

National Current Affairs

2017 Union Ministerial Reshuffle

Nine new members were inducted into Council of Ministers of NDA Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in recent reshuffle. The aim of reshuffle was to reinforce 4Ps - passion, proficiency, professional and political acumen in Government.

9 new members inducted are

- Hardeep Singh Puri: Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- Satya Pal Singh: MoS Human Resource Development and MoS Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- Shiv Pratap Shukla: MoS Finance Ministry.
- Alphons Kannanthanam: MoS (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Tourism; and MoS in Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- Raj Kumar Singh: MoS (Independent Charge) of Ministry of Power; and MoS (Independent Charge) of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- Virendra Kumar: MoS in Ministry of Women and Child Development; and MoS in Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- Anantkumar Hegde: MoS in Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- Ashwini Kumar Choubey: Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare
- Gajendra Singh Shekhawat: Minister of State (MoS) for Agriculture

Besides, four senior ministers were elevated to the cabinet rank. They are

- Piyush Goyal: Railway Ministry.
- Nirmala Sitharaman: Defence Ministry.
- Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi: Minority Affairs Ministry.
- Dharmendra Pradhan: Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Ministry.

5 September: National Teachers Day

The National Teachers Day is observed every year on 5th September in India to commemorate birthday of country's first Vice President and second President Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

- To celebrate this day, various programmes were organised in schools and colleges throughout the country to honour of teachers who shaped the lives of students and showed them path of success.

- On this occasion, Environment Ministry launched Prakarti khoj, an environment awareness initiative. It is an online environmental quiz competition conducted at national level. The objective of quiz was to generate interest among school children about the science related to environment.

‘Prakriti Khoj’ – An Environment Quiz

- It aims to motivate them towards effective participation in other major programmes related to conservation and protection of the Ministry.
- This quiz will provide a unique platform for students to measure their awareness level regarding environmental issues.
- A separate web portal – www.ngc.nic.in containing information on the quiz has been developed by Ministry.
- The mode of quiz will be online through multiple choice questions.
- NGC was initiated by Ministry in 2001-02 for creating environmental awareness among children by formulating “Eco-clubs” in schools across the country.
- Three age groups is planned to be covered in Phase-I which will be open only to Eco-clubs i.e. in the age-groups 8-12 years, 13-15 years and 16-18 years.
- The second phase of the quiz will be open to students from all schools across the country in the year 2018.

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

- Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born on 5 September 1888 in Thiruttani in then Madras Presidency of British India (now in Tamil Nadu). He was Indian philosopher and statesman and one of best known scholars in field of comparative religion and philosophy in India in 20th century.
- He had tremendously contributed towards new contemporary Hindu identity in eyes of the ill-informed Westerners. He held great respect for teachers and always believed that teachers are real nation builders and thus should always be the best minds in the country.
- He was the first Vice President of India (in office from 1952–1962), Second President of India (in office from 1962 to 1967).
- He was first recipient Bharat Ratna, India’s highest civilian award along with politician C. Rajagopalachari, scientist C. V. Raman. He was also awarded British Royal Order of Merit (1963).

International Current Affairs

North Korea's 6th nuke test 9.8 times powerful than 5th: S Korea

The “artificial quake” in North Korea thought to be its sixth nuclear test was five to six times more powerful than the fifth nuclear test.

Key Points:

- As per the South's Yonhap news agency report, it was 9.8 times more powerful than the tremor from Pyongyang's fifth test.
- Japan said the explosion was ten times the strength of Pyongyang's test last September, while reports in South Korea said it was up to five times more powerful than the Nagasaki bomb in 1945.

About North Korea

- Capital: Pyongyang
- Supreme leader: Kim-Jong-un
- Currency: North Korean Won

Tajikistan bans women from wearing veils

The Tajikistan government has banned its women from wearing veils. The Tajikistan government has introduced a legislation, wherein it has asked the women to “stick to traditional national clothes and culture”.

Key Points:

- The new legislation does not introduce a penalty for breaking the rule, but some have claimed that fines could be introduced at a later date.
- Under existing laws, women wearing hijabs are already banned from entering the country's government offices.
- In the beginning of August, officials approached more than 8,000 women wearing hijabs in the capital of Dushanbe and ordered them to wear their scarves in the Tajik style.

About Tajikistan

- Capital: Dushanbe
- President: Emomali Rahmon
- PM: Kokhir Rasulzoda

NASA Astronaut Peggy Whitson to return home after 288 days in space

According to the US space agency NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson is set to depart the International Space Station (ISS) and return to Earth after completing a 288-day long mission.

Key Points:

- Whitson is completing a 288-day mission that began in November 2016, spanning 122.2 million miles and 4,623 orbits of Earth – her third long-duration stay on the outpost.
- Whitson set multiple other records while in orbit such as:
 - World's oldest spacewoman, at age 57, and most experienced female spacewalker.
 - She also became the first woman to command the space station twice following her launch last November.
- She had gone up to the station on 17 November 2016, already having an accumulated space time of 377 days.
- At the time of their landing, she will have accrued a total of 665 days in space over the course of her career (3 space missions), which is more than any American astronaut till date.
- The feat would place her at the 8th position on the all-time space endurance list.
- Whitson's expedition crew members, Yurchikhin and Fischer, who were launched in April 2017, would be completing 136 days in space on their return.
- Russia's Yurchikhin will return to Earth with a total accumulated space time of 673 days over the course of 5 missions.
- This feat would put him in the 7th place on the all-time endurance list.
- The three new astronauts who would be joining the existing ones at the station include NASA's Mark Vande Hei and Joe Acaba and Alexander Misurkin of Roscosmos.
- They are scheduled to launch on 12 September from Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

Five banks of BRICS nations sign pact for credit lines

Five banks of BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (ICM) have agreed to establish local currency credit lines and develop cooperation on credit ratings. In this regard, they have signed agreement ahead of 9th BRICS summit to be held in Xiamen, China.

These five banks are Brazilian Development Bank, Russia's Vnesheconombank, Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM), China Development Bank and Development Bank of South Africa.

Key Facts

- The agreement will allow these five banks to establish framework mechanism to extend credit lines in local currencies to BRICS ICM members and BRICS companies against guarantees of signatory banks. The use of local currencies will help to

promote mutually beneficial economic cooperation, increase trade, mitigate currency risks and facilitate companies in accessing BRICS markets.

- Moreover, the agreement on credit ratings will allow ICM members to share information about internal credit ratings assigned to clients, as well as assignment methodologies and rating assessment. Information under it will be provided at request and on a confidential basis.

BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (ICM)

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) nations had established the BRICS ICM to enhance trade and economic relations amongst BRICS countries, and enterprises.

Appointments & Resigns

Nirmala Sitharaman: India's first full time woman Defence Minister

Nirmala Sitharaman (58) became first full time woman Defence Minister of India after she was promoted to the Union Cabinet.

- She takes charge of the crucial ministry from Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- Ms Sitharaman is second woman to become Defence Minister of India. First was former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was holding additional portfolio as Defence Minister from 1980-82.

Nirmala Sitharaman

- Nirmala Sitharaman was born 18 August 1959 in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.
- Currently, she is Rajya Sabha MP representing Karnataka. She hails from Andhra Pradesh. She had obtained BA degree from Seethalakshmi Ramaswamy College, Tiruchirappalli and MA degree in economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University followed by Ph.D in Indo-European textile trade within GATT framework and MPhil.
- She has served at Pricewaterhouse Coopers as a Senior Manager and later for the BBC World Service.
- Before her elevation to Union Cabinet in NDA Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, she was Minister of State (MoS) for Finance and Corporate Affairs and Minister for Commerce and Industry with independent charge. Before that she was national spokesperson for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). She was member of National Commission for Women (NCW) from 2003-05.
- She is founder member of Pranava School in Hyderabad.

Kenneth I. Juster named U.S ambassador to India

The United States has announced economic policy maker and expert on India, Kenneth I Juster, as the next US ambassador to India.

Key Points:

- Juster has previously served as Under Secretary of Commerce from 2001-2005, Counselor (acting) of the State Department from 1992-1993, and deputy and senior adviser to the Deputy Secretary of State from 1989-1992.
- He has also served as Chairman of Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, and as Vice Chairman of The Asia Foundation.
- In the private sector, he has been a partner at the investment firm Warburg Pincus LLC, Executive Vice President at com, and senior partner at the law firm Arnold & Porter.

Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore was appointed the new sports minister

Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore was appointed as the country's Youth Affairs and Sports Minister on 3rd Sep 2017.

Key Points:

- He has succeeded Vijay Goyal as the Sports Minister and is the first sportsperson to become the head of the Sports Ministry.
- Rathore joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2013 and was sworn in as minister of state for information & broadcasting when the Modi government came to power in May, 2014.
- He is the first Indian shooter to win an Olympic medal after his silver at the 2004 Athens Games.
- He also has three gold medals from the Commonwealth Games to his name from 2002 and 2006, along with a silver.
- In 2004 and 2006, he won two World Championship golds as well in Sydney and Cairo respectively.

Hockey India sacks chief coach Oltmans

Hockey India fired national coach Roelant Oltmans after a string of unimpressive outings at the international level on 2nd of Sept 2017.

Key Points:

- Currently, Director David John will be taking charge in the interim, including the upcoming Asia Cup next month.

- The committee included over 24 members that included former players, current team members Sardar Singh, P.R. Sreejesh and Manpreet Singh and several other members.
- Oltmans had first taken charge of the Indian team temporarily just before the 2013 Asia Cup after Australian Michael Nobbs had been removed.

Environment

Ancient Buddhist site from 1st century discovered in Andhra Pradesh

On August 28, 2017, Archaeologists in Andhra Pradesh have discovered an ancient Buddhist site that dates back to 1st century AD, in Guntur district, in Putlagudem village of Achampet mandal.

- Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, CEO of Culture Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati (CCVA) found the site. The site had six limestone pillars with half lotus medallions and depicted animals and patterns. He informed that these structures dated back to satavahana rule.
- One of the prime Buddhist tourist spots in the state in Ghantasala village in Krishna district, is all set to receive a boost, with a Rs 1,500 crore project.
- The new facility will be themed on the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha. A two-storied structure in Buddhist architecture resembling a pedestal with a 100-ft wide and 70-ft high Buddha in the Mahaparinirvana posture will be a major highlight.
- There are also plans for a 'Buddhist circuit' being drafted by the AP Tourism and Culture Department Under Swadesh Darshan scheme.

Science & Technology

Goa CM Manohar Parrikar launches grievance redressal portal

On September 1, 2017 Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar launched an online portal for redressal of public grievances — aimed at addressing complaints within 30 days.

- The portal www.goaonline.gov.in can be accessed after providing basic information like name, address, mobile number, Aadhaar number, date of birth, email id, etc.

- After registration, the citizens can login using their credentials and enter the details of their grievance and mention the concerned department towards whom it is addressed.
- Those with registered grievances will be informed of the status of their complaints via SMS and emails.

FDA approves first gene-altering leukemia treatment

The Food and Drug Administration has approved its first gene therapy drug in the United States that will treat childhood leukemia.

Key Points:

- Novartis drug Kymriah works by genetically modifying pediatric and young adult patients' blood cells to attack cancer cells in blood and bone marrow.
- It will be used in patients under the age of 25 with acute lymphoblastic leukemia who were unresponsive to initial treatment.
- Kymriah is a cell-based gene therapy. The therapy is a genetically-modified autologous T-cell immunotherapy.
- According to the National Cancer Institute approximately 3,100 patients aged 20 or younger are diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most common childhood cancer in the United States, each year.
- Each dose of Kymriah contains a patient's own immune cells, which are sent to a lab to be genetically modified using a virus.
- This therapy, known as chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy (CAR-T), gives the cells the ability to recognize and kill the source of the cancer.
- The patient's T-cells are collected and sent to a manufacturing centre where they are genetically modified to include a new gene that contains a specific protein that directs the T-cells to target and kill leukaemia cells that have a specific antigen (CD19) on the surface.
- Once the cells are modified, they are infused back into the patient to kill the cancer cells.
- The safety and efficacy of Kymriah were demonstrated in one multicenter clinical trial of 63 pediatric and young adult patients with relapsed B-cell precursor ALL.

CERT-In issues alert on Locky Ransomware

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has issued an alert about spread of new ransomware (malicious software) 'Locky' that can lock computers and demand ransom for unlocking them.

Ransomware is basically type of malicious software designed to block access to computer system until sum of money is paid.

Locky Ransomware

- Locky ransomware is being circulated through massive spam campaign in which spam emails with common subject lines target computers by locking them and demanding ransom for restoring access to users. It first had surfaced in 2016.
- It encrypts files on victims' PCs and adds a .locky file extension. The attackers then demand ransom in Bitcoin payment to unlock the files. It is demanding ransom of half bitcoin, which at present rate is equivalent to over Rs 1.5 lakh. So far, it has extorted more than \$7.8 million in payments, according to a recent study. However, its impact on Indian systems is not clear so far.

Comment

The Locky Ransomware cyberattack is third major ransomware attack this year after Wannacry and Petya which had crippled thousands of computers, including those of multinational corporations. According to an ASSOCHAM PWC study, India was third worst affected country in list of over 100 countries hit by Wannacry in May 2017.

CERT-In

- CERT-In is nodal agency for information technology security under aegis of Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Electronics and IT. It was established in 2004.
- Its mandate is to protect Indian cyberspace and software infrastructure against destructive and hacking activities.
- It also responds to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout country.
- It also issues guidelines, vulnerability notes, advisories, and whitepapers regarding to information security practices, prevention.

Intel unveils AI-focused 'Movidius Myriad X' processing unit

Intel has introduced a new vision processing unit (VPU) called Movidius Myriad X. The new Intel VPU is aimed at providing end-to-end artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to a wide range of product categories such as smart cameras, virtual reality (VR) devices, robotics and even drones.

Key Points:

- Myriad X is the world's first system-on-chip (SOC) shipping with a dedicated neural compute engine for accelerating deep learning inferences at the edge.
- The Myriad X architecture is capable of 1 Trillion operations per second (TOPS) of compute performance on deep neural network inferences.
- It is capable of delivering more than 4 TOPS of total performance, its tiny form factor and on-board processing are ideal for autonomous device solutions.

- Myriad X uniquely combines imaging, visual processing and deep learning inference in real time with:
- Programmable 128-bit VLIW Vector Processors: Run multiple imaging and vision application pipelines simultaneously with the flexibility of 16 vector processors optimized for computer vision workloads.
- Increased Configurable MIPI Lanes: Connect up to 8 HD resolution RGB cameras directly to Myriad X with its 16 MIPI lanes included in its rich set of interfaces, to support up to 700 million pixels per second of image signal processing throughput.
- Enhanced Vision Accelerators: Utilize over 20 hardware accelerators to perform tasks such as optical flow and stereo depth without introducing additional compute overhead.
- 2.5 MB of Homogenous On-Chip Memory: The centralized on-chip memory architecture allows for up to 450 GB per second of internal bandwidth, minimizing latency and reducing power consumption by minimizing off-chip data transfer.

Sports

Bharadwaj finishes runner-up at India Junior GP

Young Indian shuttler Rahul Bharadwaj is defeated by top seed Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn in the men's singles. He finished runner-up at the India Junior International Grand Prix on 3rd Sept 2017.

Key Points:

In a 33 minute contest Bharadwaj blew a 6-2 lead in the first game to eventually go down 16-21 11-21 to the Thailand shuttler.

MS Dhoni has become the first wicketkeeper to effect 100 stumpings in ODI cricket

MS Dhoni retires from International Test cricket. MS Dhoni reached a record of 100 stumpings in One-Day Internationals during his 301st match, as India played Sri Lanka in the fifth ODI of the five-match series at Colombo.

Key Points:

- Dhoni surpassed former Sri Lankan wicket-keeper Kumar Sangakkara, who had 99 stumpings in 404 matches.
- Dhoni, recently, became the sixth Indian player to play 300 matches in the 50-over format.

- He joined the elite club comprising of Mohammed Azharuddin, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly, Yuvraj Singh.
- Dhoni has also played 90 Tests and 77 T20 Internationals.
- In 90 Tests, Dhoni has taken 256 catches and effected 38 stumpings while his T20 Internationals' catches/stumping record stands at 43/23.

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