

National Current Affairs

Cabinet approvals on 20th September 2017

The Union Minister chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has made approvals for different category on 20th Sept. 2017.

- Cabinet apprised of the progress under National Health Mission and decisions of the Empowered Programme Committee and Mission Steering Group of NHM. National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) became two sub-missions under the overarching NHM.
- Cabinet approves transfer of Hotel Jaipur Ashok, Jaipur and Lalitha Mahal Palace Hotel, Mysore, units of India Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (ITDC) to Government of Rajasthan and Government of Karnataka, respectively.
- Cabinet approves to pay Productivity Linked Bonus (PLB) equivalent to 78 days wages to eligible non-gazetted railway employees (excluding RPF/RPSF personnel) before Dussehra/Puja holidays for the financial year 2016-17.

Cabinet approves Dentists (Amendment) Bill, 2017

The Union Cabinet has approved introduction of Dentists (Amendment) Bill, 2017 in Parliament subject to modifications of drafting as may be considered necessary by Legislative Department.

The amendment in Act include modifications in provisions of

- Membership of Dental Council of India under clause (f) of section 3 of parent Act
- Membership of State and Joint State Dental Councils under clause (b) of section 21 and clause (b) of section 23 of parent Act

Background

According to provision in Dentists Act, 1948, it was mandatory to have representation of dentists registered in Part B as Central Government nominees in Dental Council of India. Moreover, it also required election of four to two members from Part B to State/Joint State Dental Councils. However, in recent time this provision has lost its relevance. In order to reduce redundancy of provisions of their representation, Central Government has decided to delete these provisions so that their representation does not remain mandatory any more.

NGC discovers oil in Arabian sea near Mumbai High

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has made oil discovery in WO-24-3 well located west of Mumbai High fields in Arabian Sea. The well is estimated to hold in-place reserve of about 20 million tonnes.

The new discovery comes almost 50 years after ONGC began production in Mumbai High, which is India's biggest oil field. It currently produces 205,000 barrels of oil per day (just over 10 million tonnes per annum).

Key Facts

- In all, ONGC had tested nine objects or zones and all of them were found to be hydrocarbon bearing. The last object tested flowed 3,300 barrels of oil.
- ONGC is also carrying out further appraisal of discovery and has intimated upstream regulator Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH).
- The new find will add to existing production capacity of Mumbai High in less than two years time. It will help ONGC to maintain production levels from basin for a longer time than currently estimated.

Mumbai High

- Mumbai High is ONGC's flagship oil producing assets. It along with other small fields along western offshore have produced 16 million tonnes per annum of oil, which is 44% of India's total crude oil production of 36 million tonnes.
- ONGC produced 25.5 million tonnes of oil in 2016-17, which will reach 28-29 million tonnes by 2019-20.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC)

- ONGC is multinational oil and gas company, headquartered in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. It is Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under administrative control of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- It is India's largest oil and gas exploration and production company.
- It produces around 77% of India's crude oil (equivalent to around 30% of the country's total demand) and around 62% of its natural gas.

Indian Coast Guard commissions 2 high-speed interceptor boats

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) commissioned two high-speed interceptor boats C-433 and C-434 boats at the Dighi Port in Mumbai, Maharashtra. The commissioning of boats will strengthen the security umbrella over 720-km-long Maharashtra coastline. It will also help in patrolling and prevent illicit activities such as smuggling, infiltration and illegal fishing.

Key Facts

- The C-433 and C-434 boats were built by Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Shipbuilding in Chennai. They are 27.42 metres long and have displacement of 136 tons each.
- They are water jet propelled vessels with endurance of 500 nautical miles at 20 knots.
- They are capable of doing speeds up to 45 knots.
- The vessels are fitted with latest state of art navigational and communication equipment with 12.7 mm machine gun.
- They are designed for high-speed interception, low intensity maritime operations, close coast patrol, search and rescue and maritime surveillance, it added.

Singapore to set up skill center in Northeast: Dr Jitendra Singh

On September 19 2017, the Government of Singapore has proposed to set up a Skill center at Guwahati by the year 2019 and Dr Jitendra Singh, the Ministry of DoNER will coordinate in this initiative.

- Singapore also expressed its preference to engage with India in the area of Space Technology for collaboration in “peaceful uses of Outer Space”.
- An arrangement already exists between Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) Mussoorie with Singapore, wherein a certain number of passing out Civil Services/IAS officers, accompanied by two faculty members, regularly undertake a visit to Singapore.

Indian Army takes Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to India's highest battlefield, Siachen

Siachen is India's highest and hardest battlefield situated at an average altitude of 18,000 ft above sea level. On September 20 2017, the Indian Army carried Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda of Swachh Bharat to Siachen to ensure it stays clean.

- It is a logistics challenge to move all types of waste out of the glacier so that these do not become an environmental hazard. Soldiers are at risk of getting frostbite if their bare skin touches any metal object for more than 15 seconds.
- The prime motive of the drive is to maintain ecological balance of Siachen glacier. Since the launch of the campaign in October 2014, Siachen troops have removed and sent back more than 63 tonnes of garbage to the base.”

Indian Naval units of Western Naval Command on Long Range Deployment

Two Navy ships, a submarine and two Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft of the Western Naval Command (WNC) are presently on deployment to the Western Arabian Sea and the southern Indian Ocean.

- After conducting a series of exercises en-route Indian Naval Ship Mumbai and submarine Shishumar entered Duqm, Oman as part of this deployment.
- The Naval units are on a month long deployment for surveillance and cooperation with the Arabian Sea rim nations. Another ship, INS Kochi which is also a part of this deployment, is proceeding to the southern Indian Ocean.

NBCC to develop Nauroji Nagar project as World Trade Centre

On 20th September 2017, NBCC announced that it has obtained license to develop a commercial project as 'World Trade Centre' at Nauroji Nagar, New Delhi.

- This project would be completed by 2020.
- Area of the Nauroji Nagar commercial complex is 3 million square feet. It has 12 commercial towers.
- Around 3 lakh square feet of office space at Nauroji Nagar has been sold for Rs.1,100 crore to five companies – PFC, HDFC, HPCL, SIDBI and Energy Efficiency Services.
- The company expects around Rs.12,000 – 13,000 crore from selling these 12 towers.

International Current Affairs

India, Russia to collaborate on Bangladesh nuclear plant

India is collaborating with Russia to build Rooppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh. It will be first initiative under an India-Russia nuclear deal to undertake atomic energy projects in third countries. It will also be India's first atomic energy venture abroad.

- Rooppur Nuclear project (capacity of 2*1200 MWs) is Bangladesh's first atomic energy project. It is being built with Russia's help near Dhaka.
- After commissioning of two units, each with capacity of 1200 MWs, Bangladesh will be third South Asian country after India and Pakistan to harness atomic energy for energy purpose.

Background

- In December 2014, India and Russia had signed 'Strategic Vision for Strengthening Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy' to explore opportunities for sourcing materials, equipment and services from Indian industry for construction of Russian-designed nuclear power plants in third countries.

- Moreover, India had signed a civil nuclear cooperation deal, along with two more agreements, with Bangladesh in April 2017 under which two sides can supply and manufacture equipment, material for atomic power plant.

Comment

- The nuclear deal with Bangladesh allows Indian nuclear establishment to grow, internationally as for years it was not been able to grow due to sanctions imposed on New Delhi post 1974 Pokhran tests.
- However, it is not clear what kind of nuclear collaboration India is having with Bangladesh since both countries are not members of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), an elite grouping of 48 members that prevent nuclear proliferation by controlling export of materials, equipment and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Chabahar Port likely to be operational by end-2018: Government

The Union Government is hopeful that strategic Chabahar Port in Iran will be operational by end of 2018. Iran is expected to send application to EXIM Bank of India for providing first tranche of loan from the \$150 million credit line to activate the contract between India and Iran for Chabahar Port.

Chabahar port

- Chabahar port is strategically located in southeastern Sistan-Balochistan province on Gulf of Oman, near energy-rich Iran's border with Pakistan.
- It can be easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan. India and Iran signed "historic" Chabahar port agreement in May 2016 which has the potential of becoming India's gateway to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe.
- Under it, India will develop and operate for 10 years of two terminals and five berths.

Strategic importance of Chabahar Port

- The port provides access to the resources and markets of landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan. It is located less than 150km west of Pakistani port of Gwadar, being developed by China. Thus, help in countering Chinese presence in Arabian Sea or keeping track of Chinese or Pakistani military activity based out of Gwadar.
- Chabahar port will be linked International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), thus serve as India's outreach in region to Afghanistan and beyond to Russia, Eastern Europe. Thus, it will be a "win-win" situation for India, Iran and Afghanistan as it would serve as growth engine for entire region.

Saudi Arabia lifts ban on WhatsApp, Skype & other internet calling apps

On 20th September 2017, Saudi Arabia lifted its ban on internet calling applications like WhatsApp, Skype etc.

- The lift of ban on internet calling apps have been done in a move to lower online restrictions. Since, Saudi Arabia has been criticised heavily over censorship.
- The Government has said that access to VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) would reduce operational costs. Also, this would bring a digital transformation by improving internet based businesses, mainly in the media and entertainment sectors.
- This announcement was made a day after Al Jazeera media condemned Snapchat for blocking a Qatar broadcaster from its app in Saudi Arabia on the request of Saudi authorities.

Russia unveils monument to designer of iconic AK-47 rifle

On September 19 2017, Russia unveiled a statue of Mikhail Kalashnikov, inventor of the AK-47 assault rifle that became the most lethal weapon ever made and the best known Russian brand abroad.

- This weapon is Russia's defense. It's one of Russia's symbols. Perched atop a pedestal in a tiny square on Moscow's busy Garden Ring thoroughfare, the statue of Kalashnikov, who died in 2013, has him dressed in a bomber jacket and clutching an AK-47 in both hands.
- The AK-47, the small-arms mainstay of Russia's armed forces for over 60 years, is also featured on the national emblems of several African nations and on that of East Timor.

World running out of antibiotics: WHO in its "Antibacterial agents in clinical development" report

On 20th September 2017, a report released by World Health Organization (WHO) states that the world is in lack of new antibiotics.

- A report named 'Antibacterial agents in clinical development – an analysis of the antibacterial clinical development pipeline, including tuberculosis' was released on 20th September 2017, by the WHO.
- The report stated that out of the 51 antibiotic drugs that are in developing stage, only 8 can be considered as totally new drugs. Others are just modifications of the existing drugs.
- There is an urgent need to find drugs for antibiotic-resistant infections like drug-resistant tuberculosis.

- Else, people would be forced to undergo surgeries and risk their lives even for minor infections.

About WHO:

- Full form – World Health Organization
- Headquarters – Geneva, Switzerland
- Director General – Mr. Tedros Adhanom

Banking & Finance

RBI to regulate peer-to-peer lending firms as NBFCs: Government

The Union Government has issued gazette notification, notifying that Peer-to-peer lending (P2P) platforms will be treated as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and thus regulated by Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The notification will help P2P lenders to gain official recognition and opens new avenues for fund-raising and business expansion. It also ends the regulatory vacuum in which P2P lending firms were operating.

Background

- The RBI had floated a consultation paper in April 2016 on developing regulatory norms for P2P lending.
- It had proposed 6 key areas to frame regulatory framework encompassing permitted activity, regulations on capital, governance, business continuity plan and customer interface and regulatory reporting of P2P lending.

Peer-To-Peer Lending (P2P)

- P2P lending is a form of crowd-funding used to raise loans which are paid back with interest. It enables individuals to borrow and lend money – without use of an official financial institution as an intermediary.
- It can use an online platform that matches lenders with borrowers in order to provide unsecured loans. P2P lending gives access to credit to borrowers who are unable to get it through traditional financial institution.
- It boosts returns for individuals who supply capital and reduces interest rates for those who use it.

Need

- P2P lending is one of the crowd-funding business model that has gathered momentum globally and is taking root in India.
- It promotes alternative forms of finance, where formal finance is unable to reach. It has potential to soften lending rates as result of lower operational costs and enhanced competition with traditional lending channels.
- If properly regulated, P2P lending platforms can do this more effectively. Though it is in nascent stage but it is not significant in value yet, but it promises potential benefits to various stakeholders (borrowers, lenders, agencies etc).

India joins quantum computing race

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is planning to fund project to develop quantum computers in order to tap into the next big advance in computing technology.

In India, Physics departments at Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and Harish Chandra Research Institute, Allahabad, so far have only forayed into theoretical aspects of quantum computing. Experts from across country are expected to gather in Allahabad for a workshop to develop such computer.

Quantum computing

- Quantum computer is computer design which uses principles of quantum physics to increase computational power beyond attainable limits of traditional computer.
- It employs complex principles of quantum mechanics to store information in 'qubits' (quantum bit) instead of the typical binary 'bits' of 1 and 0.
- Qubit is two-state quantum-mechanical system, such as the polarization of a single photon (either vertical polarization or horizontal polarization).
- Qubit allows for far greater flexibility than the binary system. It works faster because of way such circuits are designed and can do intensive number-crunching tasks much more efficiently than the fastest comparable computers.
- For instance, quantum computer require 3.5 million fewer steps to sort billion numbers compared to traditional machine and it can find the solution in only 31,623 steps. Quantum Computing help in solving complex computing physics problems, which were earlier not possible on traditional computers.
- Quantum computers have been built on small scale and work continues to upgrade them to more practical models. Internationally, Canada's D-Wave Systems, is pioneer in developing quantum computers and has sold machines to Lockheed Martin and Google.

Business

Mahindra & Mahindra, Ford team up to explore collaboration on electric vehicles

On 18th September 2017, Mahindra & Mahindra and Ford Motor Company signed a MoU that ensures an alliance to explore electric vehicles for three years.

- Apart from working on electrification of vehicles they would also focus on the following areas:
 - Mobility programs
 - Connected vehicle projects
 - Product development
 - Sourcing and commercial efficiencies
 - Distribution within India – improving Ford's reach within India
 - Global emerging markets – improving Mahindra's reach outside India

Tata Steel and ThyssenKrupp sign MoU, will become second largest European steelmaker

On 20th September 2017, Tata Steel and German steel company ThyssenKrupp signed a MoU to combine their European steel operations in a 50-50 joint venture, in Frankfurt.

- The merger would combine Tata's steel plants in the UK and the Netherlands and ThyssenKrupp's plants in Germany.
- There is no cash involved in the deal.
- The joint enterprise would have its headquarters at Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- The new company formed by the joint venture is named as ThyssenKrupp Tata Steel.
- It will have an annual turnover of £ 13.3billion.
- This would be the second largest European steel company.
- A total of 4,000 jobs are expected to be lost in both the companies due to the merger.

About Tata Steel:

- Headquarters – Mumbai
- Chairman – Mr.Natarajan Chandrasekaran
- MD – Mr.T.V.Narendran

About ThyssenKrupp:

- Headquarters – Duisburg and Essen, Germany
- CEO & Chairman of the Executive Board – Mr.Heinrich Hiesinger

Norway's Sovereign Wealth Fund hits \$1 trillion value for the first time

On 19th September 2017, the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund officially reached \$1 trillion for the first time, in Oslo, Norway.

- Norway's Sovereign Wealth Fund was formed in the 1990s to manage the Norwegian state's oil revenues.
- This is the world's largest Sovereign Wealth Fund. It is managed by Norwegian Central Bank.
- It has reached \$1 trillion on 19th September 2017, for the first time.
- This occurred due to the increase in value of world's major currencies against dollar value and good condition of stock market.
- The fund invests in stocks, bonds and real estate.

Appointments & Resigns

Ajay Bisaria appointed as new High Commissioner to Pakistan

On 17th September 2017, Indian Government appointed Mr. Ajay Bisaria as Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan.

- Mr. Ajay Bisaria is the current ambassador to Poland.
- He will replace Mr. Gautam Bambawale as the High Commissioner to Pakistan.
- Mr. Gautam Bambawale will be appointed as ambassador to China.
- Recently Mr. Vijay Gokhale was appointed as Economic Relations Secretary at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

About Pakistan:

- Capital – Islamabad
- Currency – Pakistani rupee
- Official languages – Urdu & English
- President – Mr. Mamnoon Hussain
- Prime Minister – Mr. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi

India TV Chairman Rajat Sharma elected as NBA President

On 19th September 2017, India TV Chairman and Editor-In-Chief Rajat Sharma was elected as the new President of the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) for 2017-18.

- M.V. Shreyams Kumar, Joint MD of Mathrubhumi Printing & Publishing Co Ltd was elected as the Vice President.
- Anuradha Prasad, Chairperson-cum-MD of News24 Broadcast India Ltd would be the Honorary Treasurer.

- Newly elected members of NBA: M.K.Anand, MD and CEO of Times Network – Bennett, Coleman & Co Ltd; K.V.L.Narayan Rao, Group CEO and Executive Vice-Chairperson of NDTV Group; Rahul Joshi, CEO News and group Editor-In-Charge of TV18 Broadcast Ltd.

Awards & Recognition

3 Indians on Forbes '100 Greatest Living Business Minds' list

On 20th September 2017, three Indians were listed in Forbes '100 Greatest Living Business Minds' list.

- Three Indians – Lakshmi Mittal, Ratan Tata and Vinod Khosla were listed in Forbes special list of the world's '100 Greatest Living Business Minds'.
 - Lakshmi Mittal is the Chairman and CEO of ArcelorMittal.
 - Ratan Tata is the Chairman of Tata Group.
 - Vinod Khosla is the Co-Founder of Sun Microsystems.
- In order to celebrate Forbes' centennial, the magazine created an encyclopedia of ideas from 100 entrepreneurs, visionaries and prophets of capitalism.
- The list consists of people who have created a lasting impact on the world or innovated something that transformed their field.
- The list also includes Donald Trump. He has been referred as the "Salesman and Ringmaster Extraordinaire: Owner, Trump Organisation; 45th President of The United States".

ISKCON's Govardhan Eco village in Mumbai wins 'Spirit of Humanity' award

On September 20 2017, ISKCON's Govardhan Eco village has received the 'spirit of humanity' award, instituted by AmeriCares, a non-profit organisation working for disaster relief and global health, in the 'livelihood' category.

- The Govardhan Eco Village, set up by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is in Palghar district in Mumbai.
- ISKCON's spiritual leader is Radhanath Swami Maharaj.

Sports

FIFA bans Caribbean soccer leader Gordon Derrick for 6 years

On 20th September 2017, FIFA's Ethics Committee banned Caribbean soccer leader Gordon Derrick for six years due to financial offenses.

- FIFA said that Gordon Derrick was accused on alleged conflicts of interest, offering and accepting gifts and other benefits, mismanagement of funds, abuse of position and disloyalty.
- FIFA also said that he broke the rules by failing to co-operate for investigation.
- Gordon Derrick was barred from contesting in a presidential election for the leader of North American soccer body, CONCACAF, in 2016. After this incident, FIFA announced about Gordon Derrick's case.

About FIFA:

- Full form – International Federation of Association Football
- Motto – For the Game. For the World
- Headquarters – Zurich, Switzerland
- President – Gianni Infantino

Books & Authors

Dr. Mahesh Sharma releases the book “Bhartiya Kala Mein Salil Kridayen Evam Sadyahsnata Nayika”

On September 20 2017, Dr. Mahesh Sharma, Minister of State (Independent charge) for Culture released the book entitled “Bhartiya Kala Mein Salil Kridayen Evam Sadyahsnata Nayika” at a function in National Museum at New Delhi.

- It was written by Dr. Kshetrapal Gangwar and Shri Sanjib Kumar Singh. Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Minister of State (Independent charge) for Labour and Employment was also attended the function.
- This is an Art Book based on original research, written in Hindi and published by National Museum after few decades. This is a book written to highlight the Indian Art and describes the Water Sports (Salil Kridayen). This form of art has been the part of Indian Art from time immemorial.

Science & Technology

Floating B4 boat labs to study the Brahmaputra River

The Union Government is planning to safeguard fast-eroding Majuli island — world's largest riverine island using research carried out on floating Brahmaputra Biodiversity and Biology Boat (B4) labs along Brahmaputra River.

- The purpose of project is to study changes caused by dams, climate change, human interventions and eventual effects on river eco-system. It will constantly monitor impact of various environmental and anthropological factors that affect river and conduct research to mitigate effects.
- The project's interdisciplinary work plan is developed with IIT Guwahati as the nodal agency. It will also study freshwater resources of North East India. The integrated approach is aimed to combine data, science and judgement that can impact policy. It will start research work by December 2017. Initially, it will cover region from Pasighat, Dibrigargh, Neemati, Tejpur and Guwahati in Assam.

Brahmaputra Biodiversity and Biology Boat (B4) labs

- B4 boat labs will be large barge (or boat) which will be set up on river. It will be well-equipped laboratory with cold storage facilities for holding samples, along with multiple satellite boats or rafts that will venture into shallower and narrower parts of the river to lift samples.
- The boat will have permanent lab spread over two floors. One floor will be dedicated to scientists, while other floor will be accessible to residents of area to learn about the eco-system.

Obituary

Stanislav Petrov, who prevented possible nuclear war, dies at 77

Stanislav Petrov, a former Soviet military officer credited with preventing a possible nuclear disaster at the peak of the Cold War has died at the age of 77. He died at his home in Moscow in May but his death has only now been made public.

- Stanislav Petrov was on duty at a Russian nuclear early warning centre in 1983 when computers wrongly detected incoming missiles from the US. He took the decision that they were a false alarm and did not report them to his superiors.
- His actions, which came to light years later, possibly prevented nuclear war.
- He was known in the West as “the man who saved the world”.