

National Current Affairs

4th Meeting of Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister held in New Delhi

The 4th meeting of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) was held in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Dr Bibek Debroy, Chairman, EAC-PM & Member, NITI Aayog.

- During the meeting, EAC-PM discussed the possible modalities of implementing National Health Scheme announced by the government in Union Budget-2018-1.
- Besides, presentations were also made on Health Reforms, World Bank Report on Indian Economy and on Indian Fiscal – Monetary Framework.
- National Health Protection Scheme (Ayushman Bharat Scheme) will cover 10 crore poor and vulnerable families.
- Under it, up to Rs 5 lakh insurance cover will be provided to each family per year in secondary and tertiary care institutions.
- It will have 50 crore beneficiaries. It will be world's largest government-funded healthcare programme.
- PMEAC is a non-constitutional and non-statutory, non-permanent and independent body, constituted with the prime and sole aim to analyse all critical issues, economic or otherwise, referred to it by the prime minister and advising him thereon.

NHAI to launch ranking system for toll plazas

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has decided to launch a ranking system for the toll plazas in an effort to address issues at toll plazas.

- The massive drive was launched on more than 300 toll plazas simultaneously across the country by the Highway Operation Division of NHAI.
- The ranking will be on the basis of cleanliness, staff behaviour, availability of ambulance and cranes in case of any emergency on highways.
- Ranking system of toll plazas will improve amenities and overall convenience at toll plazas.
- It will also create competitive atmosphere of providing best services to the esteemed highway users.
- Every quarter, three best toll plazas will be identified by this ranking system and their names will be published on NHAI website.

India's first ever Highway Capacity Manual released

The Union Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has released India's first ever Highway Capacity Manual to guide road engineers and policy makers about road expansion. The manual is known as Indo-HCM.

- It was released by Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation Shri Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi.
- The manual lays down guidelines for when and how to expand or manage different types of roads and their intersections and level of services to be put in place.
- It is designed to be useful tool for guiding road engineers and policy makers in country.
- It has been developed based on the unique nature and diversity of traffic on Indian roads.
- The manual will help in the scientific planning and expansion of road infrastructure in country.
- This is first time that manual has been developed in India. Other countries like USA, China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan have developed their own Highway Capacity Manuals long time back.

All villages to be linked by roads by 2019: Union Minister

The Centre is making efforts to connect all villages through a road network by next year as part of the 'Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna.

- Earlier, the target to complete these works was 2022 but it has been advanced to 2019.
- The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched by the Central government to provide connectivity to unconnected habitations as part of a poverty reduction strategy.

International Current Affairs

First International Solar Alliance Summit in March to be mega diplomatic show

India is preparing to host the mega inaugural International Solar Alliance Summit in Delhi on March 11 in the presence of more than a dozen leaders, including those from Asia, Pacific and South America, to set the ball rolling for the country's leadership in providing affordable renewable energy.

- The big draw at the summit will be the French President Emmanuel Macron, who will be on a state visit to India coinciding with the event, which his country is co-sponsoring.
- The summit or mega founding conference comes just over two years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi first proposed the initiative.
- Close on the heels of the successful Indo-ASEAN Summit, which was attended by top leaders of all 10 Southeast Asian countries, the upcoming event is being dubbed 'a mini-Africa summit' reminiscent of the one hosted by India in 2015.
- The countries which receive maximum sunshine are on the African continent, ranging from Somalia to Egypt.

India gets access to strategic Duqm port in Oman for military use

India has secured access to key strategic Port of Duqm in Oman in Arabian sea for military use and logistical support. This was one of the key takeaways of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oman.

- During this visit, annexure to Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Military Cooperation was signed between the two countries.
- Following this pact, the services of Duqm port and dry dock will be available for maintenance of Indian military vessels.
- The Port of Duqm is strategically located situated on southeastern seaboard of Oman, overlooking Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.
- The port also has special economic zone, where about \$1.8 billion investments are being made by some Indian companies.
- It will further expand India's footprint in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).
- This will strengthen India's maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region.
- The access to Duqm port fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap along with development string of military facilities at Assumption Island in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius to counter China's increasing presence.
- It also recognizes India and Oman's common responsibility towards promoting regional peace and security.
- It will further cement bilateral strategic engagement especially in the areas of security and defence between both countries.

6th World Government Summit held in Dubai

The sixth edition of World Government Summit (WGS) 2018 was held at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) from February 11 to 13, 2018.

- India was guest country at this year's event and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had delivered the inaugural speech on day one.
- More than 130 speakers across 120 interactive sessions and more than 4,000 participants from 140 countries – including heads of governments and representatives of 16 international organisations had attended the event.
- In his inaugural speech PM Modi propounded idea of six Rs for sustainable development- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Redesign and Remanufacture, with the view to safeguarding nature.
- WGS is global platform dedicated to shaping future of government worldwide.

Indian Army contributes 2,300 personnel for UN peace keeping mission in South Sudan

Indian Army is contributing approximately 2300 personnel to support United Nations Peacekeeping Missions to South Sudan (UNMISS) in order to bring peace and normalcy in the war-torn country.

- It includes deployment of seven Garhwal Rifles Infantry battalion group of the Indian Army.
- The deployment of Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan is under Chapter VII which entails Peace Enforcement.
- This is for first time troops hailing from Garhwal region have been nominated to deploy in United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).
- The unit will be in operational control of sensitive Jonglei state of South Sudan with detachment at Juba, its headquarters in Bor County and air maintained company group at Pibor County where armed conflicts and ethnic violence is on the rise.

Gevora: The world's tallest hotel opens in Dubai

Gulf metropolis Dubai announced the opening of the 'world's new tallest hotel', pipping another towering landmark in the city for the title.

- The gleaming gold 75-storey Gevora Hotel stands 356 metres, or nearly a quarter of a mile, tall.
- The hotel will have 528 guest rooms and suites and four restaurants. It will also have a pool, jacuzzi and health club as well as a luxury spa. It also has five restaurants offering international and local cuisines.
- The highest view restaurant is located at the rooftop, giving panoramic view over the entire city.
- The Gevora Hotel has six elevators that will operate at the speed of 26 km/hour and it also has the highest pools in the world.
- It is three times taller than London's Big Ben, 56 metres taller than Paris's Eiffel Tower and 100 metres shorter than Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Twin Towers.

- The new record-holder is within view of its predecessor, Dubai's JW Marriott Marquis -- just one metre shorter.
- Located on the Sheikh Zayed Road near the Dubai International Financial Centre, the Gevora Hotel has been built by Majid Al Attar.

India, UAE inks 5 MoUs

India and United Arab Emirates (UAE) have signed five Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) in key areas of energy sector, railways, manpower and financial services.

- These agreements were signed in PM Narendra Modi's visit to Abu Dhabi
- Signed Agreements are:
 - MoU for Technical Cooperation in Rail Sector.
 - MoU to institutionalise the collaborative administration of contractual employment of Indian workers in UAE.
 - MoU between Indian Consortium (OVL, BPRL & IOCL) and ADNOC: It was signed for acquisition of 10% participating interest in the offshore Lower Zakum Concession.
 - MoU between Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX): It seeks to enhance cooperation between both the countries in financial services industry.
 - MoU between Government of Jammu and Kashmir and DP World: It seeks to establish multi-modal logistics park and hub in Jammu comprising warehouses and specialized storage solutions.

Banking & Finance

Bank of Baroda will no longer operate in South Africa

The Bank of Baroda (BoB), which is embroiled in controversial banking transactions involving the embattled Gupta family, will no longer operate in South Africa.

- The BoB opened its first branch here in 2007 after having run an office in the port city of Durban for a decade.
- The Indian state-owned bank came under the scanner after it emerged in April 2016 as the only bank willing to do business with the Gupta brothers -- Ajay, Atul and Rajesh -- who are accused of involvement in alleged state capture through their closeness to President Zuma and his family members.

Appointments & Resigns

Chandrashekhhar Kambar elected as President of Sahitya Akademi

Jnanpith recipient and Kannada litetratureur Chandrashekhhar Kambar (81) was elected as President of the Sahitya Akademi.

- He will serve as president of the Akademi for a period of five years. Hindi poet Madhav Kaushik was elected as vice president of the Sahitya Akademi.
- Kambar won election for Akademi's top post by beating his rivals Marathi writer Bhalchandra V Nemade and Odia writer Pratibha Ray by securing as many as 56 votes out of 89 in all. Kambar is the third Kannada writer to head country's national academy of letters after Vinayaka Krishna Gokak (1983) and U R Ananthamurthy (1993).
- He has to his credit 25 plays, 5 novels, 11 anthologies of poems, 16 research works and several scholarly write-ups on folk theatre, literature and education. Some of his popular plays include Jokumaraswam, Jayasidnayaka, Kadu Kudure, Nayi Kathe, Mahamayi, Harakeya Kuri and others.
- He is recipient of various awards including Jnanpith Award (2010), Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Shri, Kabir Samman, Kalidas Samman and Pampa Award.

First Pakistani woman from Hindu minority to become lawmaker

Krishna Kumari will be the first female Hindu lawmaker in Pakistan since 1947, when Pakistan gained independence from Britain.

- She has been nominated by Pakistan People's Party to contest for a general Senate seat
- She had joined the PPP as a social activist along with her brother, who was later elected as Chairman of Union Council Berano.
- She also actively participated and worked for the rights of downtrodden people of marginalised communities living in Thar and other areas.

Awards & Recognition

Indian engineer part of team awarded sci-tech Oscar

An engineer raised in Mumbai, Vikas Sathaye, was part of the team that bagged the scientific and engineering award at the Oscars 2018 Scientific and Technical Awards on Saturday.

- The four-member team was honoured at the Beverly Hills ceremony "for the concept, design, engineering and implementation of the Shotover K1 Camera System", which the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences describes as a "six-axis stabilised aerial camera mount" that has an "enhanced ability to frame shots while looking straight down".
- The camera mount is said to be such that it can be attached to the base of a helicopter and its main function is to eliminate vibrations for a steady footage.

Ramesh Sippy to get inaugural Raj Kapoor award

Veteran filmmaker Ramesh Sippy, who directed the classic blockbuster Sholay and tele-serial Buniyaad, will be conferred the first Raj Kapoor Award for Excellence in Cinema.

- Instituted by the Asian Centre for Entertainment Education (ACEE), along with various international organisations like World Bank, UNICEF, USC Annenberg Normal Lear Centre, Hollywood Health and Society, Cinepolis Foundation and CMS, the Raj Kapoor Trophy will be unveiled in Mumbai on 14th Feb.
- The global awards are being launched in memory of Raj Kapoor, the quintessential 'Showman of Post-Independent India'.
- Sippy, 71, will receive the award at the two-day 'Elevate 2K18' bi-annual conclave of ACEE's programme, The Third Eye in Mumbai.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf awarded \$5m Ibrahim African leadership prize

A coveted \$5m prize for leadership in Africa has been won by the former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

- The continent's first ever female head of state becomes only the fifth winner of the annual Ibrahim Prize for achievement in African leadership since its launch in 2006, as it is only given out when there is deemed to be a worthy candidate.
- Named for its creator, the British-Sudanese BT engineer turned telecommunications billionaire Mo Ibrahim, the prize carries an award of \$5m paid out over 10 years and then \$200,000 each year for the rest of the winner's life.
- To qualify, African heads of state have to have left office during the last three calendar years, having been democratically elected and served their constitutionally mandated term.

Sports

Skipper Steve Smith Wins Australia's Allan Border Medal

Australia cricket captain Steve Smith capped off a golden 12 months by winning his second Allan Border Medal in Melbourne.

- Smith, hailed as the country's finest batsman since Donald Bradman, polled 246 votes, well ahead of two-time medal winner David Warner (162 votes) and Nathan Lyon (156 votes).
- Smith, who had earlier been named Australia's Test Player of the Year for his dominant 12 months with the bat, won his first Border Medal in 2015.
- The skipper was the hot favourite to take the award following a year in which he played 24 international games across limited overs and Test cricket and scored 1754 runs at 67.46 with seven centuries.
- Smith, 28, is also the reigning ICC Test Cricketer of the Year after earning that accolade last month.

Environment

India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017 released by MoEFCC

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017. It has revealed that total forest and tree cover in India has increased of over 8,021 sq km (about 80.20 million hectare) which is one percent increase from 2015.

- The increase in the forest cover has been observed as 6,778 sq km and that of tree cover as 1, 243 sq km.
- The total forest and tree cover is 24.39% of geographical area of the country.
- The increase in forest cover has been observed in Very Dense Forest (VDF) which absorbs maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- It is followed by increase in forest cover in open forest.
- India is ranked 10th in world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4 % of the world surface area and sustains needs of 17 % of human and 18 % livestock population.

- India was placed 8th in list of Top Ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.

Obituary

Veteran Odia cine actress Parbati Ghosh dies at 85

Veteran Odia cine actress, director and producer Parbati Ghosh passed away on Feb 12.

- Ghosh had carved a niche in the Odia film industry through her stellar performance on the silver screen.
- After her successful debut in 'Shri Jagannath', the versatile genius presented impressive acting in a series of films, including 'Amari Gaon Jhia', 'Bhai Bhai', 'Maa', 'Laxmi', 'Kaa', 'Stree' and 'Sansar'.
- Known as Chapala Nayak, she was later rechristened as Parbati Ghosh after she married producer-director Gauraprasad Ghosh.
- She was honoured with national film awards for her stellar performance in 'Laxmi', 'Kaa' and 'Stree'. Ghosh was also presented the prestigious Jayadev Puraskar and Bioscope Award.

Important Days

February 13: World Radio Day

The World Radio Day is observed every year across the world on 13th February to celebrate radio as medium for entertainment, information and mode for communication. To mark this day, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organizes different activities with broadcasters, organizations and communities around the world.

- It marks global celebration of radio as a forum for information and entertainment that helps to bridge communication gap for remote communities and empowering people.
- It also provides an opportunity to honour radio's importance to bring communities together and promote positive dialogue for change.

'Darwin Week' kicks off in Kolkata

Science organisations in the city came together to observe 'Darwin Week' from Feb 12 to effectively put to rest any "confusion" regarding his 'theory of evolution'.

- The 'Darwin Week' was being observed by the India March for Science Organising Committee, Kolkata and Breakthrough Science Society, West Bengal Chapter.
- The event will look to generate awareness among the public, including students, about Darwin's contributions to the science of evolution, and "to dispel any confusion in this regard among the young minds.

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