

National Current Affairs

Government launches Rapid Reporting System for the Scheme for Adolescent Girls

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) has launched beneficiary module (i.e. Phase -1) of Rapid Reporting System (RRS), a web based on line monitoring for Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG).

- The RRS portal will facilitate monitoring of SAG and take corrective measures by ensuring faster flow of information, accurate targeting of beneficiaries and reduction of leakages.
- It has been developed by Ministry of WCD in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- The scheme aims at providing them nutritional support, motivating out of school girls to go back to formal schooling or skill training under its non-nutrition component.
- It also provides nutritional support and girls are also equipped with information on health, hygiene and guidance on existing public services.
- It is centrally sponsored scheme implemented using platform of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme.
- Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) are focal point for delivery of services. Ministry of WCD is implementing scheme in selected 508 districts across country.

MIS portal for Anganwadi Services Training Programme launched

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) has launched Management Information System (MIS) portal for Anganwadi Services Training Programme

- The portal has been developed by Ministry of WCD in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC) for submission of applications and estimates by NGOs for carrying out Anganwadi Services (ICDS) Training through Anganwadi Workers Training Centres (AWTC) and Middle-Level Training Centres (MLTC).
- The phase 1 of portal will enable NGOs to submit proposals to respective states/UTs which in turn will process proposals and recommend requirement of funds for running programme. On this request, Central government will further examine proposal and release funds.
- It will ensure that funds are released timely and reach beneficiaries for training purpose.

Centre sanctions setting up of second IIIT in Karnataka

The Centre sanctioned the setting up of a second Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) in Karnataka at Raichur and it was likely to become operational in the current academic year.

- It will be the second such institute in Karnataka, after the one in Dharwad.
- The proposed IIIT will be set up on a public-private partnership mode with land to be provided by the state.
- The proposed IIIT-Raichur will bridge the gap in access to quality education in northern Karnataka.

UDAN Phase-II: 325 routes awarded; 40% for North East, hills

The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation has awarded 325 air routes under the second phase of government's flagship UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam naagrik) regional connectivity scheme.

- Around 40% or 129 of 325 air routes were awarded to newly created category of 'priority areas' that include Jammu and Kashmir, Northeastern and hill states, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands.
- The routes under phase-II were awarded to 15 airlines and helicopter operators after bidding process.
These include major domestic airlines such as SpiceJet, IndiGo, Jet Airways and Air India subsidiary Alliance Air and four helicopter operators — Heligo Charters, Heritage Aviation, Pawan Hans, and Skyone Airways.
- Total 78 airports i.e. 36 served airports, 13 underserved airports and 29 unserved airports will be connected under phase-II.
- In addition, 31 helipads/ heliports will be connected through Helicopters in priority areas.
- These proposed routes will get VGF estimated at Rs. 487 crores per annum for fixed wing operations and Rs. 130 crores for Helicopter operations per annum in the Priority areas.
- The government provides VGF or subsidy for 50% of seats set aside for being offered at discounted rates by airlines and all seats up to 13 passenger seats for helicopters.

Government announces 4 new schemes to promote young scientists

The Ministry of Science & Technology has announced four new schemes to promote young scientists and researchers in the country.

- They are Teacher Associateship for Research Excellence (TARE) Scheme, Overseas Visiting Doctoral Fellowship, Distinguished Investigator Award (DIA) and AWSAR (Augmenting Writing Skills for Articulating Research).

- The schemes primarily aim at early recognition and reward to young talent in the field of science. They focus on youth to empower, recognize and motivate them.
- It aims to tap latent potential of faculty working in state universities, colleges and private academic institutions who are well trained but having difficulty in pursuing their research due to varied reasons including lack of facilities, funding and guidance. Up to 500 TAs (Teacher Associateships) will be supported under this scheme.
- This scheme facilitates mobility of such faculty members to carryout research in well-established public funded institution such as IITs, IISc, IISERS and other National Institutions (NITs, CSIR, ICAR, ICMR labs, etc) and Central Universities located preferably nearer to institution where faculty member is working.

Government to increase number of 'AMRIT' pharmacy stores 4 times

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has announced to increase number of AMRIT pharmacy stores by four times by end of 2018 from the existing 111 outlets in bid to make low-cost medicines more accessible.

- So far, 52 lakh patients have been benefited by buying discounted drugs (60 to 90% less than market price) from AMRIT (Affordable medicine and reliable implants for treatment) stores and have saved over Rs. 267 crore.
- The total maximum retail price of medicines sold off these 111 AMRIT stores was Rs. 486 crore but their sale price was Rs 219 crore.
- The AMRIT (Affordable medicine and reliable implants for treatment) scheme aims to reduce expenditure incurred by patients on treatment of cancer and cardio vascular (heart) diseases to make health care affordable for poor.
- Its intended beneficiaries are patients suffering from cancer and heart diseases (non-communicable diseases).
- Under it, retail outlets in the name of AMRIT pharmacy are opened to sell drugs for cancer and heart diseases at highly discounted rates on market rate.
- The project is implemented by government-owned HLL Lifecare Ltd (HLL) which is deputed to establish and run AMRIT chain of pharmacies across the country.
- These drugs and implants under the scheme will be sold based upon authentic prescriptions from doctors.
- At the AMRIT outlets, 202 cancer and 186 cardio-vascular drugs will be available at reduced rate of 60 to 90% compared to market rates.

International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Election Process'

Election Commission of India (ECI) today hosted a one-day International Conference on the subject 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Election Process' in New Delhi.

- Delegates at the Conference included Chairpersons/Commissioners / Senior Officials of five Election Management Bodies (EMBs) viz. Australia, Bhutan, Guinea, Moldova & Zambia and Heads of two International Organisations viz. International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).
- ECI is committed to the objective that the Persons with Disabilities (PwD) have the right to full electoral participation, on the basis of equality and shall not be discriminated against on any ground.
- On the occasion, the Election Commission of India also launched its Social Media Hub today, comprising Facebook and Youtube as part of its outreach programme for public at large.
- On the sidelines of the Conference, ECI signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in the field of election management with National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) of Guinea; with Central Election Commission of Moldova and also with International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Sushma Swaraj inaugurates Bharat-ASEAN Maitri Park in Delhi

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj inaugurated the Bharat-ASEAN Maitri Park in the national capital.

- The two-day summit is expected to give boost to India-ASEAN cooperation in key areas of counter-terrorism, security and connectivity.
- In an unprecedented event, the leaders of all 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will also be the chief guests at the Republic Day parade.
- ASEAN comprises Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Laos and Brunei.
- COMMENTS In the run-up to the summit, various programmes in different areas ranging from culture to trade have been organised by India.

WEF, Reliance Industries Ltd to set up Centre for Fourth Industrial revolution (C4IR)

WEF has partnered with Reliance Industries Ltd to set up Centre for Fourth Industrial revolution (C4IR) in Mumbai, India.

- C4IR will function as the sister center to the WEF's center for the Fourth Industrial revolution located in San Francisco, US.
- C4IR will provide insights in new forms of governance and new technology applications to Indian policymakers.

International Current Affairs

New national security unit set up to tackle fake news in UK

The UK government is to set up a dedicated national security unit to tackle fake news and disinformation.

- Based in the Cabinet Office, the team will be tasked with dealing “quickly with disinformation” and reclaiming “a fact-based public debate”.
- The changes will also see the creation a defence-specific assessment, to be separated from the wider and national security capability review (NSCR).

Banking & Finance

Prodigee Finance granted NBFC-ND license from RBI

Prodigee Finance Limited recently crossed that milestone and received their NBFC license from RBI, making it possible for the firm to provide Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME) loans as part of their services.

- According to the Bhopal-based company, the goal at Prodigee Finance Limited is to provide SMEs loans that they likely otherwise would not have had available, energising the local economy.
- By making access to small business loans more simple, and going above and beyond best industry practices when processing loan requests, the non-deposit taking NBFC could have a very powerful positive impact in the extended Bhopal area and beyond.
- Prodigee Finance Limited thanked Enterslice for their valuable help during the entire process.
- Enterslice is a legal technology company that specialises in helping entrepreneurs in starting successful businesses around the world

Govt. unveils details of recapitalisation plan for public sector banks

The Union government announced the detailed contours of the recapitalisation plan for public sector banks (PSBs) it announced in October last, including a reforms package across six

themes that cover 30 action points such as customer responsiveness, responsible banking and credit offtake.

- The capital infusion plan for 2017-18 includes ₹80,000 crore through recapitalisation bonds and ₹8,139 crore as budgetary support.
- The bonds are to have a maturity period of 10-15 years and would be issued in six tranches.
- They will be non-Statutory Liquidity Ratio and non-tradable bonds priced at a three-month average plus a certain spread decided by the government.
- The reform plan sets a goal of 'Enhanced Access and Service Excellence (EASE)' and the six pillars to achieve this include customer responsiveness, responsible banking, credit offtake, PSBs as Udyami Mitra, deepening financial inclusion, and digitalisation and developing personnel.

Business

ONGC borrows Rs 4,000 cr from ICICI Bank for buying HPCL

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) has borrowed Rs 4,000 crore from ICICI Bank on top of over Rs 18,000 crore it has taken from three other banks to part finance its Rs 36,915 crore acquisition of HPCL.

- ICICI Bank has extended one-year loan to ONGC to fund the acquisition of government's 51.11 per cent stake in Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd (HPCL).
- The company is likely to sign-up more loan agreements to pay Rs 36,915 crore to the government before the month-end. The acquisition would create India's first integrated oil company.
- This would be ONGC's biggest acquisition and second buyout this fiscal after its Rs 7,738 crore acquisition of 80 per cent stake in Gujarat State Petroleum Corp's KG basin gas block.

Appointments & Resigns

Narayanan appointed Director of ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre

Senior scientist Dr V Narayanan has assumed charge as Director of ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC).

- He succeeded S Somanath who was appointed as Director of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC).
- Prior to this appointment, he was Associate Director of LPSC and was guiding liquid propulsion activities of ISRO and was instrumental in finalising the Liquid Propulsion Roadmap of ISRO for the next 20 years.
- Narayanan had joined ISRO in 1984 and since then has functioned in various capacities.

Jerome Powell confirmed as next Federal Reserve chair

- The Senate has confirmed Jay Powell as the next Federal Reserve chair. Powell, 64, has been a Fed governor for five years and helped shape policy under Janet Yellen, who will leave after a single term as the first woman to lead the world's most influential central bank. Powell has said his leadership would represent continuity with his predecessors.

HARMAN announces Priyanka Chopra as Global Brand Ambassador

HARMAN International, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. announced that actress, singer, producer and philanthropist Priyanka Chopra has been named a global brand ambassador for the company's JBL and Harman Kardon audio brands.

- Chopra will participate in a series of marketing initiatives including social media and brand awareness events for JBL and Harman Kardon.

Tsewang Namgyal ambassador to poland

- Shri Tsewang Namgyal, presently Ambassador of India to Cuba has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the Republic of Poland.

Science & Technology

SARAS PT1N: Upgraded indigenous transport aircraft makes successful maiden flight

SARAS PT1N, the new upgraded version of indigenous transport aircraft SARAS developed by National Aeronautics Laboratory (NAL) successfully made its maiden flight in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

- The aircraft took off from HAL airport, Bengaluru and flew for about 40 minutes at the maximum height of 8500 feet at the speed of 145 knots.
- The primary objective of the test was to evaluate system performance that will be collected in about 20 flights.
- The data collected from this shall be used to freeze the design of production version aircraft.
- SARAS PT1N is a 14-seater passenger aircraft designed and developed by CSIR-NAL, a frontline aerospace research laboratory.
- The production version aircraft will have 19-seat capacity.
- The indigenous aircraft development is seen as culmination of efforts of team CSIR-NAL, IAF-ASTE, Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC), HAL and Directorate General of Aeronautical Quality Assurance (DGAQA).

Important Days

8th National Voters' Day observed

The Election Commission of India (ECI) celebrated 8th National Voters' Day across nation for enhanced participation of citizens in electoral process.

- The objective of the Day is to increase enrolment of voters, especially of newly eligible ones.
- It also spreads awareness among voters regarding effective participation in electoral process.
- The theme for this years National Voters' Day is 'Accessible Elections' to spread awareness among voters regarding effective participation in the electoral process.
- National Voters' Day was initiated in 2011 to commemorate the foundation day of the Election Commission of India (ECI) which came into existence on 25th January 1950.

Himachal Pradesh celebrates 48th Full Statehood day

Himachal Pradesh is celebrating its 48th Full Statehood day. The state-level function was held in Aani Sub Division of Kullu district, where Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur unfurled tri colour and take the salute from police, home-guards, NCC cadets and students.

- Himachal Pradesh Statehood Day is a public holiday in the Himachal Pradesh.
- Notably, it was on this day in 1971, Himachal Pradesh was declared as an 18th state of the Indian Union. Himachal Pradesh is state in North India. Bordering Tibet.

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