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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 19-03-2026

NATIONAL NEWS

Government Approves Perpetual Validity for FSSAI Licences

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has approved perpetual validity for registrations and licences issued by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India to improve the ease of doing business in India.

The reform has been implemented based on recommendations of the NITI Aayog to simplify regulatory compliance and reduce administrative burden for food businesses.

Earlier, Food Business Operators had to periodically renew their Food Safety and Standards Authority of India registrations or licences, involving documentation, fees, and regulatory procedures.

Under the new framework, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India licences and registrations will now have perpetual validity, meaning the licence will remain valid indefinitely unless suspended or cancelled due to violations.

This reform will allow regulators to focus more on monitoring, enforcement, and improving food safety standards instead of handling routine licence renewals.

The government has also revised the turnover thresholds for Food Safety and Standards Authority of India registration and licensing, effective from April 1, 2026.

Revised turnover limits:
– Basic Registration: Increased from ₹12 lakh to ₹1.5 crore.
– State Licence: Applicable for businesses with turnover up to ₹50 crore.
– Central Licence: Required for businesses with turnover above ₹50 crore.

The rationalisation of turnover limits will strengthen the role of State authorities and simplify regulatory oversight.

These measures will particularly benefit small and medium food businesses, enabling them to operate more efficiently.

The government has also addressed the issue of dual registrations faced by street food vendors.

National Highways Authority of India Revises FASTag

Annual Pass Fee

The National Highways Authority of India announced a revision in the FASTag Annual Pass fee for private non-commercial vehicles.

The revised fee will come into effect from April 1, 2026, as per the official order issued on March 12, 2026.

Vehicle owners will now pay ₹3,075 for the FASTag Annual Pass, compared to the earlier fee of ₹3,000.

The FASTag Annual Pass scheme was introduced to simplify toll payments for frequent highway travellers.

The scheme was officially launched on Independence Day in 2025 to promote digital toll collection across India's national highways.

It was designed mainly for commuters who frequently travel on highways and make repeated toll payments.

After purchasing the FASTag Annual Pass, regular commuters can avoid multiple toll deductions during frequent trips.

The FASTag Annual Pass is available only for non-commercial vehicles, including private cars, jeeps, and vans equipped with a valid FASTag account.

Once activated, the pass allows a vehicle to cross toll plazas on national highways up to 200 times within one year.

The pass remains valid for either 200 toll crossings or one year from the activation date, whichever occurs earlier.

The FASTag digital toll collection system was introduced nationwide in 2016 and has become the primary method of toll payment in India.

According to government data, around 11.86 crore FASTags have been issued across the country, of which nearly 5.9 crore remain active.

The FASTag Annual Pass scheme has gained significant popularity among motorists since its introduction in 2025.

Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden Opens for Visitors in Srinagar

The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar, known as Asia's largest tulip garden, was opened to visitors.

The garden was inaugurated by Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

The opening of the garden marks the official beginning of the spring tourism season in Kashmir.

The garden is located at the foothills of the Zabarwan Range overlooking the Dal Lake.

Every year, the blooming of tulip flowers transforms the Kashmir Valley into a colourful landscape, attracting tourists from across India and abroad.

The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden is recognised as the largest tulip garden in Asia.

The garden spreads across 74 acres and features terraced patterns filled with colourful tulip varieties.

In 2026, the garden showcases more than 1.8 million tulips, making it one of the most vibrant floral displays in the region.

The garden includes around 70 to 75 varieties of tulips, many of which have been imported from the Netherlands.

Apart from tulips, the garden also features other seasonal spring flowers that enhance the beauty of the landscape.

These include Hyacinth, Daffodil, Muscari, and Ranunculus.

The annual opening of the tulip garden has become one of the most important seasonal attractions in Kashmir, drawing large numbers of tourists and local visitors every year.

Gujarat Launches Statewide Foot and Mouth Disease Vaccination Drive

The Gujarat Government launched a statewide vaccination drive against Foot and Mouth Disease to protect livestock and prevent the spread of the disease.

The vaccination campaign began on March 1, 2026 and will continue until April 15, 2026 across the state.

The drive is being implemented under the National Animal Disease Control Programme, a major initiative aimed at eliminating major animal diseases in India.

The vaccination campaign targets livestock such as cattle, buffaloes, sheep, and goats, which are particularly vulnerable to Foot and Mouth Disease.

Veterinary teams are visiting villages and dairy farms across Gujarat to vaccinate animals and monitor their health conditions.

Foot and Mouth Disease is a highly contagious viral infection that mainly affects cloven-hoofed animals, including cattle, buffaloes, sheep, and goats.

Animals infected with the disease often develop fever, mouth ulcers, excessive salivation, and reduced appetite.

One of the major economic impacts of the disease is a significant decline in milk production, which directly affects dairy farmers and livestock owners.

The National Animal Disease Control Programme, launched by the Government of India, aims to control and eventually eliminate Foot and Mouth Disease and Brucellosis among livestock through large-scale vaccination campaigns.

As part of the vaccination drive, animals are identified through ear tagging and their details are uploaded to the Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health portal.

The Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health portal helps authorities track vaccination coverage and maintain digital records of livestock health.

BANKING

DCM Shriram Secures USD 90 Million from IFC

DCM Shriram Limited secured USD 90 million funding from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank Group (WBG), through Sustainability-Linked Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs).

Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs) are long-term debt instruments issued by companies to raise funds from investors in the market.

NCDs carry a fixed rate of interest and a specified maturity period, providing stable and predictable returns to investors.

A Non-Convertible Debenture represents a loan taken by a company from investors, with an obligation to pay periodic interest and repay the principal at maturity.

NCDs are widely used for medium- to long-term financing needs, including business expansion, refinancing of existing debt, working capital requirements, and infrastructure development.

The issuance and trading of NCDs in India are regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to ensure investor protection, transparency, and proper disclosure norms.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also influences prudential exposure norms and investment guidelines, particularly for banks and financial institutions investing in NCDs.

The investment aims to support the company’s strategic initiatives and long-term growth, particularly the expansion of its downstream chemicals business.

The funds will also be used to finance capital expenditure in agri-business operations, helping to create rural employment through direct engagement with farmers at the grassroots level.

World Bank Sanctions $300 Million Loan for Uttar Pradesh Clean Air Programme

The World Bank approved a loan of USD 300 million to support Uttar Pradesh’s efforts to improve air quality through a Clean Air Transition Programme.

The funding supports the Uttar Pradesh Clean Air Management Program (UP CAMP), targeting pollution in transport, agriculture, and industry sectors.

The initiative aims to strengthen environmental sustainability and generate employment

opportunities for youth and women in the state.

The programme focuses on integrated interventions across sectors:

Transport: adoption of electric buses and three-wheelers to reduce vehicular emissions.

Industry: use of emissions monitoring systems and adoption of cleaner technologies.

Agriculture: adoption of efficient fertiliser use to improve crop productivity.

Nearly 200 new air quality monitoring stations will be installed across Uttar Pradesh to strengthen air quality management and policy decisions.

The programme will benefit about 9 million households by providing access to clean cooking solutions.

More than 700 brick kilns will transition to resource-efficient technology under the programme.

The initiative will leverage USD 150 million in private capital in transport and MSME sectors to boost economic growth and employment.

The UP Clean Air Management Program is part of the World Bank's Regional Air Quality Management Program in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills (IGP-HF), a global air pollution hotspot.

The programme has a maturity of 10 years, including a 2-year grace period, and receives support from the multi-donor Energy Sector Management Assistance Program.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath stated the programme links economic growth, productivity, and ecological balance, aiming for clean skies, healthier citizens, and sustainable environment.

The programme will enhance firm productivity and growth, while creating greater access to jobs for young men and women.

ECONOMY

Fitch Ratings Projects India's Gross Domestic Product Growth at 7.5% for FY26

Fitch Ratings released its "Global Economic Outlook – March 2026", projecting India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at 7.5% for FY 2025–26 (FY26).

The GDP forecast for FY26 was slightly increased to 7.5% from 7.4% estimated in December 2025, mainly due to strong domestic demand and stable economic indicators.

Domestic demand is expected to remain the main growth driver, with consumer spending projected to rise by 8.6% and investment growth estimated at 6.9% in FY26.

For FY 2026–27 (FY27), Fitch Ratings revised its GDP growth forecast upward to 6.7%, compared to

6.4% projected earlier in December 2025.

The agency also expects India’s economic growth to remain around 6.5% in FY 2027–28 (FY28).

According to Fitch, India’s real economic activity showed tentative signs of slowing in January–February, but the overall economy remains resilient with double-digit credit growth.

GDP growth slowed to 7.8% year-on-year (YoY) in the December quarter, compared to 8.4% in the September quarter.

Fitch Ratings expects growth to moderate in the first half of FY27, mainly due to rising inflation affecting real incomes and limiting consumer spending growth.

In its global outlook, Fitch projected global GDP growth at 2.6% in 2026, slightly lower than 2.7% recorded in 2025.

The forecast assumes that the Iran conflict does not trigger a sustained spike in global energy prices, keeping oil prices below USD 70 per barrel in 2026.

AWARDS & PRIZES

Vairamuthu Awarded Jnanpith Award 2025

Renowned Tamil poet and lyricist Vairamuthu has been awarded the Jnanpith Award for 2025, India’s highest literary honour.

The award recognises his decades-long contribution to Tamil literature, poetry, and film lyrics.

The Jnanpith Award is presented annually to authors for exceptional work in Indian languages.

Vairamuthu is widely known for his powerful poetry, literary writings, and thousands of song lyrics in Tamil cinema.

His writings are known for combining classical Tamil literary elements with contemporary themes, making them accessible to readers across generations.

Many of his works have also been translated into other languages, expanding their reach beyond the Tamil-speaking audience.

Apart from literature, Vairamuthu is one of the most celebrated lyricists in Tamil cinema, having written thousands of songs in collaboration with leading composers and filmmakers.

The Jnanpith Award was established by the Bharatiya Jnanpith in 1961 to honour outstanding contributions to literature in Indian languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

The award includes a citation, a cash prize, and a bronze statue of Goddess Saraswati, the symbol of knowledge and learning.

Winning the Jnanpith Award is considered one of the most prestigious achievements in the Indian literary world.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Election Commission of India Appointed Assam Special Observer

The Election Commission of India (ECI) appointed Manjeet Singh, a retired IAS officer (1988 batch, Rajasthan cadre), as Special Observer for the 2026 General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam.

The Special Observer will visit Assam regularly to monitor poll preparedness and the conduct of elections, providing inputs to the Commission for necessary action.

The appointment of the Special Observer is under Article 324 of the Constitution of India, which empowers the ECI to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections.

The General Election in Assam is scheduled for 9th April 2026, with vote counting on 4th May 2026.

Chief Election Commissioner Shri Gyanesh Kumar emphasized that elections in Assam and other states/UTs will be peaceful and impartial.

The role of the Special Observer includes acting as the eyes and ears of the Commission, helping to strengthen election integrity and ensure transparent electoral processes.

The Special Observer will coordinate with the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Assam during visits to the state.

MoUs & Agreement

Himachal Pradesh Signs MoU with National Dairy Development Board

The Himachal Pradesh Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Dairy Development Board to strengthen the dairy sector in the state.

The agreement aims to enhance milk processing capacity, improve dairy infrastructure, and generate employment opportunities for farmers.

The Memorandum of Understanding is expected to support dairy-based industries and promote dairy products under the ‘HIM’ brand.

The agreement focuses on improving the overall infrastructure of the dairy sector in Himachal Pradesh and modernising milk processing facilities across the state.

It also aims to strengthen the dairy supply chain and improve efficiency in milk collection,

processing, and distribution.

The National Dairy Development Board will assist in introducing world-class technology in milk processing and dairy-related bio-products.

The initiative will help farmers access better processing facilities, reduce wastage, and increase the value of milk and dairy products.

A key focus of the Memorandum of Understanding is the development and operation of the Dagwar Dairy Project, which is expected to emerge as a major dairy processing hub in the state.

The new agreement focuses on operationalising the Dagwar dairy plant and strengthening milk processing units across the state.

Another major objective of the Memorandum of Understanding is the promotion and marketing of dairy products under the 'HIM' brand to strengthen the identity of the state's dairy sector.

The HIM brand will be used to market locally produced dairy products, which are expected to attract consumers seeking high-quality and naturally produced dairy goods.

IMPORTANT DAYS

Ordnance Factories Day

Ordnance Factories Day is observed across India on March 18 every year to commemorate the establishment of the first ordnance factory in colonial India.

The day marks the foundation of the first ordnance factory set up in 1801 at Cossipore near Kolkata.

The ordnance factories operate under the Ministry of Defence, and the day highlights their role in strengthening India's defence manufacturing capabilities.

Ordnance Factories Day provides an opportunity to showcase the research, development, production, and marketing logistics of a wide range of arms and ammunition manufactured in the country.

Historically, the East India Company considered the manufacturing of military hardware essential to strengthen its economic and political control in India.

In 1775, the British authorities established the Board of Ordnance at Fort William, marking the official beginning of the Army Ordnance system in India.

Later, a gunpowder factory was established in 1787 at Ishapore, and production started in 1791.

In 1801, the British established a Gun Carriage Agency at Cossipore in Kolkata, and production began on March 18, 1802, marking the beginning of industrial ordnance production in India.

World Social Work Day

World Social Work Day 2026 was observed globally on March 17, 2026.

The day recognises the contributions of social workers in building stronger, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

World Social Work Day is observed annually on the third Tuesday of March to honour the dedication and work of social workers across the world.

The theme for 2026 is “Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society.”

The theme highlights the importance of collective action and cooperation among people across cultural, political, and social differences to build harmonious societies.

The observance of World Social Work Day is led by the International Federation of Social Workers.

The concept of celebrating a global day dedicated to the social work profession was formally approved during the International Federation of Social Workers General Meeting held in 2004 in Adelaide, Australia.

During the meeting, member organisations agreed to establish a dedicated day to recognise the contributions of the social work profession worldwide.