

National Current Affairs

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Canada for cooperation in field of S&T

The Union Cabinet approved Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Canada for cooperation in field of Science & Technology.

- The MoU was concluded by Department of Science and Technology (DST) with Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) of Canada.
- The MoU will provide mechanism and help to foster scientific cooperation between Research & Development (R&D) and academic institutions of India and Canada.
- Under it, an innovative model of R&D cooperation between India and Canada will be implemented.
- Under this MoU, India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multidisciplinary Partnership to Accelerate Community Transformation and Sustainability (IC-IMPACTS) programme will be supported to promote multidisciplinary research partnerships between both countries.
- The R&D projects will be aimed at accelerating social transformation by providing solutions through application of S&T.
- The participants will include researchers from scientific organizations, academia and R&D laboratories from India and Canada.
- Identified areas of mutual cooperation under the MoU include safe and sustainable infrastructure and integrated water management.
- This will help to develop institutional networking and support establishment of connections between scientific organizations, scientists and specialists of both countries.

CCEA approves continuation of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has given its approval to continuation of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) till term of 14th Finance Commission i.e. 2020.

- The continuation of scheme will entail annual allocation of Rs.3,950 crore and total outlay of Rs. 11,850 crores over next 3 years.
- The MPLAD Scheme is Central Sector Scheme launched in 1993-94. It enables Members of Parliament (both elected and nominated) to recommend works for creation of durable community assets based on locally felt needs to be taken up in

their constituencies in area of national priorities like drinking water, education, public health, sanitation, roads etc.

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MSPI) is nodal ministry to coordinate work under scheme.
- Under this scheme, the funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities on receipt of requisite documents and as per these guidelines.

Gujarat tops in Logistics Ease Across Different States index

Gujarat has topped among 22 states in the Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) index released by Union Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

- It was released by Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Suresh Prabhu after the third meeting of the Council for Trade Development and Promotion in New Delhi.
- Punjab has acquired second position followed by Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- Among the Union Territories, Daman & Diu occupied top slot followed by NCT Delhi and Chandigarh.
- As regards the hilly states, Tripura was on top followed by Mizoram and Meghalaya.
- The LEADS index is a composite indicator to assess international trade logistics across States/UTs based on stakeholders' survey conducted by Deloitte for Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

3rd Meeting of Council of Trade Development and Promotion held in New Delhi

The third meeting of Council of Trade Development and Promotion (CTDP) was held in New Delhi.

- It was chaired by Union Minister for Commerce & Industry Suresh Prabhu and was attended by CM of Goa, Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat, ministers from 11 states, senior state government officials and industry bodies.
- The objective of the meeting was to enhance the Centre's cooperation with the states and union territories in making the latter active partners in boosting India's exports.
- CTDP was constituted in July, 2015 to ensure a continuous dialogue with State Governments/UTs on measures for providing International trade enabling environment in States. The council was constituted to promote India's overseas shipments. It acts as platform to develop partnership with states with aim to boost international trade.
- It also seeks to create a framework for making states active partners in boosting India's exports.

National anthem not mandatory in cinema halls: SC

The Supreme Court has ruled that playing national anthem before screening movies in cinema halls is optional and not mandatory.

- The ruling modifies apex court's earlier November 2016 order that made the playing of national anthem in cinemas mandatory.
- The apex court has accepted Union Government's affidavit that said 12-member inter-ministerial committee has been set up to suggest changes in Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
- It also asked committee to take a comprehensive decision on what changes are required in the law and its executive orders related to national anthem.
- It held that the inter-ministerial committee will now take a final call on the matter.

First PIO Parliamentary Conference held in New Delhi

The first-ever Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) Parliamentary Conference was held in the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra (PBK) in New Delhi on the occasion of Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas (PBD). It was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- The conference was way of reaching out to Indian community overseas by Central government.
- The PIO Parliamentary Conference was organised by Ministry of External Affairs to forge stronger ties with PIO. 124 Members of Parliament (MP) and 17 mayors from 23 countries including UK, USA, South Africa, Canada, Fiji, Kenya, Mauritius, New Zealand, Sri Lanka among others participated in this conference.
- The biggest delegation was from Guyana with 20 members of parliament and three mayors.
- The US delegation will be represented by only two mayors as the Senate is in session.
- The event had two Thematic Plenary Sessions – 'PIO Parliamentarians: A Journey from Struggle to Parliament' and 'Resurgent India: Role of PIO Parliamentarians'.

India, Indonesia hold 1st security dialogue, vow to combat terror

India and Indonesia held their first security dialogue on Jan 9th during which they agreed on operational cooperation in security and counter-terrorism.

- The dialogue was led by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs H Wiranto.
- Ahead of the dialogue, the Indonesian foreign ministry had said the two countries will discuss cyber security, counter-terrorism efforts and transnational organised crime.

- This dialogue comes after Indonesia and India agreed to strengthen strategic partnerships across various key areas, including defence, security, economy and maritime at the 5th Indonesia-India joint commission meeting in Jakarta.

Rajasthan to digitise all historical records

With an aim to protect old and fragile documents, the Rajasthan government is digitising 10,000 pages daily to preserve administrative and historical records of Rajputana's princely states.

- The move will further boost the state government's effort to use technology to improve the lives of people. These initiatives include a dedicated startup policy and various e- governance measures.
- The online records will help research scholars, administrative departments of state government, judiciary and general public.
- Further, it will be helpful in a variety of research uses including teaching purpose, building plans, publications and legal proceedings

International Current Affairs

North and South Korea agree to hold military talks

North Korea has agreed to conduct talks with South Korea to reduce military tensions, to send a delegation to the upcoming Winter Olympics 2018 in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

- This outcome has come after officials from North and South Korea met for the first time in more than 2 years in Panmunjom, North Korea.
- North Korea has decided to send a high-level delegation consisting of athletes, cheering squad, art troupe, visitors' group, a Taekwondo demonstration team and press personnel for the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Banking & Finance

PhonePe inks pact with mobile wallet firm FreeCharge

Flipkart's payments arm PhonePe has partnered mobile wallet company FreeCharge to allow the latter's customers pay for transactions at PhonePe's partner merchants.

- Once linked, PhonePe customers will be able to spend their FreeCharge wallet balance at all online and offline merchant outlets that accept payments via PhonePe
- To pay via FreeCharge on PhonePe, customers can link FreeCharge from 'My Account-Other Wallets' section, following which they can pay using FreeCharge or PhonePe wallet balance.
- As part of the partnership, FreeCharge customers will be able to recharge and pay bills as well as make payments for over 60,000 online and offline merchants, including MakeMyTrip, PVR, Cleartrip, 1mg, FreshMenu, Cafe Coffee Day, Apollo Pharmacy, KFC, Barista, Spencer's and FoodWorld.

Business

South Korea, GCCI sign MoU for business cooperation

On January 9, 2018, an official delegation from South Korea and the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for co-operation between South Korea and industries in Gujarat.

- The MoU focuses on cooperation in automobile, defence and textiles sectors.
- Through this MoU, Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Gujarat will get an opportunity to form joint ventures with South Korean firms in the above stated sectors.
- Technological help from Korean companies will enhance the export competitiveness of Gujarat's textile industry.

Awards & Recognition

Jeff Bezos surpasses Bill Gates' net worth, becomes richest person ever

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos worth is now more than that of Microsoft CEO Bill Gates. His net worth reached \$105.1 billion on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. However, Forbes had put Bezos' net worth at \$104.4 billion.

- The majority of his net worth comes from the 78.9 million shares of Amazon stock he owns. Shares of Amazon have risen by almost seven per cent this year after rising 56 per cent in 2017, reported money.cnn.com.

- Jeff Bezos had been declared as the world's richest person twice earlier also. Jeff Bezos also owns the Washington Post and Blue Origin, apart from Amazon.
- Bill Gates' current net worth is \$91.9 billion according to Forbes and \$93.3 billion as per Bloomberg. And he has secured second position in both of these lists.

Indigo ranks world's fourth best airline in punctuality among 'mega carriers'

India's IndiGo is the fourth most 'mega carrier' in the world, beating British Airways and Lufthansa in a travel analyst company's annual list.

- Japan Airlines takes the top spot in OAG's list of the world's most punctual 'mega carriers'. Its annual review, the Punctuality League 2018, takes into account airlines' performance on timekeeping.
- OAG has two separate punctuality lists, one for all airlines, big and small, and another one for 'mega carriers'.
- When it came to mega carriers, Japan, with its emphasis on punctuality, leads the list. The third spot goes to the American Delta Air Lines while IndiGo comes in fourth.
- The most punctual airline in the world, however, is a little known Latvian carrier called airBaltic, with a track record of 90.01% of flights on time.

Appointments & Resigns

Rocket expert K. Sivan appointed as new chairman of ISRO

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has appointed rocket scientist K. Sivan as next Secretary of the Department of Space and Chairman of Space Commission and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). He will succeed A.S. Kiran Kumar and will have term of three years.

- He had joined ISRO in 1982 in then young PSLV project and has been project director of the GSLV rocket. Currently he is Director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and was appointed in June 2015.
- He also had played key role in developing indigenous Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) MK II and was part of team that ideated on Swadeshi space shuttle (a reusable launch vehicle).
- It was Mr Sivan's expertise that gave ISRO the ability to send 104 satellites in a single mission, setting a world record in February last year.
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Music maestro A R Rahman becomes Sikkim's first brand ambassador

Oscar-winning composer A R Rahman on Monday was officially announced the first brand ambassador of Sikkim.

- Rahman was honoured here at the onset of The Red Panda Winter Carnival 2018, which aims at increasing the flow of tourists by promoting the state's bounty.
- AR Rahman's role as brand ambassador will be conducting campaigns for Sikkim to draw tourists and businesses. He will also brand Sikkim on international platforms.

Balochistan CM Nawab Sanaullah Zehri resigns ahead of no-confidence motion

On 9th January 2018, Nawab Sanaullah Zehri, Chief Minister of Balochistan, resigned before a no-confidence motion was taken against him in the provincial assembly.

- Nawab Sanaullah Zehri's resignation was accepted by Balochistan Governor Mohammad Khan Achakzai.
- Nawab Sanaullah Zehri has resigned after he was advised to do so by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, keeping in mind the no-confidence motion.
- It is said that, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi advised Nawab Sanaullah Zehri to resign in order to control the political situation in Balochistan. A political crisis started in Balochistan after no-confidence motion was initiated.

Indian-origin businessman appointed WBCSD Chairman

Singapore-based Indian-origin businessman Sunny Verghese has been appointed as the Chairman of the Geneva-based World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

- Verghese, Co-Founder and the CEO of Singapore's agri-business group Olam International Limited, is the first World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) Chair from the agri-sector.
- He succeeded Paul Polman, the CEO of Unilever, on January 1 and will serve a two-year term.

Science & Technology

Scientists for first time grow skeletal muscle tissue from stem cells

Scientists from Duke University in North Carolina, US for first time have developed working human skeletal muscle from stem cells in the laboratory.

- Stem cells are undifferentiated biological cells that can differentiate into specialized cells and can divide to produce more stem cells.
- Scientists had developed human skeletal muscle using adult skin or blood cells that were reprogrammed into a juvenile, versatile state.
- These cells were induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) which can become any other type of human cell like naturally-occurring stem cells found in embryos.
- In this case, the iPSCs were coaxed into becoming skeletal muscle cells. The breakthrough was made possible by unique cell culture conditions in lab and special 3-D scaffold which allowed cells to grow much faster and longer.
- The development is breakthrough that holds promise for sufferers of degenerative muscular diseases.
- This technique will allow scientists to grow endless amount of functioning muscle in lab to test to test drugs and gene treatments for degenerative disease.

Indian Railways launches transparent and efficient “New Online Vendor Registration System” in its research arm RDSO.

Research Designs & Standards Organisation (RDSO), Ministry of Railways’ research unit, has launched “New Online Vendor Registration System” to make systems and procedures digital and transparent.

- This system is easy and user-friendly. Vendors need not visit RDSO office for any activity related to his case for registration, they can do it online.
- This system has been developed after Piyush Goyal, Minister for Railways and Coal performed comprehensive review of the functioning of the RDSO.

Sports

Aanchal Thakur becomes first Indian to win an international medal in skiing

On 9th January 2018, India's Aanchal Thakur became the first Indian to win an international medal in skiing, by winning a bronze medal in the Alpine Ejder 3200 Cup.

- Aanchal Thakur hails from Manali. She won a Bronze medal in the slalom race category at Alpine Ejder 3200 Cup.
- The Alpine Ejder 3200 Cup was organised by Federation International de Ski (FIS) at the Palandoken Ski Centre, in Erzurum in Turkey.

Important Days

25th Raising Day of Army Air Defence – 10 January

On January 10, 2018, the Corps of Army Air Defence will celebrate its 25th raising day.

- Corps of Army Air Defence is one of the active corps of Indian army tasked with protection of Indian air spaces from enemy aircrafts and missiles ,specially below 5000 feet.
- The Corps of Army Air Defence was first raised during British era in 1939 and it took active participation in the Second World War. However, since January 10, 1994, it is exercising autonomous status.
- Its motto 'Akashe Shatrun Jahi' (Kill The Enemy in Sky) has been imprinted on its crest and flag. The current Director General of Corps of Army Air Defence is Lt. Gen. A K Sahgal

World Hindi Day – January 10

Every year, 10 January is celebrated as 'World Hindi Day' all over the world as the first "World Hindi Conference" was held on 10 January 1975.

- This day aims to promote Hindi language all over the world. Celebrations were done in various places on 10 January 2018
- The Indian Mission to Nepal celebrated the World Hindi Day in Kathmandu. Jitendra Narayan Dev, Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Nepal, presided over the event.
- Celebrations were done on World Hindi Day in various places like Telangana, Bangladesh, Mauritius etc.