

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – JAN 18, 2020

TAMIL NADU

- **The Tamil Nadu government - has appointed Justice K. Chandru, retired judge of the Madras HC, as the Chairman of a fee fixation committee for private agricultural colleges in the State**
- ✓ Justice Chandru was nominated for the position by Chief Justice Amreshwar Pratap Sahi.
- ✓ The fee fixation committee consists of a Member Secretary and seven other members.
- ✓ Agriculturist OVR. Somasundaram of Odayakulam in Pollachi Taluk of Coimbatore district has been named as one of the members.
- ✓ Earlier in August 2003, the Supreme Court had ordered the constitution of committees headed by retired High Court judges to fix fees for students admitted to private professional educational institutions.

NATIONAL

- **Punjab - became the second state in the country after Kerala to pass an assembly resolution seeking repeal of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on January 17**
- ✓ Chief minister Amarinder Singh called the new law “inherently discriminatory” and reminder of the “ethnic and religious cleansing in Hitler’s Germany”.
- ✓ The resolution was supported by AAP and opposed by Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)
- ✓ It demands changes in the documentation required for inclusion of names in the National Population Register.
- ✓ Like Kerala, the Congress government in Punjab is also likely to move the Supreme Court against the amended citizenship law soon

- **The J&K Union territory government - has decided to hand over internal security at Jammu and Srinagar airports to the CISF by January 31**

- ✓ Till now, security at the airports was jointly handled by J&K Police and the CRPF
 - ✓ However, the CRPF would still continue to take care of security of the outer areas of the airports.
 - ✓ The airports at Jammu and Srinagar are categorised as “hyper-sensitive”, while the one in Leh is “sensitive” considering its strategic location
 - ✓ The CISF has a special Aviation security group (ASG) that takes care of the airport security.
 - ✓ The runways at the 3 airports, unlike the others in the country, would continue to taken care of security by the Air Force
- **The Centre - decided to take over real estate giant Unitech, which is in a financial mess, to streamline its company management**

A DECADE AFTER SATYAM, GOVT STEPS IN TO SALVAGE ANOTHER BIG COMPANY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Forensic audit reveals company promoters siphoned off more than 50% of money deposited by individuals and financial institutions ➤ Unitech involved in 74 housing projects, with around 30,000 homebuyers ➤ Over 250 subsidiaries, including 32 foreign ones, incorporated in tax havens like 	<p>Cyprus, British Virgin Islands, Channel Islands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Yudhvir Singh Malik's name proposed as chairman & managing director; six others to be made directors to run the company to complete all pending housing projects ➤ Unitech is the 2nd high-profile company taken over by govt after Satyam in 2009
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- ✓ The company is accused of siphoning off of more than 50% of money deposited by individuals and financial institutions.
 - ✓ As per the SC's suggestion to protect the interest of homebuyers and investors, the Centre stepped in and proposed the name of retired IAS officer Yudvir Singh Malik as Chairman and Managing Director of the company.
 - ✓ Unitech Group is involved in construction of 74 housing projects and around 29,800 home-buyers have invested in the projects.
 - ✓ After Satyam in 2009, this is the second high profile company to be taken over by the government.
 - ✓ The Hyderabad-based Satyam was in the midst of a major scandal after its chairman Ramalinga Raju admitted to fudging accounts to the tune of ₹7,000-odd crore.
- **A Delhi court - issued a fresh black warrant, fixing the hanging of all four men, Akshay Singh, Pawan Gupta, Vinay Sharma and Mukesh, for February 1at 6am**

- ✓ The warrant was issued hours after President Ram Nath Kovind rejected the mercy plea of death row convict Mukesh Kumar Singh in the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case
- ✓ Accordingly, the new death warrant also covers the 14 days in accordance with a rule in the jail manual, which states convicts to be executed must have a two-week window from the date of rejection of their mercy plea.

INTERNATIONAL

- **China – reports the death of a second person from the new corona virus that has caused the onset of pneumonia in Wuhan of central China, the epicenter of the outbreak.**
- ✓ In total, 41 confirmed cases of novel corona virus (nCoV) were reported in Wuhan, including one death in January 2020.
- ✓ Corona virus belongs to a large family of viruses, which causes illnesses ranging from common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).
- ✓ They also circulate in animals including camels, cats and bats
- ✓ Two patients in Thailand and another in Japan have also been diagnosed with the virus.
- ✓ The SARS epidemic began in southern China in late 2002, which spread to more than 24 countries, killing 800 people.
- ✓ India has issued a travel advisory for those visiting China in the wake of an outbreak of corona virus in China

PERSONALITIES

- **Khagendra Thapa Magar, the world's shortest man who could walk, as verified by Guinness World Records, died in Nepal on January 17.**



- ✓ Measuring just 67.08 cm, Magar first won the title in 2010 after his 18th birthday.
- ✓ He lost it briefly later and regained it in 2015

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **ISRO'S communication satellite GSAT-30 - was successfully launched by European space agency's heavy-lift launch vehicle Ariane-5 (VA 251) from French Guiana at 2.35am (IST) on January 17.**
- ✓ This is the country's first satellite launch of this year
- ✓ GSAT-30 was successfully placed in the geosynchronous orbit 38 minutes 25 seconds after the liftoff

- ✓ The satellite was launched along with the European Space Company's telecommunication satellite- Eutelsat Konnect.
- ✓ The 3,357kg GSAT-30 intends to replace the ageing Insat-4A spacecraft, launched in 2005, with enhanced coverage.
- ✓ The high-power satellite is equipped with 12 normal C band and 12 Ku band transponders.
- ✓ The satellite will provide Indian mainland and islands' coverage in Ku-band and extended coverage to Gulf countries, a large number of Asian countries and Australia in C-band
- ✓ GSAT-30 will assist in providing DTH service, connectivity to VSATs [that support working of banks] for ATM, stock-exchange, TV uplinking and teleport services, digital satellite news gathering and e-governance applications.
- ✓ The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for various emerging telecommunication applications
- ✓ With a mission life of 15 years, GSAT-30 is configured on Isro's enhanced I-3K bus structure.
- ✓ ISRO opted for a foreign launch as the GSAT-30 is much heavier than the 2,000-kg lifting capacity of its geostationary launch vehicle GSLV-MkII.

DEFENCE

- **Lieutenant General S K Saini - will take over as the new Army vice-chief on January 25**



- ✓ S K Saini is currently serving as the chief of the Pune-based Southern Command
- ✓ The post was lying vacant since December 31 after the elevation of the then vice chief, General M M Naravane as the 28th Chief of Indian Army
- ✓ The former Chief of Army, General Bipin Rawat, was appointed as the country's first ever Chief of Defence staff.
- ✓ Lt-Gen C P Mohanty, in turn, is likely to take over the Southern Command
- ✓ Lt-Gen Y K Joshi is likely to become the chief of the J&K based Northern Command after Lt-Gen Ranbir Singh retires on January 31.
- ✓ Lt-Gen Saini was commissioned into the 7 Jat Regiment in June 1981
- ✓ He is an alumnus of Sainik School, Kapurthala

ECONOMY

- **Google-parent Alphabet - became the fourth US company to reach a market value of more than \$1 trillion on January 16**
- ✓ Alphabet joins Apple, Amazon and Microsoft as the next US firm to hit \$1 trillion in market value
- ✓ Apple was the first company to hit the market cap milestone in 2018

- ✓ It was followed by Microsoft and then by Amazon
- ✓ Apple and Microsoft are still valued at more than a trillion dollars while Amazon has since fallen below the mark.
- ✓ With a roughly \$620 billion valuation, Facebook appears to be the next likely trillion-dollar tech contender.

SPORTS

- **India's Greco-Roman wrestler Gurpreet Singh – wins the Rome ranking series tournament in a 82kg final in Italy**
- ✓ Last year, the 25-year-old from Mohali in Punjab became India's first Greco-Roman wrestler to win gold in a ranking series tournament in Sassari, Italy.
- ✓ Greco-Roman wrestling isn't as popular as freestyle in India, which is the traditional form of Indian wrestling
- ✓ In freestyle, the focus is on strength and stamina whereas in Greco-Roman, it is the speed that is the prime focus.
- ✓ In the same event, India's Sajan Bhanwal won bronze in the 77kg weight class
- ✓ This was India's third Greco-Roman medal in the tournament as Sunil Kumar had won silver on the first day in the 87kg category.

RANKINGS

- **India - is ranked as the second largest market worldwide for app downloads, as per analytics firm AppAnnie's recent 'State of Mobile' report.**
- ✓ At 19 billion, app downloads in India in 2019 grew a massive 195% from 2016 compared to a worldwide growth of 45%.
- ✓ This indicates India has registered the strongest three-year growth among the top five app economies
- ✓ The download growth in mature markets like the US was just 5% during the period, while China saw 80% growth

BOOMING BUSINESS

Source: AppAnnie State of Mobile 2020

➤ India recorded 19 billion app downloads in 2019- a 195% growth in the three-year period from 2016

➤ Consumers in India spend on average 3.5 hours per day on mobile

➤ Indian users spent \$370 million through app stores in 2019- just 0.33% of the worldwide spends, but a 185% rise from 2016

➤ TikTok was India's breakout

social app in terms of YoY downloads growth

➤ PUBG Mobile recorded highest spend among gaming apps

➤ MX Player, Hotstar, and Netflix, were top three video streaming apps

➤ Tez (Google Pay) was the finance app with the highest yearly downloads growth across iOS and Play Store



- ✓ The average Indian mobile user spent 3.5 hours per day on mobile in 2019 — just slightly below the global average of 3.7 hours — but representing a growth of 30% year-on-year compared to global growth of 10%
- ✓ Globally, consumers downloaded record 204 billion apps during last year
- ✓ Tez (Google Pay) in finance, Amazon in shopping, and MX Player for video streaming, and TikTok among social apps, are a few of India's "breakout apps" in 2019
- ✓ Spending 750 million hours on TikTok in 2019, time spent by Indian users on the short-videos app grew 240% year-on-year.
- ✓ Among gaming apps, PUBG Mobile registered highest consumer spend in India, and the app Carrom Pool was top in terms of downloads.

LOCUST ATTACK IN RAJASTHAN – A REPORT

- **In the longest- and worst-ever locust attack in Rajasthan in the last 60 years, 10 western districts of the state - have suffered crop damage in at least 3.6-lakh-hectare area**
- ✓ Sriganga nagar district has been hit the hardest, with 75% of its crops eaten up.
- ✓ The other nine affected districts are Hanumangarh, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jodhpur, Jalore, Sirohi, Nagaur and Churu.
- ✓ Farmers in these 10 districts first witnessed swarms of pink locusts coming from Pakistan damaging their kharif crop (July-Sept) in May last year, and now they are back with fresh attacks affecting their rabi crop (October-March) too
- ✓ A good monsoon, greenery and moisture have been cited as the reasons behind the excessive presence of locusts this year
- ✓ Farmers have sown wheat, gram, mustard and cumin this year, which are now damaged

FLYING 'TERRORISTS' THAT HAVE TAKEN WESTERN RAJ HOSTAGE

Pic: Bhagirath

WHAT ARE LOCUSTS

➤ Locusts are a collection of certain species of short-horned grasshoppers that have a swarming phase. These insects are usually solitary, but under certain circumstances they become abundant and gregarious.

A BIT OF HISTORY

➤ In the biblical book of Exodus, locusts are one of 10 plagues delivered upon Egypt after the pharaoh refused to free the enslaved Israelites.

HOW TO COMBAT THESE INSECTS

➤ Traditional means of control are based on the use of insecticides from the ground or the air, but other methods using biological control are proving effective.

PESTS AS FOOD

➤ In many African, Middle Eastern and Asian countries, locusts are considered a delicacy and eaten in abundance. Locusts are an excellent source of protein and contain a variety of fatty acids and minerals.



DISTRIBUTION

➤ Migratory locust has the largest world distribution area among all locusts and grasshoppers, comprising practically all temperate and tropical parts of the eastern hemisphere, i.e. Europe, Africa incl. Madagascar, Arabian and Indo-Pakistan peninsulas, Caucasus, Central and South-eastern Asia, Australia, Papua New Guinea and New-Zealand.

DISTANCE TRAVELED

➤ Locust swarms can cover vast distances. In 1954, a swarm flew from northwest Africa to Great Britain. In 1988, another made the lengthy trek from West Africa to the Caribbean.

WHEN DO THEY TURN DANGEROUS

➤ It's in the gregarious phase that locusts form swarms that can be devastating to crops and pasture. They enter the gregarious phase if there is sufficient rainfall that guarantees enough vegetation for the young ones, and the ground is moist for egg development.

LOCUST ATTACK IN RAJASTHAN

➤ Rajasthan is facing biggest locust attack in last 6 decades. Around 3.60 lakh hectares has been affected so far, which is the biggest attack for last 60 years. It is also the longest attack of locust which has affected both Kharif and Rabi crops

➤ Border districts Jaisalmer and Barmer are worst affected in addition to areas in Jalore, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Pali, Churu, Nagaur, Sriganganagar and Hanumangarh

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN THE LAST TIME?

➤ The last locust outbreak was reported in 1993 when the state's agriculture department had carried out preventive measures on 3,10,482 lakh hectares

LIFE CYCLE

➤ The life cycle of the locust consists of eggs, nymphs and adult. The eggs take about two weeks during favourable conditions to hatch into nymphs. Both nymphs and adults are feeders. However, the nymphs (also known as hoppers) do not have wings and become adults 30-40 days after hatching. The young adults take about three weeks before they are ready to mate and lay eggs. Adults live for three to five months.

SPEED

Locust swarms can fly at a speed of more than 15km/h and can cover a distance of more than 100km a day. These swarms can be as large as 80 million individuals



Pink locusts spotted in Anoopgarh tehsil in Sriganganagar

WHAT ARE PINK LOCUSTS?

➤ Desert locusts have two phases, the solitary phase and the gregarious phase. Their colouring tends to be greenish or brownish to match the colour of the herbage. In the gregarious phase the hoppers bunch together and in the later instars develop a bold colouring with black markings on a yellow background. The immatures are pink and the mature adults are bright yellow and fly during the day in dense swarms.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE MINISTRY

➤ Food and Agri Ministry with its 3 field headquarters at Bikaner, Jodhpur and Palanpur, its 75 sub-stations and over 200 outposts and radio warning parties keep a sharp lookout for the hoppers to emerge and deal with them.

WHAT DO THEY EAT

➤ Locusts devour leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, bark & growing points, and also destroy plants by their sheer weight as they descend on them in massive numbers.

INTERESTING FACTS

➤ When they come, locusts come too thick to be killed. It is said on one occasion a swarm suddenly settled on a railway track in Sindh and derailed a running train.

➤ Recently, a swarm of locusts forced a passenger plane off its course in Ethiopia. Thirty minutes later the plane landed safely but in the capital Addis Ababa instead.



Locust attack in Jaisalmer

HOW MUCH DO THEY EAT?

➤ A locust adult can consume roughly its own weight in fresh food per day, that is about two grams daily. A 1 km2 size swarm contains 40 million locusts, which eat the same amount of food in one day as about 35,000 people, 20 camels or 6 elephants.



Desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) affect the entire north Africa, Middle East and east Asian countries primarily after monsoon

WHY ARE DESERT LOCUSTS DIFFICULT TO CONTAIN?

There are many reasons why it is difficult to combat the Desert Locust

- 1 Extremely large area (16-30 million sq. km) within which locusts can be found
- 2 Remoteness and difficult access of such areas
- 3 Limited resources for locust monitoring and control in some of the affected countries
- 4 Difficulty in maintaining a sufficient number of trained staff and functioning resources during the long periods of recession in which there is little or no locust activities

THE ROUTE: The locusts coming to India (Rajasthan and Gujarat) originate from Horn of Africa and traverse Middle Eastern countries before coming via Pakistan after monsoon. Locusts can travel up to 200km a day riding on the winds

