

National Current Affairs

Ministry of Railways launches SFOORTI application

The Union Ministry of Railways has launched Smart Freight Operation Optimisation & Real Time Information (SFOORTI) application to help plan traffic flows and optimize freight operations.

- The app will help Freight Managers to monitor and manage freight business using Geographic Information System (GIS) views and dashboard.
- SFOORTI application will help to track movement of freight trains over Zones/Divisions/Sections on GIS View.
- Even passenger trains can be tracked using it. It will help to monitor freight business along with comparative analysis of Zonal and Divisional Traffic.
- The app will help in analysis of new traffic captured and traffic lost and provides a Bird's eye view of all Freight Assets in a single window.
- It will also provide end to end Rake movement on Geospatial view and will also help evaluate daily performance of expected traffic at Interchange points.
- It has Freight Operation Information System (FOIS) Map View–A GIS based monitoring and management tool designed and developed in CRIS which provides layered views of freight trains on Indian Railways.
- The FOIS Map View–A GIS has been designed to cater to Divisional, Zonal and Board levels of management for improved freight operations and also help to plan the traffic flows and optimize freight operations.

Indian Railways introduces OCR Kiosk Machines for quick printing of tickets through UTS Mobile App

Indian Railways has decided to introduce modern Optical Character Recognition (OCR) Kiosk Machines for fast and easy printing of tickets booked through UTS App.

- Western Railway has become the first railway zone to introduce the OCR Kiosk Machines in Mumbai.
- The screen of the mobile phone containing the SMS of the ticket booked through UTS App should be placed in the slot of the OCR Kiosk machine. The machine will immediately read the SMS and print the ticket.
- In the first phase, 25 OCR Kiosk Machines were planned to be installed by the Western Railway. Out of this 20 OCR Kiosk machines have already been installed and started functioning on 11th January 2018.

Kerala govt permits prisoners to donate organs to close

The Kerala government decided to permit prisoners in state jails to donate their organs to close relatives, but with certain conditions.

- However, the prisoner needs to meet certain conditions for the process to take place.
- Like, the organ donation can be made by prisoners to their close relatives only.
- Also, they have to take sanction from the concerned court, the same which convicted them, besides the medical board nod for any such organ donation.
- It was also resolved that the period the prisoner is hospitalised post donation, will be considered as parole and the hospital expenses will be met by the jail department.
- The release also made it clear of there being 'no relaxation in prison term' for the prisoner following the organ donation.

Kozhikode railway station cleanest, Nizamuddin gets lowest

The Kozhikode railway station in Kerala was ranked the best by travellers while the Hazrat Nizamuddin here was given the lowest ratings in terms of cleanliness, a survey by an app-based travel portal.

- It also found that around 40 per cent stations, found cleanest by users, were in the south followed by 20 per cent in central India and the same in the west.
- Stations that made it to the “best” list include Hubli Junction and Davangere in Karnataka, Dhanbad Junction (Jharkhand), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) and Bilaspur Junction (Chhattisgarh). Vadodara and Rajkot junctions in Gujarat, Falna (Rajasthan) and Vijayawada Junction (Andhra Pradesh) are also on the list.
- Some of the stations that received the lowest ratings by travellers include Varanasi and Mathura junctions in Uttar Pradesh, Ajmer Junction in Rajasthan, Bhusaval Junction in Maharashtra and Gaya Junction in Bihar.
- As per a survey by travel app ‘ixigo’, Kozhikode railway station in Kerala was ranked the best railway station in India by travellers in terms of cleanliness.

National Youth Festival held in New Delhi

The 22nd National Youth Festival (NYF) was held in New Delhi occasion of birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the youth icon of India.

- It was organised by Union Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports in collaboration with Uttar Pradesh Government at Gautam Buddha University Greater Noida.
- This is the first time that the National Youth Festival is being organized in National Capital Region (NCR).
- The first National Youth Festival was held in 1995 in Bhopal

- NYF is the biggest Youth Festival of its kind in country. Its objective is to provide platform to bring youth of country together in attempt to provide them opportunity to showcase their talents in various activities.
- The Theme of 2017 NYF is 'Sankalp Se Siddhi'. It seeks to capitalize on demographic dividend of country's youth and also capture vibrancy and fresh perspective of youth and to pledge to accomplish goal of New India.
- The festival provided common platform by creating mini-India, where youth interacted in formal and informal settings and exchange their social and cultural uniqueness.
- The entire programme and events of 2017 NYF were designed to enhance awareness about government initiatives and exhorting youth to express their perceptions and concepts to make their initiatives more effective.

4th International Dharma-Dhamma Conference held in Nalanda

The 4th International Dharma-Dhamma Conference on "State and Social Order in Dharma-Dhamma Traditions" was held at Rajgir in Nalanda district, Bihar. It was inaugurated by President Ram Nath Kovind.

- The event was organised as part of commemorative events to celebrate Silver Jubilee (25) year of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership. (ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations).
- The Conference was organised by Nalanda University, in collaboration with Centre for Study of Religion and Society, India Foundation, Ministry of External Affairs and Vietnam Buddhist University. Its central theme was the ideal state and just social order based on dharmic principles.
- The conference aimed to facilitated world today.

International Current Affairs

Sri Lanka removes ban on sale of alcohol to women

Sri Lanka is to allow women over the age of 18 to buy alcohol legally for the first time in more than 60 years.

- The government said that it was amending a 1955 law that it agreed was discriminatory against women.
- The amendment to the law, also means that women will be permitted without prior approval to work in places that sell alcohol.

- Under the new law, women will no longer require the approval of the state's excise commissioner in order to work or drink "in licensed premises", including restaurants.

South Australia planning to build the world's largest thermal solar plant

South Australia is at the forefront of a renewable revolution, and the new development marks a big step towards making the southern state 100 per cent renewable by 2030

- The government of South Australia has given planning approval to a major solar thermal plant which would be the largest of its kind ever built.
- The project is being developed by US company SolarReserve at a budgeted cost of A\$650m (£380m), and construction is set to begin this year.
- This will be the latest move from the southern Australian state to cement its reputation as both a national and international leader in renewable energy.
- The development follows Tesla's construction of the world's largest lithium ion battery in South Australia, which has already helped provide power during energy outages.

Saudi Arabia opens its first women-only motorshow in Jeddah

Saudi Arabia's first motorshow for women customers was held in Jeddah on January 11, 2018.

- In context of this news, it is important to note that in September 2017, Saudi King Salman had ordered an end to the ban on women drivers by June 2018.
- Fuel-efficient cars were the key highlight of this motorshow in Jeddah. A team of saleswomen was present to help their new prospective customer base.
- However, in wake of recent hike in domestic gas prices and introduction of value-added tax (VAT), it would be interesting to see car sales growth numbers in Saudi Arabia post June 2018

China to fund construction of counter-terrorism base in northern Afghanistan

China will fund the construction of a counter-terrorism base in Badakshan province in northern Afghanistan to block cross-border infiltration of the ethnic Uyghur militants.

- China would provide financial support to build the base, whose location is yet to be determined. They would cover all material (weaponry, uniforms for soldiers, military equipment) expenses and technical costs.

- China will provide financial support to construct a counter-terrorism base in Badakshan province of northern Afghanistan that would prevent cross-border infiltration of the Chinese Uyghur militants.
- A special commission has been formed to finalise the location of the base, determine construction costs and to manage technical issues.
- The Chinese Uyghur militants were trained in Al Qaeda camps. They were active during Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Banking & Finance

JioCoin: Reliance Jio planning to launch its own cryptocurrency

Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd is planning to create its own cryptocurrency, JioCoin. The JioCoin project is being led by Mukesh Ambani's elder son Akash Ambani.

- Under it, Reliance Jio is planning to build a 50-member team of young professionals to work on blockchain technology, which can also be used for multiple applications and develop various blockchain products.
- Reliance Jio is also aspiring to get into Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain technology will come in handy there.
- Blockchain is decentralized incorruptible digital ledger for storing data across a peer-to-peer network.
- It decentralizes information without it being copied. Information is held on blockchain through shared database which can be accessed on real-time basis.
- IoT is a network of devices such as smartphones, wearable devices, home appliances and vehicles, connected to internet, which enables these objects to connect and exchange data.

India a top borrower from AIIB in 2017

India has emerged as a top borrower from the China-sponsored Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with USD 1.5 billion worth of loans last year and USD three billion more in the pipeline.

- The China-sponsored bank has granted USD 1.5 billion worth of loans for various infrastructure projects last year the highest compared to all the countries.
- Next to India, Indonesia has emerged as the second largest borrower with about USD 600 million loans.

- Significantly in the pipeline for lending for India by the 84-member bank this year included USD 3.5 billion worth of projects including Mumbai Metro, Andhra Pradesh new capital Amaravati's development and irrigation network in West Bengal.
- India is the second largest shared holder in the bank which has an authorised capital of USD 100 billion.
- China is the largest shareholder with 26.06 per cent voting shares in the bank. India is the second largest shareholder with 7.5 per cent followed by Russia 5.93 per cent and Germany with 4.5 per cent.

Business

India tops domestic air passenger traffic demand at 16.4%, says IATA

As per data released by global aviation body, International Air Transport Association (IATA), India topped the worldwide growth chart of domestic air passenger traffic for the month of November 2017 with a growth of 16.4 per cent, highest in the world.

- On a month-on-month basis, India has witnessed double-digit growth for the 39th consecutive month.
- As per IATA data, total revenue passenger kilometres (RPK) in November 2017 marked 8 per cent growth as compared to November 2016.
- However, IATA has outlined infrastructure constraints, security threats and growing fees and charges as the major concerns for growth of civil aviation sector in upcoming years

GAIL to set up coal to gas conversion plants

The largest government-owned natural gas processing and distribution company, GAIL India, will now be setting up coal to gas conversion plants.

- GAIL India's coal to synthesis gas plants will be set up in Odisha. Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) will be a technology partner in this project.
- Synthesis gas is expected to be cheaper than domestic gas.
- Synthesis gas (Syngas) is a mixture comprising of hydrogen, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. It is produced by gasification of a carbon containing fuel to a gaseous product that has some heating value.

Awards & Recognition

PM Modi ranked 3rd among global leaders by Gallup International survey

The annual survey of Gallup International has ranked Prime Minister Narendra Modi at 3rd position among world leaders.

- The survey was conducted with people from 50 countries. The survey has ranked German chancellor Angela Merkel as number 1 world leader with a score of 21.
- Second position was secured by French president Emmanuel Macron with a score of 20. Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds the 3rd rank with a score of 8.

Appointments & Resigns

Indu Malhotra: First woman lawyer to be directly promoted as SC judge

The Supreme Court collegium led by Chief Justice of India (CJ) Dipak Misra has unanimously recommended name of senior advocate Indu Malhotra for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court.

- With this, she becomes first woman lawyer from the country to be directly elected for post of judge of the Supreme Court
- Overall she will be seventh woman judge in SC, since it was established 67 years ago.
- In 1989, Justice M. Fathima Beevi became first woman judge in Supreme Court.
- At present, Justice R. Banumathi is lone woman judge in SC which currently has a strength of 25 judges of total sanctioned strength of 31 (including 31).
- Indu Malhotra is reputed senior advocate practising in SC for the past 30 years.

V J Mathew appointed as Chairman of Maritime Board

On 11th January 2018, V J Mathew was appointed as Chairman of Maritime Board.

- V J Mathew is a legal consultant of Vizhinjam International container terminal company. He is also Co-President of Indian Maritime Association.
- Four other persons have also been appointed in the Maritime Board as representatives of the government. The Indian Maritime Board focuses on developing small and medium ports.

Kajol named ambassador for Swachh Aaad Swachh Bharat

Actress Kajol, an active supporter of eradicating preventable deaths from hygiene-related issues, has become an advocacy ambassador for a Swachh Aaad Swachh Bharat initiative.

- She has insisted people to become “swachhta doot” and contribute to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Books & Authors

“Majuli: Resources and Challenges” – Book explores Majuli, its challenges

“Majuli: Resources and Challenges” is a book that appreciates the beauty and challenges of Majuli, in Assam. It was edited by Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti and published by Authorspress.

- This book is a collection of essays written by experts. It is filled with photographs, maps, diagrams and charts.
- Majuli is considered to be the world’s largest freshwater river island and the single island district in India.
- Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti is an author and academician. He has expressed strong concern in the book to make Majuli a World Heritage Site.