

National Current Affairs

Committee constituted by Karnataka government recommends separate state flag

Nine member committee constituted by Karnataka government has recommended separate state flag.

- It submitted report on designing separate flag for the state and providing a legal standing for it.
- It has discounted any constitutional or legal hurdles for it.
- The committee has recommended new tricolour having yellow (at top), white (in middle) and red (at bottom) colour, with state's emblem Gandaberunda (a two-headed mythological bird) in centre. It has changed pattern of earlier unofficial flag having yellow and red which is unofficially used now.
- The white colour in new flag symbolizes peace and captures Karnataka's image the best, while other two colours are synonymous with Kannada identity.
- After getting formal state Cabinet approval, state government will make a formal application to Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) under whose purview the issue falls to amend the Flag Code 2002.
- The amendment will add provisions of including Karnataka flag as one of the symbols in the Flag Code.

Development of Solar Cities scheme: 60 Solar Cities to be developed

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) under its "Development of Solar Cities" scheme has sanctioned development of 60 Solar Cities including 13 Pilot and 5 Model Cities up to 12th Five-year Plan period (2012–2017). So far, master plans of 49 Solar Cities have been prepared.

- Moreover, Stake-holders Committees have been constituted in 21 Cities and Solar City Cells have been created in 37 Solar Cities.
- The Scheme aims at reducing minimum 10% in projected demand of conventional energy at end of five years, through combination of enhancing supply from renewable energy sources in city and energy efficiency measures. Under it, local Governments are motivated for adopting renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures.
- Solar City developed under this scheme will have all types of renewable energy based projects like solar, wind, biomass, small hydro, waste to energy etc. It may be installed along with possible energy efficiency measures depending on the need and resource availability in the city.
- Objectives of Solar City Scheme:

- Enable and empower Urban Local Governments (ULBs) to address energy challenges at City-level.
- Provide framework and support to prepare Master Plan including assessment of current energy situation, future demand and action plans.
- Oversee the implementation of sustainable energy options through public-private partnerships (PPPs).
- Build capacity in ULBs and create awareness among all sections of civil society.
- Involve various stakeholders in the planning process.

Pay as You Use Tolling: NHAI to launch Pilot Project on Delhi-Mumbai Highway

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is going to launch pilot project of Pay as you use tolling on the Delhi Mumbai national highway to study implement ability of system in the country.

- The pilot project involves implementing a satellite based electronic toll collection system running on GPS/GSM technology for around 500 commercial vehicles on selected national highway for one year.
- The proposed tolling system will work on combination of mobile telecommunications technology (GSM) and satellite-based Global Positioning System (GPS).
- It will be able to deduct money from vehicle account, credit money to concessionaire within one day and open toll gate.
- In case of failed transaction it will be able to alert toll operator to collect payment manually and not open the gate.
- The pilot project will look at ways to integrate new solution with existing pre-paid wallet account offered under FASTag program by NHAI.
- It will also draw comparison between distance based tolling and existing tolling system, as also between virtual tolling and normal tolling.

Rhodendron Park: Foundation stone laid in Tawang

Foundation stone of Rhodendron Park was laid in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh by Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

- Tawang district was once home to about 100 species of rhododendron but now they have been reduced to only 50 plus species due to construction activities in border areas.
- The park will be built in total area of 1.15 hectares. It will be partly funded under border area development programme (BADP).
- More than 30 species of rhododendrons would be planted and conserved in park where terrace cutting to raise the beauty and scenic component.

- The park will also have modern nursery, information center on rhododendron, resting sheds, public toilet facility, vehicle parking facility, signage and lightings and iron security gate.
- It will add to the scenic enhancement of city and also offer an opportunity for conservation of rhodo species, which are under serious threat due to various ongoing road and land acquisition projects.

Google and NCERT join hands to teach students digital safety

Google and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has signed a pact to integrate a course on 'Digital Citizenship and Safety' in information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum.

- The pact was signed on 'Safer Internet Day' (February 6). The course aims to bring awareness amongst the young generation of India to make Internet a Safe space.
- The Digital Citizenship and Safety course by Google India aims to bring social, ethical and legal aspects of internet safety and usage via structured in-class lessons.
- The complete course is divided into four categories (themes) viz Being Smart, Being Safe, Being a Digital Citizen and Being Future Ready.
- The course aims to grow gradually with internet usage of children from elementary classes to senior secondary.
- The modules (categories) of the course are made to engage kids and match pace with their intellectual and inquisitive nature.
- The basic modules of the course aim to make the children aware of Internet Safety, advanced topics like Privacy, Device Management, Intellectual Property (IP) and Reputation Management are added included as children grow, gradually moving towards Online Financial Literacy and Cyber Crime to shape them as Digital Citizens.
- In addition, Google has also created curriculum for teachers so that they can help students learn all about digital citizenship in their classrooms.

Rs 5252 cr allocated for railway infra development in Odisha

The Centre has allocated Rs 5,252 crore for the railway infrastructure development in Odisha.

- The allocation made during the 2018-19 fiscal is about Rs 150 crore more than the previous year's allocation.
- In 2017-18, Odisha had received Rs 5102 crore for the Railway sector.
- Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had on January 17 placed a demand of Rs 6,500 crore before the Centre for railway infrastructure development during 2018-19 fiscal.

Ministry of Railways signs MoU with Ministry of Ayush to augment Ayush services

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Ministry of Railways and Ministry of AYUSH in New Delhi today to augment the AYUSH system services in its zonal hospitals at New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Guwahati.

- Under the terms of the MoU signed, Ministry of Railways will arrange for providing logistics and infrastructure in the form of Land & building, Equipments, Furniture, AYUSH medicines and consumables as well as Manpower as per its guidelines.
- It will organize and provide orientation training to newly recruited AYUSH Doctors and AYUSH Paramedicals.
- Ministry of AYUSH in turn will provide all other technical inputs required for introduction of AYUSH Systems in the five identified Railways Hospitals.
- The Ministry will also provide technical knowhow regarding the pharmacopoeia, medicine inventory, hospital planning.

Haryana to establish farmers' welfare department

Haryana will establish a farmers' welfare department to make agriculture remunerative, enhance productivity and mitigate the distress of farm households and landless workers,

- Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar made the announcement of establishing 'Haryana Kisan Kalyan Pradhikaran' while interacting with farmers during the 'Ek Aur Sudhar' programme.
- The Chief Minister would be the chairperson of the Haryana Kisan Kalyan Pradhikaran, while the Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister would be the ex-officio vice- chairman.
- The department will undertake all possible measures to make agriculture remunerative and enhance agricultural productivity to mitigate the physical, financial and psychological distress of farm households and landless workers.
- It will also maintain close liaison with line departments for implementation and monitoring of schemes, programmes and projects through the Agriculture Advisory Council and issue necessary guidelines from time to time.

Google, Tata Trusts promote IT adoption among TN rural women

Google India and Tata Trusts today expanded their Internet Saathi programme to over 4,000 villages across six districts of Tamil Nadu.

- The global IT giant and the Tamil Nadu government also announced their plan to facilitate the provision of Google Cloud credits and access through its affiliate for eligible startups engaged with the Tamil Nadu government's startup initiative.
- Google India will also, through its developer relations team, provide technical mentorship and advisory support to various startups.
- Other initiatives as part of the announcement include working jointly to make all government sites mobile friendly, introduce joint programs to help local small and medium businesses get online, and Internet safety education for children to stay safe online.

International Current Affairs

The World Rankings 2018: More Indian Universities in Asia's Top 200

Only two Indian institutes have featured in the top 50 Asian institutes in recently released TIMES Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings for educational institutes in Asia. The two institutes that have made their way to top 50 are Indian Institute of Science (29th rank) and Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (44).

- Other institutes that have made their way to top 100 are IIT Kharagpur, IIT Roorkee, IIT Kanpur, and IIT Delhi.
- The ranks as released by the World University Ranking are: Indian Institute of Science (rank 29), IIT Bombay (44), IIT Kharagpur (60), IIT Roorkee (65), IIT Kanpur (81) and IIT Delhi (86).
- Total of 17 institutes from India have made their way to top 200 Asian Universities in comparison to last year.
- Though representation of India has increased in list, several of the universities have fallen down the rankings.
- Both IISc and IIT Bombay have dropped two places each to 29 and 44 position respectively.
- IIT Madras has witnessed biggest decline this year and has fallen from last year's 41 place to 103 this year.

Banking & Finance

RBI to set up ombudsman to further regulate NBFCs

The Reserve Bank of India wants to further tighten the regulations around the Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) by setting up an ombudsman for these entities.

- The ombudsman scheme, which will be operationalised by end of this month, will be addressing the customer grievances in the NBFC segment.
- Till now, for consumer complaints, the RBI had made it mandatory for all the NBFCs to have a grievance redressal officer, whose name and address has to be put up in the offices of the NBFCs.
- However, with an ombudsman in place, the customers can directly file a complaint, as per the RBI guidelines announced during the monetary policy.
- According to RBI, the scheme will cover all deposit-taking NBFCs and those with customer interface having asset size of one million and above initially.

India FY2019 fiscal deficit to come in at 3.5% of GDP

According to the report, India's fiscal deficit is expected to come in at 3.5 per cent of GDP in financial year 2018-19, as policymakers seek to promote economic growth by reducing the pace of fiscal consolidation,

- According to the report by BMI Research, a unit of Fitch Group, there is room for fiscal slippage as the government seeks to achieve its 7.5 per cent growth target.
- The government outlined a fiscal deficit target of 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2018-19 as against a revised estimate of 3.5 per cent in 2017-18, indicating some fiscal consolidation, albeit at a slower pace than that recommended under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework.
- The fiscal 2018-19 budget saw a further increase in overall expenditure, with the biggest allocation going to transport, rural development, agriculture, education, and healthcare, as the key focus is supporting long term growth.

Business

Maharashtra State Cabinet gives nod to fintech policy

Maharashtra has become the first state in the country to adopt a comprehensive fintech policy that aims to foster an environment for fintech startups. Besides Mumbai, the government also plans to turn cities like Nagpur and Pune into fintech hubs.

- Under the fintech policy, the state government plans to create an environment where start-ups would be nurtured and allowed to grow as it has announced a slew of incentives for the first three years.

- The state government will support 300 fintech start-ups in the next three years.
- The state government is working on setting up International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) and confident that it will emerge as top player in the fintech sector.
- Apart from the fintech policy, the state government cleared policies for defence and aerospace, electric vehicles, logistics, textile, garments, gems and jewellery, and coir (coconut fibre) etc.
- To promote defence and aerospace production, the government also plans to set up units in Pune, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad and Nagpur.

Assam to set up dedicated agency for business, investments

Assam government would soon set up a new agency to look into all aspects of business and investment in the state.

- Following the conclusion of the two-day 'Global Investors Summit-Advantage Assam', which witnessed the signing of "200 MoUs worth Rs one lakh crore", it has been decided to set up the 'Invest Assam'.
- Senior officials of the department have been asked to chalk out the future course of action for speedy execution of the MoUs.

Appointments & Resigns

Hardayal Prasad appointed as SBI Card MD & CEO

SBI Card, the country's second largest credit card issuer, has a new Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer in Hardayal Prasad.

- Prasad has taken over from Vijay Jasuja, who superannuated on January 31.
- Prior to this appointment, Prasad was with State Bank of India, holding multiple leadership positions in the bank. He had joined SBI as a probationary officer in 1983.

Science & Technology

First ever chat based job search app 'Empzilla' launched

A chat based job search mobile app 'Empzilla', first ever of its kind in the country, is being launched that will do away with existing limitations of employers and job seekers making selection process quick and cost effective.

- The mobile app gets conversation between employers and job seekers going in seconds and the latter can chat with the potential employer even within his office set up without letting his peers and seniors know the context of the conversation.
- It also relieves the Human Resource department of excessive load of mails and the need to download all the profiles which is time consuming and confusing.
- The feature of geo location in Empzilla identifies the exact distance between the hiring venue and the registered location of the candidate.

HAL develops first Hawk-i flight

The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited has developed the first flight of Hawk-i with indigenous Real Time Operating System (RTOS).

- Hawk-i is the first indigenous RTOS developed in India from scratch and certified by Center for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC).
- The RTOS is the system software which provides a standard run-time environment for real-time applications execution in a safe and reliable manner.
- The HAL-RTOS supports Integrated Modular Avionics (IMA) architecture. Key features include address, space and time partitioning, priority pre-emptive process scheduling and health monitoring.
- With this development, the HAL-RTOS can be made as a standard Real Time Operating System for any future avionics systems development in the country.

SpaceX launches its powerful Falcon Heavy rocket

SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket took off from Cape Canaveral, Florida and soared to space, carrying its payload — CEO Elon Musk's red Tesla Roadster — into orbit.

- The Falcon Heavy's first flight is finally over, and despite a fudged landing in the ocean, the rocket has shown its prowess and is likely ready to begin missions for customers.
- Adding to the launch's success, two of the Falcon Heavy's rocket cores successfully touched down back on Earth after takeoff.
- The Falcon Heavy now holds the title for the world's most powerful rocket, and its launch marks the first time a vehicle this massive has ever been sent up by a commercial company.
- It boasts 27 engines, more than any other working rocket has ever used, which together create a combined 5 million pounds of thrust at liftoff.