



## ISRO launches Chandrayaan-2 from Sriharikota



BS Yediyurappa takes oath as Karnataka CM for the fourth time



Meghalaya becomes 1st state to ensure Water Conservation

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Odisha Rasagola' gets GI Tag



A dragon tree species discovered in India

## Editorial

**Dear Students,**

Students who have cleared the Prelims 2019 must be planning to clear the next big hurdle - UPSC Main 2019. UPSC Civil Services Main exam demands not just hard work but also a clever and smart planning. As a usual, students should be familiar with the syllabus of the Main. Always read NCERTs and then go for standard books prescribed by the experts. Moreover, stay tuned with current affairs. Past students often cite, reading 'The Hindu' and 'Indian Express' news papers. This is a valuable suggestion. Also read the current affairs compilation, news related to budget, economic surveys. Always give utmost importance to each subject of the Mains. So one must allocate time for each subjects. One of the most neglected part of the preparation is the 'practice of writing answers'. Top teaching faculties in UPSC exam often advise aspirants to start the answer writing every day on each subjects. This help them during the exam, since UPSC set time frame for each exams. So it is very vital for the students practice writing for strongly framed answers to the answers to all the dimensions within the stipulated time. After solving question papers, aspirants must also enroll in test series for mains. It helps to assess the preparation level of the students by experts.

Best of luck

## Essay of the Month

### Amendments to RTI Act



With the passage of Right to Information Amendment Bill 2019 in the Lok Sabha, Opposition parties are up in the arms. Though the bill, which waits for the President's approval and gives power to Centre in deciding the terms of the commissioners, opposition is not in a mood to accept. While the Congress party claimed the amendment has dangerous, DMK termed it as a dark day for democracy.

### What is the RTI Act 2005 ?

Right to Information Act 2005 is an act of the Parliament of India. It provides for setting out the practical regime of the right to information for citizens. Under the Act, any citizen of India may request information from a public authority (a body of Government or instrumentality of State) which is required to reply expeditiously or within thirty days. The Act also requires every public authority to computerise their records for wide dissemination and to proactively certain categories of information so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request for information formally. The central information commission is headed by a chief information commissioner and 10 information commissioners. They are appointed by the President (read central

government) appoints them for a fixed tenure of five years and a salary of the rank of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners respectively. This was done to give the central information commission autonomy and protection from government interference.

### **What are the amendments?**

In the 2019 RTI amendment bill, it amends Sections 13 and 16 of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005. Section 13 of the original Act sets the term of the central Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners at five years (or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier). The amendment proposes that the appointment will be “for such term as may be prescribed by the Central Government”. Again, Section 13 states that salaries, allowances and other terms of service of “the Chief Information Commissioner shall be the same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner”, and those of an Information Commissioner “shall be the same as that of an Election Commissioner”. The amendment proposes that the salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioners 'shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government'.

### **Why it is opposed ?**

It means the government has the power to fix, the tenure of the official. This arbitrary power could be misused. In a political sense, means that any government can also threaten or lure the chief information commissioner and

information commissioners to remove or extension and curtail or increase in salary depending upon their pleasure.

### **Some notable examples**

In January 2017, acting on an application, on BA degree course, Information commissioner Sridhar Acharyulu ordered the Delhi University to allow inspection of records of students who had passed BA course in 1978. It should be noted that it was the same year the current prime Minister Narendra Modi passed the examination. But within a couple of days, Acharyulu was stripped of human resource development portfolio with immediate effect. In another example, the Reserve Bank of India had been directed on an RTI application. The activists asked RBI to provide details of the NPA in public sector banks and the details of big loan defaulters. But RBI had denied revealing information sought citing confidential nature. But the activists were strong and petitioned the Supreme Court, which first in 2015. As a result, top court directed the RBI to make the information available and reiterated the order in April this year after the central bank failed to comply with the order.

### **What does the government say ?**

The government has continued to maintain that it has not ever tinkered with autonomy or independence of any government body including the central information commission or election commission. Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh while introducing the RTI Amendment Bill 2019 in the Lok Sabha said that the Modi

government is correcting the anomaly in the RTI law passed by the UPA government. He also argued that the former government of the day, in a hurry to pass the RTI Act, 2005, missed and overlooked several things. The Central Information Commissioner has been given the status of a Supreme Court judge.

### Conclusion

Even though the government claims it is planning to 'rationalise' the power and status of the authorities, the answer are quite surprising. It says that the Chief Election Commissioner is a constitutional functionary in the Indian governance, the CIC is only a statutory authority. And while the CEC is equal in status to a Supreme Court judge, it would be correct or appropriate for the CIC to enjoy the same power and authority as many orders from the examined by judiciary and judicial review. Given the extent to which the RTI Act has empowered citizens and helped break the hold of vested interests, one must be offer great importance when it comes to ammendments. The present ammendments have not been put to any discussions or debates. So, being a democractically government, the bill should be sent to a parliamentary select committee for deeper scrutiny and analysis.

## National News

### Asia's first Six Sigma Institute of Mountain Medicines to be setup in Uttarakhand



Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat agreed to a proposal to establish Asia's first Six Sigma Institute of Mountain Medicines and High Altitude Rescue at Rudraprayag.

A press release by Uttarakhand government said, 'Chief Minister Uttarakhand accepted and agreed on a proposal to establish Asia's first Six Sigma Institute Of Mountain Medicines & High Altitude Rescue at Rudraprayag. This mountain institute will create 1,200 employment, Specialised healthcare, advance education and Rescue Training in the Uttarakhand. Rawat appreciated the High Altitude services of Six Sigma Healthcare at Dehradun and gave momento and Certificate of superb work to Six Sigma doctors. Six Sigma team also handed over the Kedarnath Medical Intelligence Report to the Chief Minister. The following meritorious doctors were awarded by Rawat with Momento and Certificates: Dr Pradeep Bhardwaj, CEO & Medical Director, Six Sigma, Dr Arvind Kumar, Dr Parvez Ahmad Dr Anita



Bhardwaj, Bhim Bahadur and Debjit Nayak.

### **West Bengal launches Didi Ke Bolo**



West Bengal has launched a new political campaign 'Didi Ke Bolo'.

Address the public Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee said, the initiative was launched to address the public grievances and other social issues. This campaign is launched with an eye to the next assembly elections in the state. The Chief Minister of the West Bengal and the Trinmool Congress (TMC) supremo announced in a press conference that more than 1,000 party workers will go to the different villages in next 100 days to learn about local issues. She also said that party will further decide who will go to which village and when. While launching this campaign, Mamta Banerjee also launched a party helpline number and a website to reach out to the masses.

### **Andhra Pradesh passes law to reserve 75% jobs for locals in industries**



The Andhra Pradesh government has made it mandatory for existing and

upcoming industries in the state to reserve 75 per cent jobs for locals. This has been done through the passage of a new law called the Andhra Pradesh Employment of Local candidates in the Industries/Factories Bill, 2019.

Passed by the state legislative assembly, the five-page bill asks existing industries to ensure 75 per cent employment to the local candidates within three years from the date of commencement of this Act. The government said it had to bring a special enactment to enforce the provision with respect to the jobs since it was noticed that the managements of industries did not subsequently keep their word to give jobs to the locals. Firms that don't comply with the 75 per cent provision could invite a penalty that will be prescribed when the rules are framed.

### **SC orders setting up of special courts in districts with over 100 pending POCSO cases**



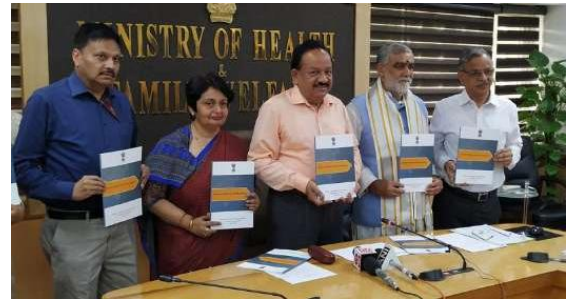
The Supreme Court has directed the setting up of special courts in each district across the country that had over a 100 cases of child abuse and sexual assault pending trial under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

A Bench led by the Chief Justice of India directed the courts to be set up within 60

days. They will be established under a Central scheme and fully funded by the Centre. This means the Centre would fund everything from the payment of the presiding officers, staff and support persons to the court's child-friendly infrastructure.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta has been asked to file a progress report in four weeks. The court said it would take up the matter again on September 26. The order came on a suo motu public interest litigation petition registered by the Supreme Court after being concerned by the "alarming rise" in child abuse cases and their long pendency in courts. Noting that children were the victims in such cases, the CJI said there was no excuse for a long delay in justice for them. The traumatised victims needed to be treated with compassion and kindness. In short, a completely different approach was required while investigating and trying POCSO cases. When told that there were two exclusive POCSO courts at the Saket court complex in the National Capital, the CJI said the Supreme Court was not talking with reference to Saket but about "those courts in certain States where privacy means drawing a curtain between the victim in a POCSO court and the accused."

### National Digital Health Blueprint released



Govt. of India has released the National Digital Health Blueprint (NDHB) report in the public domain for inputs from various stakeholders.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Health Minister said that the Government under the guidance of the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi ji is committed to ensuring high quality healthcare, accessible to all up to the last mile. "The digital health interventions are accelerating this transformation and have a huge potential for supporting Universal Health Coverage (UHC). India has everything that can help it achieve Health for all," he stated. He said that the National Digital Health Blueprint is in line with the vision of the Prime Minister to reach each individual of this country with services at their doorstep under Digital India Programme. Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Smt Preeti Sudan, Secretary (HFW), Shri. J. Satyanarayana, Former Chairman-UIDAI and Chairman of Committee on NDHB, Sanjeeva Kumar, AS & DG (CGHS), AS (Health) and Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, also graced the occasion.

## Indian Economy

### Cabinet approves creation of buffer stock of 40 LMT of sugar



The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved, the creation of buffer stock of 40 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of sugar for one year and to incur estimated maximum expenditure of Rs.1674 crores for this purpose.

According to an official release, based on the market price and availability of sugar, this may be reviewed by the Deptt. of Food and Public Distribution any time for withdrawal / modification. The reimbursement under the scheme would be met on quarterly basis to sugar mills which would be directly credited into farmers' account on behalf of mills against cane price dues and subsequent balance, if any, would be credited to the mill's account. The decisions will lead to, improvement in the liquidity of sugar mills, reduction in sugar inventories, stabilization in sugar prices by alleviating of price sentiments in domestic sugar market and thereby facilitate timely clearance of cane price dues of farmers; and benefits for sugar mills in all sugarcane producing States, by way of

clearing sugarcane price arrears of sugar mills.

### RIL bags top slot in Fortune Global 500 list



Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries (RIL) has jumped 42 places to become the highest-ranking Indian firm on the Fortune Global 500 list.

While, state-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) had been the top-ranked Indian company on the list and was first on the Fortune India 500 list which was started in 2010. This year, ranked 106, Reliance Industries (RIL) has replaced IOC (117) as the top-ranked Indian company on the Global 500 list. RIL's revenue soared 32.1 per cent from \$62.3 billion in 2018 to \$82.3 billion in 2019. In comparison, IOC clocked a 17.7 per cent growth in revenue from \$65.9 billion to \$77.6 billion. Over the past 10 years, RIL's revenue rose at a compounded annual growth rate of 7.2 per cent from \$41.1 billion in 2010, while that of IOC rose at 3.64 per cent from \$54.3 billion in 2010.

### Govt. approves DMP project in Arunachal



The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the expenditure on pre-investment activities and various clearances for Dibang Multipurpose Project (MPP) in Arunachal Pradesh for an amount of Rs 1600 crore.

The estimated total cost of Project is Rs 28080.35 including IDC & FC of Rs 3974.95 crore at June 2018 price level. The estimated completion period for the project shall be nine years from receipt of Government sanction. The project shall generate 2880MW (12x240MW) power to produce 11223MU of energy in a 90% dependable year. This is the largest ever Hydro Electric Projects to be constructed in India. The dam is 278 metres high and will be the highest dam in India once completed. The Project is located on river Dibang, in Lower Dibang Valley District of Arunachal Pradesh. The project envisages construction of a 278 m high Concrete Gravity Dam (above deepest foundation level), 6 Nos. horseshoe-shaped Head Race Tunnels of length varying from 300 m to 600 m with 9 m dia., an underground Power House and 6 Nos. horse shoe-shaped Tail Race Tunnels of length varying from 320 m to 470 m with 9m dia.

### RBI plans to launch Utkarsh 2022



The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) board, which met in New Delhi, finalised a three-year roadmap to improve regulation and supervision, among other functions of the central bank.

This medium term strategy — named Utkarsh 2022 — is in line with the global central banks' plan to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory mechanism. It is a three-year road map for medium term objective to be achieved for improving regulation, supervision of the central bank. Worldwide, all central banks strengthen the regulatory and supervisory mechanism, everybody is formulating a long-term plan and a medium-term plan. So, the RBI has also decided it will formulate a programme to outline what is to be achieved in the next three years.



## Defence News

### India, Russia sign deal to acquire R-27 missiles



Aiming to boost its capabilities in beyond visual range warfare, India has signed a deal worth around Rs 1,500 crore to acquire R-27 air-to-air missiles from Russia.

According to an official release, 'A contract has been signed with Russia for the acquisition of R-27 air-to-air missile to be fitted on the Su-30MKI combat aircraft fleet of the Indian Air Force. The Russian missiles with an extended range would give an added capability to the Sukhois to take on enemy aircraft at long ranges. The missiles have been acquired under 10-l projects which mandate the three services to maintain critical weapon systems and spares for a specified minimum period, which is known as War Wastage Reserve (WWR). The R-27 missile is a medium-to-long-range air-to-air missile developed by Russia for its MiG and Sukhoi series of fighter jets.

### Craft Utility vessel commissioned into Indian Navy



Indian Navy Ship LCU L-56, the sixth of the Landing Craft Utility (LCU) MK IV class ships, was commissioned into the Indian Navy.

According to defence source, the commissioning was done by Vice-Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, at an impressive ceremony held at Naval Dockyard recently. During the occasion, the Vice-Admiral congratulated the GRSE (Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers) for being the first shipyard in the country to have built the 100th warship. The induction of LCU 56 will add to maritime and HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) capability of ANC (Andaman Nicobar Command), as the ship will be deployed for multi-role activities such as beaching operations, search and rescue missions, disaster relief operations, coastal patrol, and surveillance operations along the Andaman and Nicobar Group of Islands. The inaugural address was delivered by Rear Admiral V.K. Saxena (retd.) CMD, GRSE, Kolkata, followed by Commodore Ashutosh Ridhorkar.

Dornier Aircraft Squadron was commissioned into Indian Navy

Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 313, the fifth Dornier aircraft squadron was commissioned into the Indian Navy by Admiral Karambir Singh, PVSM AVSM ADC Chief of the Naval Staff at an impressive ceremony held at Naval Air Enclave, Meenambakkam, Chennai.

Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, AVSM, VSM, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Eastern Naval Command (ENC), Rear Admiral KJ Kumar VSM, Flag Officer Commanding Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Naval Area (FOTNA) and a host of other dignitaries were also present during the commissioning ceremony. Addressing the gathering Admiral Karambir Singh said that, "Commissioning of INAS 313 marks yet another milestone in our efforts towards enhancing maritime security and safeguarding our nation's maritime interests". He also emphasised the importance of India maintaining an edge over its adversaries in defence preparedness. The developing geo-political situation in the region needs to be monitored constantly. It is therefore, necessary to maintain surveillance over the Bay of Bengal, Palk Bay and adjoining regions. The strategic position of the squadron will give the nation, dominance over the North Eastern part of the Indian Ocean which also consists of trade routes.

### Defence Expo 2020 to be held in Lucknow



The 11th biennial edition of DefExpo India-2020 is scheduled to be held for the first time in Uttar Pradesh's capital Lucknow.

The defence expo 2020 offers an excellent opportunity for the Indian defence industry to showcase its capabilities and promote its export potential. Main theme of the DefExpo India-2020 will be 'India: The Emerging Defence Manufacturing Hub' and focus will be on 'Digital Transformation of Defence'. The shows are conducted at an international level, which not only facilitates Business-to-Business (B2B) interaction with senior foreign delegations but also Government-to-Government (G2G) meetings and signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). The exhibition will also highlight emergence of UP as an attractive destination for investment in the defence sector and act as a platform for alliances and joint ventures in the defence industry. The northern state has a strong defence industrial infrastructure. It has four

units of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd at Lucknow, Kanpur, Korwa and Naini (Prayagraj), nine ordnance factory units, including Kanpur, Korwa, Shahjahanpur, Firozabad and one unit of Bharat Electronics Limited at Ghaziabad.

## India inks deal with Israel for MRSAM missile



Israel inks USD 50m deal with India to supply medium surface-to-air missile systems to Indian Navy.

According to a defence source, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) Wednesday signed a US\$ 50 million follow-up agreement with India to provide complementary Naval MRSAM (medium range surface-to-air missile) systems to the Indian Navy. The deal involves follow up order for a range of maintenance and other services for various sub-systems of IAI's advanced MRSAM ADS. As per the contract, the state-owned company will provide a range of maintenance and other services for various sub-systems of IAI's advanced MRSAM air defence system. The executive vice president and general manager of Systems, Missiles & Space Group at IAI Boaz Levi, described the deal as a major breakthrough and spoke about how the deal reflects the 'strong relationship' between IAI and Indian Navy. The official said, 'This contract is a breakthrough as it advances us from system development and delivery to looking after the operational needs of our customers. IAI's partnership and strong relationship with the Indian Navy is reflected in all activities with our partners in India. Only recently we have successfully completed a multi-system

trial in India that demonstrated the advanced technological centralised management capabilities of the air defence system to the utmost satisfaction of our Indian partners'.

## Indian Army places order for Spike Missiles



Indian Army has placed an order for procuring Israeli anti-tank Spike missiles, known for their precision targeting with an ability to pierce even bunkers, under emergency purchases to meet operational preparedness.

According to sources, the missiles can hit targets at a range of four kilometers and can be deployed in both mountains and plains. They can be fired from different platforms -- vehicles, helicopters, ships and ground launchers -- and can be deployed even along the Line of Control (LoC), they said. After the Balakot strike, the Army had in April cleared the procurement and the orders were placed this month, the sources added. The procurement of these missiles was also discussed in the Army Commanders meet in April.

## India and World

### Iran Test Fires Shahab-3 Ballistic Missile



Iran has test fired a Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missile inside its territory.

According to a media reports, 'A senior U.S. administration official as saying that 'we are aware of reports of a projectile launched from Iran and have no further comment at this time. The launch took place on July 24 and flew nearly 1,000 kilometers from the southern part of the country northward to an area near the capital, Tehran. It is suspected the test was part of Iran's efforts to improve the range and accuracy of their missiles. It was not immediately clear if the test was in violation of any sanctions against Iran. In the past, Washington and its allies have asserted that Shahab-3 firings do violate sanctions, while Iran's ally, Russia, has said they do not'.

### Ebola in Congo declared a public health emergency



The World Health Organization has declared the Ebola crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo a "public health emergency of international concern".

According to a reports, the current move may encourage wealthy donor countries to provide more cash. But the WHO stopped short of saying borders should be closed, saying the risk of the disease spreading outside the region was not high. The outbreak in DR Congo has killed more than 1,600 people. This week, the first case was detected in Goma, home to more than a million. The PHEIC emergency provision is the highest level of alarm the WHO can sound and has only been used four times previously. This includes the Ebola epidemic that devastated parts of West Africa from 2014 to 2016, and killed more than 11,000 people.

### US slaps sanctions against Myanmar military for Rohingya killings



The US has slapped sanctions against Myanmar's chief of military and three other top officers for gross human rights violations, including killing of Rohingya Muslims and barred their entry into America.

According to reports, as per the sanctions imposed, Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief Soe Win, Brigadier General Than Oo and



Brigadier General Aung Aung along with their immediate family members have been banned from entering the United States. With this announcement, the United States is the first government to publicly take action with respect to the most senior leadership of the Burmese military. Decision was made after these individuals based on credible information of these commanders' involvement in gross violations of human rights. The US had in 2018 designated two other generals Lieutenant General Aung Kyaw Zaw and General Maung Maung Soe. The United States remains concerned that the Burmese government has taken no actions to hold accountable those responsible for human rights violations and abuses, he said, adding that there are continued reports of the military committing human rights violations and abuses throughout the country.

#### **US House passes bill removing cap on issuing green cards**

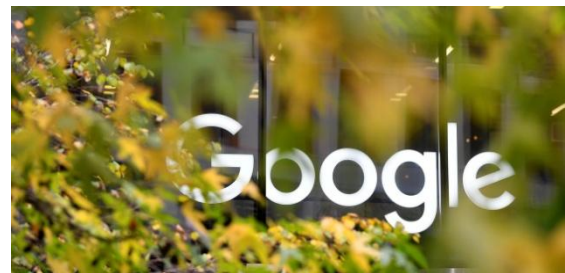


The US lawmakers have passed a Bill aimed at lifting the current seven per cent country-cap on issuing Green Cards.

According to source, Bill which is passed would benefit thousands of highly-skilled Indian IT professionals. AccA Green Card allows a person to live and work permanently in the US. Passed by the US House of Representatives, the Bill, on

being signed into law, would considerably reduce the agonising wait for talented professionals from countries like India seeking permanent work and residency permits in the United States. Titled the Fairness of High-Skilled Immigrants Act, 2019 or HR 1044, the Bill was passed by the 435-member House by an overwhelming majority of 365-65 votes. As per the present system, out of the total number of family-based immigrant visas to be given by the US in a particular year, the people of a country can be given a maximum of seven per cent of such visas. The new Bill seeks to increase this seven per cent per-country limit to 15 per cent. Similarly, it also seeks to eliminate the seven per cent per-country cap on employment-based immigrant visas. Additionally, it removes an offset that reduced the number of visas for individuals from China.

#### **French imposes Gafa tax on internet giants**



The French parliament has approved a law that would make France the first major economy to impose a tax on internet heavyweights.

Dubbed the Gafa tax – an acronym for Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon – the legislation will impose a 3% levy on the total annual revenues of the largest technology firms providing services to

French consumers. The law appeared to have opened a new front in a trade row between Washington and the EU when Donald Trump ordered an investigation into the tax, which could lead to the US imposing tariffs or other trade restrictions on France. The French finance minister, Bruno Le Maire said, 'Between allies, I believe we can and must resolve our differences in another way than through threats. France is a sovereign country, its decisions on tax matters are sovereign and will continue to be sovereign. He was warned about the investigation during a long conversation with the US Treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, this week. It was the first time in the history of the relationship between the United States and France that the US administration had decided to open such an investigation into French legislation.

#### **France to impose green tax on plane tickets from 2020**



The French government has decided to impose a tax of up to 18 Euros on plane tickets for all flights from airports in France to fund less-polluting transportation projects,

The move, which will take effect from 2020, will see a tax of 1.5 Euros imposed on economy-class tickets on internal flights and those within Europe, with the

highest tariff applied to business-class travellers flying outside the bloc. The new measure is expected to bring in some 182 million euros a year which will be invested in greener transport infrastructures, notably rail. It will only be applied on outgoing flights and not those flying into the country. A similar tax was introduced in Sweden in April 2018, which imposed an added charge of up to 40 euro on every ticket in a bid to lessen the impact of air travel on the climate.

#### **US passes bill to bring India at par with NATO allies**



The US Senate has passed a legislative provision that brings India at par with America's NATO allies and countries like Israel and South Korea for increasing defence cooperation.

The National Defense Authorisation Act or NDAA for the fiscal year 2020, that contained such a proposal was passed by the US Senate. Introduced by Senate India Caucus Co-Chair Senator John Cornyn with the support of Senate India Caucus Co-Chair Senator Mark Warner, the amendment provides for increased US-India defence cooperation in the Indian Ocean in the areas of humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism, counter-piracy and maritime security. House India Caucus Co-Chair Brad Sherman, along with

Congressmen Joe Wilson, Ami Bera, Ted Yoho, George Holding, Ed Case and Raja Krishnamoorthi introduced a similar legislative proposal to the House FY2020 NDAA that would greatly enhance the US-India relationship. The bill would be signed into law after both the chambers of the US Congress - the House of Representatives and the Senate - passes it. The House is expected to take up its version of the NDAA sometime in July before legislators adjourn for the month-long August recess on July 29. In a statement, the Hindu American Foundation commended Senators Cornyn and Warner for their efforts in advancing the US-India strategic partnership.

#### **New Zealand bans single-use plastic bags**



New Zealand has officially banned single-use plastic shopping bags Monday, introducing hefty fines for businesses that continue to provide them.

Plastic pollution has become a growing global concern, with a million birds and more than 100,000 marine mammals injured or killed every year by becoming entangled in packaging or ingesting it through the food chain. Companies that break New Zealand's ban will face heavy penalties, including fines of up to NZ 100,000 (USD 67,000). New Zealanders are proud of their country's clean, green

reputation and want to help ensure they live up to it.

### **Environment News**

#### **All India Tiger Report Released**



All India Tiger Estimation – 2018 was released by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi recently.

On the occasion of International Tiger Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the results of the fourth cycle of All India Tiger Estimation - 2018, at Lok Kalyan Marg in New Delhi. The count of tigers in India has risen to 2967, in 2018, according to this census. Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister described this as a historic achievement for India, and reaffirmed India's commitment towards protecting the tiger. The Prime Minister appreciated the speed and dedication with which various stakeholders worked to achieve this. The Prime Minister said that with almost 3000 tigers, India is today among the biggest and most secure habitats. Narendra Modi asserted India will build more homes for our citizens and that at the same time create quality habitats for animals. This balance is what will contribute to a strong and inclusive India, the Prime Minister asserted. PM said that in the last five

years, while work has proceeded at a fast pace for next-generation infrastructure, the forest cover in the country has also grown. There has also been an increase in the “protected areas.” In 2014, there were 692 protected areas, which increased to more than 860 in 2019. The “Community Reserves” have also grown from 43, in 2014, to more than 100 now. The 33% rise in tiger numbers is the highest ever recorded between cycles which stood at 21% between 2006 to 2010 and 30% between 2010 and 2014. The rise in tiger numbers was in conformity with the average annual growth rate of tigers since, 2006. Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka at 524 with Uttarakhand at number 3 with 442 tigers. It was a moment of pride for the country as it achieved its commitment to the St.Petersburg Declaration, of doubling Tiger population, much in advance to the 2022 deadline. Chhatisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in their tiger numbers while tiger’s numbers in Odisha remained constant. All other States witnessed a positive trend. Viewed at the landscape level, all 5 landscapes showed an increase with the Central Indian landscape recording the highest increment. India has been estimating its tigers using a double sampling approach involving a mark-recapture framework to ascertain tiger numbers, which is being improved over time keeping in view advancements made in science.

### India’s first dragon blood-oozing tree discovered



A trio of researchers led by Assam forest officer Jatindra Sarma have discovered *Dracaena cambodiana*, a dragon tree species in the Dongka Sarpo area of West Karbi Anglong. The team’s report has been published in the latest issue of the Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas.

This is for the first time that a dragon tree species has been reported from India. The team head said, 'We found the dragon tree species on hilly rock crevices within a 0.05 sq km area. It took us four years of fieldwork and study to classify the plant as a dragon tree species whose sap turns bright red after coming in contact with air'. The report has been co-authored by Hussain Ahmed Barbhuiya of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and Santanu Dey of Nagaland University’s Department of Botany. Researchers from IIS found that the genus *Prohaetulla* resides within the family *Ahaetuliinae*, is a close relative of all the other vine snakes belonging to the genus *Ahaetulla* and is visually similar. Researchers confirmed about their finding with integrative taxonomy. Integrative taxonomy is an amalgamation of different lines of evidence, from teeth, genetics and molecular phylogenetics, structure and bone analysis to traditional taxonomy that



helped the researchers to identify a new genus.

Colistin for food producing animals banned

The Health Ministry has banned the manufacture, sale and distribution of antibiotic, Colistin and its formulations for food producing animals, poultry, aqua farming and animal feed supplements in a bid to preserve the drug's efficacy in humans.

The ban has been imposed under provisions of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and a notification in this regard has been issued by the Centre. According to the notification, it was brought to the notice of the Central government that the use of the drug Colistin and its formulations for food producing animals, poultry, aqua farming and animal feed supplements is likely to involve risk to human beings. Following which the Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), the government's top advisory body on technical matters related to drugs in the country considered the matter and recommended prohibiting the said drug, the notification stated. The Central Government is satisfied that it is necessary and expedient in public interest to prohibit manufacture, sale and distribution of the drug Colistin and its formulations for food producing animals, poultry, aqua farming and animal feed supplements.

**Over 28,000 species are officially threatened**



More than 28,000 species around the world are threatened, according to IUCN.

According to the Red List of Threatened Species compiled by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The updated list has found that extinction risk of almost 106,000 species and found more than a quarter are in trouble. While recent headline-grabbing estimates put as many as 1 million species facing extinction, these were based on approximations, whereas the IUCN uses rigorous criteria to assess each species, creating the world-standard guide to biodiversity extinction risk. In this update, 105,732 species were ranked from least concern (little to no risk of extinction), to critically endangered (an extremely high risk of extinction) and extinct (the last individual of a species has expired). This Red List update doesn't hold a lot of good news. It takes the total number of threatened species to 28,338 (or 27% of those assessed) and logs the extinction of 873 species since the year 1500. These numbers seem small when thinking about the estimated 1 million species at risk of extinction, but only around 1% of the world's animals, fungi and plants have been formally assessed on the IUCN Red List. As more species are assessed, the

number of threatened species will no doubt grow.

### **SC Panel to frame Emergency Plan to prevent extinction of Indian birds**



Taking serious note of alarming extinction of two Indian birds -- Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Frigatebird -- the Supreme Court Monday constituted a high powered

committee to urgently frame and implement an emergency response plan for the protection of these species.

The top court constituted a three member panel comprising Director of Bombay Natural History Society; Dr Asad R Rahmani former Director of Bombay Natural History Society and member of governing body of Wetlands International South Asia and Dr Dhananjai Mohan, Chief Conservator of Forests of Uttarakhand. A bench of Justices S A Bobde and B R Gavai also sought responses from the Centre and state governments, where these two species of birds are prominently found, on a plea of wildlife activists. Senior advocate Shyam Divan assisted by advocates Sonia Dube and Sugandha Yadav, appearing for petitioner M K Ranjitsinh and others, said that directions needs to be issued to urgently frame emergency response plan for the immediate protection and recovery of both the species of bird in wake of the monsoon season. Petitioner

Ranjitsinh, who is a retired IAS officer and has served as the director of Wildlife Protection, in his plea has contended that over the last 50 years the population of the Great Indian Bustard has recorded a decline of over 82 per cent, falling from an estimated 1260 in 1969, to 100-150 in 2018.

### **India is home to 1,256 species of orchid**



The Botanical Survey of India has come up with the first comprehensive census of orchids of India putting the total number of orchid species or taxa to 1,256.

Orchids of India : A Pictorial Guide, a publication detailing all the species of India was unveiled earlier this month by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The 1,256 species or taxa of orchids belong to 155 genera and 388 species are endemic to India. The publication, authored by Paramjit Singh, former director of BSI, A.A. Mao the present director of the institute, scientists S.S. Dash, S.K. Singh, D.K. Agarwala and J.S. Jalal, also contains photographs of 775 species. Orchids can be broadly categorised into three life forms: epiphytic (plants growing on another plants including those growing on rock boulders and often termed lithophyte), terrestrial (plants growing on land and climbers) and mycoheterotrophic (plants which derive

nutrients from mycorrhizal fungi that are attached to the roots of a vascular plant). About 60% of all orchids found in the country, which is 757 species, are epiphytic, 447 are terrestrial and 43 are mycoheterotrophic.

### **Meghalaya becomes 1st state to ensure Water Conservation**



Meghalaya recently became the first Indian state to ensure water conservation, having its own water conservation policy. The move came after the Meghalaya State Cabinet chaired by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma on July 13, 2019 approved the draft State Water Policy.

**Meghalaya Water Policy 2019:** The policy will be implemented through the active participation of the community. The state will constitute a 'Water Sanitation Village Council' at the village level for smooth implementation of the policy. The policy lays down the quality check procedures to control the use of groundwater. The state policy outlines several measures like construction of check dams to conserve rainwater, setting up of rainwater harvesting systems, and proper ways to control improper use of groundwater.

### **Special Rhino Protection Force deployed in Kaziranga Forest**



An 82-member special protection force trained to combat poachers and understand animal behaviour was deployed in the Kaziranga National Park (KNP).

According to an official release, among the 82 personnel of the Special Rhino Protection Force (SRPF) are eight women. The SRPF is basically a tiger protection force named after the rhino since the threat of poaching is more for the one-horned herbivore. Their job profile includes protecting the striped cat since Kaziranga is also a tiger reserve. The Assam government would be paying the salaries of the SRPF members and the amount would be reimbursed by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, which recommended setting up of the special force.

### Tamil Yeoman declared state butterfly for TN



Tamil Nadu became the fifth State to declare a State butterfly and Tamil Yeoman bagged the distinction.

Tamil Yeoman or Tamil Maravan, it is endemic to the Western Ghats. The butterfly has a gorgeous zigzag line along the bottom edge of its wings, with artistically placed black dots over the line. This beauty can be commonly spotted in the Nilgiris. Known as *Cirrochroa thais*, it has been officially declared as state butterfly of Tamil Nadu. The southern State formally notified this by an order on lines of the State Tree (Palm), Bird (Emerald Dove), Flower (Gloriosa) and Animal (Nilgiri Tahr).

## India and Neighbour

### Sri Lanka exempted India from Visa fees



Sri Lanka has included India among 48

countries whose citizens have been exempted from visa fees for tourism purposes with effect from Aug 1.

Speaking to reporters, tourism minister John Amaratunga said visa fees, which ranged from 20 to 40 US dollars, will not be charged for grant of one month visa for tourism. The tourists can apply for electronic travel authorisations online or apply for visa on arrival. The measure will be implemented for six months initially and a decision will be taken later for extension depending upon its impact on revenue. Joining the media conference, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said they expect revenues from enhanced tourism arrivals to offset the loss. He asserted that security situation in the country has returned back to normal after Easter Sunday attacks and all the suspects have been taken into arrest. Sri Lankan tourism has been impacted after the attacks but the tourism authorities have claimed that there is a revival seen since last month.

### Dengue spread sends alarm bells in Bangladesh



Outbreaks of the deadly dengue virus has created fear across the Bangladesh.

According to reports, The country is in the grip of its worst-ever dengue attack, which has turned into an epidemic. Hospital sources said nearly 16,000 people



have been hospitalised with dengue infection. Official figures show that eight dengue patients have died and more than 15,369 have been infected by the viral disease so far. But local media reports said more than 30 people have died of the deadly dengue virus.

An official said, 'We are doing whatever is needed to control the dengue situation. Dengue cases are increasing gradually. Dengue has spread outside Dhaka city. They are working to extend beds and ICU facilities at different public hospitals, including Dhaka Medical College Hospital, in the capital to tackle the dengue situation. The number of dengue patients is increasing as the people of many new areas are being infected with the deadly virus almost every day.

#### **ICJ asks Pakistan to review death sentence**



The International Court of Justice (ICJ) pronounced the verdict in the Kulbushan Jadhav case recently.

According to new reports, the verdict that found Pakistan in violation of the Vienna Convention asked the country to review Jadhav's conviction. Out of the 16 judges, 15 found Pakistan in violation of the Vienna Convention. The judgement was pronounced around 3 pm (6:30 pm IST) at the Peace Palace, Hague, in the

Netherlands. ICJ President, Justice Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf of Somalia pronounce the verdict while the court registrar read out the case details. Jadhav, 49, a retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by the Pakistani military court on the charges of espionage and terrorism; after a closed trial in April 2017. His sentencing evoked a sharp reaction in India. The verdict in the high-profile case comes nearly five months after a 15-member bench of ICJ led by Judge Yusuf had reserved its decision on February 21 after hearing oral submissions by India and Pakistan. The proceedings of the case took two years and two months to complete.

#### **Pakistan agrees for visa-free year-long travel to Kartarpur Sahib**



Pakistan agreed in-principle to allow visa-free, year-long travel for Indian passport holders and OCI card holders to the Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara.

Confirming the reports an official said, 'Everyday, 5,000 pilgrims will be allowed to visit the Gurdwara on foot, both as individuals or in groups. Pakistan highlighted the infrastructural constraints on their side and conveyed that they may be able to accommodate many of the Indian proposals in a phased manner. India raised the demand of allowing 10,000 additional pilgrims to visit the

Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara on special occasions. The Kartarpur shrine in Pakistan's Narowal district across the Ravi is where Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, spent his final days, and is highly revered by the Sikh community. It is about 4 km from the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur'.

### **First Model Village built with Indian assistance inaugurated in Sri Lanka**



The first Model Village built with Indian assistance under the Model Villages Program of the Ministry of Housing and Construction & Cultural Affairs - Ranidugama in Gampaha District was inaugurated and the completed houses are handed over to the beneficiaries.

Minister of Housing and Construction & Cultural Affairs Sajith Premadasa Former President of Sri Lanka Chandrika Bandaranayke Kumaratunga and Acting High Commissioner of India Dr. Shilpak Ambule jointly inaugurated the village and handed over the houses. Government of India has partnered with the Ministry of Housing and Construction & Cultural Affairs to build 100 model villages consisting of a total of 2400 houses all across Sri Lanka under Indian grant assistance of 1200 million SLR. These 2400 houses are in addition to the 60,000 houses built under the Indian Housing Project meant for war affected people in

the North and East and the estate workers in the plantation areas. India has undertaken more than 70 people-oriented development projects in various fields including health, education, housing, skill development, infrastructure, vocational training among others, all across the country including the largest University Auditorium in Ruhuna University in Matara. About, 20 such projects are currently under progress. The overall development portfolio of Government of India in Sri Lanka is close to US\$ 3 billion out of which US\$ 560 million are in grants.

### **India and Bangladesh sign MOU for training 1800 Bangladesh civil servants**



India and Bangladesh have signed an MOU for training 1800 Bangladesh Civil Servants at the National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) an institute under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Govt. of India, over the next 6 years. The MOU was signed between the NCGG and the Ministry of Public Administration, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on February 8, 2019 during the visit of the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh.

K. V. Eapen Secretary DARPG and the Director General of NCGG said that the

collaboration represents a historic milestone in training and capacity building programs between India and Bangladesh. He further added that the Bangladesh Civil Servants will be trained in e-Governance and service delivery, public policy and implementation, information technology, decentralization, urban development and planning, Ethics in Administration and challenges in implementation of SDGs. This is the second time that NCGG would be entering into an MOU for a training program for Bangladesh Civil Servants. Under the first MOU signed 5 years ago, 1500 Bangladesh Civil Servants have already been trained in NCGG.

## Science and Technology

### IIT Hyderabad develops eco friendly solar cells

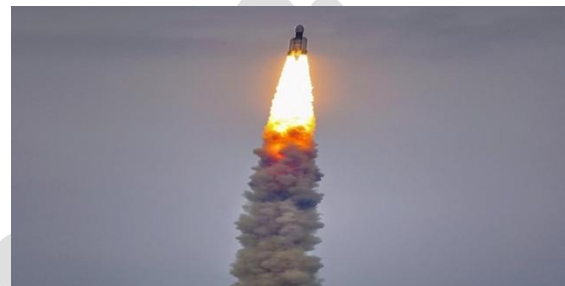


Scientists at IIT Hyderabad have developed low-cost, eco-friendly solar cells by employing an off-the-shelf dye used to make kumkum or vermilion in India.

The dye-sensitised solar cell (DSSC) is based on New Fuchsin (NF) dye with aqueous electrolyte and platinum-free counter electrodes, according to the research published in the Solar Energy journal. The most familiar solar cells today are made up of silicon and can be

seen in the various overhead panels and other places, noted Professor Sai Santosh Kumar Raavi from Department of Physics, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad. However, this technology is limited by huge fabrication costs as silicon processing is very expensive and involves very high-temperature methods that leave a large carbon footprint, Raavi, who led the project.

### Chandrayaan 2, has been successfully launched



Chandrayaan 2, has been successfully launched from the Sriharikota space station. After a tense countdown at the Isro space centre, Chandrayaan 2 launch took place at exactly 2:43 on Monday. The much-anticipated launch on Monday afternoon after the initial attempt on July 15 was watched by a billion population after it was abandoned due to a technical snag. Chandrayaan 2 took off aboard the most powerful GSLV-Mk-III rocket dubbed 'Baahubali'.

Countdown for the lift-off started at 6:43 pm on 22nd July and it finally ended with the rocket soaring into the skies, carrying a "billion dreams" with it. On July 15, the launch was called off 56 minutes and 24 seconds before the scheduled blast off at 1.55 am from the spaceport in Sriharikota following a technical problem in the

rocket. The glitch had occurred when liquid propellant was being loaded into the rocket's indigenous cryogenic upper stage engine. Isro said in a statement that all glitches had been removed and the rocket is ready for launch. As Chandrayaan 2 soars towards the Moon, aboard the GSLV-Mk-III.

## Arts and Culture

### Odisha Rasagola' gets GI Tag



It was a sweet news for people of Odisha, that Odisha Rasagola has got the geographical Indication Tag.

The rasagola, a popular dessert of Odisha, has received the geographical indication tag from the Registrar of Geographical Indication after years of controversy around

the sweet. The registration was conferred to 'Odisha Rasagola' under Section 16(I) or of authorized Section 17(3)(c) of Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act 1999 on Monday. The GI number 612 has been registered in favour of the Odisha Small Industries Corporation Limited (OSIC Limited), a government of Odisha undertaking and Utkal Mistanna

Byabasayee Samiti, a traders' organisation, in the foodstuff category. According to the application submitted to the Registrar of GI, 'Odisha Rasagola' is a sweet from the state of Odisha made of chhena (cottage cheese) cooked in sugar syrup, which is very soft to feel, is juicy and non-chewy in consistency and can be swallowed without teeth pressure.

### Ten monuments to be opened till 9 pm



In a significant move, around ten centrally protected monuments across the country will be open to public from sunrise till 9 p.m.

Making the announcement, Minister of State (independent charge) for Culture and Tourism Prahlad Singh Patel said, 'The opening hours of 10 historical Monuments across the country has been increased and now these Monuments will remain open from Sunrise to 9 pm for common public. Earlier these monuments used to open from 9am to 5.30 pm for general public. The decision has been made for the benefit of general public/tourists who can visit and appreciate the beauty of such historical sites for long hours'

The monuments that now open at 9 a.m. and close at 5.30 p.m. are: Humayun's Tomb and Safdarjung Tomb in Delhi; Rani ki Vav in Patan, Gujarat; Man Mahal in Varanasi; Gol Gumbaz in Karnataka;



Rajarani Temple Complex in Bhubaneswar; Dulhadeo Temple in Khajurao, Madhya Pradesh; Sheikh Chilli's Tomb in Kurukshetra, Haryana; a group of monuments at Pattadakal in Karnataka and a group of temples at Markanda in Maharashtra.

### NMIC's news bulletin launched



A fortnightly bulletin of the National Museum of Indian Cinema, brought out by the Films Division, was launched.

An official of the Museum said, 'The bulletin will become a platform for movie buffs and other stakeholders. It is described as a fantastic initiative by the Films Division. These museums are not just about artefacts kept in them; they are also about witnessing the journey that made cinema possible as well as about narrating the untold stories behind those cinemas. Today's generation should be aware of her contribution to Indian cinema, which came at a very personal cost'. The official also cited the example of an actress of the very first Assamese film, who remained unmarried due to the social stigma attached to the profession in those times.

It should be noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had in January inaugurated the museum, whose portions occupy a 19th century heritage bungalow and a modern building in south Mumbai.

### Jaipur listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site



Jaipur city has made an official entry in the list of the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The UNESCO shared the announcement on Twitter. "Just inscribed as @UNESCO #WorldHeritage Site: Jaipur City in Rajasthan, #India. Bravo," the UN body posted recently. The decision was taken at the 43rd session of the Unesco World Heritage Committee, which is taking place in Azerbaijan from June 20 to July 10. In addition to Jaipur, the Committee examined 36 nominations for inscription on Unesco's World Heritage List during the session.

Welcoming the Unesco announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: 'Jaipur is a city associated with culture and valour. Elegant and energetic, Jaipur's hospitality draws people from all over. Glad that this city has been inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO'. Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot expressed his happiness at the development, terming it a proud moment for the state and a development which will boost tourism. Leaders across the political spectrum welcomed the signal honour to the historical city.

## Sports News

### England Wins ODI World Cup 2019



England has won the Cricket World Cup 2019 by defeating the New Zealand at Lord's.

England ended up on the same score of 241 set by New Zealand in 50 overs after Ben Stokes carried the team with an unbeaten 84 off 98 balls while Jos Buttler made 59.

The tied score meant the two teams had to play out a Super Over but even that couldn't separate the teams and once again both England and New Zealand ended up on the same score of 15. In the end, England prevailed because it hit a total of 26 boundaries - fours and sixes scored across both the 50 overs and the Super Over - compared with New Zealand's 17, a decision which left Kiwi fans and some cricket pundits unhappy. England were featuring in their fourth 50-over World Cup final and finally managed to get their hands on the trophy without even winning the summit clash. They had suffered defeats in the 1979, 1987 and 1992 finals before this one.

### Khelo India Youth Games to be held in Guwahati next year



The third edition of Khelo India Youth Games will be held in Guwahati next year, Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju.

Rijiju announced the decision on his official Twitter handle. "I am happy to announce that the 3rd edition of the #KheloIndia Youth Games will be held at Guwahati from January 18-30, 2020," Rijiju tweeted. "The Games will see a participation of more than 10,000 athletes and officials. It will be conducted in partnership with IOA, SGFI & Assam as host State." The inaugural edition was held in New Delhi, while Pune hosted the second one this year.

## Quick and Quickly

### Operation Sudarshan



It is a code of Border Security Force (BSF) which has launched a massive exercise. The aim of the exercise is to fortify the 'anti-infiltration grid' along the Pakistan border in Punjab and Jammu. The exercise will see the entire BSF's senior field brass, thousands of troops and machinery being deployed in these forward areas. The operation was launched on July 1 and will cover the entire over the 1,000-km length of the India-Pakistan International Border. While Jammu shares about 485-km of the border with Pakistan, about 553-km of the front is in Punjab. It further runs down towards Rajasthan and Gujarat on India's western flank. The BSF is the primary force guarding this frontier as the 'first line of defence'.

According to sources huge assortments of heavy machinery, communication interceptors and mobile bulletproof bunkers have been mobilized as well as part of the exercise.

### Strum Ataka



It is an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) originating from the Russia. It is the next major generation in the 9K114 Shturm (AT-6 Spiral) family. The missile has radio command guidance and is also a Beam riding SACLOS. This missile's primary variant was designed to defeat tanks with composite armour and explosive reactive armor. The 9M120 Ataka system is often confused with the 9K121 Vikhr system, despite being different weapons systems developed by different companies. The former was designed by the KBM machine-building design bureau and manufactured by the Degtyarev plant. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Russia exported the Ataka ATGM to Iran, Kazakhstan, and Slovenia. It is also planning to export to India.

### Non-Resident Keralites Investment company



It is a new company created by The Kerala Government with 74 per cent stake to be held by expats. The decision in this regard was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. Seventy four per cent of the capital will be raised by issuing shares to NRKs, Government will have 26 per cent stake in the NRK Investment and Holding company Ltd, the main aim of which is to utilise NRI investments for implementing various projects. For this a separate or a subsidiary company may be set up under the holding company. Formation of the company was among the major recommendations submitted by the standing committees of the Loka Kerala Sabha (World Kerala Assembly), an event hosted by the state government to bring Keralites living around the globe under one platform and utilising the NRK expertise for developing the state. Developing NRK townships and infrastructure development are among the projects that are likely to be taken up by the proposed company. The cabinet also decided to appoint a NORKA (Non-Resident Keralites Affairs) Chief Executive officer as special officer of the company.

### Main Supplement

#### Key Highlights of Union Budget 2019-20



#### 10-point Vision for the decade

- Building Team India with Jan Bhagidari: Minimum Government Maximum Governance.
- Achieving green Mother Earth and Blue Skies through a pollution-free India.
- Making Digital India reach every sector of the economy.
- Launching Gaganyaan, Chandrayan, other Space and Satellite programmes.
- Building physical and social infrastructure.
- Water, water management, clean rivers.
- Blue Economy.
- Self-sufficiency and export of food-grains, pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables.
- Achieving a healthy society via Ayushman Bharat, well-nourished women & children, safety of citizens.
- Emphasis on MSMEs, Start-ups, defence manufacturing, automobiles, electronics, fabs and batteries, and medical devices under Make in India.

#### High Level Empowered Committee (HLEC) recommendations to be implemented:

- Retirement of old & inefficient plants.
- Addressing low utilization of gas plant capacity due to paucity of Natural Gas.



- Cross subsidy surcharges, undesirable duties on open access sales or captive generation for industrial and other bulk power consumers to be removed under Ujjwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY).
- Package of power sector tariff and structural reforms to be announced soon.
- Reform measures to be taken up to promote rental housing.
- Model Tenancy Law to be finalized and circulated to the states.
- Joint development and concession mechanisms to be used for public infrastructure and affordable housing on land parcels held by the Central Government and CPSEs.

#### **Measures to enhance the sources of capital for infrastructure financing:**

- Credit Guarantee Enhancement Corporation to be set up in 2019-2020.
- Action plan to be put in place to deepen the market for long term bonds with focus on infrastructure.
- Proposed transfer/sale of investments by FIIs/FPIs (in debt securities issued by IDF-NBFCs) to any domestic investor within the specified lock-in period.

#### **Measures to deepen bond markets:**

- Stock exchanges to be enabled to allow AA rated bonds as collaterals.
- User-friendliness of trading platforms for corporate bonds to be reviewed.

#### **Direct Taxes**

- Tax rate reduced to 25% for companies with annual turnover up to Rs. 400 crore
- Surcharge increased on individuals having taxable income from Rs. 2 crore to Rs. 5 crore and Rs. 5 crore and above.
- India's Ease of Doing Business ranking under the category of 'paying taxes' jumped from 172 in 2017 to 121 in the 2019.
- Direct tax revenue increased by over 78% in past 5 years to Rs. 11.37 lakh crore

#### **Tax Simplification and Ease of living - making compliance easier by leveraging technology:**

- Interchangeability of PAN and Aadhaar
- Those who don't have PAN can file tax returns using Aadhaar.
- Aadhaar can be used wherever PAN is required.
- Pre-filling of Income-tax Returns for faster, more accurate tax returns
- Pre-filled tax returns with details of several incomes and deductions to be made available.
- Information to be collected from Banks, Stock exchanges, mutual funds etc.
- Faceless e-assessment
- Faceless e-assessment with no human interface to be launched.

- To be carried out initially in cases requiring verification of certain specified transactions or discrepancies.

### **Affordable housing**

- Additional deduction up to Rs. 1.5 lakhs for interest paid on loans borrowed up to 31st March, 2020 for purchase of house valued up to Rs. 45 lakh.
- Overall benefit of around Rs. 7 lakh over loan period of 15 years.

### **Boost to Electric Vehicles**

- Additional income tax deduction of Rs. 1.5 lakh on interest paid on electric vehicle loans.
- Customs duty exempted on certain parts of electric vehicles.

### **Other Direct Tax measures**

- Simplification of tax laws to reduce genuine hardships of taxpayers:
- Higher tax threshold for launching prosecution for non-filing of returns
- Appropriate class of persons exempted from the anti-abuse provisions of Section 50CA and Section 56 of the Income Tax Act.

### **Relief for Start-ups**

- Capital gains exemptions from sale of residential house for investment in start-ups extended till FY21.
- 'Angel tax' issue resolved- start-ups and investors filing requisite declarations and providing information in their returns not to be subjected to any

kind of scrutiny in respect of valuations of share premiums.

- Funds raised by start-ups to not require scrutiny from Income Tax Department
- E-verification mechanism for establishing identity of the investor and source of funds.
- Special administrative arrangements for pending assessments and grievance redressal
- No inquiry in such cases by the Assessing Officer without obtaining approval of the supervisory officer.
- No scrutiny of valuation of shares issued to Category-II Alternative Investment Funds.
- Relaxation of conditions for carry forward and set off of losses.

### **NBFCs**

Interest on certain bad or doubtful debts by deposit taking as well as systemically important non-deposit taking NBFCs to be taxed in the year in which interest is actually received.

### **Make In India**

- Basic Customs Duty increased on cashew kernels, PVC, tiles, auto parts, marble slabs, optical fibre cable, CCTV camera etc.
- Exemptions from Custom Duty on certain electronic items now manufactured in India withdrawn.

- End use based exemptions on palm stearin, fatty oils withdrawn.
- Exemptions to various kinds of papers withdrawn.
- 5% Basic Custom Duty imposed on imported books.
- Customs duty reduced on certain raw materials such as:
- Inputs for artificial kidney and disposable sterilised dialyser and fuels for nuclear power plants etc.
- Capital goods required for manufacture of specified electronic goods.

#### **Other Indirect Tax provisions**

- Export duty rationalised on raw and semi-finished leather
- Increase in Special Additional Excise Duty and Road and Infrastructure Cess each by Rs. 1 per litre on petrol and diesel
- Custom duty on gold and other precious metals increased
- Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme for quick closure of pending litigations in Central Excise and Service tax from pre-GST regime

#### **Digital Payments**

- TDS of 2% on cash withdrawal exceeding Rs. 1 crore in a year from a bank account
- Business establishments with annual turnover more than Rs. 50 crore

shall offer low cost digital modes of payment to their customers and no charges or Merchant Discount Rate shall be imposed on customers as well as merchants.

#### **The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019**



The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Law and Justice, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad on June 21, 2019. It replaces an Ordinance promulgated on February 21, 2019.

The Bill makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and illegal. It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.

**Offence and penalty:** The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.) The offence will be cognizable

only if information relating to the offence is given by: (i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage. The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused. The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.

The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate upon the request of the woman (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.

**Allowance:** A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.

**Custody:** A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate

## **The National Medical Commission Bill, 2017**



The National Medical Commission Bill, 2017 was introduced in Lok Sabha recently and is listed for consideration and passage today.[1] The Bill seeks to regulate medical education and practice in India. To meet this objective, the Bill repeals the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956 and dissolves the current Medical Council of India (MCI). The MCI was established under the 1956 Act, to establish uniform standards of higher education qualifications in medicine and regulating its practice.

A Committee was set up in 2016, under the NITI Aayog with Dr. Arvind Panagariya as its chair, to review the 1956 Act and recommend changes to improve medical education and the quality of doctors in India.[3] The Committee proposed that the Act be replaced by a new law, and also proposed a draft Bill in August 2016. This post looks at the key provisions of the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017 introduced in Lok Sabha recently, and some issues which have been raised over the years regarding the regulation of medical education and practice in the country.

What are the key issues regarding the regulation of medical education and practice?



Several experts have examined the functioning of the MCI and suggested a different structure and governance system for its regulatory powers.<sup>3,[4]</sup> Some of the issues raised by them include:

**Separation of regulatory powers:** Over the years, the MCI has been criticised for its slow and unwieldy functioning owing to the concentration and centralisation of all regulatory functions in one single body. This is because the Council regulates medical education as well as medical practice. In this context, there have been recommendations that all professional councils like the MCI, should be divested of their academic functions, which should be subsumed under an apex body for higher education to be called the National Commission for Higher Education and Research.<sup>[5]</sup> This way there would be a separation between the regulation of medical education from regulation of medical practice.

An Expert Committee led by Prof. Ranjit Roy Chaudhury (2015), recommended structurally reconfiguring the MCI's functions and suggested the formation of a National Medical Commission through a new Act.<sup>3</sup> Here, the National Medical Commission would be an umbrella body for supervision of medical education and oversight of medical practice. It will have four segregated verticals under it to look at: (i) under-graduate medical education, (ii) post-graduate medical education, (iii) accreditation of medical institutions, and (iv) the registration of doctors. The 2017 Bill also creates four separate autonomous bodies for similar functions.