

National Current Affairs

Project Saksham: Railways launches largest time-bound upskilling exercise for its employees

The Indian Railways has launched Project Saksham, country's largest time-bound "upskilling" exercise for its employees to boost their efficiency.

- Project Saksham aims to upgrade the skillsets of 13 lakh-strong workforce of Indian Railways with a single drive spanning nine months. It will start in January 2018 and go on till September 2018.
- Indian Railways is constantly getting bad publicity on account of derailments, accidents, poor services and inefficiency of its employees.
- The mass skilling exercise aims for image makeover of Indian Railways by increasing the productivity and efficiency of its employees.
- Under Project Saksham, over the next one year, all employees in each zone will be put through a week's training in skills and knowledge relevant to their work area. It will be a five-day-on-the-job or classroom training in Railway Training Centres, depending on the nature of their employment.
- The nature of short-duration training will range from refresher courses, with eye on evolved global practices in respective areas, to skills in existing lining of functioning.
- Employees from rank of a peon to higher echelons of Railway Board Members will undergo the training.

Rajyavardhan Rathore releases the India Youth Development Index and Report 2017

On November 13, 2017, Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports (Independent Charge), Col. Rajyavardhan Rathore released the 'India Youth Development Index and Report 2017' in New Delhi.

- For constructing Youth Development Index for the year 2017, the latest definition of youth (15-29 years) as used in India's National Youth Policy – 2014 and World Youth Development Report of Commonwealth has been taken into consideration.
- In India Youth Development Index 2017, the five dimensions of Global Youth Development Index (Global YDI) have been retained.
- These five dimensions are education, health and well-being, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation for young people.

2020 deadline to redevelop 10 railway stations with airport-like amenities

Rail Land Development Authority has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with government owned infrastructure firm NBCC to redevelop 10 railway stations across India with airport-like amenities by year 2020.

- 10 railway stations which would be redeveloped as per this MoU are Delhi Sarai Rohilla, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Gomti Nagar (Uttar Pradesh), Kota (Rajsthan), Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), Nellore (Andhra Pradesh), Ernakulam (Kerala), Puducherry, Madgaon (Goa) and Thane (Maharashtra).
- The redevelopment of these 10 railway stations will be carried out at an estimated cost of Rs 5000 crore.

Sainik Sankshema Sabha to be organised in all districts of Andhra and Telangana

On 12th November 2017, Ex-servicemen Welfare Board officials said that, Sainik Sankshema Sabha will be organised in all districts in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

- The announcement was made at a rally and a grievance redressal programme organised in Hyderabad. Lieutenant General R.K. Anand who is the General Officer Commanding Dakshin Bharat Area inaugurated the rally.
- He said that, all measures were being taken by the Indian Army to reach ex-servicemen and widows of those who had served in the forces. In the meeting, many stalls were put up to facilitate and resolve grievances related to pension, re-employment and rehabilitation.

Mumbai to host Asian Bankers Association summit

For the first time, Mumbai is to host the 34th annual conference of the Asian Bankers Association (ABA) on 16th and 17th November 2017.

- The Asian Bankers Association (ABA) summit will be hosted by State Bank. The theme for this year's summit is 'Asia's turn to transform'.
- The event is expected to be attended by more than 160 domestic and international bankers. Some of the foreign speakers at the event are ADB's Noritaka Akamatsu, Chikahisa Sumi of IMF and Cheng Cheng-Mount of Financial Supervisory Commission of Taiwan.
- The this year's summit will discuss the impact of the ongoing global downturn on the outlook of the Asian economies, economic consequences of the Brexit in March 2019 on Asia, the America-first policy of the Trump administration, implications of fintech on banks, etc.

Northeast to get India's first ever 'Air Dispensary'

Northeast is set to get India's first-ever "Air Dispensary" based in a helicopter and the Union Ministry of Development of Northeast (DONER) has already contributed Rs. 25 crore as part of the initial funding.

- The Union Minister of DoNER, Dr Jitendra Singh said that, the Air Dispensary plan might be implemented, by the beginning of 2018. As per the plan, helicopter will be based at two locations, namely Imphal in Manipur and Meghalaya in Shillong.
- From these two locations, specialist doctors, paramedical staff and necessary equipment, would move into the helicopter and hold a dispensary in different locations across the eight States of North Eastern Region.
- On its way back, the helicopter can transport a sick patient, requiring admission, to a city hospital. He also said that, three twin-engine helicopters would be placed for initial operation on six routes in the region around Imphal, Guwahati and Dibrugarh.

International Current Affairs

PM Narendra Modi inaugurates rice field laboratory named after him in Philippines

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated rice field laboratory named after him International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Banos in Philippines during his three-day visit to attend ASEAN-India and East Asia summits.

- India is setting up regional centre of IRRI in Varanasi to develop high-yielding rice varieties to increase farmers' income by enhancing and supporting rice productivity, reducing cost of production, value addition, diversification and enhancement of farmers' skills.
- IRRI is international agricultural research and training organization known for its work in developing rice varieties that contributed to Green Revolution in 1960s.
- It was established in 1960 and has offices in 17 countries. It aims to reduce poverty and hunger, improve health of rice farmers and consumers, and ensure environmental sustainability of rice farming.
- IRRI is one of 15 agricultural research centres in world that form CGIAR Consortium of International Agricultural Research centres, a global partnership of organizations engaged in research on food security.
- It is also the largest non-profit agricultural research centres in Asia.

UN hosts first talks on use of 'killer robots' in Geneva

On 13th November 2017, the United Nations is set to open its first official talks on the use of autonomous weapons, including killer robots, at the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) for 5 days, in Geneva.

- The meeting is chaired by Indian ambassador on disarmament, Amandeep Gill. He said that, anything resembling a ban, or even a treaty, is unlikely to be imposed on killer robots.
- The discussion will also include civil society and technology companies. It will be partly focused on understanding the types of weapons in the pipeline.
- Proponents of a ban, including the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots pressure group, insist that human beings must ultimately be responsible for the final decision to kill or destroy.

Business

India to be 3rd largest aviation market by departure by 2019

As per a report by global consultancy and research firm, Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA), India will be world's third largest aviation market for departures by 2019.

- Currently, India is the fourth largest aviation market in the world with 131 million passengers per annum (for the year 2016).
- US is the largest aviation market with 815 million passengers, followed by China (490 million passengers) and Japan (141 million passengers).

Nepal cancels power project with China

Nepal has cancelled the Budhi Gandaki hydropower project with the Chinese firm due to irregularities and lack of transparency.

- Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa announced that, the power project with Chinese firm has been cancelled as directed by the parliamentary committee. It is said to be cancelled due to irregularities and lack of transparency.
- Budhi Gandaki Hydropower Project is a storage type project, located in Central/Western Development region on the Budhi Gandaki River of Nepal.
- The project was granted to the Gezhouba Water & Power (Group) Co Ltd (CGGC) company one and half year ago by the Nepal government, headed by Former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Awards & Recognition

Transport for London gets 2017 Bad Grammar Award

Transport for London has been given the 2017 'Bad Grammar Award' by The Idler Academy in Britain.

- The award is instituted by an academy associated with the Idler magazine. It is given to highlight "the incorrect use of English by people and institutions who should know better".
- The recipients were decided by a panel of judges that included television host Jeremy Paxman, Virginia Ironside, Beatrix Macintyre, Victoria Hull and Tom Hodgkinson.
- Transport for London won the award for at least five examples of what the organisers called its "shoddy English". One of the misleading examples quoted by the judges is: 'All the doors in this carriage will not open at the next station'. It should have been 'Not all the doors in this carriage will open at the next station.'

Appointments & Resigns

Audrey Azoulay appointed new DG of UNESCO

Former French Culture Minister Audrey Azoulay (45) was appointed as Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

- She replaces outgoing DG Irina Bokova. She is the 11th Director-General of UNESCO and the second woman to occupy this position.
- She is also first Jewish Director of UNESCO
- She was France's Minister of Culture from February 2016 to May 2017.

Bangladesh Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha resigns

Bangladesh's first Hindu Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha has resigned after facing financial irregularities and money laundering allegations.

- Surendra Kumar Sinha led the Supreme Court to a landmark verdict which scrapped Parliament's power to remove judges on grounds of misconduct and incapacity, in August 2017. This went against the government.

- He left Bangladesh in October 2017, in the middle of rumours that, he had been pressured to step aside. Immediately after he left Bangladesh, he was accused of serious crimes including money laundering and financial irregularities.
- His term was scheduled to expire in January 2018. He is the first top judge of Bangladesh to step down.

Science & Technology

Government launches Bharat Net phase 2 project

On November 13, 2017, Central Government launched phase 2 of BharatNet project to connect 1.5 lakh gram panchayats with high-speed broadband by March 2019.

- Total financial outlay for Phase 2 is around Rs. 34,000 crore.
- Under Phase 2, BSNL will roll out optical fibre in eight states that were not covered under the first phase. These eight states are Assam, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jammu & Kashmir and Sikkim.
- Contract for Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Odisha has been awarded to Power Grid Corporation of India.

Scientists created a new organic material that generates electricity when stressed

A flexible new material has been developed by researchers from Empa, the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology, which generates electricity when stressed.

- The researchers have created a thin, flexible, rubbery material that generates electricity when stretched and compressed. This works using Piezo-electric effect.
- To create this material, polar nanoparticles and silicone must be shaped before they are connected. Then, a strong electric field is introduced into the thin, elastic film to create the piezoelectric effect, which is achieved by exposing the material to extremely hot, then cool temperatures.
- This could be used in pressure sensors, pacemakers, other medical devices, clothing, control buttons, or even wearable monitors that generate electricity from the wearer's movement.

Australian scientists launch “dinner table” app to tackle vegetable aversion

On 13th November 2017, Australian scientists launched a dinner table app named 'VegEze' in an effort to tackle aversion towards consuming vegetables.

- VegEze app has been developed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). It aims to encourage Australians to add extra vegetables to their daily diets.
- CSIRO nutritionists will study how effective the app's game-like nature is at changing people's eating patterns as part of a broader research study.
- VegEze challenges users to eat three different vegetables at their evening meal daily for 21 days. It will track their intake and tally vegetable serves, with reminders and rewards.
- VegEze app features educational resources, including a visual guide to optimum serve sizes, recipes and nutritional information.

Sports

Pankaj Advani wins IBSF World Billiards Championship

Ace Indian cueist Pankaj Advani won 2017 IBSF World Billiards Championship held at Doha.

- In the final match, he defeated Mike Russell of England 6-2 to defend the 150-up format title which he had won in Bengaluru in 2016.
- In the semi-finals, he had defeated fellow Indian Rupesh Shah by 5-2 score, while Mike Russell got the better of Singapore's Peter Gilchrist 5-1.
It was Pankaj Advani's overall 17th world title. He is winner of maximum number of world titles in any sport by an Indian.
- Pankaj Advani is the only player in the world to win world titles in all formats of both, Billiards and Snooker.
- He is the first cueist in the world to win the Grand double three times in 2005 and 2008 respectively.

Marquez wins fourth MotoGP world title

On 12th November 2017, Spain's Marc Marquez won his sixth world championship and fourth in the premier MotoGP category with third place at the season-ending Valencia Grand Prix.

- Marc Marquez was holding a commanding 21-point lead in the championship from Andrea Dovizioso and he was guaranteed the title with a top-11 finish or if Dovizioso failed to win the race.
- Dovizioso crashed out five laps from the end. Marc Marquez finished in the third position and won the MotoGP world title in the Valencia MotoGP 2017.
- Marquez's Honda teammate Dani Pedrosa won the race. France's Johann Zarco finished in the second position.
- The Honda team secured a 'triple crown' comprising the constructor, rider and team championships.

Rafael Nadal presented with ATP World No. 1 award

On 12th November 2017, tennis player Rafael Nadal was presented the ATP World Number 1 award on court, at the ATP World Tour Finals at the O2 Arena, in London.

- Rafael Nadal replaced Andy Murray of Britain at Number 1 position on 21 August 2017. He has guaranteed the year-end Number 1 ranking for a fourth time following 2008, 2010 and 2013.
- Nadal has captured six titles, including two Grand Slam in the French Open and US Open and two ATP Masters 1000s in this season.
- He is the oldest player to finish year-end Number 1 in the ATP world rankings history. Nadal who hails from Spain is 31 years old.

Important Days

World Kindness Day – November 13

On 13th November 2017, World Kindness Day was celebrated in various parts of the world.

- World Kindness Day is internationally observed on 13 November every year. It was introduced in 1998 by the World Kindness Movement a coalition of nations' kindness NGOs.
- It is observed in many countries, including Canada, Japan, Australia, Nigeria and United Arab Emirates.
- The purpose of World Kindness Day is to highlight good deeds in the community, focusing on the positive power and the common thread of kindness that binds us.
- The mission of the World Kindness Movement is to inspire individuals and nations to create a kinder world through establishing independent kindness programs and projects in cities, schools, and communities across the globe.