

# National Current Affairs

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## **Parliament passes Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second Amendment Bill, 2017**

The Parliament has passed National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second Amendment Bill, 2017. It seeks to amend National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second Act, 2011.

- The Bill extends deadline for relocating slum dwellers and Jhuggi-Jhopri clusters, regulating street vendors, regularising unauthorised colonies, village abadi areas in NCT Delhi and calls for creating policy for farm houses constructed beyond permissible limits.
- The Bill seeks to extend deadline up to December 31, 2020.
- It deletes provisions and references related to regulation and protection of street vendors.
- It is mainly due to overlapping provision in Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 enacted in February 2014.
- The bill extends deadline wrt to no action will be taken by any local authority for various violations mentioned in parent act to December 31, 2020.

## **Lok Sabha passes GST (Compensation to States) Amendment Bill, 2017**

The Lok Sabha has passed the Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Amendment Bill, 2017. The Bill amends the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017 and replaces an Ordinance promulgated in September 2017.

- The amendment bill increases maximum rate at which Compensation Cess can be levied from 15 to 25% on motor vehicle for transport of not more than 13 persons (mostly luxury vehicles), including the driver and motor vehicles falling under mentioned sub-headings.
- The purpose this law is to provide compensation to state for a period of five years from the date on which the state brings its State GST Act into force.
- It allows the Union Government to notify rate of the GST Compensation Cess on items such as pan masala, coal, aerated drinks, and tobacco, subject to certain caps.
- The amount received by levying GST Compensation Cess is used to compensate states for any loss in revenue following the implementation of GST.

## **Parliament passes Indian Institute of Petroleum & Energy Bill, 2017**

The Parliament has passed The Indian Institute of Petroleum and Energy (IIPE) Bill, 2017 after it was adopted by Rajya Sabha. Lok Sabha already had passed the bill in August 2017.

- The Bill establishes the IIPE at Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh as an institution of national importance.
- The IIPE aims to provide high quality education and research focussing on all aspects and themes of petroleum, hydrocarbons and energy.
- It will actively pursue research and development in the fields such as liquefied natural gas, biofuels and renewables.
- The bill set ups key authorities for governance and management of IIPE. They are General Council, Board of Governors, Senate; and any other authorities declared by statutes.
- The Institute funding includes funds that it receives from central government, fees and money received from any other sources (grants and gifts).
- Its accounts will be audited by Comptroller and Auditor- General (CAG) of India.

### **Lok Sabha passes Triple talaq Bill**

The Lok Sabha passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriages) Bill 2017 declaring instant triple talaq illegal and criminalises it with up to three years in jail for the husband. The bill will now will be sent to the Rajya Sabha for passage before it is forwarded to the President for assent to come into force as law.

- The Bill makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form (text message, email etc) to be void and illegal i.e. not enforceable in law.
- It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by Muslim husband resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce to his wife.
- It refers Talaq-e-biddat to practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by Muslim husband to his wife results in instant and irrevocable divorce.
- It makes declaration of talaq a cognizable and non-bailable offence.
- It entitles Muslim woman against whom triple talaq has been declared to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children.

### **President inaugurates Andhra Pradesh Fiber Grid Project**

President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated Andhra Pradesh Fibre Grid project, aimed at providing affordable high-speed internet service to every household in the state at a nominal rate.

- Fibre Grid project also termed as Triple Play2 Services envisages to provide internet, television and telephone services to more than one lakh households in the state at a nominal price.
- The Fibre Grid project aims to connect over 1.45 crore households, 60000 schools, 12198 Panchayats, 10000 government offices, 670 mandal Offices, 96 municipalities, 14 corporations, 6000 Public Health Centres (PHCs) with high speed internet.
- The internet services provided under this project will be available at very high speed of 15Mbps to 100Mbps, television services will provide infotainment with 250 plus channels and telephone services will be completely rental-free.
- It will also power digital classrooms in over 4,000 government schools and offer telemedicine services at over 6,000 public health centres.
- It will power the smart cities initiative.

### **President Kovind inaugurates 100th Indian Economic Association conference**

In 27th December, President Ramnath Kovind inaugurated the 100th Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association at Acharya Nagarjuna University in Guntur of Andhra Pradesh.

- The event will be held for four days.
- Indian Economic Association is a registered body of Indian economic professionals, established way back in 1917, with the objective of providing a forum for debate and discussion of policy-oriented issues.
- The Association currently has 5000 plus members, both individual and institutional.

### **Indian Science Congress to be held in March in Imphal**

The 2018 edition of the historic Indian Science Congress will be held at Manipur University, Imphal, in March.

- The event was scheduled at the Osmania University (OU), Hyderabad, in the first week of January but had to be moved out due to “security problems.”
- The choice of venue is usually decided a year in advance and the massive logistical exercise involves coordinating the visit of several Nobel Laureates, heads of Indian science academies and thousands of students.
- In recent years, the Science Congress has also got flak for being a forum that promoted pseudo science, such as in 2014, when a session on mythology and Vedic-era airplanes was a highlight.

### **All Trains To Have Bio-Toilets By March 2019**

The government plans to complete the work of installing bio-toilets in all passenger trains by March 2019.

- All railway workshops have been instructed to compulsorily install bio-toilets in all existing in-service eligible coaches undergoing mid-life rehabilitation and periodical overhaul.
- Retro-fitment of bio-toilets in existing in-service coaches is also being done to a limited extent in coaching depots.
- Approximately 55 per cent of the total passenger carrying coaches over Indian Railways have been equipped with bio-toilets.

### **6th Global Kokan Festival promoting development of Konkan Region to begin in Mumbai**

Kokan Bhumi Pratishthan is back with the 6th edition of Global Kokan Festival to be held at CIDCO Exhibition and Convention Center, Vashi, Navi Mumbai from 6th Jan 2018 - 10th Jan 2018.

- The event to be held from 6th Jan to 10th Jan 2018 will attract around 3-4 Lakh visitors over the period of five days.
- Make In Kokan Campaign under Make in India is being started at the Global Kokan Fest for the benefit of youth and businesses in Konkan with the co-operation of various departments.
- The idea behind organizing the 6th Global Kokan Fest is to promote Kokan tourism on global map, boost reverse migration and starting a mega youth entrepreneurship drive in the Kokan region.

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## **International Current Affairs**

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### **India and Afghanistan launch 2nd air cargo route linking Kabul with Mumbai**

The second India-Afghanistan air cargo route linking Kabul to Mumbai was officially inaugurated at Hamid Karzai international airport in Kabul.

- It is expected to boost export of fresh fruits and medicinal plants from Afghanistan.
- The launch of second route follows the success of the first air corridor between both countries linking Kabul-New Delhi that was inaugurated by President Ashraf Ghani in June 2017.

- This development has assumed significance at backdrop of Pakistan's denial to use its land for trade between India and Afghanistan.
- The air freight corridor will be used by private sector in Afghanistan to increase its exports to vast Indian market by air with minimum costs.
- It will also enable the traders to circumvent the obstacles posed by Pakistan in the land route.

### **India provides medical assistance to Yemen**

India on Wednesday provided medical assistance worth about \$1 million to Yemen in response to a request from the Yemeni government.

- As part of its commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to Yemen, India has been a member of the 'Friends of Yemen' Group.
- India has earlier extended medical assistance to Yemen in April 2015.
- Additionally, India provided food assistance in the form of rice and wheat, each worth \$2 million in August 2012 and March 2013, respectively.

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## **Banking & Finance**

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### **Paytm becomes India's first payments app to cross 100 mn downloads**

India's largest mobile-first financial services platform, Paytm on Wednesday announced that its app has crossed the 100 million milestone on Google Play Store in the second week of December 2017.

- This makes Paytm the country's first payments app to cross the 100 million downloads mark.
- Paytm is charting the next chapter of its growth from being a pioneer in mobile payments to becoming a mobile-first financial services company, which offers banking, lending, insurance, and payments.
- The platform allows users to do online recharges and bill payments, book movie tickets, do travel bookings among others.

### **United Nations cuts budget by \$286 million**

The UN has approved a \$286 million cut in its annual budget for the next year, a 5% “historic reduction in spending.

- The General Assembly on Sunday approved the regular budget of \$5.397 billion for 2018-2019.
- The amount sets the budget level around \$286 million (or 5%) below the final approved level for 2016- 2017, and \$193 million below the initially proposed budget level for 2018-2019, including all “add-ons”.
- The additional reductions come mainly from across-the- board cuts in non-post resources for most Departments and Offices, including the Special Political Missions.

### **Small savings schemes’ interest rates cut by 20 bps**

The government slashed interest rates on small savings schemes, including NSC and PPF, by 0.2 percentage point for the January-March period from the rates applicable in the previous quarter, a move that will prompt banks to lower deposit rates.

- At the same time, investments in the five-year Senior Citizens Savings Scheme has been retained at 8.3 per cent.
- Rates have been reduced across the board for schemes such as National Savings Certificate (NSC), Sukanya Samriddhi Account, Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP) and Public Provident Fund (PPF). However, interest on savings deposits has been retained at 4 per cent annually.
- As per the notification, PPF and NSC will fetch a lower annual rate of 7.6 per cent while KVP will yield 7.3 per cent and mature in 11 months.
- The girl child savings scheme Sukanya Samriddhi Account will offer 8.1 per cent from existing 8.3 per cent annually.

### **India ranks 5th in list of countries with highest NPA levels**

As per the report by CARE Ratings, India has the highest level of non-performing assets (NPA) among BRICS countries and is ranked fifth on a list of countries with the highest levels of NPAs.

- The only countries ranked higher than India on the list are Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Ireland.
- All these countries, along with Spain, are commonly referred to as PIIGS, and have been victims of sovereign debt crises in recent years.
- Spain is the only PIIGS country ranked lower than India on the list, with an NPA ratio of 5.28 percent. At 9.85 percent, India’s NPA ratio is over 400 basis points higher.

### **SBI gets board okay to raise Rs 8,000 crore to comply Basel III**

The country's largest lender SBI said its board has approved raising Rs 8,000 crore through various sources, including masala bonds, to meet Basel III capital norms.

- The Central Board at its meeting held accorded approval to raise additional tier 1 (AT 1) capital by way of issuance of Basel III compliant debt instruments in USD and/or INR to the tune of Rs 8,000 crore from domestic/international market including masala bonds
- State Bank of India (SBI) said it has time limit till March 2018 to raise the funds.
- Banks in India have to comply with the global capital norms under Basel III by March 2019, three months later than the internationally agreed time frame by January 2019.

### **Bank of Baroda, Poorti tie up**

Bank of Baroda has entered into a MoU with Poorti Agri Services to help farmers buy agricultural inputs like fertilizers, seeds and pesticides.

- Poorti is a platform for online ordering and rural transformation where buyers and sellers of agricultural inputs meet and carry out trade.
- The tie-up with Bank of Baroda will help it to offer its services in a seamless manner to the farmers and agriculturists visiting the platform.
- The bank will work jointly with Poorti and make the digital platform for farmers more purposeful so that the farmers can buy agri inputs online through payment gateway of the bank.

### **Sebi puts 10% cross-shareholding cap on mutual funds**

To avoid any potential conflict of interest, markets regulator Sebi decided to put a 10 per cent cross-shareholding cap in mutual funds.

- The new measure may have an impact on the shareholding pattern of UTI Asset Management Company (AMC), requiring its promoters to lower their stake to 10 per cent or below in next one year.
- The board of Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has decided that any shareholder owning at least 10 per cent stake in an AMC will not be allowed to have 10 per cent or more stake in another mutual fund house operating in the country.
- Further, a sponsor of a mutual fund, its associates, group company and its asset management company will be restricted from holding 10 per cent or more stake in a rival AMC.
- In addition, such entities will be barred from having a representation on the board of another mutual fund house.



### **SBI Bank Cheque Books Turn Invalid From December 31**

As against the earlier proposed deadline of September 30, 2017, customers of the erstwhile banks which from the start of the FY 18 merged with State Bank of India need to apply for fresh cheque books bearing new IFSC code by December 31, 2017 as the previously issued cheque books will stand invalid.

- The list of banks includes Bhartiya Mahila Bank, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur (SBBJ), State Bank of Patiala, State Bank of Raipur, State Bank of Hyderabad and State Bank of Travancore.
- Earlier the bank has also changed branch name, codes and IFSC codes for several of its branches in major cities including Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kolkata amongst others.

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## **Business**

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### **Maruti Suzuki, Delhi Government To Develop Automated Driving Test Tracks**

The Delhi government will sign a pact with Maruti Suzuki India Limited tomorrow for developing 12 automated driving test tracks in different parts of the city.

- With the coming up of the automated tracks, the process of issuing driving licenses by Motor Licencing Officers (MLOs) will assume greater quality and accuracy.
- The first automated track is expected to be launched around January 26 next year at Saray Kale Khan.
- The tracks equipped with cameras and sensors will cost around Rs 1 crore each and will be spread, on an average, across one acre land.
- The tracks will be developed at the transport department's facilities in Hauz Khas, Burari, Jharoda Kalan, Dwarka, Mayur Vihar, Pratap Nagar, Surajmal Vihar, Loni Border, Rohini, Raja Garden and Shakoor Basti.

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## **Environment**

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### **New species of blind fish discovered inside Meghalaya cave**



A new species of blind fish has been discovered inside a cave in East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya.

- The fish -- Schistura larketensis -- gets its name from Larket village, where the cave has been found, the journal.
- The species has apparently lost its sight living in the perpetual darkness inside the cave. It has also lost its pigments too while adapting to its habitat in the dark waters.

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## Science & Technology

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### **Prithvi supersonic interceptor missile successfully test fired**

Indigenously developed Prithvi Advanced Air Defence (AAD) supersonic interceptor missile was successfully test-fired from a test range in Odisha.

- It is capable of destroying any incoming ballistic missile in low altitude.
- The target missile Prithvi interceptor AAD missile was launched from launch complex 3 of Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur in Odisha.
- After getting signals by tracking radars the missile directed its trajectory to destroy hostile target missile in mid-air in an endo-atmospheric altitude.
- The Prithvi interceptor is a 7.5-meter long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile.
- It is equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and electro-mechanical activator.

### **Shri Radha Mohan Singh launches Livestock Disease Forewarning –Mobile Application (LDF-Mobile App)**

Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister, Shri Radha Mohan Singh launched Livestock Disease Forewarning –Mobile Application (LDF-Mobile App), developed by ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (ICAR-NIVEDI), Bengaluru, in New Delhi.

- ICAR-NIVEDI has identified 13 priority diseases based on their past incidence patterns and has built a strong database of these diseases and has been providing monthly livestock disease alerts to the state and central animal husbandry departments.
- To widen its reach, ICAR-NIVEDI developed the app and used Monthly Bulletin system to send out early warning.

- Apart from early warning, the app will also provide information about clinical samples for the diagnosis in case of the epidemic so that immediate action in case of the epidemic. This app works on all kind of Android smartphones and takes up 2.5 MB space.

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## Awards & Recognition

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### **K S Chitra bags 'Harivarasanam' award**

Veteran singer K S Chitra has been selected for this year's prestigious 'Harivarasanam' award, instituted by the Kerala government.

- Chitra has been selected for the award in recognition of her contribution to propagate the spirit of secularism, equanimity and universal brotherhood.
- She was selected by a jury headed by Sabarimala high-power committee chairman Justice (ret) S Sirijagan.
- Singers K J Yesudas, M Jayachandran, S P Balasubramanyam, Gangai Amaran and M G Sreekumar are among earlier winners of the award instituted in 2012.

### **Anushka Sharma Named PETA's Person Of The Year**

Newlywed actor Anushka Sharma has been named PETA's Person of the Year by animal rights organisation People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

- Known for movies like PK, Jab Tak Hai Jaan and Ae Dil Hai Mushkil, Anushka is a vegetarian, has nabbed the title for helping to protect dogs from fireworks to advocating for horses who are forced to pull carriages in Mumbai.
- Some of her recent efforts to protect animals include launching her cruelty-free NUSH clothing line, visiting an animal shelter and promoting its work on her social media platforms, launching a campaign called PAWsitive to raise awareness of the suffering fireworks cause to animals, and taking to Twitter to demand a ban on cruel carriage rides in Mumbai.

### **Noted writer Ramendra Kumar felicitated in Sri Lanka**

Noted writer Ramendra Kumar, whose stories feature in Sri Lankan text books, has been felicitated in the neighbouring country for his contribution to childrens literature.

- Kumar is an award-winning writer with 32 books to his credit.

- His writings have been translated into 14 Indian and 13 foreign languages and have found a place in school text books and anthology also in India and abroad.
- Since 2011, Ramendras stories have been included in school text books brought out by the Sri Lanka government every year.
- The books are distributed to over 10,000 schools across the country.

### **Prince Harry becomes President of African Parks**

Prince Harry, his Royal Highness had been appointed as President of African Parks – a conservation non-profit.

- In his new role, Harry will assist in protecting African Parks' mission to protect the continent's national parks.
- In addition, his role will also have him help in the advancement of African wildlife conservation and conservation of wildlife throughout the world.
- Prince Harry, who has worked with African Parks since last year and has visited southern African several times, has a "deep personal interest" in African frontline conservation projects working to protect the area's natural heritage, as well as supporting local communities and wildlife

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## **Sports**

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### **Anisa Sayyed wins women's 25m pistol gold**

Experienced Haryana shooter Anisa Sayyed won the women's 25m pistol gold with a new record at the ongoing 61st National Shooting Championship Competitions (61st NSCC).

- Anisa shot a new finals national record score of 33 to prevail over the Maharashtra duo of Shital Shivaji Thorat and Rahi Sarnobat, who won the silver and bronze medals respectively at the National Games Shooting Range.
- Shital shot 30 in the eight-woman final to also claim a new finals national record while Rahi finished with 28.
- The other highlight of the day was upcoming talent Bhaker's 10th and 11th gold medal at the Nationals.
- After sweeping the women's 10m pistol events and the junior mixed team air pistol gold for a total of nine gold medals over the last weekend, Manu won the junior team and junior team civilian 25m women's pistol events to add more glitter to her 61st NSCC sojourn.

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# Obituary

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## **Veteran sports administrator Ashok Mattoo passes away**

The former president of the Boxing Federation of India and the treasurer of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), Ashok Mattoo, passed away.

- Mattoo, who was also with the Indian contingent for the Olympics etc., as the Chef de Mission at times, had served the boxing federation for more than two decades.
- Mattoo was also the treasurer of the IOA when the Commonwealth Games was hosted in Delhi in 2010 and served the cause with great diligence.

## **Star Wars Actor Alfie Curtis Passes Away at 87**

Alfie Curtis, who played the menacing character who threatened Luke Skywalker in the Mos Eisley cantina scene in 1977's Star Wars, has passed away.

- Curtis' first screen appearance came in a pair of episodes in the British TV series Bowler in 1973.
- Two years later, he played a variety of roles in five episodes of another British TV series, Larry Grayson.
- Curtis' best-known role, however, came in 1977 in Star Wars, in a scene as Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) and Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) enter the "wretched hive of scum and villainy" known as the Mos Eisley cantina.