

# Brain Tree

## Current Events



**16 December, 2018 – 31 December, 2018**

1. The **NITI Aayog** revealed its comprehensive national strategy for India titled “**Strategy for New India @ 75**”

The report covered forty-one crucial areas, recognising the progress already made, identifying any limitations, and suggesting the way forward for achieving the objectives. Laying down a multi-pronged strategy to promote India’s overall development, the plans aims to register an annual growth rate of 9 percent by 2022-23.

The NITI Aayog has suggested several economic reforms with the objective to accelerate growth and boost the size of India’s economy to \$4 trillion over the next five years. The blueprint proposes increasing the share of taxes in national income to 22 percent from 17 percent, inclusion of fuel and electricity within the goods and services tax (GST), and privatizing airports, in addition to key railway assets, such as freight terminals, engines and rolling stock.

It noted that besides having rapid growth, it is also necessary to ensure that growth is inclusive, sustained, clean, and formalised. The think tank suggests that this can be done by increasing the investment rate in the country measured by Gross Fixed Capital Formation to 36% of the GDP by 2022 which is currently at 29%.

The document points out two areas wherein higher public investment will be easily absorbed—housing and infrastructure. The report stated that Investment in housing, especially in urban areas, will create very large multiplier effects in the economy.

With respect to farming, the report noted that the long-term solution lies in the creation of a competitive, stable and unified national market to enable better price discovery, and a long-term trade regime favourable to exports. It has also suggested minimum support price (MSP) for produce be replaced with that of a minimum reserve price so that farmers can avail at least a basic income.

2. Indian firm takes over operations at Iran’s **Chabahar port**

Given the hurdles in the direct route through Pakistan, the Chabahar port opens up a permanent alternative route for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. In addition, it facilitates India’s role in Afghanistan’s development through infrastructure and education projects.

The port also gives India an opportunity to improve bilateral ties with Iran, a major oil supplier and potential trade market for India. Further, Chabahar also provides a link to the planned International North-South Transport Corridor, which will help India connect with Russia and Europe.

3. The Lok Sabha passed **The Consumer Protection Bill, 2018** that would replace the 1986 Act.

The bill enforces consumer rights and provides a mechanism for redressal of complaints

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regarding deficiencies in goods and services.

The amended law aims to set up the Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions as quasi-judicial bodies to adjudicate disputes. Further, a **Central Consumer Protection Authority** will be set up to promote, protect and enforce consumer rights as a class. It can issue safety notices for goods and services, order refunds, recall goods and rule against misleading advertisements. Further, **Consumer Protection Councils** will be set up at the district, state, and national level, as advisory bodies.

The Bill empowers the central government to appoint, remove and prescribe conditions of service for members of the District, State and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions. The Commissions will attempt to dispose of a complaint within three months if the complaint does not require analysis or testing of commodities.

The bill also provides for mediation cells attached to the District, State and National Commissions. The Commissions may refer a matter for mediation if the parties consent to settle their dispute in this manner.

#### 4. The World Economic Forum (WEF) released the **Global Gender Gap Report 2018**

149 countries were ranked on the basis of four thematic dimensions- Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

According to the report, the world has closed 68 percent of its gender gap; and at the current rate of change, it will take 108 years more to close the overall gender gap and 202 years to bring about parity in the workplace.

This year, the Gender Gap Index was topped by Iceland with a score of 0.858, holding the top spot in the index for the 10th consecutive year. Nordic countries dominated the top spots in the index with Norway ranked at 2nd, Sweden at 3rd, and Finland at 4th.

India was ranked 108th in the Global Gender Gap Index 2018, same as it was ranked in 2017.

In terms of economic opportunity and participation, India ranked 142nd out of 149 countries. India continued to rank third-lowest in the world on health and survival, remaining the world's least-improved country on this sub-index.

#### 5. Japan to resume **Commercial Whaling in 2019**.

Whaling is the hunting of whales for their usable products like meat, oil and blubber. In 1986 following alarming reports of certain species being driven to near-extinction, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) banned commercial whaling.

Japan confirmed its withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) after 51 years of membership. However, Japan had been utilising a loophole to continue hunting whales for the last 30 years, under a scientific programme earmarked as an exception under the IWC ban. This move by Japan to withdraw from the IWC has raised concerns from different corners. Further, it has also raised fears that other nations might also follow suit.

#### 6. **COP24, Katowice conference** finalises **rulebook** for implementing 2015 Paris Agreement.

The 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, was organised in Katowice, Poland. Two years ago, at the COP22 meeting in Marrakech, countries had set themselves a 2018 deadline for the completion of the "rulebook". The finalisation paves the way for implementation of the Paris Agreement, which

will replace the existing Kyoto Protocol in 2020.

Broadly, the Paris Agreement, which seeks to keep the global average temperatures well below 2°C from pre-industrial times, specifies what steps countries need to take in the fight against climate change. The rulebook specifies what actions can be included in the action plan, how and when to submit them. Further, the Paris Agreement asks every member nation to submit information about their greenhouse gas emissions every two years. The rulebook specifies which gases to measure, what methodologies and standards to apply while measuring them, and the kinds of information to be included in the submissions.

Further, the rulebook classifies different kinds of financial flows — loans, concessions, grants as climate finance, how they should be accounted for, and the kind of information about them needed to be submitted.

**7. SDG India Index 2018** has been released by NITI Aayog.

The Baseline Report of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index 2018, documenting the progress made by India's States and Union Territories (UTs) towards implementation of the 2030 SDG targets has been released by the NITI Aayog.

The SDG India Index was developed in collaboration with the **Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Global Green Growth Institute and United Nations in India.**

The SDG India Index tracks progress of all States and UTs on 62 Priority Indicators selected by NITI Aayog. The Index spans 13 out of 17 SDGs (SDGs 12, 13 & 14 could not be measured due to non-availability of data and SDG 17 was left out as it focuses on international partnerships). Himachal Pradesh tops the list followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu, while Uttar Pradesh is at the bottom of the list in the States category. In the Union Territory category, Chandigarh tops the list. A composite score was computed between the range of 0-100 for each State and UT based on their aggregate performance across 13 SDGs, indicating average performance of State/UT towards achieving 13 SDGs & their respective targets. Based on the score received by the State/UT, they are classified as **Aspirant, Performer, Front Runner and Achiever.**

**8.** The government introduced the **Dam Safety Bill, 2018** in Lok Sabha. The Bill provides for surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of specified dams for prevention of dam failure related disasters and to provide for institutional mechanism to ensure their safe functioning.

The bill was necessary because India has 5,254 large dams, of which 75% are over 25 years old, and 164 are than 100 years old. There have been 36 dam failures. Neither is there a uniform law nor an administrative regime for dam safety. While the **Central Water Commission (CWC)** has made efforts through National Committee on Dam Safety, Central Dam Safety Organization and State Dam Safety Organizations, these agencies do not have statutory powers and can only make recommendations.

The legislation provides for a **National Committee on Dam Safety**, to be headed by the CWC chairperson and with members nominated by the Centre; there will be representatives of the Centre and states (through rotation) as well as dam safety experts. The committee will formulate policies and regulations, which are to be implemented by a centrally appointed **National Dam Safety Authority**, headed by an officer of at least Additional Secretary rank.

The authority will also resolve issues between State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs) or between a SDSO and any individual dam owner, lay down regulations for dam inspection and for accreditation to construction and designing agencies. The Bill provides for a safety unit in each dam to be set up by individual dam owners.

9. **The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill 2016** was passed by the Lok Sabha. It allows only altruistic surrogacy by infertile Indian couples, legally married for at least five years.

Surrogacy is an arrangement where a couple commissions a woman (called a surrogate) to carry their child. The Bill allows only altruistic surrogacy (by relatives) for married couples. It seeks **to put an end to commercial surrogacy**. Payment to a surrogate mother is punishable by up to five years imprisonment and also has safeguards built in against sex selection of the baby. The Bill proposes to allow altruistic, ethical surrogacy to intending infertile Indian married couples between the ages of 23-50 for females and 26-55 for males. It limits the option to only legally married childless couples who have been trying for a child for at least five years. The commissioning couple cannot have a surviving child either biological or adopted, except when they have a child who is mentally or physically challenged or suffers from a life-threatening disorder with no permanent cure.

The bill was necessary because there have been several reports about the exploitation of surrogate mothers, women who are kept confined during pregnancy and not allowed to meet their families. Further, some women do it repeatedly for a paltry amount thus putting their own bodies at risk. Ballpark estimations by Indian Council of Medical Research are around 2,000-odd babies per year through commercial surrogacy — when a woman is paid a prefixed sum for renting her womb. CII figures say surrogacy is a \$2.3 billion industry fed by lack of regulation and poverty. The 228th report of the Law Commission had recommended prohibition of commercial surrogacy. Commercial surrogacy is allowed only in Russia, Ukraine and California(US).

The Bill now requires all surrogacy clinics to be registered. Clinics can charge for these services but the surrogate mother cannot be paid. The national and state surrogacy boards will be the regulating authorities.

10. Government conducting disinvestment through Exchange Traded Funds(ETFs)

The government is increasingly using the exchange-traded fund (ETF) route for disinvestment. In disinvestment through the ETF route, the government sells part of its equity holdings in select PSUs to a fund company which runs an ETF. Once the government sells its equity stakes to the ETF, the fund company then sells units in this readymade portfolio to thousands of public investors. Each of them get to partly own the basket of PSU stocks being offloaded by the government. Though ETF portfolios are made up of stocks that the government is keen to sell and not necessarily those that are best buys for investors, at the time of the offer, investors have preferred buying ETFs because they find them less risky when compared to buying stake in Individual companies.

11. Indian Navy launches **Information Fusion Centre (IFC)** to boost maritime security

IFC is based at the Indian Navy's **Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC)** at Gurugram in the National Capital Region. IMAC is the single point centre on Indian Navy, linking all the coastal radar chains to generate a seamless real-time picture of the nearly 7,500km coastline. The IFC-IOR is capable of tracking and monitoring 75,000-1.5 lakh

shipping traffic in the region in real-time round the clock.

12. One of the most active volcanoes of Indonesia, **Mount Soputan** volcano, erupted recently.

Indonesia lies in an area known as the Ring of Fire, and hence is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Ring of Fire, is a long horseshoe-shaped seismically active belt of earthquake epicenters, volcanoes, and tectonic plate boundaries that fringes the Pacific basin. Most of the world's earthquakes, and approximately 75 percent of the world's volcanoes occur within the Ring of Fire.

13. The Lok Sabha has passed the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016**

The bill defines a transgender person as a person whose gender does not match the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-men or trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons having socio-cultural identities such as kinnar, hijras, aravani, and jogta. The Bill aims to stop discrimination against a transgender person in various sectors such as education, employment, and healthcare. It also directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes for them. The Bill states that a person will be recognised as transgender on the basis of a certificate of identity issued through the district screening committee. This certificate will be a proof of identity as transgender and confer rights under this Bill.

However, this bill was subjected to severe criticism by transgender and intersex groups, who feel that far from protecting the rights of the trans community it will end up curtailing the very rights already granted by the Supreme Court in the NALSA verdict.

Though a parliamentary standing committee had recommended changes to the bill, in consultation with various stakeholders, the government had decided to pass the original bill from 2016, which has raised concerns from the transgender community.

The Standing Committee, in its July 2017 report, suggested some modifications and additions to the draft. The Committee felt that the definition violated the principle that transgender persons have a right to self-identification of their gender. A district screening committee is likely to involve an element of medical, biological or mental assessment, which would violate the rights of transgender persons rights under Article 19 (freedom of expression) and Article 21 (right to life) of the Indian Constitution. To broaden the ambit of protection, the committee proposed the use of the term "gender identity" and "gender expression".

14. Ministry of Women and Child Development has released a draft National Child Protection Policy.

The draft was prepared on the prodding of the Supreme Court in the wake of the Muzaffarpur shelter abuse case. As per the draft, the policy will apply to all institutions, and organisations (including corporate and media houses), government or private sector.

The draft policy recommends that all organisations must have a code of conduct based on zero tolerance of child abuse and exploitation. It requires organisations to lay down that employees don't use language or behaviour that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate. Further, it states that Institutions should also designate a staff member to ensure that procedures are in place to ensure the protection of children as well as to report any abuse. Any individual who suspects physical, sexual or emotional abuse must report it to the helpline number 1098, police or a

child welfare committee.

15. Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) authorises 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt online communications and data.

The 10 agencies include - Intelligence Bureau, Narcotics Control Bureau, Enforcement Directorate, Central Board of Direct Taxes, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Bureau of Investigation, National Investigation Agency Cabinet Secretariat (RAW), Directorate of Signal Intelligence (For service areas of Jammu & Kashmir, North-East and Assam only), and Commissioner of Police, Delhi.

Critics have described the move as an incremental step towards a surveillance state. However, there are those who argue that the right to privacy is not absolute. Surveillance is essential to ensure national security and pre-empt terrorist threats, and it is in the very nature of surveillance that it must take place outside the public eye. Consequently, the regime is justified as it strikes a pragmatic balance between the competing values of privacy and security.

16. **Winter Solstice** was celebrated on **December 21<sup>st</sup> 2018**.

Solstice, either of the two moments in the year when the Sun's apparent path is farthest north or south from Earth's Equator. In the Northern Hemisphere the summer solstice occurs on June 20 or 21 and the winter solstice on December 21 or 22. The situation is exactly the opposite in the Southern Hemisphere, where the seasons are reversed. At the winter solstice the day is the year's shortest, and at the summer solstice it is the year's longest. The term solstice also is used in reference to either of the two points of greatest deviation of the ecliptic (the Sun's apparent annual path) from the celestial equator.

When the winter solstice happens in the Northern Hemisphere, the North Pole is tilted about  $23.4^\circ$  ( $23^\circ 27'$ ) away from the Sun. Because the Sun's rays are shifted southward from the Equator by the same amount, the vertical noon rays are directly overhead at the Tropic of Capricorn ( $23^\circ 27'$  S). Six months later the South Pole is inclined about  $23.4^\circ$  away from the Sun. On this day of the winter solstice in the Southern Hemisphere, the Sun's vertical overhead rays progress to their northernmost position, the Tropic of Cancer ( $23^\circ 27'$  N).

17. The government releases a stamp, coin to commemorate Odisha's **Paika rebellion**

When the British started tinkering with the revenue system in **1803**, the farming community of Odisha rose in rebellion. At that critical juncture, Bakshi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar — the military chief of the King of Khurda led his motley army of Paikas forcing the British East India Company forces to retreat. The rebellion came to be known as Paika Bidroh (Paika rebellion).

The rebellion, by the landed militia of Khurda called Paiks, predates the first war of independence in 1857 but did not get similar recognition. It took place when the British East India company wrested the rent-free land that had been given to the Paiks for their military service to the Kingdom of Khurda

18. Sheikh Hasina wins third consecutive term as Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

The national politics in Bangladesh has been largely dominated by two parties, the ruling Awami League (led by Sheikh Hasina) and the BNP. The relationship between India and Bangladesh has always been determined by the political party in power in Dhaka. Whenever

Awami League comes to power, the relationship between the two countries is very strong, while when BNP comes to power, the relationship is just cordial.

The return of the Awami League in 2008 dramatically changed the nature of India-Bangladesh engagement on every front. A plethora of connectivity projects, unthinkable earlier, are either in place or in advanced stages of negotiation. While trans-shipment of goods using river ports and roads is on, many bus and train routes have been operationalised. A bus service from Kolkata to the northeastern region through Bangladesh has started, thus shortening time and distance to the region. The land boundary issue in north Bengal has been sorted out alongside amicable settlement of a long-standing maritime boundary dispute and neither of the sides is too keen to hype their differences from Teesta water-sharing to illegal border trade. Power and energy sector cooperation is another of many bilateral achievements. The flow of tourists has increased to such an extent that Bangladesh has proposed to set up a diplomatic mission in Chennai.

India has contributed towards security cooperation from training to interception of exchanges between groups hostile to the region's stability, averting attacks on the country's top establishments. Maintaining stability is India's first contribution to Bangladesh. There are about a dozen agreements amounting to \$10 billion of Indian private investment in Bangladesh. A \$7.5 billion Line of Credit has been approved for infrastructure and other projects in Bangladesh.

19. The Reserve Bank of India has shortlisted six major IT companies, including TCS, Wipro and IBM India, to set up a wide-based digital Public Credit Registry (PCR)

A public credit registry is an information repository that collates all loan information of individuals and corporate borrowers. A credit repository helps banks distinguish between a bad and a good borrower and accordingly offer attractive interest rates to good borrowers and higher interest rates to bad borrowers.

The move is based on the recommendations of a committee, headed by **Y.M. Deosthalee**. PCR will address issues such as information asymmetry, improve access to credit and strengthen the credit culture among consumers. It can also address the bad loan problem staring at banks, as corporate debtors will not be able to borrow across banks without disclosing existing debt. A PCR may also help raise India's rank in the global ease of doing business index.

20. India's longest railroad bridge, The Bogibeel bridge, was inaugurated recently.

The Bogibeel bridge will connect the south bank of the Brahmaputra river in Assam's Dibrugarh district with Silapathar in Dhemaji district, bordering Arunachal Pradesh. The bridge is 4.94 km long. The double decker rail and road bridge, on the Bramhaputra river, will cut down the train-travel time between Tinsukia in Assam to Naharlagun town of Arunachal Pradesh by more than 10 hours. The railways have reduced the distance between Dhemaji and Dibrugarh from 500 Kms to 100 kms

21. MSME Ministry releases a strategic action plan to boost MSME Exports

Under MSMEs' action plan, the National Resource Centre for MSME Exporters will engage with various international agencies including UN organizations to promote procurement from Indian MSMEs and further enhance their capabilities. The ministry has recommended a detailed analysis of various trade agreements, including FTAs and bilateral and multilateral

trade agreements, to identify areas of concern for MSMEs in the strategic action plan titled '**Unlocking the Potential of MSME Exports**'.

The governing council will be chaired by Secretary, MSME and co-chaired by Development Commissioner in MSME Ministry. Further, it would also include senior officials and members from MSME Ministry, Commerce Ministry, MSME Export Promotion Councils, Export Development Authorities and Commodity Boards.

22. RBI has constituted a panel on '**Economic capital framework**'. It will be headed by Ex-RBI governor Bimal Jalan.

The government was seeking to transfer a surplus of Rs 3.6 lakh crore, more than a third of the total Rs 9.6 lakh crore reserves of the central bank to the government. The ministry had suggested that this surplus can be managed jointly by the RBI and the government. The Finance Ministry had felt that the existing economic capital framework, which governs the RBI's capital requirements and terms for the transfer of its reserves to the government, is based on a very conservative assessment of risk by the central bank.

The RBI has contended that this attempt by the government to dip into its reserves can adversely impact macro-economic stability. The Finance Ministry had argued that the current framework was unilaterally adopted by the RBI in July 2017 because both the government nominees on the Board were not present during the meeting. The government did not accede to this framework and has since then been constantly seeking discussions with the RBI. The government is of the view that RBI has over-estimated its capital reserves requirements resulting in excess capital of Rs 3.6 lakh crore.

The government has proposed that the use of these funds should be decided in consultation with the RBI. The RBI, however, feels strongly that using central bank reserves has pitfalls. In its opinion, this does not tantamount to any fresh income, and was essentially in the nature of issuing new securities to fund government expenditure. Not only does it hurt the government's commitment to fiscal prudence, it also affects the confidence of the financial markets.

23. President has constituted a separate **High Court for the State of Andhra Pradesh**.

The new High Court for Andhra Pradesh will be the 25th High Court in the country. The new Andhra HC is expected to function from a temporary structure in Amaravati till a permanent building is set up at the 'Justice City' being planned in Amaravati.

Constitutionally, **Article 214** provides that every State shall have a High Court, however, **Article 231** states that Article 214 shall not be a bar for constituting a common high court for two or more States.

**Only Parliament may by law establish a Common High Court for two or more States.**

This means that, unless Parliament by law establishes a Common High Court for two or more States, every State has to have a High Court, i.e., upon formation of a new State a new High Court is also formed. **Article 216** provides that every High Court shall consist of a Chief Justice and such other number of judges as the President may from time to time deem necessary to appoint. **Article 217** relates to appointment of HC judges.

24. Niti Aayog has released the Second Delta **Ranking of the Aspirational Districts** Programme. The ranking details the incremental progress achieved by the districts during June to October this year across six key development sectors.

Aspirational Districts Programme was launched in January 2018. It aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country. The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

The districts have been ranked in a transparent basis on parameters across various performance indicators like Health and Nutrition, Education, Skill Development and Basic Infrastructure among others. The rankings are based on the data that is publicly available through the Champions of Change Dashboard, which includes data entered on a real-time basis at the district level.

25. The Lok Sabha has passed the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018**, also known as, Triple Talaq Bill.

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.

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.

Further, it also states that 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.

26. **26th National Children's Science Congress (NCSC)** is being held in Odisha. With the theme "**Science, Technology and Innovation for a Clean, Green and Healthy Nation.**"

National Children's Science Congress (NCSC) is a nationwide Science Communication programme started in the year 1993. It is a programme of National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi. It is a forum for children in the age-group of 10-17 years, both from formal school system as well as from out of school, to exhibit their creativity and innovativeness and more particularly their ability to solve a societal problem experienced locally using by method of science.

27. The Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion recently issued a clarification to the existing rules pertaining to **Foreign Direct Investment in e-commerce companies.**

E-commerce companies can operate under two different models in India. The first is the

marketplace model where the e-commerce firm simply acts as a platform that connects buyers and sellers. FDI is allowed in e-commerce companies in this model. The second model is inventory-based where the inventory of goods sold on the portal is owned or controlled by the e-commerce company. FDI is not allowed under this model.

From February 1, 2019, e-commerce companies running marketplace platforms cannot sell products through companies, and of companies, in which they hold equity stake.

This move was taken after it was noticed that big e-commerce companies while not owning inventory themselves, have been providing a platform for their group companies. These controlled or owned vendors may then be able to offer discounts to customers that competitors may not be able to match.

The government has said that e-commerce entities will have to maintain a level playing field, and ensure that they do not directly or indirectly influence the sale price of goods and services.

**28. NITI Aayog launches Global Hackathon on Artificial Intelligence**

NITI Aayog in partnership with Perlin, a Singapore-based AI start up, has launched '**AI 4 All Global Hackathon**' to further expand the idea of 'Artificial Intelligence, AI for All' articulated in the National AI Strategy. The challenge seeks to develop solutions in distributed computing and privacy preserving techniques, such as multi-party computation, in artificial intelligence. It invites developers, students, start-ups and companies to develop AI applications to make significant positive social and economic impact for India.

The objective of this hackathon is to promote awareness and subsequently develop solutions that deliver the twin benefit of efficient computing to address the infrastructure challenges, while also not compromising on privacy of data for training AI algorithms.

**29. India submits Sixth National Report to the Convention of Biological Diversity**

India is among the first five countries in the world, the first in Asia and the first among the biodiversity-rich megadiverse countries to have submitted the report. The report provides an update on the progress in the achievement of 12 **National Biodiversity Targets (NBT)** developed under the convention process, in line with the 20 global Aichi biodiversity targets. The report highlights that while India has exceeded or overachieved two of the NBTs, it is on track to achieve eight NBTs and with respect to the remaining two NBTs, India is striving to meet the targets by the stipulated time of 2020.

While globally, biodiversity is facing increasing pressure on the account of habitat fragmentation and destruction, invasive alien species, pollution, climate change and overuse of resources, India is one of the few countries where forest cover is on the rise.

With well over 20 percent of its total geographical area under biodiversity conservation, India has exceeded the terrestrial component of 17 percent of Aichi target 11 and 20 percent of corresponding NBT relating to areas under biodiversity management.

India has also made noteworthy achievement towards NBT relating to access and benefit sharing (ABS) by operationalizing the Nagoya Protocol on ABS.

Having published the first internationally recognized certificate of compliance (IRCC) under the Protocol in 2015, India has since published nearly 75 per cent of the IRCCs published so far on ABS Clearing House.

**30. Cabinet approves submission of India's Second Biennial Update Report to UNFCCC**

The second biennial update report aims to provide an update to India's first biennial report to the United Nation's body on climate change.

The report has been prepared based on a range of studies conducted at the national level. It has undergone a multitier review process, through peer review, review by Technical Advisory Committee of Experts chaired by Additional Secretary (Climate Change) and by National Steering Committee chaired by Secretary. The report contains five major components - national circumstances, national greenhouse gas inventory, mitigation actions, finance, technology and capacity building needs and support received and domestic monitoring, reporting and verification arrangements.

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