

National Current Affairs

Environment ministry releases draft National Clean Air Programme

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released draft of National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) proposing multiple strategies to reduce air pollution. It aims to tackle increasing air pollution problem across country in comprehensive manner.

- The goal of NCAP is to meet prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in country in a stipulated time frame.
- However it does not mention of any specific target and time frame.
- Under NCAP, the MoEFCC plans to take host of measures to bring down air pollution.
- Under proposed NCAP, the MoEFCC will augment air quality monitoring network, identification of alternative technology for real-time monitoring, set up of 10 city super network, indoor air pollution monitoring and management and air pollution health impact studies.
- Other measures under it also includes air quality forecasting system, issuance of notification on dust management, three-tier mechanism for review, assessment and inspection for implementation and national emission inventory.

Government launches DARPAN-PLI App

The Union Ministry of Communications has launched DARPAN-PLI application for seamless collection of premium for Postal Life Insurance (PLI) and Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) policies.

- The app launched under DARPAN Project will help in collection of premium of these two policies at branch post offices anywhere in India, with online updation of the policies.
- With launch of this app, indexing of maturity claims of PLI and RPLI policies can be done at Branch Post Office itself, upon which insurant will immediately be provided with request number for further references.
- This will help in providing better after-sales service to customers of PLI and RPLI, particularly those living in rural areas of country.
- The Ministry of Communications had launched DARPAN (Digital Advancement of Rural Post Office for a New India) Project to achieve total digitisation of postal operations in the country, under IT Modernisation Plan, Department of Posts (DoP).

Six more states to roll out intra-State e-way bills from April 20

E-way bills will be mandatory for intra-State trade in respect of six more states from April 20.

- These six states are Bihar, Jharkhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Uttarakhand.
- E-way Bill system for intra-state movement of goods was implemented from April 15 in five states. The five states were Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Telengana and Uttar Pradesh.
- Already Karnataka is implementing e-way Bill system for intra-state trade.

India expected to grow at 7.4% in 2018: IMF

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest World Economic Outlook (WEO) has projected India to grow at 7.4% in 2018 and 7.8% in 2019.

- It also held that India will again emerge as world's fastest-growing major economy at least for the next two years (2019 and 2020).
- India's growth: Over the medium term, India's growth will gradually rise with continued implementation of structural reforms that will raise productivity and incentivise private investment.
- It will be driven by recovery from transitory effects of currency exchange initiative and implementation of national GST tax and supported by strong private consumption growth.
- India's progress on structural reforms in recent past, including through implementation of GST will help reduce internal barriers to trade, increase efficiency and improve tax compliance.
- Though India's medium-term growth outlook for India is strong, important challenge to it is to enhance inclusiveness.

Law Commission of India favours simultaneous elections

Law Commission of India, the government's highest law advisory body has released draft White Paper recommending holding of simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

- The commission, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice B.S. Chauhan has decided to seek opinion of all stakeholders, including political parties, on the issue.
- Simultaneous elections can be held now in the nation by amending Constitution, Representation of the People (RPI) Act, 1951 and Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha/State Legislative Assemblies.
- Moreover, definition of simultaneous elections should be added to Section 2 of RPI Act, 1951.

India-Wiesbaden Conference 2018 held in New Delhi

The India-Wiesbaden Conference 2018 was held from April 16-17, 2018, in New Delhi. The title of conference was 'Securing Global Supply Chains through Government-Industry Partnerships towards Effective Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540'.

- The Wiesbaden Process was initiated by Government of Germany in 2012 to strengthen implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540 through Government-Industry partnerships.
- India-Wiesbaden Conference 2018 was hosted by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in cooperation with Government of Germany and UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) was industry partner.
- The Conference provided opportunity to participants to share experiences on their export control systems and identify legal and technical assistance, action plans & challenges in national implementation of UNSC 1540.

All post office branches to be linked with IPPB in 5 months

The Department of Posts will link all post office branches with the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) in the next 5 months to provide full fledged digital banking services across the country

- All 650 post payments bank will be connected to rural post offices. With this, in coming five months there will be 1.5 lakh more new banks.
- IPPB branches will start functioning after technology vendor completes the work of operating the banking network.
- The postal insurance app was also launched which will enable people in rural areas to pay for insurance premium and get the receipt instantly.
- The app will be downloaded by post masters on their handheld device which is being provided to over 1.29 lakh rural post offices with a total outlay of Rs 1,300 crore.
- The DoP has provided handheld devices to 61,941 branch offices and it will be provided in rest of the rural post offices by December.

FIEO GlobalLinker: Government launches digital platform for MSME Exporters

Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched FIEO GlobalLinker, a digital platform for MSME exporters to digitise their businesses and join global community of growing businesses. It has been developed by Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO).

- FIEO GlobalLinker aims to make the business growth of SMEs simpler, more profitable and enjoyable.
- It is growing global network currently comprising over 140,000 SME firms, seeking business collaboration and growth opportunities through use of their electronic business card and digital profiles created on platform. It is available free of cost and it offers exporters range of features.
- It will enable exporters to find clients, suppliers and advisors using search and review facilities.
- It will help to create free e-commerce store for direct sales and improved chain management.
- It will provide up-to-date business knowledge through business articles, industry news and common interest groups.
- Its platform will provide services like company intranet, integrating email, business calendar.
- It will provide application for new RCMC, endorsement, renewal, participation in FIEO's promotional programme and alerts.

Nabard approves Rs 14,690 cr funding to Rajasthan

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has extended total credit support of Rs 14,690 crore to Rajasthan for 2017-18.

- Rajasthan has been one of the biggest beneficiaries under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) of NABARD, under which NABARD disbursed concessional loan of Rs 1,851.29 crore to the state government during 2017-18.
- Among major infrastructure projects, bank sanctioned 10 irrigation projects, construction of 1614 roads and two rural drinking water supply projects.
- NABARD is playing a crucial role as an important stakeholder in infra financing sector in rural parts of the country through its various funds.

Bharat-22 ETF follow-on offer may be worth Rs. 10,000 crore

The Union Finance Ministry may come out with Rs. 10,000 crore follow-on fund offer of Bharat-22 exchange traded fund (ETF) as it looks to dilute stake in Coal India Limited (CIL) to meet the minimum public holding norm.

- Besides, it is also keen to take ETF route to sell off government shares held through Specified Undertaking of the Unit Trust of India in private companies (SUUTI)—ITC, Axis Bank and L&T.
- The Bharat-22 ETF was launched in November 2017 to meet nion Governments plan to raise Rs. 80,000 crore in current fiscal from disinvestment, lower than over Rs. 1 trillion raised in 2017.

- PSU's that are a part of the new Bharat ETF-22 are ONGC, IOC, SBI, BPCL, Coal India and Nalco.
- Through the ETF route, government might dilute about 3.55% stake held in Coal India to comply with the minimum 25% public float requirement as mandated by SEBI.
- ETF route is a safer mode of disinvestment as it protects investors against stock market volatility.

International Current Affairs

India wins six elections in UNECOSOC bodies

India has won six elections to United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) bodies, five of them unanimously.

- In these polls, India won places on executive boards of four UN bodies, three commissions and committee.
- India faced an election within the Asia-Pacific group only for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Committee.
- India polled highest number of votes, receiving 46 votes, followed by Pakistan with 43, China received 39.
- India won elections to Executive Boards of UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).
- India will serve three-year terms from January 2019 on those executive boards.
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Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to Sweden (16-17 April 2018)

At the invitation of Prime Minister of Sweden Stefan Lofven, Prime Minister of India visited Sweden on 16-17 April 2018. This was Prime Minister's first visit to Sweden as well as a visit to Sweden by Indian Prime Minister after three decades. On arrival in Stockholm on 16 April, Prime Minister was received by PM Lofven.

- India and Sweden signed a Joint Declaration on India-Sweden Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future and adopted a Joint Action Plan. Both Prime Ministers participated in a Round-table meeting with about 30 CEOs of leading Swedish enterprises and addressed the CEOs.

- During the visit, India and Sweden also hosted an India-Nordic Summit, entitled 'India-Nordic Summit: Shared Values, Mutual Prosperity'.
- Additionally, Prime Minister had separate bilateral meetings with PM Lars Lokke Rasmussen of Denmark, PM Juha Sipila of Finland, PM Katrin Jakobsdottir of Iceland and PM Erna Solberg of Norway on 17 April. The discussions focused on bilateral ties as well as major global and regional issues of mutual interest. A number of MoUs were signed on the occasion with these countries.

Banking & Finance

ICICI Bank on-boards over 250 corporates on its blockchain platform

Lending major ICICI Bank has successfully on-boarded over 250 corporates on its blockchain platform for domestic and international trade finance transactions.

- With this, leading Indian corporates -- including ones from the "S&P BSE 100 Index" -- are now undertaking domestic/international trade finance transactions on its custom-made blockchain platform.
- This initiative marks another milestone in the bank's pioneering role to promote blockchain in the banking industry in the country.
- In August 2016, ICICI Bank became the first bank in the country and among the first few globally to successfully undertake pilot transactions in international trade finance and remittance in partnership with Emirates NBD.

Awards & Recognition

Game of Thrones to receive Special BAFTA recognition

The production team responsible for the epic locales in fantasy drama Game of Thrones will be given the BAFTA Special Award at this year's British Academy Television Craft Awards.

- According to the Academy, the honour recognises how the HBO series has revolutionised various aspects of production in shooting the fantasy show.
- Hannah Murray and John Bradley will collect the award on the behalf of the team.

Appointments & Resigns

Lt Gen PP Malhotra takes over as DG NCC

Lieutenant General PP Malhotra assumed charge as Director General of National Cadet Corps (NCC), the largest uniformed youth organization in the world on 11 Apr 2018.

- Lt Gen Malhotra's distinguished professional career includes various regimental, staff and command appointments.
- Prior to assuming his present appointment, he was the Chief Engineer of the Army's premier Northern Command.

Science & Technology

Indian scientists make Ayurvedic drug to cure dengue

Indian scientists have formulated an Ayurvedic drug to cure dengue, claimed to be the first in the world, and the medicine is likely to be available in the market by next year.

- The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS), an autonomous body under the Ministry of AYUSH and ICMR's, regional research centre in Belgaum in Karnataka, have already conducted pilot studies which have proved the clinical safety and efficacy of the drug.
- The Double-Blind Placebo-Controlled Clinical Trial, which is a medical study involving human participants and is an internationally accepted method of testing is going on in the medical colleges of Belgaum and Kolar.
- This drug has been made with seven herbal ingredients which are in use in Ayurveda system of medicine since centuries.

Scientists accidentally develop plastic-eating enzyme

Scientists have accidentally developed a plastic-eating enzyme that may be used to combat one of the world's worst pollution problems, a media report said.

- Researchers from Britain's University of Portsmouth and the US Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) made the discovery while examining the structure of a natural enzyme found in a waste recycling centre a few years ago in Japan

- The finding was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
- They said the enzyme, Ideonella sakaiensis 201-F6, is able to "eat" polyethylene terephthalate, PET, which was patented as a plastic in the 1940s and is used in millions of tonnes of plastic bottles.
- Their aim was to study its structure, but they accidentally engineered an enzyme which was even better at breaking down PET plastics.

Scientists discover sweet spot of activity in immune system, key to fight cancer

Scientists at University of Southampton have shown how stimulating a specific location on the surface of immune cells can be targeted with antibodies to help in their fight against cancer.

- The new work concerns a receptor called CD40 found on the surface of certain immune cells which regulates their activity.
- The CD40 receptors are normally dispersed over the surface of resting immune cells, but must be concentrated and clustered into highly organised complexes in order to trigger an immune response against cancer.
- Scientists believe that very precise clustering is required to trigger an activation signal to 'kick-start' the immune cells as they fight diseases, including cancer.

Obituary

Veteran journalist TVR Shenoy passes away

Veteran journalist and the trustee of Manipal MAHE Trust and Dr TMA Pai Foundation, TVR Shenoy, died in Manipal on 17th April.

- Shenoy, who entered the media world through the Indian Express, was the Delhi Bureau Chief of Malayala Manorama for a long period.
- He also served the Manorama Group as the editor of The Week magazine.
- He also served the Sunday Mail daily as its editor in the 1990-92 period.
He was also the executive committee member of Prasar Bharti.

Barbara Bush, wife and mother of presidents, dies at 92

Barbara Pierce Bush, the fiercely loyal wife of one U.S. president and mother of another who was a champion of literacy and admired public figure in her own right, died on 17th April.

- The Texas matriarch was a strong, steadfast partner in her husband's political life, privately offering her own opinions while standing dutifully by his side as they moved around the country and world in pursuit of his ambitions.

Important Days

April 18: World Heritage Day

The World Heritage Day is observed every year across world on April 18.

- Observance of day aims to spread awareness importance of protecting and preserving various sites around world that have achieved world heritage status and having outstanding universal values.
- This year theme of the day is "Heritage for Generations", emphasizing on inter-generational transfer of knowledge.
- The World Heritage Day was announced by International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982.
- It was approved by General Assembly of UNESCO in 1983, with an aim of enhancing awareness about importance of cultural heritage, monuments and to conserve them.