

National Current Affairs

Centre constitutes committee to study Brahmaputra and flood control measures in Assam

The Centre has constituted a committee headed by the Vice Chairman of the NITI Aayog to study the Brahmaputra and flood control measures in Assam and neighbouring states.

- Announcement regarding this was made by Assam Water Resource Minister Keshab Mahanta.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced 100 crore rupees to figure out permanent solution for flood, during his visit to Guwahati in 2017.
- Assam government has submitted report on flood control measures to the committee.
- Work to repair the damaged river embankment due to flood is to be done by the Water Resource department.

Cabinet approves New Bill to ban Unregulated Deposit Schemes and Chit Funds (Amendment) Bill, 2018

In a major policy initiative to protect the savings of the investors, the Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval to introduce the following bills in the Parliament:

- Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018 in parliament - The bill is aimed at tackling the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country. Companies/institutions running such schemes exploit existing regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures to dupe poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings.
- Chit Funds (Amendment) Bill, 2018 - In order to facilitate orderly growth of the Chit Funds sector and remove bottlenecks being faced by the Chit Funds industry, thereby enabling greater financial access of people to other financial products, few amendments to the Chit Funds Act, 1982 have been proposed.

Cabinet approves six rail projects in 4 states

The government approved six projects at a cost of Rs 11,661 crore for new lines as well as doubling and electrification of tracks, which would generate more than 200 lakh person days of employment in Uttar Pradesh and three other states

- The projects would cover 881 km of lines in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha.

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved doubling and electrification projects of the 425 km-long Jhansi-Manikpur and Bhimsen-Khairar lines at a completion cost of Rs 4955.72 crore.
- The projects are likely to be completed by 2022-23 and will cover the districts of Jhansi, Mahoba, Banda, Chitrakut Dham in Uttar Pradesh and Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh.
- The CCEA also approved doubling with electrification of the 116.95 km-long Bhatni-Aurnihar line. The project, at a cost of Rs 1300.9 crore, is likely to be completed by 2021-22 and will cover the districts of Deoria, Ballia, Mau and Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh.
- Approval has also come for the doubling and electrification projects on the 100.6 km-long Muzaffarpur-Sagauli and 109.7 km-long Sagauli-Valmiki Nagar lines at completion costs of Rs 1347.61 crore and Rs 1381.49 crore respectively.

PM addresses National Conference on “Agriculture-2022: Doubling Farmers' Incomes”

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, attended the National Conference on the theme “Agriculture-2022: Doubling Farmers' Incomes” organised at NASC Complex, Pusa, Delhi.

- Seven thematic groups made presentations on the different subjects.
- Union Government is working towards completing 99 incomplete irrigation projects. 50 of these are likely to be completed this year.
- With each completed irrigation project, the input cost of farmers would come down.
- 20 lakh hectares of farmland has so far been brought under micro irrigation, through the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana.
- ‘Operation Greens’ announced in the budget this year, would benefit farmers growing Tomato, Onion and Potato.
- 22,000 Gramen Haats would be upgraded with appropriate infrastructure, and integrated with the e-NAM platform.
- The farmers will have a facility within 5 to 15 kilometres of his land, to connect him with markets.
- The amount sanctioned for agriculture credit has been enhanced, to ensure easy availability of credit to farmers.
- Several initiatives are being undertaken to convert agriculture waste to wealth.

Shri R.K. Singh inaugurates ‘International R&D Conclave’

Union Minister of State (IC) for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shri R.K. Singh inaugurated the ‘International R&D Conclave’ - two-day conference on Emerging Opportunities and Challenges of R&D in Indian Power Sector, organised by Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

- It focuses on Emerging Opportunities and Challenges of R&D in Indian Power Sector. Sessions of the conference will be mainly related to R&D activities in Thermal Generation, Hydro Generation, Renewable Energy, Transmission, Grid Operation, Distribution, Trading, Marketing and Tariff.
- Nearly 100 entries for paper presentation were received. Out of this 45 papers have been selected to be presented in the Conference. Papers from Germany and Japan are also included in this list.

N Gopalaswami Committee to select top 20 educational institutes of eminence

Government has constituted Empowered Expert Committee (EEC) to select 20 Institutions of Eminence from among 104 institutions (public or private) that have applied for the status.

- The committee will be headed by former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) N Gopalaswami.
- The scheme of Institutions of Eminence was rolled out by University Grants Commission (UGC).
- It aims to help 20 higher education (10 public and 10 private) institutions from country break into top 500 global rankings in 10 years, and then eventually break into top 100 over time.
- These selected institutions are proposed to have greater autonomy compared to other higher education institutions.
- They will be free to decide their fee for domestic and foreign students and have flexible course duration and structure.
- They will be exempted from approvals of government or UGC for academic collaborations with foreign institutions, except institutions in MEA and MHA's list of negative countries.

Regional conference of southern states on water resources

A regional conference of southern states on water resources was held in Hyderabad to discuss inter-state issues, including the implementation of the latest Supreme Court order on sharing of Cauvery river water.

- The conference was chaired by Minister of State for Water Resources Arjun Ram Meghwal.
- Six southern states -- Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana -- and Union Territory (UT) Puducherry, were represented by their respective ministers concerned, principal secretaries and chief engineers of water resources departments at the meeting.
- The objective of the conference is to discuss pending issues of water resources and inter-state issues including ones related to implementation of the latest orders of the

Supreme Court on sharing of Cauvery waters, Mullaperiyar dam, interlinking of Godavari-Cauvery rivers and Polavaram project and other issues

Railways to set up coach factory at Latur, Maharashtra

Union Ministry of Railways and Maharashtra State Government have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up a rail coach factory at Latur, Maharashtra.

- The MoU was signed on the sidelines of the Magnetic Maharashtra event in Mumbai.
- The coach factory will be set up over a land area of 150 hectares and will entail investment of Rs. 500 crore in the first phase.
- This project is expected to generate thousands of direct and indirect employment opportunities in Marathwada, which is one of the most backward regions of Maharashtra.
- Besides, it will also create an industrial ecosystem of ancillary units in the region.

Kerala's New Health Policy makes Vaccination Card mandatory for School Admission

In its new health policy, the Kerala government has proposed to make vaccination cards mandatory for children seeking admission in first standard.

- The decision to make vaccination cards mandatory for school admission comes after vaccination programmes were faced with resistance from different quarters in Kerala with the most recent being the struggle to implement the Measles Rubella (MR) vaccination programme in some districts, including Malappuram.
- The new health policy also declares strict legal action for people trying to discourage parents about vaccinating their children.
- In another significant initiative, special clinics have been proposed for transgenders in taluk and district-level hospitals. There is also a proposal to include sex reassignment surgery for transgenders in the state health insurance scheme.
- Also, standard treatment guidelines will be made mandatory for doctors at government hospitals and these will be applicable in private hospitals as well.
- The new health policy further proposes a comprehensive trauma care facility at every 10 kilometre by co-ordinating the services of government, private and cooperative hospitals.
- The government plans to improve facilities at trauma care units apart from training locals on trauma care and telling them “how to handle situations after an accident and how to provide first aid.
- The policy further promises to boost research activities in medical colleges.

Northeast's first regional Centre for Agriculture with Israeli collaboration to come up in Mizoram

Northeast India's first regional Centre for Agriculture with collaboration of Israel will be inaugurated in Mizoram in March 2018. It will be first such centre in North East region of India being established with Israeli collaboration.

- There are 22 such operational centres setup across India with support of Israel including in states of Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab. The first centre was established in 2008 in Haryana.
- This centre will be exclusively for processing of citrus fruits and will cater to the whole north east.
- It has been set up with tripartite collaboration of Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of Israel and Mizoram Government.
- Israel will provide expertise knowledge and professional support to the centre.
- It will benefit the farmers of the north eastern region in the long run and will also encourage the farmers from other regions.
- It will serve as model of learning for other countries in Indian sub-continent.
- It will benefit the people of North East in the area of innovation, especially for start-ups.

Government sets up the NITI Forum for Northeast

The Union Ministry for Development of North-East Region (DoNER) is setting up the 'NITI Forum for North-East' to identify constraints and recommend suitable interventions for speedy and sustainable growth in North East Region (NER).

- The forum will be co-chaired by Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER).
- The forum is tasked to identify various constraints on way of accelerated, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in NER. It will recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints. It will also review development status in NER.
- It may also examine and address any other issues which are of importance but not specifically spelt out in its Terms of Reference.
- It may devise its own procedure to conduct its business, meetings, field visits or constitution of Sub-Groups etc.

Cabinet approves creation of National Urban Housing Fund

The Union Cabinet has approved creation of Rs. 60,000 crores National Urban Housing Fund (NUHF) to finance Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) which aims to build 1.2 crore affordable houses in urban areas by 2022.

- NUHF will be placed under aegis of Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council (BMTPC).
- It will be raised from non-budgetary sources and will tap into existing government entities such as Housing and Urban Development Corp. (Hudco).
- NUHF will facilitate raising requisite funds in next four years so that flow of Central Assistance under different verticals i.e. Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP), Beneficiary Linked Construction (BLC), In-Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR) and Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) is sustained and construction of houses to address the gap in Urban Sector progresses smoothly.

Government launches Swajal Programme and Gangotri Swachh Iconic Place project

The Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched Gangotri Swachh Iconic Place project and Swajal, a community owned drinking water programme in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.

- These both projects will create cleanliness, provide basic amenities to the people of Ganga bank villages and will also generate employment.
- Moreover, Bagori Ganga Gram' project was also announced for Bagori village, which was declared open defecation free (ODF).
- The project was inaugurated at Bagori. It is community owned drinking water programme for sustained drinking water supply.
- It aims to make Gangotri as Swachh Iconic Place (SIP). For this, CSR funds of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) will be used for making Gangotri SIP.
- The SIP project is coordinated by Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation (MDWS), in collaboration with Union Ministries of Housing & Gangotri SIP.

Rajnath Singh announces special package for strengthening security in Arunachal Pradesh

On 20th February 2018, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh announced that, the Central Government has sanctioned a special package to strengthen security in 3 eastern districts of Arunachal Pradesh: Tirap, Changlang and Longding.

- The special package for strengthening security has been sanctioned to handle the prevailing insurgency problem in Arunachal Pradesh.
- This special package also includes creation of new posts, purchasing of vehicles and equipment for police. Rajnath Singh made this announcement at the 31st Arunachal Pradesh statehood day programme.
- \ He ensured that funds from the government will be dispensed at the earliest for the construction of 20 police stations in the three districts. He also ensured that a forensic science laboratory will be sanctioned for Arunachal Pradesh.

International Current Affairs

Newborn mortality -India 12th worst among 52 low-income nations

According to a report by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), India has ranked 12th among 52 lower middle-income countries in terms of neonatal mortality rate.

- Neonatal Mortality Rate in India is 25.4/1000 live births. With nearly 640000 newborn deaths each year, India accounts for a quarter of the global burden of neonatal deaths of 2.6 million babies.
- 57% of neonatal deaths in India occur in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- As these states account for 46% of all births, it can be inferred that States with the highest birth rates have higher newborn deaths

Banking & Finance

Capital First gets NHB nod for merger with IDFC Bank

On February 20, 2018, Capital First announced that regulator National Housing Bank (NHB) has approved its merger with IDFC Bank.

- IDFC Bank – Capital First Merger was announced in January 2018
- As per the terms of the merger deal, IDFC Bank will issue 139 shares for every 10 shares of Capital First.
- Capital Home Finance and Capital First Securities Limited, the subsidiaries of Capital First are also a part of the merger deal.
- Post merger, IDFC Bank-Capital First combined entity will have Asset Under Management (AUM) of Rs 88000 crore.

India notifies revised tax treaty with Kenya

On 19th February 2018, Indian government notified the revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) between India and Kenya.

- It has been stated that, the revised DTAA will enhance transparency in tax matters, control tax evasion, and eliminate double taxation. It will also improve the flow of investment, technology and services between India and Kenya.
- The revised DTAA offers reduction in withholding tax rate on dividend and interest to 10 % from 15 %.
- The withholding tax rate on royalties, and fees for management, professional, technical services has been decreased to 10 % from 20 % and 17.5 % respectively..
- The revised DTAA issues a new Article on Limitation of Benefits to provide treaty benefits to bona-fide residents of India and Kenya. It will also prevent treaty abuse by third country residents. It will enable domestic law to prevent tax evasion.
- The revised DTAA has been upgraded to the latest international standard to make available exchange of information to the maximum extent.
- Also a new Article on Assistance in Collection of Taxes has been issued to provide assistance in collection of tax revenue claims between India and Kenya.

Business

UP Govt signs pact with Amazon India for khadi products sale

On February 20, 2018, Uttar Pradesh's Khadi and Village Industries Board signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Amazon India for online selling of Khadi products.

- On behalf of Uttar Pradesh Government, the MoU was signed by Avinash Krishna Singh, the CEO of Khadi and Village Industries Board while Gopal Pillai, the Seller Services Director and GM signed on behalf of Amazon India.
- As per the terms of the MoU, Amazon India will educate and train UP's rural khadi artisans to directly sell their products to Amazon.in customers across India under the brand of UP Khadi.
- Items that would be sold on Amazon.in would include khadi shirts, kurtas, dhotis, towels. There is high demand of these items in urban areas.

Facebook, Andhra Pradesh government to work together

On 20th February 2018, Facebook India announced that, it will work together with Andhra Pradesh government, to carry out innovative pilot projects in Andhra Pradesh.

- Facebook (India) Connectivity Policy Head Aswani Rana and Andhra Pradesh Information and Technology Minister Nara Lokesh decided to work on services like internet facility to every house by means of fiber grid, internet and WiFi. This also includes TV services at a nominal cost of Rs 149.
- Nara Lokesh asked the Facebook team to carry out innovative pilot projects in Andhra Pradesh and got a positive response from the Facebook team.
- Facebook team said that, they would offer training to women, small scale and cottage industries to help them sell products online.

Science & Technology

Government launches six new user friendly features of e-NAM Platform

The Union Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare have launched six new features of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Platform to make it more users friendly.

- The six new features are e-NAM Mobile App, BHIM payment facility, new and improved Website with eLearning Module, MIS Dashboard, Grievance Redressal Management System for Mandi Secretaries and Integration with Farmer Database.
- e-NAM is one of major and important flagship schemes implemented by Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.
- Its objective is to provide competitive and remunerative price to farmers for their produce through online competitive and transparent bidding process.
- e-NAM is pan-India e-trading platform. It is designed to create unified national market for agricultural commodities.
- It integrates Central Farmer Database to increase the efficiency and reduce queue time.
- It is now available in 8 different languages and its live trading facility is available in six different languages.

Agni-II ballistic missile successfully test fired

Surface-to-surface Agni-II ballistic missile was successfully test-fired from the Abdul Kalam Island, off Odisha coast.

- The test was conducted as part of user trial by Strategic Forces Command (SFC) with logistics support from Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO).
- It was aimed at re-establishing operational effectiveness of weapon system.

- It is one of the sophisticated weapons that can act as a deterrent against nuclear-armed neighbours.
- It is equipped with advanced high accuracy navigation system.
- It is guided by a novel scheme of state of the art command and control system.
- It can be fired from both rail and road mobile launchers and it takes only 15 minutes for the missile to be readied for firing.

Light transport aircraft SARAS successfully completes second test-flight

India's indigenous developed light transport aircraft SARAS PT1N has successfully completed second test-flight.

- It was the second of the 20 test flights planned for SARAS PT1N, before it is frozen to production version.
- The first successful test was carried out in January 2017. Indian Air Force (IAF) has committed to induct 15 aircrafts initially.
- SARAS PT1N is first Indian multi-purpose civilian aircraft in light transport aircraft category as designed by the CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL).
- Its development is seen as culmination of efforts of CSIR-NAL, IAF-ASTE, Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC), HAL and Directorate General of Aeronautical Quality Assurance (DGAQA)..
- SARAS PT1N upgraded version of envisioned Saras aircraft programme aircraft. It has maximum continuous flight time of around five hours.

Sports

Virat Kohli becomes first Indian to cross 900 points in ICC ODI player rankings

On 20th February 2018, ICC (International Cricket Council) announced that, Virat Kohli has become the first Indian to cross 900 points in the ICC ODI player rankings with 909 points.

- Virat Kohli with a rating of 909 points has become the seventh player in the world to cross 900 points in the ICC ODI player rankings.
- Virat Kohli is only behind Sir Vivian Richards – 935 points (1985), Zaheer Abbas – 931 points (1983), Greg Chappell – 921 points (1981), David Gower – 919 points (1983), Dean Jones – 918 points (1991) and Javed Miandad – 910 points (1987).
- Virat Kohli is the second batsman after South Africa's AB de Villiers to cross the 900 point mark in both Tests and ODIs.

Obituary

Renowned cardiologist, Padmashri awardee, Dr BK Goyal passes away

On 20th February 2018, Dr BK Goyal, a reputed cardiologist, died after suffering from cardiac arrest, at the Breach Candy Hospital, in Mumbai.

- Dr B K Goyal served patients at the Bombay Hospital since 1966. He was the head of cardiology. In 1980, he was made the Sheriff of Bombay.
 - He received Padma Shri in 1984, Padma Bhushan in 1989 and Padma Vibhushan in 2005.
 - He was one among the youngest doctors to become the president of Cardiological Society of India.
- He also served at the JJ Hospital in an honorary position.

Eminent Malayalam writer Kunhiraman Panoor passes away

On 20th February 2018, Kunhiraman Panoor, author and civic rights activist, passed away due to age related ailments, in Kerala.

- He started his career as an official in the revenue department.
- His popular book is 'Keralathile Africa'. He had received Kerala Sahithya Akademi honour in 2006.
- He retired as deputy collector, and later served as the registrar of Malayala Kalagramam, in New Mahe. He had fought for various human right causes.

Rajasthan BJP MLA Kalyan Singh Chouhan passes away

On 20th February 2018, Kalyan Singh Chouhan, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA from Nathdwara, died after fighting cancer for a long time, in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

- Kalyan Singh Chouhan entered politics in 1988. He joined the Congress Party and became sarpanch from Kotharia gram panchayat in Rajsamand district.
- He was Khamnor Pradhan from 1998 to 2000 and Up-Zila Pramukh in the 2000 to 2005 period. Later Kalyan Singh Chouhan joined BJP. He became MLA twice.

Important Days

21 February: International Mother Language Day

The International Mother Language Day (IMLD) was observed across the world on 21 February to promote awareness of linguistic, multilingualism and cultural diversity. This year it is the 18th anniversary of IMLD.

- The observance of this day signifies importance of mother language as the greatest weapon to express one's feeling.
- Mother Language of one country is the sign of independence of that country.
- It is most powerful instruments of preserving and developing tangible and intangible heritage.
- The theme of 2018 International Mother Language Day is 'Linguistic diversity and multilingualism count for sustainable development'.
- It requires mastery over mother tongue to foster sustainable development.
- It seeks to highlight importance local languages that transmit cultures, values and traditional knowledge for promoting sustainable futures.
- Observance of this day also supports target 6 of Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which states that ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.