

National Current Affairs

CCEA approves continuation of Urea Subsidy Scheme

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved continuation of Urea Subsidy Scheme from 2017 upto 2020 and implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for disbursement of fertilizer subsidy.

- The proposal in these regards was forwarded by Department of Fertilizers, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- The continuation of the urea subsidy scheme will ensure timely payment of subsidy to urea manufacturers resulting in timely availability of urea to farmers at statutory controlled price. Implementation of DBT in Fertilizer Sector will reduce diversion of fertilizers to non-agricultural use and plug leakages.

First Interaction of 15th Finance Commission with the Members of Parliament held

In its endeavour to increase interaction with various stakeholders, the 15th Finance Commission interacted with the Members of the Parliament.

- The Meeting was to convey the proposed schedule of the Commission's work as well as its Terms of Reference (TOR) and also to seek their suggestions on these.
- Parliamentarians appreciated the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Disaster Management, Climate Change, progress made in Sanitation, Solid Waste Management and bringing in Behavioural Change to end open defecation among others.
- The Meeting assumes significance as 15th Finance Commission has to work in a very different economic scenario in the light of the fact that Planning Commission is no more there and the distinction between Plan and Non Plan grants has been done away with.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurates Asia-Pacific Regional conference of IACP

Home Minister Rajnath Singh has inaugurated the two-day Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) in New Delhi.

- The theme of the conference is "Challenges to Policing in 2020 - How is Cyber Space shaping our approach to Cybercrime and Terrorism, how do we perform within it and take advantage of it".
- The Conference is mainly focused on holding discussions about the growing interest of various terrorist or organized groups and radical elements in exploiting the

Cyberspace and its advanced technologies for their various heinous crimes and nefarious designs.

- The Conference will provide a platform for top-level Police executives, both national and international, to discuss and understand how Cyber Space is shaping the approach towards Cyber-crime and Terrorism and also how to take advantage of it for better policing.

Photography exhibition on India held in Egypt

A photo exhibition about India showcasing pictures captured by an Egyptian photographer has been held in Egypt as part of the mega annual cultural festival 'India by the Nile'.

- The exhibition titled 'Indian Images: People and Places' was inaugurated by India's Ambassador to Egypt Sanjay Bhattacharyya at el-Sawy Cultural Center in Zamalek.
- The exhibition showcased 60 photographs taken from different parts of India by Egyptian photographer Khaled Gawdat.
- The basic theme of the exhibition was to depict people, expressions and different places, particularly Kerala.
- The photographs depicts everyday life in India, landscapes, tourist places, cultural performances, people's faces and colourful costumes.

International Current Affairs

India-Iran: Cabinet approves agreement for avoidance of Double Taxation

The Union Cabinet has approved Agreement for Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on income between India and Iran. The Agreement is on similar lines as entered into by India with other countries.

- The agreement will stimulate flow of investment, technology and personnel from India to Iran & vice versa and prevent double taxation.
- It will provide for exchange of information between two contracting parties as per latest international standards.
- It will improve transparency in tax matters and will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.
- It also meets treaty related minimum standards under G-20 OECD Base Erosion & Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project, in which India participated on equal footing.

Cabinet approves the MoU on Cooperation between India and Iran in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine

The Union Cabinet has approved the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between India and Iran in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine.

- The MoU will enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the areas of Traditional Systems of Medicine. This will be of immense importance to both countries considering their shared cultural heritage.
- Both countries are having huge biodiversity and home for rare medicinal plants which are frequently used in Traditional Systems of Medicine.
- Moreover, Iran has endorsed the status of India as a true leader in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine backed by huge and strong infrastructure and "State of the Art" production units.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Iran for cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post-facto approval for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Iran for cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors.

- The MoU provides for cooperation in the areas of agricultural crops, agricultural extension, horticulture, machinery, post harvest technology, plant quarantine measures, credit and cooperation.
- It also provides for cooperation in soil conservation and water management, integrated nutrients management, seed technology and agricultural marketing. Livestock improvement, dairy development, animal health and other fields as mutually agreed upon fall within the scope of this MoU.
- Cooperation will also be effected through exchange of experts, materials and information, exchange of trainees and scientists on study visits/training programmes, facilitation of relevant conferences and workshops and any other means as may be mutually agreed upon.
- Under the MoU, a Joint Working Group (JWG) will be formed to monitor the activities carried out in fulfilment of this MoU. The JWG will hold its meeting alternately in India and Iran once in every two years.

India-Sri Lanka: Cabinet approves MoU between for promoting cooperation in IT and Electronics

The Union Cabinet has approved Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) inked between India and Sri Lanka for promoting cooperation in field of Information Technology and

Electronics (IT&E). The MoU was signed in January 2018 during the visit of Minister of Electronics & Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad to Sri Lanka.

- The MoU intends to promote closer co-operation in areas of e-Governance, e-Public Services Delivery, m-Governance, cyber security, software technology parks, start-ups ecosystem etc.
- It will also enhance bilateral cooperation in ICT domain both B2B and G2G.
- It will be implemented by establishing Working Group on IT&E composed of representatives of two countries.

WHO's southeast Asia region nations pledge to end TB by 2030

Countries of WHO's South East Asia Region pledged to end tuberculosis by 2030 and India assured its support to them for meeting their goals in eliminating the disease.

- The participating countries signed the 'Delhi End TB Summit Statement of Action', which calls for increasing budgetary and human resource allocations by governments and stakeholders to ensure that their national TB plans are fully funded and medical care for the disease is supplemented with social and financial protection in a holistic manner.
- The 'Statement of Action' expressed concern that most low-burden countries are yet to establish last mile programmes for the early eradication of tuberculosis.
- It also reiterated a firm intent "to implement a response in each of our nations that is demonstrably adequate for ending TB by 2030 and meeting milestones for 2020 by collectively reaching out to the missing two million TB cases and 1,50,000 multidrug-resistant cases".
- The Delhi End TB Summit Statement of Action identifies the roles, responsibilities and directions of the member countries of WHO SEARO region to make their countries free of tuberculosis.
- It recommends increased attention, investment and efforts for tackling the region's major burden of tuberculosis, and notes that the response has strengthened further as a result of the Delhi Call for Action, a strategic, action-oriented roadmap initiated by the countries on March 16 last year.

Banking & Finance

Tax rates under GST are world's second highest, says World Bank

The tax rates under the Goods and Services Bill are among the world's second highest, said World Bank in its report.

- The World Bank, in its bi-annual India Development Update said that GST is one of the most complex with the second highest tax rate in the world among a sample of 115 countries which have a similar indirect tax system.
- The GST at present has four tax slabs that are, 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%. Currently, around 49 nations use a single GST slab of GST, while 28 countries use two slabs.
- Besides India, there are only five countries, which use four non-zero slabs. The other countries are Italy, Luxembourg, Pakistan and Ghana, which makes India with the highest number of different GST slabs in the world.

First Data Signs Deal with RBL Bank to Provide Card Processing Services

First Data, a global leader in commerce-enabling technology, today announced a new partnership with RBL Bank, one of India's fastest growing private sector banks which currently services close to four million customers.

- Under the agreement, First Data will help RBL Bank migrate their credit card customers to its latest proprietary VisionPLUS® software providing end-to-end card processing services for the bank.
- Through this partnership with First Data, RBL will be leveraging First Data's next generation payment technology.
- First Data's focus is to help clients grow their business with best-in-class platforms, and this alliance with RBL helps deliver on that promise by enabling it to meet the dynamic customer demands of the evolving and complex Indian market.

Appointments & Resigns

Nepal's Chief Justice removed

Nepal's controversial Chief Justice Gopal Prasad Parajuli was removed by the Judicial Council amid a raging dispute over his multiple birth certificates.

- The Council sacked him saying that as per the available certificates, he should have retired from the post on August 5, 2017.
- He completed 65 years on that day, and as per Nepali law, civil servants should take retirement after reaching 65 years.

Larry Kudlow to be Trump's new economic adviser

Donald Trump has chosen economist and CNBC contributor Larry Kudlow to replace Gary Cohn as director of the White House National Economic Council,

- Mr Kudlow's appointment will bring to the White House a former Wall Street economist-turned-talking head who has views that align with the president's in some areas and clash in others.
- He is a supporter of free trade who has been critical of Mr Trump's approach to tariffs, but he has backed the president on deregulation and tax cuts.

HSBC names Pradeep Rao head of corporates in South-east Asia for global banking

Banking giant HSBC said that Pradeep Rao has been appointed as its head of corporates for South-east Asia for global banking.

- In this role, Mr Rao will be driving and deepening strategic dialogue with the bank's key clients across sectors in the region, it said in a press statement on Tuesday (March 13).
- He will also continue his current focus on the consumer and retail sectors across Asia-Pacific.

Awards & Recognition

Andhra Pradesh stands at 51st position in Global Multidimensional Poverty Index

Andhra Pradesh stands at equivalent to 51st rank globally in Multidimensional Poverty, Index according to a recent household survey conducted in the state.

- Andhra Pradesh becomes the first Indian state to conduct an exclusive household survey at state and district level to estimate the multidimensional poverty of the state.
- The study was conducted by Vision Management Unit, Planning Department, GoAP in collaboration with Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford, UK.
- Andhra Pradesh has been regularly benchmarking itself with global and national indices. The Vision Management Unit, State Planning Department has earlier brought out Happiness Index Report and Global Competitiveness Index Report.

FIFEM: Indian film Halkaa bags award at Montreal Fest

Indian filmmaker Nila Madhab Panda's "Halkaa", which had its world premiere at the 21st Festival International du Film Pour Enfants de Montreal Film (FIFEM), has bagged the Grand Prix de Montreal at the gala.

- "Halkaa" was selected among seven international children's films from different countries in the official competition of the festival.
- The film is a take on a slum child's heroism, aspirations, and dreams. The child protagonist, Pichku (Tathastu) fights to overcome the basic problems that he faces every day like defecating in the open, among others. It is his dream to make a toilet of his own where he can enjoy his privacy and do the deed in peace.

Jackie Shroff's 'Shunyata' wins international award

Actor Jackie Shroff's short film 'Shunyata' has won an award at Best of India Short Film Festival in Los Angeles, US.

- The 22-minute fiction film directed by Chintan Sarda was selected to be in top six from amongst thousands of entries and was played at a theatre in Los Angeles for a ticketed event for a week.

Ministry of Power awarded for successful implementation of e-Office

Ministry of Power has been awarded with the Certificate of Appreciation for the commendable work done towards successful implementation of e-Office in the Ministry.

- As part of Government of India's National e-Governance Programme, the Government of India launched the e-Office System for bringing in effective Governance and quality in public service delivery in Ministries/Departments.
- e-Office System aims at significantly improving the operational efficiency of the Government.

Science & Technology

QOL-2C: AYUSH Drug developed by CCRAS for cancer patients

The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) has undertaken development of coded drug AYUSH QOL-2C for improving quality of life in cancer patients

- It had conducted clinical studies of the drug in breast cancer patients at St. John's Medical College, Bengaluru and AIIMS, New Delhi and in lung cancer patients at Bhagwan Mahaveer Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Jaipur.
- CCRAS is autonomous body under the Ministry of AYUSH. It is apex body in India for formulation, coordination, development and promotion of research on scientific lines in Ayurveda and Sowa-Rigpa system of medicine.
- It undertakes scientific activities through its 30 Institutes/Centres/Units located all over the country and also through collaborative studies with various Universities, Hospitals and Institutes. It is headquartered in New Delhi.

Important Days

15th March: World Consumer Rights Day

The World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) is celebrated every year on March 15 to pay solidarity with the international consumer movement and give more attention to promote basic rights of consumers. This year the theme promoted is "Making Digital Marketplaces Fairer".

- It provides opportunity to promote the basic rights of all consumers.
- Demand those rights that must be respected and protected for those protesting against the market abuses and social injustices.
- It gives chance to protest against the market abuses and social injustices which undermine those rights.
- The World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) commemorates the historic address given by the then US President John F Kennedy to the US congress on this day in 1962.
- In India, 24th December is observed as National Consumer Day.

Obituary

Lebanese author, feminist Emily Nasrallah dies

Acclaimed Lebanese author and feminist Emily Nasrallah, who articulated women's experiences in her writing about Lebanon's civil war, has died at the age of 87.

- Her writing touched on women's determination, migration and the terror of Lebanon's 1975-1990 Civil War.
- She was the author of several books for adults and children, and was awarded regional and international prizes for her work.
- Nasrallah began her career as a journalist and published her first book, "Birds of September," in 1962, to critical acclaim.

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