

The number of polluted stretches in India's rivers has fallen from 351 in 2018 to 311 in 2022, though the number of most polluted stretches is practically unchanged, according to a report from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in November but made public this week.

The CPCB network monitors water quality at 4,484 locations across the country. Biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) exceeding 3 milligrams per litre (mg/l) is identified as polluted locations. Two or more polluted locations identified on a river in a continuous sequence are considered as a "polluted river stretch." A BOD less than 3 mg/l means the river stretch is fit for "outdoor bathing."

Increasing the retirement age of Supreme Court and High Court judges could extend the years of service of non-performing judges and might have a cascading effect with government employees raising a similar demand, the Department of Justice has told a parliamentary panel. It also said increasing the retirement age of judges would be considered along with measures to ensure transparency and accountability in appointments to the higher judiciary.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Sunday that China was ready to work with India for the "steady and sound growth" of bilateral ties and the two countries were committed to upholding stability in the border areas where tensions had prevailed since 2020. Addressing a symposium on the international situation and China's foreign relations in 2022, Mr. Wang said both countries had maintained communication through diplomatic and military to military channels. "China and India have maintained communication through the diplomatic and military to military channels, and both countries are committed to upholding stability in the border areas."

Nepal President Bidhya Devi Bhandari on Sunday appointed Pushpa Kamal Dahal, leader of the parliamentary party of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), Prime Minister of the Himalayan nation.

The Madras High Court has criticised a sessions judge, a judicial magistrate, and the police for being ignorant of legal procedures even in a case involving national security. The court has directed the Tamil Nadu State Judicial Academy to conduct refresher courses for judicial officers with special focus on enactments such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967.

1000 number of small yet important stations the railways is planning to modernise under its new "Amrit Bharat Station Scheme". This is apart from the ambitious plan to revamp 200 big

NATIONAL STOCK EXCHANGE (NSE) GETS SEBI NOD FOR SOCIAL STOCK EXCHANGE (SSE)

1. SSE functions as a regulated funding platform to allow For-Profit Social Enterprises (FPEs) and not-for-profit organisations (NPO) with a social purpose, to raise funds. At present, avenues through which social sector (FPEs and NPO) receive funding include Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), impact investing, philanthropic/Government grants etc.
2. Some of the prominent SSE includes UK (Social Stock Exchange), Canada (Social Venture Connexion), Singapore (Impact Investment Exchange) etc. Idea of SSE was floated in Budget speech 2019-20.
3. Following this, government issued a notification declaring a new security 'zero coupon zero principal (ZCZP)' under the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956. ZCZP can be publicly or privately issued by NPO upon registering with SSE of NSE. Earlier, in July 2022, SEBI also notified rules for SSE.
4. **Benefits of SSE**-Enables public participation in social causes through equity route. Provides additional capital to improve lives of underserved. Leverage private sector participation thus complementing government efforts for developmental goals. Brings together social enterprises and impact investors on a common platform. Enable fund-raising as well as information on operations and financials through standardized reporting.

NASA'S PERSEVERANCE DROPS FIRST SAMPLES ON MARS

1. Perseverance rover mission is part of NASA's Mars Exploration Program, a long-term effort of robotic exploration of Mars. Perseverance aims to look for signs of past microbial life, prepare for future human exploration and collect samples of rock and regolith (broken rock and soil) for possible return to Earth. Recently, Perseverance placed a titanium tube containing a rock sample on the surface of Mars.
2. Igneous rock sample was collected from Mars Jezero Crater called South Séitah. Samples are being placed at a location called "Three Forks," first such sample depot on another world. Depot will serve as a backup if Perseverance can't deliver its samples and subsequent NASA missions would return these samples to Earth.
3. **Significance of Mars**-Search for life: Evidence suggests that Mars was once full of water, warmer and had a thicker atmosphere, offering a potentially habitable environment. Possible planet that humans can visit or inhabit in long term: Venus and Mercury have extreme hot temperatures. All planets in outer solar system starting with Jupiter are made of gas and are very cold.

DEPARTMENT OF TELECOM (DOT) FORMS 4 TASK FORCES TO BOOST DOMESTIC TELECOM MANUFACTURING, REMOVE HURDLES

1. Mandate of Task forces is to: Recommend a phased manufacturing programme to boost domestic component supply chain ecosystem and attract global players. Suggest policy for reducing dependence on imports. Suggest measures for improving lead time and reduce inventory to resolve logistics issues. Identify new opportunities for development and manufacturing of 5G products.
2. **Need for boosting telecom manufacturing**-Dependence on imports: Much of the communications ecosystem related hardware and software is sourced from external manufacturers. Security Threat from China: In India, telecom sector is dominated by Chinese telecom equipment companies raising the speculation about Chinese involvement in Espionage, cyberattacks etc. Helpful for creating various forward and backward linkages and expand demand for other electronic components.
3. **Initiatives Taken**-Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Telecom and Networking products. Phased Manufacturing Program to promote local manufacturing of cellular mobile handsets and reduce imports. Trusted Telecom Portal (TTP) for giving clearance to trusted products that telecom service providers (TSPs) can install in their network.

JAN VISHWAS (AMENDMENT OF PROVISIONS) BILL 2022 INTRODUCED IN LOK SABHA

1. Bill seek to further enhance trust-based governance for ease of doing business (EoDB) by decriminalising and rationalising minor offences

stations. Officials said the small stations would be identified not just for their footfalls but also based on the cities they cater to.

₹11,557 crore, the amount invested by foreign investors in Indian equities in December so far, despite concerns over re-emergence of COVID in China and other parts of the world. This comes following a net investment of ₹36,200 crore due to weakening of the US dollar index.

Until recently, China remained successful in containing the spread of the disease owing to its zealous “zero COVID” policy. However, the abrupt lifting of the policy has led to a surge of COVID-19 cases. SARS-CoV-2 sequencing data previously submitted from China to GISAID shows that over the months, the country has seen isolated cases linked to multiple variants of the virus seen previously. Wide-ranging efforts are urgently required to monitor the COVID-19 situation in China and other countries, including genomic surveillance and the use of time-tested methods with significant scientific evidence.

With 2023 just days away, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has its work cut out for the coming year, starting with beautification works ahead of the G20 Heads of State and Government Summit. While the civic body’s plan largely focuses on repairing roads, refurbishing signages, fixing drains, installing public art and some aesthetic improvements within its jurisdiction, a mammoth task that it has undertaken is flattening the Okhla landfill before the summit in September, which is a shift from its previous deadline of December 2023.

Bhutan’s former King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, warned India of pressures from China in 1999, writes former RAW chief A.S. Dulat in his latest book. Mr. Dulat says the former King’s words were “prophetic” about India-China tensions in Doklam in 2017, and the build-up of infrastructure by China that has followed. He also says that New Delhi’s “muscular policy” on a range of issues, including the situation in Kashmir, and tough foreign policy in the neighbourhood led to “failures”.

and rationalisation of monetary penalties. Acts being amended include The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, Pharmacy Act, 1948, Trade Marks Act, 1999 etc.

- It will help in Settlement of many issues by adjudication and administrative mechanism, without involving courts. Enabling persons to remedy minor contraventions and defaults and save time, energy, and resources.
- Significance of EoDB**- Key to entrepreneurship, innovation, and wealth creation. Low regulatory burden helps entrepreneurs to devote time to productivity. Boost entrepreneurship through improved market efficiency and reduced regulatory burden. Attract Foreign Investment by changing investor sentiments. Encourage exports by improving competitiveness.
- Initiatives taken for improving EoDB**- Government has notified 4 labor laws by rationalizing relevant provisions of 29 Central Labour Laws. Shram Suvidha Portal (SSP) to facilitate reporting of Inspections, and submission of Returns. Launch of web-based SPICe+ and AGILE-PRO form to save time and effort in company incorporation. Dedicated Commercial Courts and a modern insolvency regime through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE SUBMITTED “ANTI-COMPETITIVE PRACTICES BY BIG TECH COMPANIES” REPORT

- Report comes amid a rising global scrutiny on big tech companies (such as Google, Apple) for abusing their market position. Google, Apple etc have faced actions from Competition Commission of India (CCI) over issues such as anti-competitive practices, in-app purchasing systems etc.
- Need for regulation**-Big Tech platforms have gained a monopoly over delivery of information. Concerns over use of sensitive data stored on these platforms (financial records, medical history etc). Level playing field for stratus. Accountability for Socio-political challenges like hate speech and misinformation.
- Key Recommendations**-Frame a definition for systemically important digital intermediaries (SIDIs) to counter monopoly. Classification could be based on revenues, market capitalisation and number of active users. Technology giants such as Alphabet (owns Google), Meta (owns Facebook), and Amazon are among those recognised world over as crucial digital intermediaries. 4. Separate Digital Competition Act to ensure a fair, transparent, and contestable digital ecosystem. Specialized digital markets unit within CCI to closely monitor SIDIs. Strict regulation on data usage for advertising and curbs on deep discounting, bundling/tying of services.

PROJECT LION

- Recently parliament was informed that Project Lion document “Lion @ 47: Vision for Amrutkal” has been prepared to secure & restore lions’ habitats.
- About Project Lion**: Envisages landscape ecology-based conservation of the Asiatic Lion in Gujarat by integrating conservation and eco-development. Being implemented in Gir landscape in Gujarat which is last home of Asiatic lion.
- About Asiatic Lion**: IUCN status: Endangered Protection: Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and Appendix I of CITES Threats: poaching, habitat fragmentation, genetic inbreeding arising from a single population in one place etc.



*“Within the four walls of comfort,
there is no door to success.”*

Dr. Khan
(KSG)