

# National Current Affairs

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## **President hosts LPG Panchayat at Rashtrapati Bhavan**

President Ram Nath Kovind hosted an 'LPG Panchayat at Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was organised by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana (PMUY).

- The LPG Panchayat aims to provide a platform for LPG consumers to interact with each other, promote mutual learning and share experiences.
- LPG Panchayat serves as interactive platform between those who received LPG cylinders under PMUY.
- One panchayat has around 100 LPG customers of nearby areas. The panchayats discuss issues such as safe practices, quality of service provided by distributors and availability of refill cylinders.
- LPG Panchayat aims at spreading awareness among LPG users about how to properly use clean fuel and its useful benefits.
- It provides platform to trigger discussion through sharing of personal experiences on benefits of use of clean fuel compared to traditional fuels like cowdung, charcoal or wood.
- It bring together about 100 beneficiaries of PMUY of area and create an interactive platform to discuss safe and sustainable usage of LPG, its benefits and linkages between using clean fuel and empowering women as their health risks are reduced. It also includes safe practices, quality of service provided by distributors and availability of refill cylinders.
- It also connects with beneficiaries of PMUY to resolve issues and wrong traditional beliefs among people through officials of oil PSUs, NGOs, Asha workers and social workers. Under it, one lakh LPG Panchayats will be activated across country to deal with issue of safe use of LPG as well as discuss its various benefits on environment, health and how it empowers women.

## **Assam becomes fourth state to issue RoW guidelines for telcos**

Assam has become the fourth state in the country to issue the Right of Way (RoW) guidelines for telecom service providers.

- The guidelines were approved by the state Cabinet in its last meeting on January 28.
- The new guidelines will regulate the establishment of underground and overground telecom infrastructure, and also facilitate telegraph infrastructure on government buildings and premises.

- The entire process will be made online within a period of one year for which the IT Department will constitute a team.
- All operators have to mandatorily register in the ease of doing business portal of the Assam government.
- The chief secretary also urged the operators to establish telecom towers in uncovered areas of the state and upgrade the existing base stations to 3G/4G level.

### **Meghalaya Governor Inaugurates India, Bangladesh 'Friendship Gate'**

Meghalaya Governor Ganga Prasad inaugurated the "Friendship Gate" constructed with an aim to have a Wagah-like beating retreat ceremony for the Indian and Bangladesh border guards.

- The Friendship Gate has been constructed near Integrated Check post, 90 km South of capital Shillong on border with Bangladesh.
- The Governor also met Border Guard of Bangladesh's Additional Director Zahid Hasan, who was present on the occasion, and distributed sweets to both the troops at the venue.
- The Governor also inaugurated a BSF Border outpost at Umsyiem during his visit to the border.

### **DAC approves capital acquisitions worth over Rs 15000 crore**

- The Defence Acquisition Council chaired by Defence Minister has approved capital acquisition of 7.4 lakh assault rifles, 17,000 light machine guns, 5,719 sniper rifles and Mareech advanced torpedo decoy systems for Indian Navy worth Rs. 15,935 crore. DAC is Defence Ministry's highest decision-making body on procurement.
- 7.4 lakh assault rifles: It will be procured for three Services. These rifles will be 'Made in India' under categorisation of 'Buy and Make (Indian)', through both the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) and private industry at an estimated cost of Rs. 12,280 crore.
- 17,000 light machine guns: It will be procured for three Services through fast-track procedure at over Rs. 1,819 crore.
- 5,719 sniper rifles: It will be procured for Indian Army and Air Force for about Rs. 982 crore. It will be bought in Buy Global category. Its ammunition will be initially procured and subsequently manufactured in India.
- Mareech advanced torpedo decoy systems: It will be procured for Indian Navy to enhance the anti-submarine warfare capabilities of Naval Ships.

### **Chandrababu Naidu is richest CM, Manik Sarkar the poorest: ADR**

The richest Chief Minister, Telugu Desam Party leader and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, has declared assets worth ₹177 crore, while the 'poorest' Chief Minister, CPI (M) leader and Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, had total assets worth all of ₹26 lakh.

- According to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh are the second and third richest CMs, with assets worth ₹129 crore and ₹48 crore respectively.
- The second 'poorest' was Trinamool Congress leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, with assets worth ₹30 lakh. People's Democratic Party leader and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti was also among the three CMs with the least assets. She had declared assets valued at ₹55 lakh.
- As for those with criminal cases pending against them, 35%, or 11 of the 31 CMs, have criminal charges against them.
- In terms of educational qualification, 10% of the 31 CMs are 12th pass, 39% graduate, 32% graduate professional, 16% postgraduate and 3% doctorate.

### **Punjab Government makes super straw management mandatory**

Punjab government has made attachment of super straw management system to combine harvester machines mandatory for harvesting paddy (rice) crop in an attempt to check the dangerous trend of stubble burning. The instructions were issued under section 31 A of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

- These instructions are aimed at saving the environment from air pollution caused by stubble burning.
- The owners of combine harvesters desirous of undertaking harvesting of paddy in state will now have to attach super straw management system with the harvester combine.
- Now, no harvester combine without functional super straw management system will be allowed to harvest paddy in Punjab.
- Super straw management system will be attached to self-propelled combine harvesters, which cuts paddy straw into small pieces and spread same. With this method, farmers are not required to burn paddy straw before sowing the next crop.

### **Punjab Government constitutes Revenue Commission**

Punjab government has notified six-member Revenue Commission with an aim to bring greater efficiency and accountability in functioning of the Revenue Department. The Commission will be headed by (Retd.) Justice SS Saron of Punjab and Haryana High Court.

- The commission will streamline existing laws, procedures and processes relating to land administration, in line with requirements of land for use of agriculture and industry. It will propose new laws and procedures, along with other methods, to make revenue administration more transparent and responsive to the needs of the people.
- It will examine need for new Acts or amendment of existing laws to legalize land lease practices in order to provide a firm basis for a modern high value agriculture and horticulture in place of current mono culture of wheat-paddy.
- It will have mandate to review organizational structure of revenue related aspirations, expectations, needs and requirements of contemporary Punjabi society. It will suggest norms of population, area etc. for all administrative units such as division, sub-division, tehsil, sub-tehsil and district.

### **Shri R.K. Singh inaugurates 'Indian Power Stations 2018' - International Conference on Operations and Maintenance**

Union Minister of State (IC) for Power and New and Renewable Energy, Shri R.K. Singh inaugurated the 'Indian Power Stations 2018' - three-day International Conference on Operations and Maintenance. The conference is being held from 13th to 15th February.

- It is being hosted by NTPC Limited to commemorate synchronization of its thermal plant at Singrauli Super Thermal Power Station, on Feb 13, 1982.
- Theme of the conference is: Technological Challenges: Risks and Challenges in Power Generation".
- This conference is a step towards meeting the challenges of strict environmental norms, cyclic operation of conventional generation, renewable integration in grid, low load operation, coal mining & extraction etc. The design of proceedings of the conference will also facilitate interaction with global fraternity and enrich knowledge base of every participant, thus benefitting the whole power sector.
- As part of the conference, the exhibition titled 'Techno Galaxy 2018' will also be inaugurated at Power Management Institute in Noida on February 14.

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## **International Current Affairs**

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### **India-Russia Agriculture Business Summit held**

The ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has organized the India-Russia Agriculture Business Summit in Delhi and additionally, a celebration of 70 years of Agricultural Relationship also held in Suratgarh, Rajasthan.

- The summit highlighted the trade opportunities in agriculture and both countries discussed trade relations in the agricultural sector.
- It included intense discussion in 4 theme sessions on potential areas of collaboration and trade in the fields of Agriculture Machinery
- Sanitary & Phytosanitary measures (both plants and animals) o Agriculture Education & Biotechnology
- Fishery and Sea products (including feeding, care and processing)
- Confectioner's/Baker's, dry fruits and coconut products.
- The summit also emphasized on the relevance of Micro and Small sized businesses (MSMEs) in the agriculture domain.

### **South Africa declares drought a national disaster**

South Africa has declared a national disaster over the drought afflicting southern and western regions including Cape Town, though the city pushed back its "Day Zero", the date when its taps are expected to run dry.

- Running water in the port city of 4 million has been affected by a wider pattern of climate change seen around the country including the Western Cape, where Cape Town is located, the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape provinces.
- Supplies have yet to recover from an El Nino-triggered drought that began two years ago and is now raising the risk of a shortage that could hit industrial and agricultural output.
- Over the past week, water consumption in Cape Town had declined to 526 million litres per day. This was the first time the daily average has been kept under 550 million litres.
- Cape Town hotels have asked guests not to use baths and to limit showers to two minutes or less, while some restaurants are switching to disposable cups and dispensing with table linen.

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## **Banking & Finance**

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### **RBI rolls out new stressed assets framework to tackle bad loan problem**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) scrapped numerous loan restructuring programmes, asking banks to immediately identify defaults and make disclosures every Friday to the RBI credit registry, starting from February 23.

- The apex bank has also warned banks of monetary penalties and higher provisions if they are found to have violated the stringent new norms.
- According to moneycontrol, the central bank has withdrawn the existing resolution frameworks and the Joint Lenders' Forum (JLF) with immediate effect.
- Further, lenders shall identify incipient stress in loan accounts, immediately on default, by classifying stressed assets As Special Mention Accounts (SMA).

### **Citi Bank bans credit, debit card transactions for purchasing bitcoins, other cryptocurrencies**

Citi Bank, in an email to its customers, has said that credit and debit cards cannot be used to purchase cryptocurrencies.

- It has been reported that RBI has warned banks about cryptocurrencies in January, telling them to step up scrutiny of financial transactions by companies and exchanges involved in the trade of bitcoins and similar digital tender.
- However, the apex bank is yet to declare such transactions illegal. The central bank's has asked banks to understand how these currencies work before dealing with such companies.

### **Government of India makes Amendments in Small Savings Act**

In order to remove existing ambiguities due to multiple Acts and rules for Small Saving Schemes and further strengthen the objective of “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance”, Government of India has proposed merger of Government Savings Certificates Act, 1959 and Public Provident Fund Act, 1968 with the Government Savings Banks Act, 1873.

- With a single act, relevant provisions of the Government Savings Certificates (NSC) Act, 1959 and the Public Provident Fund Act, 1968 would stand subsumed in the new amended Act without compromising on any of the functional provision of the existing Act.
- All existing protections have been retained while consolidating PPF Act under the proposed Government Savings Promotion Act.
- No existing benefits to depositors are proposed to be taken away through this process.
- The main objective in proposing a common Act is to make implementation easier for the depositors as they need not go through different rules and Acts for understanding the provision of various small saving schemes, and also to introduce certain flexibilities for the investors.
- Apart from offering higher interest rates compared to bank deposits, some of the small savings schemes also enjoy income tax benefits. No change in interest rate or tax policy on small savings scheme is being made through this amendment.

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# Business

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## **NTPC to supply 300 MW electricity to Bangladesh**

India's biggest electricity producer NTPC Ltd has won tender to supply 300 megawatts (MW) of electricity to power-starved Bangladesh for 15 years.

- The tender was floated by Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) for supply of 500 MW power from India for short term (2018-2019) and long term (2020-2033).
- The supply of 300MW to Bangladesh is part of India's strategy of playing a key role in creating new energy security architecture for its neighbours.
- It will help NTPC earn Rs.900 crore in annual revenue.
- It will help NTPC to keep pace with fast-changing power sector wherein absence of fresh demand for electricity is weighing down the entire power sector.
- India is currently exporting approximately 600 MW electricity to Bangladesh.

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# Appointments & Resigns

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## **Ashok Das appointed Indian envoy to Brazil**

Ashok Das, a 1987 batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer, was named India's new Ambassador to Brazil.

- Das, presently additional secretary in the external affairs ministry, is expected to take up his assignment shortly, according to a ministry statement.
- Das earlier served as India's Ambassador to Iceland. He has also served in the Indian diplomatic missions in Portugal, Cambodia, US, Canada and Bangladesh.

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# Awards & Recognition

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## **JNPT, Kamarajar and Vizag get good grades in new 'Port Performance Index'**



Major ports JNPT, Kamarajar and Visakhapatnam have received 'Good' score in a new 'Port Performance Index' that bench-marked performance of 13 ports which handle around 67% of India's maritime trade.

- The index was introduced by a study conducted by Dun & Bradstreet. It looked into the issues and challenges pertaining to the ports sector and proposed policy measures to strengthen it.
- In the study, seven ports (Cochin, Kandla, Paradip, Chennai, Mormugao, New Mangalore and VOC) have received 'Average' score, while three ports (Haldia, Kolkata and MbPT) have received 'Poor' score, according to a commerce ministry statement.
- The 'Port Performance Index' benchmarks the performance of various ports by combining qualitative perception of stakeholders with quantitative outcome based data.

### **Tata Steel bags 'most ethical company' award**

Tata Steel has been recognized by Ethisphere Institute, a global leader in defining and advancing the standards of ethical business practices, as the World's Most Ethical Company for the year 2018.

- The company has received the award for the sixth time in the 'Metals, Minerals and Mining' category, the release added.
- A total of 135 honorees from 23 countries are being recognized in 2018, the release said adding that the award will be bestowed on 13 March.
- Tata Steel has been recognized by Ethisphere Institute USA five times earlier, in 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017.
- The company has received the award for the sixth time in the 'Metals, Minerals and Mining' category, the release added.
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## **Science & Technology**

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### **Progress MS-08: Unmanned Russian Cargo Ship launched to Space Station**



Russian space agency Roskosmos has successfully launched Progress MS-08, an unmanned cargo spacecraft for the International Space Station (ISS).

- It was launched onboard of Soyuz-2.1a rocket from Russian-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan. Soyuz-2.1a has four strap-on boosters and core engine, all fuelled by mix of kerosene and liquid oxygen.
- The Progress-class capsule was carrying 2.7 tons of food, fuel, and other supplies.
- It was also carrying equipment for the German-Russian ICARUS research project aimed at studying wildlife-migration patterns. The robotic cargo capsule is docking with ISS's Zvezda service module.
- The capsule is packed with 1,390 kilograms of equipment, scientific hardware, food and supplies for orbiting lab's six-person crew, plus 890 kilograms of propellant for station, plus 420 kilograms of water, 24 kilograms of compressed air and 22 kilograms of compressed oxygen.
- The ISS, which is orbiting 400 kilometers above Earth is currently manned by six astronauts including three from US, two from Russia and one from Japan.

### **Radio Umang: India's First Online Radio Station Launched**

Radio Umang, claimed to be India's first online radio station was launched recently.

- Listeners can tune in to this online radio station through web streaming or download the app.
- With 24 hours programming, it has found listeners in Hindi speaking regions of India and in over 60 countries worldwide.
- Themed around love, peace and happiness, the station airs enriching talk shows and soothing soulful music.

### **Soft power matrix: Government developing tool to hardsell soft power in diplomacy**

The Union Government is developing soft power matrix, a tool aimed at calibrating effectiveness of India's soft power outreach and foster better diplomatic traction in India's immediate neighbourhood and beyond.

- The process is currently at a research stage. It will help in dealings with neighbouring countries and serve better as operational instrument in India's broader diplomatic doctrine.
- The proposed matrix is being seen as attempt to establish linkages between India's soft power and tangible outcomes in area of diplomacy.
- It will try and quantify this aspect of India's diplomacy in wake of criticism that country has not been able to adequately leverage its 'soft power' in matters of foreign policy.

- It is being developed to calibrate outreach efforts such as propagation of Gandhian values and philosophy, strength of Mumbai film industry, educational scholarships extended by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), extending humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to help mitigate adverse impact of natural disasters.

### **UK unveils new technology to fight extremist content online**

The British government is unveiling new technology designed to remove extremist material from social media, amid mounting pressure on companies like Facebook and Twitter to do more to remove such content from their platforms.

- The software was developed by ASI Data Science with funding from the government.
- The program will be shared with smaller companies that don't have the resources to develop such technology.
- The software being unveiled Tuesday is aimed at stopping the vast bulk of material before it goes online.
- Tests of the program show it can identify 94 percent of IS propaganda videos, according to the Home Office, which provided some 600,000 pounds (\$833,000) to fund the software's development.
- But experts on extremist material say even if the software works perfectly it will not even come close to removing all Islamic State material on line.

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## **Obituary**

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### **Noted writer Muzaffar Hussain dead**

Noted writer, thinker and journalist Muzaffar Hussain died on 13<sup>th</sup> Feb.

- He was a recipient of Padma Shri, which is the fourth highest civilian award in the Republic of India.
- Born in Bhopal, Hussain came to Mumbai and started writing in various newspapers.