



LIVE ONLINE PLATFORM
FOR GOVT. JOBS



CURRENT AFFAIRS

11th to 20th Nov.



95990 75552



www.neostencil.com

INDEX

1. National news

- 1.1 India, Singapore begin sea drills
- 1.3 4 Indian authors shortlisted for DSC Prize
- 1.4 Centre not keen on changing West Bengal to Bangala
- 1.5 India – specific Rafale add-ons after delivery of all 36 fighters
- 1.6 India steps up agro-diplomacy with China

2. International News

- 2.1 India's Act East Policy can meet OBOR Chinese envoy

3. Polity and Governance

- 3.1 French govt didn't guarantee Rafale deal Center tells SC
- 3.2 SC pulls up states for not recurring judges
- 3.3 EC warns parties on criminal cases

4. Economy

- 4.1 New index to check ease of doing agri-business
- 4.2 Is crop insurance scheme losing steam?
- 4.3 Trade deficit rises to \$17.13 bn
- 4.4 Talks on with 150 nations to reform WTO: Prabhu
- 4.5 Corruption no longer among top 3 hurdles to doing business in India

5. Science and Tech

- 5.1 ISRO invites foreign 'riders' to Venus
- 5.2 Cyclone clouds ISRO's GSAT-29 launch plan
- 5.3 GSAT-29 has a perfect launch
- 5.4 GROWTH-India telescopes first science observation

6. Environment / Geography

- 6.1 Emission tests fudges Green tribunal asks Volkswagen to deposit Rs 100Cr

7. Security

- 7.1 NSCN-K faction open to Naga peace talks
- 7.2 India, China agree to expand military ties
- 7.3 PM favours inclusive Indo-Pacific military ties

Current Affairs (11 to 20 November, 2018)

1. National News

1.1 India, Singapore begin sea drills

The 25th edition of the India-Singapore bilateral naval exercise, SIMBEX, has begun at the tri-services command in Port Blair.

The exercise, which kicked off on Saturday off the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, will conclude on November 21.

“Started as basic Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) exercises in 1994, today these exercises have graduated to complex maritime combat drills, including missile and torpedo firings, and shore-based intensive professional exchanges,” the Navy said in a statement.

12 ships to join drills

Seven ships from the Indian Navy and five ships from the Singapore Navy along with an Archer class submarine and a Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle will take part in the exercise.

Maritime patrol aircraft of both countries, P8I of Indian Navy and Fokker F50 from Singapore, will also take part.

The number of missiles and torpedo firings being undertaken are in fact unprecedented and perhaps the largest the Indian Navy has undertaken with any foreign Navy till date, the Navy added.

Logistical support

The two countries have vastly expanded their military cooperation in recent years under India's Act East policy. Late last year, the two countries signed a naval agreement which has a provision for mutual logistical support and gives India access to the Changi naval base.

India and Singapore are working on a trilateral exercise with an Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) country, likely Thailand, and eventually plan to scale it up to a multilateral format.

1.2 4 Indian authors shortlisted for DSC Prize

Four Indian authors and two authors of Pakistani origin have made it to the shortlist of the \$25,000 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2018. The names were announced at an event in the London School of Economics & Political Science on Wednesday.

The shortlisted writers are Jayant Kaikini for *No Presents Please* (translated from Kannada by Tejaswini Niranjana); Kamila Shamsie for *Home Fire*; Manu Joseph for *Miss Laila Armed And Dangerous*; Mohsin Hamid for *Exit West*; Neel Mukherjee for *A State Of Freedom*; and Sujit Saraf for *Harilal & Sons*.

Now in its eighth year, the DSC Prize is an international literary award focused on South Asian fiction writing. The jury panel this year included Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Claire Armitstead, Nandana Sen, Firdous Azim and Tissa Jayatilaka.

88 entries this year

Founded in 2010 by Surina Narula and Manhad Narula, the DSC Prize has helped raise the profile of South Asian writing. Works are selected on the basis of how poignantly they bring alive a spectrum of themes and emotions relevant to contemporary life in the region.

This year the prize received a record 88 entries. Commenting on the shortlist, Surina Narula, co-founder of the prize, said, “The shortlist represents the very best of South Asian fiction writing, and the depth, creativity and unique narrative of each of these novels is both impressive and inspirational.”

The prize received submissions also from publishers based in the U.K., the U.S., Canada, and Australia, highlighting the growing interest in South Asian writing.

The final winner will be announced at a ceremony to be held at the Tata Steel Kolkata Literary Meet in Kolkata between January 22 and 27, 2019.

1.3 Centre not keen on changing West Bengal to Bangala

The Centre is not keen on changing the name of [West Bengal](#) to ‘Bangla’ as it was “not in national interest,” a senior government official said on Thursday.

The official said the West Bengal government’s proposal to change the State’s name to ‘Bangla’ had been sent to Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for consultation, as the proposed name resembles that of Bangladesh.

The official said, “The name change could attract illegal immigrants and encourage them to cross the border due to the similarity in names. The government’s stand on illegal migrants from across the border is known to everyone.”

West Bengal shares 2,217 km border with Bangladesh.

The official added that no final decision has been taken and they would await a response from the MEA.

State Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had on Wednesday accused the Centre of sitting on the proposal, adding that it demonstrated “deprivation of the people of Bengal” and that the people of the State “must get a positive response immediately.” The change of name of a State requires ratification by the Parliament.

BJP opposes move

The BJP unit in West Bengal has opposed the move and said it should be known as ‘Paschimbanga’ instead, as it has memories attached to the Partition and the national anthem also had ‘Banga’ in it.

On July 26, the West Bengal Assembly had passed a resolution to change the name of the State as ‘Bangla’ in three languages — Bengali, English and Hindi. This resolution was moved after the Home Ministry objected to the 2016 proposal by the State to change the name to ‘Bengal’ in English, ‘Bangla’ in Bengali and ‘Bangal’ in Hindi, saying names in different languages was not possible.

1.4 India – specific Rafale add-ons after delivery of all 36 fighters

The enhanced capabilities of the Rafale fighter aircraft sought by India will be incorporated after all the 36 jets are delivered, according to sources in the [Defence](#) Ministry.

There are 13 India Specific Enhancement (ISE) capabilities sought by the Indian Air Force (IAF) and they would be incorporated in batches after April 2022, an official source said.

“After the 36th jet is delivered, the first 35 aircraft would be modified in India by Dassault Aviation at the rate of seven aircraft a month so that all 36 aircraft would be of the same capability by September 2022,” the official source with knowledge of the matter said.

67-month wait

The first Rafale for India made its maiden flight on October 30 in France and is designated RB 008. It will, however, be the last to be delivered to the IAF in April 2022, 67 months after the signing of the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA).

“This aircraft would be used to test and certify the ISE, which can only be employed after certification,” the official stated.

An IAF document accessed by *The Hindu* states that the 13 ISE capabilities are “not present in the Rafale aircraft being operated by other countries. These capabilities pertain to radar enhancements, which will provide the force with better long range capability. One of the specific capability being acquired is the ‘helmet mounted display’ through which IAF pilots will be able to counter many threats simultaneously.

“Another very significant capability enhancement sought is the ability to start and operate from high altitude airfields,” the document states. The enhancement includes an advanced infra red search-and-track sensor and a very potent electronic jammer pod. “The remaining ISE capability pertain to avionics,” the document stated.

In September 2016, India and France signed a €7.87 billion IGA for 36 Rafales in fly-away condition following the surprise announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April 2015 citing “critical operational necessity” of the IAF.

As per the IGA, deliveries begin 36 months from the signing of contract and will be completed in 67 months. The government has consistently maintained that the deal for 36 jets was done to ensure quick delivery of fighter aircraft to the IAF, which is facing a drop in squadron strength.

Egyptian model

In contrast, Egypt which signed a €5.2 bn deal for 24 Rafale jets — 16 two-seater and eight single-seater variants — in February 2015, took delivery of the first batch of three aircraft in July of the same year.

Commenting on this, Air Marshal M. Matheswaran (retd.), who oversaw the Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) procurement in the past, said structural changes required would be carried out in all aircraft during manufacture and only software upgrades are carried out later.

“There would be some software standards which would be incorporated once the production standards are ready. This can be done quickly,” he said.

It was good that some of the testing would be done in India, as the IAF would be involved and gain from the process, he said.

On the quick deliveries to Egypt, he observed that Dassault Aviation may have taken them off from the French assembly line as Egypt acquired the same variant.

Another officer, Air Vice Marshal Amit Aneja (retd) too echoed these views. He said the upgrade rate of seven a month meant “it is software integration”, which is inserted and upgraded.

“The aircraft looks the same. It is the capability enhancement. It is all about avionics, sensors and sensor fusion. And sensor fusion capability is the most critical aspect today,” he pointed out.

1.5 India steps up agro-diplomacy with China

As the trade war with the United States continues to bite — with only a slim chance that the world’s two biggest economies can go past a possible truce — China appears to be opening up to non-U.S. imports.

Smelling an unexpected opportunity to export more to the Middle Kingdom, India is quietly squeezing in the door. The focus so far has been on pushing agri-products into the Chinese market. Sensing that China would look first at its food security by diversifying imports in view of the trade war, New Delhi has stepped up its agro-diplomacy with Beijing.

Over the past two months, Indian food and beverage producers have been conducting seminars and road shows in the Chinese capital.

Soya source

Though Indian soya bean exports are apparently a priority, especially after the China imposed a 25% levy on U.S. imports, success in the huge Chinese soya bean market is yet to materialise, though some progress may have registered during talks. Visiting Commerce Secretary Anup Wadhawan in a conversation with his Chinese counterpart Wang Shouwen earlier in November “expressed satisfaction over progress on soya bean meal and pomegranate and related issues,” an Indian Embassy press statement said.

However, other agri-products may have stolen a march over soya beans in finding a niche in the Chinese market. On November 6, Jay Shree Tea and Industries Ltd. signed a \$1-million black tea export contract with State-owned COFCO. Assam tea, in particular, has good prospects in China as it blends well with milk-based tea drinks. “China has been traditionally a green tea market. But of late, its young people are developing a taste for milk infused bubble tea, potentially

opening a larger market for Indian black teas,” said Arun Kumar Ray, Deputy Chairman of the Tea Board, on a visit to Beijing.

India’s efforts to export sugar to China, which began in earnest in June, also appear to have paid dividends. Earlier this month, a Commerce Ministry statement said the Indian Sugar Mills Association had signed its first sugar export contract of 50,000 tonnes with COFCO. During his visit, Mr. Wadhawan briefed the China Sugar Association about India’s proven capacity to meet China’s sugar needs over the long haul.

China has also opened up imports of non-Basmati rice from India in June on the sidelines of the Qingdao summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Officials say China is a lucrative \$1.5-\$2 billion market for Indian rice. A delegation of Indian rice traders was in Beijing in October on a follow-up visit after China, in principle, opened its doors to 24 India-based rice mills.

Efforts to tap the Chinese agri-market, in view of the China-U.S. trade war, was flagged in April. In his opening remarks at the fifth China-India Strategic Economic Dialogue, NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar said India was ready to step in and supply soya beans to China. “I was noticing that there were some tariffs that were issued on farmers from Iowa and Ohio, etc. Maybe India can substitute for something like soya beans and sugar if we could have access to those exports with all the due quality considerations that you might have,” Mr. Kumar had said.

Trade imbalance

Despite signs of incremental progress, India’s \$63-billion trade imbalance with China is alarming. In his meetings in Shanghai, Mr. Wadhawan stressed that pharmaceuticals, information technology services and tourism, in which India has a significant global footprint, had a “minuscule presence” in China.

Earlier this year, India had raised the red flag about its adverse trade balance during China’s trade policy review at the WTO, specifically citing hindrances that Indian exporters of rice, meat, pharmaceuticals and IT products were encountering to access the Chinese market.

“There are some positive developments... but we want that to be reflected in concrete trade figures before we can conclude that there has been a turnaround in our commercial ties with China,” an Indian diplomat told *The Hindu*.

2. International News

2.1 India's Act East Policy can meet OBOR Chinese envoy

India's Act East policy and China's Belt and Road Initiative (One Belt One Road or OBOR) are a "natural" area of cooperation between the two countries, said China's Ambassador to India Luo Zhaohui on Thursday, making another pitch for India to join China's mega-infrastructure corridor, which New Delhi has rejected thus far.

However, instead of the more contentious part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor that he has spoken of in the past, Mr. Luo suggested that the cooperation could come through the "China-India-Myanmar" BCIM corridor to India's North-East.

In a written message for the Youth event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he hoped it would "provide a platform for the youth of both nations to build a 'Great Wall of Trust and Cooperation' between the two countries."

Finding synergy

"Act East and OBOR are quite natural.... And [we must see] how to synergise these two strategies together between the two countries and between the two leaders and benefit from cooperation and development. That is the right direction... and I am quite optimistic," Mr. Luo said, speaking to delegates at a "China-India Youth Dialogue" seminar.

3. Polity and Governance

3.1 French govt didn't guarantee Rafale deal Center tells SC

The Centre admitted in the Supreme Court on Wednesday that there was no sovereign guarantee from the French government on the deal for 36 Rafale jets in case the manufacturer, Dassault Aviation, defaults.

Sovereign guarantee is a promise by a government to discharge the liability of a third person in case of his default.

'No legal validity'

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal said there was a "Letter of Comfort" from France, which was as good as a sovereign guarantee. The petitioners countered that such a letter had no legal validity.

The Law Ministry had raised the lack of a sovereign guarantee as a key "problem" associated with the deal during inter-ministerial consultations before the Inter Government Agreement (IGA) was signed on September 23, 2016.

"The money involved in the procurement is high. Who will be responsible if Dassault does not deliver? The Law Ministry had left it to the government to decide," advocate Prashant Bhushan submitted before a Bench, led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi.

The Bench, comprising Justices S.K. Kaul and K.M. Joseph, heard the petitions for a probe into the decision-making process for the procurement of the jets.

Air Vice Marshal J. Chalapati explained in court how the fourth and fifth-generation fighter aircraft have "niche technology." The court reserved the case for judgment.

The court questioned the government's stand on having no "role" in Dassault's choice of an Indian Offset Partner (IOP). An amendment in the Offset Policy, which allowed "no offset obligations" for the first three years of a contract, also came under the spotlight.

Changing stance

A look at what various persons/agencies involved in the Rafale deal have said

1) GOVT. EARLIER: France government stands guarantee for the deal

GOVT SUBMISSION IN SC: No sovereign guarantee from France, but there is a 'Letter of Comfort'

2) GOVT. EARLIER: Defence Procurement Procedure followed

before PM's announcement in April 2015

GOVT SUBMISSION IN SC: Defence Acquisition Council met only in May 2015

3) GOVT. IN MARCH 2018: Cost of basic aircraft is ₹670 crore per plane

GOVT IN SEPT. 2016:

Cost of purchase of 36 aircraft, including all additions/modifications, is ₹60,000 crore, i.e. ₹1,600 crore per plane

4) DASSAULT CEO: Price of 36 flyaway aircraft now equal to 18 flyaway ordered in MMRCA deal earlier, with a further 9% discount

▪ Figures from **GOVT.** do not corroborate

5) DASSAULT CEO IN MARCH 2015: Deal nearly complete with HAL in line with the requirements

GOVERNMENT AND DASSAULT CEO NOW: New deal has no role for HAL

6) GOVT. IN JOINT STATEMENT IN APRIL 2015: Want 36 Rafale jets on better terms but the same configuration as has been tested and approved by the IAF for MMRCA, in a time frame compatible with the operational requirement of the IAF

GOVT. IN 2016: Indicated better terms and conditions compared to the 126 MMRCA deal, but not faster delivery



The amendment was made with retrospective effect shortly after the Joint Statement on the 36 jets was issued during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris on April 10, 2015. According to the current offset contract, Dassault needs to inform the Centre about its IOP only by October 2019. "The formal proposal indicating details of IOPs and products for offset discharge should have been part of the main procurement proposal... What if the IOP is not good enough? Does it serve the country's interests? What was the need to amend offset guidelines with retrospective effect," Justice Joseph asked.

The Additional Defence Secretary submitted that IOPs would be confirmed by the vendor (Dassault) either at the time of seeking offset credits or a year prior to discharge of offset obligations. "If details of IOP are given initially, we would check if the IOP is valid. If given later, the OEM runs the danger of non-acceptance of the IOP by us. Penalty is imposed," the Secretary said.

Govt. interference

Former Union Minister Arun Shourie, one of the petitioners, said there was "government interference" in the choice of an IOP. Mr. Shourie has alleged that Reliance Defence, "a company with no defence experience", is the IOP. "Dassault is a company which is in serious financial difficulties. But for this order of 36 jets, it (Dassault) would have been phased

out...Dassault has experience since 1929. It would never have gone for an IOP registered only a few days before the deal,” Mr. Shourie argued.

The Attorney-General said the secrecy maintained by the government on the Rafale deal was not about the price of the aircraft but on its weaponry and avionics. Mr. Venugopal said the ₹670-crore price quoted in Parliament was that of a bare-bone jet. “Our adversaries will take advantage of a public disclosure of the price of weaponry and avionics. They will be able to evaluate the weapons. It is out of respect for the Supreme Court that we provided you specifics on weaponry, avionics,” he said.

3.2 SC pulls up states for not recruiting judges

The Supreme Court on Thursday pulled up various State governments and the administrative side of the High Courts for delay in filling vacancies in subordinate judicial services.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, had taken *suo motu* cognisance of more than 5,000 vacancies for subordinate judicial posts even as pendency touched crores.

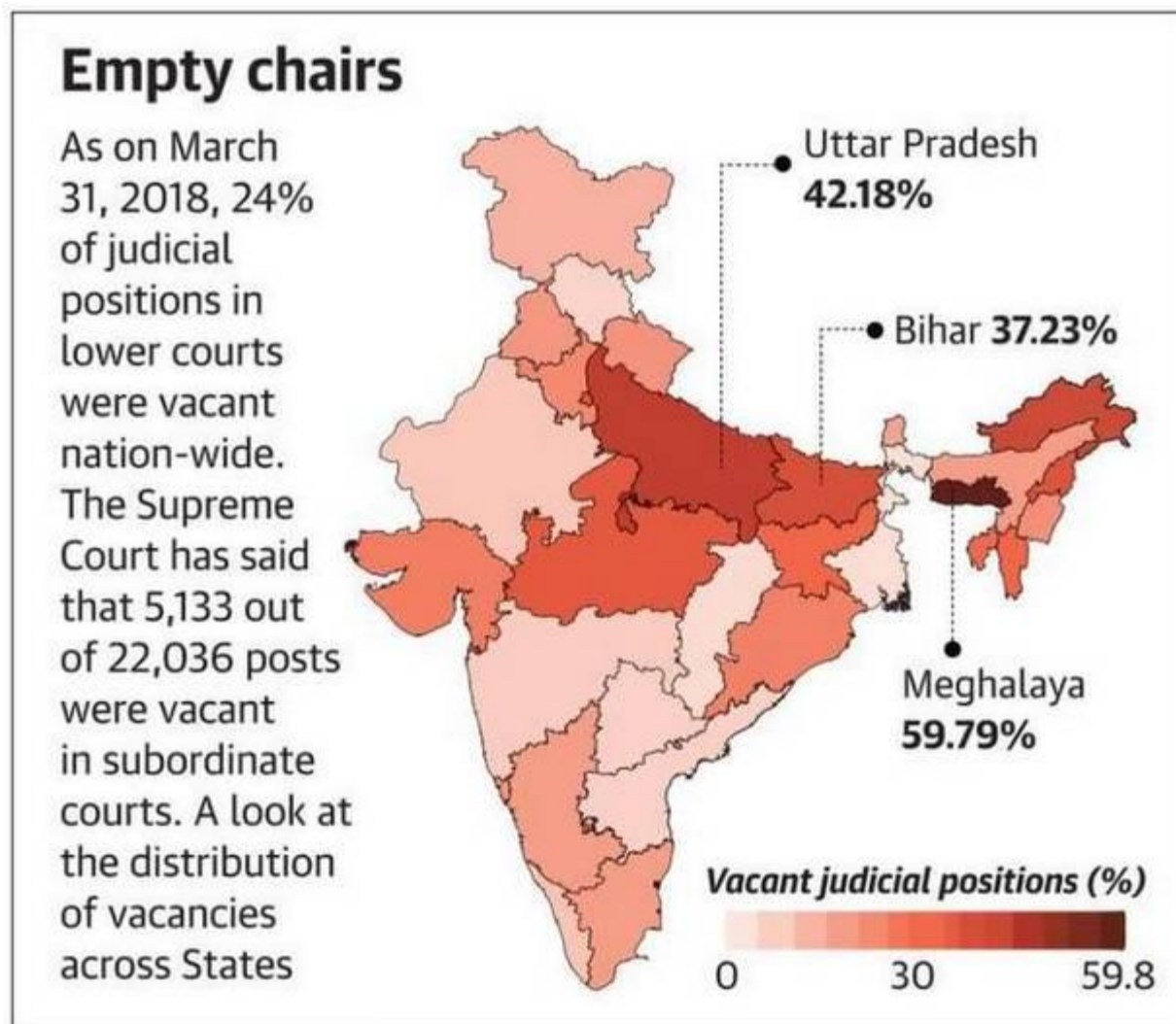
Poor infrastructure

It found that the source of the problem lay in poor infrastructure, from courtrooms to residences for judges, and a sheer lackadaisical approach to conducting the appointment process on time.

“We want our judges. We will put them in their posts, and if they cannot work, it is because the government is not giving them the infrastructure... Enough is enough,” Chief Justice Gogoi said. The Supreme Court had earlier warned of centralising appointments to the subordinate judiciary. The court found there were more than 1,000 vacancies in Uttar Pradesh alone.

Bengal services hit

It discovered that a lack of infrastructure and staff plagued the West Bengal judicial services. “We will get the Chief Secretary and pin him down. The State should tell us why courtrooms and residential houses are not being provided for judges and support staff. Is it not their duty to do so?” the Chief Justice asked.



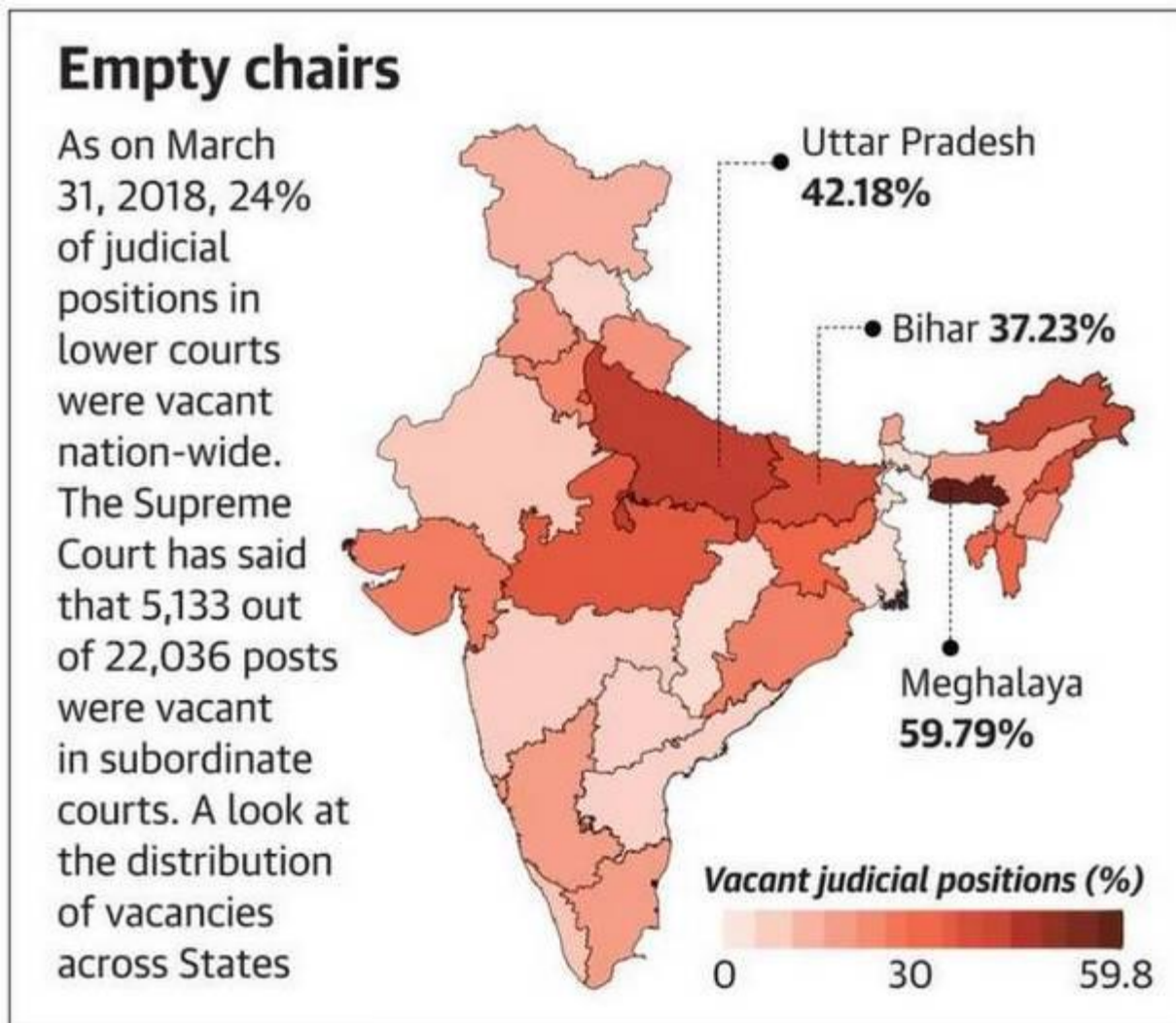
SOURCE: RAJYA SABHA Q&A

The court took note of an undertaking given by the Uttar Pradesh government that it would provide adequate housing arrangements for judicial officers.

The Bench found that the recruitment process was under way for only 100 vacancies in Delhi, which has over 200 vacancies.

The move taking suo motu cognisance of the chronically ailing condition of the lower judiciary was only recently highlighted by Chief Justice Gogoi as one which required immediate attention.

More than three crore cases are pending in the lower courts.



SOURCE: RAJYA SABHA Q&A

Five-page order

In a five-page order earlier, the Supreme Court had recorded that there were a total of 22,036 posts in the district and subordinate judiciary, ranging from district judges to junior civil judges, across the States.

It said 5,133 out of the 22,036 posts were vacant.

3.3 EC warns parties on criminal cases

Candidates with criminal antecedents and their political parties can be charged with contempt of the Supreme Court if they fail to widely publicise the cases against them as prescribed. They may also be penalised for false statements, the Election Commission has said.

Separate formats have been specified for the candidates and the parties to submit reports about publication of the declaration. The failure of the candidates and the parties to publicise the details in the manner prescribed may be a ground for post-election action like election petition or contempt of court.

The court has made it mandatory for the candidates and their parties to publish or broadcast details of the cases against them at least three times ahead of elections. The ruling applies to all candidates in the Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram and Telangana Assembly elections. The parties are also required to upload the details on their websites.

If anyone furnishes a false statement, the Election Commission can act under various provisions, including Section 171 (G) of the Indian Penal Code that prescribes a fine.

The Election Commission has received a representation about expenses on television and newspaper advertisements of criminal antecedents, and it may take a decision on Monday. “It is up to them to get advertisements published in television channels and newspapers with wider circulation in the constituencies or districts concerned, or publicise information about the cases through the media,” said a senior official of the Election Commission.

4. Economy

4.1 New index to check ease of doing agri-business

States may soon start receiving extra funding for the Agriculture Ministry's flagship schemes on the basis of their performance in encouraging agri-business, especially with regard to marketing, land and governance reforms.

The Centre expects to roll out a new Ease of Doing Agri-Business Index early next year, which will rank the States on the basis of such reforms, as well as their investment in agriculture, increased productivity, reduction of input costs, and risk mitigation measures. "In future, the Ministry may consider rewarding the higher performing States [both in absolute and incremental terms] by linking the performance with allocation from flexi funds made available in various flagship schemes of this Ministry," says a recent concept note for the Index.

NITI Aayog already brings out a Agricultural Marketing and Farm Friendly Reforms Index, rating States on their implementation of such reforms. In the initial edition of that Index in 2016, Maharashtra stood first in the rankings, followed by Gujarat.

The proposed index has a wider ambit, but the focus is still on reforms, with marketing reforms (25%) and governance and land reforms (20%) carrying almost half of the weight of the parameters in its scoring system.

Soil health cards

Another major parameter which States will be rated on is their success in reducing the cost of farm inputs (20%) by distributing soil health cards and encouraging organic farming and micro-irrigation. Risk mitigation measures such as crop and livestock insurance carry a 15% weightage, while increased productivity and investment in agriculture carry a 10% weight each.

Process-oriented

The parameters are process-oriented, and are meant to evolve as and when new reforms or initiatives are proposed, says the concept note.

As agriculture is a State subject, the success of policies and reform initiatives proposed at the Centre is dependent on implementation by the States. "To ensure that reform agenda of the government is implemented at a desired pace by all State governments, there is a need to develop a competitive spirit between the States," says the note, adding that the committee set up to recommend strategies to double farmers income by 2022 had also suggested that States should be ranked based on their reform and governance record.

The concept note is open for public and stakeholder feedback until November 15, following which operation guidelines will be drafted by the end of the month. An online dashboard to track State performances will be developed by the year-end, and a national level workshop to roll out the Index will be held in January 2019, according to the concept note's timelines.

4.2 Is crop insurance scheme losing steam?

More than 84 lakh farmers, which is around 15% of the total farmers insured in the first year of the Union government's ambitious Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in 2016-17, withdrew themselves from the scheme in 2017-18, a reply to an RTI application has revealed.

It includes 68.31 lakh farmers from the four Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Profit margins

The crop insurance companies, including Reliance, ICICI, HDFC and IFFCO, among others, have registered a total profit of around ₹15,795 crore since the launch of the scheme, though the final profit margins could change since the insurance claims for 2017-18 Rabi crops are yet to be estimated. The profits for 2016-17 are approximately ₹6,459 crore, said the RTI reply.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana	2016-17	2017-18
Loanee farmers	4,35,52,715	3,51,36,128
Non-loanee farmers	1,36,64,444	1,36,34,387
Number of farmers insured	5,72,17,159	4,87,70,515
Gross Premium	₹22,36,211.08	₹25,04,587.20
Estimated Claims	₹16,44,855.77	₹17,99,254.41
Approved Claims	₹16,24,270.97	₹16,61,116.39
Claim Paid	₹15,90,247.23	₹15,71,025.50

No. of farmers against paid claims	3,01,26,403	12601048
------------------------------------	-------------	----------

Note: Majority claims for Rabi 2017-18 are yet to be estimated/approved by the companies. (The amount for premium and claims is in lakhs) | Source: RTI application by P.P. Kapoor dated September 12, 2018

‘Scheme a fiasco’

Panipat-based RTI activist P.P. Kapoor, who sought the information from the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, alleged that the crop insurance scheme was a “fiasco” as shown by the figures and aimed at benefiting the private insurance companies in the name of farmers. He said the government would have done better to directly help the farmers than route it through the insurance companies.

As per the RTI figures, 5,72,17,159 farmers enrolled themselves for the crop insurance scheme in 2016-17, including 4,35,52,715 loanee farmers and 1,36,64,444 non-loanee farmers. But the number of these farmers dwindled to 4,87,70,515 for 2017-18 with the number of insured loanee farmers going down to 3,51,36,128, but the number of non-loanee farmers remaining almost stagnant at 1,36,34,387.

As per the scheme, the crop loans through Kisan Credit Cards -- or in other words for loanee farmers — are covered under compulsory coverage.

Among the four States, the maximum number of 31,25,025 farmers have withdrawn themselves from the scheme in Rajasthan, followed by Maharashtra (19,46,992), Uttar Pradesh (14,69,052) and Madhya Pradesh (2,90,312). In South India, the number of insured farmers in Karnataka has decreased from 27,37,667 to 16,08,569, while their number has marginally gone up for Andhra Pradesh from 17,74,444 to 18,18,449.

Losses in T.N., Andhra

Though the insurance companies made several thousand crore rupees profit in the first year of the launch of the scheme, they suffered losses in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh the same year. In Tamil Nadu, the total claim paid by the insurance companies was around ₹3,35,562 lakh against the gross premium of approximately ₹1,22,737 lakh. Similarly, the companies made a loss of around ₹3,012 lakh in Andhra Pradesh.

4.3 Trade deficit rises to \$17.13 bn

Merchandise trade (in \$ bn)

Exports (including re-exports)

Oct'17

22.89

Oct'18

26.98

%
Growth
17.86

Imports

Oct'17

37.5

Oct'18

44.11

%
Growth
17.62

Trade deficit

Oct'17

14.61

Oct'18

17.13

Source: Govt. data

Exports rebound in Oct. from contraction seen in Sept.

India's merchandise trade deficit widened in October to \$17.13 billion due in large part to a higher oil import bill, official data released on Thursday showed.

The trade deficit is wider than the \$14.61 billion seen in October of last year and the \$13.98 billion in September 2018.

Positive growth

"Exports in October 2018 were \$26.98 billion, as compared to \$22.89 billion in October 2017, exhibiting a positive growth of 17.86%," a release said. "In rupee terms, exports were ₹1,98,634.84 crore in October 2018, as compared to ₹1,48,962.64 crore in October 2017, registering a positive growth of 33.35%."

This growth in exports marks a rebound from the contraction of 2.15% seen in September in dollar terms.

The major commodities that saw stronger growth in exports compared with last year include engineering goods (8.87%), petroleum products (49.38%), gems and jewellery (5.48%), organic and inorganic chemicals (34.01%), and drugs and pharmaceuticals (12.83%).

"The October data shows that the exports are again back on double-digit growth trajectory during the on-going festive season," said Ganesh Kumar Gupta, president of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations. "The exports during the month is close to \$27 billion, which re-affirms our assessment of reaching the new milestone of \$350 billion in the current fiscal, the highest-ever exports figures during recent years braving all the odds."

"Imports in October 2018 were \$44.11 billion (₹3,24,774.78 crore), which was 17.62% higher in dollar terms and 33.07% higher in rupee terms over imports of \$37.50 billion (₹2,44,064.20 crore) in October 2017," the government said.

Oil imports in October 2018 were \$14.21 billion, which was 52.64% higher in dollar terms compared with October last year and 30.2% higher than the oil imports of September 2018.

4.4 Talks on with 150 nations to reform WTO: Prabhu

Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu on Monday said he was in talks with at least 150 countries to work out the way forward for reforming the World Trade Organisation (WTO). He said that the multilateral trading system was under stress and a number of fresh trade-restrictive measures, which would affect global trade and economic growth, had surged.

“It is necessary that we look at making the WTO improve further,” Mr. Prabhu said at a conference on a strategic alliance for the WTO and trade remedy laws. “The WTO has to change, and change for the better. We are preparing an agenda that does not exclude any country in the process of making the WTO better.”

He said that he had personally met with 150 trade ministers to move a reformed WTO agenda forward. “I am getting a positive response from all concerned, including the Director General of WTO, in our endeavour to take all countries on-board.”

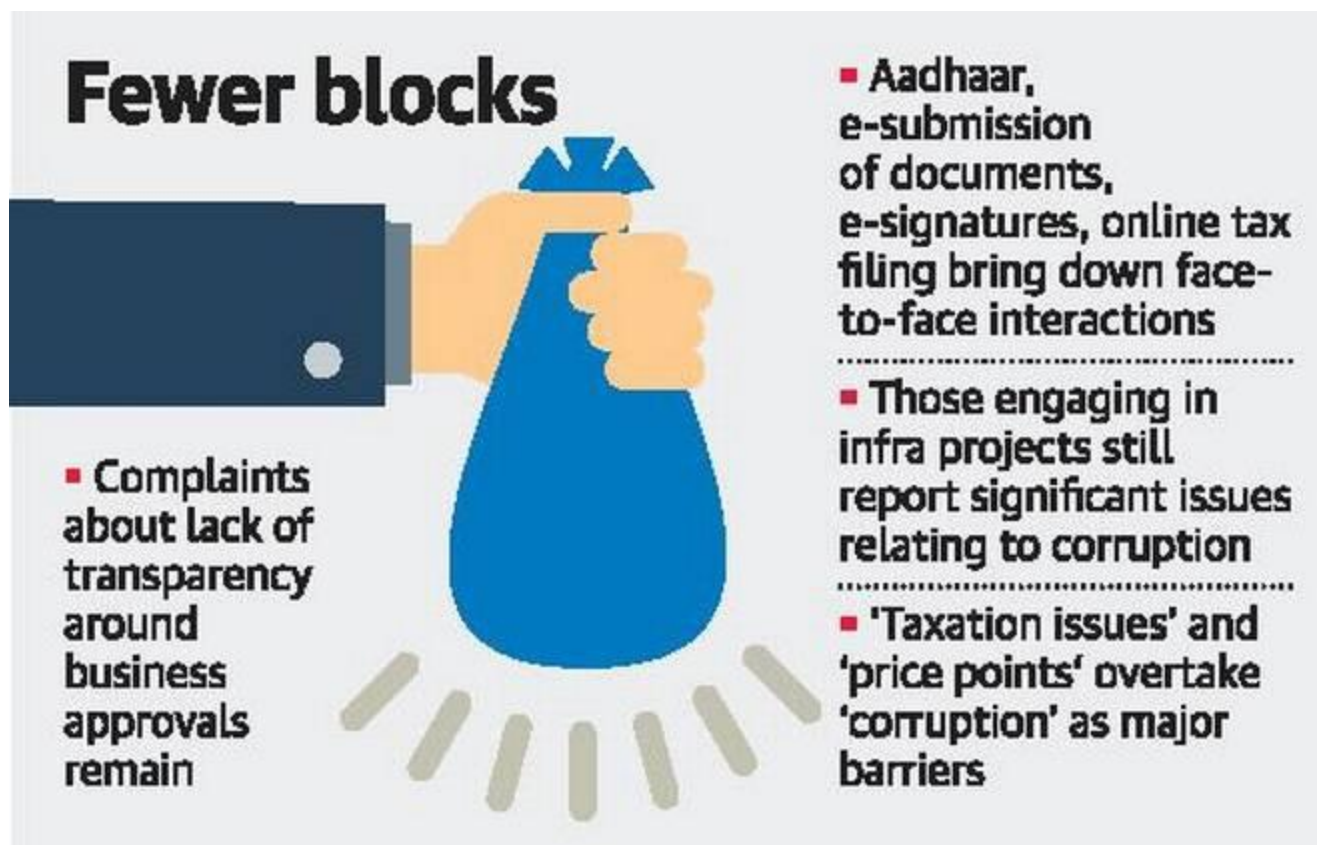
“Expansion of global trade hinges on rules and processes determined by the WTO and unless global trade expands, national economies will not benefit,” he said. “It is important that all substantive issues that have been agreed to at the Doha and other trade rounds, as well as new issues that have cropped up, are addressed with a sense of urgency.”

4.5 Corruption no longer among top 3 hurdles to doing business in India

The perception among U.K. businesses that corruption is a major barrier in doing business in India has halved, according to the latest edition of the U.K. India Business Council’s Ease of Doing Business report compared with what it was in 2015.

‘Halved since 2015’

“Since the first report was launched, there has been a considerable year-on-year fall in the number of companies that viewed ‘corruption’ as a major barrier – from 34% in 2016 to 25% in 2017, halving since 2015, where it stood at 51%,” the report said. “This decline shows a major improvement, indicating that the current government’s efforts to mitigate corruption appear to be delivering tangible and much-desired results.



Number of firms seeing it as a big barrier has fallen: U.K. India Business Council

“Those identifying ‘corruption’ as a major barrier has declined far more dramatically over the four-year course of this survey among those currently doing business in India [decline of 27% in the last two years] where it is no longer considered a ‘top-three’ barrier compared to those not currently active in India,” the report added.

The report noted that initiatives such as Aadhaar, electronic submission of government documents, acceptance of electronic signatures, and the push to file taxes online, have all reduced face-to-face interactions where corruption is most likely to take place.

“The extent of digitalisation, however, varies markedly across sectors, as does corruption, with those engaging in infrastructure projects still reporting significant issues relating to corruption,” the report added.

‘Taxation issues’ and ‘price points’ overtook ‘corruption’ as major barriers identified by 36% and 29% of respondents, respectively, the report said. However, the proportion of respondents identifying ‘taxation issues’ was 3% lower in 2018 than 2017, which, the report said, suggests that businesses may be starting to adjust to the GST.

“Those currently doing business in India cite ‘taxation issues’ as a consistent barrier, whilst those looking to enter the Indian market understandably rate ‘identifying a suitable partner’ as their most salient issue after a considerable decline in reports of ‘legal and regulatory impediments’ from 2017 to 2018,” the report said. “The key issue for those outside India is increasingly market demand for their products and services relative to government and bureaucracy-related barriers.”

While most of the respondents agreed that the government’s ‘e-biz’ initiative towards faster clearances would improve the business environment, they also said that there remain significant complaints about around the lack of transparency around business approvals, particularly in the case of statutory approvals for investments.

5. Science and Tech

5.1 ISRO invites foreign 'riders' to Venus

An 18-month-old pitch for what could be the first Indian orbiter mission to Venus has just been refreshed and relaunched, opening it up now for international experiments.

Tentatively marking the yet to be named 'Mission Venus' for mid-2023, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) plans to study the planet from an elliptical orbit that is closest to Venus at 500 km and 60,000 km at the farthest end — similar to its Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) of 2013.

The latest announcement opportunity (AO) does not specify the weight of the spacecraft; it plans to send up instruments or payloads totally weighing 100 kg. (MOM's payloads weighed nearly 15 kg.)

The new round invites space-based experiment ideas on Venus from space agencies, universities and researchers.

They should complement a dozen Indian experiments that have been shortlisted from among responses that came in for the AO of April 2017. It had then planned a total payload of 175 kg. The responses were said to be fewer and below expectations.

3rd interplanetary dash

Currently being handled by the Space Science Programme Office, the entire project must be vetted by the Advisory Committee on Space Sciences and approved by the Space Commission and eventually the government.

From the Moon orbiter mission Chandrayaan-1 in 2008 and the ₹450 crore MOM, the Venus voyage — if approved — would be ISRO's third interplanetary dash.

A lunar lander and rover mission called Chandrayaan-2 is getting ready to take off in January or February 2019.

ISRO says that it may lower the orbit of its future Venus spacecraft after a while for sharper observations. According to an informed ISRO official, the Venus mission would be comparable to the phenomenally popular MOM in terms of its the orbit and the cost.

The official said the plan was in very early stages and would get finely defined once the experiments were chosen. They would decide the weight of the spacecraft and the rocket that it would need.

5.2 Cyclone clouds ISRO's GSAT-29 launch plan

Much expectation is pinned on the November 14 space mission being taken out by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at Sriharikota, weather willing.

ISRO is readying itself to put communication satellite GSAT-29 on its heavy-lift vehicle, the GSLV-MkIII, in an evening launch on that day. The spacecraft as well as the vehicle are important to the space agency and its road map.

Weather watch is a routine pre-launch activity for space agencies and especially so for ISRO around this time of the year.

A senior official said mission managers were keeping an eye on the cyclonic buildup on the east coast in Andhra Pradesh, where the launch centre is located.

ISRO is also preparing for a PSLV mission on November 26 to launch HySIS, a new variant of Earth observation satellites, along with 20-30 small commercial satellites. One significance of the GSAT-29 mission is that an Indian spacecraft will be flown after about seven months: the last one was the IRNSS-1I launched on April 12.

For the other, it would be ISRO's second communication satellite mission of 2018. It had launched another communication satellite, GSAT-6A, on March 29 but lost it in space a day later.

The subsequent post-mortems of the 6A mission and the recall of the 5,400-kg GSAT-11 satellite from Guiana before its launch have also pushed back ISRO's ambitious plan to have a mission a month.

A third factor weighing on Wednesday's mission: this would be only the second trial or developmental flight, D2, of the GSLV-MkIII or MkIII.

Major missions

On its success hinge many major future missions, including lunar lander-rover Chandrayaan-2 that is slated for January next year.

Although there was a PSLV mission on September 16, the two small satellites on it were commercial Earth observation spacecraft belonging to a U.K. agency.

The GSAT-29 satellite itself is one of the planned Indian HTS quartet. The HTSs or high throughput satellites are being sent out to provide a vastly improved and faster Internet connectivity. GSAT-19, the first of the series, was sent up in June 2017 from Sriharikota.

The third and ISRO's heaviest to date, GSAT-11, awaits a scheduled launch on December 4 on a European space vehicle, Ariane-5, from French Guiana.

GSAT-11 was brought back from French Guiana to Bengaluru in April this year for additional tests and was re-transported last month for a confirmed launch.

ISRO had later said it did not want to take risks with such an advanced and costly satellite as GSAT-11 — put at 1200 crore including the launch fee of Arianespace.

5.3 GSAT-29 has a perfect launch

Amid concerns over Cyclone Gaja spoiling the launch of the country's heaviest satellite to be carried on board an indigenous rocket from Indian soil, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) pulled off the feat to perfection on Wednesday.

The team went ahead with the launch of the GSAT-29 on board its second developmental flight GSLV-MkIII D2 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota to clear blue skies as plumes of smoke from the rocket left a trail in the horizon after lift-off from the second launch pad at 5.08 p.m.

ISRO's GSLV-MkIII-D2 rocket blasts off from Sriharikota on November 14, 2018. | Photo Credit: [K. Pichumani](#)

Placed in orbit

The satellite was placed in a geo-synchronous transfer orbit 17 minutes after launch.

"The first operational mission of this vehicle (GSLV-MkIII) is going to be none other than the Chandrayaan-II mission in January next year. This vehicle is going to carry a human to space three years from now. Kudos to this excellent launcher of India," ISRO Chairman K. Sivan said.

The communication satellite, weighing 3,423 kg, "is a multiband, multi-beam communication satellite, intended to serve as test bed for new and critical technologies," according to ISRO.

The Ku-band and Ka-band payloads are expected to cater to communication requirements for people in remote areas in the country, especially Jammu and Kashmir, and the North-East.

The satellite will be placed in a geo-stationary orbit at its intended location after three orbit raising manoeuvres over the next few days.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi had envisioned that an “Indian son or daughter” will undertake a manned space mission by 2022 while delivering his Independence Day address this year, Mr. Sivan said ISRO had set a target of achieving this feat by December 2021.

He said ISRO planned to have two unmanned missions — one in December 2020 — before attempting to put a human in space.

5.4 GROWTH-India telescopes first science observation

The 0.7 m GROWTH-India telescope at the Indian Astronomical Observatory located in Hanle, Ladakh, has made its first science observation which is a follow-up study of a nova explosion. Novae are explosive events involving violent eruptions on the surface of white dwarf stars, leading to temporary increase in brightness of the star. Unlike a supernova, the star does not go on to die but returns to its earlier state after the explosion. A report on this published in *The Astronomer's Telegram* notes the magnitude of the nova explosion first identified by Darnley *et al* as it varies, during November 8 to November 10.

First science observation

The GROWTH-India telescope was commissioned six months ago soon after which it saw first light, on the night of June 12. “The telescope has been taking readings since then, and this is the first ‘follow-up’ work. We are happy to see this first science observation,” said G C Anupama, who Professor-in-Charge of the Indian Astronomical Observatory and is based at Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIAP), Bengaluru.

The celestial object was first noticed by a different group which saw the nova explosion. “We then pointed our telescope in that direction and measured the brightness. We found that it was fading at the rate expected for such events. This is a small step in astronomy but a big leap for us, because it is the first scientific result obtained by this telescope,” said Varun Bhalerao a faculty member at IIT Bombay and a Principal Investigator of the project along with Professor Anupama.

This recurrent nova, named M31N-2008, has been observed to erupt several times, the most recent eruption happening in November 2018. Recurrent nova systems are interesting because

they are candidates for progenitors of Type Ia supernovae. “We took follow-up images with the GROWTH-India telescope. The observations were made in different optical bands. The nova was seen to decline rapidly in brightness, by 1 - 1.5 magnitudes in the span of 2 days,” says Shubham Srivastav, post-doctoral fellow at the physics department of IIT Bombay (IITB)

Robotic eye

The telescope is potentially fully robotic and can operate on its own, but the way these readings were taken has only partly used its potential for automation. “The group sitting in IIT Bombay worked through Bengaluru’s IIAP to control the telescope. While the IITB-IIAP link was through regular internet connection, the one from IIAP to the telescope in Ladakh was through a satellite link,” said Professor Bhalerao. A typical professional telescope has a field of about 0.1 square degrees.

This telescope has a field that is five to six times larger. It can ‘slew’ or move its focus from one part of the sky to another in just about 10-15 seconds and its camera can view stellar objects that are thousands to millions of light years away.

Threefold goals

The GROWTH-India telescope is part of the Global Relay of Observatories Watching Transients Happen. Its goals are threefold: (1) Search for explosions in the optical regime whenever LIGO group detects a Binary Neutron Star merger (2) study nearby young supernova explosions. (3) Study nearby asteroids.

Transient phenomena such as supernovae are important parts of time-domain astronomy which is a less-explored frontier in astronomy. “Such an explosion is when the inner material of the star is thrown out. There is no other way we can actually see what is inside a star,” explains Prof. Bhalerao.

6. Environment / Geography

6.1 Emission tests fudges Green tribunal asks Volkswagen to deposit Rs 100Cr

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Friday directed automajor Volkswagen to deposit an interim amount of ₹100 crore with the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), following a plea that alleged that the company used “cheat devices” in emission tests in its diesel vehicles.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel further constituted a committee comprising representatives from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Ministry of Heavy Industries, Central Pollution Control Board and the Automotive Research Association of India, to estimate the quantum of environmental loss.

The committee has been asked to submit a report to the tribunal within a month, while the petitioner and the company were told that they could approach the bench with their contentions within seven days.

Plea seeks ban

The directions came while the green panel was hearing a plea moved by petitioner Saloni Ailawadi and others, who sought a ban on the sale of Volkswagen vehicles, alleging violation of emission norms. Reacting to the tribunal’s order a Volkswagen Group spokesperson said:

“The Volkswagen Group is compliant with emission norms defined in India. The Group is yet to receive a copy of the order from the NGT. The Volkswagen Group in India will review the order and subsequently challenge the same.” Earlier, the company had submitted a roadmap before the NGT to recall over 3.23 lakh vehicles in the country fitted with a “defeat device,” meant to manipulate emission tests.

7. Security

7.1 NSCN-K faction open to Naga peace talks

A breakaway group of the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) on Monday said that the outfit was keen on pursuing the Naga peace process that it had abrogated three years ago.

The group led by Khango Konyak, an Indian Naga who was the chairman of NSCN-K until his impeachment by the Myanmar-based Nagas in August, in a statement said that the decision followed an appeal by the Centre and the people of Nagaland.

Hounded out of the NSCN-K's camp in Myanmar's Sagaing Division, Mr. Konyak and his followers, numbering less than 100, had crossed over to Nagaland almost a month ago.

They had been staying in a village in the State's Mon district reportedly under the knowledge of the security forces.

Mr. Konyak's group, claiming to represent the NSCN-K, said it took note of the "positive vibes" from the Centre for resuming the peace process that began with the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the outfit and the Union government in 2001.

Ceasefire deal

Its rival group, the Isak Muivah faction of NSCN (NSCN-IM), had entered into a similar ceasefire deal in 1997. The NSCN-K walked out of its 14-year-old ceasefire in March 2015 when its founder S.S. Khaplang was its chairman.

Mr. Konyak was made the chairman after Mr. Khaplang's death in June 2017. But a tussle between the Indian and Myanmar-based Nagas saw Mr. Khaplang's nephew Yung Aung taking over.

The Centre had been insisting on having all Naga extremist groups on board before a final settlement of the Naga political issue. Six such groups were included in the peace process a year ago.

Though the Konyak-led group was not numerically significant, security agencies believed that making the outfit a part of the peace process would send a signal to Nagas of Myanmar that they do not fit into the big picture. "We should grab every opportunity to settle the issue once and for all," a senior officer of a security agency said.

7.2 India, China agree to expand military ties

India and China are set to expand their military ties, in tune with the spirit of the Wuhan informal summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April.

During talks between visiting Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra and his Chinese counterpart Shao Yuanming, both sides agreed to add another layer of exchanges between the military personnel of the two countries.

Wuhan spirit

For the first time, cadets from Indian and Chinese military academies, as well mid-level officers, will meet each other regularly. “We are expanding military exchanges between our personnel at all levels in the aftermath of the Wuhan summit,” official sources told *The Hindu*. The two senior officials also agreed to continue with visits at the level of military commands and civilian officers of the Ministry of Defence.

“The atmosphere during Tuesday’s talks was excellent, which reflected the visible and gradual easing of tensions following the Doklam crisis and the Wuhan informal summit,” the source said. “During the dialogue, a decision has been taken to add new confidence-building measures to maintain peace and tranquillity on the borders,” the official said.

An Indian Embassy statement noted that “specific additional confidence-building measures at the operational level” have been included in view of the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity in the [India-China](#) border areas. These decisions have been taken for “implementing the consensus of Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping” — an obvious reference to the Wuhan informal summit.

The two sides stressed the need to “further strengthen military-to-military ties in order to strengthen political and strategic mutual trust between the two countries,” the statement said.

The statement pointed out that the two delegations forked a timetable on “specific defence exchanges for 2019”. The sources confirmed that the regular hand-in-hand joint military exercise between India and China will be held before the year-end.

Mr. Mitra also called on State Councilor and Defence Minister of China, General Wei Fenghe on Thursday.

The Defence Secretary’s visit precedes the arrival of National Security Adviser Ajit Doval later this month for boundary talks with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Mr. Xi and

Mr. Modi are then expected to meet on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Argentina next month.

7.3 PM favours inclusive Indo-Pacific military ties

India was committed to a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday, as he called for enhancing multilateral cooperation and economic and cultural ties among member-nations at the 13th East Asia [Summit](#) in Singapore.

It was Prime Minister Modi's 5th East Asia Summit (EAS). India has been participating in the EAS since its very inception in 2005.

"At the East Asia Summit in Singapore, I shared my thoughts on enhancing multilateral cooperation, economic and cultural ties among member nations. Also reiterated India's commitment to a peaceful and prosperous Pacific region," the Prime Minister tweeted.

The EAS consists of 10 ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos), Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the U.S. It was formed to further the objectives of regional peace, security and prosperity.

Mr. Modi reiterated India's vision of a peaceful, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, strengthening maritime cooperation and commitment to a balanced Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) pact, Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Raveesh Kumar said.

The RCEP, involving 10 ASEAN members as well as China, Japan, Australia, India, New Zealand and South Korea, would cover about half the world's population and a third of its GDP. Mr. Modi also interacted with leaders of other countries, including his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe, before the summit retreat.

Interacts with cadets

Mr. Modi also met with the NCC cadets who got the opportunity to visit Singapore as a part of a cadet exchange programme. "Wonderful moments with my young friends... They shared their memorable learnings and experiences with me," he tweeted.

Mr. Modi began his two-day visit to Singapore on Wednesday.

