

National Current Affairs

Government to now fully fund education of martyrs' children

According to a notification from the defence ministry, the government will now fully fund the education of martyrs' children.

- Earlier, the education of these children was funded, but only up to Rs 10,000 a month. That limitation, on what's called "educational concession", has now been removed.
- The concession applies to the children of officers from the armed forces, 'persons below officer rank' missing in action, and those disabled or killed in action.
- This scheme covers around 3,400 children and entails an expenditure of around Rs 5 crore a year currently.
- The educational concession will be admissible only for undertaking studies in government/government-aided schools/educational institutes/military /Sainik schools and other schools or colleges recognised by the central or state governments, including autonomous organisations financed entirely by the central/state governments.

Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill passed in Parliament

Parliament passed Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill 2017 paving the way for doubling the limit of tax free gratuity to Rs 20 lakh and empowering the government to fix the ceiling of the retirement benefit through an executive order.

- The Rajya Sabha passed the bill, which was approved by the Lok Sabha last week, on March 15.
- Besides enabling the central government to fix the ceiling of tax free gratuity, the bill will also empower it to fix the period of maternity leave through executive order.
- It also notifies the period of maternity leave as part of continuous service and proposes to empower the central government to notify the gratuity ceiling from time to time without amending the law.
- The Bill also envisages amending the provisions relating to calculation of continuous service for the purpose of gratuity in case of female employees who are on maternity leave from "twelve weeks" to such period as may be notified by the central government from time to time.

All India Police Science Congress kicks off in Himachal

The two-day 46th All India Police Science Congress organised by the Himachal Pradesh Police Department and The Bureau of Police Research and Development began with a clarion call to the police by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur to stay ahead of criminals by using technology to prevent and detect crime.

- In order to ensure safety of women, Gudiya Helpline and Shakti Button App have been launched and the main object of these initiatives was to provide immediate assistance to women at the time of distress.
- The Police Science Congress would also provide an opportunity to interact, learn and understand the best practices followed in other states and union territories besides sharing of knowledge which could contribute towards increasing conviction rates.

CM Pinarayi Vijayan launches M-Kerala app at Kerala's first global digital summit

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan launched M-Kerala, a unified app for all government services at #FUTURE 2018, a first-of-its-kind digital tech summit in the state. Kerala also becomes the state with the largest public Wi-Fi deployment in the country. The state government has identified more than 1,000 public hotspots for Wi-Fi in Kerala.

- The state has also adopted a number of programmes to make the state e-literate. The internet penetration in the state is at 52 per cent. The state has a robust e-governance model with more than 3,000 paperless government offices.
- #FUTURE is the brainchild of Kerala's High Power IT Committee (HPIC), headed by Infosys Co-Founder S D Shibulal.
- One of the outcomes of the summit will be formation of a 150-member 'Digital Achievers Network of Kerala Origin', who will become the brand ambassadors of Kerala and champion the state's efforts to become a knowledge industry hub.

Videsh Aaya Pradesh ke Dwaar: MEA launches engagement programme with Regional Media

The External Publicity and Public Diplomacy Division of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) launched 'Videsh Aaya Pradesh ke Dwaar', an engagement programme with regional media in Hyderabad, Telangana.

- The initiative aims enhance public diplomacy outreach of MEA and its commitment to take objectives of foreign policy to people at grassroot-level.
- The initiative involves MEA's engagement with regional media based in different cities across the country to communicate foreign policy priorities in simple terms.
- It also seeks to highlight benefits accruing to common people through its diplomatic efforts and bring domain of foreign policy closer to people.

- It is also intends to create pool of media professionals interested in foreign policy and guide them on connecting with MEA.

International Current Affairs

44 African countries sign agreement to establish African Continental Free Trade Area

The 44 African countries from total 55 members of African Union (AU) have signed agreement to create African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), one of the world's largest free trade blocs. The agreement was signed at a summit held in Kigali, Rwanda.

- The signed AfCFTA agreement contains legal framework for free trade area.
- It will come into force after it is ratified by individual countries through their respective domestic processes.
- 10 countries including Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous country have refused to sign the agreement.
- AfCFTA will bring together 1.2 billion people with combined gross domestic product (GDP) of more than \$2 trillion from entire continent of Africa comprising 55 countries. The continental trade bloc aims to remove barriers to trade, like tariffs and import quotas, allowing the free flow of goods and services between its members.

Global carbon emissions hit record high in 2017

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), Global energy-related carbon emissions rose to a historic high of 32.5 gigatons last year, after three years of being flat, due to higher energy demand and the slowing of energy efficiency improvements.

- Global energy demand rose by 2.1 percent last year to 14,050 million tonnes of oil equivalent, more than twice the previous year's rate, boosted by strong economic growth, according to preliminary estimates from the IEA.
- Energy demand rose by 0.9 percent in 2016 and 0.9 percent on average over the previous five years. Over 70 percent of global energy demand growth was met by oil, natural gas and coal, while renewables accounted for almost all of the rest.

World's best airport' title goes to Changi, Mumbai ranked 63rd

Singapore's Changi Airport has been named the world's best for the sixth year in a row in the annual World Airport Awards by Skytrax for 2018.

- Changi led a strong showing by Asian airports. The Incheon Airport near Seoul placed second, while Tokyo Haneda, Hong Kong and Doha's Hamad International Airport in Qatar rounded out the top five.
- Denver was the top-rated airport in the USA, placing 29th overall in the global rankings. Canada's Vancouver International fared the best of North American airports, placing 14th overall.
- Mumbai airport has been given 63rd position whereas the airports in Bangalore and Delhi are at 64th and 66th place respectively.

Saudi Arabia opens airspace to Israel

Saudi Arabia opened its airspace for the first time to a commercial flight to Israel with the inauguration of an Air India route between New Delhi and Tel Aviv.

- While the move ended a 70-year-old ban on planes flying to or from Israel through Saudi airspace, there is no indication that it will be applied for any Israeli airline.
- The Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner entered Saudi airspace at around 1645 GMT and overflew the kingdom at 40,000 feet for about three hours, coming within 60 km (37 miles) of the capital Riyadh, according to the Flightradar monitoring app. It then crossed over Jordan and the occupied West Bank into Israel.

Cabinet apprised of an MoU between India and Guyana on cooperation in Renewable Energy

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been apprised of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in Renewable Energy between India and Guyana.

- Both sides aim to establish the basis for a cooperative institutional relationship to encourage and promote technical bilateral cooperation on new and renewable energy issues on the basis of mutual benefit, equality and reciprocity.
- The MoU envisages establishing a Joint Working Committee to review, monitor and discuss matters relation to areas of cooperation.
- The MoU aims for exchange of expertise and networking of information.
- The Memorandum of Understanding will help in strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Banking & Finance

Equitas Bank ties up with CSK, launches Yellow Army Savings Account

Equitas Small Finance Bank has launched a new 'Yellow Army Savings Account' to increase its customer base through its association with the Chennai Super Kings (CSK), a franchise of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

- The Chennai-based new entrant into the banking sector has joined the list of the companies that use IPL boom and their association with franchises to promote products.
- The yellow army savings account will offer an interest rate of six per cent per annum for balance below ₹10 lakh and 6.5 per cent per annum for balance above ₹10 lakh. The average quarterly balance requirement will be ₹10,000 per account.
- The Yellow Army Visa debit card comes with personal accident cover of up to ₹5 lakh, air accident cover of ₹30 lakh and lost card liability of up to ₹25,000.
- The account holders are entitled to a 15 per cent discount on the purchase of merchandise from the CSK website.
- Equitas will be the principal sponsor of CSK and the banking partner of Team CSK for three years.

Allahabad Bank soon to merge subsidiary with itself

Ministry of Corporate Affairs has granted permission to Allahabad Bank for the lender's merger with its fully-owned subsidiary AllBank Finance.

- The public sector lender announced its merger with AllBank Finance in September last year.
- AllBank Finance is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Allahabad Bank (the oldest bank of India), headquartered in Kolkata.
- It offers a range of services like debenture trusteeship, investment advisory and portfolio management, distribution of mutual fund schemes and security valuation, among others.

Business

MCX launches world's first brass futures contracts

India's largest commodities exchange platform, Multi Commodity Exchange of India Limited (MCX) launched world's first brass futures contracts.

- It will facilitate brass stakeholders to hedge their price risk.
- MCX Brass futures will be the first non-ferrous contract with compulsory delivery option.
- Its price will be quoted as per rate at ex-warehouse Jamnagar (delivery centre) inclusive of taxes and duties.
- It will provide its stakeholders with more organised and robust price discovery platform.
- It will also help them to use national level benchmark price as ready reference.
- It will enable them to mitigate their price risk.
- It will lead to best price discovery for brass, which is of key relevance to its stakeholders including importers, exporters, manufacturers, refiners, and processors among others in country, who are looking to hedge their price exposure.

Awards & Recognition

Drdo Pavilion Adjudged As Most Informative at 105th Indian Science Congress

Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) has received the 'Most Informative Pavilion' Award in Pride of India Expo organized as part of the 105th Indian Science Congress held from 16 to 20 March 2018 at Manipur University, Imphal.

- DRDO participated in the expo showcasing cutting-edge indigenous defence technologies with over 150 exhibits and models from 18 DRDO laboratories.
- The DRDO pavilion at the Expo was a big attraction among the visitors particularly students, who got opportunity to interact with DRDO scientists.
- The scientists engaged the visitors in the lively discussions on science and technologies.

'We Are Sikhs' campaign wins top US award

A campaign to create awareness of Sikhism and its followers in the United States and fight prejudice has won a top award for excellence in public relations programming to promote public causes.

- The "We Are Sikhs" campaign received the top 2018 PRWeek US award in the category of Public Cause.
- The campaign launched last year on Baisakhi by the National Sikh Campaign (NSC) and executed by FP1 Strategies, won the award for effectively projecting the Sikhs as

neighbours and everyday Americans who face discrimination due to ignorance of their faith.

- The \$1.3 million for the campaign was raised mostly by Sikhs, with some Hindus also making notable contributions.
- The campaign told the stories of Sikhs through online and TV advertising and amplifying them via emails to journalists and community events nationwide.

G.K. Reddy award for journalist Karan Thapar

- Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presented the G.K. Reddy Memorial National Award for journalism to senior journalist and television presenter Karan Thapar.

Science & Technology

Fluorimeter: DAE develops device to measure uranium traces in water

The Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology (RRCAT), an Indore-based unit of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has developed an instrument called Fluorimeter, to measure traces of uranium in water.

- The device is capable of examining traces of uranium in sample of water from 0.1 PPB (Parts-per-billion) unit to 100 PPB.
- It can be easily taken anywhere and water can be taken from any source for testing to instantly reveal if uranium traces present in water.
- It costs around Rs 1 lakh. For mass production of this instrument, DAE has transferred its technology to its other unit, Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL).
- The device will be especially helpful in areas like Punjab where uranium traces in water sources have been found to be at dangerous levels.

Indian Navy's warship INS Ganga decommissioned

Indian Navy's indigenously built warship INS Ganga (F22) was decommissioned in Mumbai, Maharashtra after over three decades of service. The warship was commissioned in December 1985 and had represented big step forward in India's indigenous warship building capability.

- INS Ganga (F22) was a Godavari-class guided-missile frigate of the Indian Navy.

- The warship along with Shakti and INS Godavari were deployed to Somalian capital Mogadishu in December 1994 to support withdrawal of Indian Army's 66 Brigade, including the 2nd Battalion, Jammu & Kashmir Light Infantry (2 JAKLI).

BrahMos missile with indigenous seeker successfully test-fired for first time

Supersonic cruise missile BrahMos was successfully flight-tested for first time with indigenously developed seeker at Pokhran test range, Rajasthan.

- So far, seeker, a critical technology in missiles was imported from Russia.
- During the test missile with India-made seeker flew in its designated trajectory and target with pin-point accuracy.
- The seeker technology determines the accuracy of missile and is closely guarded secret.
- BrahMos Missile is supersonic cruise missile developed by joint-venture between Russia's Mashinostroyenia and India's DRDO. It has been named after two rivers Brahmaputra and Moskva (river in western Russia).
- It is two-stage missile, the first one being solid and the second one ramjet liquid propellant. It operates on 'fire and forget principal'.
- It is capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against sea and land targets.

Sports

India's Elavenil Valarivan wins gold in ISSF Junior World Cup

Indian shooter Elavenil Valarivan shattered the world record and claimed the gold medal in 10m women's air rifle event of the season's first junior ISSF World Cup.

- Besides her individual podium finish, Elavenil also combined with Shreya Agrawal and Zeena Khitta to claim the team gold medal.
- Arjun Babuta bagged his second junior world cup medal, claiming a bronze in men's 10m air rifle event.
- The 18-year-old Elavenil, competing in her second World Cup and first final, shot 249.8 in the women's final to claim the top individual honours. Her 631.4 in the qualification was a new world record.
- After a 9.6, Elavenil sealed the win with a high 10.7 in the crucial 24th shot, getting the better of Chinese Taipei's Lin Ying-Shin.

Important Days

Bihar Celebrates 106th Foundation Day

Bihar celebrated its 106th foundation day on March 22. It was on this day in 1912 that the state was carved out of United Bengal. A number of programmes are being organised throughout the state to mark the occasion.

- Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu inaugurated the three-day Bihar Diwas celebrations in Patna.
- The theme for this year's Bihar Diwas celebrations is "Centenary of Champaran Satyagraha and Elimination of Dowry and Child Marriage."

World Meteorological Day

The United Nations' (UN) World Meteorological Day is annually held on or around March 23 to remember the World Meteorological Organization's establishment on that date in 1950. Many different activities and events are organized for this occasion.

- World Meteorological Day often features various events such as conferences, symposia and exhibitions for meteorological professionals, community leaders and the general public. Some events aim to attract media attention to raise meteorology's profile.