

National Current Affairs

AIM selects an additional 1,500 schools for setting up Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs)

NITI Aayog has selected an additional 1,500 schools for setting up Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) under the government's flagship programme Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) taking the total number of such labs to 2,441.

- The addition of these schools will give a major boost to realise the vision of the mission.
- With this announcement, AIM has selected 2,441 schools across India to establish ATLs to date since it began its operations over a year ago.
- The 2,441 schools have been selected from over 25,000 applications till date from two rounds of application.
- ATLs are innovation play workspaces for students between class six to twelve, stimulating innovations combining science and technology.
- Their aim is to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in schools, universities and industry with a vision to "cultivate one million children in India as the innovators of tomorrow

25th National Children Science Congress held in Gujarat

The 25th edition of National Children Science Congress (NCSC-2017) was held Gandhinagar, Gujarat from 27 to 31 December, 2017.

- The theme of the five-day Congress this was 'Science and Innovation for Sustainable Development' with the special focus on persons with disabilities.
- The NCSC is ideal and innovative programme for children to inspire, empower and expand their minds to world.
- It is a flagship programme of department of Science & Technology, Union Ministry of Science and Technology.

India's first pod taxi to follow US safety norms

The five-member committee set up for technical and safety standards of India's first pod taxi project or Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) has invited fresh bids for strictest safety standards on lines of those prescribed in US.

- In this regard, the committee has recommended issuance of fresh EOI (expression of interest) incorporating automated people mover (APM) standards and specifications

in US, along with other general safety parameters with recommendations of NITI Aayog.

- The pilot project will be taken up on design, build, finance, operate and transfer (DBFOT) basis i.e. on PPP (public-private partnership) basis.
- It is meant for a 12.3-km stretch from Delhi-Haryana border on NH 8 (near Ambience Mall) to Badshahpur via Rajiv Chowk, IFFCO and Sohna Road.
- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has been mandated to execute this project.
- The model is in place in London's Heathrow airport, Morgantown and Masdar city.
- PRT or pod taxi is an advanced public transport using automated electric pod cars to provide taxi-like demand responsive feeder and shuttle services for small groups of travellers. It is a green mode of uninterrupted transportation.

Centre releases Rs 167 crore to 9 states for border development

The Home Ministry has released Rs 167 crore to nine states with international border for the development of infrastructure in forward areas

- The states which will benefit include Rajasthan and Punjab, both having international border with Pakistan, and West Bengal and Assam, which share boundary with Bangladesh.
- The fully centrally funded BADP programme covers all villages which are located within 0-10 km of the International Border in 17 states.
- However, priority is given to those villages which are identified by border guarding forces for speedy development of infrastructure.
- The schemes permissible under the BADP include activities relating to the cleanliness mission, skill development programmes, promotion of sports activities, promotion of rural tourism, border tourism and protection of heritage sites.

Odisha to split tourism & culture dept, promote Odia language

In a move to spread and preserve history and culture of Odisha and enrich the Odia language further, the Odisha Government decided to set up a 'heritage cabinet' to be headed by chief minister Naveen Patnaik.

- It was decided that the culture department will be separated from the tourism and culture department and renamed as 'Odia Language, Literature and Culture' department.
- The government also decided to set up a 'Heritage Cabinet' to protect the monuments, ancient temples and take steps to preserve the state's culture, language and literature.
- All shops and business establishments in the state will have to display signboards in Odia language within a stipulated timeframe for which Odisha Shops and Commercial

Establishment rules, 1956 would be amended. There would be provision for punishment in case of violation of this rule.

- World Odia Language Conference would be organised every five years and the fees would be waived for students pursuing Odia course at the graduation and post-graduation levels.

Air Force team conquers Seven Summits

The Indian Air Force flag now flies high at the tallest peaks of all continents after a team of its mountaineers completed the challenging Seven Summits expedition with the scaling of Mount Vinson in Antarctica

- The Seven Summits is a well-known mountaineering goal comprising the tallest peaks of the seven continents -- Mount Everest (8848m) in Asia, Mount Aconcagua (6962m) in South America, Mount Denali (6190m) in North America, Mount Kilimanjaro (5895m) in Africa, Mount Elbrus (5642m) in Europe, Mount Vinson (4897m) in Antarctica, and Carstensz Pyramid (4884 metres) in Australasia.
- With the successful ascent of Mt Vinson, the IAF added another feather to its cap, by becoming the first organisation in India to achieve this unique feat.
- The expedition to Mt Vinson was flagged off by IAF chief Air Chief Marshal B S Dhanoa on December 8, 2017.

Government, World Bank ink loan agreement for Tamil Nadu Irrigated Agriculture Modernization Project

- The Union Government, Tamil Nadu Government and World Bank have signed \$318 million dollar loan agreement for the Tamil Nadu Irrigated Agriculture Modernization Project.
- The \$318 million loan from World Bank's lending arm International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has maturity of 19 years with 5-year grace period.
- The project aims to promote climate resilient agriculture technologies, improve water management practices, and increase market opportunities for small and marginal farmers.
- It will rehabilitate and modernize about 4,800 irrigation tanks and 477 check dams, spread across 66 sub-basins, in delivering bulk water to irrigation systems.
- It will benefit about 5 lakh farmers of which majority are small and marginal from improved and modernized tank irrigation systems.
- This project will help Tamil Nadu to scale up its efforts to unlock full potential of its agriculture sector.

- It will support farmers from water stressed state to improve efficiency of water used in farming, diversify into high value crops, and produce crops that are resilient to increasing threats of climate change.

International sweet festival is coming to Hyderabad

Telangana Tourism is planning to hold a mammoth inter-State sweet festival where the most popular delicacies from each State will be offered in various varieties.

- Sweet stalls at the festival will be categorised not by the name of the State but by the kind of the sweet being offered.
- No sweets made by hotels will be offered at the festival. Only sweets prepared in homes by families will be presented.
- Sweets from foreign countries will also be presented alongside the Indian delicacies.

International Current Affairs

India to become fifth largest economy in 2018: Report

According to recently released report titled 2018 World Economic League Table, India is set to overtake the United Kingdom and France to become the world's fifth largest economy in 2018.

- The report was released by Centre for Economics and Business Research, an economics consultancy based in Britain.
- India currently ranked seventh will overtake UK and France to become the world's fifth largest economy in 2018 in US dollar terms and further move to third spot by 2032.
- Indian economy had hit three-year low in the first quarter of the current financial year 2017 due to demonetisation i.e. scraping high-value banknotes and implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- The growth had slumped to 5.7% for quarter ending June 2016 but had recovered slightly to 6.3% for quarter ending September 2017.
- Despite temporary setbacks, India's economy still caught up with that of France and UK and in 2018 will overtake them.

Banking & Finance

Finance Ministry to issue recapitalisation bonds to PSBs in January

The Ministry of Finance is likely to issue the first tranche of recapitalisation bonds to public sector banks (PSB) in early January

- The recapitalisation bonds will not be sold in open market and will be issued to all banks
- Apart from this, the government will also infuse capital worth Rs 8,000 crore on the basis of performance.
- The government plans to infuse capital of Rs 76,000 crore by giving it space in budgetary allocation and through markets, and the rest Rs 1.35 lakh crore by issuing recapitalisation bonds.

SLCM ties up with HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank for collateral management

Sohan Lal Commodity Management (SLCM) said it has tied up with HDFC Bank and IndusInd Bank to provide collateral management services.

- This tie-up will help improve the farmers' access to post-harvest credits at affordable interest rates and also provide easy access to scientific storage facilities leading to a fair price discovery of their products in the market.
- SLCM will leverage its proprietary (patent pending) technology 'Agri Reach' and support both these banks towards offering more efficient post-harvest credit and storage service to farmers, millers and other stakeholders in the agriculture sector

Rajasthan govt sets up Automatic service ATMs at nearly 9900 Atal Seva Kendras

Rajasthan government is setting up Automatic service ATMs 'E-Mitra Plus' at nearly 9 thousand 9 hundred Atal Seva Kendras and 2500 urban locations situated across the state.

- Rajasthan has a network of over 48 thousand e-mitra centers running successfully across the state for a quarter of India's total common service centers.
- E-plus is a more advance system with completely human-less interface, which has linked with AADHAR and has provision for payment by cash and card.
- The e-Mitra network enables over 60 lakh transactions every month with turnover of about 700 crore rupees

IDBI Bank disengages Moody's from rating bonds

State-owned IDBI Bank on Tuesday said it has disengaged Moody's Investors Services (Moody's) to rate its bond programmes.

- Upon reviewing the rating engagements with various foreign rating agencies, IDBI Bank has decided to terminate all the rating contracts/engagements with Moody's Investors Services (Moody's) for various issues made under the MTN (medium term note) Bond Programme.
- Earlier in August, Moody's had downgraded the foreign currency senior unsecured MTN programme rating of IDBI and its DIFC branch to (P)B1 from (P)Ba2.
- The global ratings firm had also downgraded the bank's local and foreign currency bank deposit ratings to B1 from Ba2 citing reasons that the lender remains significantly under-capitalised and that government's capital infusions have been insufficient to repair the bank's balance sheet

Lendingkart raises Rs25 crore debt from State Bank of India

Lendingkart has raised Rs25 crore in debt from State Bank of India (SBI), a first for the country's largest public sector lender vis-a-vis a digital lending start-up.

- Lendingkart said the Rs25 crore loan is in the form of cash credit facility which essentially allows the company to draw the amount over separate tranches as and when it needs it.
- SBI's investment captures the push by banks across India—not only those in the private sector but also those in the public sector—to reach more borrowers by backing technology-enabled lending companies.
- This year, Lendingkart got two private sector banks—Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd and Yes Bank Ltd—on board as lenders.
- Lendingkart represents a group of start-ups that includes Capital Float, Neogrowth and IndiaLends, that offer small ticket-size loans, mostly unsecured credit, to borrowers with limited credit history.
- Lendingkart focuses on credit to SMEs for working capital and business needs. Its Lendingkart Finance unit raises money from the market from time to time and then lends to borrowers.

Business

Commercial flight nod for made-in-India plane

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation + (DGCA) has allowed Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL)-manufactured Dornier 228 to be used for civilian flights.

- The 19-seater aircraft has, till now, been used by defence forces and is the first plane to be made in the country for commercial flights.
- The DGCA has given type certification to this aircraft and also given certificate of airworthiness to HAL's Dornier 228.
- Now, HAL can sell this plane to airlines in India and it can be used by them for regional flights under the Modi's government's ambitious UDAN scheme.

Appointments & Resigns

Jai Ram Thakur sworn in as 14th Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh

BJP's five-time MLA Jai Ram Thakur (52) was sworn in as the 14th Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

- Along with him 11 other Ministers were also sworn in.
- Thakur is a veteran politician who earlier had served as Rural Development and Panchayati Raj minister in Prem Kumar Dhumal's government from 2008 to 2012.
- He was also BJP Himachal Pradesh unit chief from 2006 to 2009.

IPS officer Abhay appointed DG of Narcotics Control Bureau

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has appointed senior IPS officer Abhay as new Director General of Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).

- He will have tenure till November 18, 2019.
- The post was lying vacant after R R Bhatnagar took over as DG of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in April this year.
- He is at present working in CRPF.

Kerala cabinet selects Paul Antony as chief secy

The state cabinet, on Tuesday, decided to appoint Paul Antony, a 1983-batch officer, as the next chief secretary of the state.

- He will replace KM Abraham, who will retire from service on Saturday.
- Abraham has been appointed as the chairman of Kerala State Innovation council.

- He will continue to be the CEO of KIIFB after retirement. Antony, the additional chief secretary in charge of power and industries departments, will hold the office for six months.
- He too will retire from service on till June 31.

Science & Technology

NISAR: ISRO, NASA jointly working Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar Imaging Satellite

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) of NASA are jointly working on the development of NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR), a Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar Imaging Satellite.

- NISAR is a dual frequency (L & S Band) Radar Imaging Satellite.
- It will be the first radar imaging satellite to use dual frequency.
- It will be the world's most expensive earth-imaging satellite till date, costing around \$1.5 billion.
- It aims to study global environmental change and natural disasters.
- It will be launched using GSLV in year 2021. It will have mission life of 3 years.

China successfully launches remote sensing satellites of Yaogan-30 project

China has successfully launched remote sensing satellites to conduct electromagnetic environmental probes.

- They are part of third batch of the Yaogan-30 project.
- The number of launched satellites was not disclosed.
- They launched on board of Long March-2C carrier rocket from Xichang Satellite launch centre in the southwest Sichuan province. It was the 260th mission of the Long March rocket family.
- Yaogan-30 is Remote Sensing Satellite programme of China. The electro-optical digital imaging satellites developed under it by China Academy of Space Technology (CAST).

Russia launches telecoms satellite for Angola

- Russia on Tuesday launched a rocket carrying Angosat-1, the first national telecoms satellite for Angola, from its Baikonur space pad, with rare use of a rocket from Ukraine despite collapsed ties between the two nations.
- The Zenit-2SB rocket carrying Angosat to orbit was supplied by Ukrainian maker Yuzhmash, making the launch a rare joint project between the two countries since 2014, when Moscow annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.
- The Angosat project was agreed by Russia and Angola in 2009 and includes the satellite, its launch, and on-ground infrastructure in a suburb of the capital Luanda.
- The satellite is designed for a 15-year mission to boost satellite communications, Internet access, radio and TV service.

Obituary

The creator of Bugs Bunny, Bob Givens, passes away at 99

Bob Givens, one of the animators behind designing the iconic characters Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd, died at the age of 99.

- Givens put his illustrator stamp on characters like Tom and Jerry, Daffy Duck, Alvin and the Chipmunks, and Popeye.
- He also brought his skills to TV advertising, animating cartoon insects for Raid bug-killer commercials.
- He's also known for his work as a storyboard artist on the TV series Linus! The Lion Hearted and as a graphic designer on the show Baggy Pants and the Nitwits.