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# CURRENT AFFAIRS

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## Current Affairs (21 to 31 January, 2019)

### 1. National News

#### 1.1 Kumbh will generate Rs 1.2 lakh crore revenue

The Kumbh Mela, which began on January 15 and will continue till March 4, is expected to generate a revenue of Rs 1.2 lakh crore for Uttar Pradesh, says apex industry body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Although the Kumbh Mela is a spiritual gathering, the economic activities associated with it generate employment for over six lakh workers across various sectors, the CII said in a report.

The Uttar Pradesh government has allocated Rs 4,200 crore for the 49-day mela this time, which is over thrice the budget of the Maha Kumbh in 2013, making the mega pilgrimage perhaps the costliest ever.

The hospitality sector aims at employing 250,000 people, airlines and airports around 150,000 and tour operators around 45,000 people. The employment numbers in eco-tourism and medical tourism are being estimated at 85,000, says the CII study.

Apart from this there will be around 55,000 new jobs in the unorganized sector comprising tour guides, taxi drivers, interpreters, volunteers etc. This will lead to increase in income levels for government agencies and individual traders.

Attracting a massive number of foreign tourists from various countries like Australia, UK, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, New Zealand, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, the Kumbh is also a festival of the world.

“The ‘mela’ is expected to generate a revenue of Rs 1,200 billion for Uttar Pradesh, the state where it is being held, while neighbouring states like Rajasthan, Uttarkhand, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh will also benefit from the enhanced revenue generation with a large number of national and foreign tourists expected to explore other destinations,” the report said.

“The UP government has allocated Rs 4,200 crore for 2019 Kumbh Mela. The previous state government had spent around Rs 1,300 crore for the Maha Kumbh, which was held in 2013,” state Finance Minister Rajesh Agarwal had told PTI.

The area of the mela has also been doubled to 3,200 hectares as compared to 1,600 hectares in the previous melas.

The Kumbh is a unique with a massive gathering of both rural and urban population and also has a huge dispersal factor as people travel long distances across the country. In order to house this multitude, authorities have erected a mini-city of more than 4,000 tents. The city is being lit by installing over 40,000 LED lights, say local authorities. Overhauling of key infrastructure has been done, including upgrading nine railways stations and construction of a new airport terminal in Prayagraj.

The setting up of this new city in the huge mela area involves 250 km roads and 22 pontoon bridges, which will make it the largest temporary city in the world.

The kumbh is thus expected to generate direct and indirect business activities, the fruits of which would hopefully benefit the economy not only of Uttar Pradesh, but that of India as a whole, the CII document says.

Around 12 crore people are expected to visit the Kumbh between now and Maha Shivratri on March 4, when the mela will come to a close.

## 1.2 Quota for poor not aimed at forward castes: Centre to HC

The Centre on Monday contended before the Madras High Court that a recent amendment to the Constitution providing 10% reservation in jobs and higher education to 'economically weaker sections (EWS)' in the open competition category, was "not a communal reservation" aimed at the so called "forward castes."

Appearing before a Division Bench of Justices S. Manikumar and Subramonium Prasad, Additional Solicitor General G. Rajagopal said the intent of the constitutional amendment was to provide reservations on the basis of economic criteria to all communities other than those already benefiting from reservations.

### Tussle over terms

When the senior judge pointed out that providing reservations for people except those who were socially and educationally backward as well as those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would naturally refer to 'forward caste,' the ASG said, the right term that could be used was 'other communities' and not 'forward caste.'

He also contended that what had been intended for the EWS was vertical and not horizontal reservation. However, insisting on written submissions, the judges ordered notices, returnable by February 18, to the Centre as well as the State government on a writ petition filed by DMK organising secretary R.S. Bharathi challenging the amendment.

Opposing the petition vigorously, the ASG accused the petitioner, a Rajya Sabha MP, of having filed the case with a political motive. “He is not an aggrieved party because he was part of the process through which a Bill to amend the Constitution was passed by the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha, no matter in which way he voted,” Mr Rajagopal contended.

“His political party has personal interest and so he cannot maintain this writ petition. What they could not achieve in Parliament, they cannot achieve through a court of law. This is only a political game. They are trying to press their agenda. Having lost before one constitutional forum, can they misuse another constitutional forum?” Mr. Rajagopal contended.

Recording his strong objection to such submissions, senior counsel P. Wilson, representing the writ petitioner, said: “I thought he’ll reply to my arguments legally but he is replying politically.” The counsel said providing reservations based on economic criteria would amount to altering the basic structure of the Constitution.

Asserting that the intention of framers of the Constitution was to provide reservations to undo historic wrongs against the oppressed and backward classes, Mr Wilson said, unlike caste, which gets attached to a person by birth and remains until death, economic status of a person was a fluctuating factor.

Further, the Union Cabinet had now decided to fix family income of less than ₹8 lakh per annum to determine EWS, he said and argued that “tomorrow, the State may even say that a person owning only one Audi car will be eligible for reservations under EWS category. The amendment paves way for complete arbitrariness in fixing the economic criteria.”

### 1.3 Aadhaar is now passport to Nepal and Bhutan

According to the latest reports, Indians under 15 and over 65 years of age, travelling to [Nepal](#) and [Bhutan](#) can now use their Aadhaar cards as a valid travel document. The information has been relayed by the Home Ministry. However, Indians who do not fall inside these two age brackets will not be permitted to use Aadhaar cards to travel to these two countries.

It is important to note here that Indians travelling to Nepal and Bhutan do not need a visa if they have valid passports, a photo ID card issued by the Indian government, or an election ID card issued by the Election Commission of [India](#).

Erstwhile, the rule stated that people over 65, and under 15 years of age could show their PAN card, driving license, Central Government Health Service card, or ration card to prove their

identity when travelling to these two nations. Aadhaar cards were not permissible. Now, Aadhaar card issued by the Unique Identity Authority of India permits the use of this card in Nepal and Bhutan. However, it should be kept in mind that an emergency certificate and identity certificate that may be issued by the Indian Embassy in Nepal, will be valid for a single journey back to India. Furthermore, citizens between 15 to 18 years of age would be permitted to travel between India and Nepal if provided with an identity certificate issued by the principal of the child's school in the correct form.

When families travel together to Nepal or Bhutan, only one adult member needs to have valid travel papers. Then again, the other members would be required to have some proof of photographic identity that could prove their relationship with each other.

## 2. International News

### 2.1 Bill may not help many Bangladeshi nationals

Only a small number of Bangladeshi nationals are likely to benefit from the Citizenship Amendment Bill, as fewer than 200 people from the neighbouring country have so far availed the long-term visas (LTVs), a senior Home Ministry official said.

The number of LTVs issued by the Union Home Ministry to Bangladeshi nationals from 2011 to January 8, 2019, is just 187, the official told PTI.

“There cannot be too many Bangladeshis applying for the Indian nationality under the proposed new law. Otherwise, they would have already taken the LTVs for which criteria are the same,” the official said.

Of the 187 LTVs granted to Bangladeshi nationals, only two were given in 2018, three in 2017, 50 LTVs in 2016, 26 in 2015, 74 in 2014, 27 in 2012 and four in 2011. No LTV was issued to any Bangladeshi national in 2013.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh had already said the Bill would apply to all the States and the Union Territories and the beneficiaries could reside anywhere in the country.

“The burden of these persecuted migrants will be shared by the whole country. Assam alone would not have to bear the entire burden,” he had said. Home Ministry sources said the Ministry was considering a proposal to provide incentives to those people who want to settle in places other than the

### 2.2 Pak. Shares draft pact on Kartarpur corridor

Indian and Pakistani officials are expected to meet next month to discuss a “draft agreement” on the Kartarpur corridor in Punjab, sources confirmed. The meeting follows the Pakistan government’s announcement that it had shared the draft of the agreement, to be signed by the two governments, for “facilitation of (Indian) Sikh *Yatrees* to visit the Gurudwara, Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, Narowal, Pakistan”.

In a statement on Monday, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the draft had been shared “in line with Prime Minister Imran Khan’s commitment” to open the pilgrim corridor in time for the 550th Birth Anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak in November 2019. The Pakistan government also appointed its Director-General (South Asia & SAARC), Dr. Muhammad Faisal

“as the focal person on Pakistan’s side and requested that the Government of India designate a focal person at its end”, the statement said, and called for an Indian delegation to travel to Islamabad to finalise the agreement.

### **Peace effort**

“Pakistan would continue with its efforts to bring peace and stability in the region,” the statement added.

The Ministry of External Affairs didn’t comment on the statement from Islamabad. However, sources said India has been working on modalities for arrangements for the corridor on the Indian side, and is expected to meet with Pakistani officials in February this year.

The Kartarpur initiative is seen as an exceptional case for the Indian government, which has refused to open talks with Pakistan on any other issue until concerns on terror are addressed. It has agreed to work with Pakistan on the plan to help Sikh pilgrims access the sacred site, which is just four kilometres across the border from India.

Among the issues that need to be finalised are the exact point of crossing over for the pilgrims, the identity cards required, as well as security procedures and guarantees needed by both sides. In a previous draft, Pakistan had proposed a 14-point agreement, which included visa free travel for the pilgrims who would be processed at checkpoints on both the Indian and Pakistani side. The agreement included setting up a database of all pilgrims visiting, with a suggested cap of 500 pilgrims per day.

Earlier, the MEA had said there should be no restriction on the number of pilgrims or visiting hours. However, given security protocols, the Ministry of Home Affairs concluded that a cap would be necessary. The draft agreement from Pakistan also proposes to keep the corridor open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day.

Work on the infrastructure for the corridor, which was started at ceremonies held in Dera Baba Nanak in India and Kartarpur in Pakistan in November 2018, has also begun.

On Monday, the Pakistan government released photographs of work on an expressway to be used to shuttle the pilgrims from the border and for levelling work being undertaken near the Kartarpur shrine.



## 3. Polity and Governance

### 3.1 EC mulls legal action on anti EVM campaign

The Election Commission on Monday said it was examining the option of taking legal action on the claims made at a press conference in London that the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used by the electoral body could be hacked and that the 2014 Lok Sabha polls were rigged.

Syed Shuja, a U.S.-based cyberexpert levelled the allegations via Skype at an event hosted by the Indian Journalist Association and the Foreign Press Association in London. He claimed that he had intended to travel to the U.K. from an undisclosed location in the U.S. four days ago but was attacked and injured and was unable to travel.

He also alleged that the individuals who were meant to bring an EVM to the venue for him to be able to demonstrate alleged tampering had been “offered a great deal of money” and “decided not to show up.”

“It has come to the notice of the Election Commission of India that an event claiming to demonstrate EVMs used by ECI can be tampered with, has been organised in London. Whereas the ECI has been wary of becoming a party to this motivated slugfest, ECI firmly stands by the empirical facts about the foolproof nature of ECI-EVMs deployed in elections in India,” said the Commission.

“It needs to be reiterated that these EVMs are manufactured in Bharat Electronics Limited and Electronics Corporation of India Limited under very strict supervisory and security conditions and there are rigorous standard operating procedures meticulously observed at all stages under the supervision of a committee of eminent technical experts constituted way back in 2010. It is being separately examined as to what legal action can and should be taken in the matter,” the EC said.

Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said: “We cannot deny it, we cannot affirm it. But, it is clear that it adds to the significant body of thoughts which has grave doubts about the authenticity, objectivity and correctness of these machines.”

### 3.2 SC to take ‘in-chamber’ decision on Art. 35A plea

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it will be taking an “in-chamber” decision on the listing of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of Article 35-A, which provides special rights and privileges to permanent residents of [Jammu and Kashmir](#).

The oral observation came from a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi in response to an oral mentioning for early hearing of the petitions.

### **Violates Statute**

In August last year, the court indicated that it would consider the question of whether Article 35A was violative of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

However, at that time, the Centre and J&K government had sought an adjournment on the ground that an interlocutor was carrying on dialogues with the State's stakeholders.

The special status was bestowed on Jammu and Kashmir by incorporating Article 35A in the Constitution. Article 35A was incorporated by an order of President Rajendra Prasad in 1954 on the advice of the Nehru Cabinet. Parliament was not consulted when the President incorporated Article 35A into the Constitution through a Presidential Order issued under Article 370. Article 368 (i) of the Constitution mandates that only the Parliament can amend the Constitution by introducing a new article.

Article 35A gives the J&K Legislature a carte blanche to decide the 'permanent residents' of the State and grant them special rights and privileges in State public sector jobs, acquisition of property in the State, scholarships and other public aid and welfare programmes. The provision mandates that no act of the State legislature coming under the ambit of Article 35A can be challenged for violating the Indian Constitution or any other law of the land.

The three-judge Bench will decide whether or not to refer the issue to the Constitution Bench. One of the main writ petitions has been filed by the NGO, We the Citizens, which challenges the validity of both Article 35A and Article 370.

It argues that four representatives from Kashmir were part of the Constituent Assembly involved in the drafting of the Constitution and the State of Jammu and Kashmir was never accorded any special status in the Constitution. Article 370 was only a 'temporary provision' to help bring normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir and strengthen democracy in that State. The Constitution makers did not intend Article 370 to be a tool to bring permanent amendments, like Article 35A, in the Constitution.

The petition said Article 35A was against the "very spirit of oneness of India" as it created a "class within a class of Indian citizens". It said restricting citizens from other States from getting employment or buying property within Jammu and Kashmir is a violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.

### 3.3 SC refuses to stay amendments to SC/ST Act

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to stay the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act of 2018, which nullified the [controversial March 20 apex court judgment](#) diluting the stringent provisions of the Dalit protection law.

The government had brought in the amendments, saying the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people continue to face the same social stigma, poverty and humiliation that they have been subjected to for centuries.

The March 20 judgment allowed anticipatory bail to those booked for committing atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people. The original 1989 Act barred anticipatory bail.

The verdict saw a huge backlash across the country. Several died in protests and crores worth of property were destroyed. The government filed a review petition in the Supreme Court and subsequently amended the 1989 Act back to its original form.

A Bench, led by Justice A.K. Sikri, declined the plea to stay the operation of the amendments and transferred the plea to be tagged along with the review.

#### **Petitions challenge amendments**

In August, several petitions were filed challenging the amendments. The lead petitioner, advocate Prithvi Raj Chauhan, even called the amendments a “blunder” and a violation of the fundamental right to equality and personal liberty. The Supreme Court, however, refused to stay the implementation of the amendments.

The government had responded that there had been no decrease in the atrocities committed on SC/ST people despite the laws meant to protect their civil rights. It said the sad state of affairs was despite the existence of 195 special courts across 14 States to exclusively try Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) cases.

As per National Crime Records Bureau statistics, there is no decrease in the crimes against SC/ST people. The number of cases registered under the PoA in 2014 was 47,124, 44839 in 2015 and 47,338 in 2016.

In 2014, 28.8% of the cases were convicted. The acquittal was 71.2% and pendency of cases 85.3%. The next year saw 25.8% convictions, 74.2% acquittal and 87.3% pendency. In 2016, the convictions was 24.9%, acquittal 75.1% and pendency 89.3%.

“The Act of 1989 is the least which the country owes to this section of society who have been denied several civil rights since generations and have been subjected to indignities, humiliations and harassment,” the government had argued.

### 3.4 SC to hear petition on Bhopal gas leak payout

The [Supreme Court](#) on Monday decided to examine in April a curative petition by the government for more compensation to the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy, over and above the \$470 million paid by Union Carbide.

The petition, which came up before a Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, said the compensation, determined in 1989, was based on the assumptions of truth unrelated to realities.

In 2011, the Supreme Court issued notice to the Union Carbide Corporation, now a wholly owned subsidiary of Dow Chemicals Co., U.S.; Dow Chemicals; McLeod Russel India, Kolkata; and Eveready Industries, Kolkata.

#### **₹7,400 crore**

The Centre had sought reconsideration of the May 4, 1989 and October 3, 1991 orders of the court, contending that the 1989 settlement was seriously impaired. It has sought ₹7,400 crore in additional funds from the pesticide company.

The tragedy unfolded in [Bhopal](#) on the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984, when the highly dangerous and toxic gas, Methyl Isocyanate, escaped from the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL). It resulted in the death of 5,295 humans and injuries to 5,68,292 persons, besides a loss of livestock and property of 5,478 persons.

The court has already dismissed a curative petition filed by the CBI in 2010 for increasing the punishment.

#### **‘Colossal failure’**

The agency had wanted to correct the Supreme Court’s “colossal failure of justice” in 1996 when it chose to dismiss the gas leak as the result of an act of negligence, and not culpable homicide, by former Union Carbide chairman Warren Anderson and his Indian employees. Mr. Anderson died in 2014. Dismissing the curative plea in 2011, the court held that “no satisfactory

explanation has been given to file such curative petitions after about 14 years from the 1996 judgment.”

As a Bhopal court order sentencing Union Carbide executives to two years in jail sparked public outcry, the CBI moved the Supreme Court and wanted it to “restore” the criminal charge under Section 304 Part II of the IPC (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) against the accused. Those convicted included former Union Carbide India chairman Keshub Mahindra.

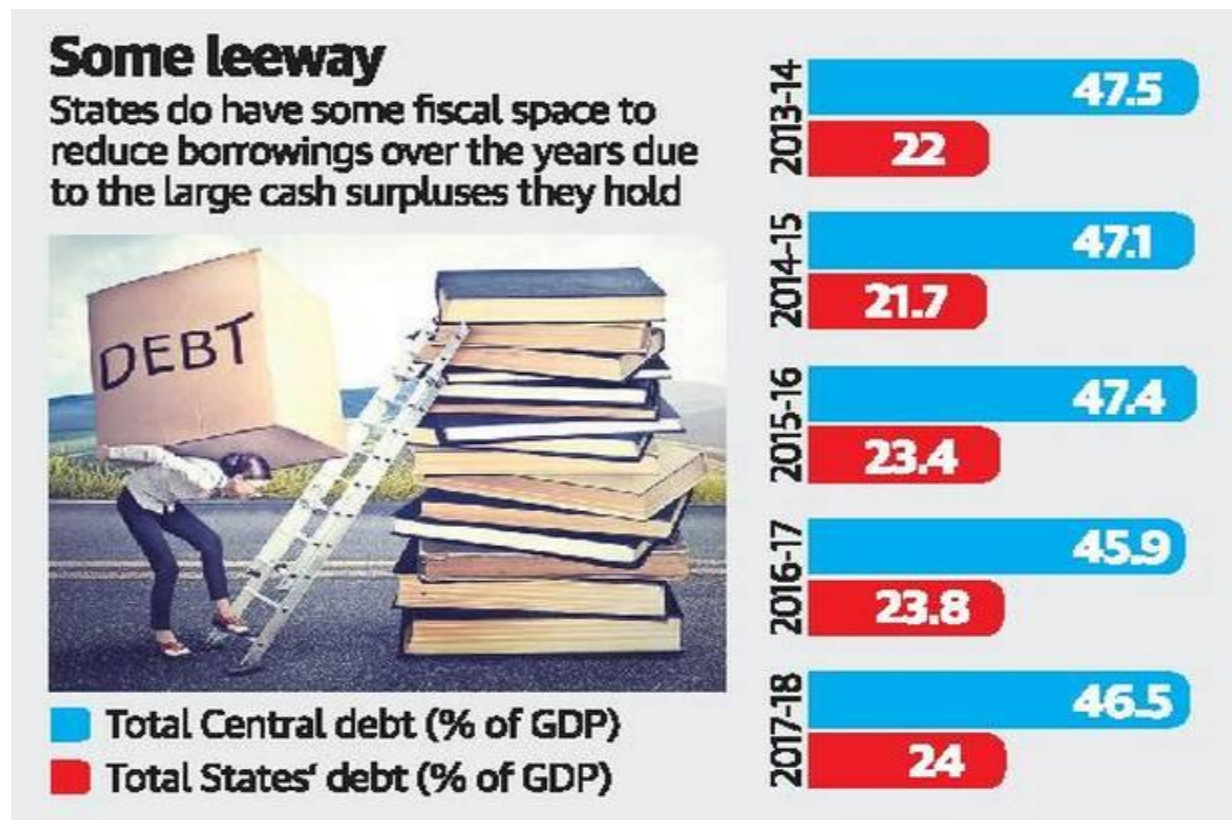
## 4. Economy

### 4.1 Centre's debt to GDP falls, states' rises

While the Centre is moving in the right direction in terms of meeting the N.K. Singh Committee recommendations on public debt, the States are moving in the opposite direction, data released by the government show.

According to the Status Paper on Government Debt for 2017-18, the Centre's total debt as a percentage of GDP reduced to 46.5% in 2017-18 from 47.5% as of March 31, 2014. The total debt of the States, however, has been rising over this period, to 24% in 2017-18, and is estimated to be 24.3% in 2018-19.

In absolute terms, the Centre's total debt increased from ₹56,69,429 crore at the end of March 2014 to ₹82,35,178 crore in 2017-18, representing a 45% increase. The total debt of the States increased from ₹24,71,270 crore to ₹40,22,090 crore over the same period, an increase of almost 63%.



Source: Department of Economic Affairs Status Paper on Government Debt

The N.K. Singh-headed FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee report had recommended the ratio to be 40% for the Centre and 20% for the States, respectively, by 2023. It said that the 60% consolidated Central and State debt limit was consistent with international best practices, and was an essential parameter to attract a better rating from the credit ratings agencies.

“The Central debt has been within control because the government has been trying to stick by-and-large to the fiscal deficit parameters,” Ranen Banerjee, leader, PwC India, said. “The increase in the debt stock at the State level is worrying because they don’t have the wherewithal to service the debt if it goes beyond a certain point. They could then start getting into a debt trap situation.”

### **UDAY bonds**

“Outstanding liabilities of States have increased sharply during 2015-16 and 2016-17, following the issuance of UDAY bonds in these two years, which was reflected in an increase in liability-GDP ratio from 21.7% at end-March 2015 to 23.4% at end-March 2016 and further to 23.8% at end-March 2017,” the status report said.

“The total outstanding liabilities as a percentage of GDP stood at 24% as at end-March 2018 and is expected to move upward to 24.3% at end-March 2019.” This, combined with the fact that ratings agencies have predicted that the combined fiscal deficit of the States to be 3.2% of GDP in financial year 2020 (higher than the prescribed 3%), and it begins to look increasingly unlikely that the States will meet their 20% debt-GDP ratio target by 2023. The report, however, says that the States do have some fiscal space to reduce their borrowing in the coming years due to the large cash surpluses they hold.

“State governments as a group have exhibited a tendency to hold large cash surpluses/investments in Cash Balance Investment Account on a consistent basis while at the same time resorting to market borrowings to finance their GFD (Gross Fiscal Deficit),” the report said.

“This indicates scope for reducing the quantum of market borrowings by State governments in case they bring down their cash surpluses (parked as investment in treasury bills of the Central government),” the report added.

## **4.2 FMCG sector to clock double digit growth**

The fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is expected to clock double digit growth in the current year, though the growth is likely to be lower than that of the previous year, which saw the sector benefit from the overall health of the economy and lower inflation.



According to the latest study by market research firm Nielsen, the FMCG industry is expected to grow between 11% and 12% in 2019, which is a tad lower than the 13.8% growth in 2018. Incidentally, the FMCG industry growth in the fourth quarter of 2018 was quite buoyant at 15.9%. Nielsen takes into account the calendar year while making projections. The growth in the current year will be primarily on the back of conducive macroeconomic environment, rural consumption, sustained benefits of GST regime and election impact, according to the study.

“Our projections suggest that the first half of the year (Jan.-Jun) will have decent double-digit growth, while industry growth in the second half will taper down to high single digits. Similar trends will be witnessed across the key super group of product categories viz Food, Personal Care & Home Care,” the Nielsen report stated.

While GDP is expected to be buoyant at 7.5% in 2019, Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) estimates for the year suggest that it will gradually increase. However, it will be within 5%, it added.

### **Crude prices**

The market research firm, however, added that crude prices in global markets and exchange rates would be the factors to watch out for.

Meanwhile, Nielsen expects the sustained government focus on rural infrastructure and surging non-farm income in rural areas to support rural FMCG consumption story. “Indian rural consumption story is projected to be continuing in 2019. Various farm level initiatives by the government including agri credit and direct subsidy transfer, along with orientation on minimum support prices for crops, are expected to boost farm income further,” it said, adding that rainfall performance and its spatial and geographical distribution need to be watched out for.

Interestingly, with the general elections scheduled later this year, Nielsen has highlighted how historical trends around elections in the last few years suggest that the FMCG industry demonstrates a stable to marginally lower growth in the election year.

Consumption growth in 2018 was led by favourable macros like growth in GDP, lower inflation and manufacturers passing on the benefits of margin expansion from the GST regime.



## 5. Science and Tech

### 5.1 ISRO launched military satellite

India successfully launched Microsat-R, a military satellite on board its Polar rocket PSLV C44, from the spaceport here on Thursday, in the first mission for the ISRO in 2019.

The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) blasted off from the first launchpad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at 11.37 pm at the end of a 28-hour countdown. In a textbook launch, the 44-metre tall, four-stage PSLV-C44 soared into the clear and starry night sky majestically and injected the 740-kg Microsat-R into orbit precisely 13 minutes and 30 seconds later.

ISRO scientists broke into celebration at the mission control centre here, about 130 km from Chennai, as the Microsat-R was released in a 274-km polar sun synchronous orbit, marking another success story for the space agency. Former ISRO chairmen Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan and AS Kiran Kumar were among those who witnessed the launch. The fourth stage of the rocket with co-passenger Kalamsat, a students' payload, would now be moved to a higher circular orbit, around 450 kms from earth, so as to establish an orbital platform for carrying out experiments.

#### **Military purpose**

The ISRO said it would take about 90 minutes for the fourth stage to reach the desired orbit. Microsat-R, an imaging satellite, is meant for military purposes, but the ISRO did not give any details about it. Built at a cost of around Rs 12 lakh, the Kalamsat is an experimental satellite for studying the communication system of nano satellites, which can be useful in many fields, predominantly disaster management. The PSLV C44 is the first launch for the country's space agency in 2019.

The PSLV-C44, assembled in 30 days, was the first mission of a new variant of the PSLV, called the PSLV-DL, as it was equipped with two strap-on configurations, the ISRO said. Usually, PSLVs were launched without any strap-ons (boosters) or were equipped with six strap-ons fixed around the rocket, but the ISRO, for the first time, used only two boosters for the mission, an official of the space agency said. He added that for the first time, the ISRO placed a satellite -- Microsat-R -- in a lower orbit, at around 274 kms from earth.

#### **Space Kidz India**

Contributed by college students and the members of a Chennai-based organisation -- Space Kidz India -- Kalamsat is the first to use PS4 (the fourth stage of the vehicle) as a platform to

orbit around the earth. “We have been working on the project for over six years now. These students are from various backgrounds and the youngest one is studying B.Sc Physics,” Space Kidz India CEO Srimathy Kesan told PTI. Kesan said Kalamsat was the lightest ever satellite to be launched by India.

## 6. Environment / Geography

### 6.1 Plastic waste imports to India go up

In spite of a ban on the import of plastic waste into India, the influx of PET bottles has quadrupled from 2017 to 2018 thanks to legal loophole, says a Delhi-based environmentalist organisation, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Smriti Manch (PDUSM).

“Indian firms are importing plastic scraps from China, Italy, Japan and Malawi for recycling and the imports of PET bottle scrap & flakes has increased from 12,000 tonnes in FY 16-17 to 48,000 tonnes in FY 17-18 growing @ 290%. India has already imported 25,000 MT in the first 3 months of FY 18-19,” says a note by the organisation.

#### Wide gap

Government and industry estimates suggest that India consumes about 13 million tonnes of plastic and recycles only about 4 million tonnes.

A lack of an efficient waste segregation system and inadequate collection is the root cause, according to experts, for much of the plastic not making its way to recycling centres.

**Expanding threat**

- Import of PET bottle scrap & flakes have increased from **12,000 MT** in FY 16-17 to **48,000 MT** in FY 17-18, growing at 290%
- India has already imported **25,000 MT** in the first 3 months of FY 18-19
- About **9 million** tonnes of plastic waste is generated in India annually
- Discarded PET bottles in India are typically collected by scrap dealers for **₹14-15/kg**. 90% of all PET bottles are recycled in India
- The production of plastic materials is done in more than **30,000 units** that are estimated to employ **4 million** people in India

■ The Indian packaging industry, the largest consumer of plastic, is valued at over **\$32 billion** and offers employment to more than **10 lakh** people

SOURCE: PDUSM, CENTRAL POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD, UNION ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY

To incentivise domestic plastic recycling units, the government had banned the import of plastic waste, particularly PET bottles in 2015. In 2016, an amendment allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in Special Economic Zones. It's this loophole that's been exploited.

A senior Union environment ministry official, who declined to be identified, told *The Hindu* that while the ministry couldn't vouch for whether such plastic imports had quadrupled, it was true that the imports had "substantially increased" and action was being contemplated. "We've been apprised of these imports and they're quite substantial. We're beginning internal investigations to see how this can be addressed," the official added.

Ravi Agrawal, director of Toxics Link, an organisation that works on plastic waste management, said that figures were "plausible" as China, once a major global importer of plastic waste for recycling, had banned such imports.

"It's possible that some of that is making its way to India but I can't be sure of these numbers," Mr. Agrawal said.

## 6.2 18 Indian institutions to study nitrogen pollution

**Scare in the air**  
Nitrogen, when released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, is considered 'reactive' and may be polluting and causing greenhouse gas (heat trapping) effect

**Some causes of nitrogen pollution**

- Emission from chemical fertilisers
- Burning of fossil fuels
- Emission from livestock manure

**Key threats due to nitrogen pollution**

- Biodiversity loss
- Pollution of rivers and seas
- Ozone depletion
- Health, economy and livelihoods

**India's nitrogen emissions grew at 52% from 1991 to 2001 and 69% from 2001 to 2011**

Eighteen research institutions in India are among a group of 50 institutions — called the South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH) — in the United Kingdom and South Asia that have secured £20 million (about ₹200 crore) from the U.K. government to assess and study the quantum and impact of "nitrogen pollution" in South Asia.

While nitrogen is the dominant gas in the atmosphere, it is inert and doesn't react. However, when it is released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, nitrogen is considered "reactive", and it may be polluting and even exert a potent greenhouse gas (heat trapping) effect.

“So far, we have focussed on carbon dioxide and its impact on [global warming](#). Nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) is 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide but isn't as prevalent in the atmosphere. However, this is poised to grow,” said N. Raghuram, Chairman, International Nitrogen Initiative (INI) and Professor of Biotechnology at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. “In the future, reactive nitrogen pollution will be a matter of significant global discussion and, unlike carbon, India and South Asia cannot wake up at the last minute, realising that it has no updated, scientific assessment of its inventory.”

Other than [air pollution](#), nitrogen is also linked to the loss of biodiversity, the pollution of rivers and seas, ozone depletion, health, economy, and livelihoods. Nitrogen pollution is caused, for example, by emissions from chemical fertilisers, livestock manure and burning fossil fuels. Gases such as ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) contribute to poor air quality and can aggravate respiratory and heart conditions, leading to millions of premature deaths across the world. Nitrate from chemical fertilisers, manure and industry pollutes the rivers and seas, posing a health risk for humans, fish, coral and plant life.

The Indian partner institutions are the Aligarh Muslim University, Centre for Marine Living Resources & Ecology, Council of Scientific & Industrial Research National Institute of Oceanography, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Indian Council of Agricultural Research-Indian Agricultural Research Institute and National Rice Research Institute, Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management Project Directorate- National Institute of Ocean Technology Campus, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Indian Ocean Rim Association Ecological Solutions, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, National Physical Laboratory, Society for Conservation of Nature, Sustainable India Trust, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) University.

Last year, Dr. Raghuram led a consortium of researchers who assessed trends in nitrogen emissions in India, where NO<sub>x</sub> emissions grew at 52% from 1991 to 2001 and 69% from 2001 to 2011. Though agriculture remained the largest contributor to nitrogen emissions, non-agricultural emissions of nitrogen oxides and nitrous oxide were growing rapidly, with sewage and fossil-fuel burning — for power, transport and industry — leading the trend. The SANH will study the impacts of the different forms of pollution to form a “coherent picture” of the nitrogen cycle. In particular, it will look at nitrogen in agriculture in eight countries — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

Tapan Adhya, Hub Co-Director for Science, who is from the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, said: “High doses of fertiliser input of nitrogen to agriculture combined with low nitrogen-use efficiency means that research on nitrogen pollution must be a priority for South Asia. This is emphasised by the scale of nitrogen subsidies across South Asia at around \$10



billion per year. Better nitrogen management will have huge economic and environmental benefits.”

### 6.3 India can't handle more big cats

While conservation efforts are aimed at increasing the tiger count in India, global experts and officials in the government suggest that India must also prepare for a new challenge — of reaching the limits of its management capacity.

Officially, India had 2,226 tigers as of 2014. An ongoing census is expected to reveal an update to these numbers. But Rajesh Gopal, head of the Global Tiger Forum, said that India's current capacity to host tigers ranged from 2,500-3,000 tigers.

Moreover, said another official, 25-35% of India's tigers now lived outside protected reserves.

With dwindling core forest as well as the shrinking of tiger corridors (strips of land that allow tigers to move unfettered across diverse habitat), officials said there were several challenges — alongside the traditional challenges of poaching and man-animal conflict — to India's success at tiger conservation. Recent attempts at translocating tigers to unpopulated reserves, such as Satkosia in Orissa, have ended badly, with one of the tigers dying.

Mr. Gopal was speaking at a conference of representatives from a group of countries who've signed a declaration to double tiger numbers by 2022, organised by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Barring China, all other tiger-range countries — Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, India and Nepal — were part of the conference in New Delhi on Monday.



Another official, involved in the ongoing census said the report — expected to be made public in May — will also, for the first time, discuss challenges of having a thriving tiger population.

“Overall, given the low availability of prey in some reserves, this is the capacity that can be supported. However, there are vast tracts of potential tiger habitat that can be used to improve prey density, develop tiger corridors and therefore support a much larger population,” said Y. Jhala of the [Wildlife](#) Institute of India (WII).

### **10,000-15,000**

K. Ullas Karanth, director, Centre for Wildlife Studies, however, said, “I would estimate the potential carrying capacity for tigers in India at 10,000 to 15,000, not the 3,000 we already have. When tiger recovery efforts began 50 years ago we had about 2,000 tigers.. If after all this effort and expenditure, we are satisfied with just 3,000 tigers, it points at a serious management problem: needlessly huge amount of money is being dumped repeatedly on the same 25,000-30,000 sq. km area where tigers are already at saturation densities, while other areas with potential for future recovery are starved of key investments.”

Since 2006, the WII has been tasked with coordinating the tiger estimation exercise. The once-in-four-years exercise calculated, in 2006, that India had only 1,411 tigers. This rose to 1,706 in 2010 and 2,226 in 2014 on the back of improved conservation measures and new estimation methods.

## 7. Security

### 7.1 India conducts 'largest coastal security drill

Ten years after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, India conducted its largest coastal defence drill, Exercise Sea Vigil, to test its preparedness along the entire 7,516.6 km-long-coastline and exclusive economic zone of the country.

The first of its kind exercise was conducted on January 22 and 23 and coordinated by the Navy.

“Exercise Sea Vigil aims to comprehensively and holistically validate the efficacy of the measures taken since 26/11. It aims to simultaneously activate the coastal security mechanism across all 13 coastal States and Union Territories,” the Navy said in a statement.

This involves the evaluation of critical areas and processes, including inter-agency coordination, information sharing and technical surveillance. “Multi agency audit and identification of gaps, shortfalls and incorporation of lessons learnt into Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are also the desired outcomes,” the Navy stated.

“In an effort to test the preparedness and coordination, some rogue elements tried to breach the surveillance network and reach the coast during the exercise,” an official said.

Post 26/11, the Navy was designated as the agency responsible for overall maritime security, including offshore and coastal security, while the Coast Guard was designated as the agency responsible for coastal security in territorial waters.

A multi-tiered patrol and surveillance mechanism with focus on technical surveillance and augmenting Maritime Domain Awareness through the coastal radar chain was adopted. Progress has been made in real-time information sharing through the National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) Network and improving intelligence and operational coordination. However, several measures are still in the implementation stage even after a decade.

### 7.2 India, South Africa to revise 22-year old strategic Partnership

[India](#) and South Africa will update their Strategic Partnership by agreeing on a comprehensive “roadmap” on the way ahead, as well as relaxing visa restrictions, when South African President Cyril Ramaphosa meets with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, officials said here.

Mr. Ramaphosa will be in India as the chief guest at the Republic Day parade on January 26, and will be accompanied by nine Ministers and a 50-member business delegation.



The Strategic Partnership between India and [South Africa](#), called the Red Fort Declaration, was signed in March 1997 by the then South African President Nelson Mandela and former PM H.D. Deve Gowda.

Officials said all aspects the partnership would be reviewed and updated with a three-year plan of action on security cooperation, trade and investment, tourism, harnessing the 'blue economy', maritime cooperation, agriculture, science and technology projects.

"We have MoUs in practically every area with South Africa. We want each of these areas to be taken up in a time-bound manner," said T.S. Tirumurti Secretary (Economic Relations) in the Ministry of External Affairs, briefing journalists ahead of the visit.

"This is going to be one important agreement, which will have all the areas on a roadmap with specific action plans," he added, describing the "catch-all" document that will be signed on Thursday. The two sides are also expected to explore new defence deals in the backdrop of the lifting of a 13-year old ban on South African defence firm Denel that was barred from doing business in India since 2005.

Denel was finally removed from the blacklist in September 2018 after the Central Bureau of Investigation filed a closure report and the Supreme Court subsequently dismissed corruption charges against the company.

The decision to take Denel off the blacklist was made after Mr. Ramaphosa made a personal intervention on the issue during his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Johannesburg last July.

"Yes, there had been a problem with Denel and we are happy that this issue was settled last year, Mr. Tirumurti said.

During his visit, Mr. Ramaphosa will also deliver the "First IBSA Gandhi Mandela Memorial Freedom Lecture", instituted by the Indian Council of World Affairs in Delhi. In an interview to television channel Wion in Davos on Wednesday, Mr. Ramaphosa said that he saw his visit to India as a "homecoming moment." "We want to promote trade and good relations between India and South Africa and celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's life and Nelson Mandela's life. Our history is the glue that binds our two countries together," he added, referring to India and South African links in their anti-colonial struggles.