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India and states

11th World Hindi Conference begins in Mauritius

- The 11th World Hindi Conference was inaugurated in Mauritius on August 18, 2018 with the theme 'Hindi World and Indian Culture'.
- The three-day conference was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Praveen Kumar Jagannath in Port Louis.
- In a first, a special flight was arranged for official delegates. Around 290 delegates arrived at Port Louis on August 17.
- This is the first time that representatives from all 29 states and Union Territories of Delhi, Chandigarh and Puducherry will be attending the conference.

Aditya - L1, ISRO's satellite to study the Sun

- Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Aditya-L1 mission, originally named as the Aditya-1 mission, is a satellite designed to study the solar corona (outer layers of the Sun) which is quite similar to NASA's Parker Solar Probe.
- The satellite was conceived as a 400 kg class satellite carrying just one payload, the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC).
- It was planned to be launched in an 800 km low earth orbit.
- But, later, it was realised that a satellite placed in the halo orbit around the L1 point of the Sun-Earth orbit has the advantage of continuously viewing the Sun without any obstructions. Therefore, the mission was revised to be called as the Aditya-L1 mission.

Damodar Valley Corp to set up India's largest pump storage hydel power

- Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) on Friday said it has decided to set up the country's largest pump storage hydel power project of 1,500 MW at an estimated cost of Rs 52 billion.
- "We are preparing to build six 250MW pump storage hydel power plants (1,500MW) at Lagu Pahar on Bokaro River which will be the largest in the country and possibly even in Asia," DVC chairman P K Mukhopadhyay said at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) organised 'Energy Conclave 2018'.
- He said the initial report was encouraging to pursue the Rs 52 billion project as it will primarily act as storage facility for the huge grid connected solar capacities which are coming up without any storage facility.

World

Ministry of Agriculture proposes to UNFAO to declare 2019 as 'International Year of Millets'

- The Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Radha Mohan Singh on August 16, 2018 wrote to Jose Graziano da Silva, the Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNFAO) to declare the upcoming year as the 'International Year of Millets'.
- Singh stressed on the need to draw wider global attention and action to promote cultivation of millets.
- This proposal came following the earlier communication of the Ministry with the Secretary General of the UN in November 2017 in this regard.
- The Ministry had requested the inclusion of this proposal in the agenda of the 26th session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) meeting which is scheduled during October 1-5, 2018 in Rome.

US forms 'Iran Action Group' for post-nuclear deal policy

- US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo on August 16, 2018 announced the formation of the Iran Action Group (IAG) to coordinate and run the country's policy towards Iran. The development follows President Donald Trump's announcement of the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the multinational Iran nuclear deal.
- Pompeo has named Brian Hook, the State Department's director of policy planning, as the group's head.

Pakistan pays tribute to Atal Bihari Vajpayee hailing him as 'statesman'

- Pakistan on August 16, 2018 paid tribute to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee hailing him as a 'statesman' after he passed away.
- Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson said that Vajpayee was a renowned statesman who contributed to bringing a change in India-Pakistan relations and remained a key supporter of SAARC and regional cooperation for development.
- He said that the government and people of Pakistan extend their heartfelt condolences to Vajpayee's family and to the government and people of India.

World's oldest cheese discovered from Egyptian Tomb: Researchers

- The world's oldest cheese was recently discovered inside an Egyptian tomb. The tomb of Ptahmes, who was the mayor of Memphis in Egypt during the 13th century BC, was initially unearthed in 1885.
- After being lost under drifting sand, it was rediscovered in 2010 and archeologists found broken jars at the site a few years later.
- One of the jars contained a solidified whitish mass, as well as canvas fabric that might have covered the jar or been used to preserve its contents.
- After dissolving the sample, the researchers purified its protein constituents and analyzed them with liquid chromatography and mass spectrometry.

China unveils Chang'e 4 lunar rover to explore far side of moon

- China has unveiled Chang'e 4 lunar rover to explore the far side of the moon by the end of 2018. In December, the vehicle will travel aboard the unmanned lunar probe Chang'e 4, which is expected to land in the Aitken basin on the far side of the Moon, not visible from the Earth.
- The vehicle is similar to Yutu, China's first lunar rover launched in 2013 along with Chang'e 3, which continues to traverse the visible side of the Moon.
- It is also the lightest of its kind in the world, weighing only 140 kg (309 pounds), much less than its predecessors.

Banking

MSME worst hit by GST, Demonetisation, says RBI study

- A recent study by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has noted that the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have been adversely hit by the Goods and Services Tax (GST) roll-out and Demonetisation, which had a significant impact on the overall credit of the sector.
- "The MSME sector has witnessed two major recent shocks, viz., demonetisation and introduction of goods and services tax (GST). The introduction of GST led to increase in compliance costs and other operating costs for MSMEs as most of them were brought into the tax net," said the report.
- It added that the MSME, however faces operational problems due to its size and nature of business, and is, therefore, relatively more susceptible to various shocks to the economy.
- MSMEs play a crucial role in the employment generation, and contribute significantly to overall economic activity, despite which the contribution faces several bottlenecks inhibiting them from achieving their full potential.

Appointments

Imran Khan sworn in as 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan

- Imran Khan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman and former cricketer, was sworn in as the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan on August 18, 2018. The oath-taking ceremony was administered by President Mamnoon Hussain at the President House in Islamabad.
- Khan's PTI party had won the general elections conducted in the nation in July 2018. However, his party had fallen short of getting full majority but it managed to scrape through a simple majority in the Pakistan parliament's confidence vote, which was conducted on August 17.
- Khan secured 176 votes, just four more than the needed 172 for a majority, beating Shehbaz Sharif, president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, who got 96.

Nandula Raghuram elected as Chair of International Nitrogen Initiative

- Indian scientist and academician Nandula Raghuram was on August 13, 2018 elected as the Chair of the International Nitrogen Initiative (INI), a global policy making initiative.
- With this appointment, Raghuram becomes the first Indian and Asian to be elected to the Chair of INI. He will succeed Mark Sutton of the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Edinburgh.
- On the other hand, the Vice-Chair elect is David Kanter of the New York University. This position has been created recently. Kanter is an expert in the role of nitrous oxide and nitrogen policy evaluation. He recently led the nitrogen side event at the 2018 meeting of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Obituaries

Former UN chief Kofi Annan passes away at 80

- Former United Nations chief and Nobel Peace Prize laureate General Kofi Annan passed away at the age of 80, following a short illness. Annan, a Ghanaian national, died in hospital in Bern, Switzerland, in the early hours of Saturday. He is survived by his wife and three children.
- Annan was the first black African to assume the office of world's top diplomat, serving two terms as secretary-general from January 1, 1997 to December 31, 2006. He later also served as the UN special envoy for conflict-ridden Syria. In 2001, Annan and the UN were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

US singer Aretha Franklin dies at 76

- US singer Aretha Franklin passed away recently at the age of 76. The "Queen of Soul" was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and made her debut in 1961.
- Franklin received the Grammy Award 18 times and was the first female vocalist to be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.
- Her style on hits such as "Respect" and "Natural Woman" attracted fans all over the world and influenced Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, and other pop divas.
- Reports state that she had cancer and her family members were there with her when she passed away at her home in Detroit on August 15.