

# National Current Affairs

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## **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways inks MoU with IL&FS for construction of Zojila tunnel**

The Union Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has inked MoU with IL&FS Transportation Networks Ltd for construction of the 14.150 km long, 2-lane bi-directional Zojila Tunnel in Jammu & Kashmir.

- This would be India's longest road tunnel and longest bi-directional tunnel in Asia. On completion, the tunnel will provide all weather connectivity between Srinagar, Kargil and Leh.
- Zojila Tunnel Project aims at construction of 14.150 km long two lane bidirectional single tube tunnel with parallel 14.200 km long egress tunnel between Baltaland Minamarg in J&K with total capital cost of Rs. 6808 crore. The duration for construction of the project is 7 years.
- Its main objective is to provide all weather connectivity to strategically important Leh region in J&K which at moment is limited to 6 months in year because of snow on passes and threat of avalanches.

## **Maharashtra govt bans sale of tobacco at shops selling FMCG products**

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday announced a ban on sale of tobacco at shops that sell chocolates, chips and other edible items.

- The move is aimed at ensuring youngsters do not get addicted to tobacco products.
- The Union government had directed state governments to enforce a ban on sale of tobacco at outlets which also sell Fast Moving Consumer Goods (items of general public consumption).
- Maharashtra, which came out with a notification on January 9, became the first state to enforce the ban.
- Shops and establishments caught selling both tobacco and FMCG items would face penal action, including cancellation of their licence, up to six months imprisonment, and a fine.
- The FDA has also extended the ban on scented supari (areca nut) by six months till July 2018
- The state has also planned disposal of over 5,500 cases under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act through local-level courts in February, she said. Some of these cases are 20 years old.
- Maharashtra will be the third state after Kerala and Gujarat to dispose of cases under the old act

### **Nitin Gadkari opens projects worth Rs 6,517 crore in Uttar Pradesh**

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari inaugurated and also laid the foundation stone for several projects in Uttar Pradesh -- all totalling Rs 6,517 crore.

- These seven national highway (NH) projects have a total length of 246 km.
- In Maharajganj, Gadkari opened the newly widened and strengthened 26.9 km Urka-Ramnagar section and 33 km long Siswa Babu to Kaptanganj section of NH 730.
- These projects cost Rs 369 crore.
- He also laid the foundation stone for widening and strengthening 21.12 km long Ramnagar-Siswa Babu section of NH 730 at a cost of Rs 193 crore.

### **Pradhan Mantri LPG Panchayat launched in Jharkhand**

Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das today launched 'Pradhan Mantri LPG Panchayat' in the state from Balijore village in Dumka district.

- The prime minister has set a target of providing gas connections to five crore families by 2019 and to fulfil his dream Jharkhand government is distributing LPG connections along with stoves,
- Jharkhand is the first state where beneficiaries are also getting stoves along with gas connections.
- Rs 300 crore was earmarked in the budget for LPG and stove distribution.
- So far, 10 lakh beneficiaries have got the connections and the state has set a target of 28 lakh poor families getting the connections this year.

### **India, Vietnam release first ever commemorative stamps**

India and Vietnam released first ever set of commemorative postage stamps to mark the long term friendly bilateral relationships between the two countries.

- These stamps based on the theme of ancient architecture is a symbol of strong friendship between the two countries.
- The two set of stamps released carry picture of Sanchi Stupa and Thien Mu Pagoda.
- Sanchi Stupa and Thien Mu Pagoda from Vietnam are symbol of traditional and historical value of Vietnam.
- The stamps have been designed by artists from the both countries.
- India-Vietnam relationships have progressed across various domain including politics, defence, commerce, foreign affairs, defence, energy, education and science.

### **Kolkata becomes first Indian metro to get floating market**

Kolkata, capital of West Bengal became first metro city in India to get floating market. It was inaugurated by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

- The floating market is located on lake at Patuli in South Kolkata which is 400 metres long and 60 metres wide.
- The lake has been transformed into the floating market similar to the one in Thailand.
- The aim of floating market is to rehabilitate over 200 shopkeepers from nearby market that was demolished for the widening of Eastern Metropolitan Bypass (EMB) — an important road that connects the northern parts of Kolkata to the eastern and southern tips.
- The market will host at least 114 boats, each one accommodating two shops.
- Special provisions have been made to ensure that water in lake does not stink and the aquatic life.

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## International Current Affairs

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### **WEF launches Global Centre for Cybersecurity**

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has launched new Global Centre for Cybersecurity in a bid to safeguard world from hackers and growing data breaches — especially from nation-states.

- The centre will be headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and will become operational from March 2018.
- The Global Centre for Cybersecurity will function as an autonomous organization under WEF.
- It will help to build a safe and secure global cyberspace.
- Its aim is to establish first global platform for governments, businesses, experts and law enforcement agencies to collaborate on cybersecurity challenges.
- It will draw on WEF's government and industry support to work towards more secure cyberspace through its established multi stakeholder approach.

### **ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit issues Delhi Declaration**

The ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit was held in New Delhi to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of sectoral dialogue between two sides under the theme of “Shared Values, Common Destiny”.

- It issued joint statement titled Delhi Declaration after the plenary session focusing on counter-terrorism, identity security, military cooperation, and bilateral financial support.
- India and 10 ASEAN countries for first time mentioned cross-border movement of terrorists and made commitment to counter the challenge through close cooperation as part of the declaration.
- Key Highlights of Delhi Declaration:
  - Called for strengthening and deepening ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit, across the whole spectrum of political-security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation.
  - Deepen cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, violent extremism and radicalisation through information sharing, law enforcement cooperation and capacity building under existing ASEAN-led mechanism.
  - Strengthen cooperation on cyber-security capacity building and policy coordination, including through supporting the implementation of ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy.
  - It called for strengthening cooperation to combat other transnational crimes, including people smuggling, trafficking in persons, illicit drug trafficking, cybercrime, and piracy and armed robbery against ships.
  - It reaffirmed their commitment to enhance physical and digital connectivity. It also called for early completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project and extend this Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.
  - Reaffirm importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region.
  - It calls for other lawful uses of seas and to promote peaceful resolutions of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

### **India, Vietnam sign two agreements**

India and Vietnam have signed two Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) to enhance cooperation in field of information and broadcasting and space cooperation.

- The MoUs were signed following bilateral meeting between PM Narendra Modi and his visiting counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc ahead of the India-Asean Commemorative Summit in New Delhi. Vietnam is a key pillar in India's Act East Policy and strategic partner in South East Asia.
- MoUs signed are:
  - MoU to enhance cooperation in field of information and broadcasting: It aims to enhance cooperation in the field of information and broadcasting, based on principles of equality and reciprocity pursuant to their national laws and regulations.
  - MoU on space cooperation: It is implementation arrangement between ISRO and National Remote Sensing Department of Vietnam.

- It seeks to establish tracking and data reception station and data processing facility in Vietnam under ASEAN India Space Cooperation .

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## Business

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### **NSIC inks pact with Malaysia's SME Corp**

National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) signed a MoU with SME Corporation Malaysia for exchange of information and cooperation in areas such as policies to aid development of small and medium businesses (SMBs) in the two countries.

- Besides, three other agreements were also signed between Indian and Malaysian entities to strengthen cooperation among smaller businesses in these countries.
- The two countries will work together in various areas like manufacturing and technology to drive growth in the SME sector.
- The two entities will also work together for improving competitiveness of Indian and Malaysian MSMEs in global markets and other forms of technical collaboration.
- The MoU between Malamega (Malaysia) and Pupathy Enclave will explore the possibilities of sourcing and supplying fossil fuels and development of green renewable energy.
- It will also explore joint business ventures for trading coal and other fuels required for power generation sector in India.
- The partnership between India's GA Software Technologies and JS Rezeki Bumi Maju Sdn Bhd will see an initial project targeted at providing computerised automated services for Malaysian immigration office and its related services/agencies via JS Rezeki's subsidiary.
- Besides, another agreement was also signed between Orchid Life (Malaysia) and Vimta Labs (India).

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## Awards & Recognition

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### **Government announces PM's Shram Awards for 2016 to 50 workers**

The Ministry of Labour & Employment has announced Prime Minister's Shram Awards for the year 2016 to be awarded to 50 workers including 3 women employed in Departmental Undertakings & Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) of Central/ State Governments and Private Sector Units employing 500 or more workers.

- In 2016, 34 workers are from PSUs and 16 workers are from Private Sectors.
- 2016 Shram Awards:
  - Shram Ratna Award: No nomination was found suitable for it.
  - Shram Bhushan: 12 workers from SAIL, BHEL and TATA Steel Ltd. were selected.
  - Shram Vir/Shram Veerangana Award: 18 workers from Naval Dockyard, Ordnance Factory, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam, TATA Steel, Hindalco Industries, Paradeep Phosphates Ltd., Brahmos Aerospace were selected.
  - Shram Shree/Shram Devi Award: 20 workers from Cement Corporation of India, Naval Ship Repair Yard, TATA Motors, Surat Lignite Power Plant, Larsen & Toubro Ltd. etc were selected.

### **2018 Padma Awards**

President Ram Nath Kovind has announced names of recipients of year 2018 Padma awards viz. Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. He approved conferment of Padma Awards on 85 persons.

- Padma Awards, the country's highest civilian awards bestowed for distinguished service of high order in various disciplines- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.
- 'Padma Vibhushan' is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; 'Padma Bhushan' for distinguished service of high order and 'Padma Shri' for distinguished service in any field. The awards are announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year.
- The 2018 list includes 3 Padma Vibhushan, 9 Padma Bhushan and 73 Padma Shri Awardees. 14 awardees are women, 16 awardees are from category of foreigners, NRIs, PIOs while 3 are posthumous awardees. The list also includes unsung persons and also people who rendered selfless service at the grassroots.
- Padma Vibhushan (It is the second highest civilian award)
  - Illaiyaraja - Art-Music
  - Ghulam Mustafa Khan - Art-Music
  - Parameswaran - Literature and Education
- Padma Bhushan (It is the third highest civilian award)
  - Pankaj Advani - Sports- Billiards/Snooke
  - Philipose Mar Chrysostom - Others-Spiritualism
  - Mahendra Singh Dhoni - Sports-Cricket

### **IAF Corporal Jyoti Prakash Nirala posthumously conferred with Ashok Chakra**

President Ram Nath Kovind awarded India's highest peacetime military decoration Ashok Chakra (31) posthumously to Indian Air Force (IAF) Garud commando Corporal Jyoti

Prakash Nirala. He had laid down his life after gunning down two terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir.

- Other two IAF officers are Rakesh Sharma (first and still only Indian citizen to go to space) and Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon posthumously decorated with the Param Vir Chakra in 1972.
- Corporal Jyoti Prakash Nirala had joined the IAF in 2005 and was 'Corporal' when he was martyred. He was part of small Garud commando batch attached to Indian Army's specialized counter-insurgency force, Rashtriya Rifles under the aegis of 'Op Rakshak' in J&K, when he was martyred.

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## Appointments & Resigns

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### **Usha Ananthasubramanian is first woman IBA chief**

Usha Ananthasubramanian, MD and CEO, Allahabad Bank, has been elected the first woman chairman of Indian Banks' Association (IBA).

- Usha was elected IBA Chairman for the year 2017-18 by its Managing Committee.
- Rajnish Kumar, Chairman, State Bank of India, was elected Deputy Chairman of IBA for the year 2017-18.

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## Science & Technology

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### **Rotavac: First India-designed vaccine to pass WHO test**

Rotavac became first indigenously developed vaccine from India to be pre-qualified by World Health Organisation (WHO).

- It means that vaccine can be sold internationally to several countries in South America and Africa.
- So far, several vaccines from India have been pre-qualified by WHO, but Rotavac is first vaccine entirely developed locally to get this status in safety and efficacy.
- Rotavac conceived and developed by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech Limited.
- It protects against childhood diarrhoea caused by the rotavirus.
- This recognition signifies credible industrial, scientific and regulatory process in place to develop vaccines in India.



- It paves the way for health and humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF, GAVI and Pan-American Health Organization to procure Rotavac for public health vaccination programmes across the world.

### **Chinese scientists for first time successfully clone monkeys**

Chinese scientists for first time have successfully cloned two identical long-tailed macaques (monkeys), named Zhong Zhong and Hua Hua using same technique that produced Dolly sheep two decades ago.

- This development makes them world's first primates – the order of mammals that includes monkeys, apes and humans – to be cloned from non-embryonic cell.
- These two identical long-tailed macaques were cloned using process called somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), which involves transferring the nucleus of cell, which includes its DNA, into egg whose nucleus is removed.
- Since cloned Dolly sheep was born in Scotland in 1996 using SCNT, scientists have successfully used this technique to clone more than 20 other species including cows, pigs, dogs, rabbits, rats and mice. Similar work in primates earlier, had always failed, leading some scientists to wonder if primates were resistant.
- Genetically identical animals are useful in research because confounding factors caused by genetic variability in non-cloned animals can complicate experiments.
- This development breaks technical barrier for the cloning of primate species, including humans.
- It will make possible to study diseases in populations of genetically uniform monkey and test new drugs for a range of diseases before clinical use.

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## **Environment**

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### **Scientists find new population of near-extinct handfish**

Tasmanian researchers have found an entirely new population of the extremely rare red handfish.

- They look like something out of a Dr Seuss book: brightly coloured fish with lizards' faces and pectoral fins like baseball catchers' mitts. They don't swim, instead using their hand-like fins to saunter along the seabed.
- Handfish survived for millions of years despite evolutionary odds stacked against them. They move by walking, which makes them easy pickings for predators and prevents them shifting to more desirable locales.



- Handfish have no larval stage. They hatch as mini adults that hobble along the sea floor, never straying far from their birthplaces.

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# Important Days

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## **India gears up for 69th Republic Day celebration**

The Republic Day parade will take place at the India Gate.

- This year a newly-formed all-women contingent of the BSF named 'Seema Bhavani' will participate in the Republic Day parade.
- The heads of state and government of 10 ASEAN nations will be the chief guests at India's 69th Republic Day celebrations today, signalling the significance Modi government attaches with the region.
- Heads of state from Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei will grace the occasion as chief guests.

## **International Customs Day 2018**

Instituted by the World Customs Organization (WCO), International Customs Day is held on January 26, which commemorates the day in 1953 when the inaugural session of the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC) was held in Brussels, Belgium. Seventeen European countries attended this session.

- In 1994 the CCC was renamed World Customs Organization (WCO) and today custom organizations from 179 countries are WCO members.
- Annually held on January 26, International Customs Day (ICD) recognizes the role of custom officials and agencies in maintaining border security.
- It focuses on the working conditions and challenges that customs officers face in their jobs.