

December 8th news:

International:

'The Silence Breakers' Named Time's Person of the Year for 2017

Time has chosen its 2017 Person of the Year: the Silence Breakers, the women and men who have come forward to shed light on sexual harassment and abuse in America. Those women featured on the cover include actress Ashley Judd, singer Taylor Swift, former Uber engineer Susan Fowler, Visa lobbyist Adama Iwu, Mexican agricultural worker Isabel Pascual, and one woman whose face cannot be seen.

National:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Inaugurated B R Ambedkar International Centre

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the BR Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi. The prime minister also unveiled two statues of the Dalit icon at the centre in Janpath. The centre was a fusion of Buddhist and modern architecture. He had laid the foundation stone of the center in 2015.

Unesco recognizes Kumbh Mela as India's cultural heritage

The Kumbh Mela has been recognized by Unesco as an "intangible cultural heritage of humanity", a tweet posted on 7th December by the international organization said.

The intergovernmental committee for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage under the UN body inscribed the Kumbh Mela on the "representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity" at its 12th session in Jeju, South Korea.

The meeting, which opened on 4 December, will end on 9 December. Kumbh Mela, considered the world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims, joins new elements from Botswana, Colombia, Venezuela, Mongolia, Morocco, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates on the list.

The inscription of elements on the list helps countries which are a part of Unesco's convention for safeguarding cultural heritage to mobilize international cooperation and assistance for ensuring that communities continue to practise and transmit such aspects of their heritage.

The Kumbh Mela, held in Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik, represents a syncretic set of rituals related to worship and cleansing in holy rivers. The inscription of Kumbh Mela was recommended by the expert body which examines in detail nominations submitted by member states. The committee also took note of the fact that knowledge and skills related to the Kumbh Mela are transmitted through the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-student relationship) by way of saints and sadhus teaching their disciples about traditional rituals and chants.

Word Heritage Sites by UNESCO

UNESCO established its Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage with the aim of ensuring better protection of important intangible cultural heritages worldwide and the awareness of their significance. This list is

published by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and its members are elected by State parties meeting in UN General Assembly. Through a compendium of the different oral and intangible treasures of humankind worldwide, the program aims to draw attention to the importance of safeguarding intangible heritage, which UNESCO has identified as an essential component and as a repository of cultural diversity and of creative expression.

The list was established in 2008 when the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage took effect.

As of 2010 the programme compiles two lists. The longer ***Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*** comprises cultural "practices and expressions [that] help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance." The shorter ***List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*** is composed of those cultural elements that concerned communities and countries consider require urgent measures to keep them alive.

Economy:

Govt ropes in ICICI Bank to enable cashless payments on e-NAM

The government has engaged private lender ICICI Bank to enable online payments at 470 mandis integrated with the national portal of electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM). At present, e-NAM participants are doing payments through traditional ways via bank branches, debit cards and net banking.

The official said, online payments should to be smooth and without any delay which is why ICICI Bank has been roped in as a banker for e-NAM.

The official also said, ICICI Bank will enable BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) on the e-NAM portal for making cashless payments.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURE MARKET (NAM)

Now Farmers' Produce will also be sold on internet

1. What is the National Agriculture Market (NAM) ?

NAM is envisaged as a pan-India electronic trading portal which seeks to network the existing APMC and other market yards to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities. NAM is a "virtual" market but it has a physical market (mandi) at the back end.

2. What is the difference between NAM and the existing mandi system?

NAM is not a parallel marketing structure but rather a device to create a national network of physical mandis which can be accessed online. It seeks to leverage the physical infrastructure of the mandis

through an online trading portal, enabling buyers situated even outside the State to participate in trading at the local level.

3. Why is NAM necessary?

It is necessary to create NAM to facilitate the emergence of a common national market for agricultural commodities. Current APMC regulated market yards limit the scope of trading in agricultural commodities at the first point of sale (i.e. when farmers offer produce after the harvest) in the local mandi, typically at the level of Taluka / Tahsil or at best the district. Even one State is not a unified agricultural market and there are transaction costs on moving produce from one market area to another within the same State. Multiple licences are necessary to trade in different market areas in the same State. All this has led to a highly fragmented and high-cost agricultural economy, which prevents economies of scale and seamless movement of agri goods across district and State borders. NAM seeks to address and reverse this process of fragmentation of markets, ultimately lowering intermediation costs, wastage and prices for the final consumer. It builds on the strength of the local mandi and allows it to offer its produce at the national level.

4. How will NAM operate?

The NAM electronic trading platform has been created with an investment by the Government of India (through the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare). It offers a "plug-in" to any market yard existing in a State (whether regulated or private). The special software developed for NAM is available to each mandi which agrees to join the national network free of cost with necessary customization to conform to the regulations of each State Mandi Act.

5. Are there any conditions for joining NAM?

States interested to integrate their mandis with NAM are required to carry out following reforms in their APMC Act.

- a) Specific provision for electronic trading .
- b) Single trading licenses valid for trading in all mandis of the State.
- c) Single point levy of transaction fee.

6. Will the APMC mandis lose out business due to NAM?

No. NAM basically increases the choice of the farmer when he brings his produce to the mandi for sale. Local traders can bid for the produce, as also traders on the electronic platform sitting in other States. The farmer may chose to accept either the local offer or the online offer. In either case the transaction will be on the books of the local mandi and they will continue to earn the transaction fee. In fact, the volume of business will significantly increase as there will be greater competition for specific produce, resulting in higher transaction fees for the mandi.

7. Who will bear the costs of NAM?

The national level platform has been developed by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, which will also bear the maintenance costs. As stated above, the integration costs for local mandis and customization of software, training etc. will also be paid for by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare as a one-time grant at the time of accepting the mandi in the national network. Thereafter, the running costs of the software at the local level, staff costs for quality check etc. will be met from the transaction fee to be generated through the sale of produce. The intention is to avoid any upfront investment by the mandi when it integrates into NAM, and also enable it to support the running cost through additional generation of revenue.

8. Who will actually operate the NAM platform?

Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Govt. of India has appointed Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) as the Lead Implementing Agency of NAM. SFAC will operate and maintain the NAM platform with the help of a Strategic partner selected for the purpose.

9. What are the likely benefits of NAM?

NAM is envisaged as a win-win solution for all stakeholders. For the farmers, NAM promises more options for sale at his nearest mandi. For the local trader in the mandi, NAM offers the opportunity to access a larger national market for secondary trading. Bulk buyers, processors, exporters etc. benefit from being able to participate directly in trading at the local mandi level through the NAM platform, thereby reducing their intermediation costs. The gradual integration of all the major mandis in the States into NAM will ensure common procedures for issue of licenses, levy of fee and movement of produce. In the near future we can expect significant benefits through higher returns to farmers, lower transaction costs to buyers and stable prices and availability to consumers. The NAM will also facilitate the emergence of integrated value chains in major agricultural commodities across the country and help to promote scientific storage and movement of agri commodities.

RBI rationalises charges on debit card transactions

In order to promote digital payments, RBI has come out with differentiated merchant discount rates (MDR) for debit card transactions, prescribing separate caps for small and large traders.

MDR is the rate charged to a merchant by a bank for providing debit and credit card services. As per the latest notification, MDR charges for small merchants with an annual turnover of up to 20 lakh rupees has been fixed at 0.4 per cent with a cap of 200 rupees per transaction by debit cards through Point of Sale (PoS) machines or online transactions.

For accepting payments via QR (quick response) code based transactions, the charge will be 0.3 per cent subject to a cap of 200 rupees per transaction.

In case the annual turnover of a merchant is over 20 lakh rupees, MDR charges would be 0.9 per cent with a cap of 1,000 rupees per transaction. If the transaction is through QR code, the charges will be 0.8 per cent with a similar cap. The directions will come into effect from 1st January.

Science and Technology

World smallest Mona Lisa created using DNA origami

Caltech scientists have made the world's smallest recreation of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, the size of a bacterium, out of DNA. The technique, dubbed DNA origami, enabled scientists to fold DNA into desired self-assembling structures using 64 tiles, which were 100 nanometers wide. The team also created a life-sized portrait of a bacterium and a bacterium-sized portrait of a rooster