

# National Current Affairs

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## **CCEA approves Rs 1,151 crore scheme for in-situ management of crop residue to fight air pollution**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved Rs. 1,151 crore Central Sector Scheme for in-situ management of crop residue in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and NCT of Delhi.

- It will promote agricultural mechanization for next two years (2018-20) to provide cost-effective and eco-friendly solution to farmers to deal with problem of stubble burning that result in raising air pollution levels in Delhi and neighbouring states every winter.
- Under this scheme, the proceeds from central fund will be used to establish Farm Machinery Banks (FMBs) for Custom Hiring of in-situ crop residue management machinery. Government will provide 80% financial assistance of project cost to cooperative societies of farmers, FPOs, SHGs, registered farmers societies or farmers groups, private entrepreneurs and group of women farmers.
- It will also provide 50% financial assistance to farmers for procurement of agriculture machinery and equipment for in-situ crop residue management.
- The central fund will also be used to create awareness among farmers about in-situ management of crop residue.
- The activities will involve mass awareness campaigns through documents, short and long films, radio and TV programmes, demonstration camps at various levels and capacity building programme etc. It will also include advertisement in print media, star campaigning, award for village or gram Panchayat for achieving Zero Straw Burning etc.

## **Cabinet approves two relief measures for stressed telecom sector**

The Union Cabinet has approved two key measures in telecom sector to facilitate investments, consolidation in the sector and enhancing ease of doing business. These include restructuring.

- Deferred payment liabilities of spectrum auction of telecom service providers (TSPs)
  - It extends time period for payment of spectrum bought in auction to 16 years from the present 10 years.
- It will give one-time opportunity for TSPs to opt for higher number of instalment (maximum 16 instalments) apart from currently permitted 10 instalments.

- Revising the limit of the cap for spectrum holding for TSPs - Based upon the recommendations of TRAI and Telecom Commission, the Union Cabinet also approved revision of limits of cap for spectrum holding.

### **Cabinet approves the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018**

The Union Cabinet has approved the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018 for introduction in the Parliament.

- It is a part of the efforts of the Government to encourage institutional arbitration for settlement of disputes and make India a centre of robust Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism.
- The Amendments in the Act of 1996 will facilitate achieving the goal of improving institutional arbitration by establishing an independent body to lay down standards, make arbitration process more party friendly, cost effective and ensure timely disposal of arbitration cases.
- The amendment provides for creation of an independent body namely the Arbitration Council of India (ACI) which will grade arbitral institution and accredit arbitrators by laying down norms and take all such steps as may be necessary to promote and encourage arbitration, conciliation, mediation and other ADR Mechanism and for that purpose evolve policy and guidelines for the establishment., operation and maintenance of uniform professional standards in respect of all matters relating to arbitration and ADR mechanism.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Pay Commission: Dearness Allowance for central government employees hiked to 7 per cent**

The Union Cabinet approved two per cent hike in Dearness Allowance (DA) for central government employees.

- This decision will see 1.10 crore central government staff and pensioners receive 7 per cent of their basic pay as DA, instead of 5 per cent.
- The hike will be put into effect from January 01, 2018.
- The Dearness Allowance hike is expected to benefit 48.41 lakh central government employees and 61.17 lakh pensioners.
- Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief are given to employees and pensioners respectively to curb the effect of inflation on their earnings.

### **Cabinet approves continuation of Swatantra Sainik**

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of Swatantra Sainik Samman Yojana (SSSY) during 2017-2020.

- The approval provides for a monthly Samman Pension to freedom fighters, as a token of respect for their contribution in the national freedom struggle and on their demise, to their eligible dependents viz. spouses and thereafter, unmarried and unemployed daughters and dependent parents, as per prescribed eligibility norms and procedure.
- The financial implication for continuation of SSSY during 2017-2020 would be Rs. 2552.93 crore.

### **Cabinet approves the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Division of High Courts (Amendment) Bill, 2018**

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts (Amendment) Bill, 2018 for introduction in the Parliament.

- The Bill brings down the specified value of a commercial dispute to 3 Lakhs from the present one Crore.
- The amendment provides for establishment of Commercial Courts at district Judge level for the territories over which respective High Courts have ordinary original civil jurisdiction i.e in the cities of Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and State of Himachal Pradesh.
- The introduction of the Pre-Institution Mediation process in cases where no urgent, interim relief is contemplated will provide an opportunity to the parties to resolve the commercial disputes outside the ambit of the courts through the authorities constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 will also help in reinforcing investor's confidence in the resolution of commercial disputes.

### **Sukhad Yatra App and Toll-free Emergency number for Highway users launched**

Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) has launched Sukhad Yatra mobile application and 1033 Toll-free Emergency number for highway users. It also launched scheme for District Driving Training Centres and will provide grant of financial assistance for Road Safety Advocacy and awards for outstanding work in Road Safety.

- Sukhad Yatra mobile application has been prepared by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to empower Highway user.
- Its key feature includes provision for user to enter road quality-related information and to report any accident or pothole on highway.
- It also provides users with real-time data related to waiting time expected at plazas and various facilities like points of interest, highway nest and nest mini, etc. available

across highway. It can also be used by users to purchase FASTag tag and further facilitate highway user experience.

- Toll-free number 1033 will enable users to report an emergency condition and highway-related feedback.
- Its service has been integrated with various ambulance, tow away services along highway to ensure rapid response time in case emergency.
- Scheme for District Driving Training Centres: Under it, at least one model driving training centre will be set up in each district of States/UTs. Its objective is to create employment and meeting requirement of HMT and LMT drivers in country. It also aims at inculcating habit of road safety, like attitudinal and behavioral changes among drivers. These centres will conduct training course for drivers carrying dangerous and hazardous goods.
- Scheme for grant of financial assistance: The financial assistance will be provided for administering Road Safety Advocacy and awards for outstanding done in field of Road Safety.

### **Cabinet approves MoU between India and Hellenic on Renewable Energy Cooperation**

The Union Cabinet has apprised Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in field of Renewable Energy between India and Hellenic.

- The MoU was signed by Union External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and H.E. Nikos Kotzias, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hellenic Republic during latter's visit to New Delhi in November, 2017.
- Under this agreement, both countries aim to establish basis for cooperative institutional relationship to encourage and promote technical bilateral cooperation on new and renewable issues on basis of mutual benefit equality and reciprocity.
- The MoU envisages establishing Joint Working Group (JWG) to review, monitor and discuss matters relation to areas of cooperation. It also aims for exchange of expertise and networking of information.

### **Cabinet approves Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between India and France**

The Union Cabinet has approved signing of Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement between India and France. The agreement will be signed during forthcoming state visit of French President to India.

- The agreement represents major milestone in enhancing people-to-people (P2P) contacts between both countries.

- It will foster mobility of students, academics, skilled professionals and researchers and strengthen cooperation on issues related to irregular migration and human trafficking between countries.
- The agreement is also testimony to India's rapidly expanding multi-faceted relationship with France and symbolizes increasing trust and confidence between two sides.
- It will be initially valid for period of 7 years and incorporates provision for automatic renewal and monitoring mechanism through Joint Working Group (JWG).

### **Cabinet approves agreement with France to prevent illicit Drugs, Psychotropic Substances**

The Union Cabinet has approved an Agreement between India and France on the Prevention of the Illicit Consumption and Reduction of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Chemical Precursors, and related offences.

- The Agreement is aimed at enhancing mutual cooperation between the two countries in the prevention of the illicit consumption of, and reduction of illicit traffic, in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and chemical precursors and related offences through exchange of information, expertise and capacity building.
- Establishment of effective institutional interaction and curbing transnational narcotics trafficking including disruption of terrorist financing structures is also envisaged through this Agreement.

### **Cabinet approves MoU between UPSC and Public Service Commission of Mauritius**

The Union has approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and Public Service Commission of Mauritius.

- The MoU will strengthen the existing relationship between UPSC and Public Service Commission of Mauritius. It will facilitate sharing of experience and expertise of both the parties in the area of recruitment.
- The MoU will develop institutionalized linkage between the Public Service Commissions of two countries. It defines the scope of cooperation between the PSC, Mauritius and the UPSC and sets out the areas of cooperation and obligations of the Parties.

### **Shri RK Singh launches National E-Mobility Programme in India**

Shri R K Singh, Union Minister of State (IC) Power and New & Renewable Energy, launched the National E-Mobility Programme.

- The Programme aims to provide an impetus to the entire e-mobility ecosystem including vehicle manufacturers, charging infrastructure companies, fleet operators, service providers, etc.
- The Programme will be implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) which will aggregate demand by procuring electric vehicles in bulk to get economies of scale. These electric vehicles will replace the existing fleet of petrol and diesel vehicles.
- The per kilometer cost for an electric car is just 85 paise against Rs 6.5 for normal cars and these would also help us achieve autonomy from expensive petroleum imports.

### **Gurugram's first cyber police station opened**

The Millennium City's first cyber police station was opened at DLF Phase-V.

- The police station will have trained manpower and modern equipment to deal with crimes in the cyber world. A separate magistrate will also be appointed for the station.
- Cyber crime experts will also be roped in. It will act as a centralised monitoring station for all kinds of online and tech-related crimes.
- A customer desk has also been set up for the residents of DLF Phase-V to facilitate any issues pertaining to Sushant Lok and Sector 53 police stations.

### **CCI imposes Rs. 54 crore fine on 3 airlines for unfair business practices**

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has imposed fine of more than Rs. 54 crore on Jet Airways, InterGlobe Aviation and SpiceJet for unfair business practices with respect to fixing fuel surcharge on cargo transport.

- The CCI order comes on complaint filed by Express Industry Council of India (EICI) against airlines alleging cartelisation.
- It has directed three airlines to cease and desist from anti-competitive practices.
- It is second order on same complaint in nearly three years.
- The penalties were imposed on airlines for concerted action in fixing and revising fuel surcharge (FSC), a component of freight charges.
- These airlines had acted in concerted manner in fixing and revising FSC rates in violation of competition norms that prohibit anti-competitive agreements, including cartels.
- The penalties were imposed at the rate of 3% of three airlines average relevant turnover of last 3 financial years and taking into consideration financial position of airlines at relevant time and noting that FSC constitutes about 20-30% of cargo revenue.

### **Delhi govt. clears plan for ration at doorstep**

The Delhi government approved a proposal to start home or doorstep delivery of ration under the Targeted Public Distribution System to all beneficiaries.

- The move allows home delivery of ration, including wheat flour, rice and sugar, in sealed packets under the National Food Security Act, 2013.
- The proposal is aimed at providing a higher level of transparency in the delivery system through inbuilt online monitoring, which will weed out corruption and diversion of foodgrain, and intends to “save time and resources of ration beneficiaries in Delhi”.
- Theft of ration, poor quality of supplies and closed shops were the major issues that residents were facing, and the implementation of this new scheme would put an end to these.

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## **International Current Affairs**

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### **'Vision for Future' event marks 70 yrs of Indo-Russia ties**

Commemorating 70 years of the Indo-Russia ties, an event was held, seeking to expose the youth with the dynamic opportunities of cooperation between the two countries.

- The programme, inaugurated at the Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra, was organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (Eurasia Division) and the International Federation of Indo-Russian Youth Clubs.
- "India-Russia diplomatic relations have completed 70 years of successful partnership
- As part of the celebrations, International Federation of Indo-Russian Youth Clubs jointly with BRICS International Forum presented a programme -- 'Vision for Future.

### **Amazon boss Jeff Bezos has become the first \$100B mogul on Forbes rich list**

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has become the first \$US100 billion (\$AU140 billion) mogul to top Forbes' annual rankings of the world's richest people.

- Bezos seized the top ranking for the first time and has added the distinction of becoming the first person to break the \$US100 billion (\$AU140 billion) barrier since Forbes began compiling its list in 1987.
- As of February 9, Bezos' wealth stood at \$US112 billion (\$AU157 billion), up from about \$US73 billion (\$AU102 billion) last year, according to Forbes.



- Most of Bezos' fortune is tied up in Amazon stock, which soared 59 per cent during the period tracked by Forbes.

### **Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport world's best in flyers' experience**

Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport is the best airport in the world in terms of passengers' experience, according to the latest Airport Service Quality (ASQ) 2017 rankings released by Airports Council International.

- In 2016, South Korea's Incheon International Airport was on top of the list.
- At present, ASQ is the only worldwide programme to survey passengers at airports. The programme measures passengers' views on 34 key performance indicators and 74% of the world's top 100 busiest airports are part of its network. The 34 parameters include airport access, security screening, check-in facilities, restrooms, stores, restaurants, etc.
- The IGI airport has been ranked number one in the world in the highest category—airports with over 40 million passengers per annum.

### **India to build 50,000 houses for earthquake victims in Nepal**

The Government of India (GoI) which made a commitment of USD 100 million in the grant for the reconstruction in earthquake-ravaged Nepal is set to build 50,000 houses in Gorkha and Nuwakot districts of the country respectively.

- The Government of India had committed post-earthquake reconstruction package of USD 100 million in the grant to support the reconstruction of 50,000 private houses in Gorkha and Nuwakot districts in Nepal.
- The Indian government will sign a partnership agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) on Thursday to expedite the reconstruction plan in Nepal.

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## **Banking & Finance**

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### **RBI slaps penalty on SBI**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed a penalty of ₹40 lakh on State Bank of India for non-compliance with directions issued by it on 'Detection and impounding of counterfeit notes'.



- The currency chest inspection of two branches of SBI revealed, among other things, violation of the instructions issued by it on detection and impounding of counterfeit notes.
- Based on the inspection report and other relevant documents, a notice, dated January 5, 2018, was issued to the bank advising it to show cause as to why penalty should not be imposed on it for non-compliance with directions issued by the RBI.
- After considering the bank's reply and oral submissions made in the personal hearing, the RBI came to the conclusion that the aforesaid charges of non-compliance with RBI directions/guidelines were substantiated and warranted imposition of monetary penalty.

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## Business

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### **India-China trade hits record \$84.4 billion in 2017**

According to data of Chinese General Administration of Customs, India-China bilateral trade has reached \$84.44 billion last year, a historic high with 18.63% year-on-year growth rate.

- This is regarded as historic landmark in bilateral relations of both countries, as volume of bilateral trade for first time has touched \$80 billion, well above the \$71.18 billion registered in 2016.
- India has emerged as the seventh largest export destination for Chinese products, and 24th largest exporter to China.

### **US move to raise import duty on steel may hit India's steel market: ISA**

According to Indian Steel Association (ISA), proposal by Trump administration to levy steep tariff on steel imports may hit India's domestic steel market.

- Recently, US had proposed to impose tariffs of 25% on steel imports and 10% on imported aluminium to protect domestic steel industry from cheap import.
- It had clubbed India as steel non-mature country with other steel surplus nations.
- The proposal, if implemented, will result in major shifts in existing global trade flows of steel and steel products.
- It will encourage steel-surplus nations to divert their exports to vibrant consumption centres (countries) like India and distort their domestic markets considerably. It will dent growth prospects of developing nation like India, whose production and consumption of steel is inward looking.

### **CCI fines Jet Airways, IndiGo, SpiceJet for unfair business practices**

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) imposed a total fine of more than Rs54 crore on Jet Airways, InterGlobe Aviation and SpiceJet for unfair business practices with respect to fixing fuel surcharge on cargo transport.

- Besides, the watchdog has directed the three airlines to “cease and desist” from anti-competitive practices.
- A fine of Rs39.81 crore has been imposed on Jet Airways while the penalties on InterGlobe Aviation and SpiceJet are Rs9.45 crore and Rs5.10 crore, respectively.
- CCI said penalties have been imposed on the airlines for concerted action in fixing and revising fuel surcharge (FSC) - a component of freight charges. The order has come on a complaint filed by Express Industry Council of India against the airlines alleging cartelisation.
- According to the regulator, the airlines acted in a concerted manner in fixing and revising the FSC rates in violation of competition norms that prohibit anti-competitive agreements, including cartels.

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## **Awards & Recognition**

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### **Balkrishna Doshi wins Pritzker Prize**

Legendary Indian architect Balkrishna Doshi (90), a pioneer of low-cost housing design has won the prestigious Pritzker Prize, considered architecture. He is 45th Pritzker laureate and first from India to receive it.

- He is one of the last living architects to have apprenticed with Franco-Swiss trailblazer Le Corbusier distinguished his work by committing to sustainable architecture and inexpensive housing.
- He is also known as an institution builder. He is first founder Director of School of Architecture, Ahmedabad, first founder Director of School of Planning, first founder Dean of Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (also designed its building), founder member of Visual Arts Centre, Ahmedabad and first founder Director of Kanoria Centre for Arts, Ahmedabad.
- He was awarded Padma Shri in 1976 and 6th Aga Khan Award for Architecture for Aranya Community Housing, 1993-1995.

### **TCS ranked as fastest growing IT services brand in 2018**

Tata Consultancy Services has been named as the fastest growing IT services brand in the world in an assessment done by Brand Finance, the world's leading brand valuation firm.

- According to Brand Finance IT Services 15 annual report for 2018, TCS now has a total brand value of USD 10.391 billion - a growth of 14.4% from the last year's total of USD 9.081 billion, with an increase of USD 1.309 billion.
- The new value is the fastest incremental growth of all companies in the industry and places TCS in the top three most valuable brands in the global IT services sector along with IBM and Accenture.

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## Appointments & Resigns

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### **Vivek Wadekar appointed new Special Director in Enforcement Directorate**

IRS officer Vivek R Wadekar was appointed as the new Special Director in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) by the government.

- The officer will be based in Delhi and his appointment will be for five years from the date he takes the charge at the agency.

### **First woman inducted as Combat Officer in ITBP**

25-year-old Prakriti has been inducted as the first direct-entry combat officer in the border guarding force, ITBP.

- The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) force is the last of the CAPFs to induct women officers in combat roles after the government first allowed it to enrol them in 2016.

### **Shri Ravi Thapar appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Panama**

- Shri Ravi Thapar, currently Additional Secretary in Ministry of External Affairs, has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Panama.

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## Science & Technology

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### **A new state of matter created**

An international team of physicists have successfully created a “giant atom” and filled it with ordinary atoms, creating a new state of matter termed “Rydberg polarons”.

- These atoms are held together by a weak bond and is created at very cold temperatures.
- This is an intricate experiment that builds upon several advances that were achieved over the past two decades.
- It uses ideas from two different fields, which have already been discovered: Bose Einstein Condensation and Rydberg atoms.
- A particularly interesting implication of these Rydberg polarons is for cosmology.

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## **Obituary**

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### **Veteran broadcaster Shivaji Dasgupta dead**

Shivaji Dasgupta, a doyen of Indian broadcasting, breathed his last on February 26, but his death came to light only on 6th March.

- Dasgupta started his broadcasting with All India Radio (AIR) from 1972 and was a regular feature at nearly all football matches at the Kolkata Maidan -- the icing on the cake being his coverage of city soccer giants Mohun Bagan and American outfit New York Cosmos match in 1977.
- He became the first Indian commentator to cover a football match from abroad when he commented on India's matches in AFC Asian Cup Finals from Singapore in 1984.
- He began his cricket commentary career with the India versus West Indies Test in Kolkata during the 1978-79 series. He also covered hockey matches, including the Beighton Cup, alongwith disciplines like athletics, kabaddi and basketball.
- In 2012, East Bengal Club honoured him with the Lifetime Achievement Award in broadcasting on the occasion of their Foundation Day on August 1.

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## **Important Days**

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### **International Women's Day - March 8**

International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8 every year. It is a focal point in the movement for women's rights.

- While the first observance of a Women's Day was held on February 28, 1909 in New York, March 8 was suggested by the 1910 International Socialist Woman's Conference to become an "International Woman's Day
- International Women's Day is annually held on March 8 to celebrate women's achievements throughout history and across nations. It is also known as the United Nations (UN) Day for Women's Rights and International Peace.
- This year's International Women's Day theme is #TimeIsNow: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives.

### **World Kidney Day - March 8**

World Kidney Day is a global awareness campaign aimed at raising awareness of the importance of our kidneys.

- World Kidney Day aims to raise awareness of the importance of our kidneys to our overall health and to reduce the frequency and impact of kidney disease and its associated health problems worldwide.
- World Kidney Day started in 2006.
- Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a worldwide public health problem with adverse outcomes of kidney failure and premature death. CKD affects approximately 195 million women worldwide and it is currently the 8th leading cause of death in women, with close to 600,000 deaths each year.