

NATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

PM Modi Visits Maharashtra, lays foundation stone of Shivaji Memorial

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a day-long visit to Maharashtra on December 24, 2016, where he laid the foundation stone of 'Shiv Smarak', the grand memorial of Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai coast. The total outlay of the project is Rs. 3,600 Crore. The project is expected to be completed by 2019.
- The Prime Minister also laid the foundation stones for two Mumbai Metro projects.
- During his visit to Mumbai, PM Modi laid the foundation stone of a new campus of SEBI's National Institute of Securities Markets (NISM) at Patalganga in Mumbai.

Primary Drafts of CGST and SGST law Approved by GST Council

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council headed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, approved the primary drafts of Central GST and State GST laws on December 23 at the 7th meeting of GST Council in New Delhi.
- The primary drafts of CGST and SGST laws have been approved. The legally vetted copy of the drafts will be circulated to all the states.
- Under GST, the states and the Centre will collect identical rates of taxes on goods and services. For instance, if 18 percent is the GST rate on a good, the states and the Centre will get 9 percent each called the CGST and SGST rates.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley stated that a total of 197 provisions and five schedules have been approved for the CGST and SGST draft laws. CGST is to be approved by Parliament while the SGST to be approved by States legislative Assemblies.

President Pranab Mukherjee gives fifth assent to amend Enemy Property Ordinance

- President Pranab Mukherjee approved re-promulgation of The Enemy Property (Amendment) Fifth Ordinance for the fifth time in a year but at the same time expressed his displeasure to the centre over using this route repeatedly for promulgating law.
- The ordinance was re-promulgated after the government failed to get a bill passed in the Winter Session of Parliament to amend the 50-year-old Enemy Property Act, which guards against succession claims or transfer of properties left by people who migrated to Pakistan and China after 1965 and 1968 wars.
- The "Enemy property" refers to any property belonging to, held or managed on behalf of an enemy, an enemy subject or an enemy firm. There are 16,547 enemy properties worth Rs 1 lakh crore across India. The Union Home Ministry acts as the custodian of the enemy properties.

- Besides this, there are 149 immovable properties of Chinese nationals, spread over Karnataka, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi.

MEA Announces New Rules to Apply For Passport

- A new set of rules were announced by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to streamline, liberalize and ease the process of issue of passport to benefit the citizens of India applying for a passport.
- As per the new rules, applicants born after January 26, 1989 are not required to submit a proof of date of birth (DOB) which was mandatory till now.
- Another key step aimed at simplifying the process is that attestation by a magistrate or notary will no longer be necessary. Self-declaration on plain paper will do.
- It is no more compulsory to provide the name of both father and mother while applying for the passport. Besides, single parents can also apply for passports of their children.
- Married applicants do not need to provide any marriage certificate. The applicant need not provide the name of her/his spouse in case of separated or divorced persons.
- The rules also provide a provision for government servants, who are not able to get no objection certificate from their respective departments.
- Provision has also been provided for the holy men to apply for passport with the names of their spiritual gurus instead of parents, provided the name match with those on at least one document such as voter, PAN or Aadhar cards.

NITI Aayog Launches National 'Performance on Health Outcomes index'

- Performance on Health Outcomes index has been launched by the government think-tank NITI Aayog along with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to encourage states to take transformative action in the Health sector. The index will rank the states on the basis of their performance on measurable health indicators.
- The features of the index, measures and methods of submitting the data will be circulated to the States through these workshops.
- The index would focus on capturing the annual incremental improvements by States rather than on historical achievements.
- Monitorable indicators that form a part of Sustainable Development Goal in Health have been included. The health index will assist in State level monitoring of performance, serve as an input for providing performance-based incentives and improvement in health outcomes, thereby also meeting the citizens' expectations.
- The exercise would also receive technical assistance from the World Bank and other third party organizations to validate the data submitted prior to calculation of the index. Data will be entered and results published on a dynamic web portal hosted by NITI Aayog.

Defence Ministry Approves Defence Projects over Rs. 7000 Crore

- The Defence Ministry approved four defence proposals worth over Rs 7,000 crore.
- The Defence Acquisition Council approved purchasing six multi-mission maritime aircraft for the Indian Coast Guard to keep an eye on the 7,500 km-long coastline worth Rs 5,500 crore.
- The DAC also gave its approval to purchase one more C-17 Globemaster Mk-III aircraft from the US manufacturer Boeing at an undisclosed price. This will add to the existing inventory of 10 aircraft that New Delhi purchased at a price of \$4.1 billion.
- Another project worth Rs 1,256-crore scheme have been approved to have 1,500 nuclear, biological, chemical warfare protection shields for the army's infantry combat vehicles.
- Besides, 55 low level light weight radars for the army and Indian Air Force at a cost of Rs 419 crore have also been approved.
- Both will be manufactured by Bharat Electronics Limited, Bengaluru.

Karnataka Government has removed restriction on night shift for women

- The state government of Karnataka has removed restrictions on allowing women to work in night shifts in all sectors in a move to provide equal opportunities for women in all sectors.
- Currently, women are allowed to be employed in night shifts only in IT and ITES sectors. The present labour regulations don't allow employers to deploy women on work between 8 pm and 6 am. However, the government made an exemption to IT and ITES companies in 2003 responding to a demand from the IT sector.
- The Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, 1961 and the Factories Act 1948 have been amended to make provision for women to work in night shift.
- However, the employment of women in night shift will be subjected to several conditions such as written consent, provision of separate loos, first priority in pick-up and drop, among others to ensure their safety, security and privacy needs.
- Since the Factories Act is an Act of Parliament, Karnataka will send the amendment for Presidential assent.

INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

WHO Says New Ebola vaccine may be up to 100% effective

- The World Health Organization (WHO) informed that a prototype vaccine for Ebola may be up to 100 percent effective in protecting against the deadly virus.
- The new vaccine was initially developed in Canada by public health authorities before being taken over by pharmaceutical giant Merck.
- The vaccine is yet to get the approval and is expected to be made available by 2018.
- In a major clinical trial of the vaccine, nearly 6,000 people in Guinea were given the test vaccine in 2015. It was found that none of the 6,000 contracted the disease.
- But in a control group of volunteers that did not receive the vaccine, 23 Ebola cases occurred.

UNSC passes resolution to end Israeli settlement on occupied Palestinian territory

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution demanding Israel to stop building settlements on occupied Palestinian territory.
- It states that Israeli settlements have no legal validity and are dangerously imperiling the UNSC viability of the two-state solution.
- It is the first resolution adopted by the Security Council on Israel and the Palestinians in nearly eight years.
- The resolution was introduced to the 15-member council for a vote by New Zealand, Malaysia, Venezuela and Senegal.

Barack Obama signs \$618 billion defence budget for 2017 to boost security cooperation with India

- US President Barack Obama has signed a \$618 billion defence policy bill for 2017 on December 23, 2016, in Honolulu, Hawaii, to enhance security cooperation with India.
- The National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA), which was passed by both the House and the Senate with veto-proof majorities earlier in December.
- NDAA will also refocus security assistance to Pakistan and conditions nearly half of the funding to Pakistan on a certification from the Secretary of Defence that Pakistan is taking demonstrable steps against the Haqqani Network in Pakistani territory.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Allahabad Bank Merges its subsidiary AllBank Finance with Itself

- Public sector Allahabad Bank has merged its wholly owned subsidiary AllBank Finance (ABFL) with itself.
- The merger was finalized at the Board of Directors meeting who gave the in-principle approval for merger of loss making AllBank Finance with the bank.
- AllBank Finance is the merchant banking arm of Allahabad Bank and also holds license for debenture trusteeship.
- ABFL offers various merchant banking services such as IPO management, debt/loan syndication, trusteeship services (debenture trustee/security trusty) structured finance, placement of equity shares to qualified institutional buyers (QIBs), investment advisory and portfolio management services.
- Besides, it also provides mutual fund and other corporate services including valuation of security.

RBI opens banking ombudsman office in Dehradun

- India's central banking institution, Reserve Bank of India(RBI) has opened its 17th banking ombudsman office in Dehradun
- RBI also announced that ombudsman office opens in Ranchi, Jharkhand on the same day.
- With this, the total number of RBI ombudsman offices have increased to 18 in India.

SBI adopts a village Shirki in Maharashtra to make it cashless

- India's public sector banking and financial services company State Bank of India(SBI) has adopted a village Shirki in Maharashtra to make the entire village will turn cashless within 30 days said by SBI deputy managing director and CIO Mrutyunjay Mahapatra.
- SBI will promote Aadhaar number-based merchant payments in the light of demonetisation, the government's pet scheme to weed out the evil of black money
- The merchants in this village have been provided with simple android phones with a USB based fingerprint capture device.

- The merchants and the consumers can transact the money through Aadhaar Pay App with their bank account number.
- SBI made cash-less colony at Nerul in Navi Mumbai with over 1000 families a cash-less colony few weeks ago.

Japan drags India to WTO against steps on iron, steel imports

- India has imposed minimum import price (MIP) on imports of certain iron and steel products.
- The country has also imposed anti-dumping duties on certain steel products to guard domestic players from cheap imports.
- Government imposes minimum import price on 173 steel items.
- Japan has dragged India to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against certain measures taken by New Delhi on imports of iron and steel products.

India to give Nepal additional 240 MW electricity

- India has agreed to give Nepal additional 240 MW of electricity.
- An agreement has been signed between Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and state-owned NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam (NVVN).
- The import of power – 80 MW immediately from January and 160 MW from February, will be made through Dhalkebar- Mujjapur Cross Border Transmission line.

PEOPLE IN NEWS

American Tourister appoints Virat Kohli as brand ambassador

- Indian international cricketer Virat Kohli was appointed as first Indian brand ambassador of Luggage maker American Tourister owned by Samsonite
- American Tourister has signed the ace cricketer to feature in a new integrated marketing communications campaign from March 2017, which will be publicised in India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

British-born NASA astronaut Piers Sellers dies at 61

- British-born astronaut Piers Sellers died of pancreatic cancer in Houston, Texas at the age of 61.
- Sellers, a climate scientist and former astronaut flew on three space shuttle missions between 2002 and 2010 and gained fame late in life for his eloquent commentary about the earth's fragility.
- Sellers featured in Leonardo DiCaprio's documentary, Before the Flood and shared his astronaut's perspective on climate change.
- Before joining the astronaut corps, Sellers worked at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center as a scientists

Co-Artist of national emblem Dinanath Bhargava dies at 89 in Indore

- Dinanath Bhargava, a co-artist in the team that sketched the national emblem Lion Capital of Ashoka and decorated the pages of the Constitutions manuscript, died at the age of 89 in Indore.
- Bhargava was suffering from cardiac ailments since past decade.
- He was born on November 1, 1927 at Multai in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh and was chosen by noted painter Nandlal Bose in the group for designing the pages of the Indian Constitution's

Renowned Kannada Actor Chetan Ramarao dies at 76

- Veteran Kannada film actor Chetan Ramarao died on December 23, 2016, at a private hospital in Mysuru due to prolonged illness.
- The 76-year old actor had acted in more than 350 films in his career spanning almost five decades.
- Some of his leading movies include Rajkumar, Vishnuvardhan and Ambarish.

SPORTS CURRENT AFFAIRS

Shiva Keshavan wins Gold at Asian Luge Championship in Japan

- Shiva Keshavan, the only professional luger from India, won his third gold in Asian Luge Championship at Nagano, Japan.
- The 35-year-old Shiva Keshavan finished the Asian Luge Championship race with a time of 99.962 seconds and top speed of 130.4 km/h to clinch the title.
- First Indian to qualify for the Winter Olympic Games, Shiva, is a five-time Olympian and two-time Asian champion. Earlier he won gold in Asian Championship in 2011 and 2012.

- Tanaka Shohei of Japan won the silver medal, taking time of 104.874 seconds with help of top speed of 124.6km/h.
- Chinese luger Taipei's Lien Te-An finished in 105.120 seconds with top speed of 126.3kph to win the bronze medal.

Jeje Lalpekhlua nominated 2016 AIFF Player of the Year

- Mohun Bagan and Chennaiyin FC striker Jeje Lalpekhlua was nominated as the '2016 All India Football Federation (AIFF) Player of the Year'.
- The 25-year-old Indian professional footballer from Mizoram will be presented a prize of Rs. 2.5 lakh along with the glittering trophy.
- Besides, Sasmita Malik was conferred the 2016 AIFF Woman Footballer of the Year Jeje Lalpekhlua award. The Odisha-based footballer will get Rs. 2 lakh in cash and a trophy.
- AIFF also awarded Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and Uvena Fernandes with '2016 AIFF Award for Special Recognition'. They will be bestowed with Rs. 1 lakh and a trophy.
- Rowlin Borges was declared the '2016 AIFF Emerging Player of the Year'.
- Sanju, of the South Asian Games 2016, was honoured with the '2016 AIFF Emerging Woman Footballer of the Year' award.
- The Punjab Football Association was named for '2016 AIFF Award for Best Grassroots Programme'.
- Pranjal Banerjee from IFA won '2016 AIFF Award for Best Referee'.
- Joseph Tony was awarded the '2016 AIFF Award for Best Assistant Referee'.

India Defeats Sri Lanka to clinch Asia Cup under-19 title

- India beat hosts Sri Lanka by 34 runs in the finals and clinched the Under-19s Asia Cup title at the R Premadasa Stadium, Sri Lanka.
- India under-19s team, coached by Rahul Dravid, opted to bat first after winning the toss and posted 273/8 in their 50 overs to which Sri Lanka could score 239 all out in 48.4 overs.
- Himanshu Rana and Shubhman Gill were the leading run-scorers for India in the tournament while Chahar was the leading wicket-taker.
 - ♦ Man of the Match: Captain Abhishek Sharma
 - ♦ Man of the Series award: Opener Himanshu Rana.
- The ACC Under-19 Asia Cup is a cricket tournament organised by the ACC for Under-19 teams from its member nations. It was first held in 2012 in Malaysia where the trophy was shared by India and Pakistan after the final was tied.

- The second edition was held in 2013/14 in UAE which was won by India by defeating Pakistan by 40 runs.

Pankaj Advani wins National title in 6-red Snooker

- Sixteen-time world champion, Pankaj Advani bagged the National title in 6-red Snooker, the shorter format of the game.
- Advani is the only player in the world to win all titles — National, Continental and World — in 6-red Snooker.
- He is now the strongest player for qualifying for the Asian and World Championships in 6-red Snooker in 2017 to represent India.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DRDO successfully tests smart anti-airfield weapon SAAW

- The Defence and Research Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully tested an indigenous Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW) from an Indian Air Force aircraft on DRDO successfully tests smart anti-airfield weapon SAAW.
- Weight: 120 kg, Range: 100km
- The smart weapon is used to destroy runways, bunkers, aircraft hangers and other reinforced structures. It is one of the world class weapons systems.
- The first test on the weapon system from the IAF Jaguar DARIN-II aircraft in Bengaluru in Karnataka in May 2016.

Govt to launch Aadaar Payment App to simplify digital transactions

- The 'Aadhaar Payment App' is all set to launch to eliminate the fee payments for service providers like card companies such as Mastercard, Visa etc.
- The app was developed by IDFC Bank along with UIDAI and National Payments Corporation of India(NPCI). With this app, people can make payments without any phone.

Aadhaar Payment App:

- Merchants should have Aadhaar cashless merchant app on their smartphones which is connected to a biometric reader.

- The transaction process is done through the Aadhaar bridge.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Super Typhoon Nock-ten (Nina) Makes Landfall in Philippines

- Super Typhoon Nock-ten made landfall on the eastern province of Philippines on Christmas Day.
- Known in the Philippine as “Nina”, Nock-Ten hit the coast near Catanduanes island with wind speed up to 255km/h (158mph). But there are no reports of damage or casualties yet.
- About 100,000 people had been moved from areas at risk in the Bicol region amid fears of widespread flooding and possible landslides.
- Dozens of ports have closed, with warnings of two-metre (6.6ft) waves.