National Current Affairs

India's first-ever broad gauge air-conditioned AC EMU suburban train flagged off in Mumbai

India's first-ever broad gauge air-conditioned AC EMU suburban train was flagged off from Borivali station on western railway in Mumbai, Maharashtra. The AC train departed from Andheri Station and reached Churchgate.

- The services of AC local train will replace existing 12 Non AC services. Out of 12 services of AC Local train 8 will run fast and will only halt at major stations.
- The first of its kind air-conditioned suburban local train local was brought to Mumbai from Integral Coach Factory, Chennai in April 2016.
- It will run on weekdays and on weekends i.e. on Saturday and Sunday it will be not operated for maintenance purpose.
- Its coaches have automatic doors, a first in the suburban system. RPF constables will be present in each coach to ensure proper security.
- It also has 'Emergency Talk Back' facility in passenger areas (four in each coach) to communicate with motorman during any emergency.
- It is also equipped with GPS-based passenger information system with audio-visual indication of stations for guard-driver and passenger communication.

BND-4201: India's first home-grown high purity gold reference standard launched

India Government Mint (IGM), a unit of Security Printing and Minting Corp of India Ltd has launched India's first home-grown high purity gold reference standard –Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya (BND-4201).

- The BND-4201 is reference material for gold of '9999' fineness (gold that is 99.99% pure with impurities of only 100 parts-per-million).
- It will be beneficial to the consumers and public at large to ensure purity of gold.
- BND-4201, the high purity gold reference standard has been developed through collaboration between IGM, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) — Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-National Physical Laboratory (New Delhi) and National Centre for Compositional Characterisation of Materials (Hyderabd).
- The gold reference standard is indispensable in gold and jewellery hall marking. This reference will also be useful for Collection and Purity Testing Centres to certify purity of gold deposits under gold monetization scheme.
- The BND-4201 standard gold bars are 25% cheaper than the imported version.

- It will also help jewellers to move towards more instrumental methods rather than conventional fire assay methods for testing purity of gold, which time consuming and non-environment friendly as poisonous gases are released.

India to link highway corridors to international trade points for Rs 25,000 crore

To facilitate trade with bordering countries like Nepal and Bangladesh, India will link its major highway corridors to international trade points at a cost of Rs 25,000 crore.

- About 2,000 kms of highways will be constructed to link major highways corridors to international trade points. This will be to facilitate trade with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- In addition to this project, Central Government is also working on plans to facilitate India's international connectivity with countries in South Asia.

States rank 50000 Gram Panchayats under Mission Antyodaya

In partnership with State Governments, Department of Rural Development has completed the ranking of 50,000 Gram Panchayats on parameters of physical infrastructure, human development and economic activities.

- 50,000 Gram Panchayats have been selected in about 5,000 clusters to drive economic activities along with development of physical infrastructure and human development on a priority.
- Public institutions like Krishi Vigyan Kendras, MSME Clusters, other Skill Development Institutions will all be involved in developing the fullest potential of these clusters for enhancing productive employment and economic activities.
- Over the next 1000 days, Central Government along with other supporting entities will resort to several interventions in order to bring about desired result.

Bengaluru becomes first city to get its own logo

Based on a crowd-sourced design, a logo was unveiled on Sunday at the 'Namma Bengaluru Habba' fest to promote 'Brand Bengaluru' on the global tourist map.

- The city is the first to gets its own identity badge. With a new identify and a new look, Bengaluru joins New York, Paris, Berlin, London, Melbourne, Singapore and other global cities in having its own tourism logo.
- Selected from 1,350 entries, the logo aims to signify Bengaluru's cosmopolitan culture, a sense of belonging, 480-year history and futuristic outlook.
- The logo would be used to enhance tourism in Karnataka.

Karnataka's Tirthahalli taluk under grip of monkey fever again

Karnataka's Tirthahalli taluk has come under the grip of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever.

- So far, five positive cases, including one death, have been reported in humans.
- Moreover, deaths of 5 monkeys were reported in the forest of Ghantejanagallu near Suruvinakoppa village.
- In 2016-17, four persons died of KFD in Tirthahalli and 48 positive cases were reported.

Reservoir computing system developed to help machines to think just like humans

Scientists from University of Michigan in US have developed a new type of neural network chip using reservoir computing system to improve efficiency of teaching machines to think like humans.

- The network developed using this system can predict words before they are said during conversation and help predict future outcomes based on the present.
- The system has been inspired by brains, neural networks are composed of neurons, or nodes, and synapses, the connections between nodes.
- It was developed using memristors, a special type of resistive device that can both perform logic and store data..
- The system used a special memristor that memorises events only in near history. ...
- The system was proved to be functional using test of handwriting recognition, a common benchmark among neural networks.
- Only 88 memristors were used in the system as compared to conventional network that requires thousands for the task and achieved 91% accuracy....

Banking & Finance

Public sector banks' NPA hits Rs 7.34 lakh crore at September-end

According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) of Indian public sector banks stood at Rs 7.34 lakh crore by the end of September 2017.

- NPAs of private sector banks' at the end of September 2017 was considerably low at Rs 1.03 lakh crore.
- Data released by RBI outlined that major portion (77%) of NPAs was on account of corporate defaulters.

- Union Finance Ministry has stated that it has resorted to several measures to tackle this problem. One such measure is expansion of network of Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs).

Insurers can now set up units at IFSC SEZs

Insurers and reinsurers can now set up facilities at IFSC Special Economic Zones (SEZ), as per IRDAI's (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India) new guidelines on International Financial Service Centre Insurance Offices (IIO).

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Registration and Operations of International Financial Service Centre Insurance Offices) Guidelines, 2017 was issued on December 21, 2017.
- As per these guidelines, IIO means a branch office to transact direct insurance business or reinsurance business permitted by the regulator.
- These guidelines are for both Indian and foreign insurers and reinsurers, registered as IIO with IRDAI. They can do direct insurance business or reinsurance business transactions or both.
- The aim of IIO should be carrying out insurance or reinsurance business exclusively from an IFSC (International Financial Services Centre). All the transactions with respect to insurance or reinsurance business should be only in foreign currency.

Maharashtra tops in GST collection in first five months

Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh are top contributors among states and Union Territories in the first five months since the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime in July 1, 2017.

- The data was revealed by Minister of State (MoS) for Finance Shiv Pratap Shukla in reply to a question in Lok Sabha.
- Maharashtra tops SGST collections with Rs 18,701 crore. Tamil Nadu is at the second spot with Rs 8,739 crore collection followed by Karnataka and Gujarat with SGST collections of Rs 7,736 crore and Rs 7,375 crore, respectively.
- Maharashtra garnered Rs 3,702 crore and Uttar Pradesh collected Rs 3,549 crore through cess levied on sin and luxury goods. Karnataka ranks third with ccess collection of Rs 3,110 crore.
- Rs 1.91 lakh crore has been collected as IGST. Out of the total IGST collection, Rs 90,038 crore has been collected through imports.

Appointments & Resigns

Saba Karim appointed as General Manager of BCCI

Former wicketkeeper of India Saba Karim (50) was appointed as the new General Manager (GM) of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

- He will report directly to BCCI CEO Rahul Johri.
- In his new administrative role, Saba Karim will be responsible for implementing operational plans, budgeting, monitoring the match playing conditions and administration of Domestic program.

Awards & Recognition

Sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik creates world's biggest sand Santa face at Puri beach

On 24th December 2017, Sudarsan Pattnaik, international sand artist, created the world's biggest sand Santa-face with the message "world peace" at Puri beach, Odisha.

- The sand Santa face is 25 feet tall and 50 feet wide. It is to be placed in the Limca Book of World Records.
- Sudarsan Pattnaik also created a sand sculpture of Jesus Christ in front of the Santa face. He used around 600 tonnes of sand.
- Sudarsan Pattnaik was supported by 40 students from the Sudarsan Sand Art Institute of Puri. The work was completed in 3 days (35 hours). This structure will be on display till January 1, 2018.

Science & Technology

AG600: World's largest amphibious aircraft takes off

China's home-grown AG600, also known as 'Kunlong', the world's largest amphibious aircraft took off took off from the southern city of Zhuhai and landed after roughly an hour-long flight.

- Its successful maiden flight makes China among the world's few countries capable of developing a large amphibious aircraft.
- It also further strengthens China's rapidly modernising military.
- The AG600 amphibious aircraft can land and take off from water. It has wingspan of 38.8 metres. It is powered by four turboprop engines.
- The aircraft has military applications but will be also used for firefighting and marine rescue.
- Its flight capabilities put all of China's artificial island-building projects in disputed South China Sea (SCS) well within its range.

LKW-2: China successfully launches second Land Surveying Satellite

China has successfully launched its second Land Surveying Satellite LKW-2 (also known as Yaogan Weixing-32) into a preset orbit from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in the Gobi desert.

- The satellite will be used for remote sensing exploration of land resources.
- It was launched on board of Long March-2D rocket. It was 259th mission of the Long March rocket series.
- The LKW-2 has been developed by China Academy of Space Technology (CAST).
- It is probably an electro-optical observation satellite based on the military Jianbing-6 series.

Sports

India finish runners-up in SAFF U15 Women's Championship (football)

On 24th December 2017, India lost against Bangladesh in the final and became runners-up of the SAFF U15 Women's Championship in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

- India was defeated by Bangladesh 1-0 in the finals of the SAFF U15 Women's Championship. Earlier, India had lost to Bangladesh 3-0 in the group stage of the championship.
- The match was very closely fought. In the 41st minute the goal hit by Shamsun Nahar made the difference and India emerged as runners-up.

Important Days

December 25: Good Governance Day

The Good Governance Day (GGD) is celebrated every year in India on December 25 to mark the birthday anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

- The day was established by Central Government in 2014 to honour Vajpayee by fostering awareness among the people of accountability in government.
- It aims to make people aware about government commitment for providing a transparent and accountable administration in the country.
- It is also celebrated to enhance the welfare and betterment of the people.
- It is celebrated to standardise government functioning and make it highly effective and accountable governance for the citizens of the country.
- It also seeks to implement good and effective policies to complete mission of good governance in India.
- It also seeks to enhance growth and development in the country through good governance.
- It also strives to bring citizens closer to government to make them active participants in good governance process.