- **safety and security requirements** -- for drones and enable their evaluation for certification.
5. A multi-stakeholder steering committee (MSC) will oversee the scheme, along with a **QCI (Quality Control of India)** secretariat.
6. This MSC will also be supported by a **technical committee (TC)** and a certification committee (CC) that will be constituted by the QCI.

8TH FOUNDING MEMBER TO JOIN SKAO

SWITZERLAND HAS become the **eighth country** to join the intergovernmental founding nations that will collaborate in building the **Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO)**, to be built in **Australia and South Africa**, led by the **United Kingdom, Australia and South Africa**.

What

1. The **SKAO** is the proposed **largest radio telescope** that is expected to be operational for carrying out observations by the early 2030s.
2. Upon being **operational by 2029**, the SKAO will generate **astronomical data** measuring **700 Petabytes**, annually.
3. **Headquartered in the United Kingdom**, the SKAO will be an array of **197 dishes** located in South Africa and 1, 31,072 antennas in **Western Australia** and operate within the **50 MegaHertz – 15.3 GigaHertz** frequency range.
4. The estimated cost of building the SKAO, during 2021 – 2029, is approximately **2 billion Euros**.
5. **India**, at present, is a **participating member** but is waiting to officially become a full member and the proposal for the same is pending with the Union government.
6. Becoming a full member will mean the **disclosure of funds** to be contributed towards the mega science project.
7. Along with the three host countries, **Switzerland joins the founding member-nations** Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, France and China.
8. In December last year, the **Federal Council approved Swiss membership to SKAO** and the country's parliament agreed to fund the project.

KOYLA DARPAN LAUNCHED FOR COAL SECTOR

The government on 21 January 2022 announced the launch of a portal, '**Koyla Darpan**', to share **key performance indicators** related to the **coal sector**. The portal was launched by Coal Secretary, the Ministry of Coal said.

What

1. The portal has **key performance indicators** like **coal/ lignite production, coal/ lignite offtake, exploration data**, central sector schemes, status of coal stock at thermal power plants, **allocation of blocks**, monitoring of major coal mines, and coal price.
2. The **Ministry of Coal** has the **overall responsibility** of **determining policies** and strategies in respect of exploration and development of **coal and lignite reserves**, sanctioning of important projects of high value and for deciding all related issues.
3. Under the **administrative control of the Ministry**, these key functions are exercised through the Public Sector Undertakings, namely, **Coal India Ltd.** and its subsidiaries and **Neyveli Lignite corporation India Limited (NLCIL)**.
4. Other than **Coal India Ltd.** and **Neyveli Lignite Corporation India Ltd.**, the **Ministry of Coal** also has a joint venture with Government of Telangana called **Singareni Collieries Company Limited**.
5. **Government of Telangana holds 51% equity** and **Government of India holds 49 % equity**.

AIRLINES CANCEL FLIGHTS DUE TO MEGA 5G ROLL OUT

Ahead of the **mega 5G rollout** in the US, **major airlines** like Emirates, **Air India**, ANA and Japan Airlines have announced to **cancel some flights over concerns** that it could potentially interfere with some instruments and may put **flyers' safety at risk**.

Why is that a problem?

1. The **US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)** has warned that the new 5G technology could interfere with instruments such as **altimeters**, which measure **how far above the ground an airplane is travelling**.

2. **Altimeters** operate in the **4.2-4.4 GHz range** and the concern is that the auctioned frequencies sit too close to this range.
3. In addition to altitude, altimeter readouts are also used to **facilitate automated landings** and to help detect dangerous currents called **wind shear**.
4. The **higher the frequency in the spectrum**, the faster the service; So in order to get **full value from 5G**, operators want to operate at higher frequencies.
5. Some of the **C band spectrum** auctioned had been used for satellite radio but the **transition to 5G means there will be much more traffic**.

MISCELLANEOUS

ICC WOMEN'S CRICKETER OF THE YEAR

India's swashbuckling opener **Smriti Mandhana** was on 24 January 2022 named the **ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year** for her incredible run of form across all formats in 2021. Mandhana was short-listed for the top award -- **the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy** -- along with Tammy Beaumont of England, Lizelle Lee of South Africa and Gaby Lewis of Ireland, the ICC said.

What

1. The 25-year-old played a sublime **innings of 78 in the first innings** of the one-off Test against England that ended in a draw.
2. She played an important knock of 49 in India's only win in the ODI series.
3. Her 15-ball 29 and fifty in the **T20I series** went in vain though as India fell short in both the matches and lost the series 2-1.
4. The **Southpaw was in good touch in the series against Australia**, starting with the ODI series where she scored 86 in the second ODI.
5. **Mandhana made India's first-ever pink-ball Test** even more memorable by smashing her maiden century in the longest format.

NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY 2022

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** celebrates **12th National Voters' Day (NVD)** on 25 January on the **theme 'Making Elections Inclusive, Accessible and Participative'**. The theme for this year's NVD, envisages focus on ECI's commitment **to facilitate the active participation of voters** during the elections and to make the complete process hassle-free and a memorable experience for all categories of voters.

What

1. To mark the occasion, **National Awards for the Best Electoral Practises** for the year 2021-22 conferred on **State and District level officers** for their outstanding performance in the conduct of elections in different spheres such as **IT initiatives, Security Management, Election Management, Accessible Elections** and contribution in the field of voter awareness and outreach.

Structure of the ECI

1. Originally the commission had **only one election commissioner** but after the **Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989**, it has been made a multi-member body.
2. The commission presently consists of **one Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and two Election Commissioners (ECs).

2. **Since 2011, National Voters' Day** has been celebrated on 25 January every year, all across the country to mark the **foundation day of the Election Commission of India**, i.e. 25 January 1950.
3. The **main purpose** of the NVD celebration is to **encourage, facilitate** and **maximise enrolment**, especially for the new voters.
4. Dedicated to the voters of the country, the day is utilized to spread awareness among voters and for promoting informed participation in the electoral process.

PADMA AWARDS 2022

President **Ram Nath Kovind** on 25 January 2022 approved conferment of **128 Padma Awards** this year. The list comprises **4 Padma Vibhushan, 17 Padma Bhushan** and **107 Padma Shri Awards**. **34 of the awardees are women** and the list also includes 10 persons from the category of Foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI and **13 Posthumous awardees**.

What

1. Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister **late Kalyan Singh** and **India's first Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat** who died in a helicopter crash were awarded **Padma Vibhushan**.
2. Veteran Congress leader **Ghulam Nabi Azad** and former West Bengal chief minister and CPM leader **Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee** were given Padma Bhushan.
3. **Cyrus Poonawalla** of the Serum Institute of India, which manufactured Covid-19 vaccine Covishield, and **Krishna Ella and Suchitra Ella of Bharat Biotech**, which produced India's indigenous **Covid vaccine Covaxin**, were also given Padma Bhushan.

Flashback

1. **Padma Awards** - one of the **highest civilian Awards of the country**, are conferred in three categories, namely, **Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan** and **Padma Shri**.
2. '**Padma Vibhushan**' is awarded for exceptional and **distinguished service**; '**Padma Bhushan**' for distinguished **service of high order** and '**Padma Shri**' for **distinguished service in any field**.
3. The awards are announced on the **occasion of Republic Day every year**.

PASSING EXERCISE IN ARABIAN SEA

Indian Navy and **Russian Federation Navy** conducted a **passing exercise** in the **Arabian Sea**. Indian Navy's indigenously designed and built guided missile destroyer **INS Kochi** and Russian Federation Navy's destroyer **Admiral Tributs** were involved in the exercise that showcased **cohesiveness** and **interoperability**, Navy said on 16 January 2022.

What

1. A **passing exercise** is done to ensure that two navies participating in it are able to smoothly **coordinate and communicate** in times of **any disaster or war**.
2. The exercise showcased **cohesiveness and interoperability** between the two navies and included **tactical manoeuvres, cross-deck helicopter operations** and **seamanship activities**.
3. Indian Navy's exercises with **Admiral Tributs** in Arabian Sea is a continuation of growing **Indo-Russian strategic co-operation** as envisaged during Russian President Putin's visit to India last December.

NDRF RAISING DAY 2022

NDRF Raising Day in India or the **foundation day of NDRF** is observed by the National Disaster Response Force every year on **19 January**. This day marks the **formation of the disaster response force** in the country **back in 2006**. In 2022, the day marks the celebration of the **17th NDRF Raising Day**.

What

1. The NDRF Raising Day highlights the role of the NDRF personnel for their help and assistance during **disaster situations in India**.
2. The **National Disaster Response Force** was **constituted in 2006** for the purpose of a special response to a threatening disaster situation under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
3. The **act of 2005** was introduced after the **successive natural calamities** between 1990 and 2004.
4. NDRF Raising Day brings to **attention the selfless service** and the unmatched professionalism shown by the **NDRF personnel** at the time of **disaster management in the country**.
5. The **motto** of the National Disaster Response Force is '**Aapada Seva Sadaiv Sarvatra**' which means the sustained disaster response service under all circumstances.

Flashback

1. The **National Disaster Response Force personnel** are trained in **flood rescue, rope rescue, collapsed structure search, and rescue**.
2. The NDRF personnel are the **specialized task force** for the special response to **calamities and disasters**.
3. NDRF had also sent the 6 tons of relief materials for the **cyclone** that **hit parts of Fiji**.

'NEOCOV' VIRUS ARE DANGEROUS

A team of scientists in China's Wuhan has warned of a lethal variant called '**NeoCov**' detected in bats triggering widespread panic as some reports suggested that it requires **only one mutation to infiltrate human cells**. **NeoCov** is said to carry the **mortality rate of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS)-CoV** and the high transmission rate of the **current SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus**.

What is the NeoCov virus?

1. **NeoCov**, which is the **deadlier version of coronavirus**, was detected in South Africa some time ago. The Wuhan lab scientists have found the **presence of this virus** in the **bats of South Africa**.
2. Considering the **extensive mutations in the RBD regions** of the SARS-CoV-2 variants, especially the **heavily mutated Omicron variant**, these viruses may hold a latent potential to infect humans through further adaptation.
3. The panic set off when the study said that this **highly lethal virus** has the potential to kill one in every three persons it infects.
4. The researchers have noted that **infection with NeoCov** could not be cross-neutralised by antibodies targeting **SARS-CoV-2 or MERS-CoV**. In its current form, **NeoCov does not infect humans**.
5. The WHO has said that it "works closely" with the **World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)**, the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** and the **UN Environment Programme (UNEP)** in order to "monitor and respond to the threat of emerging zoonotic viruses".

FACTS TO REMEMBER:

1. **India** rank **85** in a **corruption perception index (CPI)** of **2021**.
2. **India** hosted the **first India-Central Asia Summit** in a virtual format.
3. **India** has **third largest startup ecosystem** in the world **after US and China**.
4. **Spice Xchange India** is the **country's first virtual platform** for **spice exports**.
5. **NITI Aayog** released a report, titled '**Banking on Electric Vehicles in India**'.
6. The government has **mandated storage** of **international calls, satellite phone calls, conference calls** and messages for a period of at least two years.
7. **Tamil Nadu** has become the **26th state** to issue **Right of Way (RoW) rules** for easing telecom infrastructure.
8. **India** proposed a draft document on the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** at the UN in 1986.
9. **India** inked deal to **export BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles** to the **Philippines**.
10. **SWITZERLAND** HAS become the **eighth country** to join the **Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO)**.

LINKS TO FOLLOW:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60256060>

<https://theprint.in/economy/privatisation-of-psu-banks-will-create-jobs-not-take-them-away-says-dipam-secretary/821211/>

<https://www.livemint.com/specials/bitcoin-may-lack-an-economic-anchor-but-that-s-not-relevant-11643216620494.html>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/1/16/a-coup-a-counter-coup-and-a-russian-victory-in-kazakhstan>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10363649/DAILY-MAIL-COMMENT-Green-taxes-driving-families-red.html>