

National Current Affairs

Government forms Tribunal to solve Mahanadi Water dispute between Odisha & Chhattisgarh

The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has constituted Mahanadi Water Dispute Tribunal for adjudication of longstanding disputes between Odisha and Chhattisgarh over sharing of Mahanadi river water.

- The tribunal was formed under Section 4 of Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 following directives of Supreme Court on January 2018.
- The tribunal will have three members. Chief Justice of India (CJI) has nominated Supreme Court Judge A M Khanwilkar as chairman of Tribunal.
- The two other members are Justice Ravi Ranjan of Patna High Court and Justice Indrmeet Kaur Kochar of Delhi High Court.
- The tribunal will determine water sharing among basin States on basis of overall availability of water in complete Mahanadi basin, contribution and present utilisation of water resources in each state and potential for future development.
- The tribunal will be headquartered in New Delhi. It is required to submit its report and decision within three years which can be extended to maximum two years due to unavoidable reasons.

Foreign law firms can't practice in India, but their lawyers can advise: SC

The Supreme Court held that foreign law firms cannot set up offices and their lawyers cannot practise in India but they can give legal advice on foreign laws. The ruling was given by apex court on appeal by Bar Council of India (BCI), challenging judgements by Bombay and Madras High Courts.

- The ruling does not permit globalization of the legal sector as of now but it shifts the onus on Central Government to do so.
- SC Ruling allowed casual visits by foreign lawyers on fly in and fly out (FIFO) basis for rendering legal advice to clients in India.
- In this case, expression FIFO will only cover casual visit not amounting to 'practice' or for purpose of giving legal advice to clients in India regarding foreign law or their own system of law and on diverse international legal issues.
- BCI or Central Government can make appropriate rules in this regard including extending the code of ethics being applicable to foreign lawyers and entities.
- It also modified provisions of Advocates Act, 1961 for debarring foreign lawyers completely from conducting international commercial arbitration in country. Similarly, it held that BPO companies providing services like word processing,

transcription services, secretarial support and proof-reading services do not come within purview of Advocates Act, so are allowed to function from India.

PM Modi woos Varanasi with pro-poor schemes, projects worth Rs 8 bn

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a slew of schemes for poor and emphasised on harnessing solar energy for cooking.

- The PM also flagged off a new train -- Kansi-Patna Jan Shatabdi Express -- between Varanasi and Patna on the demand of the people from the area.
- The prime minister announced "Ayushman (blessed with long life) Bharat" scheme to ensure better health care facilities for the poor and said it would go a long way in helping the downtrodden foot hospital bills.
- The scheme will be implemented with the help of insurance companies and the poor who can't afford costly treatment will be able to get help up to Rs 500,000 annually. This will create a network of hospitals and employment opportunity in the healthcare sector.
- Modi also announced Pradhan Mantri Poshan Mission Yojana (PMPM scheme) to ensure nutrition to children, especially girls.
- He also lauded the concept of "kachra (waste) mahotsav" to highlight the use of waste products and make wealth out of the useless articles.

Assam govt proposes insurance scheme for journalists

Assam Government has proposed an insurance scheme for journalists and their families in the budget for 2018-19.

- A budgetary allocation of Rs 63 crore in 2018-19 has been earmarked for the (Information and Public Relations) Department (that would implement schemes for journalists) with a view to ensure security and protection of the journalists along with their families.
- Necessary provision has been made for media fellowship for pursuing higher studies in journalism so that 20 media persons can be selected for it at the rate of Rs 50,000 each
- A one-time grant of Rs 10 lakh has also been proposed for the Media Trust.
- Pension Scheme for Journalists has been introduced to provide retirement benefits to journalists working for more than 20 years in Assam.

CII to set up multi-skill centre in Darjeeling

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) will set up a multi-skill centre in Darjeeling in partnership with the Gorkha Territorial Administration.

- This multi-skill centre will initially deliver training in hospitality, beauty and wellness and healthcare.
- Since the region has huge potential in agriculture, floriculture and horticulture, CII's Food and Agriculture Centre of Excellence can also work with the administration in proposing a sustainable model.
- This would include better market linkages, increased productivity and quality and better variety of the produce.
- All this leads up to a more value added food chain, including processing.
- CII will apply its water scanning tool for developing catchment area plans.
- The water scanning tool leads to identification of promising sites for rainwater harvesting and storages (micro and medium), irrigated agriculture, and control of Silt and contaminant transport into water bodies

Prime Minister inaugurates 'The Delhi End TB Summit'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Delhi End TB Summit and launched the TB Free India Campaign.

- The global target for eliminating TB is 2030, but the target for India to eliminate TB is 2025, five years before the global target,
- India is also implementing the National Strategic Plan for TB elimination that is backed by a historic funding of over 12,000 crore rupees for the next three years to ensure every TB patient has access to quality diagnosis, treatment, and support.
- The Government has rolled out new 'National Strategic Plan (NSP) to end TB by 2025. The new NSP adopts a multi-pronged approach which aims to 'Detect' all TB patients with an emphasis on reaching TB patients seeking care from private providers and undiagnosed TB in high-risk populations, 'Treat' all patient irrespective of where they seek care adopting a patient centric approach, 'Prevent' emergence of TB in susceptible population groups and 'Build' empowered institutions and human resources to streamline implementation.

First Regional Conference on Mass Rapid Transport Systems for Urban Areas

On 13th March, the first regional conference on Mass Rapid Transport Systems for Urban Areas – Opportunities and Challenges starts in Kolkata.

- The conference was jointly organized by Ministry of Finance, AIIB, ASSOCHAM and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).

- Before the third annual meeting of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to be held in Mumbai from June 22 to 27 this year, eight such regional conferences will be held on the issues relating to infrastructures development, sustainable infrastructure, mass rapid transportation system, port and coastal infrastructure, urban development and the like in eight different cities of India.

IATA partners with Civil Aviation Ministry and National Aviation University

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and National Aviation University (NAU) to enhance human resource availability in India's aviation industry.

- The three parties to the MoU formalised this partnership on sidelines of Wings India 2018 held in Hyderabad, Telangana.
- Under the agreement, signatory institutions will leverage existing infrastructure for training in India to expand reach of vocational training in aviation disciplines. It also provides for developing closer academic cooperation between IATA and National Aviation University.
- India is expected to be third largest aviation market in the world behind China and US by 2024.
- It is forecasted to grow to a market size of 480 million passengers in 2036.
- This partnership will help contribute to human resource capacity building for India.

International Current Affairs

President inaugurates World Hindi Secretariat in Port Louis, Mauritius

President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated World Hindi Secretariat building in Port Louis, Mauritius. He also launched secretariat's logo, an Early Digital Learning Programme as well unveiled foundation stones of social housing project and large ENT hospital being built with Indian assistance.

- President Kovind visited Mauritius as part of first leg to his two-nation state visit (Mauritius and Madagascar).
- Later he will visit Madagascar, making him first Indian President to visit largest African island country.
- The World Hindi Secretariat is fully financed by Government of India and provided grant of Rs. 33 crore.
- Land for it was given by Government of Mauritius. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had laid the foundation stone of this building during his visit in 2015.

- The aim of secretariat is to present Hindi as common man's language, Janbhasha, in front of the world.
- Hindi as language has played an important role in culture and society building in both India and Mauritius. Indian diaspora in Mauritius has played a huge role in the spread of Hindi.

Saudi cabinet approves nuclear power program national policy: Report

Saudi Arabia's cabinet approved the national policy of the atomic energy program.

- The national policy includes limiting all nuclear activities to peaceful purposes, within the limits defined by international treaties.
- It also stressed on the importance of optimal utilization of natural resources from nuclear materials and applying best practices for radioactive waste management.
- Riyadh is interested in reaching a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with Washington, and has invited US firms to take part in developing the kingdom's first atomic energy programme.

Banking & Finance

SBI slashes charges for non-maintenance of Average Monthly Balance (AMB)

The country's largest lender, State Bank of India (SBI) has slashed charges for non-maintenance of Average Monthly Balance (AMB) in savings accounts by nearly 75 per cent.

- The revised charges will be effective from April 01, 2018 and will benefit over 25 crore customers. The lender said that the decision of slashing AMB was taken keeping in view the feedback from various stakeholders.
- The charges for non-maintenance of AMB for customers in Metro and Urban centres have been reduced from a maximum of Rs 50 per month to Rs 15 per month. Similarly for Semi-Urban and Rural centres, the charges have been reduced from Rs 40 every month to Rs 12 and Rs 10 GST charges will be applicable over and above the rates specified above.
- This decision follows severe criticism that the bank earned hefty income of Rs 1,771 crore in just eight months from depositors who failed to maintain balance in their bank accounts. The amount was more than SBI's July-September quarter net profit of Rs 1,581.55 crore and nearly half of the Rs 3,586 crore it earned as net profit April-September.

ICICI Bank launches 'InstaOD', instant overdraft facility for MSMEs

ICICI Bank, announced the launch of an instant overdraft facility for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in a completely online and paperless manner.

- “Christened ‘InstaOD’, this first-of-its-kind offering in the Indian banking industry enables a few lakhs of pre-qualified current account customers of the bank to instantly avail of the facility without visiting a branch and submitting physical documents”.
- The new facility the MSMEs can get an overdraft facility up to Rs. 15 lakh for a year using the bank’s internet and mobile banking app.
- The application procedure incorporates an additional level of authentication in order to make the security of the process robust. ICICI Bank will also offer a facility of instant online sanction of overdraft facility to MSME customers of other banks shortly.
- The overdraft is renewable on an annual basis, depending on the repayment track records of the overdraft facility.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India inks MoU with RBI

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for increased cooperation in effective implementation of insolvency law. The MoU was signed at a time when authorities are working on ways to address huge amount of non-performing assets (NPAs) in banking sector.

- The MoU provides for sharing of information, subject to limitations imposed by applicable laws and sharing of resources available with each other to extent feasible and legally permissible. It calls for periodic meetings to discuss matters of mutual interest, including regulatory requirements that impact IBBI and RBI’s responsibilities, enforcement cases, research and data analysis, information technology and data sharing.
- It also provides for cross-training of staff in order to enhance each party’s understanding of other’s mission for effective utilisation of collective resources. It will help in capacity building of insolvency professionals and financial creditors.
- It calls for joint efforts between IBBI and RBI for enhancing level of awareness among financial creditors about importance and necessity of swift insolvency resolution process of various types of borrowers in distress under provisions of Insolvency Code, etc.

Business

Suzlon installs India's largest wind turbine generator

The Suzlon Group has announced it has installed largest wind turbine generator ever manufactured in India with rotor diameter of 128 metres.

- This has the country's largest single rotor blade measuring 63 metres and reduced levelised cost of energy.
- The S128 wind turbine generator (WTG) is being offered in 2.6 MW to 2.8 MW variants and offers hub heights up to 140 metres.
- With its reduced levelised cost of energy, cost effective design and superior performance S128 will unlock unviable sites and set new benchmarks in the Indian wind industry.

Appointments & Resigns

Bidya Devi Bhandari: Nepal's 1st woman President re-elected for 2nd term

Nepal's first woman President Bidya Devi Bhandari (56) was re-elected for second term in office.

- In the presidential election, she defeated Nepali Congress (NC) leader Kumari Laxmi Rai with overwhelming majority.
- Ms. Bhandari was elected with more than a two-thirds majority after she secured 39,275 votes while the Nepali Congress's Ms. Rai garnered 11,730 votes.
- Prior to getting elected in 2015, she was deputy leader of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)-CPN-UML party led by incumbent Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli.
- She was elected twice in parliamentary elections in 1994 and 1999. Earlier she had served as Defence Minister of the country and been an active campaigner for women's rights.
- President of Nepal is ceremonial head of state, under the new Republican Federal Constitution of Nepal.

Gina Haspel - Donald Trump's New Pick for CIA Director

Gina Haspel, the newly nominated first-ever female director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), is a career intelligence officer with more than 30 years' experience.

- Controversially, she ran a prison in Thailand where suspected al-Qaeda members were tortured by waterboarding in 2002.

- Ms Haspel, 61, has extensive overseas experience and has served as chief of station on several postings.

Awards & Recognition

ICMR wins 2017 Kochon Prize for TB research

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) was awarded 2017 Kochon Prize for building tradition of excellence in Tuberculosis (TB) research and development. It had emerged winner from among 18 nominations.

- It was awarded for establishing India TB Research Consortium to accelerate R&D efforts in the country.
The consortium is working with public and private institutes to guide country's research efforts towards development of point-of-care diagnostics, shorter treatment regimens and effective vaccine for TB.
- The Kochon Prize is awarded annually by Stop TB Partnership to individuals and organizations that have made significant contribution to combating the disease.

India-UK Joint Team wins Newton-Bhabha Fund for Groundwater Arsenic Research project

India-United Kingdom (UK) Joint Team has won Newton-Bhabha Fund for project on Groundwater Arsenic Research in Ganga River Basin.

- The project was undertaken by Department of Science and Technology (DST) in collaboration with Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), UK to find solutions to water challenges faced in pervasively arsenic-affected Ganga River Basin.
- The Indian team comprised representatives of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, National Institute of Hydrology, IIT Roorkee and Mahavir Cancer Sansthan and Research Centre of Patna.
- The UK team consisted of representatives of University of Manchester, University of Salford, British Geological Survey and University of Birmingham.
- The project is aimed to assess problem of arsenic poisoning and to understand aggravation such situation in next 25 to 30 years and its influence on groundwater management practices and suggest water remedial technologies accordingly.
- It is conducted from three sites – Bijnor and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and Nadia in West Bengal.

Science & Technology

C-17 Globemaster: IAF for first time lands its largest transport aircraft at Arunachal Pradesh's Tuting airfield

The Indian Air Force (IAF) for first time flawlessly landed its largest transport US-manufactured aircraft, C-17 Globemaster at strategic Tuting Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) in Arunachal Pradesh, which is close to Chinese border. After the trial landing, C17 carried out operations mission and airlifted 18 tons of load.

- The landing of this aircraft is seen as part of IAF's move to strengthen its overall operations in strategically-key border state.
- It also demonstrated IAF's capability in terms of operational performance and tactical air mobility in challenging Tuting airfield which is surrounded high hills in narrow valley.
- The C-17 is US-manufactured transport aircraft commonly used to perform strategic airlift missions, transporting troops and cargo throughout the world along with medical evacuation and airdrop duties.

Obituary

Begum Hamida, pioneer in women empowerment, dies at 101

Begum Hamida Habibullah, a former Rajya Sabha member and a pioneer in women empowerment, died on 13th March.

- She was the daughter of Nawab Nazir Yar Jung Bahadur, Chief Justice Of Hyderabad High Court and wife of Major General Enaith Habibullah, who went on to become the first Commandant of the National Defence Academy.
- Ms. Habibullah was known for working on women issues. She worked with SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association), which promoted self employment for women and the art of Lucknow's famous chikankari (thread embroidery).
- She held the Social and Harijan Welfare, National Integration & Civil Defence, and Tourism ministries.
- Hamida passed senior Cambridge with Distinction in 5-Subjects before going on to get a gold medal in B.A. from Osmania University.