

National Current Affairs

Government launches Saubhagya Web Portal

Ministry of Power launched Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – ‘Saubhagya’ Web Portal. The portal can be accessed at <http://saubhagya.gov.in>.

- The web portal aims to ensure transparency as well as accelerate household electrification in rural as well as urban areas in the country.
- Saubhagya web portal will enable every state to fill current status of progress of electrification works which will enable accountability for State DISCOMs/utilities.
- It offers feature on village electrification camps that will be organised by DISCOMs in villages for facilitating instant filling up of application forms and to complete requisite documentation to expedite release of electricity connections to households.
- Saubhagya Scheme (Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in September 2017 with an aim at providing last mile electricity connectivity to all rural and urban households.

Union Cabinet approves setting up National Anti-profiteering Authority

The Union Cabinet approved setting up of National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA), an apex body with an overarching mandate under Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime so as to ensure the benefit of tax reaches consumers.

- It also approved creation of posts of Chairman and Technical Members of National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA) under GST regime.
- The NAA is tasked with ensuring full benefits of reduction in tax on supply of goods or services flow to consumers.
- It is responsible for applying anti-profiteering measures in event of reduction GST rate on supply of goods or services or if benefit of input tax credit is not passed on to recipients by way of commensurate reduction in prices.
- NAA will be headed by senior officer of level of a Secretary to Union Government and shall have four technical members from Centre and/or States.
- If NAA finds that company has not passed on benefits of tax reduction, it can direct entity to pass on benefits to consumers along with interest from the date of collection of the higher amount till date of return of such amount.
- If the beneficiary cannot be identified, NAA can ask company to transfer amount to the ‘Consumer Welfare Fund’, as provided under Section 57 of CGST Act.

- In extreme cases NAA can impose a penalty on defaulting business entity and even order cancellation of its registration under GST. NAA also has power to cancel registration of any entity or business if it fails to pass on benefit of lower taxes under GST regime to consumers, and empowers consumers to approach it in case of any complaint.

CCEA approves continuation of four programmes under Integrated Child Development Services

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved four sub-schemes under Umbrella Scheme Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

- These four schemes include anganwadi services, programme for adolescent girls called Sabla, Child Protection Services and National Creche Scheme.
- Anganwadi Services (ICDS): It aims at holistic development of children under age of 6 years and its beneficiaries are children of this age group and Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.
- Sabla (programme for adolescent girls): Its objective is to facilitate, educate and empower adolescent girls (AGs) to enable them to become self-reliant and aware citizens through improved nutrition and health status. It aims at promoting awareness about health, hygiene, nutrition, mainstreaming out of school AGs into formal and non-formal education and providing information and guidance about existing public services.

Cabinet increases carpet area of houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana

The Union Cabinet has approved increase in carpet area of houses eligible for interest subsidy under Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) for Middle Income Group (MIG) under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban). The purpose is to further enhance the scope, coverage and outreach of Scheme.

- Cabinet has approved
 - Increasing carpet area in MIG I category of CLSS from existing 90 square metre (sq m) to up to 120 sq m. Under MIG-I category, 4% interest subsidy is provided to beneficiaries, whose annual income is between Rs. 6 lakh and Rs. 12 lakh, on loan of up to Rs 9 lakh.
 - Increasing carpet area in MIG II category of CLSS from existing 110 sq m to up to 150 sq m. Under MIG-II category, beneficiaries with an annual income of Rs 12 lakh to Rs 18 lakh get an interest subsidy of 3% on loan of up to Rs 12 lakh.

- The limit of 120 sq m and 150 sq m is seen as reasonable enhancement and it will cater to market generally scouted by MIG belonging to two income categories specified in the scheme.
- The increase in carpet area will enable MIG-I category of individuals to have wider choice in Developers' projects.
- Moreover, it will also give boost to sale of ready built flats in affordable housing segment.

MP partners with Nagaland and Manipur under Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat Yojana

Madhya Pradesh has partnered with Nagaland and Manipur under Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat Yojana to strengthen cultural relations between them.

- MP Government has made its Higher Education Department as nodal department to execute the scheme.
- MP will participate in Sangai Mahotsav which is being organized in Manipur. Likewise, teams from Nagaland and Manipur will take part in Lok Rang and Bal Rang programmes of MP to present their cultural programmes.
- Moreover, translation work of Nagaland's books also has been started in MP to introduce people to state with their activities and cultural heritage.
- Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat Yojana was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Ekta Diwas (31st October 2015) on the occasion of birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel.
- Its objective is to strengthen cultural relations of various parts of country and to embolden mutual connection between people dwelling in different states.

Aadi Mahotsav: Fortnight long Tribal Festival held in New Delhi

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu inaugurated Aadi Mahotsav, a fortnight long Tribal Festival in New Delhi. The theme of the festival is 'A Celebration of the Spirit of Tribal Culture, Cuisine and Commerce'.

- The festival will feature exhibition-cum-sale of tribal handicrafts, art, paintings, fabric, jewellery and much more through about 200 stalls. Over 750 tribal artisans and artists from over 25 States participated in the festival.
- Tribal India cuisine, recreated and presented in delectable forms to suit urban tastes by special tribal chefs is special feature of the festival.
- In line with the national aspiration to go cashless, all stalls will prefer and promote payments through cards.
- The name Aadi Mahotsav suggests that the 'adi' factor is important about them.

- The adivasi way of life is guided by primal truths, eternal values and natural simplicity.
- This festival seeks to channelize and promote their natural skills and provide them sources of income.
- The Government has formed the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) for achieving this.

Karnataka Assembly passes anti-superstition bill

On November 16, 2017, Karnataka Legislative Assembly unanimously passed 'Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017'.

- This anti-superstition bill is aimed at preventing and eradicating inhuman evil practices propagated and performed in the name of black magic by conman to exploit the common people.
- The bill has two categories of practices – 'savings' and 'schedule'.
- 'Savings' list includes practices that could be tolerated. These include practices like 'pradakshina', yatras, 'parikramas' performed at religious places.
- The other category is 'schedule', which is a list of practices that need to be controlled or prohibited. These include performing any inhuman, evil act and black magic in search of precious things, bounty and hidden treasures.
- 'Vashikarana' (practised in occult science as an act of subjugation) and its advertisement as a treatment has also been banned.

Maharashtra government sets up committee headed by Sudhir Shrivastav to curb custodial deaths

On 16th November 2017, Maharashtra government set up a seven-member committee headed by Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Sudhir Shrivastava to recommend ways to stop the custodial deaths.

- Minister of State for Home (Rural) Deepak Kesarkar informed that, the committee will recommend measures so that people get proper treatment at police stations.
- The committee will also take into account the government circulars issued in the past and the judgments of the high court and Supreme Court.
- Deepak Kesarkar said that, the number of custodial deaths in Maharashtra has now come down from 36 to 15-16. A survey has revealed that, 57 % of people (victims) do not approach the police to report the crime out of fear that the police might not treat them well.

Maharashtra bans plastic bottles at Government Offices, Hotels

On 17th November 2017, Maharashtra government announced ban on plastic bottles, with effect from 18 March 2018, which will cover government offices, functions and state educational institutes before it is extended to private institutes.

- Maharashtra Environment Minister Ramdas Kadam announced the new measures on plastic bottles ban, at a meeting with municipal officials in Mumbai on 16th November 2017.
- Plastic bottles will be prohibited at the Mantralaya – the state government headquarters, before the state wide ban comes into effect on Gudi Padwa, the Maharashtrian New Year, in March 2018.
- The state government is to hold meetings with beverage manufacturers and industry leaders and urge them to shift to environment-friendly options such as compostable plastic.

Centre approves Rs 10,000 crore for 107 Maharashtra irrigation projects

On 14th November 2017, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said that, the Centre has given an in-principle approval to provide an assistance of Rs 10,000 crore to fund 107 irrigation projects in drought-hit Vidarbha and Maratha regions of Maharashtra.

- Devendra Fadnavis said that, the completion of the projects will ensure large scale irrigation facilities in the districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada, known for suicides by farmers, besides in North and Western Maharashtra.
- Maharashtra government had submitted proposals to obtain the Central government's assistance to complete the 107 irrigation projects.

International Current Affairs

Canada declared as World's Best Travel Destination for 2017

Major travel publication Travel+Leisure has named Canada 'the destination of the year' in their recent feature.

- The selection was based on data from polls conducted on travel agents, arrival statistics and cultural relevance for the year 2017.

- The magazine concluded that in 2017, travellers around the world were constantly buzzing about Canada, and so it was the clear cut pick for destination of the year. Also, Canada was described as a cheerful and polite nation.

WHO Global Ministerial Conference on Ending TB held in Russia

On 16 and 17th November 2017, Global Ministerial Conference on 'Ending TB in the Sustainable Development Era: A Multisectoral Response' was held in Moscow, Russia.

- This conference aimed to accelerate implementation of the WHO End TB Strategy in order to reach the End TB targets set by the World Health Assembly and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Ministers of Health and Ministers from other sectors including from the top 40 highest TB and Multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) burden countries, leaders of UN organizations, development agencies, regional bodies, NGOs, academic and research institutions, etc. participated in the conference.
- A Ministerial Declaration was signed at the Conference, containing bold commitments by countries to accelerate action to end TB and meet the milestones towards the 2030 SDGs.

Banking & Finance

RBI panel proposes list for hedging commodities in global markets

A panel formed by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under Chandan Sinha (former Executive Director of RBI) has recommended a list of commodities which can be hedged in the overseas markets by all Indian residents.

- The panel has outlined that exposure of Indian entities to commodity price risks has increased on account of growing integration of India economy with the rest of the world and rising volumes of cross-border trade.
- Thus it has recommended a list of commodities (which includes gold, silver, zinc, tin, crude oil and its derivatives, coal, natural gas, tea, coffee, sugar and cocoa) which can be hedged in the overseas markets by all residents i.e. by both domestic users and exporters/importers.
- Besides, the panel has also recommended that domestic banks which are active in capital markets should be allowed to offer commodity hedging facility to their

customers, on both Over The Counter (OTC) as well as international and domestic exchanges.

Paytm, ICICI Bank collaborate to offer short-term instant digital credit

Digital payments services company, Paytm has entered in to a tie-up with ICICI Bank to jointly launch 'Paytm-ICICI Bank Postpaid', that offers short-term credit to their common customers.

- 'Paytm-ICICI Bank Postpaid' offers instant digital credit for various transactions including payment for movie tickets, bill payments, flights, as well as physical goods without any documentation or transaction fees.
- Under this facility, real-time credit assessment of customers is done through Big Data based algorithm of ICICI Bank. The algorithm takes into consideration several parameters such as digital behaviour of the customer, credit bureau check, purchase patterns and frequency of online purchases to ascertain the credit – worthiness of a customer and derives a credit score within few seconds.
- Based on the credit-score, instant interest-free credit is offered to the customer. The borrowed amount has to be repaid within 45 days, after which interest at the rate of 3% is charged just as per terms of a physical credit card product. Currently maximum credit limit has been set at Rs. 20000 per customer.
- Initially, Paytm-ICICI Bank Postpaid will be available only for ICICI Bank customers via the Paytm app. Gradually it will be extended to non-ICICI Bank customers using the Paytm app as well.

Yes Bank ties up with Centre Denmark India for fintech collaboration

Yes Bank has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Innovation Centre Denmark – India (ICDK India), to bring financial technology innovations and startups from Denmark to India, and facilitate entry of Indian startups in Denmark.

- ICDK is a partnership between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science.
- This collaboration will not only promote innovation in fintech space but will also assist fintech companies in India and Denmark to gain entry in each other's markets.
- It is to be noted that Denmark is ranked No. 1 in the Global Innovation Index and in the past one year it has established itself as a Global Fintech Hub through initiatives like Copenhagen Fintech.
- Copenhagen FinTech is a non-profit organization which brings together visionary ideas of fintech entrepreneurs, the accumulated experience of the established financial sector and the research from the universities to build a thriving fintech ecosystem.

Moody's upgrades Sovereign Credit Rating of India to Baa2 from Baa3

Moody's Investors Service has upgraded the Government of India's local and foreign currency issuer ratings to Baa2 from Baa3 and changed the outlook on the rating to stable from positive.

- India's rating has been upgraded by Moody's after a gap of 13 years. It had last upgraded India's sovereign credit rating in January 2004 to Baa3 (from Ba1).
- In the accompanying report, Moody's has stated that India's rating have been upgraded on expectations that major economic and institutional reforms undertaken by Government of India will enhance India's high growth potential over a period of time and will help stabilize rising levels of debt.
- These reforms include implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST), adhering to sound monetary policy practices, recapitalisation of public sector banks and other reforms linked to JAM (Jan Dhan- Aadhaar and Mobile number) trinity.
- Baa3 is Moody's lowest investment-grade ranking. By attaining Baa2, India is now in line with Philippines and Italy.

Business

Karnataka partners with Nasscom for CoE in data science and artificial intelligence

On 16th November 2017, Karnataka government announced the launch of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for data science and artificial intelligence with Nasscom as its programme and implementation partner.

- The Centre of Excellence is based on a public-private partnership model. It will accelerate the ecosystem in Karnataka by development of data science and artificial intelligence.
- The Centre of Excellence (CoE) will provide high-end technology capabilities, data, expertise, thought leadership, and curated programmes to augment capabilities across academia, enterprises, government, innovators and advanced start-ups.
- The cost for setting up the CoE is outlined as ₹40-crore. IBM, Intel, Digital Ocean, and NVIDIA have in-principle agreed to support this programme.

Uber inaugurates its second engineering facility in Hyderabad

On 16th November 2017, Uber inaugurated its engineering facility in Hyderabad, the second such unit in India.

- A team of over 40 engineers have been hired to build business intelligence platforms and real time streaming at the engineering unit for Uber globally. It is spread over 18,000 square feet in HiTec City, Kondapur, Hyderabad.
- The facility will create more employment opportunities and have a positive impact on the state and its economy as a whole.
- In February 2016, Uber's first Center of Excellence in Asia was launched in Hyderabad to provide specialised support for critical incidents that require immediate attention.

Indian Navy signs deal with Tata Power SED for Portable Diver Detection Sonar

The Indian Navy has signed a contract with Tata Power SED under the 'Buy and Make' category, through which Tata Power SED will supply Portable Diver Detection Sonar (PDDS) for Indian Navy.

- Tata Power Strategic Engineering Division (SED) will supply the Indian Navy with Portable Diver Detection Sonar (PDDS), which will enhance its underwater surveillance capability.
- The PDDS fitted on ships can detect and track underwater threats, and allow the Navy take preventive measure against possible damage to lives or property. This move is seen as a boost for the government's 'Make in India' initiative.
- Tata Power SED will manufacture the sonars at its facility in Bengaluru with a transfer of technology from DSIT Solutions. DSIT is an Israel-based company that specialises in underwater security systems.

Awards & Recognition

Nicaragua's Sergio Ramirez wins Spain's Cervantes prize

Nicaraguan author and former politician Sergio Ramirez Mercado has won the 2017 Cervantes Prize, the Spanish-speaking world's highest literary honor.

- Sergio Ramirez has written more than 20 novels, including "Margarita, esta linda la mar" (Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea), which won Spain's prestigious Alfaguara award in 1998.

- Ramirez is an active journalist. He was deputy vice president of Nicaragua between 1985 and 1990 and a long-time member of the leftist Sandinista bloc.
- This award is generally alternated between Spanish and Latin American writers. Spanish novelist Eduardo Mendoza won the prize in 2016.
- The award consists of 125,000-euro (\$148,000). The prizes are presented each April 23 on the anniversary of the death of Miguel de Cervantes, author of “Don Quixote.”

Anand Kumar of Super 30 is awarded Rashtriya Bal Kalyan Award for 2017

On 14th November 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind awarded “Rashtriya Bal Kalyan Award 2017” to Super 30 founder Anand Kumar for his contributions in the field of teaching and education, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi.

- Anand Kumar’s Super 30 coaching institute has been providing free education, accommodation and food to students coming from the underprivileged section of society to crack the prestigious IIT entrance examination.
- The Rashtriya Bal Kalyan Award was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development. It carries a citation and Rs. 1 lakh. The awardees are selected after shortlisting the entries from all over India.
- Over 400 students have cracked IIT-JEE from Super -30 coaching institute since it has started in 2002 in Patna. Anand Kumar now aims to increase the strength of students at Super 30.

Appointments & Resigns

Chakravarthi appointed as ambassador of World Packaging Organisation (WPO)

Chakravarthi AVPS, Managing Director, Ecobliss India, has been appointed as global ambassador of the World Packaging Organisation (WPO).

- Chakravarthi AVPS is the first Asian to be appointed as ambassador of World Packaging Organisation (WPO). The honorary appointment was made in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, at the 99th board meeting of WPO.
- Chakravarthi has over three decades of experience in the paper, printing and packaging industry. He has served as chairman of Indian Institute of Packaging, Hyderabad and has been on the board of Indian Institute of Packaging for over a decade.

- He has won Worldstar award for packaging excellence for five consecutive years. Before establishing Ecobliss India, he has worked with companies like International paper, Ballarpur Industries, Akerlaund Rausing, Huhtamaki, and Pragati.

Science & Technology

Country's longest expressway from Agra to Lucknow to offer free Wi-Fi

Free Wi-Fi will soon be available on the entire 302-kilometre stretch of India's longest expressway from Agra to Lucknow.

- The Uttar Pradesh government has offered to lease out space for laying an Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) along the six-lane Agra to Lucknow expressway.
- The plan is to earn revenue to maintain the expressway and have a win-win agreement with a private player by giving out leasing rights to lay OFC in order to offer free Wi-Fi facility along the entire stretch.
- This will also help UP have Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) by traffic monitoring, event detection and speed enforcement through CCTV cameras and phone helplines at every two kilometres on the expressway.

Sports

Shagun Chowdhary crowned National Women's Trap champion at 61st National Shooting Championship

On 16th November 2017, Shagun Chowdhary bagged a national champion crown when she won the women's trap event at the 61st National Shooting Championship, in New Delhi.

- Shagun Chowdhary represented ONGC. She is the first Indian woman trap shooter to win an Olympic berth. She overcame the challenge from Punjab's Rajeshwari Kumari to score 41-38 in the final.
- N Nivetha of Tamil Nadu won the Junior Women's title in the same event shooting 37. Rajeshwari led a team consisting Sukhreet Kaur and Inaya Vijaya Singh to claim the women's team trap gold. Madhya Pradesh won medals both in the senior and junior women's team events.

Books & Authors

Vice President launches 'Journey of Women Law Reforms and The Law Commission of India – Some Insights' book

On 17th November 2017, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu received the first copy of the book 'Journey of Women Law Reforms and The Law Commission of India – Some Insights', from the Author former Joint Secretary, Dr. Pavan Sharma.

- M Venkaiah Naidu said on the occasion that, we need to focus on women's issues in India. He hoped that, the book would inspire many more experts to focus on women's issues in the next few years.
- He also said that, the author has made an excellent analysis and more such studies can help focus nation's attention to important areas like matrimonial laws, property laws, laws relating to inheritance, succession, guardianship as well as NRI marriages and issues of sexual violence.

Important Days

International Students Day – November 17

On 17th November 2017, International Students Day was celebrated all over the world.

- International Students' Day is observed by student community annually on November 17. This day was first marked in 1941 in London by the International Students' Council.
- This day marks the anniversary of the 1939 Nazi storming of the University of Prague after demonstrations against the killing of Jan Opletal and the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the execution of nine student leaders, over 1200 students sent to concentration camps, and the closing of all Czech universities and colleges.
- Today, it is treated as an international observance of student activism, differing from the earlier meaning of the day.