

**Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing.**

**INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL****UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SURVEY OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP) 2018**

A UN report on the Asia-Pacific region has urged the regional powers to invest in inclusive and sustainable growth.

The UN Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) 2018, the annual report from the UN Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC) for Asia and the Pacific have urged countries to take advantage of high growth rate and share the benefits with the national society.

Governments of countries in the Asia-Pacific region are advised to take advantage of the currently favourable economic conditions in order to address vulnerabilities and enhance the resilience, inclusiveness, and sustainability of their economies stated the report highlighting the urgency facing the economies of the region.

The report was launched at the Indian Council for Research in International Economic Relations (ICRIER).

The report described South and Southwest Asia as the fastest growing sub-region of the Asia-Pacific region and urged the countries to increase social spending.

**ESCAP:**

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region.

It is established in 1947 with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand.

**Parent Organization: UN ECOSOC**

ESCAP works to overcome some of the region's greatest challenges by providing results-oriented projects, technical assistance, and capacity building to member States in the following areas:

1. Macroeconomic Policy and Development including the publishing of Asia-Pacific Development Journal (APDJ) twice a year

2. Trade and Investment
3. Transport
4. Social Development
5. Environment and Sustainable Development
6. Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction
7. Statistics
8. Sub-regional activities for development

**UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING COURSE FOR AFRICAN PARTNERS (UNPCAP)**

The third edition of the United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners (UNPCAP) was recently inaugurated in New Delhi.

The UNPCAP sessions will be held from May 7-25.

The course is aimed to build and enhance the capacity of the African Troop Contributing Countries to the UN and to further train the trainers from these countries.

The training incorporates topics on operational and logistical matters, humanitarian issues, thematic topics and table top exercises, and mission briefs.

The course revolves around the concept of training the trainers (as stated by the UN) is one of the many steps that India has initiated towards active contribution to peace support activities.

The course is conducted by the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in India (CUNPK) in partnership with the US, the Indian Army.

The first and second editions of the course were held in New Delhi in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

**CRISIDEX SENTIMENT INDEX IMPROVED**

Business sentiment among micro and small enterprises (MSE) improved in the January-March quarter as the sentiment index rose by 14 points in the quarter, according to the

CriSidEx survey. The CriSidEx sentiment index rose to 121 in the survey quarter (SQ) of January-March from 107 in the previous quarter.

**CriSidEx:**

What is it? CriSidEx is a composite index based on a diffusion index of 8 parameters and measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 200 (extremely positive). CriSidEx will have 2 indices, one for the ‘survey quarter’ and another for the ‘next quarter’ once a trend emerges after few rounds of the survey, providing independent time series data.

The crucial benefit of CriSidEx is that its readings will flag potential headwinds and changes in production cycles and thus help improve market efficiencies. And by capturing the sentiment of exporters and importers, it will also offer actionable indicators on foreign trade.

**NABH NIRMAN INITIATIVE**

The government is augmenting the airport capacity of various airports as part of NABH (NextGen Airports for BHarat) Nirman initiative.

**NABH Nirman initiative:**

The government in February announced a new initiative — NABH Nirman— under which it proposes to expand airport capacity in the country by more than five times to handle a billion trips a year.

The three key aspects of NABH Nirman are (1) fair and equitable land acquisition, (2) long-term master plan for airport and regional development and (3) balanced economics for all stakeholders.

In the last three years, domestic air passenger traffic grew at 18% a year and the airline companies placed orders for more than 900 aircraft. NABH Nirman could take the number of airports in India to 700 from about 125 airports today.

**PHARMACOPOEIA COMMISSION APPROVED ANIMAL-FREE TESTS FOR DRUG MANUFACTURERS**

In a step that would spare animals from suffering due to drug experiments, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission has approved modern, animal-free tests for drug manufacturers.

In its latest guidelines on tests for drugs manufactured and marketed in India, the IPC has replaced the pyrogen test carried out on rabbits and the abnormal toxicity test carried out on guinea pigs and mice with tests that can be done in test tubes.

With the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission’s new mandate, the pyrogen test will be replaced by a bacterial endotoxin test or a monocyte activation test which can be carried out in test tubes.

**Towards freeing the guinea pig** Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission, a body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has replaced two animal tests:

- 1) **Pyrogen test**, carried out in rabbits, can now be replaced by bacterial endotoxin test or a monocyte activation test.
- 2) **Abnormal toxicity test** can be waived if a compliance certificate from National Control Laboratory is obtained.

The mandate has been listed in the eighth edition of Indian Pharmacopoeia and comes into effect from July 1.

**PETA'S POSITION**

- It is unethical to intentionally cause pain, fear and loneliness in animals
- Animal testing is a 'bad science' because 92 out of every 100 drugs that pass animal tests fail in humans
- It is wasteful because animal testing prolongs suffering of people waiting for effective cures

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India have been pushing for doing away with the cruel methods of testing on animals for the past several years.

The pyrogen test is carried out to check impurity or substance that can cause adverse side-effects. For the test, the drug is injected into a rabbit and the animal is closely observed for feverish symptoms.

The abnormal toxicity test is carried out to check potential hazardous biological contamination in vaccine formulations. This batch test is done before the product is approved for marketing. In this, mice or guinea pigs are injected with the vaccine.

**IPC:**

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is an Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

IPC is created to set standards of drugs in the country. Its basic function is to update regularly the standards of drugs commonly

required for treatment of diseases prevailing in this region.

It publishes official documents for improving Quality of Medicines by way of adding new and updating existing monographs in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP). It further promotes rational use of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.

#### **WESTERN GHATS DETERMINES THE AMOUNT OF RAINFALL TAMIL NADU GETS DURING THE SUMMER MONSOON**

According to a recent research, the dense vegetation in the Western Ghats determines the amount of rainfall that Tamil Nadu gets during the summer monsoon.

The research was done by the IIT Bombay.

The study was published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters. It has found that dense forests of the Western Ghats contribute as much as 40% of moisture to the southwest monsoon rainfall over Tamil Nadu during normal monsoon years. The average contribution is 25-30%.

But during monsoon deficit years, the contribution increases to as high as 50%.

The study found the forests of Western Ghats contribute as much as 3 mm per day of rainfall during August and September over a "majority of locations" in Tamil Nadu.

The researchers found a significant drop in rainfall in the range of 1-2.5 mm per day when the vegetation cover was removed from the Western Ghats.

This translates to an average of 25% of the total monsoon rainfall over Tamil Nadu.

But only small parts of Kerala get affected by deforestation in Western Ghats.

#### **Western Ghats:**

It is also known as Sahyadri (Benevolent Mountains) is a mountain range that runs parallel to the western coast of the Indian peninsula, located entirely in India

It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of the eight "hottest hot-spots" of biological diversity in the world It is sometimes called the Great Escarpment of India

The range runs north to south along the western edge of the Deccan Plateau, and separates the plateau from a narrow coastal plain, called Konkan, along the Arabian Sea.

#### **UNION CABINET TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SEATS IN THE SIKKIM ASSEMBLY**

The Ministry of Home Affairs is all set to move a proposal before the Union Cabinet to increase the number of seats in the Sikkim Assembly from 32 to 40.

This would be the first expansion of seats since Sikkim was merged with India in 1975.

The cabinet proposal will include amendments to the Second Schedule to the Representation of People Act, 1950.

#### **Reservation of seats:**

The proposal to expand the House is likely to benefit the Limboo and Tamang communities.

They were notified as Scheduled Tribes in 2002.

The existing reservations for Bhutias, Lepchas, Scheduled Castes and Sanghas will be retained.

#### **INDIA SIGNED AGREEMENT WITH WORLD BANK OF \$200 MILLION LOAN FOR NATIONAL NUTRITION**

India has signed an agreement with the World Bank for a \$200 million loan for implementing the National Nutrition Mission across 315 districts of the country.

The mission aims at reaching 10 crore beneficiaries, mainly children upto the age of six years, pregnant women and lactating mothers and adolescent girls.

The programme will be implemented in three phases between 2017 and 2020 across all districts of the country.

The mission targets a 2% reduction in both under-nutrition and low birth weight per annum.

It also aims to bring down anaemia among young children, women and adolescent girls by 3% per year until 2020.

The government will also strive to reduce the prevalence of stunting from the current level

of 38.4% (as per the National Family Health Survey 4) to 25% by 2022.

The National Nutrition Mission has an approved budget of Rs. 9,046.17 crore.

The total contribution of the Centre will be Rs. 2,849.54 crore and nearly Rs. 1,700 crore will be contributed by the States.

The remaining will be funded through the government's tie-up with multilateral agencies such as the World Bank.

#### SCIENCE AND TECH

#### NITI AAYOG AND GOOGLE TO DEVELOP AI-BASED SOLUTIONS

The government think-tank Niti Aayog said that it will be working with tech giant Google to develop AI-based solutions aimed at improving the overall economic productivity of the nation.

The move is aimed at fostering growth for India's nascent AI and machine learning (ML) ecosystem, said Niti Aayog.

India is embracing future technologies such as machine learning and AI to augment its capacity in health care, improve outcomes in education, develop innovative governance systems for our citizens and improve overall economic productivity of the nation.

While announcing the budget, finance minister had said that Niti Aayog will setup a national programme to conduct research and development in frontier technologies such as AI.

In February, the IT ministry formed four AI committees on –

- citizen-centric services
- data platforms, skilling, reskilling and R&D
- legal regulatory
- cybersecurity

2. These committees would be headed by IIT director and industry experts from bodies such as Nasscom

3. The ministry will “coordinate” with Niti Aayog on this

Niti's partnership with Google will unlock massive training initiatives, support start-ups and encourage AI research through PhD scholarships, all of which contributes to the larger idea of a technologically-empowered New India.

Under the aegis of this program, Google will train and incubate Indian AI start-ups in an accelerator program.

These start-ups will be mentored and coached by Google and its affiliates to enable them to better leverage AI in their respective business models.

#### Machine Learning:

Machine learning is the science of getting computers to act without being explicitly programmed.

It is an application of artificial intelligence (AI) that provides systems the ability to automatically learn and improve from experience without being explicitly programmed.

Machine learning focuses on the development of computer programs that can access data and use it learn for themselves.

In the past decade, machine learning has given us self-driving cars, practical speech recognition, effective web search, etc.

Examples: Google Assistant, Google Allo etc.

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