

National Current Affairs

Government releases Draft policy on Defence Production

The Ministry of Defence has released draft policy on defence production that aims to make India one of the top five manufacturers of defence platforms with active participation of public and private sectors.

- The ministry has sought comments and suggestions of experts and stakeholders on policy.
- Objectives of Policy:
 - Make India self-reliant in defence production as well as fulfil demand of friendly countries. Achieve turnover of Rs.1, 70,000 crore in military goods and services by 2025 by promoting domestic defence industry.
 - Make India one of top five manufacturers of defence platforms with active participation of public and private sectors.
 - Achieve export of Rs. 35,000 crore in military equipment and services by 2025 by promoting the domestic defence industry.
 - Attract additional investment of nearly Rs 70,000 crore and create employment for nearly 2 to 3 million people in the country.
- Features:
 - Identified military platforms.
 - Licensing process for defence industries.
 - Tax regime for defence industries.

MHRD approves 'Study In India' Programme

The Ministry of Human Resources Development has approved 'Study in India' programme.

- The programme will not only encourage more foreign students to choose India as a destination for higher education but will also double India's market share of global education exports from less than 1 percent to 2 percent.
- The move is also aimed to improve global ranking of Indian educational institutes. The programme, however, will not affect the number of seats which are meant for Indian students in any educational institute.
- Under the 'Study in India' programme, meritorious students would also be provided with fee waiver and scholarship.

BJP bags 9 out of 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh Rajya Sabha polls

BJP has won nine out of the 10 Rajya Sabha seats in UP, with its ninth candidate Anil Agrawal trouncing BSP's candidate B.R. Ambedkar by second preference vote count.

- BJP easily won 8 Rajya Sabha seats, including for its senior leaders like Arun Jaitley, Anil Jain and GVL Narsimha Rao with 39 votes apiece.
- Samjwadi Party's candidate Jaya Bachchan won the 9th seat with 38 votes but BSP's candidate lost a fierce contest for the 10th seat, notching up only 32 first preference votes instead of 37 he needed.
- BJP MLA's voted en-masse for Agrawal as their second preference candidate, leaving no scope for BSP to win the seat once the voting went to second preference.

7th India-Egypt Joint Commission Meeting held in New Delhi

7th India-Egypt Joint Commission Meeting led by EAM SushmaSwaraj and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry was held in New Delhi.

- Both the sides reviewed the progress in the areas of political, trade & investment, S&T, cyber security, capacity building, security, space and culture.
- India and Egypt are two of the world's oldest civilizations that have enjoyed cordial relations based on commonality of views on regional and international issues.

MEA's 'Videsh Aaya Pradesh ke Dwaar' launched in Hyderabad

The External Publicity and Public Diplomacy Division of the External Affairs ministry launched an initiative, 'Videsh Aaya Pradesh ke Dwaar'.

- The initiative is part of the enhanced public diplomacy outreach to take the objectives of the foreign policy to the common people.
- The initiative involves MEA's engagement with the regional media based in different cities across India who have carved their own space and have a unique and wide readership profile
- It also intends to create a pool of media professionals interested in foreign policy and guide them on connecting with the MEA.

Over 4 lakh beggars in India, West Bengal tops list, Lakhsadweep ranks lowest

The country in total has over four lakh beggars, with the highest 81,000 beggars in West Bengal, while Lakshadweep merely has two vagrants.

- West Bengal has the highest number of beggars and vagrants in India
- At least 4,13,670 beggars reside in India, which consists of 2,21,673 males and 1,91,997 females.

- Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh stood at second and third positions, with 65,835 and 30,218 beggars respectively.
- The union territories have the least number of beggars.

3 minesweepers decommissioned by Indian Navy

Indian Naval Ships, the minesweepers 'Konkan', 'Cannanore' and 'Cuddalore', were decommissioned in a ceremony at Naval Dockyard Visakhapatnam.

- The ships retired as operational ships after three decades of service in the Indian Navy.
- Each of these minesweepers sailed nearly 30,000 nautical miles during their operational life, which is comparable to circumnavigating the globe four and a half times over, the release said.
- The three minesweepers, commissioned three decades ago at Riga in erstwhile USSR, were part of the 21 Mine Counter Measure (MCM) Squadron under the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Visakhapatnam.

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.
- What is noteworthy is the fact that the 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.

Lanka Navy receives second India-built patrol vessel

India has handed over a second advanced offshore patrol vessel (AOPV) constructed at the Goa Shipyard to the Sri Lankan Navy.

- The vessel was officially handed over to the Sri Lankan Navy Chief Rear Admiral Neil Rosayro in the presence of the Sri Lankan high commissioner to India, and the chairman and managing director of Goa Shipyard.
- The construction work of this AOPV commenced in 2014 and the state-of-the-art vessel is capable of conducting patrols, policing, reconnaissance, surveillance, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and pollution control missions in Sri Lanka's maritime zones.

World's new largest cruise ship sets sail

The world's biggest cruise-liner, Symphony of the Seas, has left the shipyard of Saint-Nazaire in France to embark on its maiden voyage in the Mediterranean.

- French shipbuilder STX handed over to U.S. giant Royal Caribbean International on Friday.
- The ship, which weighs 228,000 tonnes, is 362 metres long just 20 metres shy of the length of the Empire State Building.
- It is marginally bigger than its sister ship, the Harmony of the Seas, which STX France delivered to Royal Caribbean in 2016.
- Built over two years, the Symphony can hold up to 8,000 people including 2,200 staff and is billed as faster and quieter than the Harmony.

Brazzaville declaration signed to protect world's largest tropical peatland

The Brazzaville declaration was signed to promote better management and conservation world's largest tropical peatlands-Cuvette Centrale region in Congo Basin from unregulated land use and prevent its drainage and degradation.

- It was signed jointly by Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo and Indonesia on the sidelines of Third Partners Meeting of Global Peatlands Initiative held in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.
- The Brazzaville declaration aims to implement coordination and cooperation between different government sectors to protect the benefits provided by peatland ecosystems.
- It also recognizes the importance of the scientific breakthrough of mapping the world's largest tropical peatland area.
- Peatlands are wetlands that contain mixture of decomposed organic material, partially submerged in layer of water, lacking oxygen.
- The complex biodiversity of peatlands means they are home to variety of species.

Banking & Finance

GPI Tracker system: SWIFT broadens payment tracking capabilities

The SWIFT (Society for World Interbank Financial Telecommunication System) platform has expanded its GPI (Global Payment Innovation) Tracker system to help banks track their global transactions at all times and keep full vigil on payments activity.

- From November 2018, GPI Tracker system i.e. unique end-to-end transaction reference will be included in all payment instructions carried between all 11,000 customers on SWIFT at all times, across more than 200 countries and territories.
- The expansion of GPI Tracker will cover all payment instructions sent across the network and give them full visibility over all their payments activity.
- It will significantly extend transparency and drive more banks to join service to make GPI the new normal in cross-border payments.

UCO Bank to merge branches in Hong Kong as it realigns overseas operations

Following the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s ban on letters of undertaking (LoU), Kolkata-based UCO Bank is planning to merge its two branches in Hong Kong. The country has the second highest number of foreign branches by Indian banks after the UK.

- The ban on LoUs has impacted the business of foreign branches, and as such one branch in Hong Kong would be enough to cater the needs of the region

Acquisitions & Mergers

Reliance Jio, Saavn to create \$1 billion digital music platform

In a deal led by Reliance Jio Director Akash Ambani, Reliance Industries signed an agreement for merging the digital music service Saavn with JioMusic to create a digital media platform with global reach having total value of over \$1 billion.

- The combined entity is valued at over \$1 billion, with JioMusic's implied valuation at \$670 million.”.
- Reliance will also invest up to \$100 million, out of which rupee equivalent of \$20 million will be invested upfront, for growth and expansion of the platform into one of the largest streaming services in the world.
- The integrated business will be developed into a media platform of the future with global reach, cross-border original content, an independent artist marketplace, consolidated data and one of the largest mobile advertising mediums.
- As part of the deal, additionally, Reliance will be acquiring a partial stake from the existing shareholders of Saavn for \$104 million. The shareholder base of Saavn includes Tiger Global Management, Liberty Media and Bertelsmann among others.

Awards & Recognition

Chhattisgarh wins National Water Digest Award

Chhattisgarh was awarded National Water Digest Award for Water Conservation-Diversion and increasing the irrigation capacity in the state.

- The award was presented to Chhattisgarh Water Resources Department (CWRD) on the occasion 'World Forestry Day' (observed on March 21) in New Delhi.
- This is first time that CWRD was given national Award during the past 17 years.
- Chhattisgarh bagged this award for increasing irrigation capacity, water management -water diversion, water conservation, community participation and efforts towards inter-linking of rivers, better techniques utilized in irrigation facilities.

- The Award is presented every year by globally renowned magazine 'Water Digest' which focuses mainly on water resources.

Ahmedabad airport receives award for 'Most Improved Airport'

The Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad has received the award for the 'Most Improved Airport' in the Asia Pacific region, in Airport Service Quality awards 2017 organised by the Airport Council International (ACI).

- The airport has over 200 flight movements per day and has been a busy city since the city is home to many business houses and educational institutions.
- The airport has now installed two aero-bridges and works for improving the food courts is also in progress.
- ACI is a global non-profit organisation which carries international benchmarking of airports through its participative program Airport Service Quality.

Appointments & Resigns

Kumar Birla to be chairman of merged Voda-Idea entity; Balesh Sharma CEO

Idea Cellular and UK-based Vodafone Group Plc announced a total restructuring of the leadership team for the merged business. Vodafone insider and current Chief Operating Officer (India) Balesh Sharma has been named Chief Executive Officer of the merged entity.

- Idea CFO Akshaya Moondra will take charge at the combined business in the same designation. Idea Deputy Managing Director Ambrish Jain will take charge as COO of the new company.
- As decided at the time of the deal, Aditya Birla Group Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla would be non-executive chairman of the Board of Directors of the merged company
- Aditya Birla Group intends to nominate Himanshu Kapania (currently Idea CEO) as non-executive Board member of the merged entity.
- Sunil Sood, who is at present Vodafone India CEO, will join the Vodafone Group Africa-Middle East-Asia Pacific (AMAP) Leadership Team and also help governance through board memberships.

PV Sindhu named flag-bearer of Indian contingent for opening ceremony in Gold Coast

Star shuttler PV Sindhu has been named the flag-bearer of the Indian contingent for the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast next month.

- Having won a silver medal at the Rio Olympics two years ago, the Hyderabad-based World No 3 Sindhu is one of the favourites to win the badminton women's singles title in Gold Coast.
- In the last three Commonwealth Games, the prestigious position during the march past of the opening ceremony had always gone to a member of the shooting squad.

Sebastian Vettel jumps Lewis Hamilton to win

Vettel clinched his 43rd career win in Formula 1 and also recorded a century of podium finishes in the sport.

- The other drivers with a 100 podiums include Michael Schumacher and Vettel's arch-rival, Hamilton. This was also Ferrari's 230th Grand Prix win in Formula 1.
- Ferrari driver Vettel was third in the opening stint but ran longer than his team-mate Kimi Raikkonen and early leader Hamilton and benefited hugely from a caution period just before he was due to pit.

Pankaj Advani wins World Title No. 14

Pankaj Advani defended his Asian Billiards Championships title in style by demolishing his practice partner B Bhaskar 6-1 in the summit clash here.

- With this win, Advani remains the reigning Indian, Asian and world champion in billiards for 2017-18.
- India's Amee Kamani won the Asian Women's Snooker title by blanking her Thai opponent Siripaporn Nuanthakhamjan 3-0.

Important Days

March 25: International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade is observed every year on March 25 across the world.

- Observance of this day honours and remembers those who suffered and died as consequence of transatlantic slave trade.
- It also aims at raising awareness about dangers of racism and prejudice Transatlantic slave trade which had taken place over span 400 years is considered as worst violation of human rights in history in which more than 15 million men, women and children were victims.
- The 2018 theme was 'Remember Slavery: Triumphs and Struggles for Freedom and Equality'.
- It celebrates freedom of African descent people from slavery. It also acknowledges challenges faced by people in movement towards freedom and equality.

Earth Hour 2018 observed across the world

The twelfth edition of Earth Hour was observed across the world on 24 March 2018 to take a global call on climate change.

- To mark this day, cities worldwide turned their lights off for one hour from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm local time.
- On the occasion of Earth Hour, World Wide Fund (WWF)-India made strong pitch for "Give Up to Give Back".
This initiative aims to inspire organisations, institutions and individuals to make choice to curb some habits, practices and lifestyles that burden our lives and environment.
- It includes taking steps like giving up giving up fossil fuels, single-use plastics, giving up lonely car rides for your employees, give up e-waste.

International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members

March 25 is the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members. This date is the anniversary of the abduction of Alec Collett, a journalist who died while working for the UN.

- The UN promotes the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members to encourage governments to do more in their power to protect UN personnel in their jobs.