

National Current Affairs

NMCG approves five Namami Gange projects in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has approved five Namami Gange projects worth Rs 295.01 crore in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

- Out of these 5 projects, three pertain to sewage management in West Bengal, one relates to sewage management in Uttarakhand and remaining one is related to ghat improvement works in Uttar Pradesh.
Projects related to sewage management are located in high pollution load towns along river Ganga.
- NMCG is implementation wing of National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection and Management of River Ganga (also referred as National Ganga Council).
- It was established in 2011 as registered society under Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- In West Bengal, sewage management works will be carried out in Kamarhati and Baranagar Municipalities and Nabadwip Municipality.
- Project approved for Uttarakhand is for laying of sewer lines in some of the uncovered areas in Haridwar.
- Project approved for Varanasi will be undertaken to strengthen the poor condition of ghats through bolder pitching and stone steps.

Defence Ministry clears Rs.2420 Crore worth contracts for Navy, Army

The Union Ministry of Defence (MoD) has approved procurement of P-8I Training Solution for Indian Navy and Low Intensity Conflict Electronic Warfare System (LICEWS) for Indian Army at total cost of Rs 2419.32 crore.

- These contract proposals were earlier cleared by Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) and now final approval has now been given by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- This system will be procured from Bharat Electronics Limited for Rs. 470 crore.
- It will equip Indian Army with upgraded communications infrastructure that will help forces to effectively deal with advanced communications systems being used by terrorist groups.
- The P-8I Training Solution will be brought from Boeing for Rs.1949.32 crore. It will be brought along with 10-year comprehensive maintenance service.
- It will help Indian Navy realistically train and rehearse for sophisticated missions involving P-8I aircraft, at fraction of the cost of live aircraft training.

Lok Sabha passes Bill to hike salaries of judges

The Lok Sabha passed High Court and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2017 to hike the salaries of judges of the Supreme Court (SC) and High Courts (HCs).

- The Bill seeks to amend HC Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1954; and SC Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1958.
- These Acts regulate salaries and conditions of service of judges of HCs and SC.
- The Bill proposes to hike the salary of Chief Justice of India (CJI) to Rs.2.80 lakh a month and that of judges of Supreme Court and Chief Justices of High Courts to Rs. 2.5 lakh a month.
- The CJI will get allowance of Rs. 45,000 a month.
- Judges of Supreme Court and Chief Justices of High Courts will get allowance of Rs. 34000 a month.
Judges of High Court will get allowance of Rs. 27000 a month.
- The bill proposes pension of Rs. 16,80,000 per annum to CJI. Judges of the Supreme Court and Justice of High Court will get pension of Rs. 15,00,000 per annum.

Railways, HRD and S&T Ministry ink MoU on Technology Mission for Indian Railways

Three Ministries viz. Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) and Ministry of Science & Technology have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for joint funding of Technology Mission for Indian Railways (TMIR).

- The MoU aims to facilitate co-financing of (TMIR) by investment sharing for identified railway projects for applied research.
- The percentage division of the funding between the three ministries for Technology Mission for Indian Railways' is Ministry of Railways: 30% , Ministry of HRD: 25% and Department of Science & Technology: 25%.
- Under the MoU, Ministry of HRD and Ministry of S&T have agreed to fund TMIR projects to the tune of Rs 75 crore each while Railways and Industries would also be contributing to their respective shares.
- Indian Railways will be benefitted with availability of world class indigenized technologies at very reasonable cost through this consortium approach for technology development in mission mode.
- Moreover, academic research institutions will be also benefitted with applied research and real situation output in form of new products for immediate use.
- The Indian industries will also get benefited in form of production of new items to be used on Indian Railways with additional export potential.

Health Ministry and Tata Memorial Centre launch first digital Online Oncology Tutorial

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched India's first digital Online Oncology Tutorial Series designed by Tata Memorial Centre (a grant-in-aid cancer centre under Department of Atomic Energy, GOI).

- It was launched under the Digital India initiative as part national program that will be rolled out across the country by Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) in collaboration with state governments.
- The Oncology Tutorial Series aim to train doctors across country to educate them in early detection, prevention, palliation, rehabilitation and treatment of various cancers.
- The overall course is designed for 7 weeks with different modules based on various sites and sub-sites of Cancer.
- It comprises of 14 hours of comprehensive e-learning through more than 40 video lectures, case studies, assessment questionnaires and periodic interactive Webinar sessions with respective consultants of TMC.
- It also includes, blended learning delivery model with self-paced e-learning and periodic webinar interactions with expert consultants of TMC and Continuous scientific updates in Oncology, along with end-of-course Online Assessments with enhanced reporting for individuals.
- Through this initiative, the Health Ministry and Tata Memorial Centre will try to reach millions of doctors who may not have time to attend physical conferences, CMEs and are busy working in rural or tier 2 cities.

Govt launches Swachh Survekshan 2018

The government on Thursday announced the launch of cleanliness survey for this year as part of Swachh Bharat Mission.

- The Swachh Survekshan 2018 will rank 500 cities on national level which have more than 1 lakh population, while 3,541 cities with less than 1 lakh population will have State and Regional ranking. It would be the largest survey impacting more than 40 crore urban population.
- The survey attempts to capture the progress in six broad parameters, including collection and transportation of municipal solid waste, sanitation related progress, and whether cities have started campaigns promoting Swachh Survekshan, engaging citizens in waste management, maintenance of community and public toilets.
- The Swachh Survekshan-2016 was conducted in January, 2016 assessing 73 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
Mysuru got the tag of the cleanest city of India that year. The 2017 edition was

conducted in January-February 2017 covering 434 ULBs. Indore emerged as the cleanest city in the country in that survey. This year the survey would be conducted from January to March.

CCEA approves extension of norms for mandatory packaging in Jute Materials

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved extension of mandatory packaging norms of foodgrains and sugar in jute material for Jute Year 2017-18 (i.e. July 2017 to June 2018).

- The mandatory extension was approved under the Jute Packaging Material (JPM) Act, 1987. The approval mandates that 90% of food grains and 20% of sugar products shall be mandatorily packed in jute bags.
- The decision also mandates, in first instance, entire requirement for packing of food grains will be placed in jute bags.
- Thus it makes provision for 100% packing of food grains in jute bags subject to ability of jute industry to meet the requirement.
- The decision will also help to sustain core demand for jute sector and support livelihood of the workers and farmers dependent on the sector.
- The provision of mandatory packaging will benefit jute farmers and workers in jute industry located in Eastern and North Eastern regions of country particularly in West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura.

Kolkata airport gets CAT III B technology, becomes 24x7 functional

Kolkata's Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport has become the 5th airport in India having CAT III landing system.

- It enables flight operation up to runway visual range of 50 meters with decision height of 15 meters. The facility also includes visual guidance through taxiway centreline lights up to aircraft parking stands.
- Kolkata is the fifth airport to get this upgradation after Delhi, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Jaipur.
- Flights can now land even when visibility is as low as 50 meters.
- This will enable a round the clock service and reduce the harassment of passengers due to flight delays.

Centre has approved West Bengal logo designed by Mamata Banerjee

The Centre has approved a logo designed and conceptualised by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the state's symbol.

- The logo highlighting the "Biswa Bangla" theme with Ashoka Pillars on it was sent to the Centre in May for its approval to allow it as a state symbol.
- The design was placed before a committee, headed by eminent artist Jogen Chowdhury, which approved it.

International Current Affairs

US puts Pakistan on Special Watch List for severe violations of religious freedom

The United States has placed Pakistan on 'Special Watch List' for "severe violations" of religious freedom. It is only country to be put under the newly-formed list.

- Moreover, US also re-designated about 10 countries as 'Countries of Particular Concern' under its International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act.
- They are Burma (Myanmar), China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
- As per US, Pakistan was placed in this list because it continues to harass its religious minorities, tolerates extra-judicial violence in the guise of opposing blasphemy.
- Moreover it has state-sanctioned discrimination against groups such as Ahmadis. According to research, Pakistan is one of countries with most restrictions on religion.

Iceland becomes first country to legalise equal pay

Iceland is the first country to make it illegal to pay men more than women.

- Equal pay policies is now mandatory for companies with 25 or more employees. Those that cannot show that they provide equal pay will be subject to fines.
- The law, which was passed last year, went into effect on Jan. 1.
- Iceland is already a leader in gender parity. The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Iceland as the top country for gender quality for the last nine years based on criteria involving economics, education, health, and politics.

Banking & Finance

Government launches 7.75% Savings (Taxable) Bonds 2018

The Union Finance Ministry has launched 7.75% Savings (Taxable) Bonds, 2018 scheme to help citizens invest in a taxable instrument, without any monetary ceiling. It will enable resident citizens/Hindu Undivided Families (HUF) to invest in a taxable bond, without any monetary ceiling.

- The Bonds are open to investment by individuals (including Joint Holdings) and HUFs.
- Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) are not eligible for making investments in these bonds.
- The Bonds will be issued at par i.e. at Rs.100.00.
- They will be issued for minimum face value amount of Rs.1,000 and in multiples thereof.
- There will be no maximum limit for investment in the Bonds.
- The Bonds will have maturity of 7 years carrying interest at 7.75% per annum payable half- yearly.
- The Bonds will be issued in demat form (Bond Ledger Account) only.
- The Bonds are not transferable and also are not tradeable in secondary market.
- They are also not eligible as collateral for loans from banking institutions, non-banking financial companies or financial institutions.

Yes Bank, Nearby Tech bring cardless-pinless ATM service

Fintech startup Nearby Technologies has tied up with Yes Bank to provide Aadhaar- enabled cardless and pinless ATM service by which customers can deposit or withdraw money at retailers place.

- Using the PayNEARBY mobile application on a smart phone, a retailer can become an Aadhaar ATM/Aadhaar Bank branch for cash withdrawals and deposits by a customer, Yes Bank said in a release.
- Yes Bank and Nearby worked closely with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to launch this service.
- PayNEARBYs Aadhaar ATM will be available through Yes Bank and the business correspondent agent network comprising 40,000 touch points.
- By using the Aadhaar number and finger print, a customer can do cash withdrawal or any other transactions from these locations.
- Nearby has tied up with the Retailers Association of India for spreading the relevance and creating popularity of Aadhaar services, educating customers and enabling the service even in the remotest parts of India.

Business

Air India ties up with three banks for loans for 3 Boeing 777 planes

State-owned Air India has tied up with UAE-based First Abu Dhabi Bank as well as Standard Chartered Bank and Mashreq Bank to avail short-term loans for acquiring three Boeing 777 aircraft

- Air India has tied-up with UAE-based First Abu Dhabi Bank, Standard Chartered Bank and Mashreq Bank for this purpose.
- In November 2017, Air India had issued a revised tender inviting interest from lenders for a loan worth up to \$535 million.
- The delivery of the three B777-300 ER planes is scheduled to be completed next month -- two in January and one in February.
- Two of the aircrafts are to be used for ferrying VVIPs.

Appointments & Resigns

Rajendran appointed as REAT chairman

State government has named former High Court judge B. Rajendran as the chairperson of the Real Estate Appellate Tribunal (REAT) for Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, constituted under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016.

- B Rajendran is a former High Court judge. The REAT was established under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016. He will be paid a monthly salary of Rs 80,000 as chairperson.
- The Tamil Nadu government had formed a selection committee to select the chairperson and members of the Real Estate Regulatory Authority and members of the Real Estate Appellate Tribunal, last year.

Awards & Recognition

Indian-origin banker named best governor of Asia Pacific

An Indian-origin banker in Singapore has been named as the best central bank governor in Asia-Pacific for 2018.

- Ravi Menon, managing director of Singapore's central bank Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), was recognized by the leading UK-based magazine 'The Banker' for his contribution in the makeover of Singapore's financial system.
- The annual recognition is by magazine, a publication under The Financial Times Group, is based on a selection process involving a survey of bankers and economists.

Science & Technology

NASA to launch two missions — GOLD and ICON to explore the ionosphere

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) will launch two missions — GOLD and ICON later this year. They will team up to explore the ionosphere, located 96 km above Earth's surface.

- The Global-scale Observations of the Limb and Disk (GOLD) mission will be launched in January 2018 and Ionospheric Connection Explorer (ICON) will be launched later this year.
- The two missions will be complementary to each other. ICON will be launched in low-Earth orbit (LEO) located at 560 km above Earth, like a close-up camera.
- GOLD will be launched in geostationary orbit over Western Hemisphere, about 35,398 km above Earth.
- It will help in full-disk view of ionosphere and upper atmosphere beneath it every half hour.
- The two missions can cooperate with each other when ICON passes through GOLD's field of view and each mission can get a snapshot of the same region.
- This overlap in their data will make it easier to identify reasons for changes in upper atmosphere at a given time.
- One of the missions' goals is to measure how upper atmosphere changes in response to hurricanes and geomagnetic storms. GOLD will also explore how upper atmosphere reacts to geomagnetic storms, which are temporary disturbances of Earth's magnetic field caused by solar activity.
- At night, GOLD will examine disruptions in ionosphere, which are mainly dense, unpredictable bubbles of charged gas that appear over the equator and tropics, sometimes interfere with radio communications.

Sports

Meghalaya signs deal to host National Games in 2022

The Meghalaya government, the Indian Olympic Association and the Meghalaya State Olympic Association signed the host city contract to hold the 39th National Games in the state in 2022.

- The mega sports event will coincide with the 50th year of Meghalaya's statehood.
- State urban affairs minister Ronnie V. Lyngdoh, secretary general of the Indian Olympic Association Rajeev Mehta and the Meghalaya State Olympic Association president John F Kharshiing signed the contract at a glittering programme held at the Yojana Bhawan in the main secretariat.

IPL 2018: Delhi Daredevils Name Ricky Ponting as Coach

Australian batting great Ricky Ponting was appointed coach of the Delhi Daredevils franchise for the upcoming Indian Premier League.

- Ponting takes over the reins at DD from former India captain Rahul Dravid, who had stepped down after the previous season owing to BCCI's conflict-of-interest regulations. Dravid chose to coach India A and India Under-19 teams over the IPL franchise.
- The 43-year-old has earlier coached Mumbai Indians for two seasons in 2015 (when they won the title) and 2016. Apart from coaching role, Ponting has played in the cash-rich T20 tournament for Kolkata Knight Riders and Mumbai Indians.

Pakistan Hockey Federation appoints Hasan Sardar as chief head coach

Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) appointed former captain Hasan Sardar as the new chief head coach of the national team.

- Pakistan will appear in three major hockey events this year including the Commonwealth Games, Asian Games and World Cup for the year 2018.
- Hasan Sardar had won both the World Cup and Olympic hockey gold in his career and would be head coach for a two-match series against an International eleven this month.

Obituary

Vasant Davkhare, NCP leader, passes away at 68

On Jan 4 2018, Senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Vasant Davkhare (68) passed away in Mumbai. He was former deputy chairman of the Maharashtra Legislature Council and NCP's face in Thane district of Maharashtra for the last two decades.

A Sivanandan, Sri Lankan native novelist, intellectual giant passes away

On Jan.4 2018, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, 94, novelist and intellectual giant of Sri Lankan point has passed away.

- Sivanandan won the 1998 Commonwealth Writers' Prize in the 'Best First Book category for Europe and South Asia' for his novel, 'When Memory Dies'.
- Sivanandan was also director emeritus of London's Institute of Race Relations (IRR).