

National Current Affairs

HRD Ministry allocates Rs.1000 crore for research in S&T under IMPRINT-II

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has sanctioned Rs. 1000 crore for phase II of Impacting Research Innovation and Technology (IMPRINT) India programme to boost research and innovation in the country.

- Under the IMPRINT-II, a fund is being created by Department of Science and Technology (DST) and HRD Ministry together, in which participation will come from industry and other interested Ministries.
- The project will be run as a separate vertical in coordination with DST.
- IMPRINT India Programme is joint initiative of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc).
- It seeks to develop road map for research to solve major engineering and technology challenges in 10 technology domains relevant for country.
- Objectives of IMPRINT:
 - Identify areas of immediate relevance that requires innovation in the society.
 - Ensure support and higher funding for research for identified areas.
 - Measure outcomes of innovation and research efforts and its impact on people's standard of living.
- Significance: It will motivate technical institutions to conduct research in areas where the country is heavily dependent on foreign technology.

Government launches #YesIBleed menstrual hygiene campaign

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched #YesIBleed menstrual hygiene campaign on the occasion of International Women's Day 2018.

- It is second edition of such campaign that aims to create holistic approach to issue of menstruation, which is experience that transcends culture, class, and caste.
- The "#Yes I Bleed" campaign has been initiated formally across all multi-media platforms, including Facebook and YouTube to spread awareness about issue.
- The National Commission of Women (NCW) has extended full support to Shewings in endeavour to spread awareness about the core issue of every woman's concern.

Street Lighting National Programme: 49 lakh LED street lights installed

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) has installed 49 lakh LED street lights in 28 states/UTs under the Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP). The Programme was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015.

- It aims to replace 1.34 crore conventional street lights with energy efficient LED lights by March, 2019.
- It is being implemented by EESL. It is world's Largest Street Light Replacement Programme. Rajasthan was the first state to adopt this scheme.
- Objectives:
 - Reduce energy consumption in lighting which helps DISCOMs to manage peak demand.
 - Mitigate climate change by implementing energy efficient LED based street lighting.
 - Provide sustainable service model that obviates need for upfront capital investment as well as additional revenue expenditure to pay for procurement of LED lights.
 - Enhance municipal services at no upfront capital cost of municipalities.

Commerce Ministry to devise strategy on product standard

The Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry has released draft Indian National Strategy for Standardisation for standardisation of products and services to provide level playing field to domestic industry and adopt best global practices.

- The strategy will play an active role and take leadership positions in apex international forums in related areas besides creating response mechanisms to global developments on standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment practices that impact market access of Indian goods and services.
- Key objectives of draft strategy:
 - Positioning standards as key driver of all economic activities relating to goods and services.
 - Create integrated infrastructure, roadmaps and institutions for their effective management.
 - Enhance competitiveness of Indian goods and services in domestic and international markets.
 - Develop comprehensive ecosystem for standards development taking into account diversity of interests and expertise available.
 - Provide level playing field to domestic industry and adopt best practices in standardisation, conformity assessment and technical regulations.

40 Participants attend 46th Know India Programme

40 participants of Indian Origin from 9 countries attended 46th edition of Know India Programme (KIP). Madhya Pradesh was partner state of this edition.

- As part of the initiative participants visited Madhya Pradesh, Parliament House, President's House and attended orientation programme at the Foreign Service Institute.
- KIP is initiative (scheme) of Ministry of External Affairs for Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) between the age group of 18 to 30 years.
- The scheme was launched in 2004 and has so far had 40 editions in which some 1,293 PIO youths have participated.
- Objective:
 - Engage and make students and young professionals of Indian Diaspora (18 to 30years) feel sense of connect with their motherland.
 - Motivated and inspire PIOs by transformational changes taking place in India and give them an exposure to various aspects of contemporary India's forms of art, heritage and culture.
- KIP is three-week orientation programme aimed at promoting awareness on different facets of life in India as well as the progress made by country in fields such as economic and education. It offers platform for young PIOs to visit India share their views, experiences and expectations and forge closer bonds with India.
- The participants are selected on basis of nominations received and recommendations of heads of Indian Missions and posts.

4th India-Europe 29 Business Forum Held In New Delhi

The fourth India-Europe 29 Business Forum (IE29BF) took place in New Delhi.

- The Forum was created for the first time in 2014 by Ministry of External Affairs and Federation of Indian Chambers and Commerce (FICCI) to provide an institutionalized platform for promoting business exchanges between India and the twenty-nine countries of Central Europe region.
- The theme of IE29BF 2018 was 'Synergising Economic Vision for Expanded Relations'. For IE29BF 2018, Czech Republic was the 'Focus Country'. Eighteen other European countries participated in the Forum.

Odisha MSME International Trade Fair begins in Bhubaneswar

The Odisha MSME International Trade Fair, 2018 kick started in the state on 5th March with a special focus on food processing sector.

- 35 delegates from Iran, Bangladesh, Korea and Germany are participating in the trade fair this time.
- The trade fair will have more than 350 stalls with six pavilions. While the theme pavilion will be devoted for food processing sector, pavillion-1 will be for international exhibitors and central public sector undertakings (CPSUs).

- Pavilion two will be earmarked for food processing and sea food MSME units while pavilion three will be earmarked for MSMEs of women and scheduled tribes/scheduled castes entrepreneurs.
- Pavilion four has been reserved for MSMEs working in engineering and allied sectors and pavilion five will be allotted to start ups and exporters.

International Current Affairs

AAI participates in World ATM Congress in Spain

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) is participating in World ATM Congress (WATMC) 2018 being held at IFEMA, Feria de Madrid, Spain from March 6 to 8.

- Now entering its sixth year, World ATM Congress is the world's largest international air traffic management (ATM) exhibition and conference attracting thousands of delegates each year.
- The AAI is showcasing its achievements and initiatives, through a stall at the conference.
- Conceived by the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization (CANSO) in partnership with the Air Traffic Control Association (ATCA), the World ATM Congress brings together the world's leading product developers, experts, stakeholders in aviation.

Sri Lanka declares state of emergency after Buddhist-Muslim clash

Sri Lanka declared a nationwide state of emergency for 10 days to stop the spread of communal violence, after clashes erupted between majority Buddhists and members of the minority Muslim community.

- Tension has been growing between the two communities in Sri Lanka over the past year, with some hardline Buddhist groups accusing Muslims of forcing people to convert to Islam and vandalizing Buddhist archaeological sites.
- Some Buddhist nationalists have also protested against the presence in Sri Lanka of Muslim Rohingya asylum-seekers from mostly Buddhist Myanmar, where Buddhist nationalism has also been on the rise.
- The unrest in the Indian Ocean island's central district of Kandy was triggered by the death of a driver from the majority Sinhalese Buddhist community which was caused after he was involved in an altercation with four Muslims.

Bill And Melinda Gates pledge \$170 million to Women's Economic Empowerment

Philanthropists Melinda and Bill Gates have pledged a massive sum toward women's empowerment worldwide.

- The money, from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, will be spent over four years “to help women exercise their economic power
- The donation will fund a three-pronged approach to economically empowering women: First, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will support and organize female farmers so they can sell their products at competitive prices; Second, the foundation will work in eight countries, including India, Pakistan and Tanzania, to promote women using digital bank accounts; And lastly, the foundation will facilitate self-help groups allowing women and girls share information about “everything from launching a small business to raising healthy children.”

Banking & Finance

Sidbi, CSC partner to offer MSMEs better credit access

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) signed a memorandum of understanding with CSC e-governance Services (CSCeGS) to take Udyami Mitra portal to the unserved and the underserved MSMEs.

- Udyamimitra.in is a portal to improve accessibility of credit for the MSMEs.
- It allows entrepreneurs to apply for a loan without physically visiting bank branches.
- CSCeGS is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) set up by ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY) which acts as connect point for various digitally aligned services to villages in the country.
- CSCs (Common Service Centres), one of the crucial enablers of the Digital India programme, are the access points for delivery of various e-governance and business services to citizens in rural and remote areas of the country.
- The MoU is aimed to facilitate financial support to the upcoming CSCs through bank financing.
- MoU is being entered to give programmatic approach to tap young talent from small towns and rural areas to set up MSMEs and emerge as employment giver as against being employment seeker,".
- Eligible CSCs shall become customer service points (CSPs) to deliver hand-holding services to budding entrepreneurs.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development approves India's membership

The shareholders of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) have given their nod to India's candidature to international financial institution. With this, India will become the 69th member of EBRD.

- The move follows Indian Government's application to seek membership of EBRD back in December 2017.
- It will set stage increase in joint investment with Indian companies in EBRD's regions of operation.
- The EBRD's Board of Governors, which represents all existing shareholders of the international financial institution, had voted in favour of India's membership application. With shareholders' approval, the formal membership process will now get underway, which includes purchase of shares by India at estimated cost of around 1 million euros.

Business

Microsoft inks renewable energy deal for Bengaluru facility

Tech giant Microsoft has inked its first renewable energy deal in India for powering its new facility in Bengaluru. The agreement will see Microsoft purchase 3 megawatts of solar-powered electricity from Atria Power for its new office building in Bengaluru, meeting 80% of the projected electricity needs at the facility.

- The facility, which will be operational starting June, is spread over 5.85 lakh square feet.
- This is Microsoft's first solar energy agreement in India, and one of the first ones in the Asian region.
- This deal will help the company grow in a sustainable manner and also support the growth of the Indian solar energy industry.

India for the first time starts importing LNG from US

India for first time has started process of importing Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) from United States. The development comes on the heels of India's first import of crude oil from the US in October 2017.

- The first US-sourced LNG shipment was imported by state-owned GAIL and was shipped it on board of its chartered LNG ship 'Meridian Spirit' from Cheniere Energy's Sabine Pass LNG export facility in Louisiana. It will be discharged at GAIL's Dabhol terminal, Maharashtra.

- GAIL had signed 20-year Sale Purchase Agreement (SPA) with US' natural gas exporter Cheniere Energy in December 2011.
- Under it, GAIL will purchase around 3.5 Million Tonne of LNG per year from Sabine Pass. Cheniere Energy is currently operating and constructing its Sabine Pass LNG facility in Louisiana and is constructing second liquefaction facility near Corpus Christi, Texas.
- This shipment will help GAIL to diversify its portfolio both on price indexation and geographical locations.
- Moreover, this long-term SPA will also strengthen relationship between GAIL and Cheniere and reinforce India-US trade ties.

OVL signs pact for developing Susangerd oilfield in Iran

ONGC Videsh Ltd, the overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), has signed a pact with Iran's IDRO Oil to jointly bid for a USD 1 billion contract for development of Susangerd oilfield in southern Iran.

- The onland Susangerd field in the Khuzestan province is one of the newest finds, which Iran hopes will produce around 30,000 barrels per day of oil in two development phases
- OVL signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate with IDRO Oil, which is a subsidiary of state-run Iranian Development and Renovation Organisation, in developing Susangerd field.
- IDRO Oil is one of 17 eligible contractors that have received the Iranian oil ministry's nod to be a lead partner in joint ventures with international to work in the country's energy sector.

Appointments & Resigns

Conrad Sangma Sworn in as 12th CM of Meghalaya

NPP national president and Tura MP Conrad Sangma was sworn in as the 12th and youngest chief minister of Meghalaya along with 11 other cabinet ministers on the sprawling lawns of Raj Bhavan here ending the Congress-led coalition's 10-year rule in the state.

- 40-year-old Sangma leads the newly-formed Meghalaya Democratic Alliance comprising five political parties including the BJP.

Biplab Kumar Deb to be next Tripura CM

BJP state president Biplab Kumar Deb was elected the new chief minister of Tripura. The party's tribal leader Jishnu Devvarma will be his deputy.

Sandeep Bakhshi gets 2-yr extension as MD of ICICI Prudential Life

Sandeep Bakhshi managing director and chief executive officer ICICI Prudential Life Insurance was re-appointed with effect from June 1, 2018 for a term of two years till May 31, 2020.

- Bakhshi has been associated with ICICI Group since 1986, where he was responsible for business development, project appraisals, project monitoring and business re-structuring.

Gary Cohn resigns as Trump's top economic advisor

White House chief economic advisor Gary Cohn has resigned from President Donald Trump's administration.

- The former Goldman Sachs president and free trade advocate Cohn, whose departure date will come in a few weeks, decided to quit after Trump announced he would impose stiff tariffs on steel and aluminium imports.
- Cohn clashed with Trump's protectionist advisors on the issue of tariffs.

Awards & Recognition

Harry Athwal selected for 'Pride of Birmingham's Outstanding Bravery Award'

Indian-origin Birmingham man Harry Athwal was selected for this year's 'Pride of Birmingham's Outstanding Bravery Award'.

- He was awarded for risking his life in order to help a fatally injured young boy in the 2017 Barcelona terror attack.
- Athwal is among 11 winners who will be presented with their awards at a ceremony at the University of Birmingham.

Sports

Manu Bhaker, 16-year-old from Haryana, wins 2nd gold at ISSF shooting World Cup

Pistol shooter Manu Bhaker contributed two gold medals for India in the ISSF World Cup in Guadalajara, Mexico.

- Manu, 16, won the 10m air pistol gold medal and partnered Om Prakash Mitharval for the 10m air pistol mixed team gold.
- In the individual event, the Indian debutant shot a total of 237.5 to prevail over home favourite Alejandra Zavala Vazquez, who finished second with a total of 237.1.
- In the mixed team event, Haryana girl Manu and Mitharval totaled 476.1 in the final. It was India's third gold medal here.
- In total, India has seven medals and is now on top of the medal tally in this World Cup.

Obituary

Actress Shammi passes away

Veteran actress Shammi, best remembered for her role in the Nineties sitcom Dekh Bhai Dekh, died in Mumbai on 06th March.

- She started her career in the late '40s and continued to work till 2012, acting in almost 200 films.
- Her illustrious career took interesting turns as she never quit acting and her second tryst with fame came with the advent of Hindi television.

Ex-MP cricket association chairman Bhargav dead

Former Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association (MPCA) chairman M K Bhargav passed away.

- Bhargav was a well-known figure in the states cricket circle. He had also served as the MPCA secretary.
- He was associated with the umpiring panel of the Board of Cricket Control of India (BCCI) for a long time.