

Weekly Current Affairs

16-22 March 2020

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NATIONAL NEWS

1. Govt declares face masks and hand sanitizers as essential commodities to boost supply

- The government has declared face masks and hand sanitizers as essential commodities for the next 100 days. The move is aimed at stepping up efforts to boost supply and prevent hoarding of these items in its fight to check the spread of coronavirus disease.
- The Centre has also invoked the Disaster Management Act to ensure price regulation and availability of surgical and protective masks, hand sanitizer and gloves. The decision will empower the government and States/Union Territories to regulate the production, quality and distribution of masks and hand sanitizers for smooth sale and availability of these items. It also empowers to carry out operations against speculators and those involved in overpricing and black marketing.

2. India's first culinary arts museum at WGSHA enters Limca Book of Records

- Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Management (WGSHA) of Manipal Academy of Higher Education entered the Limca Book of Records for establishing 'India's First Living Culinary Arts Museum' at WGSHA. Celebrity chef Vikas Khanna is the Founder and curator of India's first living culinary arts museum at WGSHA.
- It was his idea which led to the establishment of this culinary museum. He also donated thousands of kitchen tools and equipment worth millions of dollars to the culinary arts museum for preserving history of India's rich tradition of culinary arts and to educate the future generations.

3. Traditional "Phool Dei" festival begins in Uttarakhand

- Uttarakhand celebrates the traditional harvest festival "Phool Dei". Phool Dei is celebrated on the first day of Chaitra or in mid-March (according to Gregorian calendar).
- On this traditional festival young girls pluck the first flowers of the season to decorate their houses with flowers and the term 'Dei' refers to ceremonial pudding which is the key food in the festival that is made from jaggery, Whiteflour & curd, are offered to everyone.

4. Civil Aviation ministry flags off first-ever Indore-Kishangarh flight under UDAN scheme

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) flagged off the first-ever thrice-weekly flight from Indore (Madhya Pradesh) to Kishangarh (Ajmer, Rajasthan) on 16 March Under the UDAN scheme of Government of India.
- The tender for the Indore-Kishangarh route during the UDAN 3 bidding process was awarded to Star Air. The aim is to connect the unconnected regions. Under RCS(Regional connectivity scheme)-UDAN, Star Air already operates direct flights from Belagavi to Indore.

5. Oil India Ltd signed an agreement with Numaligarh Refinery for sale and purchase of crude oil.

- The Crude Oil Sales Agreement (COSA) will come into effect from 1 April, 2020 to 31 March 2025, that is, for a term of five years. The agreement is expected to streamline sale and purchase transactions of crude oil produced from fields in the North East India.
- The Numaligarh Refinery is in Golaghat district, Assam. It is a joint venture between Bharat Petroleum, Oil India and Govt of Assam.

6. Indian Culture Portal to showcase rich cultural heritage of India

- The portal aims to create awareness about the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of India.
- Indian Culture Portal to showcase rich cultural heritage of India Indian Culture Portal, an online portal of the Ministry of Culture, showcases the information about the rich cultural heritage of India across the globe. Indian Culture Portal was launched on 10 December 2019. The portal is available in 2 languages, namely Hindi and English. The portal aims to create awareness about the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of India.
- The portal holds various contents comprising mainly of artefacts from museums, rare books, manuscripts, virtual galleries, e-books, archives, photo archives, gazetteers, write-ups and beautiful pictures on cuisines, Indian National Bibliography, videos, detailed accounts of Indian UNESCO World Heritage site, Musical Instruments of India, festivals, paintings, folk art and classical art from the different states of India, etc.

7. Supreme Court removed a state minister over Disqualification petition for First Time

- For the first time in its history, the Supreme Court removed the Manipur Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar Singh from the state cabine for the first time in its history, the Supreme Court removed the Manipur Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar Singh from the state cabinet. The apex court has also been restrained him from entering the Legislative assembly.
- Mr Shyamkumar won the 2017 assembly elections on Congress Ticket and switched over to BJP to become the minister of Town Planning, forest and Environment. Disqualification petitions were filed against him to the speaker by the other MLAs.
- The Disqualification petitions against the minister was pending before the speaker of the Manipur Assembly since 2017. However, no action has still been taken. When the issue was appealed to SC, the apex court has invoked Article 142 and has removed the minister from the cabinet. Foot

8. National Company Law Appellate Tribunal's bench constituted in Chennai

- National Company Law Appellate Tribunal's bench has been established in Chennai. It has been established in Chennai because its requirement was felt in the Southern part of the country. However, the Delhi bench will work as the principal bench.
- As per the notification issued in this context, the Chennai bench of NCLAT will hear petitions filed against the orders of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLAT) of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Lakshadweep, and Puducherry.

9. Government to draft National e-Commerce policy and New Industrial Policy

- The Government is considering to form a National e-Commerce policy and the new Industrial Policy. The draft national e-commerce policy seeks to facilitate the regulatory environment for the growth of the ecommerce sector.
- The e-commerce policy is aimed at empowering the local entrepreneurs and encourage make in India to safeguard consumer interest to facilitate job creation. □ The newly proposed industrial policy aims to boost the growth of the manufacturing sector in India.

10. NHA ties up with Private hospitals to fight against Coronavirus

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) signed an agreement with the National Health Authority (NHA). The aim is to identify capacities to admit patients from among 19,840 empanelled hospitals under the scheme.

- Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan chaired a high-level review meeting with chiefs of All India Institute of Medical Sciences, RML, and Safdarjung Hospital to examine infrastructure preparedness

11. **Rajya Sabha moved a Resolution to remove the word “Socialism” in the Constitution**

- The ruling party (BJP) member of Rajya Sabha Shri Rakesh Sinha has issued a notice to the Chairman to permit to move a resolution. The resolution aims to drop the word “Socialist” in the Constitution.
- The resolution claims that the word socialism is redundant in the current scenario. It has to be dropped to create space for economic thinking. The Preamble of Constitution declares India to be sovereign, secular, socialist and democratic republic. The resolution claims that word was included without enough debate in the Parliament as it was introduced during emergency.
- The words “Socialist” and “Secular” were included in the 42nd amendment of the Constitution. The amendment was passed during the emergency period. The amendment attempted to reduce the powers of Supreme Court. It laid down fundamental duties of Indian Citizens. The amendment brought in several changes for it was addressed as “Mini-constitution”.

12. **Centre issues gazette notification for adaptation of 37 Central laws in J&K**

- The Centre has issued a gazette notification for the adaptation of 37 Central laws in the Concurrent List for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The gazette notification, issued by the Home Ministry's Department of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh Affairs will come into force with immediate effect.
- It contains 37 Central laws including the representation of people act, the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, the Protection of Human Rights Act, the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Indian Penal Code among others.

13. **Nirbhaya Case Convicts Hanged to Death in Tihar Jail on March 20**

- On March 20, 2020, four convicts of the Nirbhaya Gang Rape were hanged to death in Tihar Jail. In September 2013, a fast track court convicted them with a death sentence. Several curative and mercy petitions were filed by them at the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court. In 2017, the Supreme Court upheld the death penalty. Recently, in 2020, the Supreme Court refused to take in the petitions.
- Article 145 of the constitution allows the Supreme Court to frame its own rules. Under the Article, the SC rules its own proceedings, cases handled by it, transferred to high courts, etc. It has powers to stay proceedings, grant bail, allocate a number of judges to sit in a bench, etc. With this power, the apex court refused to consider the petitions of the accused.

International News & Foreign Affairs

1. **The tiny island of Niue has been declared the World's First 'Dark Sky Nation'**

- The small Pacific island republic Niue, with a population of just over 1,600, is the first country to receive the designation by the International Dark-Sky Association.
- It has become the world's first whole country recognised as a 'Dark Sky Place'. International Dark Sky Places are spaces recognised for responsible lighting policies that keep the night-time environment naturally dark.
- There are over 130 of these accredited dark sites across the world, including parks, reserves, and local communities, but never before has the honour been bestowed on an entire country like this.

2. **US Federal Reserve cuts interest rates to 0% in attempt to prop up US economy**

- The US Federal Reserve cut interest rates to zero. The Fed's hugely surprising move comes as the world

fighters to prevent further damage from the rapidly-spreading coronavirus. The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) decided to lower the target range for the federal funds rate to 0 to ¼%.

- This is the second time in as many weeks the US Fed has cut interest rates as the deadly virus threatens to cause massive disruption to the world economy. The first and last time interest rate were zero in the US was in December 2008 at the peak of the global financial crisis.

3. India to provide 107.01 million Nepali Rupees for three new school buildings in Nepal

- The Government of India will provide 107.01 million Nepali Rupees for three new school buildings in Nepal.
- The schools will be constructed in Darchula, Dhanusha and Kapilvastu districts. These schools will be built under the India-Nepal Development Partnership program. The Government of India is happy to be associated with these projects which complement the efforts of the Government of Nepal in augmenting infrastructure in the field of education

4. Philippines shut Financial Market due to COVID 19 outbreak

- Philippines become the first country to close its financial markets due to the COVID 19 (Coronavirus) outbreak. It resumed its trading on March 19, 2020. This measure was taken to ensure the safety of their employees and the people they interact with.
- Now the speculations are if other countries may take similar measures then there is a fear of a global recession. Shutting markets is an extremely rare case during times of crisis. Earlier cases were, A week long closing of America's stock after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, while Hong Kong shuts trading due to Black Monday crash in 1987. Greece halted its stock market for about five weeks in 2015.

5. World Cities Summit 2020 to be held in Singapore from July 5 to 9, 2020

- The 7th World Cities Summit (WCS) is to be held from July 5 to 9, 2020 at Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Marina Bay Sands, in Singapore. It is organized by Singapore's Centre for Liveable Cities and the Urban Redevelopment Authority. The theme for WCS 2020 is "Liveable and Sustainable Cities: Adapting to a Disrupted World".
- The WCS 2020 is held in conjunction with the Singapore International Water Week (SIWW) and the CleanEnviro Summit Singapore (CESG). Singapore Government invited Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to the WCS-2020. World Cities Summit: The WCS was inaugurated in the year 2008 and conducted once in 2 years. This platform brings Government leaders, Industrial experts to forge new partnerships and address liveable and sustainable city challenges, sharing integrated urban solutions and there will be discussions about how cities can cope with climate change, social shifts and technological disruptions with confidence.

6. Italy becomes the country with most deaths due to COVID-19

- Italy announced 427 more fatalities from COVID-19 yesterday as it becomes the country with the most deaths due to the virus outbreak. The total death toll in the European nation at more than 3,400 has crossed China's death toll of 3,245. The total number of infections in Italy has crossed 41000.
- The Italian police in Rome are repeating instructions to everyone on megaphones to stay at home and maintain distance from each other. China, on the other hand, reported the second successive day today with no new domestic cases since the virus was reported in Wuhan three months ago. Globally, the death toll from the virus has risen to over 9,800.

New Appointments and Person in News

1. Justice Bansi Lal Bhat appointed as officiating chairperson of NCLAT for 3 months

- Justice B L Bhat as officiating chairman of NCLAT On March 14, 2020, According to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India (GoI), Justice (Retd.) Bansi Lal Bhat has been appointed as the officiating Chairperson of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) for a period of 3 months with effect from March 15, 2020 or until a regular Chairperson is appointed, whichever is earlier.
- The first Chairperson of NCLAT, Justice SJ Mukhopadhaya has retired on March 13, 2020. The government has also appointed Justice (Retd.) Anant Bijay Singh as a Judicial Member of NCLAT & Ms. Shreesha Merla and Mr. Alok Srivastava as Technical Members. Prior to this appointment, Justice Bansi served as a Member (Judicial) of NCLAT for 2-years. He also worked as judicial member of the Armed Forces Tribunal and as a Judge of the Jammu & Kashmir High Court (HC).
- Bansi's appointment has been made under the Rule 10(1) of the Tribunal, Appellate Tribunal and other Authorities (Qualifications, Experience, and other Conditions of Service of Members) Rules, 2020.

2. Shardul Thakur appointed as brand ambassador of Tata Power

- Indian cricketer Shardul Thakur appointed as the brand ambassador of Tata Power, the largest power generation company in India which aims to provide uninterrupted power supply from its various plants located across India.
- This is his 1st major commercial endorsement & the campaign featuring him does have a significant presence in digital, radio & outdoors.

3. Outcomes of DefExpo-2020 reported at the Parliament March 16, 2020

- On March 16, 2020, the Raksha Rajya Mantri Shri Shripad Naik submitted the outcomes of DefExpo-2020 at Rajya Sabha as a written reply. This year DefExpo-2020 was organized in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh under the theme Theme: Digital Transformation of Defence. The DefExpo-2020 is aligned with Make in India scheme.
- Therefore, 292 Indian MSMEs participated at subsidized rates. The event acted as a platform for the Defence start ups to show case their innovations.

4. President Kovind nominates former CJI Ranjan Gogoi to Rajya Sabha

- President Ram Nath Kovind has nominated Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi to the Rajya Sabha. Mr Gogoi served as the 46th Chief Justice of India from 3rd October 2018 till 17th November last year.
- The President of India nominates twelve persons to the Rajya Sabha. In exercise of the powers conferred by Article 80 of the Constitution of India, and on the advice of the Prime Minister, the President of India can nominate 12 members to the Rajya Sabha.

5. Google appointed Karan Bajwa as MD of Google Cloud in India

- Google appointed Karan Bajwa as Managing Director (MD) of Google Cloud in India. He will advise Google Cloud's work with the local developer ecosystem and India-based Global System Integrators (GSIs). Google Cloud's field sales, partner, and customer engineering organizations in India will report to Bajwa.
- He will be responsible for driving all revenue and go-to-market operations for Google Cloud's extensive solution portfolio that includes Google Cloud Platform and G Suite in the country.

6. Priyanka Chopra Collaborates with WHO to spread awareness over COVID-19

- Actress Priyanka Chopra urged followers to rely on authentic sources of information about coronavirus and arranged an Instagram live with top personnel of the World Health Organization (WHO) to raise awareness about the pandemic.
- The 37-year-old actor documented her videos on Instagram stories where she expressed the importance of only relying on authentic information about the highly contagious disease.

7. Arundhati Bhattacharya resigns from Crisil board

- Arundhati Bhattacharya has submitted her resignation from Crisil board. She was serving as the independent director of the Crisil. Her resignation will be effective on April 15, 2020.
- She has submitted her resignation as she will be joining as a Chairperson and CEO for the India operations of Salesforce, USA.

8. Ajay Kumar appointed as India's next High Commissioner to the Republic of Uganda

- Ajay Kumar has been appointed as the next High Commissioner of India to the Republic of Uganda. Ajay Kumar is currently posted as the Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. Ajay Kumar is a 2001 batch IFS officer.

BANKING

1. DFS secretary Debasish Panda nominated as director on RBI central board.

- The Central Government has nominated Debasish Panda as a Director on the Central Board of Reserve Bank of India.
- He is a Secretary, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, New Delhi.
- The nomination of Debasish Panda is effective from March 11, 2020, and until further orders.

2. RBI opens 6 month dollar-swap window along with infusion of Rs 1,00,000 crore through LTRO

- There is global instability in financial markets due to the spread of COVID 19 (Coronavirus), which may lead or leading to a slowdown in growth. Every economy is making efforts to stabilize the financial market condition, among them, the Central Bank of India i.e. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opened a six-month dollar sell-buy swap window, and will also inject Rs 1,00,000 crore additional Long Term Repo Operations (LTROs) at the policy repo rate.
- These measures taken by RBI are to boost liquidity in the foreign exchange market of India and will serve the requirement of U.S. dollars in the market.

3. Standard & Poor's slashes India's growth for 2020 to 5.2% from 5.7% amid virus fears

- Standard & Poor's (S&P) Global Ratings, the world's leading provider of independent credit ratings, has slashed India's global economic growth forecast to 5.2 % in 2020 from 5.7 % predicted earlier, saying the global economy is entering a recession due to the spread of infection of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

4. SBI acquired 6.825% stake of Zero Mass Private Limited

- State Bank of India acquires stake in Zero Masson March 17, 2020, State Bank of India entered into an agreement to acquire 6.825%(6,825 equity shares) stake of Zero Mass Private Limited (Pvt Ltd).

- The deal is to be completed by March 31, 2020. As part of the deal, the Bank sold its entire stake in A Little World Pvt Ltd to target the Zero Mass Pvt Ltd
- Zero Mass Pvt Ltd was founded by Anurag Gupta on March 20, 2007, which is the 1st ever Business Correspondent in the country & is formerly known as Zero Microfinance and Savings Support.

Awards and Books

1. "An Extraordinary Life: A biography of Manohar Parrikar" to be released in April 2020

A book on the life and times of bureaucrat-turned-politician Manohar Parrikar, who served as the defence minister and Goa chief minister, will hit the stands in April.

2. Dr. Paramananda Majumder selected for the Moghai Ojah award

- Eminent researcher and writer Dr. Paramananda Majumder was presented the 10th Moghai Ojah Award at a function held at the auditorium of Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium. He was awarded for his significant role in raising issues of public interest and society's betterment.
- Majumder compiled the first book on the life and works of folk musician Moghai Ojah. The award recognized his invaluable contribution in bringing dhol maestro Moghai Ojah and his magnificent skill of playing the dhol back to the public domain by compiling a book on him.

Science Tech & Defence

1. Lava launches non-internet based digital payment solution

- Lava International Ltd launched its digital payments app, Lava Pay. The Noida-based smartphone company claims that the app is the world's first digital payment solution that does not require internet connectivity.
- The app will be pre-installed in the brand's upcoming feature phones. In order to send or pay money from the app, users need to enter the phone number of the receiver, the amount and a transaction 'Pass Code'.

2. CRPF signs MoU with Aditya Mehta Foundation to train its specially-abled troops in areas of cyber security & AI

- The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), India's largest Central Armed Police Force, has signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Aditya Mehta Foundation (AMF), a non-profit organization which aids people with disabilities to pursue sports, to train its 189 CRPF personnel who had lost their limbs in operations in areas of cyber security, artificial intelligence (AI) and paralympic sports.
- The agreement, signed in the presence of CRPF's Director General (DG) AP Maheshwari, will help create newer opportunities for such personnel to continue as the integral part of the force. The initiative also comes as a big boost for the CRPF personnel who had lost their limbs or undergone amputation over the past 10 years.
- During the event, The CRPF Chief Maheshwari also handed over job appointment letters to a family member of 20 CRPF personnel who had lost their lives in the line of duty or operations. Companies including Wipro, Toyota, Dream Studio, Virtusa & Garcorp provided the offer letter to the beneficiaries.

3. India bans entry of International Commercial Passenger Flights from March 22 for week

- India has banned the entry of all international commercial passenger flights from March 22 for one week. Railways and Civil Aviation will suspend all concessional travel except for students, patients, and divyang category. States are being requested to enforce work from home for private-sector employees

except those working in emergency or essential services.

4. Defence Ministry signs contract with Israeli firm IWI to acquire 16,479 light machine guns

- The Defence Ministry has signed a capital acquisition contract with Israel Weapons Industries, IWI for procurement of 16,479 light machine guns, LMGs at a cost of 880 crore rupees. IWI, which is based out of Ramat HaSharon city in Israel, would be providing Negev 7.62*51 mm LMGs to the Indian armed forces under the contract
- The contracted Negev 7.62X51 mm LMG is a combat-proven weapon and currently used by several countries around the globe. Defence Ministry said the LMG will greatly enhance the lethality and range of a soldier vis-a-vis the presently used weapon.

5. DAC gives approval for procurement of 83 indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft for Indian Air Force

- Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) today gave approval for the procurement of 83 indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force.
- While orders of 40 Tejas aircraft had been placed with HAL in initial configurations, today DAC paved the way for procurement of another 83 of the more advanced version of the aircraft from HAL

Important Days

1. Bangladesh is celebrating the birth centenary of its founder President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina marked the day by paying floral tributes to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The day marks the beginning of the year long celebration of the birth centenary named 'Mujib Barsho' in Bangladesh and across the world.
- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was born on 17th March 1920 in the town of Tungipara in Gopalganj district of the then undivided India. He led the movement against the oppressive Pakistani rulers in the then East Pakistan leading to its liberation in 1971.
- Known as Bangabandhu, he became the first President of the independent nation of Bangladesh.

Obituaries

1. Amjad Khan's brother and Bollywood actor Imtiaz Khan passed away

- Amjad Khan's brother and Bollywood actor Imtiaz Khan passed away. Imtiaz Khan starred in movies like Yaadon Ki Baraat, Dharmatama, Dayavan and Noor Jahan among more.
- He was an actor and director, and associated with popular films such as Hulchul, Pyaara Dost, Procession of Memories and Noor Jahan.

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