

# National Current Affairs

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## **Uttar Pradesh India's most polluted state: Greenpeace report**

With 15 of its cities among 30 cities with highest levels of toxic air in the country, Uttar Pradesh is India's most polluted state, says a Greenpeace India report.

- The report - Airpocalypse II - is based on air pollution related data collected from Central and State Pollution Control Boards' and Committees' annual reports and their websites and through applications under Right to Information Act wherever data was unavailable or gaps existed in the available data.
- The report brought out the list of most polluted cities in the country based on particulate matter data of PM10 levels for 280 cities during 2016 and in some cases also 2015, covering large parts of the country.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi turned out to be the worst polluted city of UP. Countrywide, it came sixth, a rung above than Ghaziabad. New Delhi topped list while Lucknow was 18th among the 30 most polluted cities and towns of the country.
- Other towns and cities in UP on the list are Hapur, Bareilly, Firozabad, Kanpur, Agra, NOIDA, Allahabad, and Mathura where PM10 levels were way above permissible limits.

## **Thar Link Express receives extension for three more years**

India and Pakistan have extended agreement of Thar Link Express, second solitary rail service between both countries for three more years i.e. till 2021.

- The Thar Express links Jodhpur (India) and Karachi (Pakistan) via Munabao (Rajasthan)-Khokhrapar (Sindh province) border crossing and carries only passengers.
- Thar Link Express is Indian portion of international passenger train operated weekly by Indian Railway using its own coaches and locomotives, between Jodhpur and Munabao.
- Passengers from Munabao clear customs and are transported to across border to Zero Point station where Thar Express takes passengers to Karachi, Pakistan.

## **Maharashtra government to give sanitary pads to 7 lakh girls at Rs 5 a pack**

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018, the Maharashtra state cabinet approved the introduction of Asmita (dignity), a scheme to provide sanitary pads to 7 lakh girls in government schools for Rs 5 a pack.

- The scheme Asmita aims to provide sanitary pads at subsidized price to girls in the age of 11 to 19 years.
- It has been launched with a motive to increase the usage of sanitary pads in rural areas of Maharashtra from the current usage rate 17 % to targeted 75 %.
- Three small scale manufacturers would produce the sanitary pads. It would be supplied through women self- help groups (SHGs).
- This scheme will cause a burden of Rs 12.75 crore on the state government annually. This scheme will be launched on 8th March on the World Women's Day.
- Apart from school girls, 1.75 crore rural women will also be covered under this scheme. But they will not be provided subsidized prices, they will have to pay the original price.

### **Uttar Pradesh launches Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana Gramin**

On January 30, 2018, Uttar Pradesh State Cabinet launched 'Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojna Grameen', a new scheme to construct houses in rural areas.

- Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana Gramin is for those who have not been covered under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna and those who are not beneficiaries of any other government housing schemes.
- Under this scheme, Rs 1.30 lakh financial aid (for constructing houses) will be given to people residing in Naxal-affected areas of Uttar Pradesh and Rs 1.20 lakh to selected beneficiaries.
- Beneficiaries under this scheme also includes those families, who have been affected with Kala Azar or Japanese Encephalitis and those who belong to Vantangia or Musahar tribes and do not have houses or are living in "Kuchcha" houses.
- Uttar Pradesh State Government has already identified about 25000 beneficiaries for this scheme.

### **Bihar cabinet grants Rs 105 crore for Mahadalit Vikas Mission**

The Bihar cabinet approved a grant of Rs 105 crore for the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission, set up with the objective of devising and implementing schemes designed especially for the most deprived sections among the Scheduled Castes.

- The Mission was set up in 2008 vide a notification of the state government as an autonomous body functioning under the SC/ST Welfare Department.

- Other decisions taken at the cabinet meeting include construction of a high security jail in Phulwarisharif block of Patna district at an estimated cost of Rs 56.72 crore, the principal secretary said.
- Maoists and notorious criminals from prisons across the state would be lodged in this jail.

### **Mihir: High performance computing facility inaugurated at Noida**

Ministry of Earth Science (MoES) has inaugurated high performance computer system (HPC) or supercomputer Mihir (meaning sun) at National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), Noida.

- The HCP will provide facility for improving weather/climate forecasts.
- It is country's largest HPC facility in terms of peak capacity and performance.
- It also propelled India's ranking to Top 30 in the list of HPC facilities in world.
- With this, MoES has acquired HPC facility total of 6.8 Peta Flops (PF) which has been installed at two of its constituent units: 4.0 PF HPC facility named 'Pratyush' at Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune and 2.8 Peta Flops facility at NCMRWF, Noida.
- It also improved India rank to 4th position after Japan, UK and US in terms of dedicated HPC resources for weather/climate forecasts.
- New HPC facility will help in meeting operational requirements of MoES and also support research and development activities on various problems related to Earth Science.
- Help MoES in developing several services for societal benefits catering by building state-of-the-art systems for multi-hazard risk reduction from floods/droughts, cyclones, heat/cold waves, earthquakes and tsunamis.

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## **International Current Affairs**

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### **India 6th wealthiest country: New World Wealth Report**

According to New World Wealth Report, India was ranked sixth in list of wealthiest countries with total wealth of US \$8,230 billion in 2017.

- The total wealth, refers to private wealth held by all individuals living in each country/city. It includes all their assets (property, cash, equities, business interests) less any liabilities. However it excludes government funds.

- Top 10 Wealthiest Countries are United States (1st, total wealth held US \$ 64,584 billion), China (2nd, \$24,803 billion), Japan (3rd, \$19,522 billion), France (7th, \$6,649 billion), Canada (8th, \$6,393 billion), Australia (9th, \$6,142 billion) and Italy (10th, \$4,276 billion).
- Meanwhile, during period under consideration global wealth rose by 12% (from US \$192 trillion at the end of 2016 to US \$215 trillion at the end of 2017) and China's wealth saw an increase of 22%.

### **U.S. lifts Ban on Refugees from 11 'High-Risk' Countries**

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018, United States lifted its ban on refugees from 11 "high-risk" countries. However, people aiming to enter US will face very tough assessments.

- Name of the "high-risk" countries have not been revealed. But refugee groups state that, they might be Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.
- The applicants are insisted to furnish detailed histories and proofs of their past activities. They are also asked to allow access to their personal gadgets and social media accounts.

### **Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Russia**

On 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018, the Syrian National Dialogue Congress was held in Sochi, Russia.

- The Syrian National Congress was organized by Russia, Iran and Turkey. Around 1,500 delegates participated in the congress. Representatives from various countries and international organizations also took part in the congress.
- Issues discussed were related to ending the seven-year civil war, necessary amendments to the constitution and post-war reconstruction.
- An important outcome of the congress is formation of a constitutional committee to promote a constitutional reform. The committee consists of Syrian government delegation and the opposition delegation.

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## **Banking & Finance**

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### **SBI to provide credit cards to farmers**

State Bank of India (SBI) has introduced a pilot scheme on credit cards for farmers, which extends facilities like lower interest rate besides the normal 40 days' credit available for credit card users

- This facility has been launched on a pilot basis in three States – Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.
- This facility will be rolled out on national level on the basis of response received and experience gathered during the pilot phase.
- Conceived by a Mumbai-based start-up, POORTI Agri Services, the Farmcart and Dealer Bandhu apps are being partnered by SBI which provides the payment gateway.
- While the present Kisan Credit Card scheme acted like a debit card for farmers, the new one would enable them to purchase farm-related items besides some consumer goods.
- A major difference between the regular credit cards and the newer one was the interest rates, which would be lower.

### **Government inks \$100 Million loan agreement for Project to Boost Rural Economy of Tamil Nadu**

The Union Government has inked \$100 million Loan Agreement with World Bank for Project to Boost Rural Economy of Tamil Nadu.

- The loan is from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and has a 5-year grace period and maturity of 19 years.
- The project aims to promote rural enterprises, facilitate their access to finance and create employment opportunities for youth, particularly women in selected blocks of Tamil Nadu across 26 districts. It will create enabling environment for producer organizations and enterprises to promote businesses across select value chains.
- The project will be operational in 120 blocks across 3,994 villages in 26 Districts of Tamil Nadu with 411,620 direct beneficiaries.
- It will be rolled out in phased manner and in first phase 26 blocks will covered in all project districts, followed by 52 blocks in second phase and remaining 42 blocks in third phase.
- Under this project, communities will identify commodities and subsectors in the value chain for preparing business plans based on the analysis.
- 30% of the financing for these s plans will be through matching grant program from project and remaining 70% will be leveraged from other financial institutions.
- The project will work with targeted households that are already part of Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
- It will also specifically support eligible households from socially and culturally disadvantaged groups to harness their existing assets, skills, and resources.

### **Government inks \$250 Million Loan Agreement with ADB to Improve Rural Connectivity in 5 States**

The Union Government has inked \$250 Million Loan Agreement with Asian Development Bank (ADB) to Improve Rural Connectivity in 5 States viz. Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).

- The loan proceeds will be used to finance the construction of 6,254 kilometres all-weather rural roads in these 5 States under the PMGS).
- It is first tranche Loan of the \$500 million Second Rural Connectivity Investment Program for India approved by the ADB Board in December 2017.
- The program is aimed to improve rural connectivity, facilitate safer and more efficient access to livelihood and socio-economic opportunities for rural communities through improvements to about 12,000 kms Rural Roads across 5 States.
- Significance of ADB-funded investment program
- Provide continued assistance to PMGSY and support the Government's long-term goal for rural development.
- It will have transformative impact in terms of rural economy and will bring greater efficiency in terms of access and connectivity for rural people in 5 states.
- Under it about 2,000 technical personnel will be imparted training on road safety and maintenance.
- It will also support Government's drive for innovative approaches to reduce costs, conserve non-renewable natural resources and promote use of wastematerials in rural road construction.
- It builds upon \$800 million ADB-financed first Rural Connectivity Investment Program in 2012 that added about 9,000 kms of all-weather rural roads in the same States.
- The road designs under it take into account climate risks (such as increased rainfall and storm surges) with measures such as greater elevation of road embankments, slope protection, and better drainage.

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## **Business**

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### **Government constitutes high powered group to look into sharing utility infrastructure**

On January 30, 2018, Prime Minister-appointed Group of Infrastructure, headed by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari constituted a high-level committee to look into procedures for sharing of infrastructure for utilities like water pipes and telecom cables.

- The committee will be headed by telecom secretary and will comprise secretaries of power and petroleum, road transport and highways and member (Engineering), railways.
- It has been decided that ministries would enter into an agreement in this regard.
- The Ministries would not charge each other for setting up projects and the payment would be on government-to-government basis.

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## Awards & Recognition

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### **Vinod Paul: First Indian to receive WHO's IhsanDogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize**

NITI Aayog member Dr Vinod Paul became first Indian to be awarded prestigious IhsanDoğramacı Family Health Foundation Prize by World Health Organisation (WHO). It will be formally presented at World Health Assembly to be held in Geneva, Switzerland in May 2018.

- He was selected unanimously for the prestigious award by WHO Board from six other shortlisted candidates from Algeria, China, Malaysia, Mexico, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan for distinguished contributions towards improving the health and well-being of families, especially in developing countries.
- Dr Paul is internationally renowned researcher, clinician, educator and public health advocate in the area of family health, with special focus on newborn health.

### **Soumitra Chatterjee presented with France's Legion d'Honneur**

Legendary Bengali actor Soumitra Chatterjee (83) was awarded France's highest civilian award, Legion d'Honneur.

- He was presented the medal by French Ambassador Alexandre Ziegler at a function in Kolkata, West Bengal.
- Chatterjee was awarded in recognition of his remarkable career and his outstanding contribution in promoting Indian cinema in France and his long-standing attraction for our country.
- He has been awarded Padma Bhushan (2004), India's highest award in cinema Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2012).
- In 1999, he became first Indian to be awarded with Commandeur de l' Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France's highest award for artistes.

### **Lt. Gen Anil Chauhan takes charge as DGMO of Indian Army**

On 30th January 2018, Lt. Gen Anil Chauhan assumed charge as the new Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the Indian Army. He replaces Lt General A K Bhatt.

- Lt General A K Bhatt will take charge of Srinagar-based 15 Corps.
- Lt. Gen Anil Chauhan has held various important posts in the Army. He has vast experience in counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir and Northeastern regions.
- Earlier he served as the commander of the Dimapur-based 3 Corps. He was also a military observer for UN peacekeeping mission in Angola. His role as DGMO, will be to manage operations of the Army.

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## **Appointments & Resigns**

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### **Indian-American Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen to lead USISPF Board**

Indian-American Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen has been elected as the Vice Chairman of the US-India Strategic and Partnership Forum, a new organisation set up to enhance business relations between India and the US.

- The new representative body - US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) was set up to promote bilateral trade and work on creating “meaningful opportunities that have the power to change the lives of citizens. Now the USISPF Board has 31 board members.
- Other members who have joined the USISPF Board recently are: Ajay Singh, chairman and managing director of Spice Jet Limited and John Kern, senior vice president of Supply Chain Operations at Cisco.

### **IOA Joint Secretary Vikram Singh Sisodia named Chef-de-Mission for CWG**

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018, Indian Olympic Association (IOA) named Vikram Singh Sisodia as the Chef-de-Mission for Commonwealth Games (CWG) that will be held in Gold Coast, Australia from April 4 to 15, 2018.

- Vikram Singh Sisodia is currently the joint secretary of Indian Olympic Association (IOA). He is also the president of Chhattisgarh State Tennis Association.
- IOA has also appointed three team managers: Namdev Shirgaonkar, Modern Pentathlon Federation of India General Secretary; Ajay Naarang, Asian Sailing

Federation official and V A Shiyad, Andaman and Nicobar Olympic Association Secretary General.

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## Science & Technology

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### **INS Karanj: Third submarine of Scorpene class launched**

Indian Navy has launched Scorpene submarine INS Karanj at the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- It is the third Scorpene class submarine built by MDL under ambitious Project 75 of the Indian Navy.
- INS Karanj has been named after older submarine as per Indian naval tradition that was in operation from 1969 to 2003.
- It served country for 34 years and was also part of operations in 1971.
- INS Karanj has an overall length of 67.5 metres and height of about 12.3 metres.
- Its hull form, fin and hydroplanes are specifically designed to produce minimum underwater resistance.
- In all, six scorpion submarines being indigenously built at MDL under Project 75 with help of French naval defence and Energy Company DCNS.

### **Government launches GeM 3.0**

The Ministry of Commerce & Industry has launched third version of the Government e-Marketplace (GeM 3.0). The earlier version GeM 2.0 was launched as pilot project in August 2016.

- GeM 3.0 will offer standardised and enriched catalogue management, powerful search engine, real time price comparison, template-based Bid and RA creation, demand aggregation, e-EMD, e-PBG, user rating, advanced GeM is an Online Market platform to facilitate procurement of goods and services by various Ministries and agencies of the Government.
- It has been envisaged as National Procurement Portal of India.
- It aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement of goods and services and eliminate corruption.
- It functions under Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D), Ministry of Commerce and Industries. It is completely paperless, cashless and system driven e-market place that enables procurement of common use goods and services with minimal human interface.

- GeM 3.0 has powerful search engine and price comparison using third party sites – multisource and real time.
- It has performance based User Rating and online vendor assessment (optional).
- It has market based-bundling and bunching of products and services.
- It also has multi-Cart Functionality and offers more Services with bid and RA Facility.
- **Benefits of GeM 3.0.**
  - Completely transparent transactions across all ranges.
  - Market Based generic requirements across all government agencies.
  - Open and dynamic market place with rating based on performance of user on website.
  - Generic standards established through universal service levels and cost comparison enabled.
  - Standardisation of specifications of both products and services enabling empirical price comparability.

### **MCD launches Mobile App 311, aims to improve civic services**

A mobile application of the three municipal corporations of Delhi was launched today in a bid to enhance engagement of citizens in resolution of grievances and improvement of civic services in the city.

- Mobile App 311 was launched by Lt Governor Anil Baijal at the Raj Niwas.
- The app can be downloaded for free from the Google Play Store and the Apple Store.
- Once downloaded, the app will empower users by giving them locations of nearby public toilets, police stations, metro stations, petrol pumps, parking, hospitals, bus stands, veterinary clinics, libraries, gyms, markets and other places.

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## **Sports**

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### **Sharath Kamal lifts National Men's singles Table Tennis title for the eighth time**

On 30th January 2018, Sharath Kamal won the National men's singles title for the eighth time at the 11Even Sports Senior Table Tennis Nationals, in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

- He defeated Anthony Amalraj 4-1 in the finals and won the National men's singles title for the eighth time at the 11Even Sports Senior Table Tennis Nationals.
- Suthirta Mukherjee defeated Manika Batra 4-3 in the finals and became the women's champion.

### **BJP MP Chintaman Wanaga dead**

Senior BJP MP from Maharashtra Chintaman Wanaga passed way.

- He was elected to the Lok Sabha from Palghar in Maharashtra. He was a member of the 11th and the 13th Lok Sabha as well.
- An advocate by profession, he was the Thane district president of the BJP from 1990 to 1996. He was a member of the parliamentary standing committee on rural development and the committee on welfare of SCs and STs.

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