

National Current Affairs

Cabinet approves continuation of RUSA

Cabinet has approved the continuation of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) with a substantially increased outlay.

- It has approved fourfold increase in outlay under RUSA. Earlier the outlay was about Rs. 600 crores per year, totalling to Rs. 2400 crore, for 4 yrs from 2013-14 to 2016-17. Now it is Rs. 7100 crores for 3 years beginning 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- 10 Central/State Universities with a grade of more than 3.5 under the Graded Autonomy Scheme will get Rs. 100 crores each. Also, 20 states would get Rs. 50 crore each, totaling to Rs. 1000 crore, to create research clusters in the state.
- In aspirational districts, which have lagged behind in education, the government will grant 70 new model degree colleges with an allocation of Rs. 12 crores each, totalling Rs. 840 crore. The government will also give Rs. 4 crore each to 75 degree colleges for upgrading them to model degree colleges.
- 8 new professional colleges will also be established in educationally backward states like UP, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh. For this government will provide a grant of Rs. 26 crore each totaling to Rs. 208 crore.
- Also 750 colleges will get Rs. 2 crore each, totalling to Rs. 1500 crore for upgradation of academic infrastructures like research labs, library etc. He added that in a unique equity initiative to set up hostels for SC/ST girl students, 15 states will get Rs. 5 crore each, totalling Rs. 75 crores.

NAIPUNYA RATHAM: Andhra Pradesh Government launches World on Wheels

Andhra Pradesh Government launched multi-utility vehicle NAIPUNYA RATHAM or World on Wheels to bring technology to remote corners.

- The Naipunya Rathaams as part of Smart village Smart Ward Programme will facilitate and look to improve digital literacy, digital skills and create awareness on various government schemes that are underway in Andhra Pradesh.
- It is aimed at taking technology and innovation to the remote corners of Andhra Pradesh.
- The first phase of Naipunya Ratham will cover 13 districts and 28 smart villages in collaboration with Hewlett Packard (HP), Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII) and Guide Foundation for Development. State Government will soon roll out 12 more Naipunya Rathams by May 2018.
- As part of it, world on wheels Lab, a 20-seater bus enabled digital facilities and learning lab equipped with smart technology gadgets as well as with e-learning tools

like HP Classroom Manager, HP Video Book and HP Life will travel across rural areas of the state.

First National Conference on Drug Law Enforcement held in New Delhi

The first-ever National Conference on Drug Law Enforcement was held in New Delhi. It was inaugurated by Minister of State for Home Affairs Hansraj Gangaram Ahir. The 2-day conference was organized by Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Ministry of Home Affairs.

- More than 50 State and Central law enforcement agencies involved in combating drug trafficking had participated in this Conference.
- The working sessions of conference focused on various topics such as 'Wider context of drug trafficking in India', 'Financial Investigations' and 'Foreign & Cyber Investigations'. During these sessions various agencies gave presentations. United Nations (UN) and other foreign law enforcement agencies.

India's first sign language dictionary of 3000 words launched

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has launched India's first Sign Language Dictionary of 3000.

- The dictionary has been developed by Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre (ISLR&TC) under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD). This dictionary is available in both print and video formats.
- It will help to bring uniformity in sign languages which are used by differently abled people especially people with hearing or speech impairment.
- ISL dictionary consists of various categories of words for example legal terms, medical terms, academic terms, technical terms and daily use words.
- It also contains videos with subtitles and focuses on providing more information in ISL. It has English and Hindi terms to help deaf children to learn English.
- The ISL Dictionary aims to remove communications barriers between deaf and provide more information in ISL.
- It also aims to give deaf people constitutional right to speech and opportunity of freedom of expression and also bringing them into the main stream of society.

Chandigarh becomes North India's 1st city to install Digital Automatic Speed Gun cameras

Chandigarh has become the 1st city in North India to install Automatic Speed Gun Cameras with digital displays for traffic management, joining Kolkatta to install such system.

- The high-tech speed cameras are equipped with night vision technology and will record the speed of oncoming traffic, helping Chandigarh Police to issue challans to anyone driving above the city speed limits
- Not only this, the advanced cameras are installed with digital display to beware motorists of over speeding. If the speed is above the permissible limit, the digital display will warn the driver with a white light. If, and when, a motorist breaks the law, a Challan will be sent to the driver along with the image of overspeeding.

Odisha signs MoU with British Council

The Odisha government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the British Council to strengthen educational and cultural cooperation.

- The British Council will support the state governments "Mo School" (My School) initiative by contributing to the development of English language skills for learners and teachers including government-aided schools.
- With the MoU, the British Council will expand its existing work in the state.
- The areas of potential collaboration include developing initiatives to improve capacity and motivation of English language teachers in primary and secondary schools, teacher development institutions, and to improve learner outcomes in English in the State and embed internationally benchmarked assessments.

FICCI's 'India Maize Summit '18

The 5th India Maize Summit 2018 was held at FICCI in New Delhi to harness the potential of maize and technological innovations.

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- The aim of the summit was to harness the potential of maize, technological innovations, promoting producer aggregation and linkages that are required.
- The Maize agri-business companies must make efforts to create linkages with farmers by exploring opportunities in agri-marketing and the govt has taken various steps to boost the income of farmers.

Centre clears plans for IAF base close to Pakistan border in Gujarat

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) cleared a long-pending Indian Air Force (IAF) plan to set up a forward fighter base close to Deesa in Banaskantha district, near India's western border in northwest Gujarat, adding teeth to its military capabilities against Pakistan.

- The new base will increase IAF's ability to respond swiftly in case of any hostilities in India's western skies.
- The Deesa base will fill an important gap between Barmer in the north and Bhuj/Naliya in the west.
- The base will come under the Air Force's Gandhinagar-headquartered South Western Air Command (SWAC), which was headed by IAF chief Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa in 2014-15. SWAC's area of responsibility covers Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and Deesa will be the ninth base under it.

IRCTC to introduce POS devices to check overcharging of food in trains

With increased complaints from passengers about overcharging by vendors, the IRCTC has decided to introduce billing through Point of Sale (POS) devices on-board trains.

- The POS hand-held devices are being introduced in a phased manner, beginning with 100 such machines getting introduced on 26 trains.
- At present, the Bengaluru-New Delhi Karnataka Express has been provided with a POS machine on pilot basis.
- As per the plan, each rake of the train shall be provided with 2 POS machines each to start with and shall be progressively increased as per the usage and response from passengers.
- The IRCTC is also deploying its officials on-board these trains to monitor the catering services. They are being provided with tablets which will be used for collection of passenger feedbacks.
- The service providers managing the on-board services are also being trained at the IRCTC central kitchen at Noida for usage of the POS machine.

World's longest Sandstone cave found in Meghalaya

Known for several caves hidden under its undulating hills, Meghalaya now boasts of the longest sandstone cave in the world. The cave named Krem Puri was discovered near the village of Laitsohum in Mawsynram area of East Khasi Hills district.

- With a length of 24,583 metres, Krem Puri was discovered back in 2016 but the actual length of the cave was obtained by the Meghalaya Adventurers' Association (MAA) during one of its recent expeditions.
- It is 6,000m longer than the current listed sandstone cave in the world, Cueva El Samán, (18,200m) in Venezuela.
- The cave system has fossils of dinosaurs, especially the Mosasaurus, a giant reptile that lived 66-76 million years ago. It is known for its complex cave systems hidden under its undulating hills.

International Current Affairs

Indians least criminal among world's major economies: Report

According to the Institute for Criminal Policy Research's data on the number of prisoners lodged in jails worldwide, the United States, with 666 of every one lakh Americans behind bars, has the highest imprisonment rate among major countries.

- India has a significantly lower imprisonment rate -- 33 of every one lakh Indians are behind bars. However, Russia and Brazil fare poorly with figures of 410 and 323, respectively.
- India seems to be better off in comparison with immediate neighbours, Pakistan has a higher prison population rate at 44, while Nepal is at 65, Sri Lanka is at 78 and Bangladesh is at 48. China too is at a much higher 118 compared with India.
- United States also tops the chart of the highest numbers of prisoners at 2,145,100, followed by China at 1,649,804 and Brazil 672,722. India came in at number five with 419,623.
- Majority of Indians in jail are not convicted criminals, but people awaiting completion of trial -- at 67.2% against 20.3% in the United States and 36.2% in Brazil.

India among 20 nations that pledged \$100 million to agency for Palestine refugees

India is among 20 nations that have pledged a total of about \$100 million to the United Nations (UN) relief agency charged with the well-being of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.

- Almost 20 donors pledged additional contributions, including Qatar, Norway, Turkey, Canada, India and Switzerland.
- Giving details of the pledges made by the nations, Mr. Guterres's spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters here on Friday that the Emir of the Qatar pledged \$50 million in new contributions, while Norway pledged \$13.6 million, Turkey \$10 million and a doubling of their food aid, Canada \$7.7 million, India \$5 million and Switzerland \$4.2 million.

Australia scraps work visa programme popular with Indians

The Australian government has scrapped the popular Temporary Work (Skilled) visa and replaced it with a new Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa.

- The Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457 visa) was employer-sponsored and which many Indians had availed was replaced on March 18.
- The new TSS visa programme will comprise two streams – short-term and medium-term.
- The short-term visas will be issued for two years, while the medium-term visas will be issued only for more critical skills shortages and for up to four years, with eligibility to apply for permanent residence after three years.
- Both the streams will include mandatory labour market testing with limited exemptions, a new non-discriminatory workforce test, mandatory criminal history checks, a market salary rate assessment and a new two-year work experience requirement.
- A higher proficiency in English language has been made mandatory under TSS for the medium-term stream.
- The new visa will also include a strengthened training obligation for employers sponsoring foreign skilled workers to provide enhanced training outcomes for Australians in high-need industries and occupations.
- These changes will give Australian job seekers more opportunity to find work while finding the right balance so businesses can prosper by acquiring the expertise they need.

Banking & Finance

HDFC Bank signs MoU with Government e-Marketplace

Private sector lender HDFC Bank today signed an agreement with the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) under which the bank will facilitate a host of services to the public procurement portal for Central and state government organisations.

- The MoU is significant as Government e-marketplace will bring transparency and efficiency in the procurement process with assured and timely payment to the sellers, GeM provides an end-to-end online marketplace for central and state government ministries or departments, central or state public sector undertakings, autonomous institutions and local bodies for procurement of common use goods /services in a transparent and efficient manner.
- About 20 states have already signed an MoU with GeM to use this portal for their procurements.

Venezuela to knock three zeros off currency amid hyperinflation

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro has ordered a re-denomination of the ailing bolivar on Thursday, by knocking three zeroes off the currency amid hyperinflation and a crippling economic crisis.

- The measure to divide the so-called bolivar fuerte – or “strong bolivar” – currency by 1,000 would take effect from June 4th, the socialist leader said.
- The move illustrates the collapse of the bolivar, which has fallen 99.99 per cent against the US dollar on the black market since Mr Maduro came to power in April 2013. A \$100 purchase of bolivars then would now have a value equal to just a single US cent.
- But Maduro (55), presented the move as a positive development intended to protect Venezuela against currency speculators and a US-led “economic war” against the Opec member.

Business

Telangana slashes VAT on aviation fuel

In a move that could boost the growth of the aviation sector, the Telangana Government has slashed VAT on aviation turbine fuel to 1 per cent from 16 per cent.

- KT Rama Rao, State Industries and IT Minister also announced the Government plans to set up a logistics hub and a dry port near the airport and transform it into a multi modal transport hub.
- KTR announced the Government move to develop a Rs 4,650 crore expressway to Hyderabad within two years by providing State's support.
- The Minister, while lauding the efforts made by the GMR Group, said the airport will transform the infrastructure in the region over the next few years.

US launches WTO challenge against China

The United States launched a challenge at the World Trade Organization against China over intellectual property breaches.

- US President Donald Trump hit China with tariffs on up to USD 60 billion of imports to retaliate against the "theft" of American intellectual property, ratcheting up trade tensions between the world's two largest economies.
- Trump also announced he was directing the USTR to pursue dispute settlement in the WTO to confront China over its policies that result in unfair treatment for US companies and innovators trying to do business in China.

- China warned the United States that it was "not afraid of a trade war" as it threatened tariffs on \$3 billion worth of US goods in retaliation over the US measures.

ISRO–BHEL tie up for Production of Space Grade Lithium-Ion Cells

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has entered into Technology Transfer Agreement (TTA) with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) to transfer technology for manufacturing space grade Lithium-Ion (Li-Ion) cells.

- The technology transfer will enable BHEL to produce space grade Li-Ion cells which can meet country's space programme requirements.
- It can also be adopted to cater Li-Ion cell requirement for other national needs.
- The ISRO uses Li-Ion batteries as power sources for satellite and launch vehicle applications due to their high energy density, reliability and long cycle life. ISRO's Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Thiruvananthapuram has successfully developed technology to produce space grade Li-ion cell.
- It also has demonstrated performance of cell under various testing conditions and established its cycle life characteristics in accelerated mode.
- These Li-Ion cells are currently being used for various satellite and launch vehicle applications.

Appointments & Resigns

Martin Vizcarra sworn in as Peru's new president

Peruvian regional governor Martin Vizcarra was sworn in as the country's new president, after his predecessor Pedro Pablo Kuczynski abruptly resigned over a corruption scandal.

- Vizcarra, while taking oath, has vowed to eliminate economic corruption from the country. This comes hours after the Peru Congress voted overwhelmingly to accept the resignation of Kuczynski.

Pakistani woman lawmaker becomes opposition leader in Senate

A senior Pakistani woman lawmaker from the opposition party of former President Asif Ali Zardari has become the country's first opposition leader in the upper house of parliament, a sign of the increasing role women have in this Islamic nation's legislature.

- Sherry Rehman, a former diplomat who served as Pakistan's ambassador to the United States from 2011 to 2013, has been a member of the Senate since 2015. She is also a former journalist and prominent human rights activist in Pakistan.

Gatestone Chairman, Ambassador John R. Bolton, Selected by President Trump as National Security Advisor

Donald Trump has ousted HR McMaster as his national security adviser and will appoint hardliner John Bolton in his place.

- The move comes despite repeated rebuttals from the White House over whether Mr McMaster would be removed from office.
- Mr Bolton, who served as George W Bush's UN ambassador is known for his hawkish foreign policy views that are more in line with Mr Trump's stances.

Awards & Recognition

Bengaluru airport wins best award in regional category

The Bengaluru airport won an international award for being the best in India and Central Asia under the regional category.

- The Kempegowda international airport was given the Skytrax award for being voted as the best regional airport in India and Central Asia by air travellers at the World Airport Awards at Stockholm in Sweden.
- As the country's third busiest airport after Mumbai and Delhi, the airport at Devanahalli on the city's northern outskirts won the award for the second consecutive year and two times in 2015 and 2011.
- The Skytrax awards is the largest passenger satisfaction assessment and prestigious among surveys measuring airport service excellence and quality.

Science & Technology

ISRO postpones launch of Chandrayaan-2 mission

The Indian Space and Research Organisation (ISRO) has postponed launch of India's second lunar mission 'Chandrayaan-2' from April 2018 to October-November 2018 as experts have

suggested more tests. It will be launched on board of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk III (GSLV-F10).

- Chandrayaan 2 is India's second mission to Moon and is advanced version of previous Chandrayaan-1 mission (launched in 2008).
- It has been developed indigenously by ISRO. It consists of Orbiter, Lander and Rover configuration.
- In this mission, ISRO will for first time attempt to land a rover on moon's south pole.
- The spacecraft (orbiter) weighs around 3,290 kg and it will orbit around moon and perform objectives of remote sensing moon.

Sports

Rohtak set to host first World Series Boxing clash

The highly competitive World Series of Boxing comes to India for the first time, with the National Boxing Academy in Rohtak set to host an explosive contest between the Indian Tigers and the Astana Arlans from Kazakhstan.

- The Indian team's campaign will be led by Sanjeet (+91 kg), who recently overturned the odds and defeated heavyweights to punch his way to the gold medal in the recently-held India Open in New Delhi.
- He will be taking on Abilkhair Turlanbekov in a clash of titans. Sanjeet didn't have such a great start, losing to the star boxer from the Patriot Boxing Team from Russia.
- The Astana Arlans, however, begin as overwhelming favourites: they are not only the WSB reigning champions but had also beaten the Indians in the first leg.

Important Days

March 24: World Tuberculosis Day

The World Tuberculosis Day (WTD) is observed every year on March 24 to raise public awareness about the global epidemic of Tuberculosis (TB) and efforts to eliminate the disease.

- WTD is observed to commemorate discovery of Mycobacterium tuberculosis, bacillus (bacteria) causing TB on 24th March, 1882 by German microbiologist Robert Koch. This discovery had opened the way towards diagnosing and curing TB.

- The theme of World TB Day 2018 is “Wanted: Leaders for a TB-free world”.
- It focuses on building commitment to end TB, not only at political level with Heads of State and Ministers of Health, but at all levels from Governors, Mayors, parliamentarians and community leaders to people affected with TB, civil society advocates, health workers, doctors or nurses, NGOs and other partners .

Punjab to observe shaheed divas as youth empowerment day

The Punjab Government has decided to observe the March 23, the martyrdom day of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, Shaheed Sukhdev and Shaheed Rajguru as 'Youth Empowerment Day'.

- A state-wide programme to administer oath to Drug Abuse Prevention Officers (DAPOs), an initiative which Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh will launch tomorrow, will mark the occasion.
- The state-level function, where the Chief Minister will pay his homage, will be held at Khatkar Kalan (the ancestral village of Shaheed – e-Azam Bhagat Singh) Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar.

World Tuberculosis Day

World TB Day is observed on March 24 to raise public awareness about the devastating health, social and economic consequences of tuberculosis (TB) and to step up efforts to end the global TB epidemic.

- The date marks the day in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced that he had discovered the bacterium that causes TB, which opened the way towards diagnosing and curing this disease.
- The theme of World TB Day 2018 - “Wanted: Leaders for a TB-free world”- focuses on building commitment to end TB, not only at the political level with Heads of State and Ministers of Health, but at all levels from Mayors, Governors, parliamentarians and community leaders, to people affected with TB, civil society advocates, health workers, doctors or nurses, NGOs and other partners. All can be leaders of efforts to end TB in their own work or terrain.
- World TB Day provides the opportunity to shine the spotlight on the disease and mobilize political and social commitment for accelerate progress to end TB.