

## **February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> news:**

### **International:**

#### **India slips to 42nd place on EIU Democracy Index**

India has slipped to 42nd place on an annual Global Democracy Index amid “rise of conservative religious ideologies” and increase in vigilantism and violence against minorities as well as other dissenting voices.

While Norway has again topped the list, followed by Iceland and Sweden, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), India has moved down from 32nd place last year and remains classified among “flawed democracies”.

The index ranks 165 independent states and two territories on the basis of five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture. The list has been divided into four broad categories—full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime.

The US (ranked 21), Japan, Italy, France, Israel, Singapore, and Hong Kong have also been named among ‘flawed democracies’. The EIU is the research and analysis division of the UK- based media behemoth *The Economist Group*. Created in 1946, the EIU describes itself as having over 70 years of experience “in helping businesses, financial firms and governments to understand how the world is changing and how that creates opportunities to be seized and risks to be managed”.

The top three positions on the list are occupied by Nordic countries—Norway, Iceland and Sweden. New Zealand is at fourth and Denmark at fifth place, while others in top ten include Ireland, Canada, Australia, Finland and Switzerland.

Only top 19 countries have been classified as ‘full democracies’, while the hybrid regimes include Pakistan (110th), Bangladesh (92nd), Nepal (94th) and Bhutan (99th). Those named as ‘authoritarian regimes’ include China (139th), Myanmar (120th), Russia (135th) and Vietnam (140th). North Korea is ranked the lowest at 167th, while Syria is a notch better at 166th place.

Top-ranked Norway has been given an overall score of 9.87 with perfect-ten scores for electoral process and pluralism; political participation; and political culture. India’s overall score has fallen to 7.23 points, even as it scored well on electoral process and pluralism (9.17). It has not managed to score so well on other four parameters—political culture, functioning of government, political participation and civil liberties.

This year’s report which also measured the state of media freedom around the world noted that in India, media is ‘partially free’. Moreover, journalists are at risk from government, military and non-state actors and radical groups, and the threat of violence has a chilling effect on media coverage.

In the 2017 Democracy Index, the average global score fell from 5.52 in 2016 to 5.48 (on a scale of 0 to 10). Some 89 countries experienced a decline in their total score compared with 2016. 27 recorded an improvement. The other 51 countries stagnated, as their scores remained unchanged compared with 2016.

Almost one-half (49.3%) of the world's population lives in a democracy of some sort, although only 4.5% reside in a "full democracy", down from 8.9% in 2015 as a result of the US being demoted from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy" in 2016. Around one-third of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule, with a large share being in China, EIU noted.

## **Bilateral:**

### **India joins Ashgabat agreement**

India has joined the Ashgabat agreement, which envisages setting up of an international transport and transit corridor linking central Asia with the Persian Gulf to significantly ramp up trade and investment.

Turkmenistan, as depository State of Ashgabat Agreement, informed India that all the four founding members have consented to the accession of India (to the agreement)

Besides Turkmenistan, the other founding members of the agreement are Iran, Oman and Uzbekistan and these countries had signed the pact on April 25, 2011.

Accession to the Agreement would diversify India's connectivity options with central Asia and have a positive influence on India's trade and commercial ties with the region. It said India's accession to the agreement will come into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> February. After approval of the Cabinet, India had deposited the instrument of accession with Turkmenistan in April 2016.

### **IWAI signs agreement with World Bank for Jal Marg Vikas Project**

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has signed an agreement with the World Bank for Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) to enhance navigation on National Waterway-1 from Varanasi to Haldia.

Ministry of Shipping said that the signing of the pact comes after Cabinet approved the implementation of 800 million US dollar JMVP for capacity augmentation of navigation on National Waterway-1, River Ganga, from Varanasi to Haldia.

The JMVP, which is expected to be completed by March, 2023, is being implemented with the financial and technical support of the World Bank.

The development and operations of the National Waterway-1 project will lead to direct employment generation to the tune of 46,000 and indirect employment of 84,000 in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

### **Bhutanese consulate office opened in Guwahati**

A Bhutanese consulate office was opened in Guwahati on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. It was jointly inaugurated by Chief Minister of Assam Sarbananda Sonowal and the Himalayan country's Foreign Affairs Minister Lyonpo Damcho Dorji.

### **Economy:**

#### **Arun Jaitley declared World's largest health scheme in budget**

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, introduced Union Budget on 1<sup>st</sup> February, in Parliament. The total budget amount is Rs 23, 42, 213 crore, the world's largest health policy was declared in the budget. Highlights are....

- Budget guided by mission to strengthen agriculture, rural development, health, education, employment, MSME and infrastructure sectors
- Government says, a series of structural reforms will propel India among the fastest growing economies of the world. The nation is firmly on course to achieve over 8 % growth as manufacturing, services and exports back on good growth path.
- MSP for all unannounced kharif crops will be one and half times of their production cost like majority of rabi crops: Institutional Farm Credit raised to 11 lakh crore in 2018-19 from 8.5 lakh crore in 2014-15.
- 22,000 rural haats to be developed and upgraded into Gramin Agricultural Markets to protect the interests of 86% small and marginal farmers.
- "Operation Green" launched to address price fluctuations in potato, tomato and onion for benefit of farmers and consumers.
- Two New Funds of Rs 10,000 crore announced for Fisheries and Animal Husbandary sectors, Re-structured National Bamboo Mission gets Rs 1290 crore.
- Loans to Women Self Help Groups will increase to Rs.75,000 crore in 2019 from 42,500 crore last year.
- Higher targets for Ujjwala, Saubhagya and Swachh Mission to cater to lower and middle class in providing free LPG connections, electricity and toilets.
- Outlay on health, education and social protection will be 1.38 lakh crore. Tribal students to get Ekalavya Residential School in each tribal block by 2022. Welfare fund for SCs gets a boost.
- **World's largest Health Protection Scheme covering over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families launched with a family limit upto 5 lakh rupees for secondary and tertiary treatment.**
- Fiscal Deficit pegged at 3.5%, projected at 3.3% for 2018-19.
- Rs 5.97 lakh crore allocation for infrastructure.

- Ten prominent sites to be developed as Iconic tourist destinations.
- NITI Aayog to initiate a national programme on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and centres of excellence will be set up on robotics, AI, Internet of things etc.
- Disinvestment crossed target of Rs 72,500 crore to reach Rs 1,00,000 crore.
- Comprehensive Gold Policy on the anvil to develop yellow metal as an asset class.
- 100% deduction proposed to companies registered as Farmer Producer Companies with an annual turnover upto Rs 100 crore on profit derived from such activities, for five years from 2018-19.
- Deduction of 30% on emoluments paid to new employees Under Section 80-JJAA to be relaxed to 150 days for footwear and leather industry, to create more employment.
- No adjustment in respect of transactions in immovable property where Circle Rate value does not exceed 5% of consideration.
- Proposal to extend reduced rate of 25% currently available for companies with turnover of less than 50 crore (in Financial Year 2015-16), to companies reporting turnover up to Rs. 250 crore in Financial Year 2016-17, to benefit micro, small and medium enterprises.
- Standard Deduction of Rs 40,000 in place of present exemption for transport allowance and reimbursement of miscellaneous medical expenses. 2.5 crore salaried employees and pensioners to benefit.

### **Tax highlights**

- To control cash economy, payments exceeding Rs 10,000 in cash made by trusts and institutions to be disallowed and would be subject to tax.
- Tax on Long Term Capital Gains exceeding Rs 1 lakh at the rate of 10%, without allowing any indexation benefit. However, all gains up to 31st January, 2018 will be grandfathered.
- Proposal to introduce tax on distributed income by equity oriented mutual funds at the rate of 10%.
- Proposal to increase cess on personal income tax and corporation tax to 4% from present 3%.
- Proposal to roll out E-assessment across the country to almost eliminate person to person contact leading to greater efficiency and transparency in direct tax collection.
- Proposed changes in customs duty to promote creation of more jobs in the country and also to incentivise domestic value addition and 'Make in India' in sectors such as food processing, electronics, auto components, footwear and furniture.

## **Science and Technology:**

### **China successfully launches first seismo-electromagnetic satellite**

China successfully launched its first seismo-electromagnetic satellite to study seismic precursors, which might help it establish a ground-space earthquake monitoring and forecasting network in the future.

A Long March-2D rocket, which was launched from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China's Gobi Desert, carried the 730-kilogramme China SeismoElectromagnetic Satellite (CSES) into a sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of about 500 Kms

Known as Zhangheng 1 in Chinese, it will help scientists monitor the electromagnetic field, ionospheric plasma and high-energy particles for an expected mission life of five years

The satellite is named after Zhang Heng, a scholar of the East Han Dynasty (25-220), who pioneered earthquake studies by inventing the first ever seismoscope in the year 132.

Zhangheng 1 will record electromagnetic data associated with earthquakes above 6 magnitude in China and those above 7 magnitude around the world, in a bid to identify patterns in the electromagnetic disturbances in the near-Earth environment

It will focus on Chinese mainland, areas within 1,000 kms to China's land borders and two major global earthquake belts.

The satellite will help scientists understand better the coupling mechanisms of the upper atmosphere, ionosphere and magnetosphere and the temporal variations of the geomagnetic field, and thus accumulate data for the research of seismic precursors, Zhao said.

## **Sports:**

### **Mary Kom triumph**

In Boxing, M C Mary Kom claimed a gold but the Indian men's juggernaut was denied a complete sweep by traditional powerhouses Cuba and Uzbekistan on final day of the India Open Boxing Tournament, in New Delhi on 1<sup>st</sup> February.

Mary Kom won against Filipino Josie Gabuco en route to her gold in the 48 kilogram class among women. In 64 kilogram category, Pwilao Basumatary was the first among the women to fetch a gold.

In the 60 kilogram category, National Champion Manish Kaushik who stunned world and Asian medalist Shiva Thapa, didn't have to step inside the ring to collect his gold. He was given a walkover by his Mongolian rival Battumur Misheelt, who pulled out owing to an injury during his semifinal bout.

Asian Games bronze-medalist Satish Kumar, however, settled for a silver he +91 kilogram category, outwitted by Uzbekistan's Bakhodir Jalolov in a split 4-1 decision. Dinesh Dagar took the welterweight silver after going down to Uzbekistan's Bobo-Usmon Baturov.

## **Awards:**

**Shesh Anand Mudhukar:** Magahi writer Shesh Anand Madhukar honored with Sahitya Akademi Bhasha Samman award. He is a second writer of Magahi language to be given this award.

Magahi language also known as Magadhi is the language spoken in Bihar-Jharkhand region of eastern India. It has been derived from ancient language Magadhi is the language spoken in Bihar-Jharkhand region of eastern India. It has been derived from ancient language Magadhi Prakrit, spoken in the ancient kingdom.

**Geospatial award for Odisha:** Odisha Government won 'Geospatial World Excellence Award-2018' for successful IT application for tracking of mineral production. The award was presented at the Geospatial World Forum Meeting held at Hyderabad, Telangana. The event was attended by more than 3,000 geospatial experts from 90 different countries. i3MS is GPS-linked web-based software designed by scientists of Odisha Space Applications Centre (ORSAC), Bhubaneswar.

**Shantaram:** Mumbai International Film Festival committee has decided to bestow V. Shantaram lifetime achievement Award to veteran film producer and director Shyam Benegal. Benegal has been selected for his contribution to the promotion of the documentary movement. The credit of Introducing experimental parallel films in India goes to him. He has made 28 great films like Ankur, Mandi, Bhumika and Manthan. Besides that, he has made 41 documentary films on various social topics.

## **Persons in news:**

**Vikram Singh Sisodia:** The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) appointed its joint secretary Vikram Singh Sisodia as the Chef-de-Mission for the upcoming Commonwealth Games to be held in Gold Coast, Australia. The IOA also appointed three team managers to accompany Sisodia and help him in the day-to-day duties during the Games. Sisodia is also currently the president of Chhattisgarh State Tennis Association.