

National Current Affairs

HEFA approves projects of 6 higher education institutions to improve the research infrastructure

The Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA) has approved projects worth over Rs. 2,066 crore for six higher educational institutions to improve the research infrastructure and further their standing at global level.

- These six institutes are IITs Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Kharagpur, Kanpur and NIT Suratkal.
- HEFA was set in September 2016 after it received Cabinet approval to provide financial assistance to institutes of higher education in addition to grants given by Union Ministry of Human Resources Development.
- It has authorised capital of Rs. 2000 crore. Government equity in it is Rs.1000 crore.
- It is not-for-profit organisation that will leverage funds from market and supplement them with donations and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds.
- These funds will be used to finance improvement in infrastructure in top institutions and will be serviced through internal accruals.

Clean Sea-2017: Coast Guard conducts Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) conducted the Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise named 'Clean Sea-2017' at sea off Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

- The objective of exercise was to ascertain preparedness of IGC, resource agencies and other stakeholders in responding to major oil spill in line with provisions of National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP).
- The exercise was planned to evaluate preparedness for Response Operations for any such oil pollution incident in highly sensitive area of A&B islands.
- The exercise was conducted in two phases for synchronizing support and cooperation provided by all stakeholders for combating oil spills in such ecologically sensitive areas.
- The exercise saw participation of ICG Pollution Control Vessel and integration of ICG Dornier/Chetak aircraft into Oil Spill Disaster Management System for aerial assessment and delivery of Oil Spill Dispersant for mitigation of spilled oil.

Eastern Railways presses first Swarna Rajdhani rake

On November 28, 2017, Eastern Railways brought into service, the first rake of upgraded Sealdah – New Delhi 'Swarna' Rajdhani. Eastern Railways presses first Swarna Rajdhani rake.

- This rake has become India's first Swarna Rajdhani rake under Project 'Swarna' of Indian Railways.
- Under Project 'Swarna', Indian Railways had given a free hand to Zonal Railways to develop and create aesthetic and passenger friendly coach interiors on running rakes of Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains.
- The objective was to establish new standards in passengers comfort. Budget of Rs. 50 lakh per rake was allocated for this purpose.
- The first rake of Sealdah – New Delhi Rajdhani has been upgraded at an expenditure of about Rs. 35 lakh.
- The new features in the coach are aesthetic International colour scheme and LED lighting to improve illumination, night signage for easy identifications of berth numbers, better hygiene by providing 'auto janitor' system in toilets, built-in ladders adjacent to berths for easy access to upper berth and CCTV cameras in doorway area and aisles to monitor any suspicious activity.

India-New Zealand Cyber Dialogue held in New Delhi

On 27th November 2017, the first India-New Zealand Cyber Dialogue was held in New Delhi.

- The Indian Delegation was led by Mr. Sanjay Kumar Verma, Additional Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs. The New Zealand delegation was led by Mr. Paul Ash, Director of the National Cyber Policy Office, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- Areas of discussion included domestic cyber policy landscape, cyber threats and mitigation, new technologies, mechanism on bilateral cooperation and possible cooperation at various international fora and regional fora. Both sides agreed to hold the next India-New Zealand Cyber dialogue in New Zealand in 2018.

Army, Rajasthan govt sign MoU to improve infrastructure near border

Indian Army has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Rajasthan State Government to improve infrastructure for their posts near the India-Pakistan border.

- As per the terms of the MoU, Indian Army will be able to use an airstrip in Lalgarh-Jatan area in Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan for 10 years.
- Rajasthan State Government has sanctioned funds for this airstrip, which is near the India-Pakistan border.

- Besides, Indian Army can undertake temporary construction work as per their requirement in the border areas of the state.

Defence Ministry approves procurement of 260 naval communication sets

On 29th November 2017, the Defence Ministry approved procurement of 260 naval communication sets at a cost of Rs 490 crore to improvise surveillance on the high seas.

- The decision of procuring these 260 naval communication sets was taken at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- It will be the first batch of indigenously designed and developed “software defined” radio sets. The gadgets will improve information sharing through secure voice communications and data transfer on board the naval ships.
- These naval communication sets will replace the old sets. The DAC, the defence ministry’s highest decision making body on procurement, has also reviewed various acquisition programmes.

India-Singapore ink Bilateral Agreement for Navy Cooperation

India and Singapore have signed Bilateral Agreement for Navy Cooperation that will allow Indian Navy ships logistical support, including refuelling at Singapore’s Changi Naval Base located near disputed South China Sea (SCS).

- The agreement was announced during second Defence Ministers’ Dialogue between India and Singapore held in New Delhi.
- The Bilateral Agreement for Navy Cooperation will allow Indian Navy ships sailing through disputed SCS or in eastern waters of Andaman Sea to refuel, restock and if needed rearm at Singapore’s Changi naval base.
- It will allow Indian Navy to directly engage with Singaporean authorities to use their facilities unlike present structure that take weeks if political clearances need to be obtained in Singapore.
- The naval logistics agreement is first for India with country located east of strategically important Strait of Malacca.

India and Italy ink MoU for enhanced cooperation in the health sector

India and Italy have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for enhanced cooperation in health sector.

- The objective of MoU is to establish comprehensive inter-ministerial and inter-institutional cooperation between two countries in the field of health by pooling scientific, technical, financial and human resources.
- Its ultimate goal is to upgrade quality and reach of human, material and infrastructural resources involved in health care, medical education and training and research in both countries.
- The main areas of cooperation are:
 - Exchange and training of medical doctors, officials, other health professionals and experts. Providing assistance in development of human resources and setting up of health care facilities.
 - Regulation of pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cosmetics and exchange of information. Short term training of human resources in health.
 - Procurement of generic and essential drugs and assistance in sourcing of drug supplies. Procurement of equipments and pharmaceutical products. Promotion of business development opportunities in pharmaceuticals.
 - Collaboration in prevention of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as neurocardiovascular diseases, COPDs, mental health, cancer and dementia with an emphasis on Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3) and related factors. Collaboration in field of climate change impact on communicable diseases and vector borne diseases.
 - Nutritional aspects of food intake, including malnutrition (over-nutrition and under-nutrition) in the light of the SDG2 and organization of nutritional services.
 - Safety of production, transformation, distribution and food delivery. Research and training of food industry operators. Information and communication to citizens on hygiene and food safety and healthy eating habits.

International Current Affairs

India loses billions to air pollution and has highest share of welfare costs

According to a report by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), India had the highest share of welfare costs (loss of income from labour), of about \$220 billion in South and South-East Asia from mortality due to air pollution.

- UNEP's report, 'Towards a pollution-free planet', was launched during the first Conference of Parties for the Minamata Convention in September 2017.
- As per the report, if more stringent measures are not adopted, global mortality costs from outdoor air pollution could rise to about \$25 trillion by 2060.

Russia to create 'independent internet' for BRICS nations

The Russian government has revealed plans to develop an 'independent internet' that operates separately from the Domain Name System used worldwide.

- The Russian Security Council has asked the Russian government to develop a separate infrastructure for BRICS countries' internet needs while still being linked to the World Wide Web, which would continue services in the event of a global internet infrastructure collapse.
- The initiative plans to create a separate 'backup' system of Domain Name Servers (DNS) that would be totally independent of international bodies and international infrastructure, yet still remaining linked to the global internet.
- This service would be used by BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. This would make BRICS countries totally independent from the DNS system and exempt from many international controls, instead giving control to individual governments.

Banking & Finance

RBI asks cooperative societies not to use word 'Bank' in names

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked co-operative societies not use the word 'Bank' in their names as it violates the Banking Regulation Act.

- RBI has also issued a statement that some co-operative societies are accepting deposits from public just like banks do. This activity is also a violation of the provisions of the Act.
- As per the statement of RBI, such societies have neither been issued any licence under the Banking Regulation Act nor are they authorised to conduct banking business.
- General public has advised to exercise caution and carry out due diligence before dealing with such cooperative societies as deposits placed with these societies are not covered by Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

Business

India-Lesotho Bilateral Ties: India donates 500 metric tonnes of rice to Lesotho

On 29th November 2017, India donated 500 metric tonnes of rice to the Kingdom of Lesotho, in Southern Africa, which is facing acute food shortage due to famine.

- High Commissioner of India to South Africa and Lesotho, Ruchira Kamboj handed over the donation to the government of Lesotho, after she presented her credentials to King Letsie III in Lesotho's capital, Maseru.
- Ruchira Kamboj also inaugurated the India-Lesotho Centre for Advanced Information Technology, a project fully-funded by the Government of India, at the Lerotholi Polytechnic in Maseru. The construction of the new building to house the Centre was completed recently.
- The third meeting of the India-Lesotho Joint Bilateral Cooperation Commission will be held in New Delhi on December 1, 2017.

India's Jet, Air France-KLM announce tie-up on routes

On November 29, 2017, India's airline operator, Jet Airways and Air France-KLM announced a tie-up to boost flights from the Indian subcontinent to Europe and then onwards to the United States.

- This tie-up could give Jet Airways, unrestricted access to Europe and North America and could reduce the scope of its existing partnership with Etihad Airways.
- As per the terms of this tie-up, Jet Airways and Air France-KLM will align their inventory and networks and will be selling one another's tickets and frequent flyer programmes.
- Both the airlines will also work together on cargo operations. In future, both the entities may also look at synergies on maintenance and joint fuel purchases
- This tie-up which has been formed after a year-long talks is expected to lead to a 40% rise in India-Europe passenger traffic for both the carriers.

Appointments & Resigns

Sibi George appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the Holy See

On 20th November 2017, Sibi George was appointed the next Ambassador of India to the Holy See.

- Sibi George is presently Ambassador of India to Switzerland.

- He has been concurrently appointed the next Ambassador of India to the Holy See, with residence in Berne. He is expected to take up the assignment shortly.

Rathna Prabha appointed as Chief Secretary of Karnataka

On 28th November 2017, the Karnataka government appointed senior woman IAS officer K Ratna Prabha as the new chief secretary of Karnataka.

- Rathna Prabha will be the third woman civil servant to hold the top bureaucratic post in Karnataka after Teresa Bhattacharya (2000) and Malati Das (2006) and the second woman to concurrently hold the top post in Karnataka with Neelamani N Raju, who is the Director General & Inspector General of Police (DG & IGP).
- Ratna Prabha will succeed Subhash Chandra Khuntia, whose term ends on November 30, 2017. Ratna Prabha retires in March 2018.

Dia Mirza appointed as UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador for India

Actor-activist Dia Mirza has been appointed UN (United Nations) Environment's Goodwill Ambassador for India.

- Dia Mirza has been recognised by the United Nations for her contribution to environment conservation.
- As a Goodwill Ambassador, she will work with the UN to further spread the message on priority areas including clean air, clean seas, wildlife protection and climate change.
- UN Environment head, Erik Solheim congratulated Dia Mirza to the programme. Dia Mirza has joined the prestigious list of UN Environment Goodwill Ambassadors, which includes Hollywood stars such as Cate Blanchett, Anne Hathaway, Angelina Jolie, Katy Perry and Emma Watson.

Ajay Kumar appointed secretary in Department of Defence Production

Ajay Kumar has been appointed as secretary in Department of Defence Production as part of a top-level minor bureaucratic reshuffle effected on 28th November 2017.

- Ajay Kumar is at present additional secretary in Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. He has been appointed secretary in Department of Defence Production with effect from December 1, 2017.
- Raghvendra Singh, director general, National Archives has been made culture secretary. Pritam Singh, additional secretary in Corporate Affairs Ministry, will be director general, National Archives.

- Apurva Chandra will be additional secretary and director general (acquisition) in defence ministry. G C Murmu, additional secretary in Department of Financial Services, has been moved to the revenue department in the same capacity.

Science & Technology

DAC approves procurement of new radio technology for Indian Navy

The Union Defence Ministry has approved procurement of 260 Software Defined Radios (SDR), a naval communication sets for Indian Navy at cost of Rs. 490 crore to ramp up surveillance on the high seas.

- The decision was taken at meeting of Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- The DAC is defence ministry's highest decision making body on procurement.
- These 260 SDRs will be procured under category of buy (India Designed Developed & Manufactured).
- It will be first batch of indigenously designed and developed software defined radio sets to be procured by any of three services.
- These will replace existing systems on-board warships.

Hwasong-15: North Korea tests most powerful ICBM

North Korea successfully launched Hwasong-15, a new type of nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

- It is North Korea's most powerful ICBM that can reach entire eastern US seaboard and Washington.
- The ICBM was launched from near Pyongyang and had reached height of 4,475 km and travelled 950 km before it accurately hitting a sea target.
- It landed inside of Japan's economic exclusion zone (EEZ) in Sea of Japan, about 250 km west of Aomori, which is on northern part of Japan's main island of Honshu.
- North Korea claims that Hwasong-15 ICBM is 'significantly more' powerful than previous missiles. It is upgraded version of Hwasong-14 ICBM.
- It is North Korea's 'greatest ICBM' that could be armed with 'super-large heavy nuclear warhead'.
- It is the first ballistic missile developed by North Korea that is theoretically capable of reaching United States mainland (including Washington DC).

Planet Labs to launch 4 satellites on board PSLV-C40

On 29th November 2017, Planet Labs Inc, a US-based integrated aerospace and data analytics company, said four of its Dove satellites will be launched aboard India's PSLV-C40 mission, scheduled to fly in January 2018.

- The primary payload for PSLV-C40 mission is Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Cartosat-2 Series satellite, and Planet Lab's four satellites will ride as secondary payloads.
- In February 2017, Planet Lab's 88 Dove satellites travelled on the PSLV-C37 as part of ISRO's record-breaking launch of 104 satellites.
- The four Dove satellites on the upcoming launch are tech demos responsible for testing improvements to several of the satellite subsystems, including camera technology, thermal control, and altitude determination & control system.

Manohar Parrikar launches farmer engagement app 'Jai Kisaan'

On 29th November 2017, Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar launched the Jai Kisaan App, a farmer engagement app containing features and functions to fulfil the needs of the farmer community in India.

- The Jai Kisan app is a one-stop solution on agricultural information and cultivation, covering crop nutrition, protection, seeds, and diagnostic services.
- Its services include soil testing and customized information wherein farmers will have access to fertilizer recommendations on the basis of crop and target yields.
- Other benefits of the application include access to commodity market prices and a five day weather forecast, to assist the farmer in making critical decisions related to his farm income.
- The Jai Kisaan app has set a target of 10,000 user base by the end of March 2018. The Jai Kisaan App is a mobile solution from Adventz Group.

Sports

Mirabai Chanu wins gold at World Weightlifting Championships

India's Saikhom Mirabai Chanu won gold medal at World Weightlifting Championships held in Anaheim, United States.

- She achieved this feat by lifting new world record of 194kg – 85kg snatch and 109kg clean-and-jerk in the 48 kg weight category.

- Thailand's Sukcharoen Thunya won silver medal with total lift of 193, while Segura Ana Iris won bronze medal with 182kg lift.
- With this victory, Mirabai Chanu became first Indian in over two decades to win the medal at the Championships.
- She is only second Indian weightlifter after Karnam Malleswari to achieve this feat.
- Olympic bronze medallist Karnam Malleshwari had won the top prize in worlds twice in 1994 and 1995

France beat Belgium to claim its 10th Davis Cup (tennis)

On 26th November 2017, France won its 10th Davis Cup title when France's Lucas Pouille beat Belgium's Steve Darcis by 6-3 6-1 6-0 to give France a 3-2 victory in the final against Belgium.

- This is France's first title since they beat Australia in 2001 before three defeats in the final in 2002, 2010 and 2014. Belgium, on the other hand has yet to win the title, having now lost three finals after defeats in 1904 and 2015.
- Yannick Noah, the last Frenchman to win a grand slam title, celebrated his third title as captain after leading France to victory in 1991 and 1996.
- France took the lead when the pair of Richard Gasquet and Pierre-Hugues Herbert, beat Belgian's Ruben Bemelmans and Joris De Loore in four sets.

Competition Commission imposes Rs. 52.24 crore penalty on BCCI

On 29th November 2017, the Competition Commission (CCI) imposed a fine of Rs 52.24 crore on the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for anti-competitive practices with respect to the Indian Premier League.

- The Competition Commission had penalised the BCCI for the same amount in February 2013 as well, but that penalty was set aside by the appellate tribunal after an appeal by the BCCI.
- In its 44-page order, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) had said the penalty of Rs 52.24 crore comes to nearly 4.48 % of the average of the BCCI's relevant turnover during the last three financial years.
- Although at present, the average of BCCI's turnover is slightly higher than the one which was considered by the CCI while passing the order in February 2013, CCI said it prefers to maintain the penalty amount.

Odisha Chief Minister unveils logo & mascot of Hockey Men's World Cup 2018

On 29th November 2017, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik unveiled the logo and mascot for the Hockey Men's World Cup 2018 at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- Naveen Patnaik launched the countdown timer for the Hockey Men's World Cup 2018 scheduled to be held in Odisha from November 28 to December 16, 2018.
- 16 countries, including India, will participate in the 14th edition of the Hockey World Cup. Patnaik also gave away cash awards worth Rs 76.75 lakh to 59 sportspersons from Odisha for their outstanding contributions in their respective sports.
- Hockey players Dipsan Tirkey, Amit Rohidas, Sunita Lakra, Deep Grace Ekka, Namita Toppo and Rashmita Minz were given cash prize of Rs 7.5 lakheach. Para athletes Jayanti Behera, Pramod Bhagat, Mohit Tandi were also present in the list.

Obituary

Egyptian actress and singer Shadia passed away

On 28th November 2017, Shadia, an Egyptian actress and singer who captivated Arab audiences for decades died.

- Shadia's death was announced on Egypt's State Information Service website, which did not say where she died. A stroke had left her in a coma at a Cairo military hospital recently.
- Shadia played roles in more than 100 films in a career that began in the late 1940s. Shadia was named Fatimah Shaker by her parents. But she was known throughout her career as Shadia. She was married three times but had no children.
- In honour of the artistic career of Shadia, Cairo International Film Festival dedicated its 39th edition to Shadia to celebrate her iconic contribution to the Egyptian cinema.