

National Current Affairs

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan crosses 1 crore mark

The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) has crossed one crore mark in antenatal check-ups.

- It was launched in 2016 to ensure comprehensive and quality antenatal checkups to pregnant women across country.
- It has provided quality antenatal checkups to pregnant women on the 9th of every month.
- The scheme is helping in making safe pregnancy to become social movement in country. It also is successful in reaching out to difficult and remote areas.
- Since its launch, more than 25 lakh check-ups were conducted in high priority districts identified by Health Ministry for focussed attention.
- Maharashtra has reported largest number of check-ups among non-empowered action group states and Rajasthan has reported largest number of check-ups among the empowered action group states.
- More than 4,800 private sector doctors have pledged to provide voluntary service under PMSMA.

India's First Automatic Early Warning Dissemination System to come up in Odisha

India's first automatic Early Warning Dissemination System (EWDS) will be commissioned by March 2018 in Odisha.

- The project aims to establish fool-proof communication system to address existing gaps in disseminating disaster warning up to community level.
- The EWDS is a first-of-its-kind automatic public address system in the country.
- The project is being implemented under National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project with World Bank's help.
- It will provide Odisha's entire population residing on 480 km length coastline a pre-warning siren in event of occurrence of natural disasters like tsunami or cyclone.
- It will help to warn vast population of state residing along its coast from State headquarters through loud sirens from towers installed at 122 locations in six coastal districts in event of occurrence of natural disasters like a tsunami or cyclone.
- The districts are Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Puri and Ganjam.

Maharashtra approves Nanaji Deshmukh Krishi Sanjivani Yojna to promote climate-resilient agriculture

Maharashtra Government has approved Nanaji Deshmukh Krishi Sanjivani Yojna, a Rs.4,000-crore project aimed at promoting climate-resilient agriculture. It will be rolled out in 2018-19 and will continue till 2023-24.

- The Scheme has been named after social activist Nanaji Deshmukh who has worked in fields of education, health, and rural self-reliance, and has been honoured with Padma Vibhushan.
- The scheme will be implemented in 5,142 villages across 15 districts. Its objectives are to improve soil quality, develop foodgrain varieties which can sustain climate variations and effect necessary changes in the crop pattern as per the availability of water in a particular region.
- Main objectives of scheme:
 - Promote very idea of sustainable development in agricultural sector.
 - Eliminate the problems of ground water salinity problems.
 - Improve conditions of the agricultural yields to overcome the climatic changes.
 - Promoting the quality of the soil such that quality of food grains produced can be improved.
 - Cultivate new variety of grains that will more sustainable and adaptable to climatic changes.
 - The scheme will cover small- and medium- scale farmers, who are more vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

India to set up \$350 million Solar Development Fund for solar projects

India announced setting up of \$350 million Solar Development Fund for financing solar projects under the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

- The fund was announced by Minister of Power and New and Renewable Energy R K Singh at first ever ISA outreach programmes 'International Solar Alliance Forum' held in Abu Dhabi's World Future Energy Summit (WFES) 2018.
- WFES is an annual event dedicated to advancing future energy, energy efficiency and clean technologies.
- It is hosted by Masdar, Abu Dhabi's renewable energy company and staged at Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre.
- WFES includes summit, an exhibition, Project Village, Round Table Discussions, Young Future Energy Leaders program, corporate meetings and social events.

Chkfake Launches an App to Check Fake Currency Notes Worldwide

Chkfake Brand Protection Solutions launches "Chkfake" - A unique global platform which allows users to check authenticity of currency notes of any major currency across the globe.

- Chkfake's vision is to build a world free from counterfeits, benefiting all stakeholders from consumers to businesses to governments.
- Chkfake is an online platform that allows anyone to check for authenticity of any major currency across globe. Available as an app on iOS and Android, it can be downloaded free of charge.
- With the help of Chkfake, one can verify the authenticity of the new notes as well as older designs of Indian Rupees anytime and anywhere by simply downloading the Chkfake app from Google Play Store and Apple Store.
- Chkfake can also be used to train key stakeholders/customers, enforcement authorities, employees or people dealing with a lot of cash on how to check for authenticity of currency notes.

In a first, Kerala to set up Blockchain Academy

State-run Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management-Kerala (IIITM-K) is all set to launch its proposed Kerala Blockchain Academy, the first of its kind in the country in Kerala.

- The academy is a joint initiative of IIITM-K and the Blockchain Education Network (BEN), a global network of blockchain communities, and will come up at the Technopark campus.
- It has been designed for those with little or no prior experience with Blockchain, wanting to train and transition into Blockchain from other careers.
- It prepares them comprehensively to explore potential application domains as well as use-cases, introducing them to basic principles and operation, experimenting with Smart Contracts and Dapps (Decentralized Applications), along with material from BEN's world-class training courses and real-life, practical simulations and team exercises.

AP govt, NITI Aayog sign MoU

The Andhra Pradesh Government and the NITI Aayog on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Amaravati to develop an online dashboard for the 115 most backward districts in the country.

- The MoU was signed in the presence of Vice-chairman of NITI Aayog Rajiv Kumar and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.
- The districts were identified on the basis of objective criteria such as education, health, nutrition, basic infrastructure like rural road connectivity, rural household electrification, access to potable water and individual toilets and others.
- Most of the listed backward districts are in Jharkhand, followed by Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

25th GST Council meet convened

The 25th GST Council Meeting was held at New Delhi on the 18th of January 2018.

- Though there is no GST return filing due date changes, various other measures were announced to improve ease of doing business.
- In addition to relaxation of GST rules and regulations, GST rates have also be reduced for various goods and services.
- Highlight of the meet was the reduction of tax rates on 29 goods and 53 categories of service.

Odisha plans to complete disaster alert project by March end

The Odisha government is planning to commission Early Warning Dissemination System (EWDS) in the coastal areas of six districts by the end of March.

- The project aims at establishing a foolproof communication system for providing information about impending disasters, like cyclone and tsunami, to the local population.
- The system, a part of World Bank-supported National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP), will ensure last mile connectivity in 22 blocks of six coastal districts - Balasore, Bhadrak, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Puri and Ganjam.
- The system will send disaster warnings through messages to all mobile phone subscribers in a particular locality that is likely to be affected by a disaster.
- The alert siren system will cover 122 locations along the coast, including tourist spots, fish landing centres and coastal habitations.

International Current Affairs

India joins Australia Group export control regime

India was admitted as the 43rd member of the Australia Group, an informal bloc (group) of countries that keeps a tight control over exports of substances used in making of chemical weapons.

- The inclusion will help to raise India's stature in the field of non-proliferation, though it is not signatory to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and help in acquiring critical technologies.
- India is first South Asian nation to become its full-time member of Australia Group.

- It is also expected to strengthen India's bid to enter 48-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- With its admission into Australia Group, India is now part of three of the four key export control groups in world dealing with non-proliferation.

Banking & Finance

HDFC Bank market cap crosses Rs 5 lakh cr mark

HDFC Bank today breached a market valuation of Rs 5 lakh crore, becoming the third company to achieve this milestone after RIL and TCS. The bank's market capitalisation (m-cap) stood at Rs 5,02,859.55 crore in afternoon trade, making it the first bank to cross Rs 5 lakh crore m-cap mark.

- The stock hit one-year high of Rs 1,953.75, up 3.31 per cent. Shares of the company were trading 2.82 per cent higher at Rs 1,944.50 apiece on BSE at 1.40 pm.
- In terms of equity volume, 1.44 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 27 lakh shares changed hands on the NSE during the day. Shares of the bank have gained nearly 5 per cent so far this year.
- Reliance Industries (RIL) is the country's most valued firm with a market valuation of Rs 5,85,539.19 crore, followed by TCS (Rs 5,54,281.97 crore), HDFC Bank, ITC (Rs 3,34,323.28 crore) and HDFC (Rs 3,04,109.53 crore).

Business

India Ratings projects economic growth at 7.1% next fiscal

India Ratings and Research today projected the country's economic growth to improve to 7.1 per cent next fiscal from 6.5 per cent this year, buoyed by robust consumption demand and low commodity prices.

- In its outlook for 2018–19, the agency said there will be a gradual pick up in growth momentum owing to structural reforms like GST and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in place. "While the implementation of GST is likely to benefit the economy over the medium to long term, the same cannot be said about the impact of demonetisation.

- With the global crude prices firming up, Ind-Ra expects retail and wholesale inflation to come in at 4.6 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively in 2018–19, indicating an end to the current rate cut cycle.
- The agency said it expects fiscal deficit in 2017–18 to come in at 3.5 per cent, overshooting the budgeted estimate of 3.2 per cent. The agency expects fiscal deficit in 2018–19 to be at 3.2 per cent, higher than 3 per cent stated in the medium-term fiscal policy statement.

Appointments & Resigns

Anandiben Patel appointed as Governor Madhya Pradesh

President Ramnath Kovind has appointed former Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel as Governor of Madhya Pradesh.

- She will replace Gujarat governor Om Prakash Kohli who is holding additional charge of office of Governor of Madhya Pradesh.

Sudeep Lakhtakia appointed as new DG of National Security Guard

Senior IPS officer Sudeep Lakhtakia was appointed as new Director General of National Security Guard (NSG).

- He will succeed SP Singh, who retired from the post.
- He is currently serving as special DG of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).
- NSG is a Federal Contingency Deployment Force under Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Facebook appoints American Express CEO as first black board member

Facebook has announced the appointment of Kenneth Chenault, the CEO of American Express, onto its board as first black board member.

- Chenault will become the first African-American board member at the social media giant.
- Chenault will also become one of a few black board members at major technology firms across Silicon Valley, joining others like Ursula Burns at Uber and Debra Lee at Twitter.

- Chenault is also a board member at IBM and has been working at American Express since 1981.

Awards & Recognition

Kashmiri publishing house enters Limca Book of Records

Gulshan Books, a Kashmiri publishing house at Jammu and Kashmir's Nehru Park has found its way into the Limca Book of Records 2018 for its wide collection of 80,000 books.

- A division of Sheikh Muhammad Usman and Sons, Gulshan Books is the only bookshop-library on a lake.
- Gulshan books has a reading room and a cafe, where a reader can enjoy their favourite books over a cup of tea or coffee for as long as they want.
- The publishing house has displayed a wide variety of books and literature based on the valley.
- The publishing house is focusing on the heritage of the valley. It is preserving the culture of the valley and giving a lot of encouragement and a platform to show their work to the budding authors.

Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust of Odisha wins prestigious UNWTO Award

Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust in Odisha has won prestigious United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Award for Innovation in Tourism Enterprise at 14th UNWTO Awards ceremony held in Madrid, Spain.

- The award was given in recognition of Mangalajodi's business model that is both economically viable and environmentally sustainable based on principles of community ownership and Eco Tourism.
- Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust is community owned and managed venture promoted by RBS Foundation India and Indian Grameen Services on banks of Chilika Lake in Odisha.
- The villagers of Mangalajodi were once associated with poaching of birds near Chilika Lake but now they stand as true defenders of wildlife in the region.
- The change was mainly due to a coordinated effort in implementing an awareness campaign on importance of preserving natural species and benefits associated with wildlife tourism.

Sports

Virat Kohli named ICC Cricketer of the Year

Indian captain Virat Kohli had something to cheer about after the second Test debacle against South Africa when he was named the ICC Cricketer of the Year at the ICC Awards on Thursday.

- Kohli was also named the ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year and captain of both ICC Test and ODI teams.
- In the qualification period from September 21, 2016 to the end of 2017, Kohli scored 2,203 Test runs at an average of 77.80 including eight centuries and 1,818 ODI runs including seven centuries at 82.63.
- Kohli regained the No 1 spot on the ICC rankings for ODI batsmen with 889 rating points, the best ever by an Indian cricketer.

India rise to 102nd spot in FIFA rankings

India jumped three rungs to be placed 102nd in the first FIFA rankings of the year. India, who are just above 103rd placed Qatar, are ranked 14th among Asian countries.

- India garnered 13 points in the last one month for a total of 333 points. The Indians remained unbeaten in 2017, having won seven of their nine matches while two ended in draws. India had also qualified for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.
- The top 14 spots remained unchanged with reigning World Champions Germany at the top followed by Brazil, Portugal, Argentina, and Belgium. Iran are the top-ranked Asian team at the 34th position.

Science & Technology

INS Vikramaditya now formally affiliated to Indian Army's Bihar Regiment

Indian Naval Ship Vikramaditya, the Indian Navy's largest ship and its sole aircraft carrier was formally affiliated to the Indian Army's highly-decorated and battle-hardened Bihar Regiment and the Indian Air Force's No 6 Squadron, that is tasked with maritime strike operations with its Jaguar fighter aircraft.

- A glittering ceremony was held onboard INS Vikramaditya at the Karwar Naval Base.

- The historic affiliation ceremony commenced with an inspection of the Tri-Service Guard of Honour by the senior officers.

Environment

Divers found the world's largest underwater cave

After 10 months of intensive exploration, scientists in Mexico have discovered the world's largest flooded cave system – and it's truly an underwater wonderland.

- Spanning an incredible 347 kilometres (216 miles) of subterranean caverns, this branching, sunken labyrinth isn't just a natural spectacle – it's also an important archaeological find that could reveal lost secrets of the ancient Maya civilisation.
- This immense cave represents the most important submerged archaeological site in the world.
- It has more than a hundred archaeological contexts, among which are evidence of the first settlers of America, as well as extinct fauna and, of course, the Maya culture.

Obituary

Veteran Kannada actor Kashinath passes away in Bengaluru

Veteran Kannada actor Kashinath passed away at the Sri Shankara Cancer Hospital in Bengaluru.

- The 1980s is popularly called 'Kashinath's yuga' in Sandalwood, as all his films were successful in this period. He has acted in over 40 movies. His last film was Chowka which released in 2017.
- Kashinath was also reportedly the god father to many Kannada actors and directors such as actor Upendra and directors V Manohar and Sunil Kumar Desai.

Cartoonist Chandi Lahiri passes away

Eminent cartoonist Chandi Lahiri passed away at a government hospital in Kolkata on 18th Jan.

- Starting his career as a journalist, he entertained the readers for more than five decades with his cartoons published in various English and Bengali newspapers and magazines. He is also called the creator of 'pocket cartoons' in Bengal.
- The famous cartoonist also wrote a few books like "Catoon er itibritto (the history of cartoons)" and "Scene's Freedom: a history in cartoons 1947-1993", that are rich in knowledge and observations about the art form.

Important Days

CM Kejriwal launches 'Girl Child Week' programme in Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday launched a week-long programme to celebrate the girl child and to create awareness about gender equality.

- Organised by NGO Alliance Defending Freedom India, the event will go on till National Girl Child Day celebrated on January 24.
- The Chief Minister urged the people of Delhi to stand up for the rights of the unborn girl child and provide information regarding those who commit such illegal acts.
- Under the week-long campaign, awareness programmes will be held regarding the importance of girl child in the society.

13th Raising Day of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) - Jan 19

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has celebrated its 13th Raising Day on January 19, 2018 in New Delhi.

- The NDRF raised on January 19, 2006, is a specialised force capable of responding to any type of disaster in the country and abroad.
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