

National Current Affairs

CCEA approves new Integrated Scheme for School Education

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved new Integrated Scheme on School Education for period 2018 to 2020 to be formulated by Department of School Education and Literacy.

- The new scheme will subsume existing schemes related to education such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
- The scheme comes in backdrop of Government's vision of Sabko Shiksha, Achhi Shiksha and aims to support the States in universalizing access to school education from classes pre-nursery to XII across the country. It will have estimated allocation of Rs 75,000 crore over the said period is 20% increase over current allocations.
- The scheme aims is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from nursery to senior secondary stage in accordance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Education.
- The main emphasis is to improve quality of school education by focussing on the two T's – Teacher and Technology.

Cabinet approves amendments to National Medical Commission Bill

Union Cabinet has approved certain amendments to National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill considering recommendations of Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee (DRPSC) and general feedback from public. Amendments approved are:

- Final MBBS Examination and exit test: The final MBBS examination will be held as common exam throughout country. It will serve as exit test to be called National Exit Test (NEXT).
- Provision of Bridge course: It removes provision dealing with bridge course for AYUSH practitioners to practice modern medicine to limited extent.
- Fee regulation: The maximum limit of 40% seats for which fee will be regulated in private medical institutions and deemed universities has been increased to 50% seats. The fee will also include all other charges taken by colleges.
- Number of nominees from States/UTs in NMC: The nominees of States and UTs in National Medical Commission (NMC) have been increased from 3 to 6. TNMC will comprise of 25 members of which at least 21 will be doctors.
- Monetary penalty for medical colleges: It adds provision providing different options for warning, reasonable monetary penalty, reducing intake, stoppage of admission

leading up to withdrawal of recognition on medical college non-compliant with norms.

- Stringent punishment for quacks: It provides severe punishment for any unauthorized practice of medicine or by quacks with imprisonment of up to 1 year along with fine extending up to Rs. 5 lakhs.

CCEA approves continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy and City Compost Scheme

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved for continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme and City Compost Scheme beyond 12th Five Year plan till 2019-20. The proposal was forwarded by Department of Fertilizers.

- The total expenditure for continuation of both schemes till 2019-20 will be Rs. 61,972 crore.
- The expenditure will be on actual basis since national roll out of DBT entails 100% payment of subsidy to fertilizer companies on sale of fertilizers to farmers at subsidized rates.
- The subsidy on Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers and Market Development Assistant (MDA) on City Compost will be provided on subsidy rates approved by CCEA on annual basis.
- The continuation of both schemes will ensure that adequate quantity of P&K is made available to farmers at statutory controlled price.

CCEA approves enhancing coverage of Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana

The CCEA has approved proposal of enhancing scope of Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY).

- The Central Government will now contribute Employer's full admissible contribution for first 3 years from date of registration of new employee for all sectors including existing beneficiaries for their remaining period of 3 years.
- It will benefit the informal sector workers as they will get social safety net and result in more job creation.
- PMRPY has been in operation since August 2016. Under it, Government is paying 8.33% contribution of Employers to Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) in respect of new employees (joined on or after 1st April 2016) having new Universal Account Number (UAN), with salary up to Rs. 15,000/- per month.

Cabinet approves re-structuring of NSDF and NSDC

The Union Cabinet has approved proposal for restructuring of National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to strengthen their governance, implementation and monitoring framework.

- The purpose of restructuring is also to ensure better corporate governance, transparency and accountability in operations of NSDC.
- Besides it will also strengthen oversight role of NSDF. It will also lead to restructuring of composition of Board of NSDF and NSDC to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and SACEP for cooperation on Oil and Chemical Pollution

The Union Cabinet has approved signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) for cooperation on response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in South Asian Seas Region.

- The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation between India and other maritime nations comprising South Asian seas region namely Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for protection and preservation of marine environment in the region.
- Indian Coast Guard (ICG) under Defence Ministry will be Competent National Authority and national operational contact point for implementation of Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan under MoU.
- It will respond to oil and chemical spills on behalf of Government of India. Further, ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) will be national emergency response centre for marine incidents.

CCEA approves continuation of Credit Guarantee Fund for Education Loans Scheme

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved continuation of Credit Guarantee Fund for Education Loans Scheme.

- It also approved continuation and modification of Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme for period from 2017 to 20.
- This will provide education loans to 10 lakh students during this period.
- The restructuring of scheme is in accordance with policy of Government to make good quality education affordable to all.
- Ceiling on loan amount has been refixed at Rs. 7.5 lakhs, considering the average loan size only of Rs. 4 lakhs in order to allow more students to access the benefit. The moratorium period will be course period + 1 year.

CCEA approves bulk export of all edible oils

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved for removal of prohibition on export of all varieties of edible oils except mustard oil. The proposal was forwarded by Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

- The CCEA has also approved empowering Committee, chaired by Secretary, Department of Food & Public Distribution to review the export and import policy on all varieties of edible oils.
- The empowering committee will consider measures such as quantitative restrictions, prior registration, imposition of Minimum Export Price (MEP) and changes in import duties depending on domestic production and demand, domestic and international prices and international trade volumes.
- The CCEA has discontinued Inter-Ministerial Committee headed by Commerce Secretary, mandated to review export of edible oils in consumer packs and calibrate MEP from time to time.
- Removing of restrictions on export of all edible oils will provide additional marketing avenues for edible oils and oilseeds.
- It will benefit the farmers by way of better realisation for oilseeds.
- It will also result in utilization of idle capacity in India's edible oils industry.
- It is considered as a step towards Ease of Doing Business by removing confusion arising out of prohibition on export of edible oils and plethora of exemptions.

Cabinet approves continuation, strengthening and establishment of Krishi Vigyan Kendras till 2019-20

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education for continuation / strengthening, upto 2019-20, of 669 Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) established till 31.03.2017, 11 Agricultural Technology Application Research Institutes (ATARIs), support to the Directorates of Extension Education (DEEs) of Agricultural Universities (AUs) and all special programmes associated with the Scheme and establishment of 76 spill over KVKs as already approved in the 12th Plan.

- KVKs would act as knowledge and resource centre in the field of agriculture in the district and would build models of technology uptake and farmers' empowerment leading to support Government of India's initiative of doubling farmers' income.
- Besides, Rain Water Harvesting, Integrated Farming System (IFS) Processing, Fish seed production, ICT enabled services, green agriculture and strengthening of soil health program shall also be supported. Further two important programmes approved include the Farmer FIRST at 52 centres and Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) for 100 Districts.

CBDT extends deadline to June 30 from March 31

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) extended the deadline of PAN linking with Aadhaar till June 30, 2018. Earlier, the CBDT had fixed March 31 as the deadline to link the documents while filing the Income Tax Returns.

- This is a fourth extension given by the government for individuals to link their PAN with their biometric ID number.
- The move comes in the backdrop of the Supreme Court directing extension of the March 31 deadline for linking Aadhaar with various other services.
- According to the latest official figures available, over 16.65 crore PANs, of the total 33 crore issued by the income tax department, have been linked with Aadhaar.

National Conclave on Psychological Trauma, Child Protection, and Mental Illnesses

The first ever National conclave was held on 27-28th March, 2018 by the Ministry of Women & Child Development, in collaboration with the Dept. of Psychiatry, AIIMS in New Delhi.

- It aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of research, service provision, and clinical practice in addressing psychological trauma and subsequent mental illnesses in Indian children and adolescents,
- The conclave provided a common platform for all stakeholders (Academicians, Clinicians, Government and NGOs) working in this area in the direction of robust evidence based research, better service provision, and capacity building of professionals.

New 'WomenInTech' forum launched

Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), India has kicked start a collaborative industry initiative aimed at addressing the sharp lack of women in STEM careers by launching a new forum called 'WomenInTech,' which will tackled the problem at various levels via a multi-pronged approach.

- WomenInTech is mainly being nurtured and driven by Anuranjita Kumar, the HR Head of RBS International Hubs and has been conceived in association with a number of technology corporates, academia and NGOs.
- The forum has been designed "to help accelerate the national agenda of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and further [to] work in alignment with the UN's focus area this year – 'Turning promises into action' it would "address the need for policy making collectively as an industry to ensure that workplaces prod more girls to take up careers in STEM on one end and on the other hand are conducive for working women to aspire for senior level roles".

- One of its initiatives is to build an independent corpus of funds, in collaboration with education NGOs, to sponsor the tertiary education of at least three young women to begin with from economically weak backgrounds in the field of engineering to top universities in the United States and United Kingdom.

NHAI collaborates with AAI

National Highways Authority of India, NHAI has collaborated with Airports Authority of India, AAI for developing green corridor along Varanasi Bypass covering 16.55 kms of NH 56 and NH 29.

- A formal Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed towards this between AAI and NHAI. Airports Authority of India has agreed to provide financial assistance of Five Crore rupees for plantations and maintenance work under their CSR funds for five years.
- NHAI and AAI have collaborated under “Adopt a Green Highway Programme” as a CSR initiative of AAI. Adopt a Green Highway Programme is an initiative by Green Highways Division of NHAI to engage Corporates, Public Sector Units, Governmental organizations and institutions under CSR and Public Private Partnership for developing green corridor along National Highways.
- This collaboration will encourage other PSUs and Corporates to utilize their CSR funds for Greening of Highways and creation of ecological assets.

International Current Affairs

Cabinet approves India, UK and Ireland MoU on organised crime

The Union Cabinet has approved signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and United Kingdom and Northern Ireland regarding cooperation in the field of organised crime.

- It is exchange of information for purposes of combating international criminality and tackling serious organised crime.
- The MoU will reinforce collaboration in field of security that will be mutually beneficial. India and UK already have agreement concerning investigation and prosecution of crime and tracing, restraint and confiscation of proceeds and instruments of crime which was signed in 1995. It also includes crimes involving currency transfers and terrorist funds.
- Both countries desire to further strengthen cooperation in fighting international criminality and serious organized crime.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Canada on IPRs

The Union Cabinet has approved Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Canada to establish bilateral cooperation activities in field of Intellectual Property (IP).

- The MoU was signed in February 2018 and is intended to promote innovation, creativity and economic growth in both countries.
- The MoU establishes broad and flexible framework through which both countries can exchange best practices and work together on training programs and technical exchanges to raise awareness on IPRs and better protect intellectual property rights (IPRs).
- It will facilitate exchange of best practices, experiences and knowledge on raising IP awareness among public, businesses and educational institutions of both countries. It will allow exchange of experts for interacting with human resources engaged in specialized IP fields.
- It will facilitate cooperation in development of automation and implementation of modernization projects, new and existing documentation and information systems in IP and procedures for management of IP. It will assist in protecting traditional knowledge.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Zambia in the field of Judicial Cooperation

The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Zambia in the field of Judicial Cooperation.

- During recent years, social, cultural and commercial relations between India and Zambia have developed in the positive direction. Signing of an agreement on cooperation in the field of justice will further enhance good relations between the two countries and add new dimensions in the field of judicial reforms.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) for cooperation on the response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in the South Asian Seas Region.

- The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation between India and other maritime nations comprising the South Asian seas region namely Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for protection and preservation of marine environment in the region.

Seychelles opposition blocks military deal with India

Two months after India and the Seychelles signed a revised agreement for the building of military infrastructure on Assumption Island, the Seychelles opposition has refused to allow it to be ratified by their parliament.

- India's ambition of setting up a joint military base in the remote coral Assumption (Assomption) Islands has suffered a major jolt.
- Giving in to Opposition protests, Seychelles President Danny Faure has reportedly shelved plans to present an amended agreement for ratification in parliament in April

Increase in India's contribution to UNRWA

In response to an United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Flash Appeal, the Government of India has increased its annual contribution for UNRWA from US\$ 1.25 million to US\$ 5 million from 2018-19 for three years.

- This enhancement was made in the backdrop of the unprecedented financial crisis being faced by UNRWA, which has been delivering valuable public services to Palestine Refugees around the world.
- The four fold increase in our contribution is based on EAM's commitment to enhance our support to UNRWA at the NAM Ministerial meeting on Palestine on 19th September, 2017.
- It is also part of our enhanced engagement with Palestine, particularly in the wake of PM's first ever historic visit to Palestine on 10 February, 2018.

Banking & Finance

SEBI approves most of the recommendations of Uday Kotak panel

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has accepted most of the recommendations made by the Uday Kotak-led committee on corporate governance.

- Out of 80-odd recommendations (of the Kotak panel), 40 were accepted without modification, 15 with modifications while eight were referred to governments and other departments.
- Among the approved recommendations was splitting up the role of chief executive officer, managing director, and chairperson for the top 500 listed firms from April 2020.

- It also approved reducing the maximum number of directors in a listed firm to eight from 10 by April 2019. The number will have to be brought down to seven the following year, it added.
- The SEBI board okayed secretarial audits for listed entities and their material unlisted subsidiaries under their listing obligation and disclosure requirement. This will enable SEBI to conduct audits of unlisted subsidiaries which contribute significantly to the revenues of listed companies'.

SBI hikes interest rates on fixed deposits above two years

The country's biggest lender State Bank of India has increased the interest rates on fixed deposits by 10-25 basis points for tenures ranging between two and 10 years.

- The new rates range between 6.6 per cent and 6.75 per cent. For fixed deposits below Rs 1 crore and with two-three years tenure the interest rate was fixed at 6.60% from the existing 6.50%. The bank owns more than one-fifth of India's banking assets.
- Similarly, for term deposits between 3 years and 5 years, customers will get 6.70% interest, against 6.50% earlier.
- For those who are looking to invest for the long-term, that is 5 to 10 years, the interest rate has been raised to 6.75% from 6.50%. The rates have, however, not been changed for fixed deposits of 7 days to 2 years.
- Following the move, senior citizens stand to gain the most. For deposits of 2 to 3 years, they will now get 7.10% interest as against 7.00% earlier. For deposits of 3 to 5 years, customers will earn 7.20% interest, up from 7.00%. For long-term deposits (5 years to 10 years), the interest rate has been fixed at 7.25% as against 7%.

Centre, ADB ink USD 80 million loan deal

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India signed a USD 80 million loan to help modernise technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions and improve the skills ecosystem in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

- The project will support the skill initiatives of the Government of Himachal Pradesh and help the state step-up the reform and scale-up its skill development efforts.
- it will fund short-term and long-term training programs in growth areas including automobiles, electronics, pharmaceutical, tourism and hospitality and banking and financial services, healthcare to help enhance the skills set of the youth and increase their employability.
- The project will help in equipping the youth with market-relevant technical and vocational skills.

- The project will help seize this opportunity by providing support in developing relevant and good quality TVET programs thereby improving employment prospects of nearly 65,000 youths by 2022.
- Further, the project will establish a polytechnic for women, six city livelihood centers, and seven rural livelihood centers, and upgrade 11 employment exchanges into model career centres.

Appointments & Resigns

Rahul Dravid to be state election icon

Cricketer Rahul Dravid as the state election icon, disabled government employees as polling staff and all women polling stations are among the slew of new initiatives taken up by the state electoral authorities for the May 12 assembly elections in Karnataka.

- The authorities are also taking the help of disabled government employees polling staff and are creating all-women polling stations to bring more voters to participate in the May 12 assembly elections in Karnataka.
- A "Karnataka Election Anthem" is also being written by film and music director Yograj Bhat which is due to be released in a week.

Lt Gen Harpal Singh takes Charge as Director General Border Roads

Lt Gen Harpal Singh, an alumni of National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla is appointed as Director General Border Roads (DGBR)

- During his 34 years of distinguished career, the General Officer has held several prestigious assignments to include Gde 2 at Army HQ, Gde 2 and Gde 1 at Comd HQ, DDG DV at Army HQ and Dy MS at Central Command.

Win Myint elected new Myanmar president

Win Myint, a close aide of Aung San Suu Kyi, has been a speaker in the lower house since 2012 and was widely tipped for the top job.

- But his role will be essentially ceremonial, with Ms Suu Kyi acting as de facto president.
- Htin Kyaw resigned as president last week, amid growing health concerns.

Science & Technology

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation launches new portal for pensioners

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) launched a new portal through which EPFO pensioners will get the details of pension-related information.

- The portal will assist users with details like pension payment order number, payment order details, passbook information and other related information.
- Further, it will provide help to pensioners to know the status of their life certificate.
- It will also provide the details and the reason of stoppage of pension.
- The enhanced "Track eKYC" facility for the convenience of members has also been launched to check the status of Aadhaar seeded against their Universal Account Number (UAN).

K2-229b: Hot, metallic Earth-sized planet discovered

Scientists using Kepler 2 telescope have discovered hot, metallic, Earth-sized planet named K2-229b orbiting dwarf star located 260 million light years away.

- They had employed Doppler spectroscopy technique also known as 'wobble method' to discover and characterise this faraway planet.
- K2-229b planet is almost 20% larger than Earth but has mass which is over two-and-a-half times greater.
It is located very close to its host star (0.012 AU, around a hundredth of the distance between Earth and Sun), which itself is medium-sized active K dwarf in Virgo Constellation.
- K2-229b orbits its star every fourteen hours. Its day side temperature reaches over 2000 degrees Celsius.

Sports

Steve Smith, David Warner banned for 12 Months

Australia skipper Steve Smith and vice-captain David Warner have been banned by Cricket Australia from playing cricket for the country for 12 months for ball-tampering. Meanwhile, Cameron Bancroft has been suspended for nine months by the Australian cricket body.

- This sanction means that Smith and Warner will be able to return just in time for the ICC World Cup 2019 but the duo will miss the India series at home, which is scheduled to be played in November this year.
- The CA officials also came down heavily on the disgraced cricketers and said that the penalties have been given to the trio to save the integrity and reputation of the country as far as sports is concerned.
- Both Smith and Warner had already stepped down as captains of their respective Indian Premier League (IPL) teams and after this latest sanction by Cricket Australia, the BCCI have sprung into action and banned the disgraced duo from the cash-rich league altogether.

Virat Kohli wax statue to be unveiled at Madame Tussauds Delhi

Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli's figure will be unveiled at Madame Tussauds Delhi, soon. The iconic Kohli will join cricketers Kapil Dev and Sachin Tendulkar, and footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, who have also been featured in the popular sports zone.

- The team of Madame Tussauds expert artists flew in from London to meet Kohli for the sitting, where they took over 200 specific measurements and images to create an authentic figure.
- Madame Tussauds Delhi is an attraction known for the portrayal of the famous names in the world of glamour, sports, history and politics under one roof. Madame Tussauds has been making wax figures for over 150 years and has attractions in cities like London, New York, Orlando, Amsterdam, Berlin, Vienna, Bangkok, Beijing, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Singapore, Sydney.

Muskan Bhanwala wins 25m pistol gold

The final competition day at the ISSF Junior World Cup in Sydney opened with another gold awarded to the Indian National Team, as Muskan Bhanwala secured the gold medal in the 25m Pistol Women Junior event.

- The Indian youngster bested People's Republic of China's Qin Sihang and Thailand's Kanyakorn Hirunphoem, who respectively took silver and bronze in the 25m Pistol Women Junior final, the second-to-last event of the ISSF Junior World Cup.
- Bhanwala — who placed 4th at last year's ISSF Junior World Championship in Suh, Germany — took the lead at the end of the sixth round, when she nailed a perfect 5-hit series and found herself sitting on a 3-point advantage over her closest rival, People's Republic of China's Qin Sihang (16).