

Finance & Economy

Walmart acquires Flipkart for \$16 bn, world's largest ecommerce deal

- Walmart Inc. on Wednesday announced its high profile acquisition of Flipkart for \$16 billion for a valuation of over \$20 billion, making it the largest ecommerce acquisition in the world. The Bentonville company has acquired 77% of the Bengaluru-based company, as per sources.
- This is also the largest buyout for the US company with its biggest bet ever in online space and on India, underscoring the growing digital consumption potential in a country of 1.3 billion.
- The Wednesday announcement culminates discussions between Walmart and the Bengaluru company that began in September 2016 with Walmart's plans to pick a minority stake in Flipkart. The talks pivoted earlier this year towards the world's largest retailer acquiring Flipkart.

India launches biggest auction of City Gas Distribution networks

- India on May 8, 2018 launched its biggest auction of City Gas Distribution (CGD) networks, offering permits to companies for selling Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and Piped Natural Gas (PNG) in 86 geographical areas.
- As per the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), that acts as a facilitator for the CGD network, this 9th CGD licensing auction is expected to attract investment of Rs 70000 crore. The last day for bidding is July 10, 2018.
- This time, changes have been made to the bidding conditions to attract greater investment from the exercise, such as the granting of utilities status to CGD networks by the Union Labour Ministry.
- Under the changed parameters, maximum weightage of 50 percent has been given to the number of piped gas connections proposed in previous eight years, as against 30 percent earlier.
- 20 percent weightage has been given to the number of CNG dispensing stations.
- 10 percent weightage gas been granted to the length of the pipeline to be laid in a geographical area and the tariffs proposed for city gas and CNG, each.
- There is a floor tariff of Rs 30 for city gas and Rs 2 per kg for CNG to prevent bidders from quoting low tariffs.

Cities for which CGD licences are on offer

- Bhopal
- Coimbatore
- Ahmednagar
- Salem
- Ludhiana
- Allahabad

- Jalandhar
- Amethi
- Barmer
- Rai Bareli
- Alwar
- Burdwan
- Dehradun

15th Finance Commission constitutes an Advisory Council

- The 15th Finance Commission has constituted an Advisory Council to advise and assist the commission on the matters related to its terms of reference.

Functions of the Advisory Council

- To advise the finance commission on any issue or subject related to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission, which may be of relevance.
- To assist in the preparation of any paper or research study that would enhance the commission's understanding on the issues containing in its ToR.
- To help in broadening the commission's ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.

The advisory council will comprise following members:

1. Arvind Virmani: President, Forum for Strategic Initiatives
2. Surjit S Bhalla: Part-time Member of PMEAC and Senior Indian Analyst for the Observatory Group and Chairman of Oxus Research and Investments
3. Sanjeev Gupta: Ex-Deputy Director (Fiscal Affairs Department), IMF
4. Pinaki Chakraborty: Professor (NIPFP)
5. Sajjid Chinoy: Chief India Economist, JP Morgan
6. Neelkanth Mishra: Managing Director and the Credit Suisse India Economist and Strategist

Indian tea records highest ever production

- Indian tea industry has recorded the highest ever production as well as exports in financial year 2017-18.
- India's total tea production was 1325.05 million kgs, an increase of 74.56 million kgs as compared to 2016-17. In percentage terms the increase was around 6%.
- Similarly, the total quantity of tea exported during the financial year 2017-18 stood at 256.57 million kgs, while the foreign exchange realised from exports of Indian tea was \$ 785.92 million.

- The quantity of tea exports increased by 12.71% to 28.94 million kgs during 2017-18 as compared to the corresponding period last year, while the revenue earned from exports saw a rise of \$ 95.19 million (13.78%).
- The earlier record for the highest quantity of tea exports was during the financial year 1976-77 when the total quantity exported was 242.42 million kgs.

India

Ravi Shankar Prasad launches website of Digital India Internship Scheme

- Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad launched the website of Digital India Internship Scheme in New Delhi on May 9, 2018.
- Under the scheme, 25 interns will be inducted for a period of three months.
- Speaking at the launch, the minister said that the interns will be paid a stipend of Rs 10 thousand per month.
- The Minister appealed to the youth to apply to the internship programme saying that Digital India is important in the scheme of things.
- The Minister also asked officials to train the interns properly and handhold them in such a way that they get the incentive for the future.

Guj-Poland sign MoU on organising independence centenary

- The department of youth and cultural affairs of the Gujarat government will be co-organisers for the centenary celebrations to mark independence of Poland in Delhi and other parts of the world.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in this regard today between the Gujarat government and the Poland government.
- The MoU was signed by Polish ambassador to India Adam Burakowski and principal secretary of youth and cultural affairs department V P Patel in presence of Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, as per an official release.
- Burakowski had requested the Gujarat government to become the co-organisers of the celebrations under "generations to generations" programme, recalling that during the World War II, King of Jamnagar Digvijaysinh Jadeja had provided shelter to over 600 women and children of the European country.
- As per the agreement, the state government's cultural affairs department will help Poland in organising and publicising "generations to generations" programme in Delhi and other parts of the world, the release said.

World

NASA, Uber team up to make flying cars a reality

- The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on May 8, 2018 signed a space act agreement with Uber Technologies to explore concepts and technologies related to Urban Air Mobility (UAM) for future air transportation such as flying cars in populated areas.
- Urban Air Mobility is a safe and efficient system for air vehicles, piloted or not, to move passengers and cargo within a city.
- The system could revolutionise the way people and goods move in crowded cities and vitally change the lifestyle.
- Under the agreement, Uber will share its plans with NASA for implementing the urban aviation rideshare network.
- NASA will use the latest airspace management computer modeling and simulation to assess the impacts of small aircraft from delivery drones to passenger aircraft in crowded environments.
- NASA will use the data supplied by Uber to simulate a small passenger-carrying aircraft as it flies through Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) airspace during peak scheduled air traffic.
- After thorough analysis, NASA will identify safety issues faced by these new aircraft in already crowded air traffic control system.

UN Chief Antonio Guterres announces to hold climate summit in September 2019

- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on May 8, 2018 announced to hold a climate summit in September 2019 in New York to review the commitments of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- The announcement was made at the opening ceremony of the 37th session of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Considering that the effects of climate change keep spreading all over the world, the UN Chief pressed for the need to adopt collective measures to deal with it. He also emphasised that the new plans must be based on investing in resilient development with low carbon emissions.
- In March 2018, Guterres appointed former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg as his Special Envoy for Climate Action who was tasked to support the United Nations (UN) in its climate strategy and in organising the 2019 summit.

Trump announces US withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal

- The President of United States, Donald Trump on May 8, 2018 announced US withdrawal from the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.
- Trump stated through a televised address that the 2015 agreement, which included Germany, France and Britain, was a "horrible one-sided deal that should never ever have been made." He added that the United States "will be instituting the highest level of economic sanction."
- He stated that any nation that helps Iran in its quest for nuclear weapons could also be strongly sanctioned by the United States.
- The statements come as a blow to US allies, which are supporting the deal.

Beijing to hold World Robot Conference

- The 2018 World Robot Conference will be held in Beijing from August 15 to 19.
- The event will see over 12,000 competing teams and 50,000 participants from more than 10 countries and regions.
- A robot competition will be held during the conference where participants will compete in five categories.
- According to the organiser, the conference will greatly stimulate passion and innovation in the robot industry as well as help with research and development.

Renewable industry created 500,000 plus jobs in 2017 globally: IRENA

- According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) report, the renewable energy industry created more than 500,000 new jobs globally in 2017, a 5.3 per cent increase from the previous year, with India and China among the largest employers.
- The report, 5th edition of Renewable Energy and Jobs - Annual Review, was launched at IRENA's 15th council in Abu Dhabi on May 8, 2018.
- The report stated that the total number of people employed in the sector, including large hydropower, now stands at 10.3 million globally, surpassing the 10 million figure for the first time.
- China, Brazil, the US, India, Germany and Japan remain the world's largest renewable energy employers, representing more than 70 per cent of all industry jobs globally.