

National Current Affairs

Government to launch KUSUM scheme to encourage farmers for solar farming

The Union Government has announced Rs.1.4 lakh-crore Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahaabhiyan (KUSUM) scheme for promoting solar farming i.e. decentralised solar power production of up to 28,250 MW to help farmers. The Union Budget 2018-19 has allocated Rs. 48,000 crore for the scheme for the ten-year period.

- KUSUM scheme will start with building 10,000 MW solar plants on barren lands and providing 1.75 million off-grid agricultural solar pumps.
- It will provide extra income to farmers, by giving them an option to sell additional power to grid through solar power projects set up on their barren lands.
- It will help in de-dieselising the agriculture sector as India had about 30 million farm pumps that include 10 million pumps running on diesel.
- The surplus electricity generated by farmers will be bought by state electricity distribution companies (discoms). Thus it will help boost the country's emerging green economy.
- Components of scheme:
 - Building 10,000 MW solar plants on barren lands.
 - Providing sops to DISCOMS to purchase the electricity produced.
 - Solarising existing pumps of 7250 MW as well as government tube wells with a capacity of 8250 MW.
 - Distributing 17.5 lakh solar pumps.

Maharashtra: Four schemes launched in agriculture and allied sectors

The Maharashtra government has launched four schemes to promote entrepreneurship in agriculture and allied sectors among the economically backward segments. It would include imparting training to 2.5 lakh youths across rural Maharashtra.

- Apart from providing loans and interest subsidies, there is a provision to impart skill development training in fields related to agro-industries and allied services.
- The larger objective is to generate employment avenues for rural youths in agriculture and related industries.
- The Annasaheb Patil Arthik Backward Development Corporation (APABDC) is the nodal body for the four schemes.
- The corporation, which is provided a dedicated budget by the state government, would also provide interest waiver on loans availed by economically backward entrepreneurs in agriculture and related industries.

- The four schemes include extending loan along with interest subsidy. The second would be for group farming, the third for group projects related to agro-industries, small and medium scale entrepreneurs and the fourth relates to skill development training in agriculture. The beneficiaries would be in the age group of 18 to 41 years depending on category.
- The annual income of the family of the individual who takes the loan cannot exceed Rs 8 lakh. The interest would be borne by APABDC.

Assam Signs MoU With NBCC For Rs 1950 Cr Twin-Tower Trade Centre

Government of Assam signed an MoU with National Building Construction Corporation (India) Limited for setting up a twin tower trade centre in Guwahati with a project cost of Rs. 1950 crore in self-financing mode.

- This iconic project will be implemented at Basistha Crossing near NH-37 with a completion period of sixty months.
- The construction work of the Twin Tower will commence from July 2018 using green technologies and would reflect rich natural heritage and culture of Assam.
- The modern tower with in-house arrangement will give a new boost to the business in the state.

First Butterfly park opens in Kanpur

The Uttar Pradesh government has inaugurated the state's first ever butterfly park in Kanpur to preserve the ecosystem.

- The butterfly park was constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 1 crore.
- A total of 100 species of flowers have been planted in order to attract the butterflies. By now, more than 50 species of butterflies have already been observed in the park.
- In addition, 40 species of evergreen flowers have also been planted, including Calendula, Gulmehendi and Dahlia, to allow the tourists witness the scenic beauty of the place throughout the year.

N Chandrasekaran Task force constituted to study AI application in military

The Ministry of Defence (Department of Defence Production) constituted a 17 member task force headed by Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran to study use and application of artificial intelligence (AI) in military.

- The task force will study the whole gamut of issues surrounding strategic implications of AI in national security perspective, in global context.

- The task force comprises National Cyber Security Coordinator Gulshan Rai, representatives from Indian Army, Navy and Airforce, chairman of Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL), representatives from ISRO, Atomic Energy Commission and defence ministry.
- It also includes representation from academic institutes such as IISc-Bengaluru, and IIT Mumbai and Chennai.

32nd Surajkund International Crafts Mela held in Haryana

The 32nd edition of Surajkund International Crafts Mela was held at Faridabad, Haryana.

- It was formally inaugurated by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in the presence of Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar.
- It is annual cultural festival hosted since 1987 to showcase richness and diversity of the handicrafts and cultural heritage of India.
- This year Uttar Pradesh is theme state and Kyrgyzstan is the partner nation.
- The Mela is organized every year by Surajkund Mela Authority and Haryana Tourism in collaboration with Union Ministries of Tourism, Textiles, Culture and External Affairs Ministry.
- The 15-day festival showcases richness and diversity of handicrafts, handlooms and cultural heritage of the country.
- This year Uttar Pradesh as theme state showcased its religious tourism, rural tourism and spiritual tourism apart from its art, culture and heritage.

Floating Treatment Wetland launched to purify Nekkampur Lake in Hyderabad

The Floating Treatment Wetland (FTW) was inaugurated on World Wetlands Day (February 2) in Nekkampur Lake in Hyderabad to clean and purify the polluted water body.

- Plants planted on FTW can clean the lake by absorbing nitrates and other pollutants in the water.
- FTW is joint effort of NGO Dhruvansh, Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA), district administration and other organisations. It measures around 3,000 sq. ft and comprises four layers viz. floatable bamboo at base, styrofoam cubicles above it. The third layer consists of gunny bags and ravel on final layer to support cleaning agents (plants).
- FTW's working is based on soil-less hydroponics technique. Hydroponics permits plants to grow only on sunlight and water. There is no need of soil.
- There are small holes at bottom of base which facilitates flow of nutrients from water to plants through biological uptake process.

First defence industrial corridor between Chennai, Bengaluru

The first of the two defence industrial production corridors, as announced in the Union Budget, will link Chennai and Bengaluru.

- The first corridor will link Chennai and Bengaluru and will pass through Coimbatore and several other industrial clusters.
- This shall provide impetus to the defence production industry in the country and in the region, in particular.
- Announcement regarding the second defence industrial corridor will be made soon.

International Current Affairs

UK allows doctors to create three-parent babies through mitochondrial donation

Britain's fertility regulator Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) has allowed doctors to create country's first 'three-parent' babies through mitochondrial donation therapy (or MRT). This move is aimed at preventing passage of incurable genetic diseases from mothers to offsprings.

- HEFA has approved procedures to be applied on two women in the city of Newcastle in northeast England.
- The procedure will use MRT for the women, having neurodegenerative disorder genes which causes problem with movement or mental functioning.
- It will create first three parent baby in UK within a year.
- MRT or Mitochondrial donation is medical technique in which defective mitochondria carried by a woman is replaced with the healthy mitochondria of a donor.

New Manchester-India Partnership set up in UK to expand trade opportunities

A new Manchester-India Partnership (MIP) aimed at connecting Indian companies with the northern regions of England has been set up to further trade, investment, science and innovation ties between India and Britain.

- The public-private initiative between India and Manchester, a core city of what has been termed as the Northern Powerhouse in Britain, is backed by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and will have permanent full-time teams based in Manchester, Delhi and Bangalore.

- Jim O'Neill, the economist who coined the phrase BRICS in reference to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa as the emerging economies of the world, officially launched the partnership at an event hosted by the Indo-British All Party Parliamentary Group on the terrace of the Houses of Parliament.

China, UNDP Pak sign \$4mn assistance agreement for Fata, Balochistan

China, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Pakistan have signed a USD 4 million agreement to provide assistance over four months to help the people of Fata and Balochistan region in Pakistan.

- The project will support the people in the restoration of their livelihood and help rebuild their lives.
- The Chinese ambassador further said that China would continue to increase the grant assistance to Pakistan.

Banking & Finance

Nepal gets a high ₹650 crore outlay

India's annual financial allocation to Nepal for 2018-19 has nearly doubled under the Union Budget.

- The External Affairs Ministry has been allocated a total ₹15,011 crore, which indicates a marginal increase of ₹1,321 crore over the previous year's grant.
- For India's development and diplomatic engagement under the 'Neighbourhood First' policy, the Budget has allocated ₹5545 crore. Bhutan is traditionally the largest recipient of Ministry's allocation.
- It has maintained the same position even as the allocation increased by ₹71 crore to touch ₹2,650 crore.
- However, the giant leap in allocation was for Nepal, which received ₹650 crore from the Ministry. This year's allocation is the third consecutive and the largest increase.

IWAI inks project agreement with World Bank for Jal Marg Vikas Project on Ganga

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) signed project agreement with World Bank and for Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) i.e. National Waterway-1 on Ganga River from Varanasi

(Uttar Pradesh) to Haldia (West Bengal). It also inked US \$375 million loan agreement for the project.

- The signing of agreement follows approval of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) for implementation of US \$800 million JMVP for capacity augmentation of navigation on River Ganga.
- Out of remaining amount, \$380 million will be sourced by Central Government's counterpart funds from budgetary allocation and proceeds from bond issue. Another US \$ 45 million will come from private sector participation under the PPP mode.
- The JMVP is being implemented by IWAI with the financial and technical support of World Bank.
- It will develop waterway between Varanasi and Haldia on Ganga River, covering distance of 1620 km by March, 2023.

Business

Cochin Shipyard Limited signs MoU with Russian firm for development of vessels

Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) and Joint Stock Company United Shipbuilding Corporation (USC), Russia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate and engage in Design, Development and Execution of contemporary, State-of-Art vessels for Inland and Coastal Waterways.

- CSL and USC will collaborate for development of High-Speed Vessels, River-Sea Cargo Vessels, Passenger Vessels, Dredgers, and other watercrafts for inland waterways and coastal shipping.
- The MoU will give a push to the Government's Make-in-India programme, as also its plans to develop eco-friendly and economic transportation along India's inland waterways and coastal shipping routes under SAGARMALA.
- Once the infrastructure for water based transport is in place there will be a demand for different kinds of specialized vessels in the near and medium term. The MoU is an effort to get ready to cater to this demand.
- USC is the largest shipbuilding company in Russia incorporating about 40 enterprises including shipyards. It has 300 years of experience and has played an instrumental role in growth of inland waterways in Russia.

CriSidEx: CRISIL, SIDBI launches India's first MSE Sentiment Index

The SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) and ratings agency Crisil have launched CriSidEx, India's first MSE Sentiment Index for micro, small and medium

enterprises (MSMEs). The index will help to indicate the current state and expected outlook on the MSME sector every quarter.

- CRISIL-SIDBI MSE Sentiment Index (or CriSidEx) has been developed jointly by CRISIL and SIDBI.
- It is a composite index based on diffusion index of 8 parameters.
- It measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 200 (extremely positive).
- Significance of index:
 - Provide crucial insights into employment, business environment and foreign trade in MSME sector.
 - Allow policy makers to take timely proactive steps, including those based on early warnings thrown up by survey of index.
 - Provide intelligence and insights for regulators, trade bodies, lenders as well as economic and financial analysts.
 - Help in forecasting business environment by capturing sentiment on various business parameters such as business situation, capacity utilisation, order book and margins.
 - Flag potential headwinds and changes in production cycles in MSME sector and thus help in improving market efficiencies.

Appointments & Resigns

B A Chopade appointed BHU vice-chancellor

The Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry has appointed B A Chopade the vice-chancellor of Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

- Chopade is at present the vice-chancellor of Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University.
- He will take charge from BHU Registrar Neeraj Tripathi, who had been holding the additional charge of the top post since October last year.

Thanglura Darlong appointed as Ambassador of India to Romania

Thanglura Darlong has been appointed as Indian Ambassador to Romania. Thanglura Darlong is an Indian Foreign Service (IFS) Officer of 1988 batch. He is currently the CLO (Chief Liaison Officer) in the South Asian University in New Delhi.

Awards & Recognition

Malaysian chef wins International Young Chef Olympiad 2018, India comes second

The 4th edition of International Young Chef Olympiad (YCO) concluded in New Delhi with Lai Jia Yi from Malaysia winning the top spot and Indian student chef Surya Sekhar Roy Choudhury claiming the second position.

- The competition was judged by eminent celebrity chefs and Michelin-starred winners including Sanjeev Kapoor, Ranveer Brar, John Wood, Chris Galvin, Scott Baechler, and Enzo Oliveri.
- Lai Jia Yi was awarded the YCO 2018 Trophy and a cash prize of USD 10,000.
- Choudhury, a student of IIM Kolkata, became the first Indian contestant to make it to the podium at YCO.
- The third place was shared by Kevin McCafferty from Scotland and Henry Lee from Hong Kong.

Science & Technology

China launches electromagnetic satellite to study earthquake precursors

China on Friday launched its first seismo-electromagnetic satellite to study seismic precursors, which might help establish a ground-space earthquake monitoring and forecasting network in the future.

- A Long March-2D rocket launched at 15:51 from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, in northwest China's Gobi Desert, carried the 730-kilogram China Seismo-Electromagnetic Satellite (CSES) into a sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of about 500 kilometers.
- Known as Zhangheng 1 in Chinese, it will help scientists monitor the electromagnetic field, ionospheric plasma and high-energy particles for an expected mission life of five years.
- The satellite is named after Zhang Heng, a renowned scholar of the East Han Dynasty (25-220), who pioneered earthquake studies by inventing the first ever seismoscope in the year 132.

Sports

India wins Under-19 World Cup 2018

India has won Under-19 ICC World Cup 2018 by defeating Australia by eight wickets. With this victory, India became first nation to win Under-19 World Cup four times.

- It was India's sixth appearance in the under-19 World Cup finals. Australia had made into the final five times, winning the tournament three times.
- The 2018 final match was played at Bay Oval, Mount Maunganui, New Zealand.
- Australia, choosing to bat first after winning the toss had set target of 216 runs (10 wickets) in 47.2 overs. India in the chase, scored 220-2 in the 39th over.

Saurav Ghosal becomes the highest-ranked Indian squash player in PSA rankings

India's Saurav Ghosal with rank number 14 became the highest ranked Indian in the Professional Squash Association (PSA) rankings released on 2nd February 2018.

- Saurav Ghosal has moved 5 places up and obtained the 14th rank. He has surpassed Joshna Chinappa who is currently at 17th position.
- Dipika Pallikal is at rank 20. Harinder Pal Sandhu is at 49th position. Mahesh Mangaonkar ranks 64. Vikram Malhotra is ranked 68.
- Also, Sunayna Kuruvilla ranks 89 and Sachika Ingale at 96.