

# National Current Affairs

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## **Andhra Pradesh bans New Year festivities in temples**

Andhra Pradesh Endowments Department has issued a circular banning festivities and special darshans at temples to celebrate New Year.

- The circular was issued by the Hindu Dharma Parirakshana Trust of the Endowments Department.
- It bans festivities and special darshans for New Year at Hindu temples.
- It states that organizing New Year festivities in temples is not a part of Hindu and Telugu traditions.
- The circular directs the temple managements and priests not to spend money for floral decorations, banners, special arrangements etc. on New Year celebrations.

## **Two Day Regional Conference on Good Governance held in Guwahati**

Two-day Regional Conference on 'Good Governance and Replication of Best Practices' was held in Guwahati, Assam from 22nd – 23rd December, 2017.

- The conference was organized by Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) under Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions in collaboration with Assam State Government.
- The conference was inaugurated by Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal.
- Objective of the conference was to provide a platform for experience sharing in the formulation and implementation of citizen centric governance, Good Governance Index, improving public service delivery and PM awarded initiatives.
- Six sessions were held during the conference on different themes including 'Responsive Public Delivery', 'PM awarded Initiatives 2017' and 'State Collaboration Initiatives in Administrative Reforms'.
- Delegates from 36 States and Union Territories (UTs) participated in this conference.

## **Environment ministry launches pilot project "Blue Flag" for beach clean-up**

In a bid to raise standards of cleanliness and setting up basic amenities at beaches, Union Environment Ministry has launched a pilot project for beach clean-up and development.

- Under this project, Environment Ministry has asked each coastal state and union territory to nominate one beach which will be developed by deploying funds through the ongoing Integrated Coastal Management Programme.

- Subsequent to the development, attempt will be made to procure 'Blue Flag' certification for such identified beaches.
- 'Blue Flag' certification testifies that a beach, marina or sustainable boating tourism operator adheres to specific standards. This certification is awarded by the Foundation for Environment Education (FEE).
- So far, all coastal states have nominated one pilot beach in their receptive territories for development under this project.

### **India's First Runway on 'Sea Bridge' to be built at Agatti Airport**

India's first aircraft runway on a 'sea bridge' will be constructed at Agatti Airport, Lakshadweep.

- Airports Authority of India (AAI) has got an approval to extend the existing runway at Agatti Airport, Lakshadweep by building a Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) platform on the beach and shallow sea.
- The existing runway will be extended on this platform and the resultant longer airstrip will enable bigger aircrafts to land and take-off from the Agatti Airport.
- Estimated cost for this project is Rs 1500 crore.
- Earlier, AAI's plan was to extend the runway by linking two adjacent islands. However, that plan had to be dropped owing to environmental concerns.

### **Parliamentary panel proposes body cameras for traffic police, RTO officials**

24-member Select Committee of the Rajya Sabha, headed by Vinay P Sahasrabudhe has recommended body wearable cameras for traffic policemen and Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) officials enforcing the Motor Vehicles Act.

- Committee expects that body wearable cameras will reduce arbitrariness and corruption by the enforcement officials.
- It has prescribed that offences recorded through these body wearable cameras should be digitally stored and monitored in the control room.
- The committee has also recommended registration of vehicles by dealers and non-production of vehicles at Regional Transport Offices (RTOs).
- The panel made these recommendations after examining the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2017.
- Union Road Transport and Highways Minister, Nitin Gadkari expects the bill to be passed in the current session of the parliament.

### **India, Russia review economic ties in key areas**

Meeting of India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) was held in New Delhi on December 23, 2017.

- This meeting was held to undertake a comprehensive review of bilateral economic cooperation between India and Russia in the areas of trade and investment, energy, transport, agriculture, industry and space.
- The meeting was co-chaired by India's External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.
- Both the countries have decided to raise the level of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on trade and economic cooperation to that of Deputy Minister/Commerce Secretary Level.
- Besides, India and Russia have agreed to create a mechanism to discuss and remove any existing barriers to trade and create working groups to boost ties in agriculture and pharmaceuticals.

#### **Uttar Pradesh government signs MoU with South Korea**

On 23rd December 2017, the Uttar Pradesh government signed a MoU with South Korea to improve cooperation in the field of tourism, skill development, culture and farming.

- A delegation from Gimhae city of South Korea met Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath at Lucknow.
- They signed a MoU for improving cooperation in tourism, skill development, culture and farming.
- This is expected to provide more employment opportunities and development in these fields.

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## **International Current Affairs**

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#### **Russia to build nuclear power station in Sudan**

Russia has agreed a deal to build a nuclear power station in Sudan weeks after President al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court, visited President Putin.

- The deal comes despite Mr Bashir facing charges of genocide and war crimes at the court in Hague, which has hampered his engagement with the outside world, and the US accusing Sudan of being a sponsor of terrorism.

- The development of nuclear technology will allow Sudan to deal with its energy security problem.
- The deal comes after Bashir met Putin in the Black Sea coast city of Sochi on November 23, where a cooperation nuclear energy deal was signed.
- During the visit Bashir asked for Russia to protect his country from the “aggressive acts” of the United States. He also said he wanted to ramp up military ties and praised Moscow’s military campaign in Syria.

### **India begins dumping probe into chemical imported from Russia**

India has initiated a dumping probe on imports of ‘Sodium Nitrite’, used in industries such as pharma and food processing, from Russia.

- The Directorate General of Anti-dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) has found sufficient evidence for dumping of Sodium Nitrite.
- If it is proved that dumping has caused material injury to domestic industry, DGAD would impose anti-dumping duty on Sodium Nitrite. The investigation period includes April 2016 and March 2017 (12 months).
- The probe would investigate on the existence, degree and effect of alleged dumping. It will also recommend the amount of anti-dumping duty, if necessary to rectify the damage on the domestic industry.

### **UN to mark Mandela’s 100th birthday with a peace summit**

The UN General Assembly has planned to mark the 100th anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s birthday with a high-level meeting on world peace.

- On 22nd December 2017, a resolution was adopted in regard with the “Nelson Mandela Peace Summit”. The peace summit will contain speeches by UN officials.
- This summit will be conducted before the annual gathering of world leaders in September 2018.
- The resolution highlighted the importance of Nelson Mandela’s contribution to promote conflict resolution, race relations, human rights, reconciliation and gender equality.

### **India, China hold 20<sup>th</sup> round of border talks**

On December 22, 2017, special representatives of India and China held talks in New Delhi to discuss important aspects related to border issues.

- This was the 20th round of border talks between India and China.

- Indian side was led by National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval while Yang Jiechi, represented China.
- Discussion during this round of talks focused on the recent Doklam standoff and other unresolved border disputes between India and China.
- In June 2017, Indian and Chinese troops were locked in a two-month long standoff following Chinese Army's plans to build a road in an area claimed by Bhutan.

### **World's Longest Glass Bridge Opens in China**

World's longest glass pedestrian bridge opened in Hebei Province of China on December 24, 2017.

- Length of this bridge is 488 meters, and the width is about two meters.
- The bridge connects two mountain peaks in Hunyagu in Pingshan County and is suspended at an altitude of 218 meters above the valley.
- Nearly 1077 glass panels weighing 70 tons are fitted on this bridge.
- The bridge can withstand weight of about 2000 people. However, only 500 visitors will be allowed at a time.
- Earlier, a 430-metre-long glass bridge constructed across a deep canyon in China's Zhangjiajie National Forest Park was considered as longest glass bridge.

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## **Banking & Finance**

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### **India's GDP growth may rebound to 7.5% in 2018: Nomura**

According to Japanese financial services major Nomura, Indian economy may witness a sharp recovery in the January-March 2018 quarter and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for 2018 is likely to be around 7.5 per cent.

- The above stated sharp recovery in January-March 2018 would come on account of ongoing remonetisation and improving global demand.
- For the ongoing, October – December 2017 quarter, Nomura expects India's GDP growth to rise to 6.7 per cent.
- Nomura's report has outlined that Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may tighten the monetary policy in near future in order to contain the inflationary pressures.

### **Banks lost nearly Rs 17000 crore to frauds last fiscal: Finance Ministry**

Minister of State for Finance, Shiv Pratap Shukla has informed Lok Sabha that Indian Banks lost Rs 16789 crore on account of frauds during 2016-17.

- This figure is based on fraud monitoring reports submitted by the scheduled commercial banks and select financial institutions to Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Mr. Shukla also informed that during 2016-17, several incidents of bank robbery, theft, and burglary were reported from different parts of India which involved a total amount of Rs. 65.3 crore.
- In the current fiscal, 393 such cases involving Rs 18.48 crore have been reported for the April – September 2017 period.
- In context of counterfeit notes, Minister of State for Finance, P Radhakrishnan informed that new fake currency notes of Rs 2000 and Rs 500 denomination that have been seized recently, are scanned or photocopied notes.

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## Business

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### **IndiGo becomes first Indian carrier to operate 1000 flights in a day**

On December 22, 2017, IndiGo became the first Indian carrier to operate over 1000 flights in a day across India.

- On December 22, 2017, Indigo's flight 6E 185 from Mumbai to Kochi became the 1000th flight.
- On the same day, IndiGo also took the delivery of its 31st Airbus A-320 Neo aircraft, taking its fleet size to 150 aircrafts.
- Earlier, on December 21, 2017, IndiGo had launched the first ATR flight between Hyderabad and Mangalore under Central Governments regional air connectivity scheme, UDAN.

### **Odisha recognised as 'Champion State' for exports**

Central Government has recognised Odisha as a 'Champion State' for exports recording the highest growth in exports during 2016-17.

- Exports from Odisha during 2016-17 stood at Rs 40872 crore, which marks a growth of 114% from Rs 19082 crore in 2015-16.
- According to Revealed Competitive Advantage (RCA) study done by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), Odisha has a competitive advantage vis-a-vis

other Indian states in four categories of export items viz. iron, mineral metals, chemicals and marine products.

- Commencement of exports from Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Balasore, Multi Model Logistic Parks (MMLP) at Jharsuguda and Port-side Container Terminal (PSCT) at Paradip will further boost the quantum of exports from Odisha.

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## Appointments & Resigns

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### **Jai Ram Thakur to be new Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister**

On 24th December 2017, BJP announced Jairam Thakur as the new Chief Minister (CM) of Himachal Pradesh.

- Jai Ram Thakur will take oath as Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh on 27 December 2017.
- He was an active member of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) when he was a college student. He was made ABVP state secretary in 1986.
- He joined Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) in the 1990s. He was appointed as the state BJP chief in 2006.

### **Belgium appoints world's first-ever female ambassador to Saudi Arabia**

Belgium has become the first country to send a female ambassador (Dominique Mineur) to Saudi Arabia.

- Dominique Mineur is currently Belgium's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. She will shift to Riyadh in 2018 summer.
- Saudi Arabia is one of the least gender equal countries in the world. Recently it has relaxed some of its restrictions on women.

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## Acquisitions & Mergers

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### **Amazon acquires home automation startup Blink**

E-commerce giant Amazon has acquired a startup named Blink that builds wireless home security systems.

- Blink's home security cameras were first introduced in 2016. Its key feature is the ease of set-up. As it can operate on batteries, it does not require wiring/plugging.
- This acquisition will help Amazon to create a presence in connected home video cameras market.
- Financial considerations related to this acquisition deal have yet not been disclosed.

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## Sports

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### **Shooting excluded at 2022 Commonwealth Games**

On 21st December 2017, it was announced that shooting has been excluded from the 2022 edition of Commonwealth Games.

- Shooting is listed in Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF)'s optional sports. A candidate city can include a maximum of 7 sports from that list in its final programme.
- Birmingham, which is the host city for 2022 Commonwealth games, has so far chosen judo, table tennis, wrestling, gymnastics, diving, cycling and 3v3 basketball to include apart from the mandatory sports.
- The programme will be finalised by the end of 2018. So far, India has earned one-fourth of its medals in Commonwealth Games through shooting.

### **Vijender Singh beats Ernest Amuzu, retains his WBO Oriental and Asia Pacific super middleweight titles**

On 23rd December 2017, Vijender Singh defeated Ernest Amuzu at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur for the show 'Rajasthan Rumble' and retained his WBO Oriental and Asia Pacific super middleweight titles.

- The 'Rajasthan Rumble' consisted of ten rounds. Vijender Singh won majority of the rounds out of the ten. In the final round he defeated Ghana's Ernest Amuzu.
- This is Vijender Singh's 10th consecutive victory in his professional boxing career. He is currently ranked 6th in the WBO rankings.

### **Sushil Kumar becomes the most expensive wrestler at PWL auctions**



On 23rd December 2017, Sushil Kumar became the most expensive wrestler of the PWL (Pro Wrestling League) in New Delhi.

- Delhi Sultans bought Sushil Kumar for Rs 55 lakh at the PWL auctions. He has become the most expensive player in the history of the PWL tournament.
- World Championship gold medallist Helen Maroulis of the United States got the highest bid among women players and was bought for Rs 44 lakh from Haryana Hammers.

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## Books & Authors

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### **Book on Gauri Lankesh's writings "The Way I See It" launched**

On 22nd December 2017, 'The Way I See It', a book containing writings by late journalist Gauri Lankesh was launched at the Mumbai Press Club, in Mumbai.

- "The Way I See It" is a book containing selected works of Gauri Lankesh. It has been edited by Chandan Gowda, writer and sociologist. This book has been released 3 months after Gauri Lankesh was murdered in Bengaluru.
- The book consists of six sections. It consists of early reportage of Gauri Lankesh in various publications and her articles in Kannada language.