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Finance and Banking

India, Russia celebrate 70 years of bilateral relations in field of agriculture

- India and Russia on February 14, 2018 celebrated 70 years of bilateral relations in the field of agriculture at Suratgarh in Rajasthan.
- On the occasion, delegations from both India and Russia visited the Central State Farm (CSF) in Suratgarh, which was set up in 1956 with the help of USSR.
- Scientists from Russia played a huge role in laying the foundation of agriculture in the deserts of Thar, which brought about a major change in the agriculture farming in nearby areas including fringe area of Punjab.

Union Government makes amendments in Small Savings Act

- In order to remove ambiguities due to multiple Acts and Rules for Small Saving Schemes, Union Government on February 13, 2018 proposed merger of Government Savings Certificates Act, 1959 and Public Provident Fund Act, 1968 with the Government Savings Banks Act, 1873.
- For this, the relevant provisions of the Government Savings Certificates (NSC) Act, 1959 and the Public Provident Fund Act, 1968 will be subsumed in the new amended Act without compromising on any of the functional provision of the existing Government Savings Banks Act, 1873.
- As per PPF Act, the PPF account can't be closed prematurely before completion of five financial years. However, the amendment allows premature closure through which, depositors can withdraw the money from their PPF Account before 5 years. This provision is introduced keeping in mind the medical emergencies, higher education needs, etc.

India and states

Health Ministry approves MCI proposal to amend the Screening Test Regulations, 2002

- The Union Health Ministry on February 13, 2018 approved the proposal of Medical Council of India (MCI) to amend the Screening Test Regulations, 2002.
- The amendment call for making it mandatory to qualify National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) to pursue foreign medical course.
- Indian Citizens or Overseas Citizen of India intending to obtain primary medical qualification from any medical institution outside India on or after May 2018, shall have to mandatorily qualify the NEET for admission to MBBS course abroad.

- The result of NEET will be treated as the Eligibility Certificate for such persons, provided that such persons fulfils the eligibility criteria for admission to the MBBS course prescribed in the Regulations on Graduate Medical Education, 1997.

India to host 2018 Global Theatre Olympics for first time

- Union Tourism and Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma on February 13, 2018 announced that India will host the 8th edition of Theatre Olympics 2018 from February 17 to April 8, 2018. Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu will inaugurate the Theatre Olympics at the majestic Red Fort in New Delhi.
- The theatrical extravaganza will be organized by the National School of Drama under the aegis of Union Ministry of Culture with a total budget of Rs 51.81 crore.
- The theme of the 8th Theatre Olympics will be “Flag of Friendship” that aims to bridge borders and bring people of different cultures, beliefs and ideologies together through the medium of theatrical art.

Indian army to deploy 2,300 personnel to join UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan

- The Indian army would be deploying about 2300 personnel in South Sudan, as a part of UN’s peacekeeping mission in the war-torn nation. The announcement was made by Army Spokesperson Col Aman Anand.
- The mission aims to bring about peace and normalcy in the nation. The Indian army personnel chosen for the mission belong to the Infantry battalion of Garhwal Rifles regiment.
- This is the first time that troops from the Garhwal regiment have been nominated for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Three-day national workshop on Automatic Speech Recognition to begin in Kerala

- A three-day national workshop on Automatic Speech Recognition and its applications will be conducted by the Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management–Kerala (IIITM-K) in Thiruvananthapuram from February 22, 2018.
- The programme would be covering aspects such as speech production, speech signal processing, speech recognition models, Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) using Deep Neural Networks and its various applications.
- The workshop will also deal with topics like recent industry approaches in speech recognition and developments, related issues and challenges and current research areas in speech.

Union Government introduces extra fee to enter main mausoleum at Taj Mahal

- The Union Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma has announced that the tourists visiting the Taj Mahal would have to pay more from April 1, 2018.
- As of now, there is no separate fee for entry to the main mausoleum. However, with this decision, those wishing to see the main mausoleum at Taj Mahal will have to pay an extra charge of Rs 200.
- Besides this, the entry fee will also be raised from existing 40 rupees to 50 rupees and an extra Rs 200. The move is aimed at preserving the historic site and effecting better crowd management.
- The decision follows a recent report by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, which had recommended immediate steps to reduce footfall into the mausoleum for its protection.

Reports

Chief Minister's Rankings: Chandrababu Naidu & Pema Khandu richest, Manik Sarkar & Mamata Banerjee least wealthiest

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW) has released a report on the financial, educational and criminal background of all the current Chief Ministers of state assemblies and Union Territories, after analysing the self-sworn affidavits that they submitted before contesting the elections.

Following are the detailed findings of the report:

Financial Background

- The average of assets per Chief Minister from state assemblies and union territories was estimated to be around Rs 16.18 Crores.
- Out of the 31 Chief Ministers analysed, 25 were found to be crorepatists, which is nearly 81 per cent of the total.

Chief Ministers with Highest Assets

- The Chief Ministers with the highest assets included Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu (177 cr+), Arunachal CM Pema Khandu (129 cr+) and Punjab CM Amarinder Singh (48 cr+).
- Among them, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was found to be the wealthiest with declared assets worth over Rs 1,77,48,95,611 crore.

Chief Ministers with Lowest Assets

- The Chief Ministers with lowest assets included Tripura CM Manik Sarkar (26 L+), West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee (30 L+) and Jammu and Kashmir CM Mehbooba Mufti (55 L+).
- Among them, the lowest declared assets worth Rs 26,83,195 lakh belonged to Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar.

- Also, the declared assets of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee include no immovable assets.

Criminal Background

- Out of the all 31 Chief Ministers analysed from state assemblies and union territories, 11 Chief Ministers were found to have declared criminal cases against them.
- Further, 8 out of the 31 Chief Ministers were found to have serious criminal cases against them including cases related to murder, attempt to murder, cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property and criminal intimidation.

Education, Gender and Age Details

- Among the total 31 Chief Ministers, only 3 Chief Ministers are women.
- In terms of educational qualification, only one Chief Minister has a doctorate degree, 5 are postgraduates, 10 are graduate professionals, 12 others are graduates, while 3 are just 12th pass.
- In terms of age, the oldest Chief Minister is Punjab's Amarinder Singh (74) followed by Kerala's Pinarayi Vijayan (72) and Mizoram's Lal Thanhawla (71).
- On the other hand, the youngest Chief Minister is Arunachal CM Pema Khandu (35) followed by Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnavis (44) and Uttar Pradesh's Yogi Adityanath (45).

Appointments

Kannada writer, Chandrashekhara Kambara elected new president of Sahitya Akademi

- Renowned Kannada playwright, poet, novelist and Jnanpith award-winning writer Chandrashekhara Kambara was elected as the President of the Sahitya Akademi on February 12, 2018.
- Kambara won the election by defeating two other Jnanpith awardees, well-known Marathi writer Bhalchandra Nemade and Oriya writer Pratibha Ray. While Kambara secured 56 votes, Pratibha Ray got 29 votes and the third candidate Nemade just got four votes.
- At the new position, he would be succeeding renowned Hindi writer Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari whose term ended on December 31.

Awards

India's Umang App, Aadhaar win awards at World Government Summit

- India's Aadhaar won the best emerging technology award at the recently concluded World Government Summit 2018 in Dubai. India was the 'Guest of Honour' country at the summit.
- The summit acknowledged technology pioneers for providing global solutions to global challenges.

- The Aadhaar project was recognised as the world's largest biometric enabled identification programme, which provides access to service income tax, passport services, bank accounts, social services benefits aimed at providing 1.2 billion citizens unique identification card with fingerprint, eye-print and other vital data.
- The initiative has been achieved through the role played by Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The award recognized the efforts of the Government of India's invention and innovation in the field of technology and making the country completely digitalized.
- India's Umang App also won the best M-Government Service Award in the Accessible Government category.
- The mobile application provides users a unified platform that combines government departments and services, facilitating transactions for citizens.
- The award acknowledged Government of India's efforts to provide convenient services to its citizens.

World

Venezuela, Libya suspended from voting in UN General Assembly

- Venezuela and Libya have been suspended from voting in the UN General Assembly for the third time in three years because of millions of dollars in unpaid dues to the world body.
- The Secretary-General Antonio Guterres informed the General Assembly in late January that 14 countries including Venezuela and Libya were in arrears, and Assembly spokesman Brenden Varma confirmed on February 14 that Venezuela and Libya have lost their vote in the 193-member global organisation as a result.
- According to a letter from Guterres to the Assembly President, Venezuela must pay a minimum of 25,200,296 US dollars to restore its voting rights and Libya must pay at least 6,594,842 US dollars.

London City Airport reopens after World War II bomb scare

- London City Airport has reopened after an unexploded 500 kilogram World War Two bomb was safely moved from the area.
- The bomb was discovered at the King George V Dock on February 11 during planned work at the east London airport. Following the discovery, all flights were cancelled, the airport was shut down and an exclusion zone was put in place, with the closure affecting up to 16,000 passengers and nearby residents being evacuated from their homes.
- The royal navy divers worked through the night to move the bomb.

Sports

India scripts history by clinching first ever series in South Africa

- Indian team led by an inspirational Virat Kohli today scripted history by winning its first ever series across formats on the South African soil as they crushed South Africa by 73 runs thereby taking an unassailable 4-1 lead in the six-match ODI series.
- No Indian men's side since its first tour in South Africa back in 1992, has ever won a series across any format. They did win a one-off T20 match in 2006 -- their first ever shortest format but it was a single match event.
- The team under Kohli achieved which neither among Mohammed Azharuddin, Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid or Mahendra Singh Dhoni could ever accomplish - win a full fledged series in the Rainbow Nation. "Very pleased, another complete performance from us.
- Only one team had the pressure of losing this series and we knew that. It's history and the guys have worked hard for it. Ever since the third Test in Johannesburg it's been a good time for us. It's been a collective effort to create history," an ecstatic Kohli said after the match.