

Vodafone with Nokia, Audi to set up first 4G network on moon by next year

- Vodafone is planning to expand its 4G network but this expansion is not happening on earth. That's right! The British telecom major is setting up the first 4G network on the moon to support a mission by PTScientists in 2019.
- The 4G network that will now enable high-definition streaming from the lunar landscape back to earth is part of a project to back the first privately funded moon mission.
- Vodafone Germany, network equipment maker Nokia and carmaker Audi said in February they were working together to support the mission, 50 years after the first NASA astronauts walked on the moon.

Long-lost IMAGE satellite discovered by amateur astronomer: NASA

- An amateur astronomer on January 20, 2018 recorded observations of a satellite in high Earth orbit. This satellite was a long-lost NASA satellite- Imager for Magnetopause-to-Aurora Global Exploration (IMAGE) satellite.
- The amateur astronomer came across the satellite through signals. Engineers from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center used NASA's Deep Space Network which consists of a series of ground-based radio telescopes to study the signals, only to discover that these signals were from the IMAGE satellite.

Japan launches world's smallest rocket to carry satellite into space

- Japan launched the world's smallest rocket to set up a tiny satellite into the orbit. Correcting the error that led to the failure of a similar attempt in January last year, JAXA (Japan's Aerospace Exploration Agency) successfully carried out the operation this time.
- The world's smallest rocket is no more than a utility pole with a length of just 10 metres while the diameter of the rocket measured just 50 centimetres. It took off from the Uchinoura Space Centre in Kagoshima Prefecture after 2 pm and delivered its payload into the prescribed orbit.

Maldives President declares state of emergency for 15 days

- Maldives President Abdulla Yameen on February 5, 2018 declared a state of emergency across the country for 15 days, before heavily armed Maldivian troops stormed the country's Supreme Court and arrested two Supreme Court judges Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Judge Ali Hameed without specifying the charges.
- Former Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was also arrested amid this rising political crisis. Their detention comes following a conflict between the Supreme Court and the President over the release of several imprisoned opposition politicians.

Bill introduced in US House to end non-defence aid to Pakistan

- In the United States, a bill was introduced on February 5, 2018 in the House of Representatives to end non-defence aid to Pakistan as it provides military aid and intelligence to terrorists.
- The Bill was introduced by Congressmen Mark Sanford from South Carolina and Thomas Massie from Kentucky. Once implemented, the Bill will prohibit the US State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) from sending American taxpayer money to Pakistan.

SpaceX launches Falcon Heavy, the world's most powerful rocket carrying car into space

- US space flight company SpaceX on February 6, 2018 launched the world's most powerful operational rocket 'Falcon Heavy' into the space. The Falcon Heavy blasted off from the Kennedy Space Centre at Cape Canaveral, Florida, United States.
- Falcon Heavy's smooth takeoff wasn't the only surprising thing about this launch, but also SpaceX managed to guide two of the Falcon Heavy's first-stage rocket boosters to land straight back on Earth. They landed in unison at a Kennedy Space Centre landing pad.

- Falcon Heavy carried a red Tesla Roadster car belonging to SpaceX and Tesla founder Elon Musk into space. The car was outfitted with a mannequin dressed in a spacesuit, a high-data storage unit containing Isaac Asimov's science fiction book series, the Foundation Trilogy, and a plaque bearing the names of 6000 SpaceX employees.

Bermuda becomes first nation to ban same-sex marriage

- Bermuda has become the first country to annul same-sex marriage. It had instituted same-sex marriage as a law via judicial fiat less than a year ago. In what is believed to be a first-time rollback of civil rights by the British island territory, Bermuda is quickly turning overturning the new law.
- It is a step towards seeking to balance opposition to same-sex marriage on the socially conservative island while complying with European court rulings that make sure same-sex couples are recognized and protected in the territory, according to Governor John Rankin.

Nancy Pelosi made history of delivering longest eight hour speech in American Senate

- Nancy Pelosi, Democrate Minority Leader, delivered her speech for more than eight hours in American Senate on 07 February 2018. The House Historian's Office confirmed the lawmaker's record of longest speech to the media.
- The previous record of longest speech dates back to 1909 when a Missouri representative, Champ Clark, spoke for 5 hours and 15 minutes against a tariff overhaul. Nancy Pelosi's speech was ended in 8 hours and 5 minutes.

China agrees to allow Indian pilgrims to undertake Mansarovar yatra through Nathu La Pass

- Union Government on February 9, 2018 announced that China has agreed to allow Indian pilgrims to embark on Kailash-Mansarovar yatra through Nathu La Pass in Sikkim after the route was closed in 2017 in the wake of the Doklam standoff.
- The Yatra through this route was not undertaken last year after the Chinese government cited unfavourable conditions to ensure safety of pilgrims and smooth conduct of the yatra.

US Senate approves budget deal including Stopgap Government Funding Bill

- The US Senate on February 9, 2018 approved a budget deal including a Stopgap Government Funding Bill. The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 71-28 and sent it to the House of Representatives again for approval.
- However, it was too late to prevent shutdown of the Federal Government that was already underway. The shutdown, which technically started at midnight, was the second this year. US Office of Personnel Management advised federal employees to check with their agencies about whether they should report to work or not.

World's First 'Driverless Transport Pods' tested in Dubai

- In a first move towards the future of transport, the Roads and Transport Authority of Dubai launched the test of the world's first 'Autonomous Pods' during the World Government Summit in February, February 11, 2018.
- Designed and made by NEXT Future Transportation Inc., two full-scale prototypes of these pods were displayed at the Madinat Jumeirah.

Venezuela, Libya suspended from voting in UN General Assembly

- Venezuela and Libya have been suspended from voting in the UN General Assembly for the third time in three years because of millions of dollars in unpaid dues to the world body.
- The Secretary-General Antonio Guterres informed the General Assembly in late January that 14 countries including Venezuela and Libya were in arrears, and Assembly spokesman Brenden Varma confirmed on February 14 that Venezuela and Libya have lost their vote in the 193-member global organisation as a result.

London City Airport reopens after World War II bomb scare

- London City Airport has reopened after an unexploded 500 kilogram World War Two bomb was safely moved from the area.
- The bomb was discovered at the King George V Dock on February 11 during planned work at the east London airport. Following the discovery, all flights were cancelled, the airport was shut down and an exclusion zone was put in place, with the closure affecting up to 16,000 passengers and nearby residents being evacuated from their homes.

UNICEF launches 'Every Child Alive' global campaign

- UNICEF in February launched the "Every Child Alive" global campaign to demand and deliver affordable, quality health-care solutions for every mother and newborn.
- Issuing a statement, UNICEF Nepal said that, in low-income countries, the average newborn mortality rate is 27 deaths per 1,000 births, reports Xinhua.
- Newborns from the riskiest places are up to 50 times more likely to die than those from the safest places.
- According to the Nepal's Demographic Health Survey 2016, one in 48 babies die in their first 28 days of life in the country, making up to 13,000 newborn deaths every year in the Himalayan nation.
- More than 80 per cent of newborn deaths are due to prematurity, complications during birth or infections such as pneumonia and sepsis, according to the report.
- India's neonatal mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births) was found to be 25.4, making it the 12th worst among 52 'lower-middle-income countries' that pose risk for newborns.
- India is also the only major country in the world to have a higher mortality for girls than boys.
- While Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan account for 46% of all births and 57% of India's neonatal deaths, Kerala and Goa have neonatal mortality rates of ten per 1,000 live births.
- India has set a Sustainable Development Goal target for neonatal mortality of 12 by 2030.
- To achieve this goal, the country will have to reduce its neonatal deaths by half in the next 12 years.
- India has managed a 66% reduction in under-five deaths between 1990 to 2015 as against the world average of 55%.

UNICEF issues Blank Statement on Syria, says it has run out of words

- UNICEF issued a blank statement on February 20, 2018 to express its outrage at mass casualties among Syrian children in the besieged enclave of Eastern Ghouta and neighboring Damascus.
- There were 10 empty lines with quote marks indicating missing text and an explanatory footnote, indicating its incapability to describe children's suffering and its outrage.
- Forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have been besieging almost 400000 civilians trapped inside Eastern Ghouta for years.

India not among top 20 coffee drinking countries

- In a survey published by the International Coffee Organisation (ICO), India is not among the top 20 coffee drinking countries of the world.
- Finland took the top spot, consuming about 12 kg of coffee per year.
- Norway, Iceland and Denmark occupied the second, third and fourth spots respectively.
- India, which did not figure in the top 20, is the seventh largest exporter of coffee.

Saudi Arabia to host first Arab Fashion Week in Riyadh

- Saudi Arabia will host its first-ever Arab Fashion Week in Riyadh in March 2018.
- The move is another step towards opening up of the country under Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's ambitious transformation programme.
- The Dubai-based Arab Fashion Council said the fashion week will be held in Riyadh from March 26 to March 31, with a second edition already scheduled for October.

- The first Arab Fashion Week is expected to play the role of a catalyst through which the fashion sector will lead other economic sectors such as tourism, hospitality, travel, and trade.

India contributes USD 1 million aid to Tonga: United Nations

- India has contributed USD 1 million aid Tonga for rehabilitation efforts after island was hit by Tropical Cyclone Gita which had caused massive destruction across the pacific ocean archipelago.
- India will provide USD 500000 for immediate relief assistance and remaining USD 500000 from the India-UN Development Partnership Fund (UNDP) for the rehabilitation efforts.
- Tonga was recently hit by worst Tropical Cyclone Gita. US's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had reported it Category 4 cyclone and was the worst on record to hit Tonga.

Venezuela becomes first country to launch virtual currency 'Petro'

- Venezuela become first sovereign country to officially launch its own cryptocurrency called Petro backed by oil, gas, gold and diamond reserves.
- Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro claimed that the pre-mined cryptocurrency Petro has raised USD 735 million on the first day of its pre-sale.
- Petro aims to help Venezuela to advance in issues of monetary sovereignty, to make financial transactions and overcome financial blockade.