

National Current Affairs

CCS approves first phase of Army reforms

The Union Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved implementation of first phase of reforms pertaining to the Indian Army based on recommendations of Lt Gen Shekatkar Committee.

The purpose of reforms is to enhance combat capability and also optimize and rebalance defence expenditure of Indian Army in phased manner by December 2019. It is first ever reform exercise to be undertaken in Indian Army since independence.

The first phase of reforms involves

- Redeployment and restructuring of approximately 57,000 posts of officers/Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs)/ Other Ranks (ORs) and civilians.
- Optimisation of signals establishments: Its purpose is to include Radio Monitoring Companies, Air Formation Signal Regiments, Corps Air Support Signal Regiments, Composite Signal Regiments and merger of Corps Operating and Engineering Signal Regiments.
- Restructuring of repair echelons in Army: Its purpose is to include Base Workshops, Advance Base Workshops and Station Workshops in the field Army.
- Redeployment of Ordnance echelons: Its purpose is to include Vehicle Depots, Central Ordnance Depots and Ordnance Depots apart from streamlining inventory control mechanisms.
- Other Reforms: Better utilization of Supply and Transport echelons and Animal Transport units. Closure of army postal establishments and military farms in peace locations. Enhancement of standards for recruitment of clerical staff and drivers in Army. Improving efficiency of National Cadet Corps (NCC).

Background

- The Union Ministry of Defence had constituted a Committee of Experts under Chairmanship of Lt Gen (Retd) DB Shekatkar for recommending measures to enhance combat capability & rebalancing defence expenditure of Armed Forces with an aim to increase “teeth to tail ratio”.
- The committee had submitted around 99 recommendations. So far, Defence Ministry has approved 65 of these recommendations pertaining to Indian Army for implementation. Remaining 34 recommendations pertaining to Indian Navy, Air Force and Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) are likely to be taken up soon.

- These reforms will be completed in all respects by December 2019. The committee had suggested that, if these recommendations are implemented over the next five years, it can result in savings of up to Rs. 25,000 crore in defence expenditure.

Arunachal Pradesh, J&K are fastest growing economies: Central Statistics Office

On 30th August, 2017, Central Statistics Office (CSO) published new series of gross State Domestic Product (SDP) data with 2011-12 as the base year.

- According to it Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh were the fastest expanding State economies in 2015-16.
- Comparison between states plays a healthy role in promoting competitive federalism thereby promoting fair competition.
- On the whole, the national economy expanded by 8 per cent in 2015-16 at constant 2011-12 prices.

Highlights:

- Arunachal Pradesh's gross State domestic product (GSDP) expanded to 16.5 per cent and that of Jammu and Kashmir 14.7 per cent at constant 2011-12 prices.
- The economies of bigger States such as Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh expanded about 8-8.5 per cent that year.

Top 5 States:

- Maharashtra remains the largest State economy, with its size estimated at ₹16,59,776.05 crores (₹16.6 lakh crore) at constant 2011-12 prices.
- The second-biggest State economy is Tamil Nadu, estimated at ₹9,48,673.85 crores.
- Gujarat's economy was estimated at ₹9,01,375.28 crores
- Uttar Pradesh at ₹9,01,256.8 crores.
- Karnataka was the fifth largest with an estimated size of ₹8,14,802.64 at constant 2011-12 prices.

These five States together account for about 46 per cent of the nation's GDP.

Growth estimates for West Bengal, compiled by the State's directorate of economics and statistics, are still under examination by the CSO, and have therefore not been published. Compilation of the growth data for 2016-17 is not yet complete, as only 18 States and Union Territories have reported their numbers to the CSO.

India, Switzerland ink two MoUs in the field of Railways

India and Switzerland have signed two Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) for exchanging technical cooperation in the field of Railways.

They were signed after delegation level talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting President of Swiss Confederation Doris Leuthard in New Delhi. They also issued Joint press statement.

Signed Pacts

- MoU between Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL) and Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich.
- MoU between Ministry of Railways and Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications of the Swiss Federation on Technical Cooperation in Rail Sector.

Key Takeaways of Joint press statement

- FDI is a big part of the Indo-Swiss cooperation. Both countries agreed to enhance the business to business cooperation. Both countries are working on new bilateral investment treaty. India thanked Switzerland for supporting for its bid for MTCR and Nuclear Suppliers Group membership.
- Switzerland agreed that reforms taken by India will serve good base for expanding cooperation in several areas. Switzerland has accepted automatic exchange of information for transparency in financial transactions with India to effectively combat black money and tax evasion and its parliament is going to pass legislation supporting it by year end. India committed to clean energy and green future and termed climate change as a global challenge.

India-Switzerland

India and Switzerland have long standing relationship and enjoy robust economic ties. Switzerland is being seventh largest trading partner and eleventh largest foreign investor for India. Both countries share common views on many major global issues.

Fourth Session of India-Tanzania Joint Trade Committee held in New Delhi

The Fourth Session of the India-Tanzania Joint Trade Committee meeting was held in New Delhi on 29th Aug, 2017.

Key Points:

- The Indian delegation was led by Commerce and Industry (Independent Charge) Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman. The Tanzanian delegation was led by the Industry, Trade and Investment Mr. Charles John Mwijage.

- With an investment of US \$ 2.2 billion, Tanzania is among the top 5 investment destinations for India.
- The potential areas for Tanzania in India include Light oils and petroleum or bituminous minerals, motor cars and vehicles, medicaments etc Similarly, Metals and Minerals, dried cashew nuts in shells from Tanzania are required in India.
- The Indian Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme of which Tanzania is a beneficiary has boosted considerably Tanzanian export to India in recent years.
- India and Tanzania agreed to enhance sectoral co-operation based on respective needs and comparative advantage for mutual benefit.
- The liberal visa regime facilitates trade and investments. Visa on arrival is available in Tanzania though only for a three-month period.
- During the discussions, it was mentioned that long-term (at least one year visas) for reputed business companies with multi-entry facility will be helpful to promote investments and business collaboration between the two countries.

About Tanzania

- Capital: Dodoma
- President: John Mangufuli
- Currency: Tanzanian Shilling

EU, India agrees to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation

India and European Union (EU) have agreed to strengthen cooperation between their security and intelligence agencies to combat threat of terrorism and check terror financing.

Both sides deliberated extensively on combating terror financing and challenges posed by violent extremism and radicalisation during 10th India-European Union Counter Terrorism Dialogue held in New Delhi.

Key Highlights

- Both sides strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and underscored need for deepening cooperation to combat terrorism in long term, sustained and comprehensive manner. They also exchanged views and assessments on prevailing terrorist threats in their respective regions including state-sponsored, cross-border terrorism in Afghanistan-Pakistan region.
- They also held discussions regarding current challenges posed by various terrorist entities, radicalisation and violent extremism, foreign terrorist fighters and combating financing of terrorism. They agreed to strengthen institutional linkages by establishing point of contact between Indian agencies and their EU counterparts including Europol for closer interaction and cooperation in field of counter-terrorism.
- Both sides also agreed to identify relevant training programmes for capacity building of individuals on both sides working in sphere of countering terrorism and violent

extremism. They also emphasised prospects for deepening counter-terrorism cooperation under the UN and Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The next India-European Union Counter Terrorism Dialogue will take place in Brussels in 2018.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

FATF is an inter-governmental body which monitors the progress of member countries in implementing necessary measures to check money laundering and terrorist financing.

Amazon to help implement Karnataka government's 'Ksheera Bhagya' Scheme

Amazon has announced a partnership with the Akshaya Patra Foundation to implement the Karnataka government's 'Ksheera Bhagya' Scheme in Bengaluru on 30th Aug 2017.

Key Notes:

- Under this scheme schoolchildren would be provided a glass of milk each five days a week.
- The partnership aims to reach out to 170,000 children across 1,300 government schools in the state.
- The scheme is developed by Karnataka Milk Federation on Chief Minister's (Siddaramaiah) to help poor children by providing them nutritious food essential for healthy growth and all-round development of schoolchildren.
- The Ksheera Bhagya Scheme was launched by the Congress government in 2013 to provide nutrition through milk to students of government schools and anganwadis across the state.
- Children studying in classes 1 to 10 and those in anganwadis are the beneficiaries.

About Amazon

- Amazon is an American electronic commerce and cloud computing company based in Seattle, Washington.
- It was founded by Jeff Bezos on 5th July 1994.

Harsimrat Kaur Badal launches Common Food Processing Incubation Center for Shallots in Perambalur, Tamilnadu

Union Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal has inaugurated a unit to process small onions in Perambalur district in Tamil Nadu on 31st Aug 2017.

Key Points:

- With this new unit it will help farmers of this region to earn extra income.

- The unit, set up at Chettikulam village at a cost of Rs 1 crore, will process small onions to produce vacuum packed peeled onion, onion paste, onion flakes and onion powder.
- While vacuum packed peeled onion will last for 1 month (under refrigeration), the shelf life of Onion powder will be 6 months, onion paste 5 months and onion flakes 6 months.
- Farmers in Perambalur district are producing 70,000 tonnes of shallots per year in a cultivation area of 8,000 hectares land.
- Perambalur is the hub of small onions. Farmers of this region had suffered huge losses due to lack of post harvest handling facilities.
- This unit will ensure that small onions do not get waste and increase farmers income.
- The institute has decided to take one crop per year and develop processing technologies and related infrastructure for that crop.
- IIFPT is working on Mission Coconut, which will be launched next year on World Coconut Day (2nd September 2018).
- Mission Banana was implemented in the previous year and this year it is Mission Onion.

About Tamil Nadu

- Capital: Chennai
- CM: Edappadi K. Palaniswami
- Governor: C. Vidyasagar Rao

Indian Government gives 20 Sri Lankan students scholarships

The Government of India has given scholarship for 20 Sri Lankan students to study Hindi at the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (Central Institute of Hindi) in Agra.

Key Points:

- The Government of India has sponsored their visit, academic fees and local hospitality for one year in Agra.
- Hindi is the most popular foreign language in Sri Lanka and is being taught in almost 80 institutions all over the island.
- High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka is Taranjit Singh Sandhu.
- Students selected for this scholarship are from the University of Kelaniya, Buddhist and Pali University, University of Jayawardanepura; Indian cultural Centre, Colombo; Bharatiya Kala Kendra, Kandy and other educational and cultural institutions of Sri Lanka.

About Srilanka

- Capital: Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte (Administrative)

- Colombo (Commercial)
- President: Maithripala Sirisena
- PM: Ranil Wickremesinghe

International Current Affairs

BRICS Innovative Competitiveness Report 2017

On 29th August, 2017, BRICS Innovative Competitive Report 2017 was released by China Science and Technology Exchange Centre.

- The report says India is expected to surpass China in innovation competitiveness between 2025-2030. At present, China is the leading BRICS nation in innovation competitiveness.
- The report is a huge confidence booster for Indian government's efforts at improving the innovation environment in the recent years.
- The report predicts that growth rate of Russia would also fall in coming years and India would take over Russia in terms of its comprehensive STI (Science Technology and Innovation) competitiveness by 2030.

About BRICS:

- South Africa was inducted in this group in 2010.
- 2016 BRICS summit was held at Goa.
- 2017 BRICS summit will take place at Xiamen, China between 3-5 September 2017.

U.S. gives \$225 million worth of conditional military assistance to Pakistan

The Trump administration has given \$ 225 million worth of conditional military assistance to Pakistan that the country can access only if it takes more action against terror groups announced on 31st of Aug 2017.

Key Points:

- The announcement comes over a week after President Donald Trump hit out at Pakistan for providing safe havens to terror groups that kill Americans in Afghanistan.
- The US insists that it wants Pakistan to take action against terrorist groups.
- The President has been clear that we are looking to the Pakistani government to take decisive action against militant groups based in Pakistan that are a threat to the region.

- It is important to US interests that Pakistan prevents terrorist sanctuaries.
- The US has provided Pakistan more than USD 33 billion help since 2002.

Banking & Finance

Freyr Energy ties up with Axis Bank

Solar energy services company Freyr Energy has tied up with Axis Bank announced on 31st Aug 2017.

Key Notes:

- It will offer term loans ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 50 lakh for tenures up to five years, for solar rooftop installations in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
- The loans will be given to MSMEs and self-employed individuals to install Freyr rooftop solar plants for industrial and commercial purposes.
- This loan programme will help MSMEs significantly to reduce their electricity bills.
- Around Past three years, Freyr installed over 800 solar systems across 14 States in India and Ghana.

About Axis Bank

Apps of Axis Bank

- Asha Home Loan
- Kisan Card
- LIME App

SEBI bans Orion Capital, Orion Broking from markets for 10 yrs

Markets regulator SEBI has barred Orion Capital as well as Orion Broking and their partners from the securities markets for 10 years announced on 29th of Aug 2017.

Key Points:

- They have been barred for failing to redress several investor grievances related to non- settlement of funds due to the clients.
- The claim amount is more than Rs 6 crore against Orion Capital and over Rs 4 crore against Orion Broking.

- According to SEBI Whole-Time Member S Raman the two firms and their partners have failed to act in accordance with the requirements of the stock brokers regulations.
- Arbitration Awards were passed against Orion Capital and Orion Broking and none of the Awards has been implemented by the notices.
- They have also been barred from alienating any of their assets in any form till the full settlements of claims of its investors are affected.

About SEBI

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India. It was established in the year 1988 and given statutory powers on 30 January 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992.
- Chairman: Ajay Tyagi
- HQ: Mumbai Maharashtra

Appointments & Resigns

Rajiv Gauba appointed as Union Home Secretary

Rajiv Gauba has appointed as Union Home Secretary for fixed two year tenure announced on 31st Aug 2017.

Key Points:

- Gauba replaced Rajiv Mehrishi. He is a 1982-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre.
- Gauba would be dealing with issues like internal security, militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast, Maoist problems in the central and east India besides other issues.
- He was born in Punjab in 1958, Gauba graduated in Physics from Patna University.
- In his previous term as additional secretary in Home Ministry, Gauba looked after the Left-Wing Extremism division.
- He served in Jharkhand as the chief secretary for 15 months before joining the central government.
- He has previously worked in the central government's ministries of home, defence, finance and environment and forests in different positions.
- Gauba has also represented India on the board of International Monetary Fund for four years.

Indian Hotels appoints Puneet Chhatwal as MD and CEO

Tata group hospitality firm Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) has appointed Puneet Chhatwal as its Managing Director and CEO announced on 29th Aug 2017.

Key Points:

- Chhatwal is currently Chief Executive and Member of Executive Board of Duetsche Hospitality/Steinberger Hotels AG.
- He will take over from Rakesh Sarna , who is stepping down on 30th Sep 2017.

Science & Technology

Youtube changes its Logo for the first time

YouTube has announced and introduced some major design changes in its iconic logo for its **desktop and mobile apps.**

Key Points:

- It has been changed for the first time in 12 years. In the new logo, YouTube is simply brought about in black text with its iconic red play button.
- The red in YouTube's logo is now brighter so that it will be seen more easily and read more clearly.
- The new redesign is available on both iOS and Android. There is a new Library and Accounts tab as well.
- The header on the YouTube app now has a white background along with the new logo visible on the left.
- The navigation tabs have been moved to the bottom of the app which is already available on the iOS version.
- YouTube had also introduced a gesture for fast forwarding or rewinding by double tapping the left and right side of the video.
- You Tube will also add new feature and able to swipe left to watch a previous video, and swipe right to watch the next one.
- YouTube will introduce square and vertical formats for watching videos.

About You Tube

- YouTube is an American video-sharing website headquartered in San Bruno, California.
- Founded on 14th Feb 2005

- CEO: Susan Wojcicki

US approves first gene therapy for cancer

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved first gene therapy, a treatment that uses patient's own immune cells to fight acute lymphoblastic leukaemia.

- The approval will usher new approach to treatment of cancer and other serious and life-threatening diseases.
- Studies have shown that 83% of patients responded to this treatment, achieving remission within three months.

Key Facts

- The gene therapy treatment was originally developed by researchers at University of Pennsylvania and licensed to pharma giant Novartis. It was previously identified as CAR-T cell therapy (CTL019) or tisagenlecleucel and now is called Kymriah.
- The treatment is completely different compared to present popular immunotherapy drugs called "checkpoint inhibitors" used to harness immune system that treat variety of cancers by helping the body's natural T cells better spot tumors.

CAR-T treatment

- The CAR-T treatment is not a pill or form of chemotherapy. It uses gene therapy techniques not to fix disease-causing genes (cells) but to turbocharge T cells, immune system cells that cancer can evade.
- These cells removed from patient's blood along with white blood cells are encoded with viral vector, reprogrammed in lab. They are reprogrammed to harbor chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) that specifically targets cancer cells.
- The revived and reprogrammed cells after returned to the patient continue multiplying to fight disease for months or years.

Launch of navigation satellite IRNSS-1H unsuccessful: ISRO

The launch of IRSO's eight navigation satellite IRNSS-1H onbaord of PSLV-C39 from Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh was unsuccessful. The heat shield did not separate as a result of which satellite did not complete the 4th stage.

- The IRNSS-1H was being sent to space to back up and replace the functions of India's first navigation satellite IRNSS-1A (launched in July 2013) as its three rubidium atomic clocks on board had stopped functioning.

- The rubidium atomic clocks on board of IRNSS-1A that stopped working were imported from European aerospace manufacturer Astrium. The atomic clocks are used to find satellite's position with an accuracy of 0.5 metre.

IRNSS-1H

- IRNSS-1H was India's first satellite actively built by consortium of private firms led by Bengaluru-based Alpha Design Technologies. T
- he consortium had completed 25% development work of IRNSS-1H, under the guidance of ISRO scientists.
- Prior to development of this satellite, private sector's role was only limited to supplying components to ISRO.

IRNSS

- The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) is an independent regional system developed by India on par with the US-based GPS, Russia's Glonass and Galileo developed by Europe.
- The navigation system offers wide services like terrestrial and marine navigation, disaster management, vehicle tracking and fleet management visual and voice navigation for drivers.
- It was named "Navic" (Navigation with Indian Constellation) by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Awards & Recognition

Konkani writer Mahabaleshwar Sail receives 2016 Saraswati Samman

Eminent Konkani writer Mahabaleshwar Sail (74) was bestowed with prestigious Saraswati Samman 2016. He was awarded for his novel "Hawthan" that captures cultural lives of traditional potter community in Goa.

He was presented the award, comprising plaque and a cash purse of Rs.15 lakh by Union minister for commerce and industry Nirmala Sitharaman at event held in New Delhi.

Mahabaleshwar Sail

- Mahabaleshwar Sail is bilingual writer based in Goa. He has written four Marathi dramas and seven Konkani novels.
- He has also written five short stories and novel in Marathi.
- He is best known for his work 'Paltadcho Munis', which had inspired film by same name.

- Most of his short stories and novels are translated into English and Hindi.
- His work 'Hawtham' was published in 2009. He has received Sahitya Akadami Award in Konkani language for his short story collection 'Taranga' in 1993.
- Mahabaleshwar Sail was born on 4 August 1943 in Shejebag in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka.
- He had served in Indian Army and had participated in 1965 Indo-Pakistani War. He also had served as UN peacekeeper in 1964-1965 at Israel and Egypt border.
- He also had worked as supervisor in Forest Department, Goa, Daman and Diu Police and India Post till his retirement.

Saraswati Samman

- Saraswati Samman is an annual award bestowed upon Indian citizen for his outstanding literary work written in any 22 Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of Constitution and published during last 10 years. The award has been named after Indian goddess of learning Saraswati.
- It is considered one of the highest literary awards in India. It was established in 1991 by the KK Birla Foundation. It carries cash prize of 15 lakh rupees, a citation and a plaque of goddess Saraswati. Harivansh Rai Bachchan was the first recipient of this award for his autobiography published in four volumes.