

National Current Affairs

West Bengal notifies sale of state government stock of 10 year for Rs 2,000 cr

West Bengal government has announced sale of its securities of 10 year tenure for an aggregate amount Rs. 2000 crore in order to meet the development expenditure.

- The government stock will be sold through the Reserve Bank of India by auction and the consent of the Central government has been obtained to the flotation of this loan
- The auction will be conducted on February 20 and the successful bidders are required to make payments on February 21. The loan will be repaid at par on February 21, 2028.

Assam worst in MMR, spent just 13.58% of NHM fund in 2017-18

Assam is at the bottom of the list with regard to maternal mortality rate (MMR) with a figure of 300 against the national average of 167, while the fund spending under National Health Mission (NHM) is just 13.58 per cent for 2017-18.

- MMR is the annual number of female deaths per 1,00,000 live births from any cause related to or aggravated by pregnancy or its management.
- The Centre is aggressively carrying out vaccination and other medication to reduce the MMR across many districts of Assam, including Nagaon, Dhubri, Goalpara, Karbi Anglong, Kokrajhar and Chirang under 'Mission Indradhanush'.
- The infant mortality rate (IMR), which is the number of deaths per 1,000 live births of children under one year of age, in Assam is also on higher side at 44 at present against the national figure of 37.

562 more Ekalavya schools for tribals soon

The government will set up 562 more Ekalavya Model Residential School (EMRS) in tribal areas across the country that will be on par with the Navodaya Vidyalayas.

- 271 EMRSs have already been sanctioned out of which 190 are currently operational.
- The EMRS are planned under a government scheme for model residential school for Indian tribals (Scheduled Tribes) across India.
- Every block with more than 50 per cent Scheduled Tribes' population and at least 20,000 tribal persons, will have an EMRS.

- An amount of Rs 241.60 crore was released to states during 2017-18 for meeting recurring cost of 190 functional EMRSs where about 56,000 tribal students are enrolled at the rate of Rs 42,000 per student per annum.

National Banana Festival in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday

National Banana Festival 2018 will be held at the Vellayani Devi Temple grounds at Kalliyoor, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala from 17th to 21st February 2018.

- This festival is organised by the Centre for Innovation in Science and Social Action (CISSA) jointly with Kalliyoor panchayat, National Centre for Banana, Trichy, and several other government institutions associated with banana research and promotion. Chairman of the organising committee is Suresh Gopi, MP.
- Nearly 150 varieties of banana from the north-eastern States, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu are displayed at the exhibition. Also, value-added products and processed goods made from banana are displayed.
- A farmers' meet, buyer-seller interactions, and entrepreneurs' meet are held as a part of the exhibition. Painting and cookery competitions are also conducted.
- A national seminar is conducted for scientists, researchers, and students. Problems faced by banana farmers in production, marketing, and export will be discussed in the seminar.

International Current Affairs

Pakistan to deploy troops in Saudi Arabia

- Pakistan Army has announced to deploy troops in its close ally Saudi Arabia under existing bilateral security cooperation agreement.
- The decision comes after meeting between Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and Saudi ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf Saeed Al-Maliki at the army headquarters in Rawalpindi.
- The troops have been deployed for training and advise mission. They will not be employed outside Saudi Arabia.
- The move comes three years after Pakistan decided against sending soldiers to join the Saudi-led military intervention in strife-torn Yemen.
- Pakistan is treading fine line in maintaining relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Qatar and other regional players. The decision of deploying troops may annoy Saudi Arabia's regional rivals like Iran and Qatar.

Botanical Survey of India inks MoU with UK's Natural History Museum

The Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and UK's Natural History Museum (NHM) have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in field of genetic and taxonomic studies, research and training, conservation in India, including species and habitat conservation assessments.

- Objectives of MoU:
 - Open up mediums of collaboration in science, support further research and boost scientific study for benefit of both India and UK.
 - Help both nations keep up with their commitment to use scientific evidence to support goals of Convention on Biological Diversity, CITES and Nagoya Protocol.
 - Capacity building and scientific exchanges between two nations and learn from each other and work collaboratively to address important scientific questions and deliver benefit to humanity.
 - It will pave way for BSI staff to work in NHM and for staff there to work in BSI.
 - It will enable exchange of knowledge and information between two esteemed research organisations.
 - Both organisations will be able to share fairly benefits that may arise from collection, study and conservation of plant materials such as seeds, herbarium specimens and tissue samples and exchange associated data and images.
 - NHM will also help BSI in capacity building in areas of systematic botany and long-term conservation of plant genetic resources in India.

Security conference begins in Munich

World leaders and ministers are meeting in Munich to discuss pressing security issues, including North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and the Syrian civil war.

- The annual Munich Security Conference opened in the southern Germany city on 16th Feb. The conference runs through 18th Feb.
- Among this year's attendees are US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono.
- The issue of North Korea's nuclear weapons development program is high on the agenda. Many participants shared their opinions on the country on the first day of the meeting.

Banking & Finance

NPCI allows Whatsapp to beta test its payments service with limited users

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has allowed Facebook-owned WhatsApp to beta test its BHIM UPI beta payments service with limited user base of 1 million and low transaction limit.

- Four banks will join social messaging app's BHIM UPI model in phases and full feature product will be released after beta test is successful.
- The multi-bank model will offer advantages such as transaction load distribution between banks and helps to integrate popular apps easily with BHIM UPI.
- The inter-operability will allow to send and receive money through any BHIM UPI ID, intent and collect call and read and generate BHIM/Bharat QR code that are required in final BHIM UPI app.

Business

PhonePe partners with IOCL for deployment of PoS terminals

Digital payments entity PhonePe, has partnered with Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) for adoption of its indigenously-designed Point of Sale (POS) device at IOCL retail outlets.

- As part of this partnership, customers can pay using UPI, credit and debit cards, PhonePe wallet and other external wallets like Jio Money & Freecharge for their fuel purchases, through the PoS device at 30 IOCL retail outlets in Bengaluru.
- This is the company's first major deployment of its Point of Sale devices that was launched in October this year.
- PhonePe said that over 10,000 POS units, which doubles up as a traditional calculator, has been installed in Bengaluru within three months of its launch.

Awards & Recognition

Milkbasket recognised as 'Startup of the Year' 2017

Milkbasket, India's first and largest micro-delivery platform has been recognised as 'Startup of the Year' 2017 at the 7th Small Business Awards.

- The startup of the year award is dedicated to young SMEs, aged 7 years or less, with great potential to become big in local/international markets.
- Small Business Awards 2018 was organised by Franchise India Group. The award ceremony was hosted in New Delhi.

TCS recognized as a global Top Employer for the third consecutive year

Tata Consultancy Services, a leading global IT services, consulting and business solutions organization, has been recognized as one of world's best employers by the Top Employer Institute for the third year running.

- TCS was certified for its exceptional employee offerings by the independent body from a pool of more than 1,300 companies in 113 countries around the world.
- The Top Employer Institute has over 25 years' experience recognizing the world's leading organizations in the field of HR management and employee conditions – providing the optimum environment for employees to develop, both professionally and personally.
- This year, TCS has again been awarded the Top Employers Global certification, making it one of only a handful of organizations to achieve this accreditation on a worldwide level.
- TCS picked up the latest Top Employer endorsement for 27 of its individual country teams across Europe, Asia Pacific, North America, Latin America and the Middle East.

Appointments & Resigns

Sachin Tendulkar made T20 Mumbai League's brand ambassador

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar has been made the brand ambassador of the upcoming T20 Mumbai League.

- The league, scheduled from March 11 to 28 is to be organised by Sports India Pvt Ltd, a consortium of IIFL Group as Lead Member and Wizcraft, with the approval and sanction of the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) and under its aegis.
- Bids have been invited for six teams to enrol and participate in the League. The teams will be from Mumbai North, Mumbai North-West, Mumbai North-East, Mumbai North- Central, Mumbai South-Central and Mumbai South.

Haruhiko Kuroda reappointed as Bank of Japan chief

Japan's government has reappointed Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda for another term and chose an advocate of bolder monetary easing as one of his deputies, a sign the central bank will be in no rush to dial back its massive stimulus programme.

- The selection of the new BOJ leadership comes at a crucial time for Japanese and global markets, which have been rattled in recent weeks on expectations major central banks will whittle down their crisis-mode stimulus.

Science & Technology

Scientists discover 100 new exoplanets using K2 mission data

Scientists have confirmed discovery of nearly 100 new exoplanets outside our solar system based on data from second mission of NASA's Kepler Space Telescope (K2 mission) released in 2014.

- With this total number of exoplanets found using NASA's K2 mission has reached almost 300.
- The discovery had started out by analysing 275 candidates of which 149 were validated as real exoplanets.
- In turn, 95 of these planets have proved to be new discoveries.
- One of planets detected was orbiting a very bright star called HD 212657 with 10-day orbit period.
- HD 212657, is now the brightest star found by either the Kepler or K2 missions to host validated planet.
- Exoplanets are very exciting field of space science. This discovery will help astronomers to develop much better picture of nature of exoplanets which in turn will allow us to place our own solar system into galactic context.
- Discovery of planets around bright stars will help astronomers to learn about them from ground-based observatories.

India aims to send Chandrayaan-II to moon's south pole this April

India aims to launch its second mission to the moon, Chandrayaan-II, in April.

- The mission will carry an orbiter, a lander and a rover, and will land on the moon's south pole and "startle the whole world."

- Chandrayaan-II will be the first inter-planetary mission by Indian Space Research Organisation to land a rover on any celestial body. The rover costs Rs 800 crore.
- Chandrayaan-II has scientific capabilities that can throw up data that “may open up possibilities of future habitation of the moon.
- India launched its first lunar mission, Chandrayaan-1, successfully in October 2008, and achieved many of its objectives before losing communication in August 2009.

Sports

Top of the world: Roger Federer, 36, becomes oldest number one

Roger Federer became the oldest world number one when the 20-time Grand Slam title winner reached the semi-finals of the Rotterdam Open.

- The 36-year-old Swiss overcame an early setback to beat Robin Haase of the Netherlands 4-6, 6-1, 6-1 and will replace old rival Rafael Nadal at the top of the rankings.
- Federer surpasses Andre Agassi, who held the top spot aged 33 years and 131 days in 2003, as the oldest man to claim the world number one spot.
- It is Federer's first time back at the summit since October 2012 having first claimed the top position in February 2004.