

NATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Centre gives Rs 1,982 crore for Andhra Pradesh's Polavaram project through NABARD

- The Centre released Rs 1,982 crore for the multipurpose Polavaram irrigation project.
- The funding is being done through NABARD, which has now started funding irrigation projects. NABARD sanctioned the long term irrigation fund under Prime Minister Krishi Sinchayee Yojana.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on December 26 revealed that so far it has sanctioned loans worth Rs 35,322 crore under Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF).
- LTIF initiative would ensure doubling of farmers' income by 2022 under the ambitious Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).

India's first 2G Ethanol Bio-refinery set up in Punjab

- The Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), a Central Government Public Sector Undertaking, is setting up India's first 2G (Second Generation) ethanol bio-refinery at village Tarkhanwala in Bathinda, Punjab.
- The purpose of the bio-refinery is to encourage production of Second Generation (2G) Ethanol from agricultural residues.

Centre & Maharashtra Inked Agreements For New Railway Projects

- The union government and Devendra Fadnavis lead Maharashtra government signed agreement for new railway projects worth Rs 45,000 crore in Maharashtra.
- The ministry of railway planning to increasing connectivity in Maharashtra with an outlay of Rs 22,000 crore.
- It will be used for laying of new railway lines, increasing capacity of railway stations and converting some single line to double line.

Centre sanctions action plan for three year under AMRUT

- The Centre has decided to step down the usual practice of annually sanctioning the action plans under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and has given a one go clearance for the scheduled plans for the remaining three years of the five-year scheme.

- AMRUT was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June 2015. It focuses on ensuring water supply and improving the sewerage network and drainage systems in cities for urban transformation.
- The new practice was launched to enable states to plan projects in a “comprehensive and holistic manner”, and for the timely execution of work.
- However, the plans for the scheme’s final three years were being approved after verifying the progress of plans cleared during the last and current financial years.

MEA Launches Twitter Seva for speedy redressal of citizen’s query

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) launched a live customer service resolution platform, ‘Twitter Seva’, to provide speedy resolution to visa and passport queries of the customers.
- The service will enable timely, transparent and large scale response to citizen’s Tweets in real-time and enhance scalability and speed the process of dealing with requests by Indian and global citizens.
- The Seva service will be supported by 198 Twitter accounts of Missions and High Commissions across the world and 29 Regional Passport Offices (RPOs) in India and eight other handles such as @MEAIndia, @Indiandiplomacy and @MEAQuery.
- Both Indians and non-Indians can simply tweet with their query relevant to any of these handles which will go to the Twitter Seva platform.
- The request will activate the concerned office nationally or across the world and address a various range of issues under the MEA, enabling the quick resolution of grievances.
- Earlier, the Telecom Ministry launched Twitter Seva in August 2016 while the Commerce and Industry Ministry, too, launched a Twitter Seva service in April.

Govt launches mobile App ‘Smart Consumer’ & OCMC to provide speedy redressal of consumer grievances

- The Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan launched a mobile App ‘Smart Consumer’ and an ‘Online Consumer Mediation Centre (OCMC)’ to provide speedy redressal of consumer grievances.
- The mobile app of the Consumer Helpline and the Smart Consumer App for accessing product information and online communities will benefit the consumers in the digital world.
- He also launched the Microsite based on the theme Digitally Safe Consumer Campaign to help consumers for being vigilant and not falling prey to cyber frauds.

INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

China Passes Environment Tax Law to Curb Pollution

- China on December 25, 2016, passed a new law to levy environment tax on polluters, especially on heavy industries.
- The environment tax law was adopted by the legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC) standing committee at a meeting in Beijing. The law will be implemented on January 1, 2018.

Important Points of the Law

- The tax rate will be 1.2 yuan (\$0.17) per unit of atmospheric pollution, 1.4 yuan per unit of water pollution, 5 yuan per tonne of coal waste and 1,000 yuan per tonne of China "hazardous waste".
- Industrial noise polluters will be levied 350 yuan per month if they exceed limits by 1-3 decibels, 700 yuan for 4-6 decibels and 11,200 yuan per month for 16 decibels and more.
- Under the new law, provincial-level governments can raise the rates for air and water pollution by up to ten times after approval by the people's congresses. Lower rates may also be applicable if emission is less than national standards.
- The law only targets enterprises and public institutions that discharge listed pollutants directly into the environment. However, carbon dioxide, one of the major contributors to global warming, is not included in the levying list.

Russian Plane Tu-154 Crashes into Black Sea

- A Russian plane on its way to Syria with 92 people onboard, including members of the world-famous Russian army choir, crashed into the Black Sea on December 25, minutes after taking off. There appeared to be no survivors
- The Tu-154 plane crashed shortly after taking off from the southern city of Adler, south of the Black Sea resort city of Sochi. The plane was conducting a routine flight to Russia's Hmeimim airbase outside the coastal Syrian city of Latakia.
- There were also eight crew members onboard. Among its 84 passengers were Russian servicemen as well as members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, nine members of the media and three staff of state-run channel Pervy Kanal.
- The plane, which belongs to the Russian Defense Ministry, was carrying 64 members of the Russian army's official choir, also known as the Alexandrov Ensemble, to a military base in Syria for a New Year's concert.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY CURRENT AFFAIRS

India's GVA is likely to grow at 6.6 per cent in 2016-17: ICRA

- The domestic rating agency ICRA has forecasted India's gross value added (GVA) growth to be at 6.6 per cent in 2016-17. This is because the economic activity would take more time to normalize due to the government's move to demonetize high-value notes.
- The report said that the currency liquidity is likely to improve significantly by the end of January 2017, however, the economic activity may take longer to normalize.
- It predicted that the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) before September 16, 2017, would dominate the economic landscape.

IRDAI grants final license to 5 global reinsurers, including RGA, Swiss Re

- The insurance regulator IRDAI has approved the R3 application and granted certificate of registration to five global reinsurers to open shops in India.
- The R3 is the final approval from the regulator to begin branch operations.
- The five global reinsurers that were granted final approval by the regulator are:
 1. US-based reinsurer Reinsurance Group of America (RGA)
 2. Munich Re from Germany
 3. Hannover Germany
 4. Swiss Re from Switzerland and
 5. French reinsurance major Scor

Google India Collaborates with Ministry of Consumer Affairs for Online Consumer Protection

- Google India in collaboration with Ministry of Consumer Affairs has announced a nationwide 'Digitally Safe Consumer' campaign.
- Aim: the main aim of the campaign is to raise awareness about online safety and protect the interest of the consumers against online fraud.
- Under the collaboration, Google and Consumer Affairs Ministry would undertake a year-long campaign which would focus on building capacities of consumer organizations,

personnel of consumer affairs department and counselors of National Consumer Helpline on Internet safety and related issues.

- Besides, Google would conduct 'Digital Literacy, Safety & Security' workshops with the help of partner agencies to provide training and information on online safety tools.

Prices of essential drugs including HIV, diabetes, anxiety disorders lowered

- To make essential drugs more affordable for the public, prices of over 50 essential drugs have been lowered by NPPA, leading to a price cut in the range of 5 per cent to 44 per cent.
- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) under Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers has also fixed the retail prices of 29 formulations.
- The essential drugs for which the prices have been capped include those used for treatment of HIV infection, diabetes, anxiety disorders, bacterial infections, angina and acid reflux.
- NPPA fixes ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013. In respect of medicines not under price control, manufacturers are allowed to increase the maximum retail price by 10 per cent annually.
- The calculation for essential drugs is based on the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1 per cent.

AWARDS

Salman Khan Ranks Top in 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List

- Based on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 list released by Forbes, Salman Khan has bagged the top position in the coveted list leaving behind Shah Rukh Khan at second place. Player Virat Kohli was placed third.
- The ranking was based on two parameters: estimates of entertainment related earnings and estimates of fame. The period under consideration was 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016.

- The 50-year-old Salman (with fame rank 2) was ranked as the top celebrity with the highest revenue for the year of Rs 270.33 crore. Salman's strong year was led by the commercial success of the Sooraj Barjatya-directed Prem Ratan Dhan Payo in late 2015 and then Sultan in 2016. His estimated total earnings constituted 9.84 percent of the total wealth of Rs 2,745 crore of all top 100 celebrities for the year.
- Shah Rukh Khan had estimated earnings of Rs 221.75 crore with fame rank 3. India's Test cricket captain Virat Kohli had Rs 134.44 crore estimated earnings.

Andhra Pradesh Finds Place in Guinness World Records for Largest Kuchipudi Dance Performance

- The state dance of Andhra Pradesh, 'Kuchipudi' has found a place in the Guinness World Records once again when a record 6,117 dancers came together to present a show at the IGM Stadium in Vijaywada on December 25, 2016.
- Guinness judge Rishinath declared "Jayamu Jayamu" presented in unison by the participants created a new record and handed over a certificate to Andhra Pradesh Chief Largest Kuchipudi Dance Performance Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.
- This 12-minute item was chosen for the year's group dance at the event. Dancers from across the countries like US, UAE, UK, Russia, Hong Kong and Mauritius took part in it. Jayamu Jayamu is considered a rich example of Kuchipudi, choreographed by the legendary Vempati China Satyam.
- The "Maha Brunda Natyam" (grand group dance) was organized as a part of the '5th International Kuchipudi Dance Convention' which was organized by the state Department of Language and Culture.

PEOPLE IN NEWS

Tata Motors shareholders remove NusliWadia from Board of Directors

- Indian multinational automotive manufacturing company Tata Motors shareholders are Tata Motors shareholders remove NusliWadia from Board of Directors voted to remove Industrialist NusliWadia as an Independent Director of the company at an extra-ordinary general meeting (EGM)
- Tata Sons board recently removed Cyrus Mistry and appointed Ratan Tata as the Interim Chairman

English Pop superstar George Michael dies at 53

- The famous pop superstar George Michael, died on December 25, 2016, at the age of 53 at his home in Goring, Oxfordshire, England.
- The English singer, songwriter, and record producer began his career with the music duo Wham! with Andrew Ridgeley.
- He became famous in the 1980s and 1990s with his style of post-disco dance-pop and his best-selling songs such as "Last Christmas" and "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go".

Actor Mithun Chakraborty resigns from Rajya Sabha citing health reasons

- West Bengal hailed Mithun Chakraborty has resigned from Rajya Sabha due to his health problems. He has submitted his resignation to Vice President Mohammad Hamid Actor Mithun Chakraborty resigns from Rajya Sabha Ansari on December 26, 2016
- Mithun is an Indian actor, singer, producer, writer, social worker, entrepreneur and Politician
- He was elected to the West Bengal Rajya Sabha Assembly by Trinamool Congress(TMC) in 2014

SPORTS CURRENT AFFAIRS

Virat Kohli topped the Lord's Cricket Ground 20 best players of 2016 list

- Lord's Cricket Ground has released its top 20 players for this calendar year. Indian test skipper Virat Kohli got the number 1 spot in the ranking owing to his marvelous performance in all format of the game.
- 4 Indians got place in the ranking. Apart from Virat the other 3 are off spinner Ravichandran Ashwin at 3rd spot, Ajinkya Rahane at 13th and Cheteshwar Pujara at 18th spot.
- The top 5 cricketers are :
 1. Virat Kohli (India)
 2. Jonny Bairstow (England)
 3. Ravichandran Ashwin (India)
 4. Rangana Herath (Sri Lanka)
 5. Chris Woakes (England)
- Lord's Cricket Ground is located in London and is owned by Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC).

SVSP sports stadium of Greater Noida gets ICC accreditation

- ICC has granted Shaheed Vijay Singh Parthik(SVSP) Sports Stadium in Greater Noida approval for conducting International cricket matches between full time member countries of the game.

- The approval came two weeks after officials from ICC and BCCI inspected the stadium.

India's Yuki Bhambri clinches ITF Hong Kong F4 Futures title

- Indian Tennis Player **Yuki Bhambri**, clinched **\$10000 ITF Hong Kong F4 Futures** title on 25 December 2016. It was his **11th title on the ITF Pro Circuit**.
- He defeated **Shintaro Imai of Japan** 6-4, 7-5 who has been placed at second position.

Sports Ministry derecognizes Yoga 15 months after being declared a sport

- 15 months after **Yoga** was declared as a sport in India in **September 2015** with the approval from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the decision has been reversed and has been once again **derecognized as a sport**.
- The sports ministry communicated to all the **National Sports Federations and the Sports Authority of India (SAI)** that "Yoga can't be termed as a sport."
- Yoga was added in the list of priority sports but the government has found out that it has many dimensions and it will not be possible to conduct competitions in Yoga.
- The sports ministry will no longer look after Yoga and it has now gone back to the **AYUSH** (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) ministry.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Scientists discovers world's most heat resistant material

- Scientists from Imperial College London, UK have identified materials that can withstand temperatures of nearly 4,000 degrees Celsius.
- The two materials, **Tantalum carbide (TaC) and hafnium carbide (HfC)** are refractory ceramics, meaning they are extraordinarily resistant to heat.
- Their ability to withstand extremely harsh environments means that refractory ceramics could be used in thermal protection systems on high-speed vehicles and as fuel cladding in the super-heated environments of nuclear reactors.

Scientists develops First Biological Pacemaker using Human Stem Cells

- Scientists from the McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine, at Toronto, Canada have developed the very first functional pacemaker cells using human stem cells.
- As per the findings published in the Nature Biotechnology, the scientists generated Scientists develops First Biological Pacemaker using Human Stem Cells sinoatrial node (SAN) cardiomyocytes, the biological pacemaker from human pluripotent cells.

- The human pluripotent stem cells are known to be capable of generating about 200 different cell types including every tissue and organ of a human body. These biological pacemaker cells were successfully tested on rats.
- A pacemaker is a device which is placed in the chest or abdomen to help control abnormal heartbeats using low-energy electrical impulses.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Whale Call, Western Pacific Biotwang, Dubbed in Mariana Trench

- Scientists at the OSU's Hatfield Marine Science Center have discovered the source of a strange sound recorded near the Mariana Trench. The metallic sound has been dubbed as Western Pacific Biotwang.
- The recording released has an unusual booming sound, with deep moans at low frequencies and a metallic finale at extremely high frequencies.
- It was recorded by seafaring robots known in the marine world as "Passive Acoustic Ocean Gliders". As per the report, scientists believe that the sound could be the call of a whole new type of whale known as mink whale.
- It is a type of baleen whale that produces sounds that span frequencies that reach as low as 38 hertz and as high as 8,000 hertz. These Mince whales live in the Great Barrier Reef off the northeast coast of Australia.
- The autonomous seafaring robots that captured the call are known as Passive Acoustic Ocean Gliders. The glider was equipped with a custom-designed and in-built passive acoustic recording system. The glider could dive up to 3,280 feet below surface.