

National Current Affairs

12th meeting of Standing Committee of Inter-State Council held

The 12th meeting of Standing Committee of Inter-State Council was held in New Delhi. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the recommendations of the Punchhi Commission on Centre-state relations. The meeting was chaired by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh.

- The Standing Committee in 12th meeting discussed 118 recommendations contained in Volumes-III, IV and V and finalised its recommendations. This includes Subjects related to centre-state relations like GST, financial transfers from the centre to the states, Police reforms, migration etc.
- Volumes-I & II were discussed during the eleventh meeting of the Standing Committee which was held in the month of April 2017, and Volumes-VI and VII will be discussed during the next meeting of the Standing Committee.
- Finally, all the recommendations of the standing committee on Punchhi Commission's report will then be placed before the Inter-State Council, headed by the Prime Minister.

30.76 lakh houses sanctioned under PMAY (Urban) till now: Government

The Union Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has announced that 30.76 lakh houses for the urban poor have been sanctioned so far since the launch of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Scheme in June 2015.

- Currently, 15.65 lakh houses are at various stages of construction and about 4.13 lakh houses have been constructed since launch of PMAY (Urban).
- Under the PMAY (Urban) Scheme, demand for housing was pegged at about 12 million and government has taken number of initiatives to support segments from infrastructure status to affordable housing.
Government is giving more emphasis on reforms, like stamp duty exemption and single window clearance to meet targets.
- Government is also removing bottlenecks and roadblocks in progress of scheme, particularly implementation of "In-situ Slum Rehabilitation (ISSR)" and "Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP)" verticals.
- PMAY(U) provide houses to all poor in urban areas by 2022. Its objective is to construct two crore houses across nation.

Punjab govt notifies ban on truckers' cartelisation

On November 24, 2017, Punjab State Government notified the 'Punjab Goods Carriages (Regulation and Prevention of Cartelization Rules), 2017', banning goods carriage operators from forming cartels in the state.

- This notification is aimed at creating a favourable environment for industries and business houses in the state which will encourage industrial and infrastructural investment.
- As per the notification, operators and permit holders of goods carriages have been barred from forming a cartel which deny freedom of choice to prospective consignors and consignees.
- Besides, operators should not compel or coerce any other operator to become a member or partner with him and should not stop him to pick up goods from any local areas, towns or cities within the State.
- In case of violation of these norms, police recourse and penalty in the form of suspension or cancellation of the permit has been prescribed.

Government to transform 115 backward districts by 2022

The Union Government has selected 115 backward districts for rapid transformation by 2022 in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to create a "New India" over the next five years.

- These 115 backward districts include 35 districts affected by Left Wing Extremists (LWE) violence, 55 districts just affected by LWE and another 15 including districts in Jammu and Kashmir and northeast affected by terrorism.
- For each of these backward districts, government has nominated senior official in rank of Additional secretary and Joint secretary as Prabhari officer.
- The First meeting of the Prabhari Officers was recently held in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary.
- Prabhari officers will form team with state representatives and bring convergence in their effort.
- They will take it up as challenge and succeed in their mission by making difference in the lives of millions of citizens in these backward districts.

DGFT doubles incentives rates for garments under Merchandise Exports from India Scheme

Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry has doubled rates for incentives under Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) from 2% to 4% of value of exports.

- The rates for incentives under this scheme have been enhanced for two subsectors of textiles industry - readymade garments and made-ups. This measure will incentivise the exports of labour intensive sectors of readymade garments and made-ups and contribute to employment generation.
- MEIS was launched under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP) 2015-20. It is one of the two schemes introduced in FP 2015-20, as part of Exports from India Scheme. The other scheme is Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS).
- Objective of MEIS is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods and products, which are produced and manufactured in India.
- It also seeks to enhance India's export competitiveness of these goods and products having high export intensity, employment potential.

President of India inaugurates International Gita Mahotsava-2017 in Haryana

On November 25, 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the International Gita Mahotsava-2017 in Kurukshetra, Haryana.

- Gita Mahotsava-2017 will conclude on December 3, 2017.
- Mauritius is the partner country and Uttar Pradesh is the partner state for this event.
- This year, about 25-30 lakh people are expected to participate in this event till December 3, 2017.
- On November 25, 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind, also participated in Gita Yajna and Gita Poojan ceremonies at Brahma Sarovar and inaugurated an international seminar on Gita at the Kurukshetra University campus.

President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates two-day conference on National Law Day in New Delhi

On 25th November 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the 2-day conference on National Law Day in New Delhi.

- This conference is organised by the Law Commission and the Niti Aayog to mark the National Law Day. The National Law Day is celebrated on November 26, the day on which the Constitution of India was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949.
- There will be four sessions on relevant issues concerning India's judicial system. These include 'judicial review and parliamentary democracy – balancing the separation of power' and 'appointments to higher judiciary – constraints of collegium system and reforms ahead'.
- There will also be sessions on themes like 'structural reforms for overcoming delays in justice delivery' and 'scope of judicial powers, judicial activism'.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver the valedictory address at the end of 2-day of the conference.

NPPA cap prices of 51 essential medicines

The drug price regulator National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has capped prices of 51 essential medicines, including those used for treatment of cancer, heart conditions, pain and skin problems.

- NPPA through separate notifications notified ceiling prices of 36 medicines and revised ceiling prices of 15 medicines. The prices were slashed in range of 6 to 53%.
- All manufacturers of scheduled formulations, selling branded or generic or both versions of scheduled formulations (drugs) at price higher than ceiling price as fixed and notified by Government, have to revise prices downward not exceeding the ceiling price.
- Moreover, manufacturers of these 51 formulations have to furnish quarterly returns to NPPA through IPDMS (Integrated Pharmaceutical DataBase Management System).
- Besides, any manufacturer intending to discontinue production of any of 51 drugs has to furnish information to NPPA, with respect to discontinuation of production of drug or its import, at least six months prior to intended date of discontinuation.

India to help Mauritius on digital locker services

The Government of India will assist Mauritius to develop and set up digital locker services.

- Ajay Kumar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of electronics and IT, said that, Government of India will assist Mauritius to develop and set up digital locker services, on the sidelines of Global Conference on Cyber Space 2017.
- The government will offer technical support and advisory services to Mauritius. The decision was taken during a bilateral meeting during the conference.
- DigiLocker is a key initiative of the Indian government under its flagship Digital India program. The free service provides citizens a shareable private space on a public cloud wherein they can store their documents.
- The service is aimed at paperless governance. Till now, about 8.87 million registered users have uploaded about 12.14 million documents on the DigiLocker.

Assam to celebrate 'Lachit Divas' in different state capitals

On 24th November 2017, Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said the Assam government would celebrate 'Lachit Divas' at various state capitals in India from next year.

- 'Lachit Divas' is celebrated to promote the ideals of Lachit Borphukan – the legendary general of Assam's history. Sarbananda Sonowal took part in the Lachit Divas celebration at the statue of Lachit Borphukan at Brahmaputra riverfront on 24th November 2017.
- The first countrywide celebration of 'Lachit Divas' would take place in New Delhi followed by state capitals such as Hyderabad, Bangalore and Kolkata in a phased manner.

International Current Affairs

India to host 36th International Geological Congress in 2020

India is going to host 36th International Geological Congress (IGC) in 2020 in NCR New Delhi.

- India had won the bid in 2012 at 34th IGC Brisbane, Australia to host the Congress in 2020.
- The 36th IGC to be held in New Delhi is jointly funded by Ministry of Mines and Ministry of Earth Sciences with active support of Indian National Science Academy (INSA) and science academies of India's neighbouring co-host countries, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- The IGC is prestigious conclave of geoscientists from around world.
- The IUGS is an international non-governmental organization devoted to international cooperation in the field of geology.

Global University Employability Ranking 2017 – IISc ranks 29th in the World

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has ranked 29th among the top 150 universities on Global University Employability Ranking 2017 published by Times Higher Education.

- This ranking has been designed by HR consultancy Emerging, is conducted by research institute Trendence and published by Times Higher Education.
- Global University Employability Ranking 2017 – Top 10:
 1. California Institute of Technology
 2. Harvard University
 3. Columbia University
 4. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
 5. University of Cambridge

Myanmar, Bangladesh sign deal for return of Rohingya Muslims

On November 23, 2017, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding on the return of Rohingya Muslims who fled the Rakhine state in Myanmar to escape a military crackdown.

- Since August 2017, nearly 600000 Rohingya people fled Myanmar to the neighbouring Bangladesh after army started an operation in response to an attack by Rohingya militants.
- Myanmar has now accepted to repatriate these Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh and a deal in this regard has been signed by Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmud Ali and Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw.
- Myanmar will start the repatriation process in two months. A joint working group to oversee the process will be formed comprising of foreign secretaries of both the countries.
- While negotiating the deal, Bangladesh had sought the involvement of UN agencies to verify proper resettlement of repatriated refugees. However, this proposal was rejected by Myanmar in the final deal.

U.S., South Korea to hold joint air force drill "Vigilant Ace"

The air forces of South Korea and the United States will hold 'Vigilant Ace' a joint drill from 4th – 8th December, 2017.

- 'Vigilant Ace' between air forces of United States and South Korea is held at periodic intervals to simulate wartime defenses.
- Nearly 12000 U.S. personnel, including U.S. Marine Corps and Navy troops will participate in the upcoming edition of 'Vigilant Ace' along with South Korean troops.
- 230 aircrafts including F-22 stealth fighters will be flown at eight U.S. and South Korean military installations.
- The objective of this drill is to enhance interoperability between U.S. and South Korean forces and increase the combat effectiveness of air forces of both nations.
- This drill will be held in the backdrop of North Korea's threats to develop and deploy nuclear missiles.

Ayodhya Mahotsav to be held in South Korea next year

'Ayodhya Mahotsav', depicting the cultural heritage of the temple town, would be held in Seoul and Gimhe cities of South Korea in 2018.

- In return, a 'Korea Festival' will be held in Lucknow and Ayodhya. An in-principle decision in this regard was made during the meeting of the Uttar Pradesh government and a delegation from South Korea led by Mayor of Gimhe city, Kim Wonman.
- People in South Korea believe that 2,000 years ago, an Ayodhya princess had married a Korean king Kim Suro. At present, their descendants are members of the "Crock Clan" and had built a memorial in Ayodhya.
- During the meeting, it was also decided that Agriculture department of UP government will receive technical support from South Korea for research in rice production.

Banking & Finance

JM Financial gets NHB nod for home finance arm

Financial services firm, JM Financial has received certificate of registration from the National Housing Bank (NHB) for carrying out housing finance activities through its subsidiary JM Financial Home Loans.

- While announcing the results for fiscal 2016- 2017, management of JM Financial had said it would enter the affordable mortgage segment along with a property brokerage.
- Currently, services offered by JM Financial include investment banking, broking, institutional equity sales, wealth management and asset reconstruction among others.
- It already has two non-banking arms, one of which is focused on real estate lending and the other is into credit business. Both these arms have combined asset of around Rs 12000 crore.

S&P retains India's sovereign rating at 'BBB-'; maintains stable outlook

On November 24, 2017, rating agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) kept its sovereign rating for India unchanged at 'BBB-', with outlook for the nation as 'stable'. S&P retains India's sovereign rating at 'BBB-'; maintains stable outlook

- BBB- rating is the lowest investment grade and just one notch above junk status.
- S&P stated that India's sizable fiscal deficit, low per capita income and high government debt do not warrant a sovereign rating upgrade as of now.
- However, it praised the recent reforms undertaken by Indian Government and expects Indian economy to grow strongly during 2018-2020.
- S&P's 'Stable' outlook for India indicates sound external account position.

- It is to be noted that, last week another rating agency, Moody's had upgraded India's sovereign ratings to Baa2 with outlook for the nation as 'positive'. Moody's cited recent economic and institutional reforms by Modi Government as the primary justification for this upgrade.

Axis Bank launches blockchain-based international payment service

Private sector bank, Axis Bank has launched an instant international payment services using RippleNet (Ripple's enterprise blockchain technology solution).

- This facility is currently available for Axis Bank's retail customers in India to receive payments from the UAE-based Rak Bank.
- Axis Bank's corporate customers in India can also use this facility to receive payments from Standard Chartered, Singapore.
- RippleNet is referred to as world's only enterprise blockchain solution for global payments. It connects banks, payment providers, digital asset exchanges and corporates for enabling seamless experience to send money globally.

Awards & Recognition

Lionel Messi receives his fourth European Golden Shoe award

On 24th November 2017, Lionel Messi received his fourth Golden Shoe award for leading all of Europe's leagues in scoring last season, in Barcelona.

- It is the fourth time Lionel Messi has received the Golden Shoe Award, drawing him even with Cristiano Ronaldo as the award record-holders.
- Messi was presented with the trophy by teammate Luis Suarez, who won the award in 2015-16. Andres Iniesta and Sergio Busquets also attended the ceremony in Barcelona.
- Messi, Ronaldo, and Suarez have shared the prize for the past nine years. The Golden Shoe is awarded by European Sports Media, an association of European sports newspaper and magazines.

Appointments & Resigns

N Sambasiva Rao appointed as Andhra Pradesh DGP

On 24th November 2017, the Andhra Pradesh government appointed 1984-batch IPS officer N Sambasiva Rao as Andhra Pradesh DGP (Director General of Police).

- N Sambasiva Rao has been holding the DGPs post as “full additional charge” since July 23, 2016, while his actual position was DGP (Coordination).
- He is due to retire on December 31. As a regular DGP, he could continue in the post for a full two-year term as per a state law.
- Chief Secretary Dinesh Kumar issued a one-line government order transferring and posting Sambasiva Rao as the DGP with immediate effect. The order did not specify whether Rao will hold the post for two years or till December 31.

Justice Satrughana Pujahari sworn in as Madras High Court judge

On 23rd November 2017, Justice Satrughana Pujahari was sworn in as a Judge of the Madras High Court by Chief Justice Indira Banerjee.

- Justice Satrughana Pujahari had been transferred from the High Court of Orissa to the Madras High Court by a notification dated November 14, 2017.
- He joined as second additional district and sessions judge, Ganjam, at Berhamapur in 2003. He worked as principal secretary to Government of Odisha, law department. He was elevated to the Bench of Orissa high court as an additional judge in 2013.

Science & Technology

Scientists create world's smallest data recorder from bacteria

Researchers from Columbia University Medical Centre (CUMC) in US have converted natural bacterial immune system into the world's smallest data recorder.

- The researchers modified an ordinary laboratory strain of ubiquitous human gut microbe (bacteria) *Escherichia coli* (E Coli) which enabled it to record their interactions with environment and also time-stamp events.
- The microscopic data recorder was created by taking advantage of CRISPR-Cas, an immune system in many species of bacteria.
- CRISPR-Cas copies snippets of DNA from invading viruses so that subsequent generations of bacteria can repel these pathogens more effectively.

- To build this microscopic recorder, researchers had modified piece of DNA called plasmid, giving it ability to create more copies of itself in the bacterial cell in response to an external signal.
- This research lays groundwork for new class of technologies that use bacterial cells for everything from disease diagnosis to environmental monitoring.
- It may help to record biological changes taking place in digestive tract which can yield an unprecedented view of previously inaccessible phenomena.
- It can be also used in environmental sensing and basic studies in ecology and microbiology, where bacteria could monitor otherwise invisible changes without disrupting their surroundings.

China successfully launches remote sensing satellites

On November 25, 2017, China successfully launched remote sensing satellites for conducting electromagnetic probes and other experiments.

- These Satellites were launched on a Long March-2C rocket from Xichang Satellite Launch Center in southwestern Sichuan. However, number of satellites launched has not been specified.
- Just few days ago, China had launched three remote sensing satellites to improve observation capability to promote commercial use for the remote sensing industry.
- Those satellites were carried by a Long March-6 rocket developed by China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation.

Environment

Dutta's Mahendragiri gecko: New species of gecko discovered in Andhra Pradesh

Scientists have discovered new species of gecko in the Eastern Ghats in northern Andhra Pradesh.

- It was identified from few areas in northern Mahendragiri range and scattered coastal hills in northern Andhra Pradesh.
- Dutta's Mahendragiri gecko is second gecko endemic to this hilly range and third vertebrate as other endemics in region are - *Gegeneophis orientalis* - caecilian amphibian and Jeypore Indian gecko (*Cyrtodactylus jeyporensis*). It grows up to 225mm in length with its tail half its size.
- It is nocturnal and lives on rocks, large trees and coffee plantations at altitudes between 250-1,100 metres above sea level.

- Dutta's Mahendragiri gecko is the 32nd species of house geckos (Hemidactylus) from India and among the largest in its genus.

Sports

Under-23 Senior World Wrestling Championship: Ritu Phogat wins Silver

India's Ritu Phogat has won Silver medal in Under-23 Senior World Wrestling held in Poland. She won silver medal in 48 kg category.

- She entered into final by defeating Bulgarian Wrestler Selishka in Quarter finals and Chinese Wrestler Jiang Zhu in the semi-final. In the gold medal bout (in the final match), she lost against Turkish Wrestler Evin Demirhan and stand in second with a silver medal.
- Previously, Ritu Phogat won gold medal at the Commonwealth Wrestling in Singapore in the 48 kg category, bronze medal at the Asian Championships. She also won National championship, which was held Indore.
- She became the most expensive female wrestler at the Pro Wrestling League auction in 2016 and played for Jaipur Ninjas franchise.

Obituary

Rajasthani folk singer Mangi Bai Arya passes away

On 24th November 2017, Rajasthani Maand folk singer Mangi Bai Arya passed away following a heart attack in Udaipur.

- Mangi Bai Arya had learnt singing from her father Kamlaram Arya, an eminent classical singer of his times.
- She had contributed significantly in taking Maand to the national and international levels.
- She has won several awards, including the Kendriya Sangeet Natak Akademy Award. The Directorate Akashvani had graded Mangi Bai Arya as an A grade artist.

Important Days

25 November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (IDEVAW) is observed every year across the world on 25 November.

- Observance of this day seeks to raise awareness about violence against women and girls, end violence against women.
- It also seeks to show that prevention is possible against violence of women.
- The theme for the year 2017 is 'Leave no one behind: end violence against women and girls.'
- It aims to reinforce UNiTE Campaign's commitment to create world free from violence for all women and girls and reaching out to most marginalized people including refugees, migrants, indigenous peoples, minorities and populations affected by natural disasters and conflicts

Communal Harmony Campaign Week observed from November 19-25, 2017

The Communal Harmony Campaign Week was observed from November 19-25, 2017 by National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH).

- The observance aimed at fostering and reinforcing the spirit of communal harmony, national integration and pride in vibrant, composite culture and nationhood.
- The observation highlighted inherent strength and resilience of our nation to withstand actual and potential threats to eclectic and secular fabric of the country and nurture a spirit of communal harmony in its widest sense. It also provided opportunity to reaffirm age old traditions and faith in values of tolerance, brotherhood and co-existence in multi-cultural and multi-religious society.
- Various programmes were organized by different stakeholders including educational institutions, public sector enterprises (PSUs), Government Departments/agencies, NGOs and voluntary organizations, etc. during the week to promote the ethos of Communal Harmony and National Integration.