

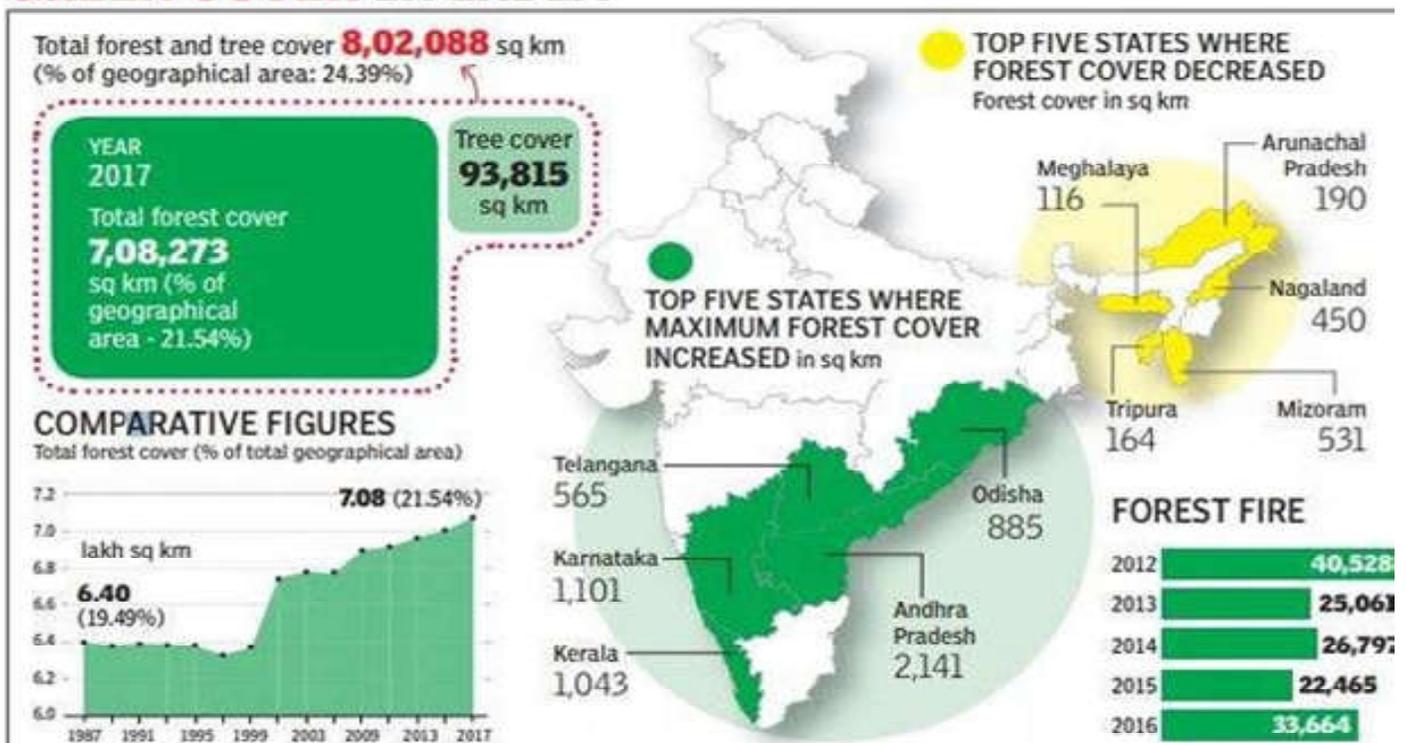
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LATEST UPDATE

Man Booker Prize 2018

Olga Tokarczuk has become the first Polish writer to win the Man Booker International Prize. Ms Tokarczuk took the £50,000 prize for her novel *Flights*. She will split the cash with translator Jennifer Croft.

The annual award goes to the best work of translated fiction from around the world. Previous winners include David Grossman and Chinua Achebe.

Five judges picked *Flights* out of 108 submissions, and announced the winner in a ceremony in London.

Lisa Appignanesi, who chaired the judges' panel, called Ms Tokarczuk "a writer of wonderful wit, imagination and literary panache".

Ms Tokarczuk is a famous novelist in her home country, where she initially trained as a psychologist at the University of Warsaw.

She has written eight novels and two collections of short stories.

Ms Croft translates Polish, Spanish and Ukrainian into English, and is a founding editor of the *Buenos Aires Review*.

Flights beat out shortlisted entries from previous winners Han Kang and Laszlo Krasznahorkai, who claimed the prize in 2016 and 2015, respectively.

Each shortlisted author and translator automatically receives £1,000. Before 2016, the Man Booker International was awarded every second year to an author for their entire body of work.

Man Booker International Prize 2018 shortlist

- √ *Vernon Subutex* by Virginie Despentes (France), translated by Frank Wynne
- √ *The White Book* by Han Kang (South Korea), translated by Deborah Smith
- √ *The World Goes On* by Laszlo Krasznahorkai (Hungary), translated by John Batki, Otilie Mulzet and George Szirtes
- √ *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi (Iraq), translated by Jonathan Wright

- √ *Like a Fading Shadow* by Antonio Muñoz Molina (Spain), translated by Camilo A Ramirez

Arunachal Tribe Protects Unique Bird Species, Wins the India Biodiversity Award!

In the forests inhabited by the Bugun tribe in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district, 10 village boys take turns every week to patrol a 17 square kilometre special area. Trained by the Special Task Force of the Tamil Nadu police, the local youth are voluntary participants in what is probably the state's first government-community collaboration in the forest conservation sector.

On May 22, the NGO won the India Biodiversity Award 2018 in the "Conservation of wildlife species" category conferred by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) and presented by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change in association with the United Nations Development Programme in Hyderabad. There were nine winners and 14 special mentions spread across four categories.

The best system of governance entails a seamless collaboration between governments and the communities they govern, with trust being reposed on either side. One can cite numerous examples of how such an alliance results in better governance outcomes.

In Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district, one can witness this form of partnership between the members of the Bugun tribal community from Singchung village and the local Forest Department. Together, they make up the Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve Management Committee (SBVCR).

The alliance was formalised in January 2017, and earlier this week, this community reserve was awarded the India Biodiversity Award in the "Conservation of Wildlife Species" category for its effort to conserve the critically endangered bird – Bugun liocichla.

To the uninitiated, the award is conferred by the

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National Biodiversity Association, and this year it was presented by the Union environment ministry and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The community reserve, considered a biodiversity hotspot, covers an area of 17 square kilometres, and is adjacent to the to the Eaglesnest Wildlife Sanctuary (EWS).

Nepal: first country in South-East Asia validated for eliminating trachoma

The World Health Organization (WHO) has validated Nepal for having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem - a milestone, as the country becomes the first in WHO's South-East Asia Region to defeat the world's leading infectious cause of blindness.

"Nepal's achievement is commendable and results from strong political commitment, intense community engagement and impressive leadership demonstrated by civil society," Dr Khetrupal Singh.

Trachoma was the second leading cause of preventable blindness in Nepal in the 1980s.

"This remarkable achievement demonstrates what political commitment and sustained partner support can do," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. "It is a big step towards health for everyone and comes at a time when Nepal accelerates its fight against other neglected tropical diseases."

A letter acknowledging validation was presented yesterday to Nepal's Minister of State for Health and Population Ms Padma Kumari Aryal by the WHO South-East Asia Regional Director Dr Poonam Khetrupal Singh and the WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in Geneva, Switzerland where the World Health Assembly is taking place.

India's first sports university to be set up in Manipur

On 23 May, 2018 the Union Cabinet, approved an ordinance to set up the country's first national sports university in Manipur.

Briefing reporters on the decisions of the Cabinet,

MISS WORLD 2017 IS...MANUSHI CHHILLAR!!!

India's Manushi Chhillar on Saturday won the coveted Miss World 2017 title at a glittering event in China, ending 17 years of drought for India at the international pageant. Priyanka Chopra was the last winner from India in 2000. Chhillar, 21, looked emotional as the crown was placed on her head by Miss World 2016 winner Puerto Rico's Stephanie Del Valle. She competed against 108 contestants at the pageant.



Miss Mexico Andrea Meza was announced the first runner up, while Miss England Stephanie Hill was declared the second runner up. Miss Mexico Andrea Meza was announced the first runner up, while Miss England Stephanie Hill was declared the second runner up.

Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said a bill to set up the university in Imphal (west) is already pending in Parliament.

The proposal to set up the national sports university in Manipur was initially announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while Rs. 100 crore funds for it were allocated in the 2014-15 budget.

TCS becomes first company to cross Rs 7 lakh cr market cap milestone

IT bellwether Tata Consultancy Services' market valuation briefly crossed the Rs 7-lakh crore mark on 26 May 2018, making it the first company to achieve this milestone.

The market valuation of TCS jumped to Rs 7,03,309 crore during the intra-day session on the BSE yesterday. The m-cap was calculated at the stock's 52-week high price of Rs 3,674 hit yesterday on the exchange.

At the close of trade, however, the m-cap of TCS

slipped below the Rs 7-lakh crore mark and stood at Rs 6,87,123.96 crore.

TCS shares slipped 0.43% to settle at Rs 3,589.45 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it had gained 1.91% to hit a one-year high of Rs 3,674. The IT major's shares have surged nearly 33% so far this year.

TCS market valuation had earlier this year went past the Rs 6 lakh crore level, making it the second company to achieve the milestone after Reliance Industries.

The Mumbai-headquartered TCS had last month became the first Indian company to close the trading session with over \$100 billion market valuation.

TCS is the country's most valued firm, followed by Reliance Industries with a market capitalisation (m-cap) of Rs 5,83,972.22 crore, HDFC Bank (Rs 5,22,420.61 crore), HUL (Rs 3,41,064.80 crore) and ITC (Rs 3,31,895.80 crore) in the top five list.

The nation's largest software exporter TCS on April 19 reported a 4.4% rise in its March quarter net profit at Rs 6,904 crore.

India receives first cargo for Mangalore petroleum reserve from ADNOC

On May 21, 2018 India received its first crude oil cargo shipment from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) for its strategic petroleum reserve at Mangalore. The shipment is part of the agreement under which ADNOC will store 5.86 million barrels of crude oil in the country under India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) programme, the oil ministry said in a statement.

"In February 2018, during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to UAE, ISPRL and ADNOC signed an Agreement under which ADNOC will store about 5.86 million barrels of crude oil in India's SPR facility at Mangalore at its own cost. The filling up began with the 2 million barrels reaching Mangalore today. ADNOC will bring additional crude oil and fill up the Mangalore cavern later this year," the ministry said.

The agreement with ADNOC allows India to use the entire available crude oil stored by ADNOC at Mangalore SPR during emergency and also allows

ADNOC to sell part of the crude oil to Indian refiners as and when required.

Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had during his visit to United Arab Emirates (UAE) earlier this month flagged off the first 2 million barrel of crude oil shipment to India along with Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, UAE Minister of State and ADNOC Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The centre has built crude oil storage facilities with total capacity of 5.33 Million Tonnes (MT) at three locations under phase I of the SPR programme including 1.33 MT at Vishakhapatnam, 1.5 MW at Mangalore and 2.5 MT at Padur.

The entire Vishakhapatnam facility and one of the two caverns at the Mangalore facility have been filled with crude oil under government funding. The second cavern at the Mangalore facility is now being filled by ADNOC. The Agreement stipulates .

UAE is India's fifth-largest crude oil supplier.

Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)

Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) programme, SPR facilities are at three locations viz. *Vishakhapatnam*, *Mangalore* and *Padur* with a total capacity of 5.33 MMT. On 25 January 2017, the Definitive Agreement on Oil Storage and Management was signed between Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Ltd (ISPRL) and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) of UAE for filling up one of the two caverns at Mangalore SPR facility. The other cavern at Mangalore has already been filled by Government. He also informed that the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Ltd (ISPRL) which is the SPV for construction of SPR facilities invited preliminary Expression of Interest (EoI) from reputed international parties for filling up of Padur SPR facility.

Navika Sagar Parikrama: Indian Navy's all-women crew completes

Indian Navy's all-women crew completed its expedition of circumnavigating the globe in more than eight months.

Under the Navika Sagar Parikrama expedition, the Indian Navy's 6-member all-women crew onboard of INSV Tarini reached Panaji, Goa in around 254 days.

It was the first ever all women Asian and Indian

HENDRA AND NIPAH VIRUSES

Henipavirus, including Hendra and Nipah viruses, is a group of emerging bat-borne paramyxoviruses which were responsible for severe disease outbreaks in humans, horses and pigs. The mortality rate of human infection varies between 50 and 100%, making them one of the most deadly viruses known to infect humans. Its use of highly conserved cell surface molecules (ephrin) as entry receptors and its highly effective replication and fusion strategies are believed to be important characteristics responsible for its high pathogenicity. Henipavirus also encodes multiple accessory proteins which play a key role in evasion of host innate immune responses.

Hendra virus and Nipah virus are highly pathogenic paramyxoviruses that have recently emerged from flying foxes to cause serious disease outbreaks in humans and livestock in Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Bangladesh and *India's Kerala state*. Their unique genetic constitution, high virulence and wide host range set them apart from other paramyxoviruses. These features led to their classification into the new genus Henipavirus within the family Paramyxoviridae and to their designation as Biosafety Level 4 pathogens. This review provides an overview of henipaviruses and the types of infection they cause, and describes how studies on the structure and function of henipavirus proteins expressed from cloned genes have provided insights into the unique biological properties of these emerging human pathogens.

Habitat loss may have triggered Nipah outbreak

Can human-caused factors like habitat loss and climate change trigger outbreaks such as the recent Nipah cases in Kerala? Existing literature does hint at this possibility.

According to a report by the World Health Organization, there is “strong evidence” that the emergence of bat-related viral infections can be attributed to the loss of the animal’s natural habitats. “As the flying fox [fruit bat] habitat is destroyed by human activity, the bats get stressed and hungry, their immune system gets weaker, their virus load goes up and a lot of virus spills out in their urine and saliva,” the report adds.

Environmental stress

“There are studies on Hendra and Nipah viruses that hint at reproductive and nutritional stress [fewer food resources] as potential role players in virus spillover,” wrote Arinjay Banerjee, who works on the immune systems of bats and related viruses in Canada’s University of Saskatchewan and has studied the Nipah outbreak in Bangladesh.

In the case of the Hendra virus – the Nipah equivalent in Australia – scientists found that when fruit bats are stressed (through habitat fragmentation, habitat reduction and physiological stress), the percentage of bats infected with the virus increases drastically, increasing the likelihood of passing it to humans through horses.

Nutritional stress through the loss of food resources – a direct consequence of habitat loss and climate change – brings bats closer to urban areas. According to a study in Malaysia, rapid urbanization of bat-rich rainforests contributed to the emergence of Nipah virus there: the regions most adversely affected were those that suffered from maximum deforestation. Forest fragmentation and hunting bats for food also bring them closer to humans and is often an important cause of disease transmission, says Rohit Chakravarty who studies bats in India.

Conservationists worry that the recent Nipah outbreak could cause a knee-jerk reaction of calls for bat culling. Culling bat populations may seem like an easy solution – and has been tried in Australia – but studies warn that instead of reducing the outbreak of such zoonotic diseases, it could cause even more damage, chiefly ecological.

That’s because about a quarter of the more than 1,300 bat species seen worldwide feed on fruit and nectar and are crucial pollinators (of fruit trees, including mango, guava and banana), helping maintain genetic diversity in agricultural systems. They are also important seed dispersers; other bat species help bring rodent and insect numbers under control.

circumnavigation expedition of the globe.

They were welcomed by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Navy chief Admiral Sunil Lanba at INS Mandovi boat pool in Panaji.

The 'Navika Sagar Parikrama' expedition was flagged off on 10th September 2017.

It aimed at promoting women empowerment.

The crew led by Lt Commander Vartika Joshi covered a total of 21,980 nautical miles in INSV Tarini, which was inducted into the Indian Navy on 18th February 2017.

The other crew members comprised Lt Commanders Pratibha Jamwal, P Swathi and Lieutenants S Vijaya Devi, B Aishwarya and Payal Gupta.

The expedition was completed in six legs with five stopovers at Fremantle I Australia, Lyttleton in New Zealand, Port Stanley in Falkland Islands, Cape Town in South Africa, and Port Louis in Mauritius.

Russia unveils world's first floating nuclear power station

Russia unveiled on 19th May 2018 the world's first floating nuclear power station at a ceremony in the port of the far northern city of Murmansk, where it will be loaded with nuclear fuel before heading to eastern Siberia.

Built in Saint Petersburg, the Akademik Lomonosov arrived in Murmansk on Thursday where it was moored in the port and presented to the media.

Constructed by the state nuclear power firm Rosatom, the 144 by 30 metre (472 by 98 foot) ship holds two reactors with two 35 megawatt nuclear reactors that are similar to those used to power icebreaker ships.

The 21,000-tonne barge will be towed in the summer of 2019 to the port of Pevek in the autonomous Chukotka region in Russia's extreme northeast, 350 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle.

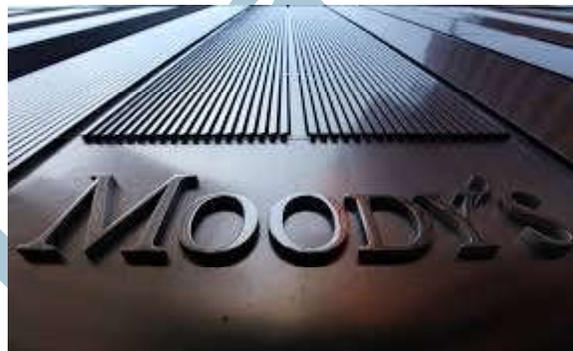
The barge can produce enough electricity to power a town of 2,00,000 residents, far more than the 5,000 who live in Pevek, Russia's northernmost town.

It will be primarily used to power oil rigs as Russia pushes further north into the Arctic to drill for oil and gas and needs electricity in far-flung locations.

Vitaly Trutnev, who is in charge of the construction and operation of floating nuclear power stations

Moody's Upgrades India's Government Bond Rating To Baa2 From Baa3

On November 16, 2017 Moody's Investors Service ("Moody's") has upgraded the Government of India's local and foreign currency issuer ratings to Baa2 from Baa3 and changed the outlook on the rating to stable from positive. Moody's has also upgraded India's local currency senior unsecured rating to Baa2 from Baa3 and its short-term local currency rating to P-2 from P-3.



The decision to upgrade the ratings is underpinned by Moody's expectation that continued progress on economic and institutional reforms will, over time, enhance India's high growth potential and its large and stable financing base for government debt, and will likely contribute to a gradual decline in the general government debt burden over the medium term. In the meantime, while India's high debt burden remains a constraint on the country's credit profile, Moody's believes that the reforms put in place have reduced the risk of a sharp increase in debt, even in potential downside scenarios.

Moody's has also raised India's long-term foreign-currency bond ceiling to Baa1 from Baa2, and the long-term foreign-currency bank deposit ceiling to Baa2 from Baa3. The short-term foreign-currency bond ceiling remains unchanged at P-2, and the short-term foreign-currency bank deposit ceiling has been raised to P-2 from P-3. The long-term local currency deposit and bond ceilings remain unchanged at A1.

at Rosatom, said such units would "supply electricity and heat to the most remote regions, supporting growth and sustainable development."

He said use of such floating reactors can save 50,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year.

WHITE HELMETS : AN IMPARTIAL HUMANITARIAN NGO

The White Helmets, officially known as Syria Civil Defence (SCD), is a volunteer organisation that operates in parts of rebel-controlled Syria and in Turkey. SCD is officially an impartial humanitarian NGO, with no affiliation to any political or military actor and a commitment to render services to anyone in need. Like all NGOs operating in opposition-controlled areas, SCD negotiates humanitarian access with organisations such as local councils, provincial councils, and armed groups, with relationships varying widely from governorate to governorate. The majority of their activity in Syria consists of urban search and rescue in response to bombing, medical evacuation, evacuation of civilians from danger areas, and essential service delivery. 159 White Helmets have been killed since the organisation's inception. The organisation has been the target of a disinformation campaign by supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russia-sponsored media organisations such as Russia Today (RT), with claims of close ties with terrorist activities.

SCD's stated mission is "to save the greatest number of lives in the shortest possible time and to minimize further injury to people and damage to property." Their work covers the 15 civil defence tasks as laid out in international humanitarian law (IHL); the bulk of their activity in Syria consists of urban search and rescue in response to bombing, medical evacuation, evacuation of civilians from danger areas, and essential service delivery.

The most prominent role of SCD was rescuing civilians from airstrikes with barrel bombs, improvised explosive devices dropped by SAAF helicopters. Following a request from Bashar al-Assad for support, Russia intervened in the Syrian Civil War on 30 September 2015. Much of the work of SCD has been responding to aerial bombardments by the Russian Air Force attack aircraft.

As well as providing rescue services, SCD undertakes repair works such as securing damaged buildings and reconnecting electrical and water services, clearing roads, teaching children about unexploded ordnance hazards, as well as firefighting and winter storm relief. Sometimes described as the most dangerous job in the world, SCD operations involve risk from a wide variety of war-zone threats. By late 2016, 159 White Helmets had been killed since the organisation's inception.

SCD is not affiliated with the International Civil Defence Organisation, nor is it connected to the Syria Civil Defence forces which have been a member of the ICDO since 1972. However, as the Syrian government's civil defence organisation does not operate in rebel-held areas, and bombardment of civilian populations in Syria is overwhelmingly perpetrated against opposition-held areas by Syrian government forces, SCD is engaged in the civil defence tasks. As of 2015, SCD had an annual budget of \$30 million provided by a mix of state donors and public fundraising. Volunteers who work full-time receive a \$150 monthly stipend.

It has a co-ordination office on the Turkish-Syrian border in Gaziantep and a training centre in Turkey. There are about 100 female White Helmets.

According to investigative journalists and analysts, SCD became a target of a systematic information warfare campaign by the Russian government, the Syrian government, and their supporters, who have accused the organisation of taking sides in the Syrian Civil War, carrying arms and supporting "terrorist" groups. According to The Guardian's Olivia Solon, claims by contributors to the English language Russian RT television network and Sputnik news agency have also come under critical scrutiny. According to the fact-checking organisation Snopes.com these accusations against the White Helmets are unfounded. Likewise, multiple journalists have raised serious questions as to the credibility and government ties of individuals making accusations against SCD. According to The New York Times's Linda Qiu, Assad's claim that the White Helmets are "Al-Qaeda members" was "without evidence".

In November 2016, the Revolutionaries of Syria Media Office, a Syrian media organisation, published a video showing two White Helmet volunteers performing a staged rescue operation for the Mannequin Challenge meme. The organisation apologised for their volunteers' error of judgement and said it had not shared the recording on their official channels.

YPG closed a White Helmets centre and banned the organization in Afrin. This situation ended after the successful occupation of the city during the Operation Olive Branch.

The barge had initially been scheduled to be fuelled in Saint Petersburg, but that work was moved to Murmansk instead due to concern in countries along the Baltic Sea.

Cabinet approves National Policy on Biofuels - 2018

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved National Policy on Biofuels - 2018.

Salient Features:

The Policy categorises biofuels as "Basic Biofuels" viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and "Advanced Biofuels" - Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.

The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.

Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.

The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.

Roles and responsibilities of all the concerned Ministries/Departments with respect to biofuels has been captured in the Policy document to synergise efforts.

Expected Benefits:

Reduce Import Dependency: One crore lit of E10

saves Rs.28 crore of forex at current rates. The ethanol supply year 2017-18 is likely to see a supply of around 150 crore litres of ethanol which will result in savings of over Rs.4000 crore of forex.

Cleaner Environment: One crore lit of E-10 saves around 20,000 ton of CO2 emissions. For the ethanol supply year 2017-18, there will be lesser emissions of CO2 to the tune of 30 lakh ton. By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.

Health benefits: Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.

MSW Management: It is estimated that, annually 62 MMT of Municipal Solid Waste gets generated in India. There are technologies available which can convert waste/plastic, MSW to drop in fuels. One ton of such waste has the potential to provide around 20% of drop in fuels.

Infrastructural Investment in Rural Areas: It is estimated that, one 100klpd bio refinery will require around Rs.800 crore capital investment. At present Oil Marketing Companies are in the process of setting up twelve 2G bio refineries with an investment of around Rs.10,000 crore. Further addition of 2G bio refineries across the Country will spur infrastructural investment in the rural areas.

Employment Generation: One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.

Additional Income to Farmers: By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for these waste if a market is developed for the same. Also, farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Thus conversion of surplus grains and agricultural biomass can help in price stabilization.

Background:

In order to promote biofuels in the country, a

National Policy on Biofuels was made by Ministry of New and Renewable Energy during the year 2009. Globally, biofuels have caught the attention in last decade and it is imperative to keep up with the pace of developments in the field of biofuels. Biofuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the ongoing initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation. Biofuels programme in India has been largely impacted due to the sustained and quantum non-availability of domestic feedstock for biofuel production which needs to be addressed.

21st FIFA World Cup 2018

The 2018 FIFA World Cup will be the 21st FIFA World Cup, a quadrennial international football tournament contested by the men's national teams of the member associations of FIFA. It is scheduled to take place in Russia from 14 June to 15 July 2018, after the country was awarded the hosting rights on 2 December 2010. This will be the first World Cup held in Europe since the 2006 tournament in Germany; all but one of the stadium venues are in European Russia, west of the Ural Mountains, to keep travel time manageable.



The final tournament will involve 32 national teams, which include 31 teams determined through qualifying competitions and the automatically qualified host team.

Of the 32 teams, 20 will be making back-to-back appearances following the last tournament in 2014, including defending champions Germany, while Iceland and Panama will both be making their first appearances at a FIFA World Cup. A total of 64 matches will be

played in 12 venues located in 11 cities. The final will take place on 15 July at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow.

The winners of the World Cup will qualify for the 2021 FIFA Confederations Cup.

Mascot

The official FIFA World Cup mascot for the 2018 tournament, a wolf named Zabivaka ("the one who scores" in Russian), was unveiled on 21 October 2016. Representing an anthropomorphic wolf with brown and white wool T-shirt with the words "RUSSIA 2018" and orange sport glasses. The combination of white, blue and red T-shirt and shorts are the national colors of the Russian team. The student designer is Ekaterina Bocharova, and the mascot was selected by Internet voting.

The election results were announced on 22 October 2016, in the Evening Urgant on Channel One Russia. Wolf, named Zabivaka, scored 53% of the vote, ahead of Tiger (27%). Cat, with 20% of the vote, was third. More than 1 million people participated in the voting, which took place during September 2016 on the FIFA platforms, as well as during the live broadcast on Channel One, where the results of the creative competition were announced.

2022 Winter Olympics

The 2022 Winter Olympics, officially known as the XXIV Olympic Winter Games commonly known as Beijing 2022, is an international winter multi-sport event that will take place in Beijing and towns in the neighboring Hebei province, People's Republic of China, from 4 to 20 February 2022.

These games will be the first Winter Olympic Games ever held in China. Beijing was elected as the host city in July 2015 at the 128th IOC Session in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

With its previous hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics, Beijing will be the first city to have ever hosted both the Summer and Winter Olympics; there are plans to utilize many of the same indoor venues that were used in 2008, as well as Beijing National Stadium as ceremonies venue. They will be the last of three consecutive Olympics being held in East Asia, following the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South

Korea, and the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.

The mascot(s) for the 2022 Games will be unveiled in 2020.

MiG-21 Bison Fighter Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi Flew first time

Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi became the first Indian woman to pilot a fighter aircraft when she made her first solo flight in a MiG-21 Bison on February 19. The MiG-21 has been one of the mainstays of the Indian Air Force for decades, and is set to be completely phased out over the next two years.

Here is a quick 10-point guide to the MiG-21:

1. The MiG-21's full name is the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21. It was designed by the Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau of the Soviet Union in the 1950s. It made its first flight in 1956, and was first inducted into active combat duty in 1959.
2. It is one of the most used fighter aircraft in aviation history. It has been used by the air forces of more than 60 countries on four continents. It is presently operated by the air forces of 13 countries, and has been retired from the air forces of 49 countries.
3. It is the most-produced supersonic aircraft, with close to 11,500 being built.
4. After the Soviet Air Forces and the Russian Air Force, the MiG-21 was most prominently used by the Indian Air Force. The IAF purchased its first MiG-21 in 1961, under an agreement which gave India full transfer of technology and the rights to build the aircraft in India. It became the first supersonic fighter operated by the IAF.
5. The MiG-21 FL variant was designed specifically to meet India's requirements. The first MiG-21 built entirely in India rolled out in 1970. Around the turn of the century, IAF MiG-21s were upgraded, and the variant was called the MiG-21 Bison. This was the variant that Avani Chaturvedi flew in.
6. The nicknames most commonly used for the MiG-21 in the IAF are 'pencil' and 'rocket' - 'pencil' because it looks like one with wings slapped on and 'rocket' because it is a single-engine aircraft with everything mounted around it. It can fly at a top

speed of 1.8 mach, close to 2200 km per hour. Estimates of the range of different variants of the MiG-21 over the decades has ranged from 650 km to 1250 km.

7. More than 1200 MiG-21s have been inducted in the IAF over the decades. Close to 300 are presently in service. The MiG-21 has served in IAF combat in the 1965, 1971 and 1999 wars with Pakistan.
8. In the 1971 war, they proved to be decisively better than the Lockheed F-104 Starfighters of the Pakistan Air Force. These face-offs between the MiG-21s and the Starfighters were the first supersonic air battles on the Indian subcontinent.
9. MiG-21s have scored 11 confirmed kills for the IAF. However, this number is likely to be on the lower side considering the revisionist claims of the Pakistani military.
10. Crashes of MiG-21s of the IAF have gained attention over the past decades, with the media giving it the moniker of 'flying coffins'. However, Air Force officials say the number of crashes only seems high because of the large number of the aircraft in service.

Bhawana Kanth becomes second woman fighter pilot to undertake solo flight in MiG-21

Flying officer Bhawana Kanth has become the second woman pilot of Indian Air Force to fly solo in a fighter aircraft. On Friday, around 2 pm, the 25-year-old flew in a MiG 21 Bison aircraft from Ambala Air Force Station to achieve the feat, reports news agency ANI.

Last month, Bhawana's batchmate Avani Chaturvedi became the first woman pilot of the Indian Air Force to complete a solo flight in the same aircraft. She completed the half-an-hour long solo flight in the Russian-origin jet in the skies over Jamnagar Air Base.

India State of Forest Report 2017 Released

Strongly emphasising the increasingly green credentials of the country, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan has said that India has shown an increasing trend in the forest and tree cover, in comparison to the global trend of decreasing forest cover during the last de-

cade. Releasing the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017 here today, Dr. Harsh Vardhan pointed out that India ranks among the top ten countries of the world in terms of forest area, despite the fact that none of the other 9 countries has a population density of more than 150 persons per sq km, compared to India, which has a population density of 382 persons per sq km. "India is ranked 10th in the world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4 % of the world surface area and sustains the needs of 17 % of human and 18 % livestock population", the Minister said. He averred that despite such tremendous population and pressures of livestock on our forests, India has been able to preserve and expand its forest wealth. Dr. Harsh Vardhan added that as per the latest FAO report, India is placed 8th in the list of Top Ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.

Quoting figures from the India State of Forest Report 2017, Dr. Harsh Vardhan stated that the latest assessment shows that there is an increase of 8, 021 sq km (about 80.20 million hectare) in the total forest and tree cover of the country, compared to the previous assessment in 2015. He added that the increase in the forest cover has been observed as 6,778 sq km and that of tree cover as 1, 243 sq km. "The total forest and tree cover is 24.39 per cent of the geographical area of the country", the Minister pointed out. He also underlined the encouraging sign that much of the increase in the forest cover has been observed in Very Dense Forest (VDF), as VDF absorbs maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. "The increase in forest cover in VDF is followed by increase in open forest", the Minister said. He also pointed out that the ISFR 2017 has been prepared with the help of scientific tools.

Giving the State-wise break-up, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that three states - Andhra Pradesh (2141 sq km), followed by Karnataka (1101 sq km) and Kerala (1043 sq km) have shown the maximum increase in forest cover. "Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover of 77,414 sq km in the country in terms of area, followed by Arunachal Pradesh with 66,964 sq km and Chhattisgarh (55,547 sq km). In terms of percentage of forest cover with respect to the total geographical area, Lakshadweep with (90.33 per cent) has the highest forest cover, followed by Mizoram (86.27 per cent) and

Andaman & Nicobar Island (81.73 per cent)", the Minister stated. Referring to the enormity of the task of preparing the State of Forest Report, the Minister said, "Work has already started for preparing ISFR 2019".

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of State in MoEF&CC, Dr. Mahesh Sharma said that 18, 000 points have been physically surveyed in a scientific manner in the preparation of the report. He appealed to the society and media to help in the huge task of conserving and protecting the forests.

Addressing the gathering, Secretary, MoEF&CC, Shri C.K Mishra underlined that economic value of the forests must be realised and forests should be used economically. He emphasised that the value of forests is more for the people living in and around forests, hence the most critical issue is for whom is this exercising being conducted. Shri Mishra stated that forests do not exist in isolation and the benefits of the forests must be transferred to the people. He stressed that issues related to agro-forestry and degraded forests must be paid attention to.

The present assessment also reveals that 15 states/UT's have above 33 per cent of the geographical area under forest cover. Out of these States and Union Territories, seven States/UTs namely Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur have more than 75 per cent forest cover, while 8 states - Tripura, Goa, Sikkim, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Assam have forest cover between 33 per cent to 75 per cent. About 40% per cent of the country's forest cover is present in 9 large contiguous patches of the size of 10, 000 sq.km, or more.

As per the ISFR 2017, the total mangrove cover stands at 4,921 sq km and has shown an increase of 181 sq km. All the 12 mangrove states have shown a positive change in the mangrove cover, as compared to the last assessment. Mangrove ecosystem is rich in biodiversity and provides a number of ecological services.

The total growing stock of India's forest and trees outside forests is estimated as 5,822.377 million cum, of which 4,218.380 million cum is inside the forests and 1,603.997 million cum outside. There is an increase of 53.990 million cum of total growing stock, as compared to the previous assessment. Out of this the increase in

growing stock, there is an increase of 23.333 million cum inside the forest and 30.657 million cum outside the forest area. The total carbon stock in the country's forest is estimated to be 7,082 million tonnes, which shows an increase of 38 million tonnes, as compared to the previous assessment.

The extent of bamboo-bearing area in the country has been estimated at 15.69 million ha. In comparison to the last assessment done in 2011, there has been an increase of 1.73 million ha in bamboo area. The growing stock of the bamboo in forest has been estimated to be 189 million tonnes. There is an increase of 19 million tonnes in the bamboo-growing stock as compared to the last assessment done in 2011. The total annual potential production of timber from trees outside forest has been estimated at 74.51 million cum. The Government has recently enacted a Bill in the Parliament for taking out bamboo from the tree category, where it is grown outside forest areas. This will encourage people to grow bamboo on private lands, which will be helpful in increasing the livelihood opportunities for farmers and also enhance the green cover and carbon stock of the country.

Director General, Forests and Special Secretary, Dr. Siddhanta Das, Additional Director General, Forests, Shri Saibal Dasgupta and senior and retired officers of Forest Survey of India were among those present on the occasion.

BACKGROUND: The information given in the report will serve as an important tool to monitor the country's forest resources and plan suitable scientific and policy interventions for its management. It will also serve as a useful source of information for the policy makers, planners, State Forest Departments, line agencies involved in various developmental works, academicians, civil society and others interested in natural resource conservation and management.

The India State of Forest Report 2017 is 15th such report in the series. In line with the Government of India's vision of Digital India and the consequent need for integration of digital data sets, the Forest Survey of India has adopted the vector boundary layers of various administrative units upto districts developed by Survey of India along with digital open series topo sheets, bringing about full compatibility with the geographical areas as reported in Census, 2011. Forests

play a vital role in water conservation and improve the water regime in the area. Considering the importance of water bodies in forest, FSI has assessed water bodies in forest cover for the decade 2005-2015. As per the assessment, there is an increase of 2,647 sq km in the extent of water bodies inside forest cover between 2005 to 2015.

The report contains information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, growing stock inside and outside the forest areas, carbon stock in India's forests and forest cover in different patch size classes. Special thematic information on forest cover such as hill, tribal districts, and north eastern region has also been given separately in the report. The report for the first time contains information on decadal change in water bodies in forest during 2005-2015, forest fire, production of timber from outside forest, state wise carbon stock in different forest types and density classes.

The spatial information given in the report is based on interpretation of LISS-III data from Indian Remote Sensing satellite data (Resourcesat-II) with a spatial resolution of 23.5 meters. Satellite data for the entire country was procured from NRSC for the period October, 2015 – February, 2016. The satellite data interpretation is followed by rigorous ground truthing. In addition extensive ground data collected by field parties at more than 18000 points all over the country and information from other collateral sources are also used to improve the accuracy of the interpreted image.

Forest Survey of India (FSI) has been assessing the forest and tree resources of our country on a biennial basis since 1987. The results of the assessment are published in its biennial report titled "India State of Forest Report (ISFR)".

3rd Raisina Dialogue : All about India's flagship global conference

Visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is slated to inaugurate the third edition of the geopolitical conference, Raisina Dialogue, in New Delhi on 16th January 2018 (Tuesday) evening. The three-day multilateral global conference participated over 550 delegates – some 150 speakers are expected to address the three-day event. The Raisina Dialogue is organised jointly by the Ministry of External Affairs

and the Observer Research Foundation.

The **theme for the 2018 Conference** is *"Managing Disruptive Transitions: Ideas, Institutions and Idioms"*. This theme is designed to explore the shifting dynamics within the global order; where old relationships need new directions, emerging partnerships face unprecedented constraints and the notions of power and sovereignty are challenged. The Dialogue will foster discussions on the role of institutions, the possibility of collective action and successful responses to these modern developments.

The *Raisina Dialogue* is a multilateral conference held annually in New Delhi. Since its inception in 2016, the conference has emerged as India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics. The conference is hosted by the Observer Research Foundation, an independent think tank, in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs of India.

The conference is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving a variety of global policymakers including heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials. In addition, The Dialogue also welcomes major private sector executives, as well as members of the media and academia. It is designed on the lines of Singapore's Shangri-La Dialogue.

The name "Raisina Dialogue" comes from Raisina Hill, an elevation in New Delhi that is home to the Government of India, as well as the Presidential Palace of India, Rashtrapati Bhavan.

PSLV-C40/Cartosat-2 Series Satellite Mission

India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C40), successfully launched the Cartosat-2 Series satellite and 30 co-passenger satellites from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota on January 12, 2018. Here's a look at the mission and how the satellites were deployed.

India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, in its forty second flight (PSLV-C40), successfully launched the 710 kg Cartosat-2 Series Satellite for earth observation and 30 co-passenger satellites together weighing about 613 kg at lift-off. PSLV-C40 was launched from the First Launch Pad (FLP) of Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota.

The co-passenger satellites comprise one Microsatellite and one Nanosatellite from India as well as 3 Microsatellites and 25 Nanosatellites from six countries, namely, Canada, Finland, France, Republic of Korea, UK and USA. The total weight of all the 31 satellites carried onboard PSLV-C40 is about 1323 kg.

The 28 International customer satellites were launched as part of the commercial arrangements between Antrix Corporation Limited (Antrix), a Government of India company under Department of Space (DOS), the commercial arm of ISRO and the International customers.

Commenting on the mission, ISRO chairman A S Kiran Kumar, who will be resigning from his position on January 14, said, "ISRO is starting 2018 with the successful launch. All satellites have been released. So far, the performance of Cartosat has been satisfactory."

15th Finance Commission Constitutes Under Chairmanship NK Singh

The Union Cabinet on 22 Nov 2017 gave its nod to set up the 15th Finance Commission that will decide on the distribution of taxes between the Centre, states and local bodies. The Finance Commission is set up every five years, and the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission are expected to be implemented from April 1, 2020.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission are keenly awaited as it will have an impact on the way the income from taxes is shared among Centre, states and local bodies.

After the Cabinet decision, the government will have to issue a notification constituting the 15th Finance Commission and announcing its terms of reference. The recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission were implemented from April 1, 2015. It had changed the fiscal relationship between the Centre and states by raising the share of states in Central taxes by 10% from the then 32%. Former Rajya Sabha member N K Singh's name is doing the rounds as a prospective candidate for the chairmanship of the commission. The 14th Finance Commission, chaired by former RBI Governor Y V Reddy, was set up on January 2, 2014 and its re-