

National Current Affairs

Government constitutes Alternative Mechanism Panel for PSBs consolidation

The Union Government has constituted Alternative Mechanism Panel headed by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to oversee merger proposals of public sector banks (PSBs). The other members of the panel include Railway and Coal Minister Piyush Goyal and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

- This alternative mechanism has been set up by the government to fast-track consolidation among public sector banks to create strong lenders.
- The mechanism will oversee the proposals coming from boards of PSBs for consolidation.
- The decision comes after government had announced Rs. 2.11 trillion bank recapitalisation plan for public sector banks weighed down by bad loans, seeking to stimulate flow of credit to spur private investment.
- It was also announced that recapitalisation plan will be accompanied by series of banking reforms over next few months. The constitution of an Alternative Mechanism is move in that direction.
- The move to create large banks through consolidating PSBs aims at meeting credit needs of growing Indian economy and building capacity in PSB space to raise resources without dependence on the state exchequer.

Microsoft Partners Karnataka Government to bring AI to agriculture

Karnataka government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with tech giant Microsoft for empowering farmers with technology-oriented solutions like Cloud, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced analytics.

- The move is also aimed at using digital tools that have the potential to deliver cutting edge innovations and AI to help farmers get higher crop yields in state.
- The MoU will experiment with Karnataka Agricultural Price Commission (KAPC) and Department of Agriculture to help improve price forecasting practices to benefit farmers.
- It will help enable the use of intelligent technologies to deliver solutions in the agriculture sector.

Punjab CM constitutes committee under Randhir Singh for sports varsity in Patiala

On October 30, 2017, Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh constituted a steering committee under International Olympic Committee (IOC) member, Randhir Singh, to work out the modalities for setting up a sports university in Patiala.

- This committee has been set up under the aegis of the Sports and Youth Affairs Department.
- The committee also includes Olympian Pargat Singh, J S Narula – Former Vice Chancellor of Lakshmibai National University of Physical Education (LNIPE), Gwalior and Dr L S Ranawat – Former Vice Chancellor of Rajasthan Sports University.
- After studying the existing national and international models of Sports Universities, the committee will prepare a draft legislation which will be presented to the government.
- The committee will also spot suitable land and buildings in and around Patiala, which can be used for setting up the sports university.

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale launches Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana in Mumbai

Union Minister for state for social justice and empowerment, Ramdas Athawale launched the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana in Mumbai.

- The Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana has been launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with an objective of making quality medicines available at affordable prices to all, particularly to the poor and underprivileged, through exclusive outlets.
- Jan Aushadhi Medical store is set up with an aim to reduce out of pocket expenses in healthcare.
- Currently, more than 600 medicines and 150 surgical and other medical items are being made available at affordable rates at Janaushadhi Kendras opened across the country under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana.

Life term for government officials indulging in torture: Law Commission

The Law Commission in latest report has recommended government to ratify Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and also recommended life in jail for public servants convicted of torture. In July 2017, Union Government had asked Law Commission of India to examine issue of ratifying the convention after a writ petition was filed in court.

- UN convention: Government should ratify UN convention on torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment as it leading to difficulties in

extraditing criminals from foreign countries due to the absence of a law preventing harsh treatment by authorities.

- 'Prevention of torture bill, 2017: It has proposed legislation to amend various laws to prevent torture by government officials. The bill proposes "stringent punishment" to perpetrators to curb menace of torture and to have deterrent effect on acts of torture. It could extend up to life imprisonment and also fine.
- Compensation: It suggested amendments to Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872 to accommodate provisions regarding compensation and burden of proof. It recommended an amendment to section 357B to incorporate payment of compensation in addition to payment of fine provided in Indian Penal Code. For compensation to victims, courts should decide upon justifiable compensation after taking into account various facets of individual case, such as nature, purpose, extent and manner of injury, including mental agony caused to the victim. The courts should also bear in mind socio-economic background of the victim and ensure that compensation will help victim bear expenses on medical treatment and rehabilitation.
- Burden of proof: It held that state own responsibility for injuries caused by its agents on citizens and held that principle of sovereign immunity cannot override rights assured by Constitution. It calls for effective mechanism must be put in place to protect victims of torture, complainants and witnesses against possible threats, violence or ill treatment.

International Current Affairs

India, Italy sign six pacts and to enhance counter-terror cooperation

India and Italy have signed six agreements to boost cooperation in the fields of railways safety, energy and promoting mutual investments, among others.

- They were signed after detailed talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Italian counterpart Paolo Gentiloni.
- Both leaders discussed wide-ranging issues, including the emerging security challenges facing the world such as terrorism and cybercrimes, while agreed to enhance cooperation to counter them.
- They vowed to fight violent extremism in all forms and manifestations and agreed to strengthen consultation mechanism through regular exchange of assessments and information, training and capacity building programmes in sphere of counter-terrorism.

- They also resolved to enhance cooperation to take decisive and concerted actions against al-Qaeda and ISIS.
- They also called upon all the UN member countries to designate terrorist entities in line with the relevant UNSC Resolutions.

India tops list of new TB cases in 2016 – WHO

According to 'Global TB Report 2017' released by World Health Organization (WHO), India has topped the list of seven countries, accounting for 64 per cent of the 10.4 million new tuberculosis (TB) cases worldwide in 2016.

- In 2016, nearly 7 million people died from TB, marking a 4% drop as compared to 2015 report.
- In terms of new tuberculosis (TB) cases worldwide in 2016, India is followed by Indonesia, China, Philippines, Pakistan, Nigeria and South Africa.

Pakistan to 2018 Asian Cricket Council Emerging Nations Cup

Pakistan will host the 2018 Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Emerging Nations Cup in April 2018.

- The decision was taken during the meeting of the ACC held in Lahore on October 2017.
- In it, six ACC teams including five full members will play in the tournament.

India, Tunisia agrees to combat terror, extremism

On October 30, 2017, India and Tunisia agreed to jointly combat terrorism and extremism and scale up bilateral cooperation in the field of security.

- Union External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj co-chaired the 12th India- Tunisia Joint Commission Meeting with Tunisian Foreign Affairs Minister, Khemaies Jhinaoui.
- Besides conducting a review of bilateral ties, both the ministers discussed regional and international issues of mutual interest.
- Both the ministers initiated a roadmap for India-Tunisia partnership in a bid to give a new impetus to bilateral relations between India and Tunisia.
- Six agreements in the fields of judicial cooperation, information and communications technology, cooperation in youth issues and trade and business, were also signed during this meeting.

- A year-long festival of India in Tunisia and festival of Tunisia in India will be held in 2018, to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Banking & Finance

MSME Samadhaan: Government launches MSME Delayed Payment Portal

The Union Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) has launched MSME Delayed Payment Portal – MSME Samadhaan (<http://msefc.msme.gov.in>).

- The portal aims at empowering micro and small entrepreneurs across country to directly register their cases relating to delayed payments by Central Ministries, Departments, CPSEs, State Governments.
- The Samadhaan portal will give information about pending payment of MSEs with individual CPSEs/Central Ministries, State Governments, etc.
- The CEO of PSEs and Secretary of Ministries concerned will also be able to monitor cases of delayed payment under their jurisdiction and issue necessary instructions to resolve the issues.
- The portal will facilitate monitoring of delayed payment in more effective manner.
- The information on portal will be available in public domain, thus exerting moral pressure on defaulting organisations.
- The MSEs will also be empowered to access portal and monitor their cases.

Government inks \$200 million Loan Agreement for Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project

The Union Government and World Bank have signed \$200 million Loan Agreement for Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project.

- The \$200 million loan from World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has a 7-year grace period, and a maturity of 16.5 years.
- Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project will support Assam Government to facilitate agri-business investments, increase agriculture productivity and market access and enable small farm holders produce crops that are resilient to recurrent floods or droughts in state.

- It will help state to increase agricultural productivity by strengthening farming systems, raise private sector investments to promote agri-enterprises to create better job opportunities for youth in state.
- The Project will be implemented in over 16 Districts of Assam. Over 500,000 farming households will directly benefit from it and at least 30% women are expected to participate in project activities.
- Specific focus will be given to women-led enterprises and their participation in decision-making process of farmer producer organizations.

SBI-World Bank sanction Rs 2,317-cr for 575 mw rooftop solar projects

On October 30, 2017, State Bank of India (SBI) and the World Bank announced Rs 2317 crore credit facilities to seven companies to finance grid connected rooftop solar projects.

- Seven corporate to which the credit facilities have been extended include Adani Group, Hinduja Renewables, JSW Energy, Tata Renewable, Azure Power, Cleantech Solar and Hero Solar Energy.
- These grid connected rooftop solar projects which will together generate 575 mw.
- As per the arrangement between World Bank and SBI, World Bank will provide dollar funding and based on that, SBI will provide rupee funding to companies.
- Under this arrangement, SBI has so far funded 43 projects worth Rs 2,766 crore which will add 695 mw of solar rooftop capacity to the grid.
- Credit facility under this arrangement is being extended only to those companies which possess sound technical capacity, relevant experience and creditworthiness.
- SBI's renewable energy loan portfolio currently stands at Rs 12,000 crore.

Awards & Recognition

Sharmila Tagore honoured with 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award by PHDCCI

Veteran actor Sharmila Tagore was honoured with 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award by PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) for her contribution in the field of cinema.

- She was presented with the award by Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh and Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari.
- Sharmila Tagore is celebrated actor who had debuted in movies with legendary director Satyajit Ray's Bengali film Apur Sansar (1959).

- Apart from her, Filmmaker-poet Muzaffar Ali was conferred with Special Award for his outstanding contribution to promote and arts, fine arts and literature.
- Music legend Usha Mangeshkar and singers Prem Bhatia, Ankit Tiwari, Kavita Seth, Akriti Kakar, Rahul Vaidya, Manmeet of Meet Brothers and actor Sukhmani Lamba were also felicitated at the event.

Michael Jackson named top-earning dead celebrity for 5th time

Michael Jackson, who died in the year 2009 i.e, eight years ago, is still generating millions of dollars.

- Late singer Michael Jackson has been named the highest-earning dead celebrity for the 5th consecutive year by Forbes list of top-earning dead celebrities. His earnings have been estimated to be \$75 million (₹485 crore).
- Two other singers who have featured among the top five are Elvis Presley and Bob Marley, with earnings of \$35 million (₹226 crore) and \$23 million (₹148 crore) respectively.
- Forbes says Jackson's earnings are boosted by a new greatest hits album, a Las Vegas Cirque du Soleil show and a stake in the EMI music publishing catalogue.

Appointments & Resigns

SK Sinha appointed Secretary (security) in Cabinet Secretariat

On 30th October 2017, senior police officer SK Sinha was appointed as the Secretary (security) in the Cabinet Secretariat.

- He is at present special director in the Intelligence Bureau. He has been appointed in place of ARK Kini, who retires on 30th November 2017.
- The Secretary (security) is the administrative head of the Special Protection Group (SPG), who is responsible for closely monitoring the security arrangements for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former prime ministers and members of their immediate families in India and abroad.

AP Maheshwari appointed DG, Bureau of Police Research

On 30th October 2017, senior police officer AP Maheshwari was appointed as Director General of Bureau of Police Research and Development.

- He is currently a Special Director in Border Security Force.
- The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has appointed Maheshwari to the post for a period up to his superannuation on 28th February, 2021.
- He has been appointed in place of Meeran C Borwankar. Meeran C Borwankar is a 1981 batch IPS officer of Maharashtra cadre, whose tenure ended last month.

Tata Steel elevates T V Narendran as global CEO, MD

On 31st October 2017, Tata Steel Ltd promoted T V Narendran as chief executive officer and managing director globally.

- T V Narendran joined the Tata Steel in 1988. He was serving as Managing Director (India and South East Asia) for the past four years.
- During T V Narendran's tenure as Managing Director, Tata Steel executed and commissioned the Kalinganagar steel plant and also enhanced the plant's ability to serve higher value segments like steel for automobiles.
- Tata steel board also re-appointed Koushik Chatterjee as executive director and chief financial officer for five years with effect from 9th November 2017.

Vikram Singh appointed Private Secretary to President

On 30th October 2017, Railway officer Vikram Singh was appointed as Private Secretary to President Ram Nath Kovind.

- The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has appointed Vikram Singh as Private Secretary to President Ram Nath Kovind for a period of two years.
- Currently, he is posted as a senior director in the Traffic Commercial directorate in the Railway Board. In Railways, he was working in the vertical responsible for increasing revenues from passenger segment and create policies for commercial earnings within passenger-amenities ecosystem.

B C Khanduri to head parliamentary standing committee on defence

BJP MP B C Khanduri will head the recently constituted parliamentary standing committee on defence.

- The committee will examine operational preparedness of armed forces and review accidents involving strategic defence assets.

- It will also assess the procurement policy relating to defence equipment.
- It will also critically review accidents involving strategic defence assets and look into quality of ration provided to forces especially in border areas.

Birendra Prasad Baishya re-elected as President of IWLF

On 30th October 2017, Birendra Prasad Baishya was re-elected as President of the Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLF) in the Annual General Body Meeting.

- The newly formed Executive Committee of IWLF consists of seven vice-presidents, and Sahdev Yadav has become the secretary general.
- The elections of IWLF was conducted under guidelines issued by the sports ministry. New members of the elected body for the term 2017-21 are:
 - President: Birendra Prasad Baishya
 - Vice Presidents: D Chandrahas Rai, Tara Singh, Sunil Elangbam, K Suryanarayana, Narayan Sahu, Paramjit Singh, Abraham Techii.
 - Secretary General: Sahdev Yadav
 - Secretary: Badeti Venkataramaiah

Acquisitions & Mergers

Thomas Cook India acquires Tata Capital's travel firm

On 30th October 2017, Thomas Cook India announced the acquisition of the wholly-owned subsidiaries of Tata Capital Limited, Tata Capital Forex Limited (foreign exchange) and TC Travel and Services Limited (travel services).

- The acquired companies will be hereafter referred as TC Forex Services Ltd. and TC Travel and Services Ltd. Value of the transaction was not shared.
- The network of the two acquired entities includes 24 locations and 263 employees across India. This acquisition creates opportunities for stronger customer service and stakeholder value.

Science & Technology

ERO-Net launched in Rajasthan

On 30th October 2017, Rajasthan's Chief Electoral Officer Ashwini Bhagat launched the Election Commission's web-based project, ERO-Net, using which voters can register their names on electoral rolls.

- Till now, the Electoral Roll Management System (ERMS) software was being used to make voter lists. It could not identify multiple entries of a voter.
- ERMS software has been replaced with ERO-Net, which is a transparent mechanism to identify whether the voter was listed anywhere in the country.
- Using ERO-Net, people can register their names on electoral rolls, rectify the details of their voter identity card, and transfer their names to another constituency online.
- Voters can see their registration details on the official website of the state chief electoral officer (<http://ceorajasthan.nic.in>) or through an SMS.

Sports

West Bengal to lease land for football centre to AIFF for Rs 1

On 30th October 2017, the West Bengal cabinet decided to provide a 15 acre land to the All India Football Federation (AIFF) on lease for Rs 1 to help set up the National Centre of Excellence.

- The West Bengal cabinet has decided to give 15 acre of land to the AIFF for 90 years on an exchange of Rs 1 only.
- AIFF President Praful Patel has said that, a National Centre of Excellence for football will be set up with the land, at Rajarhat New Town in Kolkata, with help from the FIFA.
- The national senior men's and women's football team and the age group teams will be housed in this centre.

Mithali Raj, Virat Kohli top spot in ICC ODI rankings

Indian cricket team captains Virat Kohli and Mitali Raj occupied the No.1 position in the latest ICC ODI Cricket rankings for batsmen and bats women which was published on 29th Oct 2017.

- Mithali has 753 points, while Perry and Satterthwaite are on 725 and 720 points respectively.

- Ellyse Perry of Australia and Amy Satterthwaite of New Zealand also jumped one place each to be at second and third spots while Meg Lanning of Australia has dropped from first to fourth after missing the series against England due to injury.
- Earlier in the year, Mithali became the first batswoman to score 6000 runs in One-Day Internationals during India's World Cup league game against Australia. With the win, she became the leading run-scorer in women's cricket having overtaken Charlotte Edwards of
- Indian cricket team's captain Virat Kohli reclaimed the top spot with a career-best 889 points.
- Kohli overtook South Africa's AB de Villiers in the rankings after his achievement on Sunday in the final ODI against New Zealand when the Indian captain surpassed de Villiers to become the fastest to 9000 ODI runs in 194 innings, 11 lesser than the South African.
- The previous highest points tally of 887 was managed by Sachin Tendulkar in 1998 and by Kohli this year.
- In the decider against New Zealand, Kohli also became the first batsman to score 2000 international runs in 2017 beating the likes of South Africa's Hashim Amla (1988 runs).

Diya wins one gold, one silver in ITTF World Cadet Challenge

On 29th October 2017, Indian table tennis player Diya Chitale won silver medal in the girls' doubles category of the 2017 ITTF World Cadet Challenge, in Suva, Fiji.

- Diya Chitale hails from Mumbai. She was the only Indian player selected to represent Asia in this tournament.
- Diya Chitale (India) and Hanna Ryu (South Korea) pair were defeated by Yingqi Huang (China) and Yumeno Soma (Japan) pair by 0-3 (7-11, 11-13, 7-11). Diya Chitale (India) and Hanna Ryu (South Korea) pair and won silver medal.
- Diya had won gold medal in the Team event, as part of Team Asia. In the singles also, she did well and finished tenth.

Obituary

South Korean veteran actor Kim Joo-hyuk passed away

On 30th October 2017, South Korean veteran actor Kim Joo-hyuk died in a car crash in Seoul, South Korea.

- Kim Joo-hyuk is a South Korean actor. He had won Best Supporting Actor Award recently, at the inaugural Seoul Awards. He died in a car crash in Seoul. He was 45 years old.
- Kim was driving a Mercedes-Benz SUV that clipped the car ahead of him, overturned and crashed into an apartment and caught fire. He was taken to Konkuk University Hospital, where he died on 30th October 2017. Police have been investigating the accident.
- He is known for films like Yourself and Yours, The Servant and My Wife Got Married, and several TV series.

Writer and journalist Khadri Achyuthan dies at 71

On 29th October 2017, veteran Kannada writer and journalist Khadri Achyuthan died after a brief period of illness, in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

- His contribution to the development of Kannada television news is enormous. He has also contributed to the coinage of new Kannada words.
- He is a veteran print and broadcast journalist, author, academic and translator of various literary works. He was the former Doordarshan news director in the Bengaluru Kendra.
- He has written a book in Kannada on ISRO. He has worked on Kannada translations of Sardar Patel and Dr Ambedkar.

Important Days

31 October: Rashtriya Ekta Diwas

Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day) is observed every year across India on 31 October to commemorate birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhai Patel who had played important role in unifying the country.

- Observance of day provides an opportunity to re-affirm inherent strength and resilience of our nation to withstand actual and potential threats to unity, integrity and security of our country.
- To mark this occasion various activities and events are being organised across ministries and departments all over the country. Besides, Run for Unity was organised in New Delhi from the National Stadium.

- The idea of Rashtriya Ekta Diwas was mooted by PM Narendra Modi in October 2014 to mark the birth anniversary of Independent India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

World Savings Day – October 31, 2017

On 31st October 2017, World Savings Day was observed all over the world.

- World Savings Day is also called the World Thrift Day.
- It is celebrated every year on 31st October all over the world. In India World Savings Day is celebrated on 30th October.
- The theme for World Savings Day 2017 is: Our future starts with savings. World Savings Day was established to spread awareness among people around the world about the idea of saving money in a bank.
- The World Savings Day was established in 1924, during the 1st International Savings Bank Congress (World Society of Savings Banks) in Milano, Italy.
- The World Savings Day is promoted through educational films, broadcasting, chorus singing, press-articles, leaflets, brochures, lectures, posters etc.

World Cities Day – October 31, 2017

'World Cities Day' is observed on 31st October, every year across the world.

- It is observed to promote public interest in global urbanization, to seek cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contributing to sustainable urban development across the world.
- In December 2013, United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to designate 31st October as 'World Cities Day'.
- 'World Cities Day' is observed with 'Better City, Better Life' as a general theme. However, every year a different sub-theme is selected, to promote successes of urbanization or address challenges resulting from urbanization.
- Sub-Theme of 'World Cities Day', 2017 is 'Innovative Governance, Open Cities' which highlights the important role of urbanization as a source of global development and social inclusion.