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UPDATE**

NATIONAL NEWS



PEOPLE IN NEWS

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National News

1. SC directs Centre to grant permanent commission to women officers in the Army within 3 months

In a historic judgment, the Supreme Court has ordered the Centre to ensure that women officers are given permanent commission (PC) in the Army, while adding that the officers will be now eligible for command posting. In its verdict on Centre's appeal against the Delhi High Court direction, the SC said the permanent commission will apply to all women officers in the Army in service, irrespective of their years of service. The Supreme Court also directed the Centre to grant permanent commission within three months to all women officers in Army who opt for it. The SC added that all terms of appointments of women officers shall be same as their male counterparts.

Last year, women officers were granted permanent commission (PC) in all 10 branches of the Indian Army. The Centre decided to grant permanent commission to women officers inducted in branches such as signals, engineers, army aviation, army air defence, electronics and mechanical engineers, army service corps, army ordinance corps and intelligence.

The Centre had argued that permanent commission will be given to only those women officers who joined the forces after 2014.

The decision of the Defence Ministry had opened opportunities to women officers in the Indian Army to serve for a longer duration and to pursue permanent careers in all branches like their male counterparts.

In April, the Army had also had kicked off the process of inducting women as jawans by starting their online registration for recruitment in the corps of military police.

2. Government Unveils Plan For Research On 'Indigenous' Cows

The government has recently unveiled a programme to research on 'indigenous' cows-SUTRA PIC (Scientific Utilisation Through Research Augmentation-Prime Products from Indigenous Cows). It is to be funded by multiple scientific ministries and led by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

It has the Department of Biotechnology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Ministry for AYUSH among others and the Indian Council of Medical Research as partners.

The Aim is to perform scientific research on the complete characterization of milk and milk products derived from Indian indigenous cows. It includes scientific research on nutritional and therapeutic properties of curd and ghee prepared from indigenous breeds of cows by traditional methods

3. 'Pyaar ka Paudha' campaign launched by Bihar govt to encourage practice of planting trees

Ahead of Valentine's day, 'Pyaar ka Paudha' (a plant of love) campaign has been launched by the Bihar government's Department of Environment and Forest in Patna, to encourage the practice of planting trees in the state. Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change comes under the Bihar government on February 12.

4. Govt To Establish Central Consumer Protection Authority

Recently, the government has decided to set up the Consumer Protection Authority under the Consumer Protection Act 2019. Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution also consulted industry representatives about the role and functioning of a proposed CCPA. The CCPA will have an investigation wing, headed by a Director-General, which may conduct inquiry or investigation into such violations. It may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement. In case of a subsequent offense, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of up to five years. CCPA may issue directions to the trader, manufacturer, endorser, advertiser, or publisher to discontinue such an advertisement or modify it in a manner specified by the authority, within a given time. The authority may also impose a penalty up to Rs 10 lakh, with imprisonment up to two years, on the manufacturer or endorser of false and misleading advertisements.

For every subsequent offense committed by the same manufacturer or endorser, the penalty may go up to Rs 50 lakh, with imprisonment up to five years.

A consumer is defined as a person who buys any goods or avails a service for a consideration. It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purposes. It covers transactions through all modes including offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.

Consumer protection act 2019 seeks to strengthen consumer rights and provides a mechanism for redressal of complaints regarding defects in goods and deficiency in services.

The Act replaced The Consumer Protection Act, 1986, and seeks to widen its scope in addressing consumer concerns.

5. Cabinet approves Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II

The Union Cabinet has approved the Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) [SBM (G)] till 2024-25, which will focus on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus), which includes ODF sustainability and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM). The program will also work towards ensuring that no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet.

SBM (G) Phase-II will also be implemented from 2020-21 to 2024-25 in a mission mode with a total outlay of Rs. 1,40,881 crores. This will be a novel model of convergence between different verticals of financing. Of this Rs.52,497 crore will be allocated from the budget of D/o Drinking Water and Sanitation while the remaining amount will be dovetailed from the funds being released under 15th Finance Commission, MGNREGS and revenue generation models particularly for solid and liquid waste management. Under the program, provision for incentive of Rs.12,000/- for construction of Individual Household Toilet (IHHL) to the newly emerging eligible households as per the existing norms will continue. Funding norms for Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) have been rationalized and changed to per capita basis in place of no. of households. Additionally, financial assistance to the Gram Panchayats (GPs) for construction of Community Managed Sanitary Complex (CMSC) at village level has been increased from Rs.2 lakh to Rs.3 lakh per CMSC.

The programme will be implemented by the States/UTs as per the operational guidelines which will be issued to the States shortly. The fund sharing pattern between Centre and States will be 90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K; 60:40 for other States; and 100:0 for other Union Territories, for all the components.

6. GoI to launch “TILHAN Mission” to make India Self Reliant in oil seed Production

On February 19, 2020, the Agricultural Minister Narendra Singh Tomar announced that Government of India is to launch “TILHAN MISSION” to boost the oil. The government will launch Tilhan Mission to make the country self-reliant in oilseed production.

India is the fourth largest vegetable oil economy in the world after USA, China and Brazil. Today, the oil seeds account for 13% of cropped area in the country.

7. NITI Aayog Releases its Vision for the National Data and Analytics Platform

NITI Aayog released its vision for the National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP). The platform aims to democratize access to publicly available government data. It will host the latest datasets from various government websites, present them coherently, and provide tools for analytics and visualization. NDAP will follow a user-centric approach and will enable data access in a simple and intuitive portal tailored to the needs of a variety of stakeholders. NDAP will spearhead the standardization of formats in which data is presented across sectors and will cater to a wide audience of policymakers, researchers, innovators, data scientists, journalists and citizens.

The development of NDAP will take place over a period of one year. The first version of the platform is expected to be launched in 2021. The process will follow a user-centric approach, and will incorporate feedback received from various users and stakeholders throughout the course of its development.

8. Union Cabinet approves constitution of 12-member 'Technology Group'

The Union Cabinet has approved the formation of an empowered "Technology Group". The Cabinet-approved group will consist of 12 members with the Principal Scientific Adviser to Government of India serving as its Chair. The 12-member Technology Group is mandated to “render timely policy advice on the latest technologies; mapping of technology and technology products; commercialisation of dual-use technologies developed in national laboratories and government R&D organisations; developing an indigenisation road map for selected key technologies; and selection of appropriate R&D programs leading to technology development.”

The three pillars of work of the Technology Group will include policy support, support on research and development proposals, and procurement support.

9. Uttar Pradesh govt allots Rs 2,000 cr for Jewar airport in budget

The Uttar Pradesh government allotted a fund of Rs 2,000 crore for the Jewar Airport in Gautam Buddh Nagar. The announcement was made during the budget presentation by Finance Minister Suresh Khanna in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Lucknow.

10. Centre Plans to Offer 6,000 Acres of Land in Kashmir to Woo Businesses Ahead of Investment Summit

India plans to offer around 6,000 acres (2,400 hectares) of land in Kashmir as part of a business summit planned for April or May to help the region after withdrawing its special rights and making sweeping administrative changes. Last August, the BJP-led central government revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status by abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution, bifurcating the state into Union Territories.

The government enforced the changes through a harsh crackdown, deploying thousands of additional troops, imposing a communication blackout and detaining several politicians and citizens.

11. India to switch to world's cleanest petrol, diesel from April 1

India will switch to the world's cleanest petrol and diesel from April 1 as it leapfrogs straight to Euro-VI emission compliant fuels from Euro-IV grades now - a feat achieved in just three years and not seen in any of the large economies around the globe. India will join the select league of nations using petrol and diesel containing just 10 parts per million of sulphur as it looks to cut vehicular emissions that are said to be one of the reasons for the choking pollution in major cities.

India adopted Euro-III equivalent (or Bharat Stage-III) fuel with a sulphur content of 350 ppm in 2010 and then took seven years to move to BS-IV that had a sulphur content of 50 ppm. From BS-IV to BS-VI it took just three years.

It was a conscious decision to leapfrog to BS-VI as first upgrading to BS-V and then shifting to BS-VI would have prolonged the journey to 4 to 6 years. Besides, oil refineries, as well as automobile manufacturers, would have had to make investments twice - first to producing BS-V grade fuel and engines and then BS-VI ones.

State-owned oil refineries spent about ₹35,000 crore to upgrade plants that could produce ultra-low sulphur fuel. This investment is on top of ₹60,000 crore they spent on refinery upgrades in the previous switchovers.

BS-VI has a sulphur content of just 10 ppm and emission standards are as good as CNG. Originally, Delhi and its adjoining towns were to have BS-VI fuel supplies by April 2019 and the rest of the country was to get same supplies from April 2020.

But oil marketing companies switched over to supply of BS-VI grade fuels in the national capital territory of Delhi on April 1, 2018. The supply of BS-VI fuels was further extended to four contiguous districts of Rajasthan and eight of Uttar Pradesh in the National Capital Region (NCR) on April 1, 2019, together with the city of Agra. BS-VI grade fuels were made available in 7 districts of Haryana from October 1, 2019. The new fuel will result in a reduction in NOx in BS-VI compliant vehicles by 25 per cent in petrol cars and by 70 per cent in diesel cars.

12. India to send aircraft on Feb 26 to Wuhan to bring back its citizens after China gives clearance

India is likely to send a military transport aircraft to the coronavirus-hit Wuhan on February 26 to deliver relief material and bring back more Indians following a clearance from China, Union Health ministry officials said. The neighbouring country was delaying clearance to the C-17 military transport aircraft which was to fly on February 20 to Wuhan, though Beijing had allowed flights from other countries to evacuate their nationals.

The aircraft will carry a large consignment of medical supplies to China and bring back more Indians from Wuhan.

Union Health minister Harsh Vardhan, who undertook a review of the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID19) management across the country with the senior officials of the Ministry, informed that at present the screening of passengers is being done in all 21 airports, 12 major and 65 non-major seaports and border crossings. Also flight passengers coming to India from China, Hong Kong, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore, Japan, Kathmandu, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia are being screened at 21 designated airports in the country for a possible exposure to the novel coronavirus.

13. West Bengal Transport Department to reintroduce double-decker bus

The West Bengal Transport Department is set to reintroduce the iconic double-decker bus on city roads. The bus bodies have been designed in-house by transport department and two of these are being readied for service. After the introduction of open roof buses, the transport department will try to develop the design of bodies of these buses more to take the project forward for public transportation.

Double-decker buses had made it to the city roads during the Raj era and the red and white-coloured behemoths had been part of Kolkata's public transportation till the mid- 1990s, before these were phased out owing to high maintenance costs.

The Calcutta State Transport Corporation (CSTC), which is now known as WBTC following the merger of three state transport undertakings, also used to run trailer double- deckers in a few routes, with the most popular being the iconic L-9.

The only city in the country that now has double- decker buses in its public transportation fleet is Mumbai, with transporter BEST plying around 50 of these at present.

14. Haryana government to open Atal Kisan-Majdoor canteens to provide meals

Haryana state government is to open Atal Kisan-Majdoor canteens in all mandis and sugar mills across the state. The announcement was made by Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya at the Budget Session of State Assembly which commenced in Chandigarh. The aim of the move is to provide affordable and cheap meals to farmers and labourers at a concessional rate of Rs.10 per plate. 25 Atal Kisan-Majdoor canteens will be established in 2020 in the state. Haryana government will also provide free and concessional travel facility to 41 different categories of residents in the ordinary buses of Haryana Roadways.

Also, under a new initiative, the women and girls belonging to 11 lakh BPL families will be given sanitary napkins free of cost during the year 2020-2021.

15. 2,900-tonne gold mine found in Sonbhadra, 4 times that of India's reserves

Gold reserves, estimated at more than 2,900 tonnes, have been found at Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh with the state government now gearing up for auctioning the mines for extraction of the precious metal. According to the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and UP geology and mining directorate reports, gold reserves totalling 2,944 tonnes have been found in the Sona Pahadi and Hardi blocks of the backward Sonbhadra district.

The geology and mining department is also in the process of geo-tagging the areas spread across villages identified for prospective mining of gold and other minerals in Sonbhadra. Since India is estimated to have gold reserves of less than 700 tonnes, the projected gold reserves in Sonbhadra is nearly five times that amount.

16. India rejects China's objection to Amit Shah's visit to Arunachal Pradesh

India strongly rejected China's objection to Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, saying any criticism of visits by Indian leaders to a state of the country does not stand to reason. Shah is in Arunachal Pradesh to attend the 34th Statehood Day function and launch a number of development projects. China routinely objects to Indian leaders' visits to the northeastern state.

The India-China border dispute covers the 3,488-km Line of Actual Control (LAC). China and India have so far held 22 rounds of Special Representatives talks to resolve the border dispute.

International News

1. UK announces points-based visa system

EU students will also be subject to the points-based system for study visas, as the single global system promises to “treat EU and non-EU citizens equally”. Due to come into effect from January 2021, the proposed changes require those seeking to work in the UK earn at least £25,600 a year, as well as having specific skills and qualifications, including the ability to speak English.

Student visa routes will also be points-based. Students seeking to study in the UK will need to demonstrate that they have an offer from an approved educational institution, that they can support themselves financially and that they speak English.

2. Sri Lanka formally informs UNHRC to withdraw from co-sponsoring UNHRC resolution on war crimes

Sri Lankan government formally informed the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) its decision to withdraw from co-sponsoring the resolution on addressing of war crimes and accountability issues. Foreign minister Dinesh Gunawardena told the UNHRC session in Geneva that the previous government of Mahinda Rajapaksa before 2015 established domestic mechanisms to address issues related to accountability, rule of law and human rights.

3. Bangladesh to sign Free Trade Agreement with Nepal

Bangladesh and Nepal have agreed to sign a Free Trade Agreement to enhance trade between the two countries. Bangladesh has also agreed to allow Nepal to use its Saidpur airport located in its northernmost district of Nilphamari close to Nepal. Earlier, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen had a meeting with his Nepalese counterpart. Both the ministers discussed ways to enhance trade, investment and connectivity including use of seaports of Bangladesh. Bangladesh exports commodities worth \$38 million to Nepal and imports goods worth around 18 million dollars.

4. Amazon’s Jeff Bezos pledges \$10 billion to launch Earth Fund for combating climate change

The Bezos Earth Fund would fund scientists, activists, NGOs -- any effort that offers a real possibility to help preserve and protect the natural world

Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon and the world’s richest man was committing \$10 billion to a new fund to tackle climate change.

Fellow billionaire Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, now devotes much of his time to his charity foundation and a venture fund that makes investments aimed at helping curb emissions and reverse climate change.

Economy, Defence and Business News

1. Govt renames IDSA as 'Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses'

The central government has renamed Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), a government think tank, as Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in order to "honour the commitment and legacy" of the late defence minister. Parrikar, who was defence minister from November 9, 2014 to March 14, 2017, died on March 17 last year in Panaji at Goa due to pancreatic cancer. The renaming of the IDSA "will align the vision and aspiration of the premier defence institute with the contribution of the former Raksha Mantri and Padma Bhushan awardee".

2. New Army Headquarters: Rajnath Singh lays foundation of 'Thal Sena Bhawan'

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stone of a new army headquarters building in Delhi Cantonment recently. This complex will be named as 'Thal Sena Bhawan'. It will be constructed over 39 acres of land.

This army building, to be built in 7.5 lakh square meters that will have 6014 offices that will include 1684 offices for military and civilian officers and 4330 offices for sub-staff. The new Army headquarters will also provide employment opportunities to the youth of India. According to the media reports, it will take five years to complete the construction work. This building will be known as 'Thal Sena Bhawan'. The new Army headquarters has been designed as a multi-storey environment-friendly building. It will be constructed as per the Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) norms.

3. India must invest \$109 bn in 10 yrs to halve road fatalities: World Bank

India needs to invest an estimated extra \$109 billion in road safety over the next decade to halve its crash fatalities, the World Bank said in a report released on a day when at least 35 people were killed in four separate accidents in the country. The bank said such an investment will bring economic benefits equivalent annually to 3.7 per cent of the GDP.

The report titled "Delivering Road Safety in India" was released at the 'Third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety' in Stockholm. It points to the high death rate on India's roads caused by chronic lack of investment in systemic, targeted, and sustained road safety programmes and identifies relevant investment priorities to reverse the trend.

India has one of the highest rates of road crashes in the world. Every year, about 150,000 people lose their lives on India's roads, and more than five times that number are injured or maimed for life, the report said. The national highways alone claim one life a year for every two kilometers. This is ten times higher than the developed country threshold. Road crashes also impact economic growth, costing the economy between 3 to 5 per cent of GDP a year, it said.

4. Virgin Group reaches out to Nitin Gadkari for hyperloop train

Richard Branson-owned Virgin Group has reached out to transport minister Nitin Gadkari with a proposal to establish a hyperloop transportation system between New Delhi and Mumbai, after the Maharashtra government decided to shelve the company's proposed project in the state last month. Hyperloop uses magnets to levitate pods inside an airless tube, creating conditions in which the pods can shuttle people and freight at speeds of up to 1,200 km per hour.

5. Moody's cuts India's GDP growth forecast for 2020 to 5.4% from earlier 6.6%

Moody's Investors Service has slashed India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth forecast for 2020 to 5.4 per cent. It had earlier predicted a GDP growth of 6.6 per cent. Moody's has also cut the 2021 GDP growth from 6.7 per cent to 5.8 per cent.

Moody's said that the weakness in global economy due to the impact of the novel coronavirus outbreak could hurt India's recovery. It added that any recovery in the country may be lower than expected.

6. Promoting handicrafts artisans, MSMEs will help achieve \$5 trillion economy

Prime Minister said government will keep taking decisions to achieve the goal of a \$5 trillion economy. Facilitating & strengthening traditional handicrafts workers, artisans, and MSMEs will help in achieving the goal. PM participated in 'Kashi Ek Roop Anek' program organized at Deendayal Upadhyay Trade Facilitation Center in Varanasi. The country will benefit from the products of UP reaching abroad and online markets of the world.

7. Google to shut down free WiFi at railway stations in India

Tech giant Google has decided to wind down its 'Station' programme globally through 2020, including in India, given that going online has become much easier and cheaper over the last five years. Google had launched 'Station' in India in 2015 in partnership with Indian Railways and Railtel to bring fast, free public WiFi to over 400 railway stations in the country by mid-2020.

Apart from India, Station is available in Nigeria, Thailand, Philippines, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil and South Africa.

Under its Next Billion Users initiative, Google has built lite apps (YouTube Go, Google Go and more), offline features (such as YouTube and Maps Offline), as well as country-specific products like Tez (now Google Pay India) and platforms like Android Go to bring lower-cost devices to customers.

8. India's Navy to Receive First of Four P-8I Neptune Maritime Patrol Aircraft in April

The Indian Navy is expected to begin inducting a second batch of Boeing P-8I Neptune advanced maritime patrol/anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft this April. In 2016, the Indian Ministry of Defense (MoD) placed a \$1.1 billion follow-on order for four additional P-8Is with deliveries set to begin in the first quarter of 2020. Based on the contract, the first of the four aircraft will be delivered in mid-2020 and the remaining three in 2021. In early 2009, the Indian government and Boeing concluded a \$2.1 billion deal for the purchase of eight P-8I aircraft becoming the first international customer of an export variant of the U.S.-made maritime patrol aircraft.

The Indian Navy's first P-8I squadron (Indian Naval Air Squadron 312A) was stood up at a naval base in Rajali in November 2015. The Indian Navy operates its entire fleet of eight P-8I maritime patrol aircraft from Rajali.

The P-8I, a variant of the Boeing P-8A Poseidon, is considered to be one of the most advanced maritime patrol aircraft currently in service around the globe. The P-8I is equipped with some of the most modern U.S. anti-submarine warfare (ASW) technology including a Telephonics APS-143 OceanEye aft radar system and a cutting-edge magnetic anomaly detector. The APS-143 is not present on the original P-8A Poseidon in use by the U.S. Navy.

The aircraft is also armed with U.S. weapons systems including Harpoon Block-II missiles, MK-54 lightweight torpedoes, rockets, and Mark 82 depth charges. The aircraft are all data-linked with Indian submarines in order to have the capability to pass on information about enemy vessels.

The Indian MoD decided against procuring Mark 82 depth charges for ASW operations and instead to rely on the ASW capabilities of the MK-54 torpedoes and Harpoon Block-II missiles.

In June 2017, Boeing was awarded a three-year contract to continue its support of the Indian Navy's P-8I fleet. In April 2019, the Indian and U.S. navies conducted their first bilateral anti-submarine warfare exercise since the signing of a Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in September 2018 that enables closer interoperation between U.S. and Indian military platforms including the P-8I and P-8A fleets of the Indian and U.S. navies.

COMCASA now allows P-8I and P-8A aircraft to share real-time operational intelligence, including a secure Common Tactical Picture.

Last June, the Indian MoD approved the procurement of 10 more P-8Is. Notably, the U.S. Navy is moving forward with plans to integrate the Lockheed Martin AGM-158C Long Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM) on the P-8A, according to Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR).

9. Microsoft opens new engineering and innovation hub in Noida

To further tap engineering talent in India, Microsoft announced the launch of its third India Development Centre (IDC) in Noida, after opening two such premier engineering and innovation hubs in Bengaluru and Hyderabad. The IDC-NCR will open opportunities for thousands of engineers, said the company, with plans to expand to a full-fledged development centre similar to the other two facilities.

The IDC-NCR will be home to Microsoft's engineering teams across various technology groups, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and research group, Cloud and enterprise group and experience and devices Group, along with core services engineering and operations.

It will also house "Mixer", Microsoft's live-streaming gaming platform team, thus becoming the first centre to host the gaming team outside the company headquarters in Redmond, Washington State.

10. Uber, Delhi Police partner for safety of passengers

Passengers hiring Uber cabs from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport can now send a direct alert to the taxi aggregator and Delhi Police at the same time if they want to report a problem during their travel. To start with, 1,000 Uber cabs found frequenting the airport have been enabled with this feature.

11. Airtel, Vodafone Idea and Reliance Jio Oppose Trai's Decision to Publish User Specific Tariff Plans

The three private telecom operators- Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea are against the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) on publishing user-specific tariff plans. For the unaware, both Airtel and Vodafone Idea offer a lot of user-specific plans to keep them not leaving the network. All the three telcos expressed that the publication of offers which are available only for few users or the offers which were withdrawn will create a lot of confusion among the users. The confusion may also result in a large number of consumer complaints. The Trai always urged telcos to maintain transparency in the sector. As part of the same, it ordered telecom operators to publish all the tariff plans, including the limited period offers and the plans which are available only to select customers. But telcos have now come together and expressed their concerns over this order from Trai. The current leading telecom operator, Reliance Jio, in a letter submitted to Trai said the publication of the offers could create confusion, which will ultimately lead to an increase in consumer complaints.

12. RBI unveils 5-yr financial inclusion strategy

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come up with a National Strategy for Financial Inclusion 2019-24, aimed at providing access to formal financial services in an affordable manner. It aims to promote financial literacy among customers. The Financial Inclusion Advisory Committee of the RBI — in consultation with the Centre, Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority of India (PFRDA) — has recommended various ways in which the objective can be fulfilled. The committee has recommended universal access to financial services wherein every village should have access to a formal financial services provider within a 5-km radius. Customers may be onboarded through an easy and hassle-free digital process. This includes increasing banking outlets of commercial banks. Further, digital financial services have to be strengthened in all tier-II to tier-VI centres to facilitate a less-cash society by March 2022.

The plan aims to provide basic financial services — savings account, credit, micro-life and non-life insurance products, pension product, and a suitable investment product — to every eligible adult. To achieve this, every adult enrolled under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna should be enrolled under an insurance scheme and pension scheme by March. Further, the public credit registry has to be made fully operational by March 2022 so that authorised financial entities can leverage the same for assessing credit proposals.

Under the national strategy, the committee has recommended new entrants to the financial system — eligible and willing to undergo any livelihood/skill development programme — may be given the relevant information regarding government livelihood programmes to help them augment their skills.

The committee has said customers have to be made aware of the recourses available for grievance resolution. Adequate safeguards also need to be ensured to store and share customers' biometric and demographic data, so that their Right to Privacy is protected.

Therefore, it has been recommended to devise a customer grievance portal or mobile application that will act as a common interface for lodging, tracking, and redressal of grievances pertaining to the financial sector, collectively by all stakeholders, by March 2021. It has also been advised that there should be co-ordination between all stakeholders.

13. GMR Group to sell 49% stake in airport business to France's Groupe ADP

GMR Group has signed an agreement with Groupe ADP of France to sell a 49 per cent stake in its airport-holding company. The group will raise Rs 10, 780 crore from the deal, which will help it pare debt. The deal values GMR Airports at Rs 22,000 crore.

GMR had in March 2019 signed a definitive agreement with a Tata group-led consortium to sell 44 per cent in the company. In January this year, it decided to divest a 49 per cent stake. But despite getting clearance from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the deal faced hurdles because it violated a clause that prevents airline groups from holding more than a 10 per cent stake in Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL). The Tatas hold a majority stake in Vistara and AirAsia India. GMR holds 64 per cent stake in DIAL. The new deal will give a fresh lease of life to GMR Group's debt-restructuring plan, which was held up due to the regulatory hurdle for the Tata deal. GMR Infra has a debt of Rs 25,660 crore in its books.

14. Gujarat govt partners with SBI to facilitate MSME loans

The Gujarat government signed an MoU with State Bank of India (SBI) to facilitate approval of loans to entrepreneurs in the MSME sector with ease and within a short time-frame. As per the MoU, the top public sector lender will provide working capital to entrepreneurs seeking to start new micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) within a short time -frame after providing theoretical approval within 15 days of making an application, the government said in a release here.

Within 15 days of making an application, the bank will provide theoretical approval to the project. Start-ups can submit an application on either the MSME portal or to the local nodal agencies.

15. Karaikal LNG terminal to start operations by Q4 2021

LNG logistics company AG&P said it will commission an LNG import facility at Karaikal in Puducherry by the fourth quarter of 2021. The Karaikal LNG import facility is expected to commence commercial operations by Q4 2021. Owned and operated by AG&P, the LNG terminal is being built on a 12-hectare site within the Karaikal Port, which enjoys the only deep-water access on the East Coast. Karaikal LNG, which will have an initial capacity of 1 million tonne per annum, will include a floating storage unit (FSU) leased through a long-term charter agreement with ADNOC Logistics and Services (ADNOC L&S) from 2021, providing an efficient solution that will enable the supply of this clean fuel to be affordable. AG&P develops and builds LNG import terminals in nascent and growing markets around the world. These facilities encourage the development of a downstream gas value chain and unlock latent demand. At Karaikal LNG, AG&P has developed a flexible configuration combining floating storage and onshore facilities, such as truck-loading.

16. Centre releases Rs 19,950 crore as GST compensation to states and UTs

The Centre has released Rs 19,950 crore as goods and services tax (GST) compensation to states and Union Territories for October. Generally, the Union government releases compensation for two months and this is the first time it has given compensation for only one month.

Compensation was given on February 17, almost a month ahead of the GST Council meeting, slated for March 14. States have been complaining about the delay in release of compensation.

17. GMR Group to sell 49% stake in airport business to France's Groupe ADP

GMR Group has signed an agreement with Groupe ADP of France to sell a 49 per cent stake in its airport-holding company. The group will raise Rs 10,780 crore from the deal, which will help it pare debt. The deal values GMR Airports at Rs 22,000 crore. GMR had in March 2019 signed a definitive agreement with a Tata group-led consortium to sell 44 per cent in the company. In January this year, it decided to divest a 49 per cent stake. But despite getting clearance from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the deal faced hurdles because it violated a clause that prevents airline groups from holding more than a 10 per cent stake in Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL). The Tatas hold a majority stake in Vistara and AirAsia India. GMR holds 64 per cent stake in DIAL. The new deal will give a fresh lease of life to GMR Group's debt-restructuring plan, which was held up due to the regulatory hurdle for the Tata deal. GMR Infra has a debt of Rs 25,660 crore in its books.

18. Rupee ranks among top 5 EM currencies

Even though the rupee lost 0.37% against the dollar in 2020, it still ranks among the top five best performing emerging market currencies. The Mexican peso has taken the top slot, gaining 1.2% against the greenback, while the Brazilian real lost more than 8% being the worst performing unit. The rupee's relative outperformance is likely to have given the RBI good opportunity to shore up record dollar reserves.

19. Govt approves merger of Indus Towers with Bharti Infratel: Report

The Department of Telecom (DoT) approved the merger of the country's largest mobile tower company Indus Towers with Bharti Infratel. The combination of Bharti Infratel and Indus Towers will create a pan-India tower company with over 163,000 towers, operating across all 22 telecom service areas. The combined entity will be the largest tower company in the world outside China. Bharti Infratel and Vodafone hold 42 per cent stake each in Indus. Vodafone Idea holds 11.15 per cent stake in the mobile tower firm. As per the plans, the combined company, which would fully own the respective businesses of Bharti Infratel and Indus Towers, would change its name to Indus Towers Ltd and will continue to be listed on Indian stock exchanges. The timely completion of the tower deal is critical for the companies, as it would allow Bharti and Vodafone Idea in offloading stake and raising funds. In April 2018, Bharti Airtel, Idea Cellular, and Vodafone Group had announced an agreement for the merger of Indus Towers and Bharti Infratel to create the largest mobile tower operator in the world outside China. Vodafone was to be issued 783.1 million new shares in the merged entity in exchange for its 42 per cent stake in Indus Towers, and this could take its holding to 29.4 per cent in the new company, depending on the options finally taken by Idea and Providence. Similarly, Airtel's stake in the new combined tower behemoth was to be diluted to 37.2 per cent in the combined entity, from 53.5 per cent it currently holds in Bharti Infratel. The transaction at the time of the deal announcement valued Indus Towers at an enterprise value of Rs 71,500 crore.

20. 'Vivad se Vishwas' scheme: Cases in arbitration abroad eligible, says I-T dept

Income tax cases being arbitrated abroad will be eligible to be taken up under the proposed 'Vivad se Vishwas' scheme to settle disputes between the taxman and the taxpayer. It spells out the main features of the scheme proposed by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech on February 1, like the eligibility, disputes covered and payment terms. Under the eligibility head, the department said appeals and writs filed on or before January 31 this year will be allowed to be taken up under the scheme.

Other eligibilities are: Orders for which time for filing appeal has not expired on January 31; cases pending before dispute resolution panel (DRP) or where the DRP issued direction on or before January 31, 2020 but no order has been passed; cases where assessee filed revision and in raid cases where disputed tax is less than Rs 5 crore in a year.

Disputes where the payment has already been made shall also be eligible; appeals or writs filed by taxpayers or the department and cases in arbitration in India or abroad. The scheme will cover all disputes related to tax, penalty, interest, fee, tax deducted at source (TDS) or tax collected at source (TCS). For remittances made on or before March 31, 100 per cent of the disputed tax is to be paid (125 per cent in search cases) and if appeal relates only to disputed penalty or interest or fee then 25 per cent of the disputed penalty or interest or fee is to be paid. If the payment is made beyond March 31 but by the end date of the scheme on June 30, then 110 per cent of disputed tax is to be paid (135 per cent in search cases) such that it does not increase total demand. If the case relates to appeal only on disputed penalty or interest or fee then 25 per cent of the disputed penalty or interest or fee is to be paid under the scheme by March 31. This amount will be 30 per cent if payment is made beyond after March, 31 but before June, 30. If an issue in taxpayer's pending appeal is already decided in his favour by appellate forum or if department has filed appeal on an issue, amount payable is 50 per cent of aforesaid amounts.

21. India, Maldives discuss issues of mutual interest in the area of security and law enforcement cooperation

India and Maldives discussed issues of mutual interest in the area of security and law enforcement cooperation. Home Minister Amit Shah held a meeting with his Maldivian counterpart Sheikh Imran Abdulla who called on him in New Delhi.

22. India successfully test-fires K-4 Ballistic Missile

India has successfully fired 3500 kilometer strike range nuclear capable submarine launched K-4 ballistic missile off coast in Andhra Pradesh. The missile under development by DRDO will be equipped on indigenous INS Arihant class nuclear powered submarines of Navy. The missile test-firing to a range of around 1,500 km was carried out from an underwater platform in the sea early in the morning today, sources said. The nuclear triad includes capability to launch nuclear weapons from air, surface and underwater platforms and the submarine launched capability is considered to be the strongest and best for the task.

The missile is being developed for being deployed on the fleet of the Arihant Class nuclear submarines being built by India. India is expected to carry out more tests of the missile before it is ready for being equipped on the nuclear submarines. At the moment, only the first nuclear boat INS Arihant is operational for the Navy.

K-4 is one of the two underwater missiles that were being developed by DRDO. The other one is the over 700 kilometre strike range BO-5 missile. Notice to Airmen and marine warnings for long range missile test were already issued by India for the planned test firings.

According to media reports, Government sources had earlier clarified that the test of k-4 would be done from an underwater pontoon as the missile was being tested and launch from a submarine would be done once it is ready for development.

23. Centre approves Rs 2379 crore for construction of Z-Morh tunnel in J&K

The govt entered into an agreement for construction of 6.5 kms long Z-Morh tunnel on Srinagar-Leh National Highway at the cost of Rs 2378.76 crore which will be completed in 3.5 years. Z-Morh Tunnel would provide all-weather road connectivity to Sonamarg tourist spot in Jammu and Kashmir which mostly remains closed during the winters due to heavy snowfall in Gagenger area.

People in News

1. Radhakishan Damani becomes India's 2nd richest person

Radhakishan Damani, founder of retailer Avenue Supermarts, has become India's second-richest person with a networth of \$17.8 billion, next only to his Altamount Road neighbour Mukesh Ambani, who heads the leader-board for the uber-rich not just in the country but in the Asian continent.

Veteran Mumbai investor Radhakishan Damani became India's retail king after the March 2017 IPO of his supermarket chain DMart.

Damani got into retailing in 2002 with one store in suburban Mumbai and has been unstoppable since.

Damani also holds stakes in a range of companies, from tobacco firm VST industries to beer maker United Breweries.

His property portfolio includes the 156-room Radisson Blu Resort in Alibag, a popular beach-front getaway close to Mumbai.

2. Sunil reaches second successive final at Asian Wrestling

India's Sunil Kumar reached the final of the 87kg category with a brilliant come-from-behind victory over Azamat Kustubayev at the Asian Wrestling Championships. Kumar was down 1-8 in his semi-final bout against his Kazakh opponent but made a great comeback, winning 11 points on the trot to finish the bout at 12-8.

3. Afghanistan presidential election: Ashraf Ghani re-elected

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani has been declared the winner of last September's election following delays due to allegations of vote-rigging. Mr Ghani was re-elected with 50.64% of the vote. But his main rival Abdullah Abdullah, who came second with 39.52%, contested the result, declared victory, and vowed to form his own parallel government.

4. Mahant Nriyha Gopal Das elected as President of Ram Mandir Trust

Nripendra Misra, former principal secretary of Prime Minister Modi has been elected as the head of the temple construction committee. Champat Rai was appointed as the general secretary. The trust has been mandated by the Central Government to complete the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya.

The 15-member trust was formed in adherence to the Supreme Court verdict on the Ayodhya dispute in November last year.

Rankings

1. Delhi's IGI Airport becomes first single-use plastic-free airport of India

GMR-led Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said that Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport has become free of single-use plastic usage. The Confederation of Indian Industry-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development (CII-ITC CESD) that supports the business community towards achieving sustainability has certified DIAL for its successful voluntary implementation of single-use plastic-free airport measures within IGI Airport's operations.

In September 2018, following the World Environment Day theme of 'Beat Plastic Pollution,' Delhi Airport was the first Indian airport to make 'single-use plastic-free' commitment in 2019. With the use of eco-friendly sustainable alternatives, it has significantly reduced its plastic waste generation. Some plastic items that are exempt from the list of banned items include security tamper-evident bags, sealed PET bottles, pre-packaged materials from manufacturers meant for sale and compostable plastic bags. Delhi Airport is a leading Indian airport both in passenger and cargo capabilities with annual traffic of 68.5 million passengers per annum in 2019.

Sports News

1. Sachin Tendulkar wins Laureus Sporting Moment award for 2011 World Cup triumph

Sachin Tendulkar being lifted on the shoulders of his teammates after their World Cup triumph at home in 2011 was voted the Laureus best sporting moment in the last 20 years.

With the backing of Indian cricket fans, Tendulkar got the maximum number of votes to emerge winner. Tendulkar, competing in his sixth and last World Cup, finally realised his long-term dream when skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni smacked Sri Lankan pacer Nuwan Kulasekara out of the park for a winning six. The charged-up Indian cricketers rushed to the ground and soon they lifted Tendulkar on their shoulders and made a lap of honour, a moment etched in the minds of the fans.

2. Koneru Humpy wins Cairns Cup title, reclaims 2nd spot in chess world ranking

World rapid champion Koneru Humpy claimed her second title in the last two months by emerging triumphant at the Cairns Cup chess tournament following a draw against compatriot Dronavalli Harika in the ninth and final round. Humpy, who was crowned world champion in the last week of December 2019, finished the tournament with 6 points. The icing on the cake is that Humpy would be gaining five ELO rating points (the basis for international rankings) and moving to no.2 in the world list.

World champion Wenjun Ju finished second with 5.5 points after winning her final round game against Russia's Alexandra Kosteniuk (5 points). Kosteniuk ended fourth in the tournament.

3. India to host 16-team FIH Junior Men's World Cup 2021

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) announced India as the hosts for the FIH Junior Men's World Cup 2021. The international governing body also announced that the competition will be played towards the end of 2021. The competition, which features the best young U-21 level talent from across the world, will again be heading to India, which won accolades from around the world for hosting one of the best FIH Senior Men's Hockey World Cups in 2018 held at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium, Bhubaneswar. The International Hockey Federation (FIH) has also announced that the venue and dates for the FIH Junior Men's World Cup 2021 will be announced at a later stage.

4. Host cities announced for 2020 Fifa U17 World Cup in India

Five cities in India have been selected to host the 32 matches of this year's Fifa U17 Women's World Cup, taking place November 2 to 21. Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, Kolkata and Navi Mumbai are the five host cities. Navi Mumbai will host the final. Key dates in the tournament schedule were announced. The opening match will take place on November 2, the quarter-finals on November 12 and 13, the semi-finals on November 17, and the third/fourth-place playoff and final on November 21. The tournament's official slogan – "Kick Off The Dream" – was also unveiled. India hosted the men's Fifa U17 World Cup in 2017.

t opportunities in an integrated and timebound manner.