

National Current Affairs

India imposes anti-dumping duty on some stainless steel imports

The Union Finance Ministry (Department of Revenue) has imposed anti-dumping duty on some cold-rolled flat products of stainless steel from China, United States, South Korea and European Union to curb the influx of cheaper imports and help local producers.

- The duty will be in effect till December 2020 and exempts certain grades of stainless steel.
- However, government has allowed import of product as long as end use of the import is in same form.
- Earlier in October 2017, Government had imposed anti-dumping duty on import of some flat steel products from China and EU for five years.
- In September 2017, Government had imposed additional 18.95% countervailing duty on some hot-rolled and cold-rolled stainless steel flat products, a first such levy on a steel product.

Tamil Nadu CM lays foundation stone for Rs 198 cr aerospace park

On October 25, 2017, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, EK Palaniswami laid the foundation stone for an aerospace park at Kanchipuram district.

- The aerospace park will be set up by Tamil Nadu State Government in 245 acres of land at an estimated cost of Rs. 198 crore.
- This project will be jointly implemented by Tamil Nadu State Industries Promotion Corporation Ltd and Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation.
- In the first phase, various facilities will be set up in 5 lakh sq ft area.
- Post completion, the aerospace park will attract investments to the tune of Rs.1000 crore and will create 30000 job opportunities.
- Nearly 50 companies are expected to set up their operation centres in this park. Tidel Park, Minerva Aviation, Bala Works, Unicorn Pvt Ltd and Wintech Precision Engineering are some of the companies which have been handed over the land allotment order by Mr. Palaniswami.

Muddle over GEAC's approval for GM mustard DMH-11

It was reported earlier in May 2017 that Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) had cleared transgenic mustard, DMH-11 for commercial cultivation.

- However, records of that GEAC meeting which was made public now do not record any such approval.
- Though GEAC gave its approval for commercial cultivation of DHM-11, but the final release will be only after approval of Environment Minister.
- GEAC is apex body under Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change for regulating manufacturing, use, import, export and storage of hazardous micro-organisms or genetically engineered organisms (GMOs) and cells in the country.
- It is also responsible for giving technical approval of proposals relating to release of GMOs and products including experimental field trials.
- GM Mustard DMH-11 (Dhara Mustard Hybrid) is genetically modified variety of Herbicide Tolerant (HT) mustard.
- If it gets final approval from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), GM mustard DMH-11 will be first GM food crop to be commercially cultivated in India. Right now, only GM cotton is allowed.

Deadline for linking Aadhaar with government schemes extended to March 31, 2018: Centre to SC

On October 25, 2017, Union Government informed Supreme Court that deadline for linking of Aadhaar to avail benefits under government welfare schemes has been postponed to March 31, 2018. Before this extension, the deadline for linking Aadhaar was December 31, 2017.

- On account of this extension, benefit to participants of various welfare schemes administered by Central Government, who do not have Aadhaar number or who have not linked their Aadhaar number, will not be denied till March 31, 2017.
- This is the second extension granted by Government. Earlier the deadline was extended from September 30, 2016 to December 31, 2017.
- This extension applies to total 135 schemes which are administered by various ministries of Union Government.

Odisha government starts work to prepare 2nd phase of SCCAP

Odisha State Government has started the process to prepare the second phase of the State Climate Change Action Plan (SCCAP) for the next five years with an outlay of Rs. 31667 crore.

- Officials of State Forest and Environment departments have been directed to make an assessment of the benefits derived from the first phase of the SCCAP implemented from 2010-11 to 2015-16.
- The second phase of SCCAP will follow a two-pronged approach focusing on 'adaptation' and 'mitigation'.

- On basis of experience of the first phase, 102 action points in 12 major sectors have been identified. These sectors are – agriculture, coastal and disaster management, energy, fisheries and animal resource development, forestry, health, Industrial arena, mining, transport, urban development, water resource management and waste management.
- Second phase of the State Climate Change Action Plan (SCCAP) will also focus on phasing out of old vehicles for reducing emission, promotion of electric vehicles, strengthening enforcement and emission check up system, augmentation of integrated sewerage projects in major urban areas and municipal solid waste management.

IAF planes carry out emergency landing drill on Lucknow-Agra Expressway

The Indian Air Force (IAF) aircrafts on 24th oct 2017 took off as part of a special drill on a Four kilometre stretch of the Agra-Lucknow Expressway in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district.

- The exercise by the IAF, in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh government, saw a C-130 J Super Hercules transport aircraft make a short landing on the highway, around 65 km from Lucknow.
- It took off again, after which around 15 fighter jets touched down or made low overshoot over the highway. This is the first time a transport aircraft participated in such an exercise in India.
- The IAF had conducted a similar exercise in 2016 to mark the opening of the Expressway. The 32-kilometre, six-lane, expressway which is the India's longest expressway which was inaugurated by the then Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav and his father Mulayam Singh Yadav.

International Current Affairs

Global Passport Power Rank 2017: India ranks 75

India's passport was ranked 75th among 94 countries in recently released Global Passport Power Rank 2017.

- India was ranked three notches better than its previous ranking.
- According to this index, Singapore has world's most powerful passport, making it first Asian country to top it.
- Singapore is followed by Germany, Sweden and South Korea. Key Facts In this edition of index, Singapore's passport scored visa-free score of 159.

- It means that approximately 3.4 million holders of Singaporean passports can now travel to 159 countries either without visa or can have one issued on arrival.
- Historically, top 10 most powerful passports in world were mostly European, with Germany having lead for past two years. Since early 2017, number one position was shared by Singapore with Germany and steadily it became number one.
- US passport was in sixth place, alongside Malaysia, Ireland and Canada.
- US passport ranking has fallen down since President Donald Trump took office after Turkey and Central African Republic (CAR) revoked visa-free status of US passport holders.
- India, which was listed 78th in 2015 has improved its ranking, figuring at 75th position with visa-free score of 51.
- Afghanistan was placed at last position of 94 rank with a score of 22, followed by Pakistan and Iraq at 93 with a score of 26, Syria at 92 with score of 29 and Somalia at 91 with score of 34
- The Global Passport Power Rank is released by Canada based global financial advisory firm Arton Capital.
- The index ranks national passports by cross-border access they bring, assigning visa-free score according to number of countries passport holder can visit visa-free or with visa on arrival.

Chile named best country to visit in 2018

On 24th October 2017, Lonely Planet, the travel guide company, ranked Chile as the number one country to visit in 2018, in its Best in Travel 2018 list.

- Lonely Planet released its Best in Travel 2018 list on 24th October 2017. Top 10 destinations were listed in 4 categories namely: Top 10 countries, Top 10 cities, Top 10 regions, Top 10 best value.
- In the top 10 countries category, Chile was ranked the number one country. It was followed by South Korea and Portugal in the 2nd and 3rd positions.
- In the top 10 cities category, Seville of Spain was ranked as number one. In the top 10 regions category, Belfast & the Causeway Coast of Northern Ireland was ranked number one. In the top 10 best value, Tallinn of Estonia was given the number one rank.

First BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine meeting held in New Delhi

The first-ever meeting of BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BITFM) was held at Parvasi Bhartiya Kendra in New Delhi. It was organized by Union Ministry of AYUSH.

- India being a major stake holder in the field of Traditional Medicine plays an important role in influencing the policies and strategies related to the Traditional Medicine in the BIMSTEC Forum.
- The Meeting discussed important agendas such as implementation of strategies of BITFM, priority areas for technical and research collaboration among member states on traditional medicine.
- It also discussed regional strategy on protection of Genetic Resource associated with traditional medicine knowledge and intellectual property rights, human resource development and capacity building among BIMSTEC States.
- It also discussed new initiatives, proposals and programmes for cooperation on traditional medicine among BITFM.
- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is international organisation involving a group of countries in the South Asia and South East Asia namely, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

India grants USD 585,000 aid to Sri Lanka University

On October 25, 2017, India provided equipment and vehicles worth USD 585,000 to University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka. Jaffna is a Tamil-dominated former war zone in Northern part of Sri Lanka.

- These equipments and vehicles are a part of the USD 3.9 million project to develop the agriculture and engineering departments of the university.
- The project aims to create better facilities and improved learning environment for students pursuing professional courses in Agriculture and Engineering.
- Government of India will also provide support for curriculum development, faculty exchanges, training and research.
- In order to extend support to Tamil population in Jaffna, Indian Government has also constructed a 200-bed hospital ward complex costing USD 13 lakh.

Qatar introduces minimum wage for first time

On 25th October 2017, Qatar announced minimum wage for its workers for the first time.

- Qatar has introduced certain labour law reforms, including minimum wage. It has not been announced when these reforms will come into effect.
- The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has welcomed this move. The ITUC announced that the agreed reforms are:
 - A minimum wage for all workers regardless of race
 - Employers will not be able to stop employees leaving Qatar
 - Identification documents will be issued by the state and not by businesses

- A central authority will track work contracts to prevent promised terms being replaced with worse conditions
- Employee's committees will be set up in workplaces along with a complaint resolution process

China unveils World's first track-less train that runs on virtual railways

On 23rd October 2017, China began test runs of its world's first track-less train in Zhuzhou city, China.

- China's world's first track-less train, that runs on virtual track is promoted as the 'World's First smart train'. This train could travel at the speed of 70 kmph. This train is called Autonomous Rail Transit (ART).
- This train was created to reduce urban traffic problems. This was developed by CRRC Corporation Limited.
- This train is a hybrid between a bus and tram. It runs on virtual railways that are represented by white lines.
- This train is said to be much cheaper than the tram and subway system. It will begin full-fledged operations soon. The train has three compartments and can carry 300 passengers.

Banking & Finance

SBI foundation among seven shortlisted companies given LOI under Adopt a Heritage Scheme

Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley has presented Letters of Intent (LOI) to seven shortlisted entities under the 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme'.

- Post announcement of this scheme, Ministry of Tourism received positive response from several organisations.
- After detailed scrutiny, 14 monuments have been allocated for adoption to 7 entities. These entities are reputed names in hospitality industry, travel industry and banking industry.

IDFC to exit \$2.6 billion infra, PE funds business

Infrastructure Development Finance Company (IDFC) has started work on exiting the infrastructure and private equity funds management business, IDFC Alternatives, which has assets worth \$2.6 billion.

- IDFC Alternatives has been one of the longest running risk investment managers in the country.
- It consists of three asset classes — infrastructure, real estate and generic private equity investments.
- It is to be noted that IDFC is currently engaged in merger discussions with Shriram Group. Thus IDFC's decision to exit from Alternatives indicates that it must not be a part of merger talks.
- IL&FS, IDFC and ICICI have been the major players of alternate asset management industry which has generated poor returns in recent years.

Government retains General Provident Fund interest rate at 7.8% for Oct-Dec

On October 25, 2017, Government retained the interest rate for general provident fund (GPF) at 7.8% for October–December 2017 quarter in line with that for public provident fund (PPF).

- General Provident Fund is a provident fund account which is available for government employees. All Government employees are eligible to contribute a certain percentage of their salary to GPF which is paid back (along with interest) at the time of his/her superannuation or retirement.
- Thus, it implies that employees of central government, Railways and defence forces will get 7.8% interest on their retirement savings for the October-December quarter.
- It is to be noted that government had kept the interest rate on PPF unchanged at 7.8% for October-December, in line with the rates for small savings schemes.
- The interest rate on GPF for previous quarter i.e. July-September 2017 was also 7.8%.

Business

Start-up Sangam Initiative: Oil companies to back 30 start-ups with Rs 320-crore fund

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas launched Start-up Sangam initiative to develop new business models, marketing plans, technology and innovations in heavy oil and gas industry sector by supporting 30 start-ups.

- For the same, 10 oil and gas PSUs have setup Rs. 320-crore venture capital fund to encourage start-ups based on innovative ideas in the energy sector.
- The corpus was created by contributions from India Oil Corporation (IOL), ONGC, Engineers India, Oil India, Numaligarh Refinery, Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HP), GAIL, Balmer Lawrie and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals.
- The selected start-ups will work in various fields related to energy such as converting waste plastics to petroleum fuels, multipurpose fuel from agricultural waste biomass, solar stove and leak detectors for liquefied natural gas (LNG) cylinders, Self – sustaining low-maintenances toilets or eco-toilets and Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) for underwater inspections.
- Start-ups in technology field will get 30 months to submit proof of concept whereas start-ups with business ideas will be given 18 months.
- These oil and gas PSUs will buy out these projects submitted by selected startups in given time frame based on merit to do more innovations.

Biocon ranked 9th in Science Careers' top employers' survey

Biocon, a Bangalore based company, is the first Indian company, which was ranked ninth in the survey.

- The survey was based on an evaluation of 23 characteristics including financial strength, easy adaptation to change, and a research-driven environment.
- Biocon has been ranked No.9 in The Science Careers Top 20 Employers Survey 2017. It is the only Asian Company in the prestigious list of global biotech and pharma companies.
- Biocon has been recognised for 'being an innovative leader in the industry', 'having a clear vision' and 'being socially responsible'.
- Biocon is the only Company from Asia to feature in the list since 2012.
- The findings are based on 6,950 completed surveys from readers of Science and other survey invitees.
- Survey respondents came from North America (65 per cent), Europe (25 per cent) and Asia/Pacific Rim (7 per cent); 94 per cent work in biotechnology, biopharmaceutical and pharmaceutical companies.

Awards & Recognition

South African Indian-origin couple Salim Abdool Karim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim wins top US award for AIDS research

On 25th October 2017, Professors Salim Abdool Karim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim, a South African Indian-origin researcher couple, were awarded the 2017 IHV Lifetime Achievement Award for Public Service.

- Salim Abdool Karim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim received the 2017 IHV Lifetime Achievement Award for Public Service from the Institute of Human Virology (IHV) in Baltimore, US.
- The award was presented to them by Robert Gallo, for their exceptional contributions in the field of HIV/AIDS. Robert Gallo is the one who discovered that HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the cause of AIDS.
- Salim Abdool Karim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim were the first to demonstrate that Antiretrovirals could prevent sexual transmission of HIV in 2010. They also discovered that, the Tenofovir Gel prevents Genital Herpes.

Appointments & Resigns

Utpal Kumar Singh Takes Charge as Uttarakhand Chief Secretary

On 25th October 2017, senior IAS officer Utpal Kumar Singh took charge as the new chief secretary of Uttarakhand replacing S Ramaswamy, in Dehradun.

- Utpal Kumar Singh is a 1986 batch IAS officer. He was earlier posted on deputation in New Delhi as additional secretary in the ministry of agriculture.
- He was relieved from his responsibilities at the Centre before completion of his deputation term due to a request from the Uttarakhand state government.
- He has earlier served as the principal secretary of various departments in Uttarakhand including PWD, energy, personnel, higher education, agriculture and home.

American Express CEO Kenneth Chenault to Step Down After 16 Years

On 25th October 2017, American Express Co said that, its chairman and chief executive officer Kenneth Chenault would step down in 2018.

- Kenneth Chenault, will be succeeded by Vice Chairman Stephen Squeri as CEO, on 1st February 2018. Kenneth Chenault is 66 years old.

- Chenault joined American Express in 1981 as a director of strategic planning. He became the CEO of American Express in 2001. He has held the CEO position for almost 16 years.
- Stephen Squeri is 58 years old. He has been associated with American Express for almost 32 years. He served as group president of global corporate services in American Express before taking over as vice chairman in July 2015.

Science & Technology

Ichthyosaur fossil discovered for first time in India

Geologists for the first time have discovered 152 million-year-old fossil of Ichthyosaur, an extinct marine reptile in Kutch desert region of Gujarat.

- The specimen belongs to Ophthalmosauridae family of ichthyosaurs that lived in oceans between 165 and 90 million years ago.
- The 5.5 m long fossil was found inside rocks from Mesozoic Era, which ran between 252 and 66 million years ago along with fossils of ammonites and squid-like belemnites.
- Ichthyosaur (or fish-lizards in Greek) was large reptile that lived at same time as dinosaurs.
- They were often misidentified as swimming dinosaurs and they first appeared in early Triassic period.
- Until now many ichthyosaur fossils were found in North America and Europe and fossil record in Southern Hemisphere was mostly limited to South America and Australia.
- The discovery throws light on evolution and diversity of ichthyosaurs in Indo-Madagascan region of former Gondwanaland.
- It also shows India's biological connectivity with other continents in Jurassic.

Indian Navy approves new mission-based deployment plan

Indian Navy has approved new mission-based deployment plan for deploying mission-ready ships and aircraft along critical sea lanes of communications and choke points in Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

- Besides, new transition cycle for ships from maintenance periods to operational deployments was also approved.

- Under this mission-based deployment plan, Indian Navy's 14-15 ships will be deployed year-round in region to meet any eventuality across spectrum of operations ranging from acts of maritime terrorism and piracy to Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions.
- These deployments are aimed at maintaining 24/7 and round the year vigil with ships being sustained and turned around on station.
- These vessels will monitor increased Chinese presence in these areas.
- It focuses efforts of operational commanders on training and safety inspections of ships before deployment.

Scientists develop new tool to improve monsoon forecast

Scientists from Florida State University in the US have developed new tool for objectively defining onset and demise of Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM).

- The new method uses rainfall rates to mark span of ISM at any given location throughout affected region.
- For generations, scientists have struggled to produce model for reliably defining duration of monsoon.
- No existing system has allowed researchers to reliably define parameters of season at fine scale as seen in this new model. Current weather forecasting and monitoring protocols focus attention on monsoon onset at one location, specifically in Kerala, and extrapolate for rest of region.
- The new model takes into consideration specific locations by covering whole country, and objectively defines onset and demise dates for any given year.
- The new system ties onset of monsoon to location-specific rainfall thresholds and can work to allay confusion and frustration due to lack of clear, granular and objective benchmark for ISM onset and demise for all areas of country.

Saudi Arabia becomes first country to grant citizenship to a robot

On 26th October 2017, Saudi Arabia became the world's first country to grant citizenship to a robot, by granting citizenship to Sophia, an Artificially Intelligent (AI) robot.

- The robot, Sophia, was awarded citizenship of Saudi Arabia at the Future Investment Initiative summit in Riyadh. Specific details of Sophia's citizenship were not discussed.
- It is not clear whether she will receive the same rights as human citizens, or if Saudi Arabia will develop a specific system devoted to robots.
- Sophia was created by Dr. David Hanson, founder of Hanson Robotics. She has been designed to look like late American actress, Audrey Hepburn.

- Sophia has been given the ability to express different emotions. Her eyes also change colour in response to lighting.

Sports

Kochi Tuskers win arbitration against BCCI

Kochi Tuskers have won arbitration case against the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) over wrongful termination from the Indian Premier League (IPL) and demand Rs.850 crore compensation from BCCI.

- Kochi Tuskers' IPL contract was terminated by previous BCCI president Shashank Manohar citing breach of franchise agreement in 2011. Kochi Tuskers appealed against this decision.
- Kochi Tuskers owners had won the arbitration case against BCCI in 2015. BCCI was asked to pay Rs.550 crore as compensation with 18 % annual penalty on failing to do so.
- But in the last two years, the board neither paid the compensation nor included Kochi Tuskers back in the IPL. Now, Kochi Tuskers has asked for Rs.850 crore compensation.

Puducherry becomes associate member of BCCI

On 25th October 2017, the Committee of Administrators (COA) chose Puducherry as an associate member in the Indian cricket board (BCCI).

- Three parties had claimed to represent Puducherry in the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The Cricket Association of Puducherry (CAP) was chosen by the Committee of Administrators (CoA) as an associate member of the BCCI.
- The BCCI approved Puducherry's associate membership in its Senior General Meeting in October 2017.

Gokul Natesan becomes second Indian-origin player to be signed by NBA G-League side

On 21st October 2017, Gokul Natesan became the second Indian-origin player to be signed by an NBA G-League side.

- Gokul Natesan was signed by Canton Charge, a minor league affiliate team of Cleveland Cavaliers of the National Basketball Association (NBA).
- Gokul Natesan is 23 years old. He is a computer science graduate. He lives in a small town sandwiched between Santa Clara and Cupertino, in the USA.
- Natesan started playing basketball at the age of five. He later played in YMCA League for Cupertino High School.
- He also played for the Bay Area Ballers in the local leagues in Bay Area. Natesan was selected as the RMAC defensive player of the year in 2016.

Obituary

Gaur Kishore Ganguli, the noted freedom fighter passed away

On 24th October 2017, freedom fighter and lawyer Gaur Kishore Ganguli died at his residence in Dhanbad, Jharkhand.

- Ganguli is survived by his wife, four daughters and widowed daughter-in-law and a grandson. He was born on 21st October, 1923 in Purulia in West Bengal.
- He joined the Quit India movement in 1942 when he was 19 years old and a student of Ranchi College. He served a two-and-half-year long jail term along with his father in the prisons of Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Patna.
- He began practising in Dhanbad district court after the reorganization of states in 1956 and was a member of the bar association.

Fats Domino, rock 'n' roll pioneer, dies at 89

On 25th October 2017, singer Fats Domino died due to natural causes in New Orleans, United States.

- Fats Domino was born in 1928. He left school at 14 years to work in a bedspring factory. He then started his career as a singer.
- His first recorded song is The Fat Man (1949). He became one of the first black performers to feature on pop music television shows.
- Domino was one of the first ever inductees to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 1998 he was the first rock'n'roll musician to be awarded the National Medal for the Arts. He lived in New Orleans. He was married to Rosemary, who died in 2008.