

# National Current Affairs

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## **Union Cabinet approves National Rural Drinking Water Programme**

The Union Cabinet approved continuation and restructuring of National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP). The programme will cover all the Rural Population across the country.

- The purpose of continuation and restructuring is to make it outcome-based, competitive and better monitored with increased focus on sustainability of schemes to ensure good quality service delivery to rural population.
- NRDWP will be continued co-terminus with 14th Finance Commission cycle till March 2020.
- It will enable the country to reach the goal of increasing coverage of sustainable Piped Water Supply.
- Its focus will be on piped water supply, increase level of service delivery, thrust on coverage of water quality affected habitations, coverage of Open Defecation Free (ODF) declared villages, Integrated Action Plan (IAP) districts, Border Out Posts (BOP) with piped water supply and Institutional set up for proper O&M of water supply assets etc.
- The restructuring will make programme flexible, result-oriented, competitive, and will enable the Ministry towards to reach the goal of increasing coverage of sustainable Piped Water Supply.

## **Cabinet approves creation of National Testing Agency**

The Union Cabinet approved creation of National Testing Agency (NTA) as an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for higher educational institutions. It will be society registered under Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860.

- The NTA will initially conduct entrance examinations currently being conducted by CBSE. Other examinations will be taken up gradually after NTA is fully geared up.
- These examinations will be conducted in online mode at least twice a year to give adequate opportunity to candidates to bring out their best.
- In order to serve requirements of the rural students, it will locate centres at sub-district and district level and as far as possible it will undertake hands-on training to the students.
- NTA will be chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by Ministry of Human Resource Development. The CEO will be Director General (DG) appointed by

Government. Besides, there will be Board of Governors comprising members from user institutions. The DG will be assisted by 9 verticals headed by academicians and experts.

### **Cabinet approves appointment of 2nd National Judicial Pay Commission**

The Union Cabinet approved appointment of Second National Judicial Pay Commission (SNJPC) for subordinate judiciary in country.

- It will be headed by Justice (Retd) J P. Venkatrama Reddi, former Judge of Supreme Court. R Basant, former Judge of Kerala High Court will be its member.
- The Commission will examine present structure of emoluments and conditions of service of Judicial Officers in States and UTs.
- It aims to evolve principles which will govern pay structure and other emoluments of Judicial Officers belonging to subordinate judiciary of country.
- It also aims at making pay scales and conditions of service of Judicial Officers uniform throughout country.
- It will examine the work methods and work environment and variety of allowance and benefits in kind available to Judicial Officers in addition to pay and to suggest rationalization and simplification. It will also devise its own procedures and formulate modalities necessary for accomplishing task.
- The Commission will make its recommendations to State Governments preferably within period of 18 months. The recommendations will help in promoting efficiency in Judicial Administration, optimizing size of judiciary etc. and to remove anomalies created in implementation of earlier recommendations.

### **Cabinet approves Joint Interpretative Declaration between India and Colombia**

The Union Cabinet approved signing of Joint Interpretative Declaration (JID) between India and Colombia regarding existing Agreement for Promotion and Protection of Investments. The agreement was signed between them signed in November 2009.

- The JID will help to impart clarity on interpretation of existing Agreement as it includes interpretative notes to be jointly adopted for many clauses.
- It includes definition of investor, investment, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, National Treatment (NT), expropriation, Investor-State Dispute Settlement provision and Denial of Benefits.
- JIDs in general play important supplementary role in strengthening investment treaty regime. Issuance of such statements will have strong persuasive value before arbitration tribunals as Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) disputes are increasing. Such pro-active approach by partners can foster more predictable and coherent reading of treaty terms by arbitration tribunals.

### **Cabinet approves protocol amending DTAA between India and Kyrgyz**

The Union Cabinet approved protocol amending Agreement between India and Kyrgyz for avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

- The Protocol amending Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) aims to update Article 26 (Exchange of Information) of DTAA to international standards.
- The updated Article 26 of DTAA provides for exchange of information to widest possible extent. The new paragraphs 4 and 5 have been inserted into Article 26 to make mandatory for States to provide information which is requested.
- Such information cannot be denied on ground that it has no domestic tax interest in that information or held by bank or a financial institution, etc.
- The Protocol further empowers India to use information received under DTAA for other law enforcement purposes on supplying state authorizing such use.

### **Cabinet approves MoU with Philippines on agriculture and related fields**

The Union Cabinet approved signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Philippines in field of agriculture and related fields. It will improve bilateral cooperation in field of agriculture and will be mutually beneficial to both countries.

- The MoU provides for cooperation in fields of rice production and processing, dryland farming systems, multi cropping system, bio-organic farming, solid and water conservation and management, soil fertility, agro forestry, sericulture, livestock improvement etc.
- The MoU will promote understanding of best agricultural practices between both countries and help in better productivity as well as improved global market access.
- It provides for constitution of Joint Working Group (JWG) composed of equal number of representatives.
- The JWG will meet once every two years alternatively in Philippines and India.

### **Cabinet approves Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement with Hong Kong**

The Union Cabinet approved Agreement between India and Hong Kong, special administrative region of China for Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on income.

- The agreement will stimulate flow of investment, technology and personnel from India to HKSAR & vice versa.
- It will also prevent double taxation and provide for exchange of information between them. It will also improve transparency in tax matters and will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.

- The Section 90 of Income Tax (IT) Act, 1961 empowers Central Government to enter into agreement with foreign country or specified territory for avoidance of double taxation of income and for exchange of information for prevention of evasion or avoidance of income-tax chargeable under IT Act, 1961.

### **First project under Prime Minister's Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative commissioned**

The Union New and Renewable Energy Ministry has commissioned 1.5 MW Small Hydro Power (SHP) Plant in Biaras Drass, Kargil area of Jammu & Kashmir. It is the first project to be commissioned under Prime Minister's Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative.

- The Biaras SHP project was developed by Kargil Renewable Energy Development Agency (KREDA) under Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC).
- It will power Drass town in Kargil, which is one of coldest places in India.
- Power from it will be sufficient to meet normal power requirement of about 1000 families, which would make them comfortable in extreme winter season.
- Such projects will be able to replace use of diesel to great extent at least for about 8 months in year and reduce greenhouse emissions in region.
- Prime Minister's Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative aims to minimize dependence on diesel in Ladakh region to meet power requirement by diverting to local renewable sources.

### **2nd Meeting of EAC-PM focuses on Job Creation, Social Sector and Infrastructure**

The Second Meeting of Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has spelt out 'clear road map' for government to ramp up job creation and infrastructure financing avenues while investing more resources in health, education and skill development. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Bibek Debroy, Member NITI Aayog.

- The deliberations of EAC-PM took stock of economic and social analysis done by theme groups and evolving initiatives led by different Members.
- It identified key issues, strategies and recommended interventions in respect of these themes.
- EAC-PM spelt out clear road map for stepping up skill development, job creation; enhanced resource investment in social sector- including for Health and Education and for boosting Infrastructure financing.
- It formulated far reaching recommendations to guide evolving framework for 15th Finance Commission, including incentivization of states for achieving Health, Education and Social Inclusion outcomes.
- It is also evolving design of a new Economy Tracking Monitor, linking economic growth indicators with social indicators for last mile connectivity.

- It held that improvements are needed in National Accounts and innovative steps for unlocking growth, exports and employment potential including through transformation of India's Gold Market.

### **23rd GST council meet held in Guwahati, 28% tax only for 50 items**

23rd meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council headed by Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley was held in Guwahati, Assam on November 10, 2017.

- Decisions taken during this meeting of GST council has brought in a comprehensive overhaul of GST rates.
- Besides return filing has been eased and more relief has been provided to small and medium enterprises.
- GST rate on 177 items has been reduced from 28% to 18%. Now only 50 items, mostly demerit, sin and luxury goods will attract 28% GST rate.
- This decision will have a revenue implication of Rs 20000 crore annually.

### **IT employees get nod to set up trade union in Karnataka**

The labour commission of Karnataka has certified the formation of the Karnataka State IT/ITES Employees Union (KITU) under the Trade Union Act, 1926, and Karnataka Trade Unions Regulations, 1958.

- Since last year, large numbers of IT employees have been approaching the courts seeking solutions for grievances like indiscriminate layoffs and long working hours.
- So far, IT employees have been approaching pressure groups such as the Forum for IT Employees (FITE), the National Democratic Labour Front-IT (NDLF-IT) and the Union for IT/ITES (UNITES) for help in fighting legal battles.
- The Karnataka State IT/ITES Employees Union (KITU) now formed is backed by the Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU). CITU is an affiliate of the CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist).

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## **International Current Affairs**

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### **US Congress authorises \$700 million for reimbursing Pakistan**

The American Congress has authorised up to \$700 million in Coalition Support Fund (CSF) to reimburse Pakistan for activities carried out in support of US operations in Afghanistan.

- The authorisation is included in the reconciled text of the House and Senate versions of the 2018 National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA-2018).
- The reconciled version makes \$350m of \$700m available to Pakistan under the CSF contingent upon certification from the secretary of defence that Pakistan is taking demonstrable steps against the Haqqani network.
- The certification need to declare that Pakistan was making an attempt to coordinate with Afghanistan to restrict the movement of militants along the border, and Pakistan had shown progress in arresting and prosecuting senior leaders and mid-level operatives of the Haqqani network and LeT.

#### **BSF, Pakistan Rangers to hold Commandant-level talks**

- On 10th November 2017, the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Pakistan Rangers decided to conduct Commandant-level talks along the International Border (IB) to resolve local issues.
- The Border Security Force (BSF) and the Pakistan Rangers have decided to initiate dialogue at the local level again. This practice was suspended one-and-a-half years ago.
- Director General of BSF K.K Sharma said that, both the forces agreed to the proposal and the meetings would be held at regular intervals after a meeting with Major General Muhammad Saeed, Director General, Sindh Rangers.

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## **Banking & Finance**

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#### **PNB MetLife to sell policies to Bahrain Bank customers**

Private sector life insurance company PNB MetLife has entered into a tie-up with Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait (BBK) to sell retail and group insurance products to BBK's customers in India.

- As per the terms of the tie-up, PNB MetLife will offer protection, health, savings and wealth plans to BBK's customers in India spread across its branches.
- Besides the conventional products, customised insurance plans will also be offered to BBK customers in India.

- Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait has been operating in India for over 30 years while PNB MetLife has a customer base of 93015 by September 2017.
- Bancassurance has been an important part of the PNB MetLife's growth strategy.
- Bancassurance is a relationship between a bank and an insurance company wherein insurance company sells its products to the bank's customers and bank gets a commission in return.

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## Business

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### **HAU, Netherlands to jointly work on crop residue management**

On 9th November 2017, Haryana Agriculture University (HAU), Hisar, and the Netherlands government decided to jointly work on a project to tackle issues like crop residue management.

- The decision was taken at a meeting of the Joint Working Group of the Indo-Dutch Collaboration presided over by HAU Vice-Chancellor, K P Singh, at Haryana Agriculture University.
- HAU and Netherlands would jointly work on a project to tackle issues like crop residue management and on bio-defence strategy, protected cultivation, peri-urban and urban horticulture, floriculture and hydroponic vegetables.
- Also, an Indo-Dutch Horticulture Centre at Jhajhar, would be set up. This would be an agri-business incubation centre and explore the scope for teacher-student training, exchange programme, special short-term training programme and knowledge gap analysis.

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## Awards & Recognition

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### **Debjani Ghosh to be first woman President of NASSCOM in 2018**

The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has named Debjani Ghosh its president-designate.

- She will succeed R Chandrashekhara after his tenure ends in March 2018. It will make her first female president global trade body representing software companies.

- She is former Managing Director of Intel South Asia. She is also member of NASSCOM's Executive Council and a trustee of NASSCOM Foundation.
- NASSCOM is global non-profit trade association (organisation) of Indian Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. It facilitates business and trade in software and services and encourages the advancement of research in software technology.

### **NINL gets prestigious Kalinga Safety Award**

On 10th November 2017, Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited (NINL) received the prestigious "Kalinga Safety Award" in the 8th Odisha State Safety Conclave.

- The Odisha-based NINL got the award in gold category for best safety performer of the year 2016.
- S B Jagdale, Joint Managing Director, NINL received the award from Odisha Governor S C Jamir.
- The Odisha State Safety Conclave was organised by Institute of Quality and Environment Management Services (IQEMS) and institute of Public Enterprises.
- Earlier, NINL had also won the prestigious Ispat Suraksha Puraskar-2017 award in the "No fatal accident for Integrated Steel Plant" category for the third consecutive time.

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## **Appointments & Resigns**

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### **RedBus co-founder Phanindra Sama appointed CIO of Telangana**

Co-founder of RedBus and serial entrepreneur Phanindra Sama has been appointed as Chief Innovation Officer for Telangana state.

- Minister for IT, KT Rama Rao handed over the appointment letter at Secretariat today.
- Sama is currently serving as a Patron in Kakatiya SandBox, an experimentation lab for people to work on solutions to local problems.
- Phanindra Sama co-founded RedBus, India's first online bus ticket booking service in 2006. He stayed with the company for eight years as CEO.
- Phanindra Sama received a several prestigious awards as an entrepreneur. "India's best internet startup", 2010 by IMAI and "Entrepreneur of the Year" award under IT by ET NOW, in the year 2013 are amongst some of awards received by him.

### **Ravi Bangar concurrently appointed as Ambassador of India to Ecuador**

On 10th November 2017, Ravi Bangar was appointed as Ambassador of India to Ecuador.

- Ravi Bangar is an Indian Foreign Service Officer (IFS) of 1982 batch. He is presently the Ambassador of India to Colombia.
- He has been concurrently (at the same time) appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Ecuador.

### **Gautam Gambhir named Govt nominee in DDCA managing committee**

The India cricketer, Gautam Gambhir was on made as a government nominee in the Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA) managing committee.

- The current player of Kolkata Knight Riders, Gambhir thanked the Sports Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore in Twitter.
- Gambhir has played 58 Tests, 147 ODIs and 37 T20 Internationals. He has been the top scorer in finals of two World Cups (2007 T20 and 2011 50-over) that India won.

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## **Acquisitions & Mergers**

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### **HCL gets nod for joint venture company with MECL, NALCO**

Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) has received approval from its board of directors to form a joint venture company with Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd (MECL) and NALCO Ltd.

- The three entities will now form a Joint Venture (JV) in the name of Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL).
- KABIL will have an authorised capital of Rs. 100 crore and paid-up capital of Rs 30 crore respectively.
- A joint working group will be formed under this Joint Venture to deal with government-to-government (G2G) deals relating to sourcing of rare minerals from other countries.
- This JV will help HCL to diversify and source rare minerals like titanium.

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## **Environment**

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### **Breeding season of Olive Ridleys begin in Odisha**

Olive Ridley turtles have started arriving in large at Gahirmatha beach in Odisha's Kendrapara district for breeding season. Gahirmatha beach is known as world's largest rookery of this species.

- During the breeding season, large numbers of turtles arrive at Gahirmatha beach for mating. Later, they scale sand slope in large numbers to lay eggs in January and February. In 2016-17 season, around 9.75 lakh Olive Ridley turtles came out from sea to lay eggs along Odisha coast.
- Olive Ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is smallest and most abundant of all sea turtle found in world.
- It gets its name from its olive coloured carapace, which is heart-shaped and rounded. It is found in warm waters of Pacific and Indian oceans.
- In India, it is protected under Wildlife (Protection) Act.
- The breeding season of Olive Ridley turtle commences its journey from Indian Ocean towards Bay of Bengal during their mating season in October and November every year. A single female can lay upto 100 to 150 eggs in a pit dug on beaches.

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## **Science & Technology**

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### **Google Arts and Culture unveils its first lab experiment in India**

On 10th November 2017, Google Arts and Culture unveiled its first lab experiment in India at an exhibition at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), Mumbai.

- As a part of first Google Arts & Culture Lab experiment in India, Google has collaborated with Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) and the British Museum in London to unveil Future Relics.
- Future Relics is an interactive installation that takes participants on a shared journey, connecting past with present whilst looking to the future.
- This was created as part of the landmark exhibition 'India and the World: A History in Nine Stories' at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS).
- The Future Relics project will blend ancient craft and modern technology to build relics for the future.

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# Obituary

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## **Former Test cricketer Milkha Singh passes away**

On 10th November 2017, former India cricketer A G Milkha Singh passed away after a cardiac arrest at a hospital in Chennai.

- Milkha Singh played Test matches in the 1960s. He was a flamboyant left-hand batsman and a fine fielder.
- He made his Ranji Trophy debut at 17 years. He had a great career for Tamil Nadu in the Ranji Trophy.
- He scored over 4,000 runs in first-class cricket, including eight centuries.

## **Veteran journalist Virendra Sanghi passes away**

On 10th November 2017, veteran journalist Virendra Sanghi passed away in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Virendra Sanghi had worked for the Samachar Bharti and PTI-Bhasha for a long period of time.

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# Important Days

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## **National Education Day – November 11**

On 11th November 2017, National Education Day was observed all over India. National Education Day is celebrated on 11 November every year to mark the birth anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first education minister of independent India.

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development announced on 11th September 2008 to celebrate 11th November as National Education Day to recall Azad's contribution to the cause of education in India.
- The objective of celebrating National Education Day is to strengthen our educational institutions and to raise the quality of education to greater heights.
- On this day seminars, symposia, essay-writing, elocution competitions, workshops and rallies with banner cards and slogans on the importance of literacy and nation's commitment to education are conducted.