

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Chhattisgarh CM dedicates country's first cashless bazaar to people in Raipur

- Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh launched India's **first cashless bazaar in Raipur**.
- This 'Smart' bazaar consist of **nearly 900 shops which are providing the facilities of cashless payments using POS, UPI and other digital systems** to its customers.
- Chhattisgarh is currently leading in the nation in training its people in digital transactions.

First Cashless Villages in India

- Jhatipur village in Panipat district became the first village in Haryana
- Dhasai village is the first cashless village in Maharashtra
- Lanura in Budgam district is the first village in Jammu and Kashmir
- Telangana's Ibrahimpur becomes first cashless village in south India

Tamil poet-saint Thiruvalluvar Statue gets Place at Haridwar's Mela Bhawan

- The 12-foot-tall stone statue of renowned Tamil poet and philosopher-saint Thiruvalluvar was inaugurated at Mela Bhawan premises in Haridwar, Uttarakhand by Chief minister Harish Rawat.
- However, the priests and saints raised objections to place Thiruvalluvar's statue on either bank of the Ganga at Har ki Pauri, or near the statue of the Adi Sankara in Haridwar's Shankaracharya Chowk which led to the delay in the installation process by 6 months.

Madras High Court Bans Sharia Courts Functioning in Tamil Nadu

- The Madras High Court **declared a ban on all unauthorised 'Sharia' courts** functioning on premises of mosques in Tamil Nadu, to safeguard the interests of a large number of innocent Muslims whose fate was being decided by such illegal Sharia courts and councils in the state.
- The court passed the order after hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by an NRI Abdul Rahman, a 29-year-old sales engineer employed in the Gulf. He approached 'Sharia council' to reunite with his wife but was forced to divorce her.
- The 'Sharia court' on the premises of Makka Masjid Shariat Council was dealing with matrimonial disputes, summoning parties and passing divorce orders like a regular court.

World Confluence of Humanity, Power and Spirituality Held in New Delhi

- The ninth edition of World Confluence of Humanity, Power and Spirituality, organised by ASSOCHAM in association with Srei Foundation and Times Foundation was held in New Delhi.
- The theme of the convention was **"Sach Bharat: Spirituality at Work"**

- Aim of the confluence was
 - to spread an idea and principles of Humanity, Power and Spirituality among the people
 - to inculcate the right sense of attitude,
 - devotion to work,
 - unified cooperation in work,
 - faith in self and others,
 - peace and harmony,
 - fearlessness.

Centre Plans Setting up Single Tribunal to Adjudicate Inter-state Water Disputes

- The Centre has planned to set up a single, permanent Tribunal to adjudicate all Inter-State River Water Disputes, subsuming existing tribunals, to resolve grievances of states in a speedy manner.
- A retired Supreme Court judge will act as the chairperson of the Tribunal. The government has also proposed to amend the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956. It directs to form benches to look into disputes as and when required which would cease to exist once the disputes are resolved.
- Earlier water tribunals took ages to deliver final solution into disputes, where as the proposed Tribunal is expected to deliver its verdict during a span of three years.
- Besides, the amendment also proposes to set up Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) comprising experts and policy-makers to handle disputes prior to the Tribunal.

Government Considers Merging Cyber and Telecom Appellate Tribunal

- The Center is planning to merge Cyber Appellate Tribunal (CyAT) with the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to avoid identical functions.
- There are 36 tribunals functioning in the country dealing with subjects such as income tax, electricity, consumer protection, company laws and railway accidents. The government is seeking to reduce the number of tribunals from 36 to 18 as most of these bodies perform "identical functions".
- The Department of Legal Affairs in the Law ministry will be the nodal agency for administration of various tribunals. Currently, the tribunals are handled by various ministries.
- CyAT settles matters related to information technology. TDSAT resolves disputes and dispose of appeals with a view to protect the interests of service providers and consumers of the telecom sector to promote and ensure orderly growth of the telecom sector.

Kyrgyzstan President's Almazbek Sharshenovich Atambayev 4-day visit to India from December 18-21, 2016

- President of **Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Sharshenovich Atambayev**, was on a **four-day** official visit to India from December 18-21, 2016. This was Atambayev's first visit to India after being appointed as the President.
- During his visit, he was accompanied by his spouse **Raisa Atambaeva** along with a high-level delegation comprising of Ministers, senior officials and business leaders.
- President Atambayev arrived in **New Delhi on December 20** and was accorded a ceremonial reception at the forecourt of **Rashtrapati Bhavan** by **President Pranab Mukherjee** who also hosted a dinner banquet in his honor.

Government Soon to launch toll free number '1955' to Report call drops

- The **Union government** has decided to launch a toll-free number **'1955'** in order to take a feedback from the **telecom subscribers** on **call drop** issue. The code has been allotted for Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) on call drops.
- According to the **Department Of Telecom (DoT)**, the provisioning of the new number would be mandatory for all telecom operators along with making the number accessible for local and STD calling.
- State-run telecom operator **Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL)** has been directed to configure the short code. The government has also directed operators not to charge any integration, maintenance, operational fee from MTNL.

Union Government announces Rs 207 crore project for Majuli

- Centre has announced **Rs 207 crore project** for protection and development of **world's biggest river island Majuli**, located along river Brahmaputra in Assam.
- The announcement was made by Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) **Jitendra Singh**.
- The amount earmarked by the Ministry of DoNER will be spent primarily for safeguarding the land loss due to erosion and to protect the 80 km length of the bank line on the right bank of river **Brahmaputra** along world famous Majuli island.

The fifth edition of the Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCSS) to be hosted by India in 2017.

- **IT and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad** on December 20, 2016, informed that India has been selected to host the **fifth edition** of the **Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCSS) in 2017**.
- The conference is likely to be held in **last quarter of 2017**. Over **100 countries** are expected to participate in it with ministerial level delegations.

- The opportunity to host the conference comes as a recognition to India's emerging role as big cyber power accelerated by **Digital India** which has gained international fame.
- GCCS will deliberate on issues related to **promotion of cooperation in cyberspace**, norms for responsible behavior in cyberspace and to enhance cyber capacity building.
- The first edition of GCCS was hosted by UK in 2011 followed by Budapest in 2012. South Korea hosted the third edition in 2013 and the Netherlands in 2015.

INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Government of Iran Unveils Bill of Right

- **President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani** on December 19, 2016, unveiled a **landmark bill of rights**, guaranteeing freedom of speech, protest, fair trials and privacy for the **citizens of the nation**.
- During his 2013 election campaign, Rouhani had promised a bill of rights for citizens.
- Though many of the rights are already enshrined in **Iran's constitution** written after the 1979 Islamic revolution, the new bill offered the first clear list of principles that could be used to check the performance of state institutions.
- Rouhani said the **authorities should respect limits on their powers**, accusing them of ignoring human rights.
- As a part of the Bill, the President stated that no one is allowed to enter another person's house, shop or private workplace without the permission of the owner, in the name of discovering whether crimes or sins have been committed.
- The President cleared that the bill was not yet a formal law, but must be **implemented by everyone**.
- A new **special deputy** for citizenship rights will be deployed to work with government departments to **draw up reform plans and check their progress** with annual reports.

UNSC approves Resolution to deploy UN observers in Aleppo

- The **United Nations Security Council** on December 19, 2016, unanimously approved a resolution to deploy UN observers to the **Syrian city of Aleppo**.
- The resolution taken during a session at the council's headquarters in **New York**, stated that **UN monitors** sent to **Aleppo** would be carrying out "**adequate, neutral monitoring and**

direct observation” on evacuations from eastern Aleppo and the safety of civilians who remain in the Syrian city.

- The **15-member body** unanimously approved a resolution drafted by **France** that urged all parties to provide monitors with safe, immediate and unimpeded access.
- The resolution also asks UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to adopt prompt measures to let the observers examine “the well-being of civilians” and get in touch with interested parties during their deployment.
- Aleppo is a city in Syria, located about 355 kilometers north of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Hong Kong to withdraw visa-free facility for Indians post January 23

- **Hong Kong** has decided to **withdraw visa-free facility** for **Indians**. Indians can enter with a valid passport for a period up to 14 days without a visa.
- From **January 23, 2017**, Indian nationals must apply for and successfully complete **pre-arrival registration** online before they can visit Hong Kong Special Administrative Region HKSAR visa-free.
- The pre-arrival registration is valid for **six months**, during which the applicant can visit Hong Kong multiple times. Indian nationals must furnish an “approval slip” before boarding a plane or ship to the city.
- India was chosen as a “testing point” because it is one of the major sources of asylum-seekers. According to the latest figures, 561,625 Indian tourists visited Hong Kong in 2015, a rise of 22% compared to 2013. In the first 11 months of 2016 alone, 474 615 Indians visited the city.
- This is the first time Hong Kong has implemented such a restriction for a country. Among the total of 10,335 pending refugee applications in the city, 80% are from India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

RBI to Shortly Issue Rs. 500 Banknote in New Series

- The **Reserve Bank of India** on December 19, 2016, announced that it is issuing a new batch of **Rs 500 notes** in **Mahatma Gandhi (New) series** with the **inset letter R** in both the number panels bearing the signature of **Dr Urjit R Patel** Governor, Reserve Bank of India, with the **year of printing ‘2016’**.
- Earlier, the Reserve Bank had also informed to issue **Rs 500 notes** in **Mahatma Gandhi (New) series** with the **inset letter E having star mark** in both the number panels and **Swachh Bharat logo** printed on the reverse of the banknote.

- In a serially numbered packet, if any defect in any note is detected at the printing stage, the note is replaced at the note printing presses by banknotes having the same number so that the sequence of the packet is maintained.
- As a part of the Bank's ongoing efforts to benchmark its procedures against international best practices as also for cost effectiveness at printing presses, it has proposed STAR series numbering system for replacement of the defectively printed banknotes thus save time and cost. Packets with star series notes will have 100 pieces as usual but not in serial order.
- The Star series notes will be legal tender and members of public may freely accept and use these notes. To facilitate easy identification of note packets containing 'star' notes, the bands on such packets will clearly indicate the presence of these notes in the packet.
- 'Star' banknotes in Rs 500 denomination are being issued for the first time. 'Star' banknotes in the denomination of Rs 10, 20, 50 and 100 are already in circulation.
- The central bank has also notified that it will shortly issue **Rs 50 denomination banknotes** in the Mahatma Gandhi Series-2005, with **inset letter R and L** in both the number panels bearing the signature of Urjit R Patel and the year 2016 printed on the reverse of the banknote.
- Meanwhile, the Central Bank has also imposed stiff restrictions on depositing more than Rs 5,000 in the scrapped Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes, mandating that it can be deposited only once per account till December 30 after explaining to bank officials the reasons for not having done that so far.

Bank of Baroda, First Indian Company to Support FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017

- Bank of Baroda has become the first Indian company to sign up as a National Supporter for **the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017**, which will be held from **6 to 28 October 2017**.
- This will be the first time that India will be hosting FIFA international football competition. FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017 will see participation from 24 countries including India and matches will be played at six different venues.
- With the signing of the agreement, **Bank of Baroda** has claimed the **first out of six National Supporter** slots for the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017. The tournament FIFA will be signing 5 more national supporters ahead of the tournament.
- Though, BOB is the first Indian supporter for the tournament, FIFA already has international sponsors for all events, including Coca-Cola, Adidas, and Wanda.

BRICS bank approves USD 75 million loan for Shanghai Solar Power Project

- The **New Development Bank**, jointly found by the BRICS countries approved **USD 75 million** (525 million yuan) loan for a solar power project in **Shanghai, China** on December 20, 2016.
- The power project '**Shanghai Lingang Distributed Solar Power Project**' is being developed by Shanghai Lingang Hongbo New Energy Development Co.

- The loan with a **maturity period of 17 years** was approved under an agreement signed between New Development Bank (NDB), the Ministry of Finance and the Shanghai municipal government.
- The project by **Shanghai Lingang Hongbo New Energy Development** is a solar photo-voltaic power plant with **total capacity of 100 MW**.

Centre extends time period for farm loan dues by 60 days

- The **Union Government** on December 19, 2016, decided to provide additional grace period of **60 days to farmers**, whose crop loan dues fall between **November 1 and December 31, 2016**.
- This decision was taken in view of constraints faced by the farming community in repayment of loans due to demonetization of high value notes.
- If such farmers repay the loan within 60 days with effect from the date on which the repayment was due, they will be eligible for **prompt repayment incentives**.
- The Government took this step in view of the need of the farming community for more time to repay their loan dues. The move is expected to provide a boost to the rural and agricultural economy.
- The prompt payee farmers can avail short term crop loans at **4% per annum**. This prompt repayment incentive however does not accrue to those farmers who repay after one year of availing such loans.
- The Union Government provides crop loans at **7% per annum** to provide stimulation to rural sector and farming community. The added incentive of 3% per annum is provided to farmers for prompt repayment of loans within due date and upto a maximum period of one year.

Cabinet Approves Creation of Indian Enterprise Development Service (IEDS)

- The Government on December 21, 2016, approved the **cadre review and formation** of the **Indian Enterprise Development Service (IEDS)** in the Office of the Development Commissioner, **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises**.
- The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi**.
- The Indian Enterprise Development Service, to start with, will have a cadre strength of 617 officers, 6 of which will be at the level of joint secretaries.
- These officers will man 72 field offices of the Development Commissioner and the headquarters in Delhi. Out of the 72 field offices, 30 are MSME development institutes and 28 branch institutes.
- The creation of the new cadre and change in structure will strengthen the organization as well as help to achieve the vision of Startup India, Stand-up India and Make in India.
- The measure will enhance the capacity and efficiency of the organisation and also help in achieving growth in the MSME sector through a focussed and dedicated cadre of technical officers.

Bengaluru to get India's second sericulture centre

- Union government plans to launch its **second centre** of excellence for **sericulture in Bengaluru**.
- The first such centre was set up in **Ranchi, Jharkhand**
- The Central Silk Board has set up the centre to boost the silk industry

PEOPLE IN NEWS

Kate Succeeds as Queen Steps down as Wimbledon Patron

- **Queen Elizabeth II**, **queen of the United Kingdom** and the other Commonwealth realms, is stepping down as patron of Wimbledon.
- The 90-year-old queen has been patron of the **All England Club since 1952**, and last made an appearance at the Wimbledon tournament in 2010.
- She will be succeeded by Prince William's wife, **Kate Middleton**, the Duchess of Cambridge.
- The queen will step down from her role at more than 20 charities and organizations, including the **Rugby Football Union**, the Welsh Rugby Union, the Amateur Swimming Association, the Lawn Tennis Association, the Rugby Football League and the British Cycling Federation.
- **Prince Harry** will become patron of the RFU.

Russian ambassador to Turkey Shot Dead in Ankara

- **Russia's ambassador to Turkey, Andrei Gennadyevich Karlov**, was shot dead in front of a crowd at a posh art gallery exhibition in Ankara, Turkey on December 19, 2016. **He was 62.**
- Police later **killed the assailant** on December 20. The assailant, **Mevlut Mert Altintas**, was a 22-year-old off-duty police officer who worked in Turkey's capital.
- **Karlov**, Russian career diplomat served as nation's ambassador to North Korea before serving as Russian Ambassador to Turkey.
- The incident happened a day after protests in Turkey over Russian support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin said the act was undoubtedly a provocation aimed at disrupting the normalisation of bilateral ties and the peace process in Syria.

SPORTS CURRENT AFFAIRS

AIBA grants full membership to Boxing Federation of India

- AIBA has voted unanimously to grant full membership to the recently-formed Boxing Federation of India (BFI) at a meeting on the sidelines of its 70th anniversary gala in Montreux, Switzerland.
- The BFI has already been granted affiliation by the Sports Ministry but is awaiting recognition from the Indian Olympic Association.

Arjun Bhati wins in Kids Golf World Championship

- Arjun Bhati bagged the first position in the Kids Golf World Championship after defeating South Africa's Methu Denish during the three-level final match in Malaysia.
- Out of the 21 countries that participated in the tournament, Arjun secured the first position scoring 2 extra shots.
- He has played a total of 82 tournaments till date out of which he won around 69 of them. Out of the 69 tournaments that he won, he backed 35 first positions.
- He recently won the Albatross International Junior Golf Championship India 2016 and secured the first position.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Researchers Develop Vaccine for Chikungunya fever

- A team of researchers from **The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston** have developed a safe and effective vaccine for **Chikungunya** fever made from an insect-specific virus.
- The research team at The University of Texas Medical Branch used the **Eilat virus** as a **vaccine platform**. The Eilat virus only infects insects and has no effect on people. An **Eilat virus clone** was used to design a hybrid virus-based vaccine containing Chikungunya structural proteins.
- The researchers tested the safety and efficacy of the newly developed Chikungunya virus in **mice and non-human primates**.
- The researchers found that the **vaccine strengthened the immune system** and protected mice and non-human primates from disease when exposed to the Chikungunya virus.

- The tests showed that a single dose of Chikungunya vaccine induced **neutralized the antibodies within four days**. The efficacy of the vaccine lasted for more than 290 days.
- The vaccine was found to provide complete protection against the Chikungunya virus in two different mouse models. However, in the non-human primates, there was neither evidence of the virus in the blood nor symptoms of Chikungunya.
- Chikungunya is a mosquito-borne disease that causes fever and joint pain. Some of the other symptoms of Chikungunya include fatigue, muscle pain, headache, and rash. Some individuals may recover within a week, but many develop long-term joint pain.

India successfully test-fires long range nuclear-capable subsonic cruise missile Nirbhay

- India successfully test-fired its long range subsonic cruise missile, **Nirbhay**, from the launch complex 3 of **Integrated Test Range (ITR)** at Chandipur, Odisha coast at 11: 56 hours on December 21, 2016.
- The state-of-the-art surface-to-surface missile is developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation**.
- It was fourth test of Nirbhay missile and out of four, three have ended in failure. The maiden launch was conducted in March 2013 but it was failure, the second test was conducted in October 2014 was a big success while the third mission on October 16, 2015 was again a failure.

Scientists Discover Molten 'Jet Stream' Deep Inside Earth

- According to a new study, published in the journal Nature Geoscience, scientists for the first time have discovered a huge **jet stream of molten iron** deep within the Earth's core, around **1,860 miles (3,000km)** below the surface.
- Researchers believe the jet is likely to be caused by liquid in the core moving towards a boundary from both sides, causing it to be squeezed out sideways.
- The discovery could shed light on how Earth protective, magnetic shield works. According to scientists, the stream is moving at about 40km per year and is roughly 420km wide.
- This speed is three times faster than normal outer-core speeds and hundreds of thousands of times faster than rate at which Earth's tectonic plates move.
- The discovery was made by the researchers from the University of Leeds, using the **European Space Agency (ESA's) trio satellite** known as **Swarm satellites** which map the Earth's magnetic field to better understand its workings.
- The three satellites were launched in 2013 with the goal of studying Earth's magnetic field. The European Space Agency's Swarm satellites are providing sharpest X-ray image yet of the core.

Ministry of Minority affairs Launches website for Haj Pilgrims

- **Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi** on December 20, 2016, launched the **tri-lingual website www.haj.gov.in** relating to **Haj matters**. The website is in **Hindi, Urdu and English** languages.
- The website www.haj.gov.in is a **one stop facility** to provide all necessary information relating to Haj management in one place. It provides link for the prospective applicants to enable them to apply online for Haj.
- Besides giving information about Ministry of Minority Affairs, Haj Department, Haj Pilgrimage, rules and regulations on Haj, Haj Committee of India and private tour operators, the website also has Do's and Don'ts during Haj and also a film informing about various aspects of the pilgrimage.
- The website also hosts information about the **Private Tour Operators (PTO)**. This would help the prospective pilgrims to gather information about the services provided by the PTO. It also has provision for getting feedback from users and for registration of public grievances.
- **Haj 2017** has already been announced and from **January 2, 2017**, Haj Committee of India will start receiving the application.

BOOKS AND AUTHORS

First issue of a National Newspaper 'Saanjhi Saanjh' Released by Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot

- **Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot**, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment released the first issue of a **National Newspaper 'Saanjhi Saanjh'**, dedicated to **Senior Citizen**, in the National Capital on December 19, 2016.
- The newspaper will carry inspirational stories besides important and useful news concerning elderly persons. It will serve as a bridge between old and new generations