

National Current Affairs

Government inks MoU with Maruti Suzuki to support Skill India in automobile industry

The Union Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Maruti Suzuki India Limited have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support Skill India Mission in automobile industry.

- The Flexi MoU aims to provide high employment potential trades related to automobile and manufacturing industry to youth under Skill India Mission.
- As per MoU, Maruti Suzuki in consultation with Director General of Training (DGT), under Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship will develop specific training modules as per need of the automobile industry.
- The company will conduct courses at pan-India locations leveraging facilities and services available at ITIs, training centers of training partners, regional training centers, vendors and dealers associated with Maruti Suzuki.
- The courses offered will include Manufacturing, Automotive Body Repair, Automotive Service & Repair and Automotive Paint Repair.
- All these courses will be approved by NCVT (National Council for Vocational Training) and it will award certificates to all candidates after completion of the course.

NPPA notifies prices of 65 essential formulations

The national drug pricing regulator National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has notified prices of 65 essential formulations, including those used for treatment of diabetes, pain, infections and high blood pressure.

- The 65 essential formulations fall under scheduled I formulations under Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), 2013.
- 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 to the ceiling price cap.
- Moreover, manufacturers of these 65 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 65 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

First National Training of trainers programme for Sendai Framework held in New Delhi

The first national-level training of trainers programme to sensitise various Central Ministries and Departments on utilisation of Sendai Framework for developing action plans for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) was held in New Delhi.

- The was organised by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in collaboration with United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction-Global Education and Training Institute (UNISDR-GETI).
- The first of its kind training programme for Sendai Framework aimed at building capacity of participants to utilise defined indicators to monitor progress of Sendai targets.
- It also provided training modules to enable them to lead consultations and train others on the monitoring of the Sendai Framework Targets.
- SFDRR is an international Treaty that was approved by UN member states in March 2015 at Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan.

BJP wins Gujarat but misses Century, seeps Himachal

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has won Gujarat legislative assembly elections for the sixth time.

- The BJP has won 99 of Gujarat's 182 assembly seats, comfortably over the halfway mark but stopping just shy of a 100.
- The BJP has won 44 of Himachal Pradesh's 68 seats and the Congress has won 21.
- Among seats that the BJP has ceded to the Congress in Gujarat is PM Modi's hometown Vadnagar.
- The BJP has been in power in Gujarat for over two decades.

DCGI allows Indian firm to conduct phase 1 trials for Zika vaccine

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has granted permission to Indian firm to conduct Phase-I clinical trials for a Zika vaccine.

- It was announced by Union Minister of State (MoS) for Health and Family Welfare Ashwini Kumar Choubey in Lok Sabha.
- The Phase I trials ascertain safety, tolerability and physiological action of a compound inside the body.
- Zika Virus is vector borne diseases spread by Aedes egypti mosquito. Infections in pregnant women can cause children to be born with brain deficiencies (microcephaly) and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS).

Punjab bans nylon, plastic kite string

The Punjab government has imposed a complete ban on the manufacturing, sale, production, supply and use of kite string made of nylon, plastic or any other synthetic material.

- Any other kite flying thread that is sharp or made of glass, metal or any other material has also been banned in the state.
- Only a cotton thread, free from any sharp, metallic, glass component, adhesive and thread strengthening material, would be permitted for kite flying.

India to host meeting of WTO member countries on food security and other issues

India is planning to host meeting of World Trade Organisation (WTO) member countries in February 2018 to muster support for food security and other issues.

- The proposed meeting will be in backdrop of developed nations forming groupings to prepare ground for pushing new issues i.e. investment facilitation, preparing rules for e-commerce, promoting gender equality and reducing subsidy on fisheries with view to curbing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
- India has been keenly pushing agriculture issues at WTO. It has also been raising its voice against bringing new issues, especially those which are not directly linked to trade, on the negotiating table.

Losar Festival celebrated in Ladakh

The traditional festival of Losar was celebrated in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir to mark the beginning of New Year in this Himalayan region.

- The 10 day long festival began with illumination of religious and residential places and by visiting monasteries for prayer.
- The Losar festival marks the beginning of New year in Ladakh and Tibet region and falls in December.
- Losar is Tibetan word for 'new year'.
- It is considered to be the most important festival of the region.
- It is an important social and religious celebration in Ladakh.
- Ladakhi Buddhists make religious offering before their deities in the domestic shrines or in the Gompas.

Assam government inks MOU with Isha Foundation

Assam government and the Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev-led Isha Foundation on Monday inked an MOU for rejuvenation and conservation of rivers.

- Assam government's Environment and Forest Department signed the MOU.
- Dredging of the rivers Barak and Brahmaputra have been undertaken by the government to rejuvenate the rivers through de-silting for increasing their water carrying capacity.
- The central government has already constituted a cabinet sub-committee to study the problem of flood and erosion in the state and Rs 100 crore has been allotted by the centre for conducting a study of River Brahmaputra.

UNESCO to set up gaming hub in Andhra

Andhra Pradesh government in association with UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) is contemplating on setting up a centre of excellence for children with learning differences as well as a gaming for e-learning hub, first of its kind in India and Asia-Pacific region.

- They would be working with many schools in the State to screen students at a very early age to see if they are dyslexic or have any other form of learning difficulty
- The hub will advise the universities what the future courses that they have to be designing.
- Skill development will be one of the areas of focus.

Banking & Finance

YES Bank, EIB to co-finance \$400 mn for clean power projects

YES Bank and the European Investment Bank will co-finance \$400-million funding for renewable power generation in the country.

- The new financing programme will streamline financing for a range of renewable energy projects being built and operated by leading Indian corporations and private sector developers.
- Of the \$400-million, the EIB will fund \$200 million, while the rest will be supported by YES Bank, the project promoters and other financial institutions.
- Under this renewable power generation initiative, several solar projects in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka have been identified.

- Additional wind and solar projects are also being examined. The EIB loan of \$200 million has a tenor of 15 years.

Awards & Recognition

Shree Saini from Washington has been crowned Miss India USA 2017

Shree Saini, a resident of Washington state, was crowned Miss India USA 2017.

- Prachi Singh, a 22-year-old medical student from Connecticut was declared the first runner-up, while North Carolinas Fareena became the second runner-up at Miss India USA 2017 pageant.
- At the beauty pageant, cancer surgeon Kavita Malhotra Pattani from Florida was declared Mrs India USA 2017.

Appointments & Resigns

NGT chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar retires

National Green Tribunal (NGT) Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar today retired from the post after completing his five-year tenure.

- During his tenure as NGT chief, he passed several landmark orders and judgements.
- These include the ban on 10- year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles, the slew of directions for rejuvenation of the Ganga and Yamuna, the demolition of illegal hotels in Himachal Pradesh and the ban on plastic items in Delhi, Haridwar and Punjab.
- His recent order capping the number of pilgrims at Vaishno Devi to 50,000 per day and his direction to maintain silence at Amarnath invited ire from various quarters.

Apple appoints Michel Coulomb to lead India operations

Apple has appointed an expat to lead the Indian operations. Company veteran, Michel Coulomb, who was the managing director for South Asia operations at Apple, has been appointed the chief of Indian operation with immediate effect.

- Coulomb, a French national, has been with Apple for over 14 years and considered a key executive of CEO Tim Cook.
- He has earlier led Apple's operations in Middle East, Tukey and Africa before moving into Singapore last year as chief of South Asia,

Acquisitions & Mergers

Bharti Airtel signs agreement to buy Millicom's operations in Rwanda

Bharti AirtelBSE -0.88 % has entered into a definitive agreement with Millicom International Cellular under which Airtel Rwanda Limited will acquire 100% equity interest in Tigo Rwanda Limited.

- The consideration for the transaction is based on approximately 6x EBITDA multiple, payable over two years.
- The agreement is subject to regulatory and statutory approvals.
- The move comes within days of Mittal admitting that it's Africa investment was 'a bit rushed' and should have been done with a little more due diligence.

Sports

Aakarshi Kashyap wins U-17 and U-19 singles titles at junior Nationals

Aakarshi Kashyap, India's top-ranked junior, claimed an impressive double crown at the junior national badminton championships in Guwahati by winning the Under-17 and Under-19 singles titles.

- The 16-year-old defended her title in the Under-17 category by beating Malvika Bansod in the final on Monday.
- The Bhilai teenager's feat is incredible considering she played 12 matches across five days in the two age-group categories. She dropped only two games throughout her double title-winning campaign.
- Kashyap was not the only shuttler to win a double at the junior Nationals. Mithula UK, 17, also achieved the feat after winning the Under-19 girls doubles (with Rutuparna Panda) and mixed doubles (with Krishna Prasad Garaga) titles.
- Maisnam Meiraba of Manipur won the Under-17 boys singles title.

- In the Under-19 boys singles final, Aryamann Tandon beat BM Rahul Bharadwaj.

Russian doping: Alexey Voevoda receives lifetime ban from IOC

Russian double Olympic gold medallist Alexey Voevoda has been banned for life for doping at the 2014 Winter Games.

- Voevoda, 37, won in the four-man and two-man bobsleigh in Sochi.
- Russia has been banned from the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang for "systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system.
- The International Olympic Committee's decision means 32 Russian athletes have been banned for life for doping violations at Sochi 2014.

Junior boxers claim six gold medals at German tournament

Indian junior boxers packed quite a punch at the fifth International Sven Lange Memorial Tournament, clinching six gold, four silver and a bronze medal to finish as overall champions in the German city of Schwerin.

- To top it all, Bhavesh Kattamani (52kg) picked up the best boxer trophy along with his gold medal.
- The other gold-medalists for India were Vijeydeep (63kg), Akshay (60kg), Ish Pannu (70kg), Lakshay Chahar (80kg) and Vinit (75kg).
- The silver-winners were Anil (48kg), Swapnil Shinde (50kg), Aman (54kg) and Satender, while the lone bronze- medalist for the country was Aakash (66kg).

Important Days

56th Goa liberation day - 19th December

On December 19th, 56th Goa liberation day was celebrated in Goa.

- The state was liberated on this day in 1961 from Portuguese control after almost 450 years of colonial rule.
- On this day, a torch light procession is carried out from three different locations of Goa. They finally meet at the Azam maidan and pay tribute to martyrs.