

NATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Cabinet Approvals on February 15, 2017

- Approval for setting up of **Food Legumes Research Platform (FLRP)** at Amlaha, Sehore in **Madhya Pradesh** for meeting the emerging food security challenges.
- Cabinet approved the **signing of Air Services Agreement between India and Rwanda** which will enable the airlines of the two countries to operate services in each other's territory.
- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs gave its approval to **award contract in 31 contract areas under Discovered Small Fields Policy 2016** undertaken last year
- Union Cabinet approved the **merger** of the **State Bank of India** with its **5 subsidiary banks** namely State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur; State Bank of Hyderabad; State Bank of Mysore; State Bank of Patiala and State Bank of Travancore.

Indian Panaroma Film Festival Begins in Port Blair

- The **five day** film festival has been organized by the Directorate of Information, Publicity & Tourism, **Andaman & Nicobar Administration**
- About 15 films of different languages and different genre will be screened at two different venues including PBMC Auditorium and ITF Ground during the festival.

Himachal Pradesh Inaugurates Campaign against Drug Addiction

- The campaign aims to make the **state drug free**.
- The Governor has announced to grant **Rs 1 lakh** to the Press Club Shimla for organising the campaign against drugs
- Through the campaign, the state will make effort to eradicate drugs that not only affect the physical and mental health of the addict but also lead them towards increase in crime.

Approval for Greenfield Airport at Sabarimala

- **Kerala cabinet** gave its in-principle approval for setting up a **Greenfield Airport** at **pilgrim centre Sabarimala** located at the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the Western Ghats mountain ranges of Pathanamthitta District, Kerala.
- Lakhs of devotees visits the Sabarimala hill shrine each year and in recent years the number of pilgrims visiting the temple had gone up especially during November-January **Mandala-Makaravilakku pilgrim festival season**.
- The airport will cater to the needs of lakhs of devotees who visit the famous Lord Ayyappa hill shrine every year by **reducing the traffic congestion**. Currently, only road ways medium is available to reach the hill shrine.

Indian Seed Congress in Kolkata

- The theme of Seed Congress is **"Seed of Joy"**.
- The theme is in line with vision of PM Modi government to bring happiness and prosperity in the lives of farmers by doubling their farm income by 2022.

- The centre has directed the state governments to prepare variety wise seed rolling plants to meet year wise, season wise requirements of quality seeds.
- These rolling plants would help in improving the Seed replacement rate along with Variety replacement rate so that sustainable agricultural production and productivity could be ensured.
- Indian seed industry has the potential to become a major industry to supply quality seeds in global markets.

International Conference on NexGen Technologies for Mining and Fuel Industries-NxGnMiFu-2017

- **Aim :** To innovate new techniques, technologies and applications for clean, safe, symbiotic sustenance of society, environment and industries in post-2020 era.
- An industrial exhibition is also being organised in the Vigyan Bhawan lawns and will run in parallel with the technical sessions.
- Eight distinguished luminaries from the mining, fuel sectors, 800 delegates from India and 50 delegates from countries like, UK, Australia, China, Republic of Korea, Czech Republic, Germany, USA, Japan, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria etc. have expected to participate in the event.

INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

India Ranked 143 in the 2017 Index of Economic Freedom Index

- India has been ranked **143 out of 186 economies** in the annual **Index of Economic Freedom 2017** released by top US based Think Tank, **The Heritage Foundation**.
- The Index measures the degree of economic freedom in the countries of the world.
- India has been placed in the category of **"Mostly Unfree" Economies** in which the points ranges from 50.0-59.9.
- Among South Asian countries, only Afghanistan (163) and Maldives (157) were ranked below India. Nepal (125), Sri Lanka (112), Pakistan (141), Bhutan (107), and Bangladesh (128) surpassed India in economic freedom
- **Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand** are the top three nations in the Index respectively.

UNICEF Makes \$110 Million Appeal for Sudan Children

- **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** has launched a **\$110 million** appeal to help **two million acutely malnourished children** across Sudan including hundreds of thousands living in conflict areas.
- Sudan is home to around 13 percent of all children suffering from acute malnutrition across Africa. Two million children under five in Sudan are acutely malnourished.
- UNICEF has spent about \$500 million in Sudan over the past five years and increasingly aims to tap funds from inside Sudan.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

RBI will Reimburse Banks MDR Charges Effective January 1, 2017

- **Reserve Bank of India** has decided to reimburse banks **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) charges** on debit cards used by citizens for payment with effect from January 1, 2017.
- In December 2016, the government had decided to absorb the merchant discount rate (MDR) charges in respect of debit card transactions for making payments to it to encourage people to use digital payments post demonetisation.
- Also, the banks will have to certify that MDR charges for transaction amounts up to Rs 1 lakh have not been collected from the payer.

Citi Bank launches instant chat service for customers

- Mumbai based **Citi Bank** has launched instant chat services for customers named **Citibank Online (CBOL)**.
- With this **India become the first country** in Asia Pacific within the Citi network to have this kind of service.
- CBOL will focus on **resolving queries** instantly regarding cards, loans, domestic and non-resident accounts, and online transactions.

RBI Doubles Gold Loan Limit for Regional Rural Banks to Rs. 2 lakhs

- **Reserve Bank of India** increased the **gold loan limit** for **RRBs (Regional Rural Banks)** to **Rs 2 lakh** from the current Rs 1 lakh on February 16, 2017 to help the farmers and artisans have access to credit who are willing to pledge gold as collateral.
- The limit has been doubled for the loans **not exceeding 12 months** from the date of sanction.
- However, RBI has also directed that the gold loans should **not exceed 75%** of the value of the gold pledged for taking the loan.

Name and Shame Campaign of Catholic Syrian Bank Starts Paying Dividends

- **Name and Shame Campaign** initiated by **Catholic Syrian Bank** Employees and Retirees against willful **Defaulters in Kerala** have started paying dividends.
- As per the bank, of the **30 defaulters** identified with dues of more than **Rs. 50 lakh each**, about **10 borrowers** have approached the bank with settlement proposals and the bank has also received firm assurance for payments worth **Rs. 25 crore** from defaulters.
- Through the campaign, the bank is succeeding in spreading the message to defaulters not to avoid loan repayments.

Tata Motors Signs Strategic Technological Agreement with Microsoft

- **Tata Motors Ltd** and **Microsoft India** entered into **strategic agreement** to collaborate on the technology front for making driving a more personalized experiences for the customers.
- Microsoft will make use of its IoT (internet of things), AI (artificial intelligence) and machine learning technologies to develop a highly personalized, smart vehicle for the customers.

- The tie-up will act as a new revenue opportunity for the company as car buyers increasingly look for value-added services.

MCX signs MoU with Singapore Diamond Investment Exchange

- **Mumbai based Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX)** and **Singapore Diamond Investment Exchange** have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to explore areas of cooperation.
- It will enhance transparency in pricing, besides exploring further areas of collaboration.
- The agreement will facilitate cooperation between the two exchanges in areas such as knowledge sharing and research, standardisation of the product for Indian markets

PEOPLE IN NEWS

Edappadi K Palaniswami Appointed as the New Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

- **Edappadi K Palaniswami** has been appointed as 13th **chief minister** of the state of Tamil Nadu.
- Panneerselvam was appointed as the Chief Minister within hours of death of AIDMK supremo and Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa on December 5, 2016.
- Later on February 5, 2017 Panneerselvam stepped down paving the way for Sasikala to be elected its legislature party leader who was already chosen AIADMK general secretary.

Vikas Swarup appointed India's next envoy to Canada

- Indian Foreign Service (IFS) **Vikas Swarup** was appointed as India's High Commissioner to Canada
- He will replace **Syed Akabaruddin** who is who is moved as serving as India's Permanent representative in the United Nations
- Vikas is currently working as the spokesperson of **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)**. He had served the country's in several embassies including US and Turkey.

Government appoints 5 new judges to Supreme Court

- **New Judges are :**
 1. Madras High Court Chief Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul
 2. Rajasthan HC Chief Justice Naveen Sinha
 3. Kerala HC Chief Justice Mohan M Shantanagounder
 4. Chhattisgarh HC Chief Justice Dipak Gupta
 5. Karnataka HC judge S Abdul Nazeer.

FIBA Appoints Norman Isaac as its First Indian Technical Delegate

- **International Basketball Federation (FIBA)** has promoted **Norman Isaac** as the **Technical Delegate (TD)** of the sport's worldwide governing body.
- He has become the **first Indian** to be ever appointed to the post. In 2006, FIBA appointed him as the FIBA Commissioner at Muscat, Oman.

- He will be assigned to any country except his own during his tenure as TD and will be responsible for conduct of an entire event, ranging from actual competition management to every related aspect, from media arrangements to logistics.

AWARDS

AIIMS, New Delhi Wins First Prize for Sanitation & Hygiene under Kayakalp Awards

- India's premier health institute the **All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi** was awarded the first prize of the **Government's Kayakalp Award** under the **Central Government Hospitals category** for maintaining high standards of sanitation and hygiene.
- The second prize was received by **North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS)**, Shillong, which got a cash prize of **Rs 3 crore**.
- **Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER)**, Chandigarh, received the third prize of **Rs 1 crore**.
- **Commendation awards of Rs 50 lakh** each were given to AIIMS, Raipur, AIIMS, Jodhpur and National Institute of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases (NITRD), Delhi.
- The Kayakalp award scheme was launched in 2015 so as to improve the culture of sanitation and cleanliness in India's health care facilities.

Indian-origin Shand Panesar Wins UK's Bravery Award

- An Indian-origin Scotland Yard officer **Shand Panesar** along with his colleague **Craig Nicholson** was honored with the **2017 Outstanding Bravery of the Year Award**.
- The duo were honored the top bravery award in the United Kingdom for risking their own life to save a family trapped in a burning house in Hillingdon in September 2016
- The coveted Total Excellence in Policing Awards recognizes a host of dedicated police work across **14 separate categories** including Outstanding Bravery, Best Detective, Thief Taker of the Year, and Excellence in Victim Care among others.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Scientists 'Unmask' Protein Shielding Superbug Against Antibiotics

- Scientists from University of Western Australian have mapped the **molecular structure** of a **protein** that protects the **superbugs** from all the antibiotics including **Colistin**, which is an antibiotic used when all other treatments fail.
- Using a technique called X-ray **Crystallography** scientists mapped the three-dimensional structure of EptA.
- The research may help to develop new drugs for antibiotic-resistant bacteria strains and lead to all new method of treatment.

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

NASA Scientists Record January 2017 as Third Warmest January in 137 years

- **January 2017** has been recorded as the **third warmest January in 137 years** of modern record-keeping.
- As per the report, **January 2016** was the hottest month with a temperature of 1.12 degree Celsius warmer than the mean January temperature from 1951-1980.
- This was followed by **January 2007** at 0.96 degree Celsius and finally January 2017 with a temperature of 0.92 degree Celsius warmer than mean January temperature.
- The monthly analysis by the GISS team is based on the data acquired by about 6,300 meteorological stations around the world, ship- and buoy-based instruments measuring sea surface temperature, and Antarctic research stations.

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