

GDP surges in third quarter

GDP growth in the third quarter of financial year 2017-18 was 7.2%, the fastest in the year so far, according to official data released.

- The government also marginally increased its estimate for the full year's growth to 6.6% from its earlier estimate of 6.5%.

Growth in GDP was at 6.5% in the second quarter of this financial year. Growth in the gross value added (GVA) in the third quarter stood at 6.7%, up from the 6.2% seen in the second quarter and the 5.6% in the first quarter of this financial year.

- In the third quarter, the manufacturing sector exhibited a strong recovery, growing at 8.1%, following up on a 6.9% growth in the second quarter.
- The agriculture sector also saw relatively robust growth in the third quarter, growing at 4.1%, up from 2.7% in the first and second quarters.

Pharma promotions tax exempt: tribunal

A recent decision of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal's Pune bench allowing pharmaceutical companies to account for their spending on doctors as a deductible expenditure has sparked off a fresh debate on ethics.

- Since the companies are out of the purview of the Medical Council of India (MCI), money spent on promotions, which in some cases could be gifts, travel, hospitality and so on for doctors, besides medical conferences and samples, can be claimed as deductible expenditure.
- Doctors accepting such promotions may be violating the code of ethics of the MCI.

The tribunal's order came in a case involving Emcure Pharmaceuticals Ltd, which filed returns in which expenses of Rs 2.07 crore were claimed as 'advertisement sales promotions'.

- Of this, about Rs 50 lakh was for 'print and promotion' and the remaining Rs 1.57 crore was for 'sales promotions'.
- A Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) circular disallows deductions that violate MCI regulations. However, the IT Appellate Tribunal reversed the decision by the assessing officer and ruled in favour of the company.
 - Citing observations made in other cases, the bench noted that pharma companies organised seminars and discussions to upgrade the knowledge of doctors, and such activities were undertaken to make doctors aware of products. The order noted that only when the companies made doctors or medical practitioners aware of such products and medicines could they be "launched successfully".

The pharma company's claim was disallowed by the IT department on the ground that it violated the MCI code of ethics.

Ghani ready for talks with Taliban

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani unveiled a plan to open peace talks with the Taliban, days after the militants called for direct negotiations with the U.S.

This step eventually recognised Taliban as a political party.

Background

The apparent openness by both sides to some form of negotiations came as civilian casualties have soared in recent months.

Taliban increasingly targeting towns and cities in response to a new and more aggressive U.S. military policy ordered by President Donald Trump.

On 26th February, the Taliban said it was prepared to enter direct talks with the U.S. to find a “peaceful solution”. That statement, however, made no mention of negotiating with the Afghan government.

Kabul process

Mr. Ghani disclosed the framework at the Kabul Process, a regional conference focussed on bringing peace to the country.

He called for a truce, after which the Taliban could become a political party and contest elections. In return, the militants should officially recognise the Afghan government and Constitution, a perennial sticking point in past attempts to open talks.

There was no immediate response from the Taliban.

India backs Kabul's peace offer

India welcomed Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani's outreach to the Taliban.

India backs the peace talks, but wants action against any members of the Taliban and their sponsors who don't join the process.

The government's position is consistent with India's support to an “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled reconciliation process, within the framework of the Afghan Constitution and the internationally accepted red lines”.

Pakistan admits to being on 'grey list' of FATF

After days of ambiguity, Pakistan confirmed that it will be on the ‘grey list’ of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June, once an action plan has been mutually negotiated.

But the country disputed claims of being put on a ‘black list’.

Ban on artists

Pakistan also criticised the Indian Motion Pictures Producers' Association's decision to uphold its ban on Pakistani artists.

Fiscal deficit overshoots full-year revised estimate in Jan.

News

India's fiscal deficit touched ₹6.77 lakh crore at the end of January, 113.7% of the target for the entire fiscal, on account of higher expenditure.

Fiscal deficit is a reflection of government borrowings to meet revenue-expenditure gap. It was 113.7 % in the 10-month period of 2017-18 as compared to 105.7% in the year earlier period.

What is the target?

Fiscal deficit had been pegged at ₹5.33 lakh crore or 3.5% of the GDP, for the current fiscal ending March 31.

The figure was revised to ₹5.95 lakh crore in the Union Budget 2018-19.

Revenue Deficit

As per data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA), the revenue deficit during the April-January period of 2017-18, at ₹4.80 lakh crore works out to 109.2% of the revised budget estimate.

It was 129.9% in the corresponding period of the last financial year. Net tax receipts in the first 10 months of 2017-18 fiscal were ₹9.7 lakh crore.

Total receipts from revenue and non-debt capital of the government during the period amount to ₹11.63 lakh crore or 71.7% of revised estimate.

IMD: Summer to be warmer than normal

Why in news?

The summer months from March-May will be “warmer” than normal said the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its annual summer forecast.

It also said that several parts of north India will experience at least a degree hotter than their average summer temperatures.

Normal Temperature

The ‘normal’ temperatures refer to the mean temperatures during those months between 1981 and 2010.

North, west and east

A harsh summer is in store for Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, west and east Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, west and east Uttar Pradesh, west and east Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh, with mean seasonal temperature-spikes likely to be greater than 1 degree Celsius.

The IMD outlook also added Tamil Nadu, south interior Karnataka and Rayalaseema would see temperature rise between 0.5 degrees Celsius and 1 degree Celsius from their historical normal.

The IMD’s climate summary in January said that 2017 was the “fourth warmest year on record since 1901”.

What studies say?

Studies indicate increasing trends in the frequency and duration of heat waves over the country.

This can be attributed to increasing trends in the greenhouse gases and the warming of the sea surface temperatures over the equatorial Indian and Pacific oceans, the IMD noted in its press statement.

The latest forecast from IMD’s models indicate that La Nina — a weather condition that generally brings heavy rains to India — will wane after spring.

However forecasts before spring are, according to meteorologists, prone to error with better accuracy after May.

Moon to get first mobile phone network

Why in news?

The moon will get its first mobile phone network next year.

This enables high-definition streaming from the lunar landscape back to the earth, part of a project to back the first privately-funded moon mission.

Vodafone Germany, network equipment maker Nokia and carmaker Audi are working together to support the mission.

4G Network

It was decided to build a 4G network instead of 5G. This is because the next generation networks are not stable enough to ensure they would work from the lunar surface.

The project will last for about 11 days because of massive changes in temperature on the moon.

STATE-AP

Waterbird species down by half in EGREE Region

The number of water bird species has declined by half in most habitats when compared with the Asian Waterbird Census 2017 across the East Godavari River Estuarine Ecosystem (EGREE) region.

This was revealed during a census conducted in the region, including the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and parts of Mada forest and Papikondalu regions.

The census was conducted on February 20 and 21 in accordance with Asian Waterbird Census guidelines.

It is noteworthy that in the census, uncommon bird species such as Eurasian spoonbill or common spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*, Oyster catcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) and Yellow bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) were recorded.

The Yellow bittern was not recorded in previous census.

Of the 85 recorded species 57 are least concern, 17 were not evaluated, 10 of them were near threatened and one is globally endangered waterbird species.

National award for State

Andhra Pradesh has been chosen for the 4th Atal Shastra, Markenomy Award-2018 for being the 'Top most and best infrastructure excellent State in India in IT and Mobility'.

According to State Energy Conservation Mission, 4th Atal Shastra, Markenomy Awards were given for excellence in sustainable economy and clean and green infrastructure.

STATE-TELANGANA

Telangana moves to mobile governance

The government is going to bring out a law to ensure that all its services are available through mobile and in the near future, citizens can expect land registrations, revenue records and the likes to be available in the format.

T app Folio was launched by the govt

- Right from today by downloading the app, citizens can avail up to 150 services of the GHMC, RTA, Police and T-Wallet and within a year another 1000 services will be added to it, said Meeseva and Electronics Service Delivery (ESD) Commissioner G.T. Venkateswara Rao.
- All government departments will be dovetailed into T App Folio and it was ready to accept apps developed by the private sector having public utility like those dealing with women's safety and tourism.

Soon, every public utility office like village panchayat, health centres, school and police station, among others will be provided with 2 GBps and households with 15 MBps connections through the T-Fibre project.

Panel asked to peruse Group-II papers

The Hyderabad High Court sought the services of three designated senior advocates of High Court to resolve the dispute regarding allegations of usage of white fluid to alter the answer sheets of Group –II mains papers conducted by Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC).

- These three senior advocates will peruse answer scripts of about 5,000 top candidates and ascertain whether white fluid was used by anyone to alter the results or acted to overcome the secrecy of identity of candidates.
- The TSPSC had conducted written examination for 1,032 posts of group –II posts in 2015-16.

The three senior advocates have been requested to peruse answer sheets and submit report by March 19,2017.