Brain Tree

Current Events

15 October to 31 October, 2018

1. The government and the **R**eserve **B**ank of **I**ndia (**RBI**) have stuck to their stance of asking payment companies to store payments data locally.

> **Data Localisation** is the act of storing and processing user data within the geographical borders of the country it originated in.
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> On April 6th 2016, the RBI suggested that all payment system providers should store data locally to ensure better monitoring and access to data. All system providers were given six months' time from the date of issue of circular to comply with the norms and report compliance by 15 October. Most of the global payment firms have still not complied with the norms set by the RBI even as the 15th October deadline lapsed.
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> Concurring with the RBI, the government stated data stored in India will be safer since the providers who will store this data can be made more accountable. It also added that absence of Data localization can be detrimental to our National Security. This stance by the government is in line with the **BN Srikrishna committee's Draft Personal Data Protection Bill 2018**, which deals with larger issues of storing, processing and utilization of customer data.
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> The main reason for the reluctance by these companies seems to be the high initial costs involved in creating such an infrastructure.
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> Other concerns have also been raised, foremost amongst those is the concern that storing and processing data in India might lead to a surveillance state with government and RBI having access to all personal information of people. Though, there are those who have pointed out that even though the data is stored in the country, the encryption keys may still remain out of reach of national agencies. Further, some have pointed out that in case the data systems, with data of Indians, are compromised on foreign soil, Indian law enforcement agencies will not be able to do much. The growing number of digital channels for finance are posing a challenge to countries in detecting money laundering and tax evasion.
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> Countries such as Russia, China and even the European Union have taken steps to localize data, albeit with varying levels of protectionism. Other countries have also started looking into the matter of data localization. This shows a domino effect of protectionist policy, which some say is against the values of a globalised, competitive internet marketplace, where costs and speeds, rather than nationalistic borders, determine information flows.

2. For the first time this season, Delhi's air has turned 'severe', the worst category in six-level **A**ir **Q**uality **I**ndex (**AQI**) assessed by the **C**entral **P**ollution **C**ontrol **B**oard (**CPCB**).

Training Tomorrow's Administrators

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Air pollution is choking several cities in the northern States once again, as changes in temperature and slowing winds trap soot, dust and fine particulate matter. The National Capital Region is badly hit, as the burning of agricultural residue in Punjab and Haryana is releasing large volumes of smoke containing, among other pollutants, highly damaging fine particulates, or PM2.5. The problem is aggravated by the burning of urban waste, diesel soot, vehicular exhaust, road and construction dust, and power generation.

The Supreme Court of India, the Delhi government and other stakeholders such as the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) among others have put into effect stringent measures to tackle the rising problem of air pollution in the national capital region (NCR). Starting October, the disposition in Delhi imposed a Supreme Court-mandated **G**raded **R**esponse **A**ction **P**lan (**GRAP**) aimed at reducing the presence of PM 2.5 and PM 10, the two elements mainly responsible for the 'severe' tag currently carried by air pollution levels in the National City. Earlier, policies such as odd-even traffic plan have been implemented in Delhi to curb the domination of pollutants in the air above NCR. Mechanised cleaning of roads, spraying of water vapours from tall buildings and other such steps have been put into effect to restrain dust particles from rising.

3. The Supreme Court restricts the use of **fireworks during all events to a two hour window** with the states being given discretionary powers to fix the time slots. Further it ordered that only crackers with reduced emission and "**green crackers**" can be manufactured and sold.

Diwali celebrations this year will come with certain caveats. Poor air quality across the country prompted the Supreme Court to come up with immediate measures to curb rising air pollution. From partially banning fireworks to setting the time limit on bursting of crackers, the court has issued guidelines on almost every aspect of the festival.

Green crackers are so named because they do not contain harmful chemicals that would cause air pollution. Components in firecrackers are replaced with others that are less dangerous and less harmful to the atmosphere.

Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) was the premier agency involved in the process of testing different materials in this regard. Emissions testing facility has been established at CSIR-NEERI, which this will test conventional and green crackers and monitor them for emissions and sound. E-crackers or electric crackers are also being tested by a team from CSIR-CEERI in Pilani.

4. Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has launched **Harit Diwali-Swasth Diwali** campaign.

This campaign was initiated in 2017-18 to enlighten children about negative effects of fire crackers and motivate them to celebrate Diwali in environment-friendly manner. It encourages children to buy gift, food items, or sweets for poor and underprivileged children living in their locality, rather than buying crackers.

Under this campaign, the MoEFCC will undertake various activities for creating awareness among various stakeholders and encourage people to participate in combating

air pollution. This campaign was extremely successful and the air quality had not deteriorated post Diwali in 2017 unlike what was experienced in 2016.

5. The report on air pollution and child health was released on the eve of the WHO's first ever **G**lobal **C**onference on **A**ir **P**ollution and **H**ealth.

The report released by the **W**orld **H**ealth **O**rganisation (**WHO**) states that globally, 93% children under 18 are exposed to PM2.5 levels above guidelines set by the WHO. Further it went on to note that in low- and middle-income countries, 98% of all children under 5 are exposed to PM2.5 levels above WHO air quality guidelines. In high-income countries, the figure is 52%.

The report stated that air pollution **affects neurodevelopment and cognitive test outcomes, and negatively affects mental and motor development**. It was also noted that air pollution **damages children's lung function**, even at low levels of exposure. Children exposed to high levels of air pollution may be at **greater risk for chronic diseases** such as cardiovascular disease later in life.

The report noted that children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution because they breathe more rapidly than adults and so absorb more pollutants. They also live closer to the ground, where some pollutants reach peak concentrations at a time when their brains and bodies are still developing. The report also reveals that when pregnant women are exposed to polluted air, they are more likely to give birth prematurely, and have small, low birth-weight children.

According to WHO, pollution related mortality and disease burden is one of the highest in India, which **accounts for 25% of the global deaths due to air pollution**. In 2016, as many as 1 lakh children deaths under the age of 5 years in India were caused due to polluted air.

The report also pointed that **Fourteen out of the 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India.** Further it stated that most cities, unlike Delhi **do not have an emergency response plan to tackle air pollution**. While some of the cities like Patna and Varanasi have recently formulated action plans, there are none in place to issue advisories or mitigate the pollution at the source level instantly as in the case of the Graded Response Action Plan

6. The **E**uropean **S**pace **A**gency (**ESA**) and the **J**apan **A**erospace **E**xploration **A**gency (**JAXA**) successfully sent two probes on a joint mission to the planet Mercury.

An **Ariane 5** rocket, launched from French Guyana, lifted an unmanned spacecraft, **BepiColombo**, which is carrying the two probes. The orbiters are ESA's **M**ercury **P**lanetary **O**rbiter (**MPO**) and JAXA's **M**ercury **M**agnetospheric **O**rbiter (**MMO**, or 'Mio'). The ESA-built **M**ercury **T**ransfer **M**odule (**MTM**) will carry the orbiters to Mercury using a combination of solar electric propulsion and gravity assist flybys, with one flyby of Earth, two at Venus, and six at Mercury, before entering orbit at Mercury in late 2025.

It is the first mission to send two spacecraft to make complementary measurements of the planet and its environment at the same time.

7. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is preparing a detailed project report through the National Highways and Industrial Development Corporation Ltd (NICL) to construct **India's longest bridge** between Dhubri and Phulbari, in Assam, with a length of 19.3km.

The bridge will be constructed over the **Brahmaputra river.** At present, people cross the river either in small boats or by vehicles that have to take a detour of 100 km before climbing the Naranarayan bridge.

The country's longest river bridge, as of now. Between **Dhola and Sadiya in Assam, is 9.5km**. It reduces the distance from Rupai (Assam) to Roing (Arunachal Pradesh) by 165 km, and travel time from 6 hours to 1 hour.

8. The Uttar Pradesh Government officially renames Allahabad as **Prayagraj**.

It is believed that until around 500 years ago, the city was called Prayag which is when the Mughal emperor, Akbar, gained interest in the city and renamed it to Illahabad (the abode of God) which was anglicized into the recent name Allahabad.

The Government of UP said the change in the name was accepted keeping in view the emotions and feelings of the people. Further, others have pointed to the economic benefits attached, stating that such a name change would increase the tourism potential of the city, which is famous for Triveni Sangam(Confluence of three rivers of The Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati) and the Kumb Mela.

Though there have been no studies done to date to measure the impact of city name changes, the costs involved are beyond dispute. When cities re-brand, highway traffic signs out into neighboring States have to be changed. Railway signage, systems and paperwork across the country have to be updated. Government and business stationery have to be destroyed and remade at a cost to the environment. The biggest cost may be in re-educating outsiders about the name change, an intangible line item whose true costs will never be known.

9. The US government stated that it would withdraw from the **I**ntermediate-**R**ange **N**uclear **F**orces **T**reaty (**INF**) with Russia, a landmark 1987 agreement signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to remove nuclear weapons from Europe.

The **1987** treaty, signed by the then-US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, prohibited Washington and Moscow from possessing, producing or test-flying ground-launched cruise missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500km. The INF treaty was the agreement that broke the deadlock of the Cold War arms race, from which all future progress followed. It not only prohibited an entire class of deadly nuclear weapons but also brought about in-depth verification protocols that ensured compliance.

The US President Trump says he decided to quit the landmark agreement because he believes Russia is already violating it. He also says China, which possesses its own short and intermediate range land-based nuclear weapons, should also be party to such an

agreement limiting the nuclear capabilities of Russia and the US.

Analysts claim that the US withdrawing from the treaty is likely to start another arms race between the US and Russia, with both countries likely racing to invent new nuclear weapons to help their nations gain the utmost advantage from the lifting of restrictions. Once the next generation of short or intermediate land-based nuclear weapons is developed, or modified from existing sea or air-based platforms, the push will be to redeploy them back around Europe.

And if Russia decides to move such weapons to its Western Borders, Americans and the Europeans will be forced to respond and deploy short or intermediate-range nuclear weapons and point them eastward, leading to a potential Nuclear Flash Point(In international relations, a flashpoint is an area or dispute that has a strong possibility of developing into a war.)

10. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday was conferred with the **Seoul Peace Prize 2018** "for his contribution to high economic growth in India and world through 'Modinomics.'"

Established in 1990, the Seoul Peace Prize was an effort to crystallise the Korean people's yearning for peace on the Korean Peninsula and in the rest of the world. It was initially established to commemorate the success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul, Republic of Korea – an event in which 160 nations from across the world took part, creating harmony and friendship and a worldwide atmosphere of peace and reconciliation. Seoul Peace Prize has been awarded to those who have made their mark through contributions to the harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and to world peace.

The Seoul Peace Prize Committee stated that it has decided to confer the 2018 Seoul Peace Prize on Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in recognition of his dedication to improving international cooperation, raising global economic growth, accelerating the Human Development of the people of India by fostering economic growth in the world's fastest growing large economy and furthering the development of democracy through anti-corruption and social integration efforts.

Previous winners of the award include former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and renowned international relief organizations like Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam. The prize has been awarded to those who have made their mark through contributions to the harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and to world peace.

11. **Amur falcons**, longest travelling raptors begin arriving in Nagaland

In October every year, huge numbers of Amur falcons arrive in northeast India from Siberia en route to their final destination in Somalia, Kenya and South Africa. The Amur falcon breeds in South-eastern parts of Siberia and northern China before migration in large flocks across India and over the Arabian Sea to parts of Southern Africa. These birds have one of the longest migration routes of all, travelling up to 20,000km a year.

Doyang Lake near Pangti village in Nagaland's Wokha district is the stopover location

for the Amur falcons during their annual migration.

12. India and Japan sign $75 billion **currency swap agreement**

A foreign currency swap is an agreement to exchange currency between two foreign parties. The agreement consists of swapping principal and interest payments on a loan made in one currency for principal and interest payments of a loan of equal value in another currency. In this case, RBI will get a certain amount of yen and the Bank of Japan will get an equivalent amount in Indian rupees. The rate will be decided on the basis of prevailing market rates. After this pact, India and Japan would not require dollars to trade between themselves. The move may help support the rupee as well as yen against the dollar (which is appreciating currently). According to a release issued by the government, the swap arrangement should aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange rates and the capital market in India. With this arrangement in place, India's prospects would further improve in tapping foreign capital for country's developmental needs. This facility will make the agreed amount of foreign capital available to India for use as and when the need arises.

In the past India has had several currency swap agreements with other countries such as the UAE, Russia, Iran, Singapore etc.

13. A new multidimensional calculation of poverty reveals that India's Poor states, despite having made some improvements, continue to be poor

Multidimensional **P**overty **I**ndex (**MPI**) is a relatively new composite index that seeks to fix some of the conceptual and statistical problems with **U**nited **N**ations **D**evelopment **P**rogramme's (**UNDP**) widely used Human Development Index (**HDI**). One major criticism of the HDI was that it is too strongly determined by its income component.

The MPI, created by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, uses 10 indicators to measure poverty in three dimensions: **education, health and living standards**. If an individual is deprived in a third or more of ten weighted indicators, the index identifies them as poor, and the intensity of their poverty is measured by the number of deprivations they are experiencing.

In its 2018 update, India's MPI index in 2018 was 0.121, placing it **53rd out of 105** developing countries for which data was available. **Poor nutrition was the largest contributor to India's multidimensional poverty** while insufficient access to clean water and child mortality contributed the least. Relatively few people experienced deprivations in school attendance. It noted that 91 of the poorest 100 districts are concentrated in seven states - Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. With over half the population in Bihar, and over 40% in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are multidimensionally poor.

14. Sardar Patel's statue or the **Statue of Unity** was inaugurated during a function on Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's birth anniversary today on 31 October.

Double the height of the Statue of Liberty in New York, the Sardar Patel statue **near the Narmada Dam in Gujarat** is not only the tallest in the world but also the one to be completed in the shortest time. The 182-metre Statue of Unity took 33 months to

complete while China's Spring Temple Buddha statue took 11 years.

Vallabhbhai Patel (October 31, 1875 – December 15, 1950) was a political and social leader of India who played a major role in the country's struggle for independence and subsequently guided its integration into a united, independent nation. He was called the **"Iron Man of India"**, and was often addressed as "Sardar".

Patel organised the peasants of Kheda, Borsad, and Bardoli in Gujarat in a non-violent civil disobedience movement against oppressive policies imposed by the British Raj; in this role, he became one of the most influential leaders in Gujarat. He rose to the leadership of the Indian National Congress and was at the forefront of rebellions and political events, organising the party for elections in 1934 and 1937, and promoting the Quit India movement. After independence he became Independent India's first Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Subsequently, **Patel took charge of the task to forge a united India from the 565 semi-autonomous princely states and British-era colonial provinces**. Using frank diplomacy backed with the option (and the use) of military action, Patel's leadership enabled the accession of almost every princely state. Hailed as the Iron Man of India, he is also remembered as the "Patron Saint" of India's civil servants for establishing modern all-India services.

15. The WTO ministerial conference recently concluded in Canadian capital of Ottawa.

India, along with US, China and South Africa amongst others, did not participate in the ministerial. It was attended by the European Union, Japan, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Kenya, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile. The ministerial unveiled a new trade agenda that points towards the launch of a new round of trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) next ministerial meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan in June 2020

The Ottawa meeting reaffirmed the importance of a "rules based multilateral trading system" and stressed the "indispensable role the WTO is playing in the facilitation and safeguarding trade". The meeting concluded that action is necessary in three broad areas,

   i.   Improving the WTO's dispute resolution mechanism.
   ii. Monitoring the transparency of member country trade practices.
   iii. Invigorating the WTO negotiating process.

16. India ranks **14th on the Global Impunity Index**.

The **Committee to Protect Journalists** released its Global Impunity Index titled **"Getting Away with Murder: CPJ's 2018 Global Impunity Index spotlights countries where journalists are slain and their killers go free"**.

The Impunity Index is released annually to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on **November 2**. CPJ calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population. For the index released this year, CPJ. At the top of the list for the fourth year in a row is Somalia with its dismal record of convicting perpetrators and 25 unsolved cases, followed by Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and the Philippines. The report clarifies that all 14 of the countries have appeared

on the index at one point or the other since CPJ began to compile the list in 2008. **India has landed at the 14th position with 18 unsolved cases**. In all, it has been on the list 11 times and was ranked 12th in 2017. In its 2017 report, CPJ had said that since the early 1990s, 27 journalists had been killed "with complete impunity" in India. India also refused to participate yet again in UNESCO's impunity accountability mechanism, which requests information on the status of investigations into killed journalists.

17. India's rank in the World Bank's **Ease of Doing Business 2019** survey climbed 23 places to **77** among 190 countries surveyed.

The Ease of doing business index ranks countries against each other based on how the regulatory environment is conducive to business operations. India has lowered regulatory barriers in line with international best practices in certain areas. States are also lowering these barriers and simplifying their regulatory regimes, which has helped them to attract investments.

India's ranking improved 65 places from 142nd in 2014 to 77th in 2018, a record for a major economy. India is seeking to reach the 30th position by 2020, according to an output-outcome framework document prepared by the government. India used to be the last among the BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa - countries in the ranking, but now it has overtaken Brazil and China in the list. **New Zealand, Singapore and Denmark retained their first, second and third spots**. Russia, at 35 is the best among BRICS countries; while Brazil is now the last.

18. The biennial **Living Planet Report 2018** has been released by the **World Wide Fund for Nature**.

The report stated that the global wildlife population shrank by 60% between 1970 and 2014, with the worst declines being observed in the tropics.

It also noted that since 1960, the global ecological footprint has increased by more than 190% while the extent of wetlands is estimated to have declined by 87% since 1970.

Further, the report also mentions that India's soil biodiversity is in grave peril. The WWF's 'risk index' for the globe, indicating threats from loss of above-ground diversity, pollution and nutrient over-loading, over-grazing, intensive agriculture, fire, soil erosion, desertification and climate change, shows India among countries whose soil biodiversity faces the highest level of risk.

19. Asma Jahangir, Rebeca Gyumi, Joenia Wapichana and Front Line Defenders were presented with the **Human Rights Prize** for 2018

The United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights is an honorary award given for outstanding achievement in human rights. Prize was established by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and was awarded for the first time on December 10, 1968, on the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Prize is an opportunity not only to give public recognition to the achievements of the recipients themselves, but also to send a clear message to human rights defenders the world over that the international community is grateful for, and supports, their tireless efforts to promote all human rights for all.

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20. The Madras High Court has upheld the state Assembly Speaker's decision to disqualify 18 legislators last year for defection.

The **10th Schedule** to the Constitution, popularly referred to as the '**Anti-Defection Law**,' was inserted by the **52nd Amendment in 1985**. The grounds for disqualification are mentioned under **Articles 102 (2) and 191 (2).** A Member of Parliament or state legislature is deemed to have defected -

- When the elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.

- If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorised to do so, without obtaining prior permission.

- Independent members would be disqualified if they joined a political party.

- Nominated members who were not members of a party could choose to join a party within six months; after that period, they were treated as a party member or independent member.

21. Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched the web portal of the Scheme "**S**cheme for **P**romotion of **A**cademic and **R**esearch **C**ollaboration (**SPARC**)".

The scheme aims at **improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions** by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world. Under this Scheme, 600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years to facilitate strong research collaboration between Indian research groups with the best in class faculty and renowned research groups in the leading universities of the world, in areas that are at the cutting edge of science or with direct social relevance to the mankind, specifically India.

Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme. Details may be viewed at www.sparc.iitkgp.ac.in.

22. India and Bangladesh sign agreements for enhancing inland and coastal waterways connectivity

Some of the agreements between the two sides are

- The two countries have signed an agreement to use Chattogram and Mongla Ports in Bangladesh for movement of goods to and from India. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has also been signed for movement of passenger and cruise services.

- An addendum to '**P**rotocol on **I**nland **W**ater **T**ransit and **T**rade' (**PIWTT**) between India and Bangladesh has been signed for inclusion of Dhubriin India and Pangaonin Bangladesh as new Ports of Call.

- The two sides have also agreed to consider inclusion of Rupnarayanriver **(National Waterway-86)** from Geonkhali to Kolaghat in the protocol route and to declare Kolaghatin West Bengal as new Port of Call.

- Both sides agreed to declare Badarpur on river Barak **(NW 16)** as an Extended Port of Call of Karimganj in Assam and Ghorasal of Ashuganj in Bangladesh on a

> reciprocal basis.

- Both sides have also agreed for development of Jogighopa as a hub/trans-shipment terminal for movement of cargo to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Bhutan and notifying Munsiganj River terminal by Bangladesh Customs for routing third party Exim cargo through Kolkata Port.

23. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister has given its approval for creation of special **F**isheries and Aquaculture **I**nfrastructure **D**evelopment **F**und (**FIDF**).

FIDF would provide concessional finance to State Governments / UTs and State entities, cooperatives, individuals and entrepreneurs etc., for taking up of the identified investment activities of fisheries development. Under FIDF, loan lending will be over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23 and maximum repayment will be over a period of 12 years inclusive of moratorium of two years on repayment of principal.

The FIDF aims to –

- Create fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and Inland fisheries sectors.

- Provide employment opportunities to over 9.40 lakh fishermen and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities.

- Attract private investment in creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.

- Aid Adoption of new technologies.

- Augment fish production to achieve its target of 15 million tonne by 2020 set under the Blue Revolution; and achieving a sustainable growth of 8% -9% thereafter to reach the fish production to the level of about 20 MMT by 2022-23.

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24. The Union Cabinet has approved the constitution of a High Level Steering Committee for periodically reviewing and refining the **N**ational **I**ndicator **F**ramework (**NIF**) for monitoring of **S**ustainable **D**evelopment **G**oals (**SDGs**) with associated targets.

The **S**ustainable **D**evelopment **G**oals (**SDGs**) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs came into effect in January 2016, and they will continue until 2030. The **17 SDGs** are an extension to the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty by 2015.

Statistical indicators of NIF will be the backbone of monitoring of SDGs at the national and state level and will scientifically measure the outcomes of the policies to achieve the targets under different SDGs. Further, using the statistical indicators, the MoSPI will be able to present reports on implementation of SDGs. The Reports will facilitate assessment of progress, identify challenges and give recommendations for follow up at the national level. Data source Ministries / Departments will be responsible for providing regular information to MoSPI on these indicators at required intervals and disaggregation for national and sub-national reporting of SDGs.

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25. The International Conference on **St**atus **a**nd **P**rotection of **Co**ral **R**eefs (**STAPCOR** – 2018) is being held at Bangaram coral Island of Territory of Lakshadweep, with the Theme "**Reef for Life**"

> It was jointly organized by **Department of Environment and Forest, Union Territory of Lakshadweep Administration with the technical support of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)** and in association with **M**inistry **o**f **E**nvironment, **F**orest and **C**limate **C**hange (**MoEFCC**), **I**nternational **U**nion for **C**onservation of **N**ature (**IUCN**), **E**nvironmental **I**nformation **S**ystem (**ENVIS**) in consonance with declaration of year 2018 as 3rd decadal International year of Reefs.
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> The first IYOR was designated in 1997 in response to the increasing threats on coral reefs and associated ecosystems. The hope was to increase awareness of the value of and threats to coral reefs, and to promote conservation, research and management efforts on a global scale.
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> Coral organisms, called **polyps**, can live on their own, but are primarily associated with the limestone communities, called **reefs**, they construct. Coral polyps are tiny, soft-bodied organisms, at their base is a hard, protective limestone skeleton called a calicle, which forms the structure of coral reefs.
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> Reefs begin when a polyp attaches itself to a rock on the sea floor, then divides, or buds, into thousands of clones. The polyp calicles connect to one another, creating a colony that acts as a single organism. As colonies grow over hundreds and thousands of years, they join with other colonies and become reefs. Some of the coral reefs on the planet today began growing over 50 million years ago.
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> Coral **reefs cover less than one percent of the ocean floor, but support about 25 percent of all marine life.** Pollution, global warming, and sedimentation are threatening large swaths of the world's reefs. When stressed by such things, corals will evict their boarders, causing **coral bleaching** (whitening of coral that results from the loss of a coral's symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae) or the degradation of the algae's photosynthetic pigment) that can kill the colony if the stress is not mitigated.

26. **Invest India**, the country's investment promotion body, has won **United Nations (UN) Award for excellence in promoting investments in sustainable development.**

> Invest India received this award for excellence in servicing and supporting major global wind turbines company in establishment of blade manufacturing plant in India while committing to train local staff and produce **1 gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy.** Implementation of this project is expected to reduce India's wind energy cost significantly.
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> Invest India is the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency of India and acts as the first point of reference for investors in India. Invest India is set up as a nonprofit venture under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Government of India. It was operationalized in early 2010, as a joint venture between the **D**epartment of **I**ndustrial **P**olicy & **P**romotion (**DIPP**), Ministry of Commerce & Industry (35% equity), **F**ederation of **I**ndian **C**hambers of **C**ommerce and **I**ndustry (**FICCI**) (51% equity), and State Governments of India (0.5% each).

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The core mandate of Invest India is investment promotion and facilitation. It provides sector-specific and state-specific information to a foreign investor, assists in expediting regulatory approvals, and offers hand-holding services. Its mandate also includes assisting Indian investors to make informed choices about investment opportunities overseas.

The UN Investment Promotion Award is given annually by **U**nited **N**ations **C**onference on **T**rade and **D**evelopment (**UNCTAD**). It was started in 2002 as part of its investment promotion and facilitation programme. It honours **I**nvestment **P**romotion **A**gencies (**IPA**s) and their governments for their achievements. It also seeks to showcase best practices in attracting investment into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)-related projects that can inspire investment promotion practitioners in developing and developed countries.

27. The **N**ational **P**hysical **L**aboratory (**NPL**)—India's official timekeeper—has suggested that **India should have two time zones**, with the Northeastern states on 'IST-II', running an hour ahead of the rest of the country.

In the northeast region, the sun rises and sets ahead of the official working hours which are based on the **I**ndian **S**tandard **T**ime (**IST**). In winters, the daylight hours are further shortened as the sun sets much early. This has adverse impacts on productivity and electricity consumption. In fact, tea gardens of Assam for long have been following **'chaibagaan time' which is one hour ahead of IST**. In order to overcome difficulties in coping with IST, parliamentarians and other groups from the region have been demanding a separate time zone for the north east.

At present, the country observes a single time zone based on the longitude passing through **82°33′E**. This, under the new proposal, will become IST-I, covering the regions falling between longitudes 68°7′E and 89°52′E. And IST-II (UTC + 6:30 h, represented by longitude passing through 97°30′E) will cover the regions between 89°52′E and 97°25′E. This will include all the northeastern states as well as Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The additional time zone for the northeast takes into account several factors like impact of sunrise and sunset timings on biological activities of people; synchronising sunrise and sunset timings with office hours; minimisation of spatial extension at the proposed border of time demarcation; and feasibility of technically managing two time zones.

When sunrise and sunset timings were mapped at 10 locations across the country - Dong, Port Blair, Alipurduar, Gangtok, Kolkata, Mirzapur, Kanyakumari, Gilgitum, Kavaratti and Ghuar Mota - it was found that **time difference between the extreme east (Dong) and extreme west (Ghuar Mota) is close to two hours**. The study notes that from the body's circadian rhythm point of view, the existing IST is highly suitable for Kanyakumari, Kavaratti, and Ghuar Mota; manageable for Alipurduar, Kolkata, Gangtok, Mirzapur and Gilgitum; but highly unsuitable for Dong and Port Blair.

But on the other hand, having two times zones may create other problems. One hour gap between the two time zones, in the morning and evenings would bring about almost 25% overlap between office timings in the two time zones, which could potentially impact the business of both private and government entities. Moreover, movement of people over the time zones would require them to reset clocks every time that is done, which may be a

difficult task for the common man. Further, it has raised debates that the **"partitioning" of the country** on the basis of time zones may create undesirable consequences, since the people in the North-East already feel a sense of separation from the mainland.

28. India urges IMF to implement quota reforms

International **M**onetary **F**und (**IMF**) is an international organization which was conceived at UN conference in Bretton Woods in 1944. **IMF's primary aim is to ensure stability of international Monetary System** (i.e. exchange rates etc.) for the purpose of smoother transactions among member countries or all over the world. It does it in three ways: surveillance of economy of all 188 member countries, lending to countries with balance of payments difficulties, and giving practical/technical help to members by helping in framing economic or financial policies etc.

The IMF is a quota-based institution. Quotas are the building blocks of the IMF's financial and governance structure. An individual member country's quota broadly reflects its relative position in the world economy. Quotas are denominated in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the IMF's unit of account.

The SDR serves as the unit of account of the IMF and some other international organizations. The SDR is neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF. SDRs can be exchanged for these currencies.

Quotas play multiple roles

- Quotas determine the maximum amount of financial resources a member is obliged to provide to the IMF.

- Quotas are a key determinant of the voting power in IMF decisions.

- The maximum amount of financing a member can obtain from the IMF under normal access is based on its quota.

- Quotas determine a member's share in a general allocation of SDRs.

The quota reforms will help India, since they increase India's voting share from the current 2.3% to 2.6%.

29. **F**inancial **A**ction **T**ask **F**orce (**FATF**) team conducts an on-site assessment and finalises 40 recommendations for de-listing Pakistan from its grey list.

Pakistan was placed on the grey list by the FATF in June for failing to curb anti-terror financing.

FATF is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7. It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas. The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.

FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally. In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from

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misuse.

30. The Supreme Court questions states about criminal cases pending against legislators.

The SC gave a deadline of four weeks to comply with its September 12 order. The order has called on States/UTs to furnish data to determine the number of special courts to be set up across the country to exclusively try accused legislators. It also warned that their Chief Secretaries and Registrars General will be made personally liable for non-compliance.

The apex court had on December 14 last year ordered these courts to be established to fast track the long-pending trials against MPs and MLAs in a bid to weed out corruption and criminality in politics. So far, the Centre informed the court that a dozen such courts have been created in 11 other States.

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