

National Current Affairs

Government sets up expert group for suggestions on artificial intelligence policy

The Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY) has set up an internal expert committee to advise the government on a policy on artificial intelligence (AI).

- The expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India as government's main focus is to reduce cyber-attacks with AI.
- Its recommendations will be used to frame the policy.
- The government recently had drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India's strategic plan to use AI.
- The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, ensuring safety and security of AI systems; understanding and addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.
- Artificial intelligence is branch of computer science concerned with making computers behave like humans.

Assam govt rolls out new Tourism policy

On October 19, 2017, Assam State Government rolled out 'Tourism Policy of Assam 2017' with an aim to increase tourist inflow in the state by at least two to three times within next five years.

- 'Tourism Policy of Assam 2017' will be effective from January 2018 to December 2022.
- To channelize resources in making this policy a success story, tourism sector in Assam has been accorded the 'Industry' status.

Arunachal Assembly approves Kamle as 23rd district

On October 18, 2017, Arunachal Pradesh State Assembly passed Arunachal Pradesh (Re-Organisation of Districts) Amendment Bill 2017 to create a new district named 'Kamle'.

- The bill was introduced on October 14, 2017 by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Prema Khandu.
- Kamle is the 23rd district of Arunachal Pradesh. It has been created by bifurcating the present Upper and Lower Subansiri districts.

- It has six administrative units (three each from Upper Subansiri and Lower Subansiri).
- Kamle has a population of 22,256 homogeneous people.
- Amid rising concerns that this decision would encourage creation of more districts in future and will thereby affect state's exchequer, Chief Minister Prema Khandu stated that government is planning to re-visit the district creation policy of 1983.

Indian Army organises Jashn -e-Kokernag to strengthen jawan-awam relationship

With the slogan of "Jawan aur Awaam Amun Hai Muqam" (Army and Locals together, peace will prevail), 19 batch Rashtriya Rifles of the Indian Army on 19th October 2017 organised 'Jashn-e-Breng' festival in Kokernag village of the Anantnag district to promote peace and brotherhood between security forces and the local population.

- The soldiers arranged free medical assistance and several cultural programmes for the Kokernag public.
- The camp had several stalls which included agriculture, horticulture, and Veterinary.
- Free check-ups and medicines were given to the visitors by the Specialised doctors from Army and government hospitals.
- They even provided wheelchairs to specially abled people and ear machines to deaf persons.
- Medical experts from the field of gynecology, veterinary, diabetology, and various other backgrounds are available at the camp. They also arranged local music to connect to the community and their efforts are receiving appreciation from the public.

Two day "AYUSH Festival of Stamps 2017" held at Panaji, Goa

On 17th and 18th October 2017, the "AYUSH Festival of Stamps 2017" was held at Panaji, Goa.

- The "AYUSH Festival of Stamps 2017" was inaugurated by Rajya Sabha MP Vinay Tendulkar at Maquinez Palace in Panaji, Goa.
- The two-day exhibition event is jointly organised by the Goa Postal Region, Indian postal department and the Ministry of AYUSH.
- This festival is the first of its kind. Its objective is to promote healthy hobbies such as stamp collection among students and healthy lifestyle habits.
- Stamps related to ayurveda, yoga and related traditional practices from India and abroad were displayed at the event. About 150 schools and 5,000 students participated in the festival.

Maharashtra government releases Rs 4,000 crore in phase 1 of loan waiver scheme

On October 18, 2017, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis announced that the State Government has released a sum of Rs 4,000 crore under the first phase of the farm loan waiver scheme.

- Out of Rs 4000 crore which has been released under Phase I, Rs 3200 crore is for writing off the loans of 4.62 lakh farmers and Rs 800 crore will be distributed as incentive for 3.78 lakh farmers who are paying their loans on time.
- It is to be noted that total farm loan waiver (announced in June 2017) which will be provided to the farmers has been estimated at Rs. 34000 crore.
- Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis has mentioned that amount under Farm Loan Waiver scheme will be released in phased manner and by November 15, 2017, 75-80% disbursement will be completed.
- Maharashtra State Government believes that farm loan waiver is not a temporary solution for farmers' problems. Along with it, continuous investment in agriculture for next five years will ensure sustainable development.

Centre constitutes SOPs to regulate deployment of CAPF in states, UT

In order to meet emergent and unforeseen needs for security measures in States and Union Territories, Central Government has formulated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) when such requests are made.

- While processing the requests for deployment of CAPF in States/UTs, Chief Secretaries and Director General of Police (DGP) of respective States/UTs and Director Generals of CAPFs will have to follow the SOPs.
- State Governments have been asked to constitute a state level committee under chairmanship of Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) of the state which may examine and scrutinize requirements of Central Armed Police Forces.
- The scrutiny of such requests is to be done by keeping in view internal security, previous scale of deployment, optimal utilization of state resources, intelligence inputs, and the availability of CAPF in nearby locations.
- These committees will in turn recommend the Central Government for CAPF deployment indicating the specific quantum of force required, anticipated duration and necessary justifications for the same.

International Current Affairs

Jaipur and Srinagar Airport ranked first and second in ACI-ASQ Survey

The Jaipur and Srinagar Airport were ranked first and second respectively in ACI (Airports Council International)-ASQ (Airport Service Quality) Survey in the category of 2-5 million passengers.

- It was for second consecutive time Jaipur Airport was rated Best Airport in the World in the 2 to 5 million passengers per year traffic volume category.
- Earlier it was ranked best Airport in 2016 also.
- Besides, Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) bagged World 1 airport Award trophy of the ACI in the 5-15 million passengers per annum category.
- The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Awards are aviation industry's most prestigious accolades. They recognize airports which have achieved highest passenger satisfaction ratings in ASQ Survey which is the world's benchmark measure of airport excellence.
- ACI-ASQ Survey is only worldwide programme to survey passengers at airports on their day of travel.

Canada chosen as partner country for 2017 Technology Summit, New Delhi

Canada has been chosen as the partner country for the 23rd edition of Technology Summit which is scheduled to be held from 14th – 15th November, 2017 in New Delhi.

- This event is India's largest knowledge and technology conference and exhibition.
- It is jointly organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Indian Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- This edition of the Technology Summit will highlight range of research and innovations areas where India and Canada are world leaders.
- The theme of this summit will be 'Advanced Manufacturing' focusing on advances in various sectors including aerospace, Aviation, Artificial Intelligence and Life Sciences.
- Role of women in science and business as well as promoting the start-up and incubator communities in India and Canada will also be highlighted at the summit.

INDRA – 2017: Indo-Russia's first-ever tri-service joint exercise begins in Vladivostok, Russia

Exercise INDRA-2017, the first ever Tri Services Joint Exercise between Indian and Russian Armed Forces begun in Vladivostok, Russia on October 19, 2017. INDRA -2107 will continue till October 29, 2017.

- The previous editions of INDRA Exercise between India and Russia were single service bilateral exercise. 'INDRA-2017' marks the first bilateral exercise in which all the three Services of the Armed Forces viz. Army, Navy & Air Force of India and Russia will participate.
- Indian contingent comprising of 350 personnel from Army, 80 from Air Force, two IL 76 aircraft and one Frigate and Corvette each from the Navy are participating in INDRA – 2017. Whereas from Russian side nearly 1000 troops of the 5th Army, Marines and Ships of Pacific Fleet and aircraft from Eastern Military District will participate in INDRA-2017.
- INDRA-2017 is a landmark event in the history of Indo-Russian defence cooperation and will strengthen mutual confidence and inter-operability of the armed forces.
- During the course of INDRA-2017, armed forces of both the countries will be engaged in professional interactions, will establish joint command and control structures and will train in counter terrorism operations in a joint tri service environment.

Banking & Finance

SBI Foundation commits Rs.10 crore for conservation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus

On 17th October 2017, SBI Foundation granted Rs.10 crore for the conservation and restoration of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSTM) of Mumbai over the period of 3-5 years.

- Central Railway's Divisional Railway Manager SK Jain and SBI Managing Director PK Gupta signed a MoU. As per the MoU, SBI Foundation will provide Rs.10 crore for the project under the "SBI-Project Swachh Iconic CSMT".
- CSTM railway station is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Through this project, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of SBI aims to contribute in development and preservation of world heritage structures.
- Restoration work of CSTM heritage building will be done by INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) an expert agency.

Banks to provide funds at 7% to women SHGs under DAY-NRLM: RBI

On October 18, 2017, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued revised guidelines on Interest Subvention Scheme under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods

Mission (DAY-NRLM), stating that banks will provide funds to women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas at 7 per cent under the DAY-NRLM in current fiscal, 2017-18.

- RBI issued above mentioned revised guidelines as received from the Ministry of Rural Development. These guidelines will be implemented by 21 public sector banks and 19 private banks.
- As per the scheme, banks will be subvented to the extent of difference between the Weighted Average Interest Charged and 7 per cent subject to the maximum limit of 5.5 per cent for the year 2017-18.
- Women SHGs availing credit up to Rs. 3 lakh rupees will be eligible for this interest subvention scheme.
- Benefits of this scheme will be applicable on credit to women SHGs across 250 districts of India.

Kotak Mahindra Bank launches Paymint

Kotak Mahindra Bank in collaboration with financial technology firm Zeta has launched a multi-wallet digital prepaid solution for salaried employees named 'Paymint'.

- Through Paymint's single digital interface, which is powered by Zeta, corporate entities will be able to manage multiple reimbursements and allowances offered to employees including meal vouchers, medical reimbursements, travel allowances, conveyance and other similar allowances.
- Paymint will not only help corporate to get rid of cumbersome process of executing employee benefits programme but will also simplify the process for employees.
- Processing allowances and reimbursements typically involves lot of paperwork. Paymint makes all these processes paperless and that too by providing a secure and customised system.

Kotak Bank ties up with Samsung Pay

Kotak Mahindra Bank has tied up with Samsung, under which its credit and debit cardholders will be able to tap and pay using Samsung smart phones at merchant establishments.

- Currently, Samsung Pay works on 2.9 million points-of-sale card machines across India. It uses the Magnetic Secure Transmission (MST) technology which enables consumers to make in-store payments without the need for a physical card.
- This tie-up will strengthen Kotak's digital savings account product as the customer will get a virtual debit card for contactless payments.

Business

Madame Tussauds among 3 FDI proposals cleared by DIPP

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has approved three foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals, including that of Merlin Entertainment-owned Madame Tussauds, to open single-brand retail. FDI 3 FDI proposals cleared by DIPP:

- Mountain Trail Foods, which operates the Chai Point outlets, has got approval for food retailing. This would bring in FDI inflows of Rs.65 crore. Kohler India Corp's proposal for single-brand retail has been approved.
- Madame Tussauds is expected to open its first museum in India in Delhi. DIPP has approved 20 single-brand retail proposals worth Rs.4,900 crore so far.
- Single brand trading applications that got approval include Amazon, Grofers, Urban Ladder, Acer, Fossil India and Bally International.

Awards & Recognition

Jaipur, Srinagar top ranked airports in small aerodrome

On 18th October 2017, Jaipur and Srinagar Airport got first and second rank respectively in the category of 2-5 million passengers in Airport Council International (ACI)-Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Survey.

- Dr. Guruprasad Mohapatra, Chairman, Airports Authority of India (AAI) and his team received the ACI-ASQ Award at a function held in Mauritius on 17th October 2017.
- This is for the second consecutive time Jaipur Airport has been rated the Best Airport in the World in the traffic volume of 2 to 5 million passengers per year. Jaipur was ranked as the Best Airport in the same category in 2016 also.
- The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Awards are the aviation industry's most prestigious honours. It measures passengers' views on indicators like airport access, check-in, security screening, restrooms, stores and restaurants.

Environmental scientist Hans Joachim Schellnhuber receives Blue Planet Prize

Environmental scientist Hans Joachim Schellnhuber has received Blue Planet Prize, world's most prestigious award for pioneers in environmental science.

- Schellnhuber has been awarded the Blue Planet Prize for establishing a new field of science, Earth System Analysis, and introducing most influential concepts including the notion of tipping elements in the climate system.
- Gretchen Daily of Stanford University, USA is the second recipient of the Blue Planet Prize. She has been awarded for her research about biodiversity and natural capital.
- Blue Planet Prize was instituted by Asahi Glass Foundation (affiliate of Asahi Glass manufacturing company of Japan) in 1992.
- It is presented to outstanding thinkers who help meet challenges of planetary dimensions.
- The award carries prize money of 50 million Japanese Yen and is handed over in presence of Japan's Imperial Prince and Princess.

ISKCON's Govardhan Eco Village gets green platinum award

Govardhan Eco Village, set up by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Palghar district of Maharashtra has won the 'Green Platinum Award'.

- Green Platinum Award has been instituted by Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), which is a part of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- The award was given to Gauranga Das, the Director of Govardhan Eco Village during the Green Building Congress-2017 at Jaipur, Rajasthan in beginning of October 2017.
- Govardhan Eco Village is a farming community and retreat centre spread across 100 acres of land. It was set up in 2003.
- Organic farming, cow protection, rural education and rural development are some of the major activities carried out at Govardhan Eco Village.

Appointments & Resigns

Sunny Verghese appointed as WBCSD Chair from 2018

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) has appointed NRI businessman Sunny Verghese, co-founder and CEO of Singapore-based Olam International, as its new chairman from 2018.

- Sunny Verghese is the first ever Asian CEO to be appointed as Chairman in World Business Council for Sustainable Development's (WBCSD) 25 years of history.
- Sunny Verghese will succeed Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever as the Chairman. Paul Polman's chairmanship ends in 31st December 2017.

- WBCSD is a global network of more than 200 CEOs who are responsible for a combined revenue of more than \$ 8.5 trillion and 19 million employees.

Manika Jain appointed as Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Cambodia

On 18th October 2017, Manika Jain was appointed as Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Cambodia.

- Manika Jain is an Indian Foreign Service (IFS) Officer of batch 1993. She is presently the Consul General of India, Melbourne.
- She has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Cambodia. She would take up the assignment shortly.

Science & Technology

World's largest mud eruption 'Lusi' caused by volcano: Study

Scientists have said that, 'Lusi', the world's largest ongoing mud eruption that began on the Indonesian island of Java in 2006, would not stop soon, as it is connected to a nearby volcanic system.

- The study, published in the 'Journal of Geophysical Research: Solid Earth', discovered that the hot magma from the Arjuno-Welirang volcano has been heating the organic rich sediments under Lusi.
- Researchers suspect a magnitude 6.3 earthquake that struck Java two days before the mud started flowing as the trigger to Lusi eruption.
- The Lusi eruption began on 29th May 2006. By September 2006 enough mud rushed to the surface to fill 72 Olympic-sized swimming pools daily.
- The sea of mud has buried some villages 40 metres deep and made around 60,000 people homeless. The volcano still periodically throws jets of rocks and gas into the air.

Tejas jets to get French-made radars

On 17th October 2017, French defence firm Thales announced the development of a radar catering to the specific needs of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to equip the Tejas light combat aircraft.

- In 2016, HAL had issued a tender for Active Electronically Scanned Array (ASEA) radars for Tejas Mk-1A LCAs and till date no company has been selected.
- Thales claims that, the radar meets the specific needs of HAL to equip the 80 Tejas Mk1A multi-role aircraft operated by the Indian Air Force.
- Thales said the radar reflects its expertise in active array technologies. Tests on the radar were carried out recently at the Cazaux air base in France.
- Thales claims that, the radar is designed for air-to-air superiority and strike missions, long detection ranges and multi-target tracking capabilities.

Sports

Ravi Shastri becomes World's Highest Earning Cricket Coach

Indian cricket team coach Ravi Shastri is the world's highest-earning cricket coach in the world.

- He is paid around 1.17 million dollars per year from the BCCI which is more than the salary of Indian cricket team's captain Virat Kohli.
- But most importantly it does not include the money he earns from advertising. Next to Ravi Shastri, the Australia coach Darren Lehmann who earns around \$0.55 million.
- Not only Shastri but also the Australian captain Steve Smith is earning more than Kohli. Noticeably, Smith will earn an almost \$1.4 million this year. Kohli, meanwhile, earns a sum of roughly 1 million per year.
- Shastri, like all coaches, does not earn match fees. The report also mentions that Ravi Shastri's salary is "less only than what the top player from Australia, England and India earns a year".