

National Current Affairs

Heavy Water Board inks agreement for sale of 20 tonnes of Heavy Water

Heavy Water Board (HWB), a constituent industrial unit of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) signed a collaborative agreement with Clearsynth, Mumbai for sale of 20 tonnes of Heavy Water in year.

- It will be sold for development of deuterium labelled compounds, NMR Solvents, d-labelled Active Pharma Ingredients (APIs).
- During previous years, Indian industries had imported deuterated compounds and Heavy Water to tune of 9 Million USD.
- This collaborative agreement will initiate import substitution for deuterated compounds and Heavy Water.
- HWB is constituent unit under DAE in the Central Government. It is primarily responsible for production of Heavy Water (D₂O) which is used as 'moderator' and 'Coolant' in nuclear power as well as research reactors.

PM addresses Economic Times Global Business Summit in New Delhi

On February 23, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered the keynote address at the 4th Global Business Summit in New Delhi.

- During the address, PM Modi outlined that Indian government is taking stringent action against financial irregularities and will not accept unlawful acquisition of public money.
- Global Business Summit, is a flagship initiative of the Times Group. The first edition was held in January 2015.
- It brings together, visionaries, heads of state, thought leaders, policy makers, academicians and corporate heads for discussing current macroeconomic issues and share their views on the same.
- Theme for Global Business Summit 2018 was 'New Economy, New Rules'.
- This year's Summit was presented by Yes Bank and Economic Times.

J&K govt sets up council for promotion of Urdu

On February 23, 2018, Jammu & Kashmir State Government constituted the State Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (SCPUL).

- Objective behind setting up this council is to promote J&K's official language (Urdu).

- SCPUL would be headed by the Education Minister of Jammu & Kashmir State Cabinet, while vice-chancellors of all central and state universities in J&K, administrative secretaries of finance, school education, culture and law departments; secretary of the J&K academy of art, culture and languages would be the official members.
- An amount of Rs. 2 crore has been set aside for this Council.

International Current Affairs

TAPI gas pipeline: Work on Afghanistan section begins

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have ceremonially broke ground on Afghanistan section of ambitious, multi-billion dollar TAPI gas pipeline.

- The ceremony was attended by Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani and his Turkmenistan counterpart Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and India's Minister of state for external affairs Shri M. J. Akbar.
- TAPI gas pipeline project is proposed trans-country natural gas pipeline from Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The pipe line connects central Asia with south Asia covering 1,840 km.
- The pipeline has capacity to carry 90 million standard cubic metres a day (mmscmd).
- Both India and Pakistan will get supply of about 38 mmscmd whereas Afghanistan will get 14 mmscmd supply of natural gas.
- For its security, an inter-government joint security task force (JSTF) has been recommended to serve as nucleus of safety provided by security consultants.
- The TAPI Project is considered as an important initiative of these four countries to connect energy rich Central Asia with energy starved South Asia.
- From India's perspective, TAPI Project will provide an alternative supply source of gas with dependable reserves leading to enhanced energy security.
- It will further diversify the fuel basket to the benefit of Indian economy as it would be used mainly in power, fertilizer and city gas sectors.

India, Canada ink six pacts

India and Canada have signed six agreements in different fields including nuclear science, energy cooperation, sports, education, science and technology cooperation and information communication technology.

- Agreements signed are:
 - MoU on Cooperation in Sport.
 - MoU for Cooperation in Higher Education.
 - MoU for Cooperation on Intellectual Property Rights.
 - Terms of Reference for the India-Canada Ministerial Energy Dialogue.
 - MoU for cooperation in the Fields of Science, Technology and Innovation.
 - Joint Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the Field of Information Communications Technology and Electronics.
- India-Canada share strategic partnership underpinned by shared values of democracy and pluralism.

India, Germany inks MoU for Sustainable Urban Development programme & Smart Cities in India

India and Germany have inked MoU for “Implementation Agreement in Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Cities in India.

- The Agreement was signed between Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, India on behalf of Government of Germany.
- The objective of programme is to develop and apply concepts for sustainable urban development about provision of urban basic services and housing in selected cities and Smart Cities in India.
- It will also develop and apply concepts for provision of Urban basic services & housing in Smart Cities Technical cooperation to support approaches in integrated planning, affordable housing and basic services.
- The technical cooperation measure will support approaches for sustainable urban development in area of integrated planning, provision of affordable housing and basic services with particular focus on water, waste water and solid waste management and mobility.

India, Uzbekistan's Andijan region ink agreement for cooperation in pharmaceutical industry

The Andijan Region of Uzbekistan and India have inked agreement for cooperation in pharmaceutical industry.

- Under it, both sides will develop cooperation in implementation of program for production of pharmaceutical, bio-pharmaceutical products and medical equipment in the Andijan region of Uzbekistan.

- Both countries had agreed to work together in principle on issue of creating Uzbek-Indian free pharmaceutical zone in Andijan region and start joint development of business plan for this project.
- They had agreed to work together on issue of attracting direct investments of Indian companies and Uzbek investors to create modern production facilities for production of pharmaceutical products and medicines with high value.
- This was to be done on basis of medicinal substances and medicinal plant raw materials, produced, but not limited, on created plantations in Uzbekistan.

India-German MOU on Sustainable Urban Development programme & Smart Cities

On 23rd February 2018, an Indo-German MoU was signed for “Implementation Agreement in Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Cities in India”.

- The ‘Sustainable Urban Development Programme – Smart Cities in India’ project is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).
- It will be jointly implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, India and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).
- The project will promote sustainable urban development under the national urban programmes like Smart Cities Mission, with the Sustainable Development Goal No. 11 ‘Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’.
- Germany contributes up to 8 million EUR for the project. The project will be carried out for 3 years: from 2018 to December 2020.
- The project’s main focus is integrated planning approaches for the three Smart Cities, development of local innovations and pilot approaches to provide affordable housing and basic services in the three cities.

India International Textiles Expo organised in Colombo

- A three-day India International Textiles Expo (IITExpo) was organised in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 21st to 23rd February, 2018.
- This Expo was organised by Powerloom Development & Export Promotion Council (PDEXCIL) with the support of Union Ministry of Textiles & Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- The expo was inaugurated by Sri Lankan Minister of Special Assignments, Dr. Sarath Amunugama.
- At the Expo, 45 exhibitors from various textile clusters of India displayed variety of fabrics, home textiles and traditional items suitable for apparel, industrial and general consumers.

20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) held in Fiji

20th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) was held in Nadi, Fiji from 19th – 23rd February 2018.

- The Conference was held for Education Ministers of Commonwealth nations to meet and discuss solutions to contemporary issues and challenges in education sector viz. low enrolment rates in preschool, primary and secondary schools, gender disparities in education and low adult literacy.
- Theme of 20CCEM was “Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?”.
- First Commonwealth education conference was held in Oxford, UK in 1959. It has been taking place every three years since then.

Banking & Finance

Government inks loan agreement with ADB for Improvement and Expansion of Water Supply in Bihar

The Union Government has inked \$84 million loan agreement with Asian Development Bank (ADB) for improvement and expansion of water supply in Bhagalpur and Gaya towns in Bihar.

- The loan has 25-year term, including grace period of 5 years with annual interest rate determined in accordance with ADB's lending facility based on London interbank offered rate (LIBOR) and commitment charge of 0.15% per year.
- This agreement is for tranche 2 loan, part of \$200 million multi-tranche financing facility (MFF) for Bihar Urban Development Investment Program that was approved in 2012 by ADB. The program aims to provide sustainable urban infrastructure and services in four towns in Bihar –Gaya, Bhagalpur, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur.
- The project 2 will improve access to better quality and sustainable water supply, for people of Bhagalpur and Gaya towns. It will help two towns to achieve national urban service goals or match many of national averages for urban service delivery performance in India.
- The investment program will assist urban local body (ULBs) in designing affordable tariffs for operation and maintenance (O&M) cost recovery.
- The loan finances will support civil works subprojects and will benefit 1.1 million people in two project towns with increased coverage of treated water supply by 2021.
- It will also train 400 urban local body (ULB) staff in management and O&M of water supply systems and help ULBs improve technical and financial management of water supply operations.

RBI launches Ombudsman scheme for NBFCs

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched Ombudsman Scheme for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) for redressal of complaints against NBFCs registered with RBI under section 45-IA of the RBI Act, 1934.

- The scheme will provide cost-free and expeditious complaint redressal mechanism relating to deficiency in services by non-banking financial companies covered under the scheme.
- The offices of NBFC Ombudsmen will function at four metro centres —Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and New Delhi. They will handle complaints of customers in respective zones. To begin with, the scheme will cover all deposit-taking NBFCs.
- Under this scheme, any customer or person can file complaint with ombudsman on various grounds.
- Only written complaints or those in electronic format will be accepted.
- RBI will appoint one or more of its officers in rank of not less than General Manager (GM) to be known as Ombudsman to carry out functions.

RBI directs banks to link SWIFT to core banking solutions by April 2018

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed banks to link SWIFT (Society for World Interbank Financial Telecommunication System platform) with their core banking solutions (CBS) by April 30, 2018.

- This decision is part of RBI's efforts to tighten internal controls in banks following Rs 11,400 crore fraud that was unearthed at Punjab National Bank (PNB).
- CBS is centralised software used to support bank's most common transactions.
- The mega PNB fraud surrounds around SWIFT technology which was misused by its branch officials to fraudulently issue LoUs (letters of undertaking), kind of Bank guarantees to diamond and jewellery importer Nirav Modi-linked companies without getting proper approvals and without making entries in CBS.
- The failure of SWIFT-CBS link led to Rs 11,400 crore fraud at PNB and enabled these transactions to go undetected for over seven years.
- SWIFT is global financial messaging service that enables financial institutions worldwide to send and receive information about financial transactions in secure, standardized and reliable environment. It is used to transmit messages relating to cross border financial transactions.

Business

Airtel, Huawei successfully conduct India's first 5G network trial

Telecom Major Bharti Airtel and Chinese telecom equipment maker Huawei have successfully conducted India's first 5G (fifth generation) network trial.

- It was conducted at Airtel's network experience centre in Manesar, Gurugram (Haryana) and was able to achieve over 3 gigabit per second (Gbps) data speed.
- The setup for this 5G trial involved 5G RAN that operated on 3.5GHz network band, along with 5G Core and 50GE network slicing router. In duration of tests, a user throughput speed of 3Gbps was achieved, claimed to be highest for 3.5GHz band.
- The tests were conducted within a 100MHz bandwidth and resulted in a 1-millisecond end-to-end network latency.
- The test is small but significant step in its journey towards next generation 5G mobile networks, which could offer data speed up to 100 times faster than current 4G networks.
- It also demonstrates spectral efficiency and potential for diversified services such as Internet of Things (IoT) and augmented reality (AR)/virtual reality (VR), which can be delivered by 5G technology to serve a digitally connected world.

India's first 4G LTE telecom system unveiled

On February 23, 2018, Union Telecom Minister Manoj Sinha launched India's first locally developed 4G/LTE telecom system.

- This system has been designed and developed by India's leading telecom equipment manufacturer VNL Ltd.
- NL Ltd. has designed and developed this 4G/LTE system by taking into consideration, the requirement for high speed connectivity, particularly in rural areas of India.
- It not only ensures seamless connectivity at most affordable prices but also reduces import dependence for such equipments.
- Abbreviation LTE stand for Long-Term Evolution. In context of telecommunication technology, LTE is a standard for high-speed wireless communication for mobile devices and data terminals.

Tamil Nadu Govt, Microsoft tie-up to accelerate cloud technology adoption

On February 23, 2018, Tamil Nadu State Government announced an agreement with Microsoft to improve the integration of technology in teaching and learning across the state.

- The agreement aims at reforming education, build tech capacity and enhance digital literacy across all levels.

- As per the terms of the agreement, Microsoft will adopt seven schools identified by Tamil Nadu State Government and will train their teachers and students in inculcating skills such as critical thinking, app development, creative coding & gaming, robotics and entrepreneurship.
- All educators in primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education across Tamil Nadu will be offered Microsoft Innovative Educator Program.
- Besides, Microsoft will also train and provide a digital literacy certification to District Education Officers (DEOs) in Tamil Nadu.

Government imposes anti-dumping duty on ceramicware from China

The Union Finance Ministry (Department of Revenue) has imposed anti-dumping duty on import of ceramic tableware and kitchenware from China in bid to protect domestic producers. Both items will attract anti-dumping duty of \$1.04 per kg, making the imports expensive.

- The protectionist measure against cheap Chinese import was based recommendation of Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Anti-dumping Duty is an import duty imposed by government on imported products which have prices less than their normal values or domestic price.
- Thus, it is protectionist and counter import measure used by country under multilateral World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime to protect its domestic producers and market from below-cost/cheap imports

Awards & Recognition

NHRC retains its 'A' status of accreditation with GANHRI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has retained its 'A' status of accreditation of Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for fourth consecutive term.

- NHRC was awarded 'A' status for first time in 1999 which it retained in 2006 and 2011 reviews. The Sub Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of GANHRI had recommended that NHRC be reaccredited with "A" status.
- The GANHRI accreditation system has evolved and been strengthened over past years.

- It measures that GANHRI adopted to improve process including system by which NHRIs are reviewed on periodic basis of 5 years, appeal process for NHRIs to ensure greater transparency and due process, more rigorous review of each application, more focused recommendations and wider distribution and greater knowledge of SCA recommendations by NHRIs and other stakeholders, so that they can follow up in-country and contribute to the accreditation process.

Appointments & Resigns

Subbarayudu appointed the Ambassador of Bolivia

On 23rd February 2018, M. Subbarayudu was appointed the next Ambassador of India to Plurinational State of Bolivia.

- M. Subbarayudu is an Indian Foreign Service Officer (IFS) of the 1994 batch. He is currently the Ambassador of India to Lima. His residence is in Lima.
- He has been concurrently appointed the next Ambassador of India to Plurinational State of Bolivia. He will soon take up this new assignment.

Science & Technology

Dhanush missile successfully test fired

Nuclear-capable surface-to-surface Dhanush ballistic missile was successfully test-fired from naval ship off Odisha near Paradip in the Bay of Bengal.

- The missile test was carried out by Strategic Forces Command (SFC), the tri-services military command that controls all of India's nuclear weapons and their associated delivery systems.
- Dhanush missile is also known as Prithvi-III. It is naval variant of indigenously-developed Prithvi-II missile.
- Its design features customisations to Prithvi platform to make it suitable for launch from ship.
- It is short-range ballistic missile capable of carrying nuclear as well as conventional warheads.

- It can be used for both ship-to-ship and ship-to-surface strikes. It has declared strike range of 350 km.

Sports

PyeongChang Winter Olympics 2018 held in South Korea

PyeongChang Winter Olympics 2018, officially known as the XXIII Olympic Winter Games was held in Pyeongchang, South Korea from 9th – 23rd February, 2018.

- Motto of PyeongChang Winter Olympics 2018 was “Passion.Connected”.
- Soohorang, a white tiger, and Bandabi, an Asiatic black bear were the official mascots for this event.
- Norway topped the medal tally at PyeongChang Winter Olympics 2018 by winning 14 Gold, 14 Silver and 11 Bronze.
- First Gold Medal at PyeongChang Winter Olympics 2018 was won by Sweden’s Charlotte Kalla

Obituary

Kunwar Bai: 106-year-old icon for Swachh Bharat campaign passes away

Kunwar Bai, a 106-year-old woman from Chhattisgarh who was chosen as mascot for ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’, passed away after a prolonged illness.

- She had shot to fame in 2016 when story of her selling goats to build toilet at home had got nationwide publicity.
- She was felicitated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at public meeting at Kurrubhat village in Rajnandgaon district and later made a mascot for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- She started showing other villagers the toilets at her home while educating them about its importance.
- She had encouraged others from village to build toilets. Her efforts had help to make her village open defecation free as very home in her village has toilets.

Important Days

Central Excise Day – February 24

On 24th February 2018, Central Excise Day was observed all over India.

- The Central Excise Day is celebrated every year on 24th February to mark the enactment of the Central Excise and Salt Act, 1944.
- This day is celebrated by conducting seminars, workshops, trade interactions, cultural events etc. organized by Central Excise officers across India.
- This day is celebrated to encourage the excise department employees to perform their duties in a better manner and honour their contributions.