

National Current Affairs

Maharashtra to grade performance of its 7.5 lakh govt employees

Maharashtra government wants to rank and grade state employees on their performance.

- A new 100-point performance marking system has been proposed for its 7.5 lakh state employees, which will take into account both subjective and objective evaluation of an employee's performance during the year.
- While the new reviewing system does not disincentivise the average or the poor performers, it has proposed public recognition and rewards for 'Sukarmis' or the good performers across ranks. On the basis of the marking system, various state departments will be asked to identify 5 per cent employees across cadres as the top performers at district, department and state levels.
- Government has planned to roll out various cash rewards and perks for such employees, besides giving their contribution wide recognition and enhancing their involvement in decision making.

President Ram Nath Kovind pitches for simultaneous elections

President Ram Nath Kovind has called for simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

- He made this state while addressing the joint sitting of Parliament on the commencement of the Budget Session.
- He made this statement arguing that frequent elections impede speed of development as officials have to assist in conducting polls.
- He called for sustained debate on subject of simultaneous elections and urged all political parties to arrive at consensus on this issue.
- The idea of 'one nation one election' has been proposed for many years starting with Law Commission suggestion in 1999.

Rs 3400 crore for airports in North East

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has allocated around Rs 3400 crore for the upgradation of airports in the North East region

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- Projects worth Rs 934 crore had already been completed, he said work on the rest would be over in the next two or three years.
- Among the works to be done are; construction of a new integrated terminal building in Assam, strengthening of the existing runway, refurbishment and a new Air Traffic Control cum technical block in Guwahati, construction of an aircraft hangar and a new control tower cum technical block, extension of the runway extended and installation of power infrastructure in Dibrugarh and construction of a new terminal building at Silchar as well as in Jorhat along with the modification and expansion of the existing buildings.

Coast Guard programme for children of fishing hamlets

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) today conducted a 'Day at Sea' event for children of fishing hamlets at Frazerganj in South 24 Parganas district, as part of its initiative for close interaction with the fishing community of coastal areas.

- Nineteen boys and girls of Frazerganj, a fishing harbour on Bay of Bengal coast at the southern tip of West Bengal, were provided a thrilling experience of travelling on board a hovercraft that had been brought in from the ICG base at Haldia for the joyride.
- The crew members of the Air Cushion Vehicle (technical name for hovercraft) tickled the curiosity of the young children by showing them various life saving and safety equipment on board.
- The outreach programme for the children is amongst a slew of events that the Coast Guard is conducting in the run up to the 41st Raising Day on February one.

Yogi inaugurates Mahesra bridge

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the Mahesra bridge on the Sonauli- Gorakhpur road.

- The bridge would connect Gorakhpur and its adjoining districts to Nepal, and usher in development and employment to the districts of east UP.
- The chief minister said the government would soon launch a massive sanitation and an encephalitis vaccination programme for children up to the age of 15 years from April.
- Adityanath asked public representatives to ensure cleanliness in all districts and villages in order to combat encephalitis, and promised medical facilities would be made available at the CHC (community health centre) and the PHC (primary health centre) level.

JK govt forms panel to devise horticulture development model

The Jammu and Kashmir government has constituted a committee headed by the state chief secretary to study the scope and definition of horticulture as envisaged by the Centre and other states of the country.

- As per a order issued by General Administrative Department (GAD), the committee headed by the chief secretary with administrative secretary finance; administrative secretary planning and monitoring; and administrative secretary horticulture departments as members will study the scope, definition of horticulture in Government of India and other states.
- It will bring the state horticulture department at par with the national framework and to facilitate correct assessment of growth in the sector, for improved perspective planning and harnessing vast potential in the sector.

Himachal Pradesh launches Zero Budget Natural Farming project to promote organic farming

Himachal Pradesh Government has launched Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) project to promote organic farming.

- The project aims to increase agriculture produce and the income of farmers by the year 2022.
- ZBNF is set of natural farming methods where cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero.
- It is a farming practice that believes in natural growth of crops without adding any fertilizers and pesticides or any other foreign elements. It is different from organic farming.
- The word Zero Budget refers to zero net cost of production of all crops.
- This means that farmers need not purchase fertilizers and pesticides in order to ensure the healthy growth of crops.
- The main aim of ZBNF is eliminate use of chemical pesticides and uses biological pesticides and promote of good agronomic practices.
- It lowers cost of inputs of farmers and gives better capacity to increase the incomes.
- It also protects soil from degradation and helps in retaining soil fertility and is climate change resilient.

Banking & Finance

Paytm, Alibaba's AGTech Holdings launch new mobile gaming platform

Mobile payments company Paytm and Alibaba Group-owned AGTech Holdings Ltd have formed a joint venture to launch Gamepind, a gaming platform aimed at mobile users in India.

- Gamepind will offer a host of popular social, casual and sports games with an exclusive rewards programme. The platform will be available as a standalone app and in the Paytm app.
- In addition, the platform will offer cash coupons and products, which will serve as a marketing and promotional platform for merchants to engage with mobile shoppers and gamers.
- AGTech Media currently holds 45% in the joint venture, and Paytm owns the rest.

Axis Bank launches 4th edition of "Evolve"

Private sector Axis Bank launched the fourth edition of 'Evolve', an annual multi-city knowledge series for Bank's SME customers.

- The current edition of evolve, titled "Transform your Family Business into your dream company", will empower the SMEs understand the winning strategies and best practises that have helped some of the leading family businesses in India grow into reputable enterprise.
- This edition will span across 30 cities including Nagpur, Surat, Rajkot, Pune, Vishakhapatnam, Trichy, Kanpur, Ludhiana and Jamshedpur, a bank release said here.
- The series aims to equip the participating SMEs with new-age strategies, live case studies, operational know-how, regulatory and Government related knowledge skills.

Business

Infosys signs MoU with Kailash Satyarthi Childrens Foundation

Infosys Foundation, the philanthropic arm of IT major Infosys has signed a MoU with the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation for a grant to create a child-friendly village towards improving children's health, providing education and creating a non-violent environment.

- Infosys Foundation will disburse this grant over the next three years.

- The Kailash Satyarthi Childrens Foundation is a non-profit organization, envisions a world where every child is free, safe, healthy, educated and has the ability to discover their potential.
- Kailash Satyarthi has been at the forefront of the global movement to end child slavery and exploitative child labour and was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014.

Renault-Nissan group pips VW to become top-selling carmaker in 2017

The Renault-Nissan automaking alliance emerged as the world's biggest seller of light vehicles in 2017, bumping Volkswagen AG off the top spot, after the inclusion of Mitsubishi Motors' numbers boosted its final tally.

- Nissan Motor Co's sales hit a record high of 5.82 million, while French automaker Renault SA has reported sales of 3.76 million. Mitsubishi's sales came in at 1.03 million, bringing total 2017 sales for the group to around 10.61 million light vehicles.
- Together, the three automakers beat record sales of around 10.53 million light vehicles at Volkswagen, 2016's top seller which also includes the Audi, Skoda, Seat and Porsche brands.
- Toyota Motor Corp, which held the No.2 spot in 2016, posted group sales of 10.2 million units last year, excluding its Hino Motors heavy trucks.

India becomes third largest producer of crude steel

According to recent report published by World Steel Association (WSA), India has overtaken US to become the world's third largest steel producer in 2017.

- India's crude steel production has grown by 6.2% to 101.4 million tonnes (MT) in 2017 compared to 95.5 MT in the previous year.
- China has remained world leader by producing 831.7 MT in 2017, up 5.7% from 786.9 MT in the year-ago period.
- Japan is second largest global steel producer and had witnessed negative growth in steel output declined by 0.1% to 104.7 MT in 2017 from 104.8 MT in 2016.
- The Global steel production had reached 1,691.2 MT in 2017, up by 5.3% compared to 2016 when output was 1,606.3 MT.
- Crude steel production increased in all regions in 2017 except in CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), which has remained stable.

Awards & Recognition

Calicut University confers D.Litt on Mohanlal, PT Usha

Kerala Governor and Calicut University Chancellor P. Sathasivam on Monday conferred the D. Litt on Malayalam superstar Mohanlal and veteran athlete P.T. Usha, "the Payyoli Express".

- The honorary degree was awarded to the two legends after four years since it was first announced.
- Mohanlal, one of the two reigning superstars in the Malayalam film industry in a career spanning close to four decades, continues his glorious run at the top.
- Usha, who is now 53-years-old, is an employee of the Indian Railways. She also runs the P.T. Usha School of Athletics in her hometown.

Obituary

CEC LAHDC of Leh region Sonam Dawa passes away

Chief Executive Councilor of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council of Leh Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir Dr Sonam Dawa Lonpo passed away. He was elected to the chief executive councillor in 2015.

World's oldest man Francisco Nunez Olivera dead at 113

On 29th January 2018, Francisco Nunez Olivera named "the world's oldest man" passed away in Bienvenida village, Spain.

- He died just a month after he turned 113 years. He was born on 13 December 1904.
- His long life has been credited to his consumption of vegetables he cultivated in his own land and a glass of red wine every day.

Important Days

Hicky's Bengal Gazette: 238th anniversary of India's first newspaper celebrated

Journalists and social activists celebrated 238th anniversary of India's first newspaper the Hicky's Bengal Gazette.

- 29 January is also celebrated Hicky's Day to pay tributes to the fighter-journalist James Augustus Hicky who is considered as founder of journalism in India.
- Hicky's Bengal Gazette (Original Calcutta General Advertiser) was an English language weekly newspaper published in Kolkata (then Calcutta), the then capital of British India.
- It was founded by James Augustus Hicky. It was the first newspaper printed in Asia.

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