

NEWS TODAY

INDIA ANNOUNCES A SLEW OF MEASURES FOR MALDIVES

• Measures are aimed to help Maldives deal with economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Five-pronged package includes:

- > **\$500 million to support Greater Malé Connectivity Project** that aims to connect Male to Villingili, Thilafushi and Gulhifahu islands.
- > **A direct cargo ferry service** to enhance sea connectivity and provide predictability in supplies for importers in Maldives and exporters in India.
- > **Creation of an air travel bubble** to facilitate movement of people for employment, tourism and medical emergencies.
- > Renewed quotas for **supply of essential commodities** that includes food items, river sand, stone aggregates etc.
- > Additional **financial aid of \$250 million.**

• **Importance of Maldives for India**

- > **Strategic location:** Its central location between the Strait of Malacca and Gulf of Aden is crucial for India to keep watch over the sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean Region.
- > **Counter Chinese effect:** Maldives has become a focal point in China's Belt and Road Initiative aimed at building trade and transport links across the region.
- > **Under its Neighbourhood First policy,** India is committed to developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all its neighbours.



INDIA RANKS FIRST IN NUMBER OF ORGANIC FARMERS

• India is home to **30% of the total organic producers in the world** and ranks **ninth in terms of area under organic farming**, 2.59% of the total organic cultivation area (57.8 million hectares).

- > **Major organic exports from India:** flax seeds, sesame, soybean, tea, medicinal plants, rice, and pulses etc.
- > Sikkim is first fully organic state in the world.
- Organic farming is a production system which **avoids or excludes use of synthetically compounded fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators** etc. It relies upon **crop rotations, use of crop residues, animal manures, legumes, green manures, biofertilizers** etc.
- **Benefits:** reduces soil erosion, decreases nitrate leaching into groundwater and surface water, maintains level of organic matter, protects soil fertility etc.
- **Issues:** Production declines in initial years, increased pest attacks, rising input costs and limited market etc.
- **Initiatives for adopting organic farming:**
 - > **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana** under National Mission of Sustainable Agriculture aims at development of sustainable models of organic farming.
 - > Mission **Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region.**
 - > **Organic e-commerce platform Jaivik kheti** for directly linking farmers with retail as well as bulk buyers.

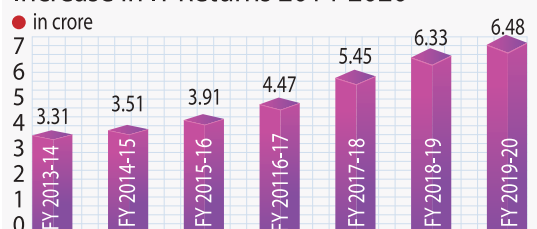
GUJARAT GOVERNMENT NOT IN FAVOUR OF TRANSLOCATING LIONS TO MADHYA PRADESH (MP)

- Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary (Gujarat) is the **only place in the world where Asiatic lions** (IUCN status: Endangered) are found.
- In 2013, Supreme Court ruled **in favour of creating a second home for them** by translocating a few of them to **Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in MP.**
 - > High rate of inbreeding and the resultant reduced genetic diversity may make Gir lions **highly susceptible to epidemics.**
 - > **Gir Forest is unable to sustain** the steadily increasing numbers.
 - > Infections, food poisoning and infighting among lions.
- However, till date, **not a single Gir lion has been transported to MP.** Gujarat government had stated that lions are:
 - > **Pride of the state and like family members** to local communities and Barda Wildlife Sanctuary (Porbandar) was being prepared as a second home for lions.
 - > Safe in Gujarat and that **their population and range was growing.** According to 2020 census, **there are an estimated 674 Asiatic lions** (increased by 29% in last 5 years) in Gir forest region.
- Asiatic lions and **African lions** are subspecies of the same species. Asiatic lions are slightly smaller than African lions (IUCN status: Vulnerable)

PRIME MINISTER LAUNCHES 'TRANSPARENT TAXATION - HONOURING THE HONEST' PLATFORM

- It is aimed at **easing the tax compliance and also rewarding honest taxpayers.**
- It aims to resolve the problems of a taxpayer instead of entangling him further and **ensure that there is no direct contact in all matters of scrutiny, notice, survey or assessment.**
- Main features of Platform are Faceless Assessment, Faceless Appeal and Taxpayer Charter.
 - > **Faceless assessment:** To eliminate direct contact between Taxpayer and Income Tax officer.
 - > **Faceless appeals:** Appeals will be randomly allotted to any officer in the country and identity of the officer deciding the appeal will remain unknown.
 - > **Taxpayer charter:** It outlines the rights and responsibilities of both tax officers and taxpayers.
- At present there are **only 1.5 crore taxpayers in the country.** That is just a little over 1% of India's population and only 1.6% of the country's adult population. **To improve this government has taken steps like:**
 - > Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Act, 2020 for resolution of pending tax disputes.
 - > Reduction in Corporate tax rates.
 - > Abolition of Dividend distribution Tax.

Increase in IT Returns 2014-2020



ISRAEL AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) STRIKE MAJOR DIPLOMATIC AGREEMENT

- Both countries agreed to full normalization of relations in **exchange for Israel suspending annexation of occupied West Bank territory.**
 - Agreement **represents their shared distrust of Iran**, groups such as Hezbollah and outfits like Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.
- With this, **UAE became the first Gulf country** to establish diplomatic and economic relations with Israel.
 - Gulf countries are the seven Arab states which border the Persian Gulf, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE.
 - Jordan and Egypt are the only two other Arab states** to have diplomatic ties with Israel.
- In return, Israel pledged to **suspend its ambitions to annex parts of the West Bank.**
 - In **1967 Middle East war Israel occupied West Bank**, also home to some 430,000 Israelis. In 2019, Israeli Prime Minister stated that he had plans to annex the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.
- Agreement firms up opposition to Iran**, which UAE, Israel and US view as the main threat in the conflict-riven Middle East.



Arab, Palestinian in Gaza/West Bank

People Group Location from IMB. Other Map Data/Geography from GMMS (GMI). Map by Joshua Project

ALSO IN NEWS

<p>Changes in National Overseas Scholarship Scheme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, major changes in scheme were approved. Scheme provides financial assistance to the selected candidates for pursuing Master level courses and Ph.D abroad. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is available for students belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, Landless Agricultural Labourers and Traditional Artisans category. It is Central Sector Scheme and implemented by Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
<p>Official Languages Act (OLA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supreme Court advised government to amend the OLA, 1963 to include scheduled languages other than Hindi and English as official language of the Government of India. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OLA stipulates that government must publish notifications only in Hindi and English. Scheduled languages are those languages which are listed in the 8th schedule of the Constitution and are given official recognition and encouragement by the Central government
<p>India offers USD 1 million to each Caribbean Community (CARICOM) country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is aimed at improving health infrastructure and capacities etc. CARICOM is treaty among Caribbean countries to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members to ensure that the benefits of integration are equitably shared, and to coordinate foreign policy. Members of CARICOM: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.
<p>Core Investment Companies (CIC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, RBI released revised norms for CICs. CIC is a non-banking finance company (NBFC) which carries on the business of the acquisition of shares and securities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It holds not less than 90% of its net assets in the form of investment in equity shares, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies.
<p>Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NASA's TESS finished its primary mission by imaging about 75% of the starry sky. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has found 66 new exoplanets (planets beyond solar system), and nearly 2,100 such candidates. TESS is an all-sky survey mission that will discover thousands of exoplanets around nearby bright stars. It was launched in 2018. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TESS is finding planets ranging from small, rocky worlds to giant planets, showcasing the diversity of planets in the galaxy.
<p>Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO) launched by Ministry of Defence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is three-tiered organisation to enable the end users interaction with academia and industry towards fostering innovation and indigenisation for self-reliance in defence. Three-tiers of NIIO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naval Technology Acceleration Council (N-TAC) will bring together the twin aspects of innovation and indigenisation and provide apex level directives. A working group under the N-TAC will implement projects. Technology Development Acceleration Cell (TDAC) has also been created for induction of emerging disruptive technology in an accelerated time frame.
<p>Online Performance Dashboard "Empowering Tribals, Transforming India"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an interactive and dynamic online platform that showcases updated & real-time details of 11 schemes / initiatives of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for achieving SDGs. It is part of Digital India Initiative to work towards empowering Scheduled Tribes and will bring efficiency and transparency in the system. Developed by: Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

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