

Amnesty labels Israel an 'apartheid state'



Amnesty International has labelled Israel an “apartheid” state that treats Palestinians as “an inferior racial group,” joining the assessment of other rights groups which the Jewish state vehemently rejects. “Israel’s cruel policies of segregation, dispossession and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid,” Amnesty’s secretary general Agnes Callamard said.

Chinese, French firms ink Uganda oil deal



Chinese and French oil giants sealed a landmark \$10 billion deal to develop Uganda’s energy resources and build a vast regional oil pipeline, a megaproject that has incensed environmental groups. The so-called Final Investment Decision was announced at a ceremony in Kampala by the heads of France’s TotalEnergies and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC).

Denmark lifts nearly all COVID-19 restrictions amid cases surge



Denmark became the first European Union country to lift nearly all of its Covid restrictions despite record numbers of cases, relying on its high vaccination rate to cope with the milder Omicron variant. People will no longer be required to wear face masks or present COVID-19 health passes indicating proof of vaccination, recovery or a recent negative test result.

Burkina Faso restores constitution, appoints coup's leader as head of state for transitional period



In Burkina Faso, the military government announced that it has restored the constitution a week after taking power and has appointed the coup's leader as head of state for a transitional period. The military government said it had approved a fundamental act that lifts the suspension of the constitution. Meanwhile, the statement did not give a timeline for the transition period.

The move came shortly after the African Union suspended Burkina Faso for the takeover and diplomats from West Africa and the United Nations pressed demands for a return to civilian rule. On January 24, rebel soldiers detained president Roch Marc Christian Kabore and imposed army rule on the country.

World's first hydrogen-powered flying boat to be made in Dubai



The Jet, the world's first clean-energy, hydrogen-powered flying boat, is set to be launched in Dubai. The Swiss based startup THE JET ZeroEmission announced that it has signed an agreement with UAE-based Zenith Marine Services and DWYN to manufacture and operate The Jet.

The boat will cruise without noise over the waters at a speed of 40 knots, and has a capacity of hosting 8-12 passengers. It is equipped with two fuel cells, an air conditioner and other environmentally friendly technologies that help reduce carbon emissions.

World Wetlands Day: Wetlands action for people and planet



February 2 is World Wetlands Day. This Day is observed every year to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands for people and planet. The 2nd of February also marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. A call to take action for wetlands is the focus of this year's campaign.

India has 46 Ramsar sites, which include the Chilika Lake in Odisha, Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, Harike Lake in Punjab, Loktak Lake in Manipur and Wular Lake in Jammu and Kashmir.

India, European hold second virtual maritime security dialogue



India and the European Union have held their second maritime security dialogue in a virtual format. The meeting was co-chaired by Joint Secretary for Disarmament and International Security Affairs at Ministry of External Affairs Sandeep Arya and Director for Security and Defence Policy at the European External Action Service Ms Joanneke Balfort.

The consultations included developments in the maritime security environment, policy developments covering the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative, India-EU maritime cooperation and regional initiatives to address international maritime security issues.

Trade through Benapole ICP remains suspended as talks end inconclusive



The export-import activity between Bangladesh and India through the Benapole-Petrapole trading point remained suspended as the talks between the truckers, labour unions and authorities on the Indian side at Petrapole ended inconclusive. The local transport association, drivers Union, labour Unions at the ICP have gone on an indefinite period since Monday alleging harassment at the border post in checking drivers licence, vehicle and other documents.

Petrapole is the largest land port in South Asia. Nearly 30 percent of land-based trade between India and Bangladesh takes place through ICP Petrapole. In 2020-21, trade worth Rs. 15,771 crore took place through this land port with more than 1.06 lakh cargo movements.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh says, Induction of Women Fighter Pilots in IAF to be converted into permanent scheme



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has said that his Ministry has decided to convert the Experimental Scheme for Induction of Women Fighter Pilots in the Indian Air Force into a permanent scheme. In a tweet, Mr Singh said, It is a testimony to the capability of India's Nari Shakti (Women Power) and our Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment towards women empowerment.

Indian Coast Guard celebrates its 46th Raising Day



Indian Coast Guard is celebrating its 46th Raising Day on February 1. From just seven surface platforms in 1978, the Indian Coast Guard, (ICG) has grown into a formidable force with 158 ships and 70 aircraft in its inventory. It is likely to achieve targeted force levels of 200 surface platforms and 80 aircraft by 2025. As the fourth largest Coast Guard in the world, it has played a significant role in securing the Indian coasts and enforcing regulations in the maritime zones of India. The ICG has saved over one thousand two hundred lives at sea in the last one year and more than 11 thousand since its inception.

NIMHANS to spearhead national tele-counselling



The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) will spearhead a National Tele-Mental Health Programme across the country, the Union Budget announced. Another city institution - Indian Institute of Information Technology, Bengaluru (IIITB) - will provide technical support for the project.

With the COVID-19 pandemic accentuating mental health problems in people of all age groups, the programme aims to “better the access to quality mental health counselling and care services”. The programme will include a network of 23 tele-mental health centres of excellence, with NIMHANS being the nodal centre and IIITB providing technology support, the Budget speech said.

Lt. Gen. Manoj Pande is Vice Chief of Army Staff



In a series of changes in the top hierarchy of the Army, Lt. Gen. Manoj Pande took over as the Vice Chief of Army Staff on Tuesday from Lt. Gen. C.P. Mohanty who superannuated on January 31. Prior to this, Lt. Gen. Pande was serving as the Eastern Army Commander. He was commissioned in December 1982 into the Corps of Engineers (The Bombay Sappers). Lt. Gen. Pande will be the senior most officer in the Army when current chief Gen. Manoj Naravane completes his tenure in April.

Highlights of Union Budget 2022-23



FM Nirmala Sitharaman presents Union Budget for 2022-23 in Parliament

- India's economic growth estimated at 9.2 percent, the highest among all large economies.
- Outlay for Capital expenditure in Union Budget hiked by 35.4 percent.
- Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) extended up to March 2023. The guarantee cover will be expanded by 50,000 crore rupees.
- Additional credit of 2 lakh crore rupees for MSME to be provided under Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises.
- Productivity Linked Incentive in 14 sectors for achieving the vision of AtmaNirbhar Bharat will be strengthened.
- Use of 'Kisan Drones' to be promoted for crop assessment, digitization of land records, spraying of insecticides and nutrients.
- Implementation of the Ken-Betwa Link Project at an estimated cost of 44,605 crore rupees to be taken up.
- Four hundred new-generation Vande Bharat Trains to be developed over the next three years.
- One Station-One product concept to be popularized to help local businesses and supply chains.
- One hundred PM GatiShakti Cargo Terminals for multimodal logistics facilities to be developed during the next three years.
- PM GatiShakti Master Plan for Expressways to be formulated in 2022-23 to facilitate faster movement of people and goods.
- National Highway network to be expanded by 25 thousand kilometres in 2022-23.
- Allocation of 60,000 crore rupees made for Har-Ghar, Nal-Se-Jal to cover 3.8 crore households in 2022-23.
- 80 lakh houses to be completed in 2022-23 under PM AwasYojana, both rural and urban.
- A new Vibrant Villages Programme to be launched to cover border villages with sparse population, limited connectivity and less infrastructure.

- Two lakh Aangawadis to be upgraded under the Saksham Anganwadi Mission.
- A new scheme-Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North-East, PM-DevINE to be implemented through North-Eastern Council.
- One class-one TV channel' programme of PM eVIDYA to be expanded from 12 to 200 TV channels.
- A Digital University to be established to provide access to students across the country for world-class quality universal education.
- Government to set up 75 Digital Banking Units (DBUs) in 75 districts of the country by Scheduled Commercial Banks.
- 100 per cent of post offices to be brought under core-banking system.
- Digital Rupee, using blockchain and other technologies to be issued by RBI from 2022-23.
- E-Passports using embedded chip and futuristic technology to be rolled out in 2022-23.
- Auction of spectrum for rollout of 5G mobile services to be taken up in 2022.
- Additional 19,500 crore rupees allotted under PLI scheme to give a fillip to domestic manufacturing in solar power.
- Revised Fiscal Deficit during current year is estimated at 6.9 percent.
- New provision introduced for taxpayers to file an Updated Return on payment of additional tax.
- Alternate Minimum Tax for cooperative societies reduced from 18.5 to 15 per cent.
- Last date for Tax incentive for Start-ups extended by one year from 31st March 2023.
- Customs duty on cut and polished diamonds and gemstones is being reduced to 5 per cent.
- Customs duty exemption given to steel scrap last year is being extended for another year.
- Outlay for the 'Scheme for Financial Assistance to States for Capital Investment' is being enhanced from 10,000 crore in the Budget Estimates to 15,000 crore rupees.
- Virtual digital asset to be taxed at the rate of 30 per cent.
- Surcharge on long term capital gains arising on transfer of any type of assets to be capped at 15 per cent.

Indian economy contracts by 6.6 pc in 2020-21



Indian economy contracted by 6.6 per cent in 2020-21 as against the earlier estimate of 7.3 per cent decline, showing that the COVID-19 pandemic hit economy did not perform as badly as was initially worked out. The National Statistical Office has also revised downward the real GDP growth number for 2019-20 to 3.7 per cent as against the earlier estimate of 4 per cent.

Under the first revision released in January 2021, real GDP or GDP at constant (2011-12) prices for the years 2019-20 was pegged at Rs 145.69 lakh crore, showing growth of 4 per cent during 2019-20.

India to take on Australia in Semifinal of ICC Under-19 World Cup in Antigua



Four-time champions India will take on Australia in the Semifinal of the ICC Under-19 World Cup 2022 at the Coolidge Cricket Ground in Antigua. India's campaign has been hit with COVID-19 after Indian captain Yash Dhull and five others tested positive following the first match. Dhull and four others returned to action for the quarter-final against Bangladesh, but Nishant Sindhu, who was the stand-in skipper in Dhull's absence, tested positive and missed the quarter-final.

Mithali Raj climbs to second spot in Women's ODI Batting Rankings released by ICC



Mithali Raj has reached the no. 2 spot in the latest Women's ODI Batting Rankings released by ICC, ahead of the upcoming ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022. Mithali Raj has a total of 738 points to her credit and sits second to Australian player Alyssa Healy with 750 points. Alongside Mithali, opener Smriti Mandhana is the only other Indian player to find herself in the top 10 rankings. As per the latest rankings, Mandhana sits sixth on the list with a total of 710 points to her credit.