

CURRENT AFFAIRS SNIPPETS : APRIL 2017

STATE

Uttar Pradesh cancels 15 government holidays

Uttar Pradesh state government has cancelled 15 public holidays marking the birth or death anniversaries of eminent personalities. Alternatively, on these days, the school and college students would be taught about these public figures through various programmes.

Out of the 42 public holidays observed by the state, 17 pertained to birth anniversaries. The move was taken at the backdrop of increasing concern over the shrinking academic session due to increased holidays. It is held that in the state 220-day academic session has been reduced to only 120 days due to the celebration of such holidays. The previously ruled Samajwadi Party had declared holidays on the anniversaries of the following personalities: Former PM Chandrashekhar (April 17), Maharishi Kashyap and Maharshi Nishadraj Jayanti (April 5), Hazrat Ajmeri Garib Nawaj Urs (April 26), Maharana Pratap Jayanti (May 9) and the death anniversary of Ambedkar (December 6).

Northeast India's largest IT hub opens in Tripura

Northeast India's sixth and largest Information Technology (IT) hub was inaugurated here on Monday to boost employment and e-governance besides to export software technology. Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, accompanied by IT and Education Minister Tapan Chakraborty and Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) Director General Omkar Rai inaugurated the IT hub, set up at a cost of Rs 50 crore.

The hub is expected to create more employment opportunities for the youths and extend the e-governance to cover all the people of the region. This would facilitate famous IT companies to set off their business and services and boost export of software technology. This will be the largest hub in the region. Last year, Tripura got an award for its performance in IT and e-governance from the central government. The state has already extended many e-governance based facilities and services up to the level of gram panchayats. The e-district scheme in the state helps

people in getting various certificates and documents from their concerned panchayats or blocks. It is estimated that the state's 80 percent of the state's 37 lakh population have begun to use mobile phones leading to an IT boom.

India's first sea ropeway to connect Mumbai and Elephanta Island

India's first and longest ropeway to connect Mumbai with the famous Elephanta Island in the Arabian Sea is planned to be constructed by the Mumbai Port Trust.

The 8-km ropeway will begin from Sewri in Mumbai's east coast and end at Raigad district's Elephanta Island, globally renowned for Elephanta Caves, a Unesco World Heritage site. Elephanta Island is a 16 sq. km island that has several archaeological remains famous for its cave sculptures. The 40-minute ride by a 20-seater cable car is expected to boost tourism as it offers a magnificent view of mudflats on the east coast especially during the flamingo season, the mangroves as well as the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link to the north. At present, the islands are accessible only by ferries from the mainland and takes around an hour for the 10-km cruise. Other details like the cable height and capacity of cars are being worked out.

Telangana passes bill to hike reservations for Muslims and STs

The Telangana legislature has passed the Telangana Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Bill, 2017, that seeks to raise substantially the reservation for backward Muslims and scheduled tribes.

Defending the Bill, Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao maintained that the move was not based on religion, but on social backwardness and quantifiable data on the composition of the population in the new state. The new legislation will increase the reservation for socially and educationally backward Muslims from the existing 4% to 12% and for Scheduled Tribes from 6% to 10% taking the total quotas in government jobs and educational institutions in the state much beyond

the 50 % ceiling set by the Supreme Court. The total quota in the state will now increase to 62%. The bill will now be sent for obtaining President's assent. Since the reservation goes beyond the 50% ceiling set by the Supreme Court, the state government wants the centre to include the bill in the 9th schedule of the Constitution which will preclude a judicial review. States like Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand already have reservations totalling more than 50 percent.

West Bengal's new Social Security Yojana combines 5 old beneficiary schemes

The State government of West Bengal has introduced the Social Security Yojana by combining five separate beneficiary schemes for workers in the unorganised sectors and for self-employed people. The decision was taken during a Cabinet meeting held on 17 April 2017. The meeting was led by the state's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The Yojana is expected to benefit around 5 Cr people, with around 1 Cr getting direct benefits.

The five earlier Social Security Yojana include: State Assistance Scheme for Provident Fund for Unorganised Sector. West Bengal Unorganised Sector Workers' Health Security Scheme. Social Security scheme for Construction Workers. West Bengal Transport Workers Social Security Scheme. West Bengal Bidi Workers Welfare Scheme. The Trinamool Congress-led state government has spent around Rs 880 Cr between 2011 and 2016 to bring more than 85 lakh people under the schemes. According to the state's Finance Minister, Amit Mitra, workers from over 46 unorganised sectors including bidi workers, book-binding workers, motor mechanics, boatmen and ICDS workers, as well as self-employed people from 15 sectors including the jewellery manufacturing sector, will stand to benefit from the all-encompassing new scheme.

Kerala government allocates sum for former circus artists

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) led coalition in Kerala, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) has decided to provide pension to former circus artists in the state. The decision was taken up after a group of circus artists met Kerala's Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan while he was visiting the state's Kannur district and conveyed their plight to him.

The government has allocated a sum of Rs 1.13 Cr for the same. Thalassery in Kannur district is considered to be the cradle of Indian circus. Earlier in February 2017, the Society for Promotion of Art and Circus had submitted a memorandum to the Member of Parliament from Kozhikode, M.K. Raghavan, seeking pension for circus artistes all across the country. Kerala was previously giving a nominal pension of Rs 1200 to all circus artistes who had a ration card and had been working in the State for at least 30 years. However, this pension was available only to those working in the State. Hence, this new decision will definitely address some of the grievances of the circus artists.

Jharkhand police initiates Taare Zameen Par programme for underprivileged children

Jharkhand Police has initiated Tare Zameen Par programme to enlighten children in Naxal-affected areas in the Palamau district of Jharkhand. This programme is aimed to restore confidence in the state police force and to encourage children to lead happy lives. As a part of the programme, the state police appealed the locals to donate bags, shoes, books and clothes to improve the basic amenities of the children in the Naxal-affected areas.

NATIONAL

Ganga Swachhta Sankalp Diva to be celebrated on May 2 2017

May 2, 2017 will be observed as Ganga Swachhta Sankalp Divas by National Mission on Clean Ganga (NMCG) at 12 locations, namely, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Bhagalpur, Sahibganj, Kolkata, Raj Ghat (Hardoi), Bithoor, Srinagar (Uttarakhand), Vidhur Kuti (Bijnor) and Devprayag. Apart from these locations, with the help of Ganga Vichaar Manch, local NGOs and volunteer support, the event is slated to be organized at more than 30 other locations. The objective of the event is to spread awareness and promote active involvement of the masses in Swachh Ganga. The event envisages developing a sense of pride and ownership among masses and to actively support for Namami Gange programme.

In March 2017, NMCG observed 16 days long 'Ganga Swachhta Pakhwada' along with five Ganga Basin States. The event emerged as a mass movement with

the participation of various stakeholders. NMCG is organizing 'Ganga Swachhta Sankalp Divas' by considering the overwhelming success with active participation of various communities in the pakhwada.

Union government launches MSEFC portal and MyMSME mobile App

Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Union Minister for Urban Development, Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation and Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting launched two important initiatives of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Ministry of MSME), viz. Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Council (MSEFC) portal and MyMSME Mobile App on the occasion of the 15th Meeting of the National Board for MSME here today. Union Minister for MSME Shri Kalraj Mishra and Minister of State for MSME Shri Haribhai Parthibhai Chaudhary were present on this occasion.

Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Council (MSEFC) portal on <http://msefc.msme.gov.in>, would facilitate implementation of the delayed payment provisions of the MSMED Act 2006 and also assist in monitoring of delayed payment cases. This online platform is expected to be a significant step in the direction of Digital India from the perspective of the MSME Sector in the country. The MyMSME mobile app on <http://my.msme.gov.in>, provides information on all schemes implemented by the Ministry of MSME at one place. With the help of MyMSME mobile app Ministry of MSME would be providing one single window to MSMEs to access information on all schemes implemented by the Ministry and as well as apply for any of them. And MSMEs can also lodge grievances pertaining to Ministry of MSME through this app.

PM Narendra Modi launched UDAN scheme

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday flagged off the maiden flight between Shimla and New Delhi under government's UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) scheme, an endeavour to make regional connectivity easy.

The UDAN scheme aims to stimulate regional connectivity with flights covering distances up to 800 km through a market-based mechanism. 43 cities are expected to be mainstreamed on India's flight con-

nectivity grid. A dozen airports where limited but irregular flights operate will be connected. As many as 31 destinations that are not operational despite the existence of airports will become active. Five airlines — Alliance Air, SpiceJet, Turbo Megha, Air Odisha and Air Deccan — were awarded 128 routes under the scheme after a bidding process. The government aims at making flying affordable by capping fares at Rs. 2500 per seat per hour. Airfare for a 1-hour journey of approximately 500 km on a fixed wing aircraft or for 30 minute journey on a helicopter would be capped at Rs. 2,500. The scheme is a component of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) which was released on June 15, 2016.

Union government takes 10 new Swachh Iconic places under Swachh Bharat Mission

The government has announced the names of ten new Iconic places under the Phase II of Swachh Iconic Places initiative. Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) is an initiative of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission.

The ten new iconic places that will be undertaken in Phase II of Swachh Iconic Places initiative are: Gangotri, Yamunotri, Mahakaleshwar Temple (Ujjain), Char Minar (Hyderabad), Church and Convent of St. Francis of Assisi (Goa), Adi Shankaracharya's abode Kaladi in Ernakulam, Gomateshwar in Shravanbelgola, Baijnath Dham (Devghar), Gaya Tirth (Bihar) and Somnath temple in Gujarat. The ten Iconic places that are already under implementation in Phase I are: Ajmer Sharif Dargah, CST Mumbai, Golden Temple (Amritsar), Kamakhya Temple (Assam), Maikarnika Ghat (Varanasi), Meenakshi Temple (Madurai) Shri Mata Vaishno Devi (Katra, J&K), Shree Jagannath Temple (Puri), The Taj Mahal (Agra), Tirupati Temple (Tirumala). The aim of this initiative is to make these places intensely clean and transform them as model 'Swachh Tourist Destinations', that will enhance the experience of visitors from India and abroad. Under the Swachh Bharat Mission, a special clean-up initiative will be carried out on 100 iconic heritage, spiritual and cultural places in the country.

Union Cabinet decides to ban use of red beacon by VIPs from May 1

The Union Cabinet has put a ban on the use of red beacons atop cars of VIPs. Only three categories were exempted from the ban. They are the President, Vice-

President and Chief Justice of India. The exemption also applies to the emergency service vehicles. Accordingly, fire brigade, ambulance services, police vehicles and other emergency services will be allowed to use the blue beacon. The decision will come into force from May 1, 2017. In effect, the ban is applicable to the prime minister, union ministers, chief ministers, state cabinet ministers, bureaucrats and judges of the High Court and Supreme Court. The decision was taken to end VIP culture.

As per the existing practice, a red light beacon can be used atop of vehicles of high dignitaries specified by the Central and State government. As per the notification issued by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways in 2005, the following dignitaries were eligible to use red light with a flasher. They are the President, Vice-President, Prime Minister, Former President, Deputy Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Cabinet Ministers of the Union, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Former Prime Ministers, Leaders of Oppositions in the Rajya Sabha & Lok Sabha, Judges of the Supreme Court. As per the present decision, neither the state nor the central government can nominate any members to use the red beacon.

Vistadome glass-ceiling coach launched by Indian Railways

Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu has flagged off Visakhapatnam-Kirandul passenger train with first of its kind, see-through, vistadome coaches through a video link from Bhubaneswar. The Vistadome air-conditioned coach is a first-of-its-kind on Indian Railways that has been introduced with an aim to promote tourism. The 40 seat coach has been built by the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu at a cost of INR 3.38 crore. At present only one coach has been attached to the train on trial basis.

The specially-designed Vistadome air-conditioned coach, claimed to be a first-of-its-kind on Indian Railways, has large glass windows and an observation lounge that offer passengers a panoramic view of the sites along the 128-km rail route from Visakhapatnam to Araku valley hill station.

A unique feature of this Rs 3.38 crore 40-seat coach is the double-wide reclining passenger seats that could be rotated 360 degrees for a better sightseeing experience. A similar coach would later be introduced on a route in northeast as well, he said.

Government covers 14 SC, ST, OBC and DNT scholarship schemes under Digital Payments

The Government has stated that 14 scholarship schemes for Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)/Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes (DNTs) students come under Digital Payments Initiatives.

All scholarship amount are released to students' bank account and there is 60% Aadhaar seeding in SC student bank account, stated social justice minister Thaawarchand Gehlot. He stated that 14 scholarship schemes for Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes (DNTs) students covering 3.54 crore students are under digital payment.

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment implements seven different types of scholarships, which include: Post and Pre-Matric Scholarships; Top Class Scholarship; National Overseas Scholarships; National Fellowship for Scheduled Castes administered by the UGC; Pre-Matric Scholarship for Children of those engaged in unclean occupations; Free Coaching for Scheduled Castes and OBCs (70: 30 ratio); and Upgradation of merit. The Government of India believes that Education for all is the key to empowerment. Nearly 54 % of Budget of the M/o SJ&E is incurred on scholarships for Scheduled castes.

Prime Minister launches BHIM-Aadhaar platform

Prime Minister has launched BHIM-Aadhaar platform from Nagpur. BHIM-Aadhaar platform is the merchant interface of the BHIM App that has been launched for making digital payments using the Aadhaar platform. BHIM App was launched in December 2016 to provide a one-stop solution for all digital payments. The App created a new world record by registering 1.9 crore downloads within four months since its launch.

The newly launched BHIM-Aadhaar platform will help people to pay digitally using their biometric data like thumb imprint on a merchant's biometric enabled device like a smart phone or a biometric reader. The App needs to be installed only by merchants and they need to connect their smartphones to the biometric scan machine to accept the payments from customers. Prime Minister has also launched two new offers rewarding BHIM users. Both the schemes will be administered by Ministry of Electronics and

Information Technology (MeitY) and implemented by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

BHIM – Referral Bonus Scheme: Under this scheme, both the existing BHIM users and the new users will get a cash bonus credited directly to their account. This scheme incentivizes the existing BHIM users to refer new users to BHIM. Upon completion of minimum 3 unique successful transactions amounting to Rs 50 to any 3 unique users, the bonus will be paid to both the referrer and the referee. **BHIM – Cash back Scheme:** Under this scheme, merchants will get cash back on every transaction using BHIM. The merchants can get cashback of up to Rs 300 per month, with each merchant eligible to win up to Rs 1800 in 6 months.

Government to launch SAMPADA scheme for food processing

The government will soon launch an umbrella programme ‘SAMPADA’ for food processing sector with Rs 6,000 crore outlay to integrate current and new schemes aimed at reducing food wastage and doubling farmers’ income. Announcing this, Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal said her ministry would soon approach the Cabinet for the approval of ‘Scheme for Agro-Marine Produce Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters (SAMPADA).’

To create infrastructure for improving the entire food supply chain, three schemes— ‘Creation/ Expansion of Food Processing and Preservation Capacities’, ‘New Agro-Processing Clusters’ and ‘Backward and Forward Linkages’ are on anvil. The Centre has so far sanctioned 42 mega food parks and 234 cold chain projects with 139 lakh tonnes of preserving and processing capacity of agro-produce worth Rs 35,000 crore. The post-harvest losses is estimated at Rs 92,000 crore annually, she said, adding that these food parks and cold chains would help in cutting this wastage. These projects, being set up with a total investment of about Rs 15,000 crore, will also generate employment for 3.5 lakh persons and benefit 15 lakh farmers. Last month, food processing ministry sanctioned 101 new cold chain projects being set up by firms like Big Basket, Amul and Haldiram entailing Rs. 3,100 crore in investments. The ministry’s grant-in-aid for these projects will be Rs. 838 crore, while the remaining over Rs. 2,200 crore will come from the private sector.

India ranks 40 in WEF’s 2017 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index

India was ranked 40th among the 136 economies across the world in 2017 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) released by the World Economic Forum (WEF). In this edition of index, India has jumped 12 places from earlier 52nd position in 2015. But it lagged behind its other Asian peers like Japan (4th) and China (13th).

Top 10 Countries in 2017 TTCI: Spain (1st), France (2nd), Germany (3rd), (4th), the United Kingdom (5th), the United States (6th), Australia (7th), Italy (8th), Canada (9th) and Switzerland (10th). India continues to enrich its cultural resources, protecting more cultural sites and intangible expressions through UNESCO World Heritage lists, and via a greater digital presence. The index compiled by World Economic Forum (WEF) ranks 136 countries across 14 dimensions under sub-indexes. Globally, advanced economies still hold the top slots, 12 of the top 15 most improved countries are emerging markets.

INTERNATIONAL

Poland supports India’s Permanent membership at UNSC

Poland has assured its support for India’s bid for membership in the elite Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and a permanent seat in the expanded UN Security Council. This was stated during the visit of vice President Hamid Ansari to the Poland. Apart from discussing various bilateral and multilateral issues, the two countries also signed an agreement in the agriculture sector. It was also agreed upon that there exists scope to increase cooperation in railway, defence, mining, agriculture, civil aviation, as well as in areas like food processing, solar energy, clean coal, treatment of solid waste. Poland is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Also, the countries acknowledged the need for early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the UN.

India and Poland established diplomatic relations in 1954. The two countries share common ideology like opposition to colonialism, imperialism, and racism. Poland is India’s largest trade partner and export destination in the east European region. Investments made by India in Poland are around USD 3 billion

and Polish investments in India are around 600 million USD. India's major exports to Poland include tobacco, processed minerals, chemicals, rubber, plastic, machinery, drugs, transport equipment, and ready-made cotton garments etc.

Trump introduces biggest tax reform plan in US history

US President Donald Trump has introduced biggest tax reform plan in the history of United States. As per the proposals of the new plan, major cuts have been made in the income tax rate.

The income tax rates have been slashed from 39.6% to 35%. The new plan has also sharply slashed the business taxes. Steep discounts have been announced on corporate profits that are brought back into the US. The new plan proposes for a 15% corporate tax rate which is a sharp drop from the existing 35%. In addition, the new reforms aim to move to a territorial tax system that provides relief to both small and large businesses. It is also proposed to repeal the estate tax, the alternative minimum tax. In addition, tax relief will be provided to the families with child and dependent care expenses. Further, the number of tax brackets is expected to be brought down to three from seven.

First malaria vaccine to be tested in Kenya, Ghana and Malawi in 2018

The World Health Organization has announced that it is ready to test the first malaria vaccine in the real world setting in 2018. The aim of the testing will be to ascertain whether the vaccine will work under real world circumstances or not. Kenya, Ghana and Malawi have been chosen for taking part in the pilot project.

The vaccine, RTS, S, also known as Mosquirix, was produced by GlaxoSmithKline in 1987 in a public-private partnership with the PATH Malaria Initiative and with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2015, the vaccine received approval from the European Medicines Agency (EMA). For the next four years (2017-2021), the vaccine will be administered to children between 5 and 17 months in Kenya, Ghana and Malawi. The vaccine will be given four times and will be administered by an intramuscular injection. The RTS, S vaccine works by targeting the liver phase of the malaria parasite's life cycle as the parasite multiplies inside the liver after getting introduced into the body by a mosquito

bite. It has taken about 30 years for the creation of the vaccine to the approval of pilot programme in 2017. Only five species of Plasmodium parasite spread malarial parasite worldwide.

According to WHO, malaria kills one child every two minutes and has killed 429,000 people in 2015. According to the WHO World Malaria Report 2016, Nigeria suffers most malaria deaths worldwide (26%), followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo (10%), India (6%), and Mali (5%).

Australia abolishes 457 Visa Programme largely used by Indians

Australia has abolished the 457 Visa Programme used by thousands of temporary foreign workers, a majority of them Indians to address growing unemployment in that country. Instead, Australia wants to adopt 'Australians first' approach to skilled migration. Since access to the skills is important for the growth and investment of that country's businesses, it intends to replace the 457 visa programme by another visa programme, with new restrictions. The new temporary visa will be designed in such a way it will help in recruiting the best and brightest to fill critical skill gaps in the interest of that nation. The new visa will ensure that foreign workers are not brought into Australia just because it is easy for the employers to recruit a foreign worker than go to the trouble of hiring an Australian.

There are about 95,757 workers in Australia on primary 457 visa programme. Worryingly, the majority of the visa holders are from India followed by the UK and China. This announcement has come days after Prime Minister Turnbull visited India where a range of issues, including national security, counter-terrorism, education and energy, were discussed. Totally, six agreements were signed during his visit. The 457 visa allows Australian employers to employ foreign workers for a period up to four years in skilled jobs where there is a shortage of Australian workers.

G20 Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy held in Germany

The G20 Digital Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy was held in Dusseldorf, Germany. Ministers responsible for the digital economy from G20 countries had participated in it. It concluded with adaptation of declaration on 'Shaping Digitalisation for an Inter-connected World'.

It talks about the need for greater availability of affordable broadband connectivity, broader adoption of digital technologies and services improved digital skills and literacy, greater digital entrepreneurship for the digital economy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It includes three annex papers on 'Digital skills in vocational education and training', 'A Roadmap for Digitalisation: Policies for a Digital Future' and 'G20 Priorities on Digital Trade'. It calls for collaboration between the countries and all stakeholders, including academia and private sector and sharing of best practices forms. It calls for greater support for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) which might be constrained by their scale in adoption of digital technologies.

The Group of Twenty (G20) is the premier forum for its members' international economic cooperation and decision-making. It is deliberating forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies on economic issues and other important development challenges. It was started in 1999 as a meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in the aftermath of the Southeast Asian (Tiger economies) financial crisis.

Japan officially recognizes Bitcoin as currency

Japan has officially recognized bitcoin and digital currencies as legal money along the lines of other fiat currencies with effect from April 1, 2017. Bitcoin is a form of digital currency or virtual currency created and held electronically. No one controls it that is not regulated by any central bank or government. The recognition comes after implementation of a new law amending Banking Act in Japan for legalizing these currencies. It will help in integration of digital currency into legal banking system through regulatory scrutiny.

The recognition means regulations governing banks and financial institutions will be applicable to cryptocurrency and digital currencies exchange platforms. They will be also required to comply with strict Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements, along with annual audits. Other requirements include meeting the stated capital and cyber security requirements to ensure consumer protection. It also makes these digital currencies as "property of value," meaning that they can be used for payment in the broader marketplace and that it may be bought or sold.

BUSINESS

Paytm launches Digital Gold

On the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, Indian e-wallet giant, Paytm announced that it has collaborated with MMTC-PAMP to launch Digital Gold, enabling users to buy gold online and store it in MMTC-PAMP's vault free of charge.

This new service will enable users to request their gold to be delivered at their home in the form of minted coins.

The goal is to offer complete flexibility in deciding the amount they want to invest and enable consumers to develop a habit of saving regularly in digital gold for long-term wealth creation. We are confident that this solution will help millions of Indians to buy and sell 24K 999.9 pure gold with utmost confidence and security. As per World Gold Council estimates. Indians currently hold more than 24,000 tons of gold worth \$ 900 billion and Indian households bought more gold in 2016 than any other financial asset. The digital gold service will also allow users to sell purchased gold online anytime. Backed by Alibaba Group, Paytm currently have more than 218 million wallet users with 5 million merchants and claims to have touched 1.5 billion transactions in Financial Year 2017.

Myntra acqui-hired logistics start-up for an undisclosed amount

Flipkart-owned fashion retailer Myntra said that it has acqui-hired logistics start-up InLogg for an undisclosed amount, to strengthen and expand its supply chain capabilities. The deal referred to in start-up parlance as an 'acqui-hire,' is when a company acquires another firm to recruit its people.

The acquisition will see the InLogg team join Myntra. The Bengaluru-based firm was founded in 2015 by former-Flipkart employees Preeti Jain, Rajat Khanduja and Prateek Gautam. Myntra said that it would also acquire InLogg's technology platform that provides end to end logistics solutions for the e-commerce sector.

The acquisition will also allow the firm to leverage local and regional players to enhance its reach, reduce delivery time and develop a plug and play model which

can be scaled in the future. InLogg is Myntra's fourth technology-led acquisition. Earlier, it acquired Bengaluru-based tech ventures Cubeit and Native.

SBI becomes India's most valued public sector company

State Bank of India (SBI) surpassed Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to become the country's most valued state-owned company in terms of market valuation. At the end of trade on Tuesday, the market cap of SBI stood at Rs. 2,35,307.51 crore. That was about Rs. 2,961.79 crore more than that of state-run energy major ONGC's Rs. 2,32,345.72 crore.

ONGC once used to be the country's most-valued company in terms of market valuation. Among the top-10 most valued companies list, SBI is at the fifth position, while ONGC is seventh. State Bank of India shares ended the day with a mild gain of 0.17 per cent at Rs. 290.15, while ONGC fell 1.12 per cent to Rs. 181.05 on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). IT major Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is the most-valued Indian company with a market cap of Rs. 4,54,902.85 crore, followed by Reliance Industries Limited (Rs. 4,45,578.92 crore), HDFC Bank (Rs. 3,70,480.05 crore), ITC (Rs. 3,38,851.25 crore), State Bank of India, HDFC (Rs. 2,35,122.56 crore), ONGC, Infosys (Rs. 2,11,870.18 crore), Hindustan Unilever (Rs. 1,97,464.44 crore) and Maruti Suzuki India (Rs. 1,85,235.49 crore).

Aditya Birla Nuvo to be merged with Grasim industries

Kumar Mangalam Birla, chairman of Aditya Birla Group, announced the merger of Aditya Birla Nuvo (ABNL) with Grasim Industries to create an entity with Rs 60,000-crore annual revenue or about \$9 billion. This will be followed by the demerger of the financial services business into a separate listed company.

ABNL has interests in Aditya Birla Financial Services (ABFSL), telecom (Idea Cellular), textiles and fertilisers, along with new ventures such as payments banks and solar power through various entities. Its financial services business is seeing high growth and needs funding. Grasim, on the other hand, has presence in cement, chemicals and viscose-staple-fibre businesses. The new entity will have a mixture of mature and new-age businesses with steady cash flows. This is one of the primary objectives of the merger.

The other objective is to unlock the value of the financial services firm, which will now be separately listed. According to the scheme, shareholders of ABNL will get three new shares of Grasim for 10 shares in ABNL. After the merger, every share in the "new Grasim" will entitle seven shares in ABFSL, when it gets demerged.

Flipkart acquires eBay India business to fight Amazon

India's largest e-commerce firm Flipkart has raised \$1.4 billion led by China's internet giant Tencent, with participation from the online auction site eBay and Microsoft, valuing the Bengaluru-based company at \$11.6 billion, post the investment.

This marks the largest capital infusion for any privately-held Indian internet venture and surpasses the earlier high set by Flipkart itself when in July 2014 it picked up \$1 billion and set the stage for a funding boom in the local startup ecosystem. The latest financing round for Flipkart comes amid talks of the e-tailer's likely acquisition of its domestic rival the Softbank-backed Snapdeal, further consolidating the cash-guzzling e-commerce market. Flipkart's much-anticipated fund-raise has been in the making for months even as it faced a series of valuation mark-downs by its existing investors over the past year. The domestic e-commerce player was earlier valued at \$15.2 billion when it last raised \$700 million from existing investors in July 2015. TOI reported about Flipkart's latest fund raise in its March 16 edition. Post its acquisition, eBay India will be reporting to Flipkart's CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy, an ex-eBay executive who was handed over the baton at the online retail firm in January this year.

Nokia partners with Airtel and BSNL to bring 5G services in India

While Finnish giant Nokia is prepped up to make a comeback in the mobile space, it is also planning to roll-out 5G connectivity in India along with Bharti Airtel and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL). Nokia is also setting up an experience centre within its R&D center in Bengaluru to understand stakeholder requirements for 5G in India and push towards the adoption of the new technology in the country.

5G is expected to launch in developed countries by 2020 and by 2022, in India. While the penetration of 4G in the Indian market has been tepid, there is much

scepticism towards the adoption of 5G in India. Despite the pessimistic outlook, mobile companies, telecom operators and the Centre are working towards ensuring that India comes on board the 5G bandwagon in line with the world. According to Nokia, it will work with BSNL with an aim 'to accelerate the development of a 5G ecosystem'. Nokia and BSNL will reportedly be conducting joint 5G demonstrations across the country. According to the company, the combination of high speed and low latency in 5G raises a host of possibilities, such as remote healthcare, virtual reality, augmented reality, connected cars, and full automation of homes and businesses, among others. Nokia and BSNL will work towards finding an efficient and cost-effective path for network evolution to 5G for enhanced speed and capacity.

AWARDS

Bhubaneswar becomes first Indian city to win Pierre L'enfant Awards 2017

Bhubaneswar has become the first Indian city to win Pierre L'enfant International Planning excellence award-2017 instituted by the American Planning Association (APA). Bhubaneswar has been chosen for its good and advanced town planning and engaging its residents in the planning process. The APA Awards jury has selected Five Excellence Award recipients in total who will be honoured at the Awards Luncheon at APA's National Planning Conference in New York on May 8.

Pierre L'enfant was a French-born American architect and civil engineer. He is credited for designing the layout of the streets of Washington, D.C. The American Planning Association (APA) has named an award in his honour to recognize excellence in international planning. Pierre L'enfant was a French-born American architect and civil engineer. He is credited for designing the layout of the streets of Washington, D.C. The American Planning Association (APA) has named an award in his honour to recognize excellence in international planning.

GNFC wins golden Globe Tigers Award 2017

Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilisers and Chemicals Ltd (GNFC) has won the prestigious Golden Globe Tigers Award for Excellence and Leadership in CSR for the year 2017 in the category of 'E-Payment Leadership'.

GNFC has been awarded for the implementation of digital transactions in its township at Bharuch (Gujarat). Award was given to GNFC at Golden Globe Tigers Night 2017 held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event saw the participation of global CSR leaders from over 43 countries. This is the second award for GNFC in this category. It has already won the Golden Peacock Award for its cashless innovation.

Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilisers & Chemicals Limited is a state-owned manufacturer of fertilizers and Chemicals. It was founded in 1976. It emerged as the first fertiliser company in the country to adopt a cashless economy successfully. Golden Globe Tigers Award for Excellence and Leadership recognises leaders in marketing, branding CSR and social innovation, education and academic across leadership levels in an individual and organisation. It is considered as one of the highest award individuals and organizations can aspire to achieve.

Newton wins Jury Prize for Best Film at the Hong Kong International Film Festival

Hindi film *Newton* has won the Jury Prize for Best Film at the Hong Kong International Film Festival. Earlier, the film had its world premiere at Berlinale and got its first global recognition by winning the Art Cinema award for the Forum section at Berlinale. The film also went to 16th Annual Tribeca Film Festival. *Newton* is a political comedy film directed by Amit Masurkar. The story revolves around a clerk on election duty in a conflict-ridden region of Chhattisgarh. The movie was shot in the jungles of Chhattisgarh.

The Hong Kong International Film Festival was founded in 1976 and is Asia's oldest international film festival. Every year, it introduces Hong Kong, Chinese, Asian cinema and filmmakers to the world. It screens more than 250 titles from over 55 countries at each edition of the festival.

UNESCO's Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize 2017 announced

UNESCO has named Giuseppina Nicolini, Mayor of Lampedusa (Italy) and the non-governmental organisation SOS Méditerranée (France) as the winners of Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize 2017 "for their work to save the lives of refugees and migrants and welcome them with dignity".

In the past, Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize has

been granted to internationally renowned personalities like Nelson Mandela, Yasser Arafat, King Juan Carlos of Spain, former US president Jimmy Carter and Shimon Peres. For the first time, the award goes to a mayor. Giuseppina Nicolini is a 56-year-old mayor of a small Italian island since 2012. She has been selected for the award for “her boundless humanity and unwavering commitment to refugee crisis management”. As a mayor, Nicolini ensured that the Lampedusa deals as efficiently and humanely as possible with the migrants and refugees arriving from war-torn Middle Eastern countries by sea. Lampedusa is a small island which is roughly equidistant from Southern Sicily, Malta and Tunisia. UNESCO’s Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize was created in 1989 to honour living individuals and active public or private bodies or institutions that have made significant contribution to peace.

Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Tripura chosen for Krishi Karman Awards 2017

The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has selected Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Tripura for the Krishi Karman awards for their record performance in the production of food grains during 2015-16. Apart from these states, Meghalaya would get commendation prize for total food grain production and would be given a cash award of Rs 1 crore.

Tamil Nadu has been chosen in large category (production more than 10 million tonnes), Himachal Pradesh in medium category (1 to 10 million tonnes) and Tripura in small category (less than 1 million tonnes). Tamil Nadu had produced 130 lakh tonnes of foodgrains in 2015-16, which is the highest in the last five years. In terms of yield in foodgrains, the state managed to get a yield of 3.38 tonnes per hectare as against the all-India average of 2.028 tonnes per hectare, which is 67% more than the national average. The state had adopted an “innovative, eco-friendly integrated pest management” to achieve this feat. In addition, government interventions like post-harvest management, disbursement of subsidies and integrated soil health management were also taken into account by the agricultural ministry. Tamil Nadu will receive a sum of Rs 5 crore for the award. Tamil Nadu had already bagged the award thrice in 2011-12 for highest food grains production, in 2013-14 for highest pulses production and in 2014-15 for highest coarse cereals production. Tripura has been selected for the Krishi

Karman Award 2015-16 for a commendable increase in food grain production in small category states. The state produced 825,000 tonnes of food grain in 2016. The state would also receive a cash award of Rs five crore. Tripura gets this national award for the second time. The state targets to produce 935,000 tonnes of food grain in 2017.

Goldman Environmental Prize announced

Social activist Prafulla Samantra was announced one among six winners of the Goldman Environmental Prize for his “historic 12-year legal battle that affirmed the indigenous Dongria Kondh’s land rights and protected the Niyamgiri Hills from a massive, open-pit aluminum ore mine.” The other five winners for this year are: Mark Lopez (United States); Uroš Macerl (Slovenia); Rodrigo Tot (Guatemala); Rodrigue Katembo (Democratic Republic of Congo); and Wendy Bowman (Australia).

Prafulla Samantra is a trained lawyer and has been involved in activism since the Jayprakash Narayan-movement. He was an iconic leader responsible for rallying tribes in Niyamgiri region of Odisha and made use of legal provisions to block mining-to-metals conglomerate Vedanta from setting up a bauxite mine there. Samantara was the first citizen to use law to halt the mining operations of Vedanta. As a result of his efforts, the company has been forced to suspend mining of bauxite from that region.

Colson Whitehead wins 2017 Pulitzer Prize

Colson Whitehead’s celebrated novel *The Underground Railroad* has won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The novel is about an escaped slave that combined liberating imagination and brutal reality. Earlier in November 2016, the novel had received the National Book Award of US. This makes Colson Whitehead first person to win Pulitzer and National Book Award for fiction in last 20 years.

List of winners

Letters, Drama & Music

Fiction: *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead.

Drama: *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage.

History: *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*, by Heather Ann Thompson.

Biography or Autobiography: *The Return: Fathers,*

Sons and the Land in Between, by Hisham Matar.
Poetry: Olio, by Tyehimba Jess (Wave Books)

General Nonfiction: Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City, by Matthew Desmond.

Music: Angel's Bone, by Du Yun.

Journalism

Public Service: New York Daily News and ProPublica
Breaking News Reporting: Staff of East Bay Times, Oakland.

Investigative Reporting: Eric Eyre of Charleston Gazette-Mail, Charleston/.

Explanatory Reporting: International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, McClatchy and Miami Herald
Local Reporting: The Salt Lake Tribune Staff

National Reporting: David A. Fahrenthold of The Washington Post

International Reporting: The New York Times Staff
Feature Writing: C. J. Chivers of The New York Times

Commentary: Peggy Noonan of The Wall Street Journal
Criticism: Hilton Als of The New Yorker

Editorial Writing: Art Cullen of The Storm Lake Times, Storm Lake.

Editorial Cartooning: Jim Morin of Miami Herald

Breaking News Photography: Daniel Berehulak, freelance photographer

Feature Photography: Jason Wambsgans of Chicago Tribune

64th National Film Awards

The 64th National Film Awards for year 2016 were announced on 07 April 2017. Marathi film Kasaav won the award in the Best Feature Film category and Fireflies in the Abyss won in the Non-Feature Film Category.

Winners

Best Feature Film: Kasaav (Marathi).

Non-Feature Film: Fireflies in the Abyss.

Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment: Sathamnam Bhavathi

Best Direction: Rajesh (Ventilator)

Best Actor: Akhay Kumar (Rustom)

Best Actress: Surabhi Lakshmi (Minnaminungu)

Best Supporting Actress: Zaira Wasim (Dangal)

Best Child Artist: Adhish Praveen (Kunju Daivam), Saj (Noor Islam), Manohara (Railway Children)

Best stunt choreography: Peter Hein (Pulimurugan)

Best Children's Film: Dhanak (Hindi)

Best Film on social issue: Pink

Best Male Playback Singer: Sundara Iyer (Joker)

Best Female Playback Singer: Thume jaake

Best Screenplay (original): Syam Pushkaran (Maheshinte Prathikaram)

Best Screenplay (adapted): Sanjay Krishnaji patel (Dashakriya)

Best Editing: Rameshwar Ventilator

Sound designer: Jayadevan (Kaadu Pookunna Neram)

Best production design: 24

Best Costume Designer: Sachin (Marathi film)

Best Environmental film including agriculture: The Tiger who crossed the line

Best Make-up Artist: MK Ramakrishna

Best Music Direction: Babu Padmanabha (Kannada Lama)

PERSON-IN-NEWS

Astronaut Peggy Whitson sets new space record

Astronaut Peggy Whitson has set a new space record for most days in space by a US astronaut. She has broken the previous record set by Jeff Williams who had spent a total of 534 days in space.

President Trump congratulated her through a video chat between White House and the ISS. Peggy Whitson, at present, is serving as the Space Station Commander of Expedition 51. She was recently launched to the ISS in November 2016 using a Russian Soyuz capsule. At the time of her launch, she had already accumulated 377 total days in space. At the time of her return back to Earth, she would have accumulated more than 600 days in space.

Malala Yousafzai made youngest UN messenger of Peace

United Nations (UN) Secretary General Antonio Guterres has bestowed the highest honour UN Messenger of Peace upon Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai.

She was described as a symbol of the most important thing in the world-education for all. With this, she became youngest ever UN Messenger of Peace. The coveted title is bestowed by UN upon distinguished individuals, carefully selected from the fields of art, literature, music and sports or other fields of public life. The Messengers of Peace scheme was instigated in 1997 as a central addition to the system of UN goodwill ambassadors and honorary ambassadors, run by the different UN agencies since 1954.

