

Banking and Financial News

ADB, India sign 85 mn dollar loan to support Odisha skill development project

- The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** and the Government of **India** In December, 2018 signed a **85 million dollar loan to improve the skill development eco-system in Odisha** and establish an advanced skill training centre, the World Skill Centre (WSC), in the state capital Bhubaneswar.

ICICI Securities launches eATM service for retail investors

- Brokerage firm **ICICI Securities** Ltd has announced **launch of eATM orders, which instantly credits into a retail investor's bank account funds accrued from stock sales**. Under the current settlement system, an investor gets money into their accounts after two days (T+2) after a transaction.
- The **ICICIdirect** account almost becomes like an ATM where clients can sell and within 30 minutes walk into any ATM and withdraw the cash. The money would be credited within 30 minutes with a limit of ₹50,000 per client per day.

Tech Mahindra launches first AI based talent exchange market place, 'Talex'

- IT major, **Tech Mahindra Ltd**, In December, 2018 launched the **first Artificial Intelligence (AI) based, talent exchange market place, Talex**, to address issues related to upskilling, reskilling and talent management within the organisation.
- The solution has been developed by an in-house team of young disruptors, company release said.

SBI Mutual Fund launches its first AI powered voice assistant

- **SBI Mutual Fund**, one of India's leading mutual fund houses in the country, announced the launch of **its first AI-powered voice assistant with Google In December, 2018**.
- The voice assistant can be currently accessed through any smart phone having Google Assistant or where the Google Assistant app has been downloaded, or any of the Google Home devices.

Bahrain and Maharashtra Government signs MoU on fintech

- The **Economic Development Board (EDB)**, the investment promotion arm of the **Kingdom of Bahrain** In December, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the **Maharashtra Government** to provide a framework for **Co-operation between the two authorities to promote FinTech in their respective markets**.
- This MoU is in line with the EDB's aims of exploring greater synergies between India and Bahrain in the financial technology space and will last for an initial period of three years.

Centre approves SCord to tackle smuggling

- In an attempt to tackle smuggling, the Central government has approved **Anti-Smuggling National Coordination Centre (SCord) under the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI)**.
- All the border agencies like BSF, ITBP, Assam Rifles, SSB and Coast Guards would be the members of SCord, which will help India to formulate a national anti-smuggling policy.

India, UAE sign currency swap deal

- **India and the UAE** In December, 2018 **signed two agreements, including one on currency swap**, as external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj held exhaustive discussions with her counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan to step up cooperation in areas such as trade, security and defence.
- **Currency Swap is a pact between two countries that allows trading in their own currencies and payments to import and export trade at a pre-determined exchange rate**, without bringing in a third benchmark currency like the US dollar.
- The second agreement will **enable both sides to undertake development projects in Africa**.

Government forms Rajiv Kumar Committee to look at selling of OIL, ONGC fields to private companies

- The Union Government on December 3, 2018 constituted a six-member committee to look at selling of 149 small and marginal oil and gas fields of state-owned the **Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Limited (OIL) to private and foreign companies to boost domestic output**.
- The panel is chaired by the **NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar**.

RBI keeps all key policy rates unchanged

- The Reserve Bank of India, RBI, maintained status quo on all key policy rates in the fifth bi-monthly monetary policy review announced this afternoon. Subsequently, **the repo rate remains unchanged at 6.5 percent and the reverse repo rate at 6.25 percent**.
- Repo rate is the rate at which RBI lends to banks generally against government securities. The reverse repo is the rate at which RBI borrows money from banks. **The RBI informed the marginal standing facility rate and the Bank Rate too remain at 6.75 percent**.
- Assuming a normal monsoon next year, **RBI said that inflation will likely to stay in the range of 3.8 to 4.2 percent in the first half of next fiscal**.

RBI to set up panel to look into problems of MSMEs

- The **Reserve Bank of India** Wednesday said an **expert committee will be constituted to propose long-term solutions for the economic and financial sustainability of the MSME sector**.
- The panel's composition and its terms of reference will be finalised by the end of December, the RBI said in '**Statement on Developmental and Regulatory Policies**'.
- **The report of the panel will be submitted by the end of June 2019. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute significantly to employment, entrepreneurship and growth in the economy**.

Indian Overseas Bank to issue 18.24 crore shares under ESPS scheme

- State-owned **Indian Overseas Bank** Wednesday said it has decided **to issue more than 18 crore shares to its staff under the employee stock purchase scheme**.
- The lender said that the issue price, including premium, is determined by the committee of directors.
- However, the bank did not disclose details about the issue price and how much fund has been raised under this scheme.

Indian Chamber of Commerce signs MoU with China Council to promote bilateral trade

- **The Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC)** In December, 2018 signed an MoU with **China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT)** to increase the bilateral trade between India and China.

RBI approves Amalgamation of SBM Bank (Mauritius) Limited, India with SBM Bank (India) Limited

- The Reserve Bank of India approved the Scheme of amalgamation of **SBM Bank (Mauritius) Limited, India with SBM Bank (India) Limited.**
- The amalgamated entity has been granted licence by the Reserve Bank to carry on the business of banking in India through **Wholly Owned Subsidiary (WOS) Mode under section 22(1) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.**
- The Scheme has been sanctioned in exercise of the powers contained in **sub-section (4) of Section 44A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.**

RBI to implement an Ombudsman scheme for digital transactions

- Reserve Bank of India has said that it will implement **an Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions covering services provided by entities falling under Reserve Banks regulatory jurisdiction.**
- RBI said, with the digital mode for financial transactions gaining traction in the country, there is an emerging need for a dedicated, cost-free and expeditious grievance redressal mechanism for strengthening consumer confidence in this channel.
- **The scheme will be notified by the end of January 2019.**

ICICI Bank launches Robo Advisory App for Mutual Fund Investment

- ICICI Bank has launched "**Money Coach**", **a software robotics algorithm-led investment advisory application on mobile.**
- The app will provide seamless service through a bank account right from enrolment into a mutual fund and then to actual investment and liquidation.
- **This is the first time a bank has come with such a service.**

Cabinet approves Agriculture Export Policy in line with govt's commitment to double farmer's income by 2022

- The Union Cabinet In December, 2018 approved **Agriculture Export Policy in line with government's committment to double farmer's income by 2022.**
- Speaking to media in New Delhi after the meeting of the Cabinet, Minister for Commerce and Industry Suresh Prabhu said, farmers will get the benefit of export opportunities through a stable trade policy regime.

Ministry of Shipping approves development of freight village in Varanasi

- Ministry of Shipping has **approved development of a freight village in Varanasi adjoining the Inland Waterways Terminal on River Ganga.** It will be developed at a cost **156 crore rupees.**
- According to an official release, it will serve as a cargo hub and a centre for aggregation and value addition.

OPEC to consider PM Modi's views on deciding global oil prices

- During the meeting of leaders of Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna, Saudi Arabia's energy minister Khalid Al Falih said OPEC nations will **consider Prime Minister Narendra Modi's consumer-centric views on oil pricing before taking any decision.**
- Oil prices have crashed nearly 30 percent in the last two months as major producers including the US are pumping oil at high rates.

India signs agreement with Iran to pay crude bill in rupee

- India signed an agreement with Iran to pay for crude oil it imports from the *Persian Gulf nation in rupees*.
- Indian refiners will *make rupee payments in a UCO Bank account of the National Iranian Oil Co (NIOC)*.

RBI Governor Urjit Patel resigns

- Reserve Bank Governor Urjit Patel In December, 2018 stepped down from his post citing personal reasons.
- In a statement, Dr. Patel said he is stepping down with immediate effect.
- He said it has been his privilege and honour to serve in the Reserve Bank of India in various capacities over the years.
- Dr. Patel succeeded Raghuram Rajan as the 24th Governor of RBI in September 2016. He had been appointed for a three-year term.

SEBI to relax listing norms for start-ups; renames ITP as 'Innovators Growth Platform'

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on December 7, 2018 passed a slew of relaxations for start-ups in sectors like e-commerce, data analytics and bio-technology to raise funds and list them on stock exchanges.
- The proposed changes include **renaming the 'Institutional Trading Platform' (ITP) of start-ups' listings as 'Innovators Growth Platform'**.

The SEBI had earlier set up an expert group to review the start-up platform. The group proposed following changes in the Framework:

- Do away with requirement of **at least 50 percent of pre-issue capital**
- The group proposed to get rid of the requirement of at least 50 percent of pre-issue capital held by qualified institutional investors.
- **It proposed that 25 percent of pre-issue capital for at least two years should be with qualified institutional investors**, a family trust with net worth of at least Rs 500 crore, well-regulated foreign investors and a new class of 'Accredited Investors' (AIs).

UK court orders extradition of Vijay Mallya

- The UK court on December 10, 2018 ordered the extradition of Indian business tycoon and liquor baron Vijay Mallya from Britain to India to face charges of fraud filed against him. The decision follows a nine-month-long trial on an extradition warrant, which began with Mallya's arrest in April 2017 and ended in September.
- India has been seeking the businessman's extradition on charges of fraud and money laundering amounting to almost Rs 9,000 crore. He has been on bail since his arrest.

RBI cancels Certificate of Registration of 32 NBFCs

- The Reserve Bank of India In December, 2018 said it has **cancelled the Certificate of Registration of 32 non-banking financial companies**.
- The central bank in a release said it cancelled the registration of the companies by exercising of powers vested on it under Section 45-IA (6) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

Govt contribution to NPS raised to 14 per cent

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has said **Cabinet had decided to make some changes in National Pension Scheme, NPS on 6th of this month.**
- Speaking to media in New Delhi In December, 2018, Mr Jaitley said **Central Government contribution will be raised to 14 per cent from existing 10 per cent in NPS.**
- He said the tax exemption limit for lump sum withdrawal on exit has been enhanced to 60 per cent.

ADB to give \$31 mn loan to develop tourism and boost jobs in Tamil Nadu

- **The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide \$ 31 million loan to develop tourism and boost jobs in Tamil Nadu,** a finance ministry statement said Tuesday.
- **The total cost of the project is \$ 44.04 million, of which the government will provide \$ 13.04 million. It is expected to be completed in June 2020.**

RBI slaps Rs 10 mn fine on Indian Bank for violating cyber security norms

- **The Reserve Bank of India Tuesday said it has imposed a fine of Rs 10 million on Indian Bank for violating cybersecurity norms.**
- **The RBI has imposed, by an order dated November 30, 2018, a monetary penalty of Rs 10 million on Indian Bank for contravention of Circular on Cyber Security Framework in banks,** the central bank said in a release.

Economist Surjit S Bhalla resigns as Member of the Economic Advisory Council to PM Modi

- **Economist Surjit S Bhalla resigned from his position as the part-time Member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.**
- Prime Minister accepted Bhalla's resignation.
- The Economic Advisory Council is **headed by NITI Aayog member Bibek Debroy.**

Nissan's first global digital hub inaugurated at Trivandrum IT park

- **The Nissan Global Digital Hub was officially inaugurated In December, 2018 at Trivandrum, Kerala.** This centre will drive digital transformation for Nissan's business by placing digital technology at the heart of key operations and services.
- **The facility, located in Kerala's IT hub, Technopark, in Thiruvananthapuram, is the first of a number of software and information technology development centres slated to come up in Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America.**

ICICI Bank launches first-ever account exclusively for working women in India

- **ICICI Bank In December, 2018 announced the launch of the first ever account exclusively for working women in India. Christened, 'Advantage Woman Aura Savings Account',** it offers a slew of benefits across categories like 'banking', 'lifestyle', 'convenience', 'investment & tax planning', 'child education' and 'protection'.
- **The comprehensive bouquet of benefits includes a cashback of Rs. 750 per month on usage of debit cards across key segments,** 50% discount on locker rentals and processing fees on home, auto and personal loans. It also offers unlimited free transactions on ICICI Bank as well as Non – ICICI Bank ATMs in India, thereby providing exceptional flexibility.

CBIC notifies 'Korean Won', 'Turkish Lira' in List of Currencies for Exchange Rate

- The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) included two currencies - **Korean Won and Turkish Lira in the list of currencies for which it notifies the exchange rate.**

- Currently, the CBIC notifies exchange rates for 20 currencies for the purpose of valuation of imported and exported goods and now with the inclusion of Lira and Won, the total number is now 22.

Amazon India inks pact with FISME to educate MSMEs about online selling

- **Amazon India** Thursday said it has partnered with **FISME** to help **micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) tap into opportunities in the e-commerce sector.**
- According to the pact, Amazon.in will collaborate with **The Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME)** to conduct various events and workshops across the country that will enable MSMEs sell their products online.

President Kovind inaugurates 5th Enterprise India show in Myanmar

- President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the **5th Enterprise India show in Yangon, Myanmar In December, 2018 which was hosted by Confederation of Indian Industry** and the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce. The focus of the conference was Small and Medium Enterprises.
- Addressing the gathering of business leaders from both the countries, President said that India has established itself as the fastest growing major economy in the world, the two countries can do much to learn and leverage from each other's competencies.

Ashok Leyland inks MoU with Israel's Elbit Systems for high mobility vehicles

- **Hinduja Group firm Ashok Leyland** Wednesday said it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with **Israel's Elbit Systems for high mobility vehicles.**
- As part of this agreement, Ashok Leyland will provide high mobility vehicles (HMV) for mounting Elbit Systems' artillery guns and systems. The integrated systems are targeted for worldwide export markets," Ashok Leyland said in a regulatory filing.

India, ADB sign USD 60 Million loan agreement to reduce floods in Assam

- **India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)** on December 13, 2018 **signed a USD 60 million loan agreement to reduce floods and the riverbank erosion in Assam.**
- **This Tranche 2 loan is part of the USD 120 million multi-tranche financing facility (MFF) of the ADB for the Assam Integrated Flood and Riverbank Erosion Risk Management Investment Program.** The program was approved by the ADB Board in October 2010.

Niti Aayog organising 3rd edition of Women Transforming India awards 2018

- NITI Aayog is organising the **third edition of the Women Transforming India Awards 2018.** The event will also mark launching of the upgraded portal of the **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP).**
- An official release said, Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu, as the Chief Guest, will give away the awards and launch the WEP upgraded portal.

OPPO set up R&D centre in Hyderabad

- Chinese handset maker **OPPO** Saturday said it has **set up a research and development (R&D) centre in Hyderabad.**
- The India R&D centre is the fourth such set up globally and the largest outside China, it said.

India decides to extend 1.4 billion dollar aid to Maldives

- India has decided to extend 1.4 billion dollars financial assistance to the Maldives as budget support, currency swap and line of credit for the social and economic development of Maldives.
- President Solih reaffirmed his government's "India-First Policy" and commitment to working closely with India.

PM Modi inaugurates 175 Km Sewerage Network in Prayagraj; NMCG sanctions funds for Kumbh Mela

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 16, 2018 inaugurated various projects worth Rs 199.65 crore under Namami Gange Programme in Prayagraj, including 175 KM of sewerage network.
- The projects will prevent 7.8 crore litres of sewage from flowing untreated into Ganga River every day.
- Prime Minister Modi also laid the foundation stone for two projects in the Trans Ganga/Yamuna area under 'One City-One Operator Scheme' with sanctioned cost of Rs 767.59 crore.

These projects include Intersection and diversion (I&D) of sewage network, 7 sewage pumping stations and 3 STPs of total capacity 72 million litres per day (MLD).

Capital First-IDFC merger creates IDFC First Bank; V Vaidyanathan to be CEO

- New generation private sector IDFC Bank and non-banking financial company Capital First announced completion of their merger Tuesday, creating a combined loan asset book of Rs 1.03 trillion for the merged entity IDFC First Bank.
- "IDFC Bank and Capital First merged effective 18th December 2018. Merged entity to be called IDFC First Bank, subject to shareholders' approval," the firms said in a joint statement.
- Following the merger, the board of IDFC Bank approved the appointment of V Vaidyanathan, founder and chairman of Capital First Ltd, as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the merged entity, said the statement.

PM launches projects worth 41,000 crore Rupees in Maharashtra

- PM launches housing and infrastructure projects worth 41,000 crore rupees in Maharashtra; Foundation laid for new metro sections in Thane & Pune; work commences for 90,000 housing units at the cost of 18,000 crore rupees.
- Giving a big push to infrastructure projects in the Maharashtra, Prime Minister Narendra Modi In December, 2018 laid down the foundation stone for the Thane-Bhiwandi-Kalyan Metro and the Dahisar-Mira-Bhayander Metro. With the completion of this metro project in 2021, connectivity is all set to further improve across the state of Maharashtra. Addressing on the occasion, PM said that this metro project decongest the Mumbai suburban area.

Chhattisgarh government waives of farm loans of over 16 lakh farmers

- Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has announced to waive off farm loans to the tune of Rs 6,100 crore of more than 16 lakh farmers.
- It has been decided to waive off all short-term loans availed by farmers from cooperative and Rural development banks.

Vijay Mallya to face bankruptcy proceedings in UK High Court in 2019

- Embattled liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya to face bankruptcy proceedings in the UK High Court in 2019.
- A consortium of Indian banks in their attempt to recoup unpaid debt worth nearly 1.145 billion pounds has filed the case.

NITI Aayog releases 'Strategy for New India @75'

- The NITI Aayog on December 19, 2018 released 'Strategy for New India @75', its comprehensive national Strategy for New India which defines clear objectives for 2022-23. The Strategy was released by the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

Recommendations stated under Drivers

- Steadily accelerate the economy to achieve a GDP growth rate of about 8 percent on average during 2018-23. **This will raise the economy's size in real terms from USD 2.7trillion in 2017-18 to nearly USD 4 trillion by 2022-23.**
- In agriculture, shift the emphasis to converting farmers to 'agripreneurs' by further expanding e-National Agriculture Markets and replacing the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act with the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing Act.
- Give a strong push to 'Zero Budget Natural Farming' techniques that reduce costs, improve land quality and increase farmers' incomes.

Recommendations under Infrastructure

- Expedite the establishment of the **Rail Development Authority (RDA)**, which is already approved.
- **Deliver all government services at the state, district, and gram panchayat level digitally by 2022-23.** With the completion of the **Bharat Net programme in 2019**, all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats will be digitally connected.

Recommendations under Inclusion

- Successfully implementing the Ayushman Bharat programme including **the establishment of 150000 health and wellness centres across the country, and rolling out the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyaan (PM-JAY).**
- Upgrade the quality of the school education system and skills, including the creation of a new innovation ecosystem at the ground level by establishing **at least 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs by 2020.**

Assam govt approves debt relief scheme for farmers

- The Assam government has approved **debt relief scheme for the farmers of the state.** The decision was taken in a cabinet meeting headed by Chief Minister Sarbanand Sonowal, held in Guwahati on December 17, 2018.
- The state cabinet decided to waive 25 percent of loan amount to the farmers. **However the maximum relief per farmer would be capped at 25 thousand rupees.**

Govt to infuse Rs 83,000 crore in PSBs in next few months

- The government will infuse 83000 crore in Public Sector Banks in next few months in the current fiscal.
- Briefing media in New Delhi In December, 2018 evening, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the recapitalisation **will enhance the lending capacity of state-owned banks and help them come out of the RBI's Prompt Corrective Action, PCA framework.**

States' Startup Ranking 2018 released: Gujarat ranked Best Performer

- The **Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)** on December 20, 2018 announced the **results of the first ever States' Start-up Ranking 2018**. DIPP began the exercise to review the Start-up ecosystem of the states from January 2016.
- **Gujarat was ranked as the "Best Performer"** in the States' Start-up Ranking 2018. Gujarat allocated Rs 100 Crore budget for Startups and provided assistance to 200 projects.
- A total of 27 States and 3 Union Territories participated in the exercise.

States' Startup Ranking 2018	
Category	States
Best Performer	Gujarat
Top Performers	Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha, and Rajasthan
Leaders	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana
Aspiring Leaders	Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal
Emerging States	Assam, Delhi, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand
Beginners	Chandigarh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Puducherry, Sikkim, and Tripura

Nitin Gadkari inaugurates projects worth Rs 9533 Crore in Arunachal Pradesh

- Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation **Nitin Gadkari inaugurated projects worth Rs 9533 crore at separate events in Roing and Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh.**
- The infrastructure projects will transform the picture of states in the North Eastern region of the country by way of development, job creation, tourism and employment for the youth.
- In Roing, Gadkari inaugurated **bridges across Dibang and Lohit River System, including approach road between Chowkham-Digaru.** The total length of this project is 30.95 km and cost Rs 1508.30 Crore.

Union Government to set up panel to look into tax issues faced by start-ups

- The Union Government has decided to **set up an expert committee to look into all the taxation issues being faced by startups and angel investors.** The information was shared by the **Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) on December 20, 2018.**
- **The decision was taken at a high-level meeting of Department of Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) Secretary Ramesh Abhishek, and Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) Chairman Sushil Chandra.**

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik announces Rs 100 billion-scheme for farmers

- **Naveen Patnaik unveiled a Rs 100 billion scheme for farmers titled Krushak Assistance for Livelihoods & Income Augmentation (KALIA).** The scheme to benefit both farmers and share croppers was approved at a meeting of the Agriculture Cabinet. **The scheme envisages Rs 101.8 billion expenditure over three years till 2020-21.**
- The latest scheme for the distressed farm sector is made up by five components- financial support for cultivation, livelihood support for landless households, financial assistance to vulnerable

agriculture households and landless labourers, **life insurance cover and exemption of interest for crop loans of up to Rs 50,000.**

RBI shortlists TCS, Wipro, IBM, 3 others for setting up Public Credit Registry

- **The Reserve Bank of India** has shortlisted six major IT companies, including **TCS, Wipro and IBM India, to set up a wide-based digital Public Credit Registry (PCR)** for capturing details of all borrowers and wilful defaulters.
- The proposed PCR will also include data from entities like market regulator **Sebi**, the corporate affairs ministry, **Goods and Service Tax Network (GSTN)** and the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)** to enable banks and financial institutions to get a 360-degree profile of the existing as well as prospective borrowers on a real-time basis.
- The other three shortlisted vendors are: **Capgemini Technology Services India, Dun & Bradstreet Information Services India, and Mindtree Ltd.**

IKEA signs MoU with Uttar Pradesh govt worth 5000 crore

- **Uttar Pradesh** government In December, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Swedish furniture giant **IKEA for the investment of Rs 5,000 crore to set up an integrated commercial project, including a store, in Noida.**
- According to the government, the project will provide direct employment to 4,000 people and indirect employment to 4,000 more.

Punjab National Bank Launches Special Card for Kumbh Mela

- State-owned **Punjab National Bank (PNB)** has launched a **special card for Kumbh Mela 2019.**
- The bank has partnered with the Uttar Pradesh government to create a model for digitization at this edition of Kumbh Mela, PNB said in a statement issued In December, 2018.
- It is estimated that 12 crore devotees will participate in this event which happens every 12 years.

India, Japan sign Exchange of Notes and Loan Agreements on Japan's assistance Loan to India

India and Japan on December 21, 2018 signed **Exchange of Notes and Loan Agreements on Japan's Official Development Assistance Loan to India.**

These 3 projects are:

- **Chennai Metro Project (Phase 2) (I) for Japanese Yen (JPY) 75.519 billion**
- Program for Japan-India Cooperative Actions towards **Sustainable Development Goals in India for JPY 15.000 billion**
- Project for **Dairy Development for JPY 14.978 billion.**

For these three projects, Japan has committed JICA Official Development Assistance of around Rs. 6668.46 crore jointly.

J&K Bank enters into MoU with Global Money Transfer Company

- Facilitating its customers to receive remittances faster, **J&K Bank Limited has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Instant Global Money Transfer Company** for online money transfer.

- The tie-up will help people working abroad to send money to their families and students overseas to repay loans taken for study purposes in India as well as tourists visiting various parts of the country.

GST Council reduces GST Rates of 23 goods and services; revised rates effective from January 1, 2019

- **The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council on December 22, 2018 slashed GST Rates for 23 commonly used goods and services.** The reduced rates will come into effect from January 1, 2019.
- The GST rate on movie tickets, costing up to Rs 100, was cut to 12 percent from 18 percent, while tickets over 100 rupees will attract 18 percent tax against 28 percent. Monitors and TV screens up to 32-inches and power banks will attract 18 percent GST, as against 28 percent earlier.

GST rate reduction from 28 percent to 18 percent

- Pulleys, transmission shafts and cranks, gear boxes, falling under HS Code 8483
- Monitors and TVs of up to screen size of 32 inches
- Used pneumatic tyres of rubber
- Power banks of lithium ion batteries.
- Digital cameras and video camera recorders
- Video game consoles and other games and sports requisites falling under HS code 9504

PM Modi unveils projects worth around Rs 15,000 cr in Odisha

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth around Rs 15,000 crore in Odisha** In December, 2018.
- These projects are related to health, road and highways, higher education and culture. **These projects are part of Mr Modi's vision of Purbodaya - a prosperous East for building a new India.**
- Among the projects, **the Prime Minister dedicated the new campus of IIT-Bhubaneswar at Aragul built at a cost of Rs 1660 crore.**

Logistics Development Committee constituted to suggest reforms for ease of doing trade

- The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) **has constituted a Logistics Development Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Bibek Debroy, Chairman of EAC-PM** to assess key challenges and suggest reforms in logistics development and associated commerce.
- The committee comprises secretaries and heads of the concerned departments and ministries such as **Revenue, Commerce, Logistics, DIPP, Civil Aviation, Shipping, Road Transport & Highways, Railways, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).**

RBI to soon issue new Rs 20 note

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will soon **introduce a new Rs 20 currency note with additional features**, as per a document of the central bank.
- The central bank has already issued new look **currency notes in the denominations of Rs 10, Rs 50, Rs 100 and Rs 500, besides introducing Rs 200 and Rs 2,000 bank notes.**

MSME Ministry proposes to establish governing council to boost shipments

- **The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) has proposed to establish a governing council to ensure efficient delivery of all export-related interventions**, as a part of its action plan to boost shipments from micro, small and medium enterprises.
- The governing council shall be **chaired by Secretary, MSME and co-chaired by Development Commissioner in MSME Ministry.**

RBI constitutes Expert Committee headed by Bimal Jalan on Economic Capital Framework

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in consultation with the Union Government, on December 26, 2018 constituted an **Expert Committee on Economic Capital Framework**. The Committee will be headed by **Bimal Jalan**, while, former secretary Rakesh Mohan was named as the Vice Chairman.
- The panel will decide on **the appropriate size of reserves that the RBI should maintain and the dividend it should give to the government**.
- The decision regarding the constitution of the Committee was taken **by the Central Board of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its meeting held on November 19, 2018**.

RBI launches survey to capture retail payment habits in 6 cities

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** on December 26, 2018 launched a '**Survey on Retail Payment Habits of Individuals (SRPHi)**'.
- The survey will capture payment habits of individuals in six cities, including four metropolitan towns.
- It will cover a sample of 6,000 individuals from various socio-economic **backgrounds across six cities including Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Guwahati**.

Government reviews guidelines for FDI in E- commerce

- The Government has reviewed guidelines **for Foreign Direct Investment in E- commerce companies to protect the interests of domestic players**.
- It prohibited **e-commerce companies from entering into an agreement for exclusive sale of products**.
- **Cash back provided to buyers by group companies of marketplace entity shall be fair and non-discriminatory**.

RBI plans to set up portal to supervise cybersecurity measures of PSPs

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) plans to set up an **Integrated Compliance and Tracking System portal to supervise cybersecurity measures of payment system providers (PSPs)**.
- This is in light of cyber risk, with particular consequences to the banking sector, said the RBI. **The central bank also plans to expand the portal to cover other regulated entities**.
- **The number of cybercrimes in 2017-2018 stood at 2,059 cases with a total value of Rs 10.96 billion, a steep rise against 1,372 cases of a total value of Rs 423 million in 2016-2017**.
- The past year saw cyber-attacks on various banks including **City Union Bank, Punjab National Bank, Cosmos Bank and the State Bank of Mauritius**.

RBI relaxes withdrawal limit for depositors of City Co-op Bank to Rs 5,000

- The Reserve Bank has increased the withdrawal limit for depositors of **City Co-operative Bank Ltd, Mumbai, to Rs 5,000**.
- Amid weakening of the financial position of the cooperative bank, the RBI in April had imposed several restrictions on it, **including limiting the withdrawal by depositors to Rs 1,000**.
- Now the RBI has modified its April directions in relation to the bank.

CCEA approves increase in MSP for Copra by more than Rs 2000 per quintal

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved increase in the **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** for Fair Average Quality (FAQ) of "Milling Copra" to Rs 9521 per quintal for 2019 season from Rs 7511 per quintal in 2018.
- The MSP of "Ball Copra" was increased to Rs 9920 per quintal for 2019 season from Rs 7750 per quintal in 2018.

Maharashtra Government implements recommendations of 7th Pay Commission

- The **Maharashtra Government** on December 27, 2018 implemented **the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission**, a move that is expected to benefit as many as 20.50 lakh employees of the state government.
- The implementation of the new pay commission will benefit the officers, employees, teachers from the unaided schools and those from Zilla Parishad institutions.

India announces Rs 4,500 crore assistance to Bhutan

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** has announced a **Rs 4,500 crore financial assistance to Bhutan** for its 12th five-year plan after holding wide-ranging talks with his **Bhutanese counterpart Dr. Lotay Tshering**.
- **The new five-year plan of Bhutan began this year and will continue till 2022.** In his media statement, Modi said **hydropower cooperation with Bhutan** is a key aspect of bilateral ties and that work on the Mangdechhu project will soon be completed.

ESAF small finance bank gets RBI nod to operate as scheduled bank

- **ESAF small finance bank** which received the first banking license in Kerala since independence has got **RBI approval to operate as scheduled bank**.
- This makes Thrissur-based ESAF small finance bank (SFB) the fifth scheduled bank from Kerala. **ESAF micro finance institution, started in 1992, was one among the ten applicants to receive approval from RBI to start banking operations in 2016.**

RBI to set up compliance portal to track cyber fraud

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** would set up a **compliance and tracking system portal to tackle the proliferation of cyber-fraud and seeks to establish a better redressal mechanism for consumers.**
- With digital transactions gaining traction, RBI's customer-protection measures are seen as a bid to promote and improve confidence in the digital channel.
- This will support the government's objective of **creating a 'less-cash' economy.**

Over 1.12 lakh MSME loan applications approved under '59 minutes' scheme

- **Public sector banks** have approved more than **1.12 lakh loan applications of MSMEs totalling Rs 37,412 crore under the '59 minutes' loan scheme** launched by the government in November.
- GST-registered micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can take loan up to Rs 1 crore in just 59 minutes through 'psbloansin59minutes.com' portal.

Gross NPAs jump to 11.2% or Rs 10.39 tln in FY18: RBI Report

- The number of ATMs has declined marginally to 2.07 lakh in FY18 from 2.08 lakh in FY17, primarily due to branch rationalisation by a few public sector banks, the Reserve Bank said in its annual report Friday.
- Similarly, the number of operational on-site ATMs too came down to 1.06 lakh during the year from 1.09 lakh in FY17, while that of off-site ATMs increased to 1 lakh from 98,545.

RBI exploring mobile phone-based solution to help visually impaired identify banknotes

- The Reserve Bank of India is exploring the possibility of mobile phone-based solution to help visually-impaired people easily identify the currency notes.
- Currently, intaglio printing-based identification marks are present in the banknotes of Rs 100 and above for helping the visually challenged.

RBI extends liquidity sops for banks to March 31

- The Reserve Bank of India has extended the relaxation offered to banks for offering liquidity support to NBFCs up to March 31.
- It had allowed banks to use government securities equal to their outstanding credit to non-bank lenders- NBFCs and HFCs, over and above their outstanding credit to them as on October 19, to be used to meet liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) requirements.
- LCR are highly liquid assets that banks and financial institutions hold to meet their short term obligations. The Reserve Banks had relaxed these norms to help NBFCs get liquidity support from banks.

Bank frauds rise 72% in 2017-18 to Rs 412 bn; PNB scam biggest cause: RBI

- Frauds in the banking industry increased by 72 per cent to Rs 412 billion in 2017-2018, against Rs 239 billion in the previous year. This jump was mainly on account of the Rs 140 billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud, said a report by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) In December, 2018.
- The number of fraud cases stood at 5,917 cases in 2017-18 against 5,076 cases in 2016-2017. This was a rise of 16.5 per cent over the previous year with an incremental 841 cases.
- The number of fraud cases reported by banks was generally hovering at around 4,500 in the past 10 years before their increase to 5,835 in 2017-18, said RBI's annual report released in August.

Loan subsidy for middle-income group extended till March 2020

- The Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri said on December 31, 2018 that the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) loan subsidy for middle-income group has been extended till March 31, 2020.
- Speaking on the same, Puri said that about one lakh beneficiaries have taken benefit of the scheme so far.
- Under the yojana, around 68.7 lakh houses have been sanctioned, 37 lakh houses have been grounded and 13.5 lakh have been completed and handed over.

MSMEs Ministry established export promotion cell to create sustainable ecosystem

- The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Ministry has established an export promotion cell to create a sustainable ecosystem for MSMEs.
- This was stated by the Minister of State (Independent Charge) for MSME Giriraj Singh in a written reply in Lok Sabha yesterday.

Shikha Sharma retires as Axis Bank MD & CEO, Amitabh Chaudhry to succeed

- **Axis Bank** In December, 2018 said its Managing Director and CEO Shikha Sharma has retired, effective December 31, 2018.
- **Amitabh Chaudhry** will be the new managing director and CEO of the bank with effect from January 1, 2019, it said further.
- **Chaudhry**, the former MD and CEO of HDFC Standard Life Insurance Company, was in September named the MD and CEO of Axis Bank for a period of three years, with effect from January 1, 2019.
- **Earlier on December 8, Axis Bank had inducted Chaudhry as additional director on its board**, three weeks ahead of his taking over as the new managing director and CEO of the private sector lender.

India and States

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa to be the Chief Guest at Republic Day Celebrations 2019

- **South African President Cyril Ramaphosa will be Chief Guest at India's 70th Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2019.**
- Ramaphosa was invited to be chief guest by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when two leaders met on sidelines of G20 summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

India and Sweden sign MoUs in Renewable Energy sector

- **India and Sweden** In December, 2018 signed **two memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in the Renewable Energy sector** to enhance the technology and bring in energy efficiency in India.
- The first MoU was signed between Swedish solar pump manufacturer **Spowdi** and Bangalore based **EMVEE for setting up local manufacturing/assembly in Bangalore.**
- The second MoU was signed between **Swedish Earth Fault Protection System** provider **Swedish Neutral** and India's leading distribution company **Tata Power DDL for setting up a pilot for earth fault protection in Delhi.**

India's First Engine-Less Train Touches 180 Kmph Mark During Trial Run

- **India's first locomotive-less aka engineless train breached the 180 kmph mark during the test run In December, 2018**, a senior official said. It has been named 'Train18'.
- This Rs 100-crore indigenously designed train will become the country's fastest train.

UP-Nepal to sign MoU declaring Ayodhya-Janakpur twin cities

- The **Uttar Pradesh** and **Nepal** governments will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) **to declare Ayodhya and Janakpur as twin cities**, an official said In December, 2018.
- An understanding to this effect was arrived at a meeting between a Nepalese delegation and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath late In December, 2018.

Microsoft India to host first Education Days in India on Dec 4-5

- Continuing in its efforts to enhance the educational landscape through technology, **Microsoft India is organising the first Microsoft Education Days 2018 in Gurugram on December 4 and 5.**

- The two-day event will bring together students, over 220 educators and Microsoft Partners under one roof to showcase their work and deliberate on innovation in Education in India.

FSSAI launches Heart Attack Rewind Campaign for elimination of industrially produced trans-fat

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched media campaign “**Heart Attack Rewind**”, calling for **elimination of industrially produced trans-fat in the food supply**.
- It will support FSSAI’s global target of eliminating trans-fat in India by 2022, a year ahead of global target by World Health Organization (WHO).
- It is in line with FSSAI objective to get Freedom from ‘Trans Fat: India@75’.

Government launches Digital Sky Platform for drone registration

- The Union Government’s Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) to enable safe flying **of Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS) popularly referred to as drones** came into effect on December 1, 2018. The Government had announced the release of the regulations in August 2018.
- With the announcement, while nano drones can start flying in the country with immediate effect, for drones of micro size and above categories, the operators would be required to register on the **Digital Sky portal**.

Nagaland becomes first north-eastern state to launch single emergency number ‘112’

- The Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on December 1, 2018 launched **the single emergency number ‘112’ under the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) for the state of Nagaland**.
- The launch coincided with the state’s formation day and the **inaugural day of the 2018 edition of the Hornbill Festival**.

India, US agree to further strengthen bilateral defence cooperation

- **India** and the **US** have **agreed to further strengthen bilateral defence cooperation that follows the discussions and outcomes of the 2 plus 2 Dialogue** held in New Delhi this year.
- Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who is on a visit to the US, discussed with American counterpart James N Mattis the growing partnership between India and US in the field of defence.

Second meeting of NITI Forum for North East held in Guwahati

- **The second meeting of the NITI Forum for North East was held in Guwahati on December 4, 2018.** The meeting was presided over by Vice Chairman of the NITI Aayog Rajiv Kumar and co-chaired by Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region, Dr. Jitendra Singh.
- The NITI Forum for North East was constituted in 2018 to periodically review the development status in North Eastern Region.

International conference on bears starts in Agra

- **The four-day International conference on bears began in Agra, Uttar Pradesh** on December 4, 2018. The conference is expected to witness participation from over 80 delegates from 11 countries across the world.
- The conference is aimed at sharing knowledge on the principles of the welfare of bears and other wild animals in zoos, sanctuaries and rescue centres.

Statue of Unity among top tourist destinations

- The 182-metre tall '**Statue of Unity**', dedicated to Sardar Patel in Gujarat's Narmada district has slowly become one of India's top tourist spots.
- The statue is now attracting around **30,000 visitors every day**. The United States Consul-General Edgard Kagan also visited the memorial.

India, China exchange views on issues of common interest

- **India and China** In December, 2018 exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest.
- Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale and Vice Foreign Minister of China Kong Xuanyou held consultations in New Delhi.

Mahindra's Igatpuri plant India's first Carbon Neutral Facility

- **Mahindra's Igatpuri** plant has become **India's first carbon neutral manufacturing facility** and has been certified by Bureau Veritas (India) Pvt. Ltd.
- Mahindra & Mahindra said that it was the first company in the world to commit to doubling its energy productivity by 2030, signing on to The Climate Group's EP100 program.

National Commission for Women to support livelihood programmes for women in northeast

- The **National Commission for Women (NCW)** has decided to **support northeast livelihood programmes** for **women**, particularly for those falling under the younger age group, through skill development and specialised training.
- The livelihood programmes will impart skill training to these women in order to make them self-reliant.

Railways Ministry, Madame Tussauds Wax Museum sign MoU to foster tourism in Delhi NCR

- **The National Rail Museum (NRM)** of the Railways Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **the Madame Tussauds Wax Museum to foster tourism in Delhi NCR region**.
- **This first time ever public-private museum collaboration** will help attract more tourists to both National Rail Museum and Madame Tussauds Wax Museum.

GSAT-11: India's heaviest communication satellite launched successfully from French Guiana

- India's heaviest and most-advanced communication satellite **GSAT-11**, also called the "**Big Bird**", was successfully launched into space on December 5, 2018 from **the Spaceport in French Guiana, South America**.
- The satellite will help provide satellite-based internet to remote places where cable-based internet cannot reach. The satellite, **weighing 5854 kg**, is the heaviest Indian-made equipment that has been put into the orbit.

India, Peru sign agreement for co-operation and mutual assistance in Customs Matters

- **India** and the Republic of **Peru** on December 5, 2018 signed an agreement for **co-operation and mutual assistance in customs matters**.
- The agreement was signed on the sidelines of the **80th Session of the Policy Commission meeting of the World Customs Organisations (WCO)** which was held in **Mumbai** during December 3-5, 2018.

WCD Ministry to formulate guidelines to ensure safety of children in hostels

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development will soon **formulate guidelines for children's hostels, prescribing the minimum standards of care that should be provided to the children.**
- The decision comes at a time when institutions, housing children on the request of parents who are unable to take care of them and their education or due to other circumstances that force parents to keep them at children's homes, are not registering under **the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.**

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari inaugurates India Water Impact Summit 2018 in New Delhi

- Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, **Nitin Gadkari inaugurated India Water Impact Summit 2018 in New Delhi.**
- The three days summit is jointly organised by the Ministry, National Mission for Clean Ganga and the Centre for Ganga River Basin Management and Studies.

Bihar government sets Rs 100 fee for family property split

- **Bihar government fixed Rs 100 as the charge** for people to get their property registered after division of family's immovable assets.
- This decision was taken at cabinet meeting which was chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Conference on partnership between EU and India for Cultural Heritage Conservation begins

- The two-day conference on partnership between the **European Union and India commenced in New Delhi for Cultural Heritage Conservation.**
- Over 30 leading experts are deliberating on issues being faced in cultural heritage conservation and exploring innovative solutions to tackle challenges of climate change and urbanisation.

Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana: Delhi Government launches Free Pilgrimage Scheme for senior citizens

- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on December 5, 2018 launched the '**Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana**' which offers **free travel packages for senior citizens from Delhi to five religious circuits.** 1,100 senior citizens from every constituency of Delhi will be able to avail this facility at one go.
- Under this free pilgrimage scheme, **a Delhi resident above 60 years will be eligible to take free pilgrimage along with his or her spouse.**

Cabinet approves implementation of Shahpurkandi Dam (National Project) on river Ravi in Punjab

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi In December, 2018 **approved implementation of Shahpurkandi Dam Project, Punjab on river Ravi,** Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said.
- For this, **Central Assistance of Rs 485.38 crore (for irrigation component) would be provided over five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23.**

Centre approves additional assistance of over Rs. 3048 cr to Kerala in view of recent devastating flood

- Centre In December, 2018 approved an **additional assistance of over 3048 crore rupees to Kerala in view of recent devastating flood in the state.**
- It also sanctioned **over 539 crore rupees to cyclone hit Andhra Pradesh** and **over 131 crore rupees to landslides affected state of Nagaland.**

Foundation stone of PUSA 'Kisan Haat' in ICAR's ATIC was laid by Radha Mohan Singh

- Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Radha Mohan Singh In December, 2018 **laid the foundation stone of Pusa Kisan Haat in ICAR's Agricultural Technology Information Centre (ATIC).**
- The Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister said with a view to encourage and attract youth towards agricultural education and cater to the rising number of students, an international hostel is being constructed.

Cabinet approves National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems

- Union Cabinet In December, 2018 approved the **National Mission on interdisciplinary Cyber-physical system** which will be implemented by Department of Science and Technology at a **total outlay of Rs 3660 crore for a period of five years.**
- Under this scheme, 15 Technology Innovation Hubs, six Application Innovation Hubs and four Technology translation Research Hubs are to be set up across country.

Indian Coast Guard conducts Exercise 'Clean Sea-2018' at sea off Port Blair

- The **Indian Coast Guard** has conducted the **Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise titled 'Clean Sea - 2018' at sea off Port Blair** In December, 2018.
- Coast Guard ships Viswasth, Vijith, Rajveer, Rajshri, 4 interceptor boats and its air assets Dornier and Chetak helicopters participated in the exercise.

Ravi Shankar Prasad launches National Challenge 'Ideate for India - creative solutions using technology' for school students

- Minister for Electronics and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad In December, 2018 launched **National Challenge - 'Ideate for India - creative solutions using technology' for school students in New Delhi.**
- '**Ideate For India**' national challenge is a joint collaboration between National e-governance Division and Intel India, supported by the Department of School Education and Literacy of Ministry of Human Resources Development.

Kiren Rijju inaugurates All India Police Shooting Competition 2018 at Manesar

- Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijju In December, 2018 **inaugurated the 19th All India Police (AIPDM) Shooting Competition-2018 at Manesar, Gurugram in Haryana.**
- More than 750 participants of 31 teams of State Police Forces and Central Armed Police Forces are participating in the event.

India pays homage to Dr B R Ambedkar on his 63rd Mahaparinirvan Diwas

- India paid homage to Bharat Ratna **Dr BR Ambedkar on his 63rd Mahaparinirvan Diwas on December 6, 2018.**
- He died on **December 6, 1956** and the day is observed as Mahaparinirvan Diwas every year.

Modi to inaugurate Asia's 2nd largest bridge Bogibeel in Assam on Vajpayee's birthday

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate on December 25 **the Bogibeel Bridge, India's longest rail-road bridge, connecting the north and south banks of the Brahmaputra,** falling in the eastern part of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, a senior railway official said as per PTI.
- The ceremony to mark the opening of the bridge coincides with **the 94th birth anniversary of the former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee,** who passed away in August.
- **It will be the second largest bridge in Asia with three-lane roads on top and a double-line railway track below.**

India's first underwater museum to open off Puducherry coast soon

- India is set to get its first underwater museum off the Puducherry coast, giving a boost to tourism in the Union territory.
- **INS Cuddalore**, a minesweeper decommissioned in March after it travelled 30,000 nautical miles in 30 years, will be turned into a museum, according to a Times of India report.

Kia Motors signs MoU with Andhra for future eco mobility

- South Korean auto major **Kia Motors** In December, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) **with the state of Andhra Pradesh to collaborate on the partnership for future eco mobility.**
- The partnership reinforces Kia's commitment to support the Andhra Pradesh government in growing the uptake of electric vehicles (EV) and the development of a local EV infrastructure, the company said in a statement.

Gangotri, Yamunotri in Uttarakhand; Amarkantak in MP; and Parasnath in Jharkhand included under PRASAD Scheme

- Union Government included **Gangotri** and **Yamunotri** in Uttarakhand, **Amarkantak** in Madhya Pradesh and **Parasnath** in Jharkhand under **Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASAD)** to develop pilgrimage and heritage destinations in the country.
- With the new additions, the number of sites under PRASAD has now reached to 41 in 25 states.
- It was launched in 2014-15 by Union Ministry of Tourism.

Air pollution causes 1 in 8 deaths in India

- India, **with 18 percent of the world's population, has a disproportionately 26 percent of the global premature deaths and disease burden due to air pollution.**
- **One in eight deaths in India was attributed to air pollution in India in 2017**, making it a leading risk factor for death.

Tourism Ministry formulates Guidelines for approval of Online Travel Aggregators

- The Union Ministry of Tourism has formulated the guidelines for approval and re-approval of **Online Travel Aggregators to ensure adequate safeguards against deficiency of service, alternate arrangements and punitive deterrence.**
- The voluntary scheme will be open to bonafide online travel aggregators to bring them on a common platform in the organised sector. The guidelines will be rolled out online by the end of December 2018. Hence, all applications and fee payment will have to be made on the online platform.

Kandhamal Haldi of Odisha to get GI tag

- **Odisha's Kandhamal Haldi (turmeric)** will soon get Geographical Indications (GI) tag.
- Its registration was moved by Kandhamal Apex Spices Association for Marketing and was accepted under sub-section (1) of Section 13 of Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

India opposes move to declare Gilgit-Baltistan as fifth province

- India has voiced strong opposition to **Pakistan's move to declare Gilgit-Baltistan as its fifth province.**
- MEA spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said India's stated position on Gilgit Baltistan has been very clear and consistent.

NITI Aayog launches Global Hackathon on Artificial Intelligence

- **NITI Aayog** in partnership with **Perlin**, a Singapore-based AI start up, has launched '**AI 4 All Global Hackathon**' to further expand the idea of '**Artificial Intelligence, AI for All**' articulated in the National AI Strategy.
- The Hackathon was announced at the AI conference organised by NITI Aayog, in partnership with the **ORF**, held in Mumbai in November 2018.

India Water Summit concludes in Delhi

- The three days India Water Summit concluded in New Delhi In December, 2018. Key issues including afforestation, biodiversity, urban river management, innovation in sewage and sewerage management were discussed during the event.
- During the valedictory session, Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, U.P Singh emphasized on the creation of a working group which will help in converting technology to working models.

Foreign Minister of Iceland meets Sushma Swaraj in Delhi

- **Foreign Minister of Iceland Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson** In December, 2018 met **External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj** in **New Delhi** and held discussions on bilateral, multilateral and international issues of interest.
- The two sides noted that in the **areas such as geo-thermal energy, fisheries, IT, pharmaceuticals and tourism, the two countries could establish strong partnership**. The Icelandic Minister appreciated growing opportunities for Icelandic companies in the fast-growing Indian economy.

MP Upendra Kushwaha resigns from Union Council of ministers

- Member of Parliament and Chief of Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP) **Upendra Kushwaha** resigned from the **Union council of ministers on December 9, 2018**.
- According to reports, Kushwaha has sent his resignation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he is quitting the BJP-led NDA alliance.

India starts visa on arrival for South Korean nationals

- **India has started granting visa on arrival to South Korean nationals**, a move that makes South Korea the second nation to be given the privilege after Japan, whose citizens have been getting the privilege since March 2016. The decision came into effect from October 1, 2018.
- Like the Japanese nationals, the facility to South Korean citizens would include double entry visit for a period not exceeding 60 days for business, tourism, conference and medical purposes for entry through six designated international airports - Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

India successfully test-fires Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile Agni-5

- The indigenously built **Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile Agni-5** has been test-fired successfully from **Abdul Kalam island under Chandipur Interim Test Range** In December, 2018.
- This is the fourth successful test of this missile. Previously the test of Agni 4 was unsuccessful. Having 17 meters length and 2 meters diameter the missile can hit the target from a distance of 5 thousand kilometres.

Government notifies four commonly used medical devices as drugs

- The Union Government has notified four commonly used medical devices including **nebulisers, blood pressure monitors, digital thermometers and glucometers as drugs under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.**
- The decision will enable the government to ensure their quality and performance. The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) will regulate the import, manufacture and sale of these devices from January 2020.

Tamil Nadu launches toll-free helpline '181' for domestic violence victims

- The Tamil Nadu government on December 9, 2018 **launched a 24-hour toll-free helpline '181' for women facing domestic violence and sexual harassment.** The initiative was launched by the state's Chief Minister K Palaniswami.
- The move will enable women facing domestic violence and sexual harassment at home or workplaces to contact the toll-free helpline to get emergency assistance such as police help, legal aid or medical services including an ambulance.

India, China to resume military drills after one year gap

- The 7th India and China joint military exercise - '**Hand in Hand**' will begin on December 1, 2018 in the southwest Chinese city of Chengdu. It is scheduled to conclude on December 23.
- The exercises will be held after a gap of one year as both the sides were locked in a 73-day standoff in Doklam in the Sikkim sector of the border in 2017.

Kannur International Airport in Kerala begins operations

- **The Kannur international Airport-KIAL in Kerala began its operations on December 9, 2018** with Union Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu and Kerala Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan jointly lighting the lamp inside the terminal building, marking its inauguration.
- The chief minister and the Union Minister then jointly flagged off the first flight from the airport to Abu Dhabi at 10.10 am.

18th All India annual conference of heads of science centres, museums begins

- The 18th **All India Annual Conference of the Heads of Science Centre's and Museums began on December 8, 2018 in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.**
- Inaugurating the three-day conference, Arunachal Pradesh Environment and Forest Minister Nabam Rebia said that the Arunachal Pradesh State Council Science and Technology is playing an important role to tie up and collaborate with other scientific institutions across the country to promote science and technology in the state.

Home Ministry launches Twitter account to spread awareness about cybercrimes

- Home Ministry launched a Twitter account '**@CyberDost**' to spread awareness about cybercrimes and normal precautions to be taken.
- The Twitter handle **@CyberDost** is aimed at enhancing people's basic knowledge about cybercrimes and precautions to be taken for prevention.

PM Modi to inaugurate Partners' Forum 2018

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the fourth Partners' Forum on December 12, 2018 at New Delhi.
- The Government of India, in association with the **Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH)**, is hosting this two-day international conference.
- The invited countries have been selected from across all regions and income levels and include countries that are **currently chairing key global and regional bodies** (e.g. G7, G20, BRICS, etc.).

EU Ambassador opens India's first CoE at MAHE

- India's first Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence established by the European Union was inaugurated at the Department of European Studies (DES) at Manipal Academy of Higher Education here in December, 2018 by Ambassador of the European Union (EU) to India and Bhutan, Tomasz Kozlowski.
- Kozlowski congratulated the leadership, faculty and students of MAHE on this achievement and stated that Manipal has always been a pioneer in promoting higher education and research in international relations in India in general and European studies in particular.

Delhi HC bans online sale of medicines across India

- The Delhi High Court on December 12, 2018 ordered a **ban on the sale of online medicines by e-pharmacists across the country**. The court directed both Central and state government to ensure immediate implementation of the order.
- The HC bench comprising **Chief Justice Rajendra Menon and Justice V K Rao passed the judgement while hearing a PIL filed by Delhi-based dermatologist Zaheer Ahmed** who complained that lakhs of medicines were being sold on the internet every day without much regulation, posing a huge risk to patients and doctors alike.

UP to establish Umbrella University named after former PM late Atal Bihari Vajpayee

- The Uttar Pradesh Government has decided to establish **an umbrella university to control all the medical and dental colleges and nursing institutions in the state**. The university will be named after former Prime Minister, **late Atal Bihari Vajpayee**.
- The decision was taken in a cabinet meeting headed by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at Lucknow on December 11.

Govt approves auction of 683 private FM Radio channels

- The government has approved the auction of **683 private FM Radio channels in 236 cities, some of them in remote areas**.
- Answering a specific question, he said an **FM Relay station at Godda in Jharkhand has been approved**. The Minister said, a transmitter is being procured for this purpose.

SC Collegium recommends Justice Ravindra Bhat as Chief Justice of Rajasthan High Court

- The Supreme Court collegium recommended the appointment of **Justice Ravindra Bhat as the Chief Justice of Rajasthan High Court**.
- **Justice Bhat is currently a judge of the Delhi High Court**.

First National Workshop on Explosives Detection inaugurated at Pune

- The first National Workshop on Explosives Detection was inaugurated in December, 2018 at High Energy Materials Research Laboratory Pune.

- A total of 200 delegates from different **DRDO labs, Army, CRPF, CISF, Police, Academic Institutes, Industry and other Security agencies** are attending the workshop.

India, Saudi Arabia sign bilateral annual Haj 2019 agreement

- **India and Saudi Arabia** on December 13, 2018 signed **the bilateral annual Haj 2019 agreement at Jeddah**. The agreement was signed by the Union Minister for Minority Affairs, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Haj and Umrah Minister of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Mohammad Saleh bin Taher Benten.
- A large number of Muslim women are likely to go to Haj 2019 without “**Mehram**” (male companion). More than 2100 women have already applied.

India's first private UAV factory comes up in Hyderabad

- **India's first private sector unit for manufacturing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) opened at Adani Aerospace Park** here In December, 2018.
- Built by the **Adani Group** and Israel-based **Elbit Systems**, the 50,000 square feet facility will develop Hermes 900 medium altitude long-endurance UAVs for the Indian and global markets.

Google launches shopping website in India

- Google has unveiled **Google Shopping**, a dedicated search engine intended to provide an immersive and improved online shopping experience.
- Along with finding products, **Google Shopping allows users to filter through offers and review prices across multiple retailers**.

Railway Minister Piyush Goyal dedicates first Railway University to nation in Vadodara

- **Railway Minister Piyush Goyal dedicated India's first Railway University to the nation in Vadodara** yesterday. Speaking on the occasion, Mr Goyal said that this is a big step towards the professional education and training in the railway sector.
- **Ministry of Railways has sanctioned 421 crores rupees for this university** and its curriculum development for the next five years.

Telangana becomes India's first state to have paperless justice system

- **Telangana became the first state in the country to have Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) integrated with the Crime and Criminals Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)** project that facilitates transparency and speed in police service delivery.
- The ICJS is aimed at integrating the CCTNS project with e-courts, e-prisons, databases, forensics, prosecution, juvenile homes and a nationwide fingerprint database of criminals.

ICMR releases draft of India's first essential diagnostics list

- In a bid to ensure quality diagnostics at all level of healthcare facilities, **the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has formulated draft of new National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL)**.
- “The list is on the lines of the drug list. It is a scientifically designed list, **which has been based on the World Health Organization's list of essential diagnostics** for key areas like HIV and hepatitis, but it also takes into account the priority areas of non-communicable diseases and diseases prone to outbreaks such as dengue,” Dr Kamini Walia, senior scientist at ICMR was quoted by Hindustan Times as saying.

ECO Niwas Samhita 2018-an Energy Conservation Building Code for Residential Buildings launched

- Ministry of Power has launched the ECO Niwas Samhita 2018, an **Energy Conservation Building Code for Residential Buildings (ECBC-R)**.
- **The implementation of this Code is will give a fillip to energy efficiency in residential sector.**
- **This Code has been prepared after extensive consultations with all stakeholders, consisting of architects & experts including building material suppliers and developers.**

J-K admin greenlights proposal for setting up first-ever university in Ladakh

- **Jammu and Kashmir administrati**In December, 2018 gave its nod for the **establishment of the first ever university in Ladakh.**
- The approval came during a State Administrative Council meeting chaired by Governor Satya Pal Malik. His advisors, K Vijay Kumar, Khurshid Ahmad Ganai and Kewal Kumar Sharma, Chief Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam and Principal Secretary to the Governor Umang Narula were also present at the meeting.

JK becomes first state to have explicit law banning 'Sextortion'

- **J&K has become first state in the country to have a law explicitly banning sexual exploitation of women by those in positions of authority,** having a fiduciary relationship or a public servant.
- Bill seeks to amend the Ranbir Penal Code whereby specific offence under section 354 E is being inserted to provide for the offence of '**Sextortion**'.

President Kovind lays foundation stone of Railway Station at Kevadia

- President Ramnath Kovind In December, 2018 laid the **foundation stone of new ultra-modern Railway Station at Kevadia in Narmada district of Gujarat**
- **The station will connect the Statue of Unity project to the rest of India** through broad gauge railway line.
- **As par schedule 32 kilometers long new broad-gauge railway line between Chandod and Kevadia** will be completed in one year and connect the Kevadia with the rest of country.

PM Modi held delegation-level talks with Maldivian President; signs 4 MoUs

- **India and Maldives signed four agreements** on various fields in New Delhi.
- Both sides agreed to further strengthen bilateral ties. **They welcomed new visa agreement between India and Maldives.**

IAF flies India's first bio-jet fuel blended Aircraft

- A team from the **Aircraft Systems and Testing Establishment (ASTE)**, Indian Air Force's (IAF) premier testing establishment, **flew India's first military flight using blended bio-jet fuel on Russian-made An-32 transport aircraft here In December, 2018.**
- The aircraft was flown by experimental test pilots and test engineers from ASTE. The project is a combined effort of **IAF, Defence Research, and Development Organisation (DRDO), Directorate General Aeronautical Quality Assurance (DGAQA)** and **CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum.**

Severe Cyclonic Storm 'PHETHAI' over west central Bay of Bengal weakens into a cyclonic storm

- The Severe Cyclonic Storm '**PHETHAI**' over west central Bay of Bengal moved further northwards with a speed of 24 kmph, weakened into a cyclonic storm and lay centred over west central Bay of Bengal.

- Cyclone 'PHETHAI' is also being tracked by DWR Chennai, Machilipatnam and Vishakhapatnam apart from Satellite and other observations.

IIT Bhubaneswar's solution wins first IoT innovation challenge

- An Internet of Things (IoT)-based solution from IIT Bhubaneswar that can store, track and analyse data related to consumers' LPG consumption has won the first edition of 'The Grand India IoT Innovation Challenge' by Tata Communications.
- The winner Prajjawala from IIT Bhubaneswar received Rs 5 lakh as top prize in the 4-month long contest organised in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Tamil Nadu Launches Door-Step Aadhaar Enrollment For Children Below 5

- The Tamil Nadu government has launched a scheme to provide the door-step registration for Aadhaar for children under the age of five. The scheme, worth Rs. 13.61 crore, will help collect the biometric data of children from their homes to issue them their unique Aadhaar number, an official statement said.
- Chief Minister K Palaniswami launched the scheme In December, 2018 and gave away seven Aadhaar kits that contained laptop computers and biometric machines Social Welfare Department officials for the scheme.

Railways to introduce first AC local train in north India in 2019

- The first AC local train in north India will hit the tracks next year, with the railways planning to launch the state-of-the-art train for passengers travelling short distances from Delhi.
- The MEMU (mainline electric multiple unit) train, having eight stainless-steel coaches, will cater to the Uttar Pradesh cities within 200-300 km from Delhi.

ISRO successfully launches GSAT-7A satellite

- The Indian space research Organisation ISRO In December, 2018 successfully launched geostationary communication satellite GSAT-7A onboard Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle GSLV-F11.
- The exclusive advanced communication satellite separated from the rocket after 19 minutes of the launch.

Govt to open Eklavya School in areas having significant tribal population

- Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram has said that every block with more than 50 per cent Schedule Tribe, ST population and at least 20 thousand tribal persons, will have an Eklavya Model Residential School by the year 2022.
- The Minister said, as per census 2011, there are 564 sub-districts having more than 50 per cent ST population and at least 20 thousand tribal persons.

India's International Aviation Safety Assessment rated highest

- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has retained the highest aviation safety ranking for India.
- The US regulator, FAA carried out an audit in July 2018 to confirm India's adherence to the standards laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

Transport Ministry asks states to accept vehicle documents, driving licence in electronic format

- The Union Road Transport and Highways Ministry on December 18, 2018 asked **states to facilitate acceptance of driving licence and other documents such as vehicle registration certificates in electronic format by enforcement agencies.**
- The Ministry, while issuing a **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to states**, said that the vehicle owners can also show their documents including driving licence, RCs and insurance certificates through mobile apps like **Digilocker and mParivahan app.**

Maruti Suzuki India, Ministry of Rural Development sign MoU for training rural youth under DDU-GKY

- **The Union Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD)** on December 19, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) **with Maruti Suzuki India Ltd for training rural youth for skill development under the flagship Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY).**
- The **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)** is the flagship placement linked skill-training scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development.

India's largest cancer institute 'National Cancer Institute' launched

- India's largest cancer hospital, **National Cancer Institute (NCI)** began the trial run of its **Outpatient Department on December 18, 2018.**
- Located in Jhajjar District, NCI is a project under **AIIMS, Delhi.**

Commemorative Postage Stamp on Rajkumar Shukla released

- The **Department of Posts** recently released the commemorative **Postage Stamp on Rajkumar Shukla, who was associated with Champaran Satyagraha of 1917.**
- Rajkumar Shukla made a seminal contribution in drawing the attention of Mahatma Gandhi to the plight of peasants suffering under an oppressive system established by European indigo planters in Champaran (Bihar).

NFAI and FTII sign MoU for transfer of land for construction of film storage facility

- **National Film Archive of India (NFAI)** and **Film & Television Institute of India (FTII)** signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for **transfer of three acres of land for the construction of storage facility for films and film material.**
- The land belonging to FTII at their **Kothrud campus in Pune** will be transferred to NFAI for this purpose.

Government launches Asiatic Lion Conservation Project to conserve their population

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on December 20, 2018 launched the **"Asiatic Lion Conservation Project"** to protect and conserve **the population of Asiatic Lion and its associated ecosystem.**

The total budget of the project for 3 years amounts to around Rs 9784 lakh.

PM Modi to release commemorative coin on Paika Rebellion; will inaugurate Lalitgiri Archaeological Museum

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will release the commemorative **coin and postage stamp in memory of Paika Rebellion on December 24, 2018** during his visit to Bhubaneswar to commemorate Paika Rebellion.

- The Prime Minister will also be inaugurating the **Lalitgiri Archaeological Museum**, adding a new facet of tourism in the region and increase the immense potential of employment generation.

Assam govt approves release of Chah Bahgicha Dhan Puraskar Mela

- The Assam government has approved the release of second instalment of the **Chah Bagicha (tea estate) Dhan Puraskar Mela**.
- **All the beneficiaries will get 2,500 rs in their bank accounts by January 15, 2018.** The government will bear Rs 200 crore towards this.

India, China hold first people-to-people exchanges meeting

- External Affair Minister Sushma and her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi co-chaired **the first-ever meeting of India-China High-Level Mechanism on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges in New Delhi** on December 21, 2018.
- India and China had decided **to set up people to people mechanism during the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping** on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit in China.

'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' field-level awareness campaign launched in three states

- A three-state field-level campaign on Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) will be organised by the **Union Government** from the first week of January 2019.
- As a part of the campaign, **over 900 cultural programmes across various districts of Maharashtra, 100 programmes in Goa and 30 programmes in UT of Dadra & Nagar Haveli would be held.**

Government authorises 10 central agencies to monitor any computer

- The **Union Government** has authorised ten central intelligence, security and tax agencies to **intercept, monitor and decrypt all the data** contained in "any" computer system. The order was issued on December 20, 2018 by the '**cyber and information security**' division of the Ministry of Home Affairs(MHA) under the authority of Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba.
- The move has set off a political storm with the opposition accusing the government of trying to create a "**surveillance state**".

Defence Minister inaugurates Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre

- Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on December 22, 2018 launched the **Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** at **Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC)** in Gurugram.
- The inaugural event saw participation from officials belonging to different ministries and ambassadors and resident defence attaches of partner countries.

India successfully test-fires Agni-IV ICBM from Odisha coast

- India In December, 2018 **successfully test-fired its nuclear-capable long-range Inter Continental Ballistic Missile Agni-IV, with a strike range of 4,000 km.** The test was part of a user trial by the Army.
- The strategic surface-to-surface missile was flight tested from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Dr Abdul Kalam Island off Odisha coast at 8.30 am.

India's first music museum to be set up in Thiruvaiyaru, Tamil Nadu

- The country's first music museum will be set up with assistance from the Central government in **Thiruvaiyaru, Tamilnadu**, the birth place of **Saint Tyagaraja**, one of the Trinities of Carnatic music.
- This was announced by the State Minister for Culture and Tamil Development **Shri K Pandiarajan** in **Madurai** In December, 2018.

President of India Inaugurates Centre of Excellence for Genetic Blood Disorders

- President of India, **Shri Ram Nath Kovind**, inaugurated the **Centre of Excellence for Sickle Cell Anaemia, Thalassemia and Other Genetic Blood Disorders** at the **Prathima Institute of Medical Sciences in Karimnagar, Telangana** In December, 2018 (December 22, 2018).
- Speaking on the occasion, the President said that our country has made significant strides in the field of healthcare.

PM releases commemorative Rs 100 coin in honour of Atal Bihari Vajpayee

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a commemorative **Rs 100 coin in honour of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee** in Parliament house.

NGT bans mining activities within 10 km radius of Sariska Tiger Reserve

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on December 22, 2018, **banned all mining activities within 10 km radius of the Sariska Tiger Reserve**.
- It also said that any further mining activity is subject to the clearance of leases by the **National Board of Wildlife**.

NGT sets up Expert Panel to look into re-use of RO waste water

- The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** constituted an expert committee to devise ways of re-filtration or secondary use of **Reverse Osmosis (RO) waste water**.
- It will look into ways of making re-filtration or the secondary use of the rejected waste water from RO systems viable.

PM announces Sardar Patel Award for National Integration

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced annual **Sardar Patel Award for National Integration** at the **DGPs/IGPs Conference at Kevadia**.
- This award would be given for outstanding efforts to further national integration.

PM Modi inaugurates Bogibeel Bridge in Assam; flags off first passenger train

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 25, 2018 inaugurated **India's longest rail-road bridge 'Bogibeel Bridge' over the Brahmaputra River in Assam** to boost defence along the border with China.
- This 4.94 kilometre long bridge over the Brahmaputra river took nearly two decades and **over Rs 5900 crore to get completed**.

Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand Yojana launched in Uttarakhand

- The **Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand Yojana** has been launched in **Uttarakhand**. Under the scheme, each household in the state will be able to avail medical **treatment of up to 5 lakh rupees annually**.
- The scheme will benefit **23 lakh households and cover 1,350 critical diseases**. Launching the Yojna in Dehradun, Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat distributed scheme-related golden cards to beneficiaries.

UP Police bans namaz in public places

- The Uttar Pradesh Police has reportedly issued an order banning namaz at a public park in Noida's Sector-58. According the reports, police banned the prayers or any religious activities in the park following a complaint.
- The companies in the area had earlier sought district magistrate's permission for their employees to offer Friday prayers at the open grounds, but had to come back empty handed.

Patna Zoo closed after deaths of peacocks due to H5N1 Virus

- Patna Zoo has been closed for an indefinite period following the confirmation of H5N1 virus killing six peacocks in the zoo.
- The zoo had been closed following deaths of six peacocks between December 16 and 24. The bodies of the peacocks were sent to National Institute of High-Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal where it was confirmed that birds died after being infected with H5N1 virus.

Maharashtra CM launches Vajpayee International Schools in Mumbai

- Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on December 25, 2018 launched **Atal Bihari Vajpayee International Schools in Mumbai**, on the occasion of the 94th birth anniversary of the late Prime Minister.
- The State aims to introduce international curriculum in 100 schools run by civic bodies, the tribal development department, the social justice department and the education department.

PM Modi to rename three islands in Andaman and Nicobar after Netaji Subash Chandra Bose

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will rename three islands of Andaman and Nicobar after Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on December 30, 2018. These three islands are - Ross Island, Neil Island and Havelock Island.

Renaming of islands

Island	New Name
Ross Island	Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island
Neil Island	Shaheed Dweep
Havelock Island	Swaraj Dweep

- These islands will be renamed during PM Modi's visit to Port Blair to mark the 75th Anniversary of hoisting of the National Flag at Port Blair by freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose.

Triple Talaq Bill passed in Lok Sabha

- The Lok Sabha In December, 2018 passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, also known as Triple Talaq Bil, by negating the amendments moved by some opposition members, making all declarations of instant triple talaq void and illegal.
- It seeks to make the practice a punishable offence with imprisonment of up to three years.
- The Bill will replace the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance-2018.

Andhra Pradesh gets new High Court

- **Andhra Pradesh got its own High Court on December 26, 2018.** It will start functioning from January 1.
- Ministry of Law and Justice notified the constitution of the **High Court in Amaravati.**
- **Andhra Pradesh High Court will be the 25th High Court in the country.**

NITI Aayog releases Second Delta Ranking under Aspirational District Programme; Virudhunagar District ranked as most improved district

- NITI Aayog on December 27, 2018 released the Second Delta Ranking of the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP). The rankings were released by **NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant.**
- **Virudhunagar District of Tamil Nadu was ranked as the most improved district in the Rankings.** The ranking represented the incremental progress made by districts between June 1, 2018 and October 31, 2018.
- The districts were ranked in a transparent basis on parameters across **Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure** through key performance indicators.
- **Pakur in Jharkhand was ranked worst at 111.**

Gaganyaan Programme: Cabinet approves Indian Human Spaceflight Initiative; first manned flight to take place in 40 months

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on December 28, 2018 approved **the Gaganyaan Programme, first Indian Human Spaceflight Initiative of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).**
- The **Gaganyaan Programme will require a total expenditure of around Rs 10,000 crore.** This expense includes cost of technology development, flight hardware realisation and essential infrastructure elements.

Cabinet approves amendment in POSCO Act, 2012 to protect children from sexual abuse

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 28, 2018 approved the proposal for **Amendment in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 to make punishment more stringent for committing sexual crimes against children.**
- **The POCSO Act, 2012 was enacted to Protect the Children from Offences of Sexual Assault, Sexual harassment and pornography** with due regard for safeguarding the interest and well-being of children.

Cabinet approves setting up of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2018

- **The Cabinet approved the draft National Commission for Indian Systems of Medicine (NCIM) Bill, 2018.**
- The Bill seeks to replace the existing regulator Central Council for Indian Medicine (CCIM) with a new body to ensure transparency.

Tourism Ministry signs MoU to develop mobile audio guide app for five iconic sites

- The Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism K J Alphons handed over a Memorandum of Understanding to Resbird Technologies under **the 'Adopt a Heritage' project for the development of a mobile audio guide application for five iconic sites** at a function in New Delhi on December 27, 2018.

The five iconic sites are as follows:

- Rajasthan - Amer Fort
- Assam - Kaziranga
- Goa - Colva Beach
- Kerala - Kumarakom
- Bihar - Mahabodhi Temple

Besides this, the Tourism Minister also handed over the Letters of Intent to seven shortlisted agencies for consideration under the project in the presence of Tourism Secretary Yogendra Tripathi.

Railways to grant fare concession to transgender senior citizens

- The Indian Railways announced on December 27, 2018 that it has decided to **grant 40-per-cent concession in passenger fares to transgender senior citizens.**
- The concession will be applicable to those of the third gender, who are aged 60 years or above. It will be available from January 1, 2019.

PM Modi renames Ross, Neil & Havelock Islands in Andaman and Nicobar

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi In December, 2018 announced the renaming of three islands of Andaman and Nicobar on the occasion of 75th anniversary of Tricolour hoisting by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Port Blair. Mr Modi was addressing a public function at the historic Netaji Stadium in Port Blair this evening.
- The Prime Minister said, **the Ross Island has been renamed as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep, the Neil Island would now be known as Shaheed Dweep and the Havelock Island as Swaraj Dweep.**
- Mr Modi also released a commemorative stamp, **its first-day cover and a 75 rupees coin on this special day. He also announced setting up of a deemed university after Netaji Bose.**
- **This includes 7 Megawatt solar power plant, Solar Village, launching of State Wide Network, Optical Fiber Cable connecting Chennai and Port Blair, plasma regasification plant, upgradation of Ayush and Garacharma hospitals, 50 MW LNG Power Plant, introduction of 20 electric cars, release of book on start-up policy, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Island Industrial Development scheme and Chatham Bambooflat bridge.**

PM to inaugurate Indian Science Congress-2019 in Punjab on Jan 3

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Indian Science Congress-2019 in Jalandhar, Punjab on the third of next month.
- This will be the 106th edition of the event based on the theme 'Future India: Science and Technology'.

PM Modi's visit to Uttar Pradesh: One District, One Product Regional Summit held; 6th International Rice Research Institute inaugurated

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 29, 2018 visited Varanasi and Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh on December 29, 2018.
- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of medical College in Ghazipur during the visit in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He took stock of the preparations for the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

6th International Rice Research Institute dedicated to the nation

- The Prime Minister dedicated the 6th International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), South Asia Regional Center (ISARC) to the nation. The Institute is built at the campus of National Seed Research and Training Center (NSRTC) in Varanasi.
- It will serve as a hub for rice research and training in South Asia and SAARC region. *This first international Center in the eastern India is expected to harness and sustain rice production in the region.*

One District, One Product Regional Summit

- The One District, One Product Regional Summit was held at Deendayal Hastakala Sankul (Trade Facilitation Centre & Crafts Museum) in Varanasi.
- 'One District One Product' scheme is aimed at enhancing the skills of local people and increasing the reach of the indigenous trades, crafts and products from small towns and small districts in the state.

Hooda panel recommends creation of specialised information warfare units, restructuring of military intelligence

- The panel headed by former Northern Army Commander Lieutenant General (retired) DS Hooda has recommended that the Army and the Air Force should sort out their issues such as the ownership of attack helicopter and utilisation of air defence assets which are common for both the services in a big way.
- Lt Gen Hooda submitted his report to the NSAB recently and held discussions with the members of the NSAB including noted China expert Lt Gen SL Narasimhan about 10 days ago.
- The panel was set up by the government based on the recommendation of Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra about five months ago and utilise Lt Gen Hooda's expertise for carrying out a study on the restructuring of the armed forces.

Cabinet approves submission of India's Second Biennial Update Report to UNFCCC

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved Submission of India's second Biennial Update Report (BUR) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) towards the fulfilment of the reporting obligation under the Convention.
- The second biennial update report aims to provide an update to India's first biennial report to the United Nation's body on climate change.

Delhi Police becomes first police force in country to digitise all malkhanas

- The Delhi Police In December, 2018 become the first police force in the country to digitize all malkhanas, rooms for keeping seized arms and ammunition, across every police station in the state, an official release said.
- Delhi Police Commissioner Amulya Patnaik inaugurated the e-malkhana project of the remaining 10 districts at Chinamaya Mission.

President of India Inaugurates the 12th Global Healthcare Summit in Mumbai

- The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the 12th Global Healthcare Summit organized by the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin in Mumbai In December, 2018.

- Speaking on the occasion, the President acknowledged the professionalism and excellent reputation of doctors of Indian origin in the US.

IndiGo becomes first airline to get longer range Airbus A321neo plane

- Budget carrier **IndiGo** has become the first domestic airline to have longer range **Airbus A321neo plane in its fleet with the first aircraft arriving Saturday morning in New Delhi** from the European aviation major **Airbus' Hamburg facility in Germany**, an airline source said.
- The maiden A321neo (new engine option), VT-IUA, landed at 9.06 am at Terminal-3 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi and was accorded the traditional water canon salute on arrival, the source told PTI.

Indian railways to build India's first vertical bridge

- **Indian railways will be building country's first vertical-lift bridge connecting Rameswaram in Arabian Sea to mainland India** that will allow ships and steamers to pass through without any hinderance. It will replace the existing 104-year-old Pamban bridge.
- The bridge, which is **over two-kilometre-long, is likely to cost Rs. 250 crore.**
- **It will have a 63-metre stretch which will lift up** while remaining parallel to the deck to allow access to the ships.

Delhi govt to erect welcome gates at 12 border points

- The Delhi government has decided **to erect 'Welcome Gate' at 12 border points of the national capital by next year.**
- The welcome gates will be put up at Delhi's main border points - **Noida, Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Sonipat, Kharkhoda, Bahadurgarh, Badli, Gurugram, Kundli and Gazipur.**

Tuticorin Airport to soon be 5th International airport in Tamil Nadu

- Efforts are on to develop **Thuthukkudi (Tuticorin) Airport as the fifth international airport in Tamil Nadu.**
- Airport Director **N Balsubramaniam** revealed on December 31, 2018 that the airport is likely to be declared as an international airport within four years.
- International flights are already being operated from four airports of the state including **Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai and Trichy.**

India submits Sixth National Report to the Convention of Biological Diversity

- India on December 29, 2018 **submitted its Sixth National Report (NR6) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).**
- **The report was submitted online to the CBD Secretariat by Union Environment Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan** during the inaugural session of the 13th National Meeting of the State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs), which was organised by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), New Delhi.

Appointments

India

Name	Appointed as	Organisation/Country
Shaktikanta Das	Governor	Reserve Bank of India
A N Jha	Finance Secretary	India
AS Rajeev	MD & CEO	Bank of Maharashtra
T.S Vijayan	additional independent director	YES Bank
Kirthiga Reddy	Venture Partner	Softbank Vision Fund
Arundhati Bhattacharya	Chairman	SWIFT India
Uday Shankar	Chairman	Star and Disney India
Zoramthanga	Chief Minister	Mizoram
K Chandrasekhar Rao	Chief Minister	Telangana
Bharat Bhushan Vyas	Member	Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)
Brijendra Pal Singh	President	Film and Television Institute of India (FTII)
Ashok Gehlot	Chief Minister	Rajasthan
Sachin Pilot	Deputy Chief Minister	Rajasthan
Kamal Nath	Chief Minister	Madhya Pradesh
Bhupesh Baghel	Chief Minister	Chhattisgarh
Sandip Somany	President	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)
V Vaidyanathan	MD & CEO	IDFC First Bank
Madhavi Goradia Divan	Additional Solicitor General	Supreme Court
M Nageswar Rao	Additional Director	CBI
Rajendra Tiwari	Advocate General	Madhya Pradesh
Ashwin Yardi	Chief Executive Officer	Capgemini India
Srinivas Kandula	Chairman	Capgemini India
Harsh Vardhan Shringla	Ambassador of India	United States of India
Pranab Kumar Das	Chairman	Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs
Mahesh Narayanan	Country Manager	LinkedIn India
Nilanjan Roy	Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	Infosys
Badal Bagri	Chief Financial Officer	Bharti Airtel
Woorkeri Venkat Raman	Head Coach	Indian women's national cricket team
P V Bharathi	MD & CEO	Corporation Bank

Bijay Kumar	Deputy Managing Director	Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Ltd
Sanjay Sethi	Chairman	Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT)
Justice Chagari Praveen Kumar	Acting Chief Justice	Andhra Pradesh High Court
Justice T.B.N Radhakrishnan	Chief Justice	Telangana High Court
Vivek Bhatia	MD & CEO	ThyssenKrupp Industries India

World

Name	Appointed as	Organisation/Country
Pawan Singh	first Indian member	Judges Committee of the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF)
Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador	President	Mexico
Preeti Saran	Asia Pacific Seat	United Nation's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)
Rajiv Mehrishi	Vice-Chair	United Nations Panel of External Auditors
Uday Shankar	President	The Walt Disney Company Asia Pacific
Rajesh Subramaniam	President and Chief Executive Officer	FedEx Express

Days

Day	Observed on	Theme/Info
International Day of Persons with Disabilities	3 December	Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality
International Day for the Abolition of Slavery	2 December	
World AIDS Day	1 December	Know your HIV status
National Pollution Control Day	2 December	to give the honor and memorialize the thousands of human beings who had lost their existence because of the Bhopal gas calamity
47th Indian Navy Day	4 December	
World Soil Day	5 December	'Be the Solution to Soil Pollution'

Submarine Day	8 December	The day commemorates the induction of the first submarine, the erstwhile INS Kalvari, into the Navy on this day in 1967.
SAARC Day	8 December	
International Civil Aviation Day	7 December	Working Together to Ensure No Country is Left Behind.
International Anti-Corruption Day	9 December	United Against Corruption
Armed Forces Flag Day	7 December	
Human Rights Day	10 December	Let's stand up for equality, justice and human dignity
International Mountain Day	11 December	#MountainsMatter
International Day of Neutrality	12 December	
International Universal Health Coverage Day	12 December	Unite for Universal Health Coverage: Now is the Time for Collective Action.
National Energy Conservation Day	14 December	
International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime	9 December	
Vijay Diwas	16 December	
International Migrants Day	18 December	'Migration with Dignity'
National Mathematics Day	22 December	Birth anniversary of famous mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan
International Human Solidarity Day	20 December	
National Consumer Day	24 December	Timely Disposal of Consumer Complaints
Good Governance Day	25 December	

World

India to host G-20 Summit in 2022

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that India will host the G20 Summit in 2022**, when the country celebrates its 75 years of Independence.
- In a tweet, Mr Modi said, in 2022 India completes 75 years since Independence and he looks forward to welcoming the world to the G-20 Summit in that special year.
- Mr Modi invited leaders from across the world to come to India, the world's fastest growing large economy, and know its rich history and diversity and experience the warm Indian hospitality.

World Bank unveils USD 200 billion in climate action investment for 2021-25

- **The World Bank unveiled USD 200 billion in climate action investment for 2021 to 2025**, thus, doubling its current five-year funding.
- The move coincides with a UN climate summit COP24 in Katowice, Poland.
- The move represents a significantly ramped up ambition to tackle climate change and sends an important signal to the wider global community to do the same.

Qatar to withdraw from OPEC in January 2019

- **Qatar** decided to withdraw its membership from the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** from January 2019.
- The announcement was made by Qatar's Energy Minister, Saad al-Kaabi at a press conference in Doha.

COP24: UN Conference on Climate Change begins in Poland

- The **24th meeting of Conference of Parties (COP24) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** began on December 3, 2018 at **Katowice, Poland**.
- The Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama declared the UN COP24 climate summit open and handed over the presidency of the talks to Michal Kurtyka, Poland's Deputy Environment Minister in the presence of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Asia Pacific Summit 2018 begins in Kathmandu

- The **Asia Pacific Summit 2018** began on December 1, 2018 in **Kathmandu, Nepal**. The Summit will continue till December 3, 2018.
- The Theme of two-day Summit is "Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity, and Universal Values".

SpaceX launches 64 satellites aboard reusable rocket

- Elon Musk's SpaceX on December 3, 2018 launched **its Falcon 9 rocket carrying 64 small satellites into low orbit around the Earth, setting a new US record**.
- According to the company, the mission was one of its largest and most complex and intricate endeavours. The mission also marked the third voyage to space for the same Falcon 9 rocket, which marks another milestone for SpaceX's cost-cutting reusable rocket technology.

UNSC to convene on Iran missile launch issue

- The UN Security Council convened on December 4, 2018 to discuss on **the Iran missile launch issue**.
- The world body held the meeting at the request of France and Britain after they accused Iran of test-firing a medium-range missile during the weekend.

UN launches AI chat bot with Facebook to help battle climate change

- The world is facing a man-made disaster and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon, renowned broadcaster Sir David Attenborough said on the launch of UN's new campaign, **ActNow.bot**.
- The initiative comes as global decision-makers are being asked at the two-week long UN climate negotiations, known as COP24, which officially began on November 3, to intensify efforts in the battle

against climate change and to agree on the implementation guidelines of the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement.

- ActNow.bot is designed with artificial intelligence to give people the power and knowledge to take personal action against climate change directly on the **Facebook Messenger Platform**.

United States gives 60 days to Russia to comply with nuclear treaty

- **United States** warned **Russia** that it will withdraw from a major Cold War treaty limiting mid-range nuclear arms, if **Moscow does not dismantle missiles within 60 days**.
- US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the US will no longer be bound by the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, unless Moscow withdraws a new system that has threatened to trigger an arms race.

US re-establishes Permanent Diplomatic Mission in Somalia for first time in 27 years

- The **United States** re-established a "**permanent diplomatic presence**" in **Somalia** for the first time in 27 years.
- The department spokeswoman Heather Nauert called the new move another step forward in formalising US diplomatic engagement in Mogadishu.

OPEC to meet in Vienna

- The **members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries** and other oil-producing countries are scheduled to meet in **Vienna** to discuss ways to manage the oil output, supply glut and demand slowdown.
- Over the past two months, **oil prices have plunged and a barrel of Brent crude currently stands at around USD 60**.

China launches the first ever space rover to explore the dark side of the moon

- China has launched a rover on December 8, 2018, **that will land on the far side of the moon, a global first that would boost Beijing's ambitions to become a space superpower**.
- The **Chang'e-4 lunar probe mission** -- named after the moon goddess in Chinese mythology -- launched on a Long March 3B rocket from the southwestern Xichang launch centre in the pre-dawn hours, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

India 4th, China 1st highest carbon dioxide emitter: Study

- **India is the fourth highest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world, accounting for 7 per cent of global emissions in 2017**, a study by the Global Carbon Project released on December 5 says.
- The top four emitters in 2017, **which covered 58 per cent of global emissions, were China (27 per cent), the US (15 per cent), the European Union (10 per cent) and India (7 per cent)**, according to the projection by the Global Carbon Project.

Indian cardiologist performs world's first telerobotic surgery from a distance of 32 km

- **India became the world's first to successfully perform a telerobotic coronary intervention on December 5 by an Ahmedabad base cardiologist in Gujarat**.
- An Ahmedabad based cardiologist **Dr Tejal Patel performed the first ever telerobotic operation on a middle-aged woman**

UN launches new framework to combat international terrorism

- The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on December 6, 2018 launched a new framework titled **'UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact'** to combat international terrorism and coordinate efforts across the peace and security, humanitarian, human rights and sustainable development sectors.
- The framework is an agreement between **the UN chief, 36 organisational entities, the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organisation** to better serve the needs of member states when it comes to tackling the scourge of international terrorism.

FAO Council approves India's proposal to observe International Year of Millets in 2023

- Food and Agriculture organisation, FAO Council has approved **India's proposal to observe an International Year of Millets in 2023.**
- **Millets consists of Jowar, Bajra, Ragi and minor millets together termed as nutri-cereals.** In addition, the FAO Council has also approved India's membership to the Executive Board of the United Nations World Food Program for 2020 and 2021.

First International Conference on 'Sustainable Water Management' held in Mohali

- **The first International Conference on 'Sustainable Water Management' began on December 10, 2018 at Indian School of Business (ISB) in Mohali, Punjab.**
- The conference is being organised by Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) under the aegis of the National Hydrology Project of the Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. It will be held for two days till December 11.

UAE to double women's representation in Federal National Council to 50 per cent

- The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has, in a landmark decision, decided to increase the representation of Emirati women in the **Federal National Council to 50 per cent from the coming Parliamentary term.**
- A decree passed by the UAE President has directed the doubling of the current percentage of women's representation in the Federal National Council from 22.5 per cent to 50 per cent in the coming parliamentary term.

John Kelly to step down as US's Chief of Staff

- President Trump said on December 8, 2018 that his chief of staff, **John F. Kelly, would step down by the end of December 2018.**
- The move is a part of a long-planned staff shake-up as the president heads into the 2020 campaign facing growing peril from the special counsel and newly empowered Democrats.

Ukrainian to end two-decade-old friendship treaty with Russia

- Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on December 10, 2018 signed a bill ending the two-decade-old **treaty on friendship, cooperation and partnership between Ukraine and Russia.**
- **The treaty will be terminated on April 1, 2019 amid rising tensions between the two countries.**

Japan chooses Chinese character for 'disaster' to define year 2018

- **Japan selected the Chinese character for 'disaster' as its defining symbol for 2018,** a year that saw the country hit by deadly floods, earthquakes and storms.
- At the end of every year, the people of Japan vote for the Chinese character they think embodies the key events of the previous 12 months. **20858 people out of 193,214 chose the character 'disaster'.**

- **Floods across Japan in July 2018 caused more than 200 deaths and nearly evacuation of 9 million people.**

Nepal bans Indian currency notes above Rs 100 denomination

- The Nepal government has banned the use of Indian currency notes of Rs 2,000, Rs 500 and Rs 200 denominations, according to a media report.
- The government has asked the people to refrain from keeping or carrying Indian bank notes higher than Rs 100 denomination as it has not legalised them, The Kathmandu Post quoted Minister for Information and Communications Gokul Prasad Baskota as saying.

Global debt hits all-time high of USD 184 trillion: IMF

- **The International Monetary Fund has revealed in a report that the global debt has reached an all-time high of 184 trillion US dollars**, which is the equivalent to 225 per cent of the world GDP in 2017.
- The report states that nations like the **United States, China and Japan account for more than half of the debt.**

Sweden moves to ban outdoor smoking

- Sweden is banning outdoor smoking in certain public places including playgrounds and train station platforms.
- In a 142-120 vote the Riksdagen, the Swedish Parliament extended the smoking ban as of July 1, 2019.
- According to the new law, **the goal is to make the Scandinavian country smoke-free by 2025.**

'Justice' is Merriam-Webster's word of the year after spike in searches

- Merriam-Webster has chosen "justice" as its 2018 word of the year.
- Merriam-Webster's word of the year follows the Oxford Dictionaries choice of "toxic" and Dictionary.com's pick of "misinformation."

Sri Lankan President reinstates ousted PM Ranil Wickremesinghe

- Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on December 16, 2018 **reappointed Ranil Wickremesinghe as the Prime Minister of the country**, after suddenly dismissing him from the post nearly two months ago.
- The President clarified that his move to terminate the Prime Minister was done in "good faith" and the reinstatement was done to uphold parliamentary traditions and democracy.

COP24: Member countries finalise 'Katowice package' rules to implement 2015 Paris Climate Agreement

- The UN Climate Conference (COP24) on December 14, 2018 saw the adoption of '**Katowice package**', **the rulebook for implementation of the 2015 Paris climate agreement.**
- The Ministers of 200 nations reached consensus on rules after two weeks of intense negotiations during **the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that took place during December 2-14, 2018 in Katowice, Poland.** The meeting was presided by Polish President, Michal Kurtyka.

Rural India-set drama 'Period. End of Sentence' in Oscar shortlist

- **Period. End of Sentence**, a film about women in India fighting against the deeply rooted stigma of menstruation and delving upon the work of real life Pad Man Arunachalam Muruganathan, has made it to the **Oscar shortlist in the Documentary Short Subject category**.
- The film is executive produced by **Guneet Monga** and co-produced by **Monga's Sikhya Entertainment**, which has backed films like *The Lunchbox* and *Masaan*.

Farthest object in solar system 'Farout' discovered

- Scientists have discovered the most-distant body ever observed in our solar system, located over 100 times farther than Earth is from the Sun.
- The new object, discovered by Scott S Sheppard from Carnegie Institution for Science, David Tholen from the University of Hawaii and Chad Trujillo from Northern Arizona University in the US, has been given the provisional designation **2018 VG18** nicknamed **Farout**.

New Zealand to phase out plastic shopping bags from 2019

- In **New Zealand**, regulations for mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic shopping bags **will take effect from July 1, 2019**.
- The retailers will no longer be able to sell or give away single-use plastic shopping bags from July next year after the cabinet agreed to the proposed regulations for a mandatory nationwide phase-out of these bags.

Belgium Prime Minister Charles Michel resigns over migration spat

- **Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel** has resigned amid pressure on his government over **his support for the UN global compact on migration**.
- The pressure increased after his biggest coalition partner, the right-wing N-VA party, quit the government over the issue.

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis resigns, cites differences with Trump

- **Jim Mattis**, the Defence Secretary of the United States abruptly announced his resignation on December 20, 2018, **citing policy differences with President Donald Trump as the main reason behind the move**.
- The resignation comes a day after President Donald Trump announced that all US troops would be withdrawn from Syria. **The President is also considering a substantial US pullout from the 17-year-long conflict in Afghanistan**.

US Senate approves legislation to fund government

- The US Senate has approved a legislation **to temporarily fund the government in an effort to avoid partial shutdown over President Donald Trump's insistence on setting up border wall with Mexico**. The funds would keep the government running till February 8.
- The House of Representatives, in which the Republicans have a majority, needs to pass a similar bill to avoid a government shutdown this weekend.

France fines Uber 400000 euros over huge data breach

- France's data protection agency said on December 20, 2018 that it had fined **the US ride-hailing group Uber 400,000 euros over a 2016 data breach** that exposed the personal data of some 57 million clients and drivers worldwide.
- **The French Data Protection Authority said the breach would have been prevented**, if certain elementary security measures had been in place.

Burundi names Gitega as new capital

- **Burundi declared the small central city of Gitega the country's new political capital** on Saturday, in line with a presidential promise made a decade ago.
- A government spokesman named Gitega while also stating that the previous capital Bujumbura, on the north-eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika, would in future function solely as the country's economic centre.

Patrick Shanahan to replace James Mattis as US Defence Secretary

- **Patrick Shanahan** will be taking over as **the acting US Defence Secretary from January 1, 2019**, replacing James Mattis, who resigned abruptly recently. The announcement was made by US President Donald Trump through a tweet on December 23, 2018.
- James Mattis had abruptly announced his resignation on December 20, 2018, citing policy differences with President Donald Trump as the main reason behind the move.

India's Vedangi Kulkarni becomes fastest Asian to cycle the globe

- India's **Vedangi Kulkarni has become the fastest Asian to cycle the globe**. The 20-year-old Indian completed the 29,000 kilometers' distance required to qualify as bicycling across the globe on December 23, 2018.
- Overall, **Kulkarni spent 159 days peddling up to 300 km a day in 14 countries**.

Thailand approves medical use of marijuana

- **Thailand** on December 25, 2018 approved **the licensed use of marijuana for medical use and research**.
- With this, **Thailand has become the first country in Southeast Asia to take such action**. Marijuana has been traditionally used as a stimulant and painkiller in the nation.

Iraq declares Christmas as a public holiday

- The Iraqi government has declared **Christmas Day a national holiday across the country**.
- The declaration came after the Iraqi Cabinet approved a law to mark December 25 as an official holiday across the country **"on the occasion of the birth of Jesus Christ"**.

Japan announces withdrawal from IWC to resume commercial whaling

- **Japan** on December 26, 2018 announced its decision to **withdraw from the International Whaling Commission and said that it will resume commercial whaling from July 2019**. The withdrawal will come into effect by June 30, 2019.
- The withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission means that the Japanese whalers will be able to resume hunting of minke and other whales, which are currently protected by the IWC, in the Japanese coastal waters.

Palestine to apply for full UN membership in January 2019

- Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki declared on December 26, 2018 **that Palestine would initiate an application to gain full state membership at the United Nations in January 2019.**
- To secure full state membership, **the Palestinians would require the support from at least nine out of the UNSC's 15 member states.**

UAE reopens its embassy in Syria, after 6 years of suspension

- The **United Arab Emirates** on December 27, 2018 resumed its diplomatic services at its embassy in **Damascus in Syria** after six years of suspension. The move signals a thaw in the relations between the two countries, as also with the Arab world.
- The Charge d'Affaires of the UAE Embassy began discharging his duty on December 27, 2018.

Sheikh Hasina wins third consecutive term as prime minister

- **Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina secured her third consecutive term and fourth overall with a landslide victory in the nation's general elections.** The results were announced by the Election Commission on December 31, 2018.
- **The Election Commission confirmed that Hasina won her Gopalganj-3 seat bagging over 2.29 lakh votes,** while her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) opponent got only 123 votes.

Lists & Reports

Deepika Padukone First Woman to Reach Top 5 in Forbes India List of Richest Indians

- **Deepika Padukone has become the first woman ever to feature in the top 5 of this list.** With Rs 112.8 crore earning—courtesy Padmaavat and her many brand endorsements—she features at the fourth position.
- As per the publication, there are **18 women on this year's list while there were 21 the previous year.** Apart from her, Alia Bhatt, Anushka Sharma, Katrina Kaif, PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal are also included in the top 100 list.
- Bollywood actor **Salman Khan tops the list with a total earning of Rs 253.25 crore between October 1, 2017, and September 30, 2018.** He has been declared the country's highest paid celeb for the third consecutive year.
- Indian cricket captain **Virat Kohli** was placed on the second spot with total earnings of Rs 228.09 crore. Actor Akshay Kumar completed the top three with Rs 185 crore tally in the period under consideration for the list.

PM Modi most followed world leader on Instagram

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi emerged as the most popular global leader on social media platform Instagram with 14.8 million followers.**
- According to a list published by online platform **twiplomacy**, Modi is followed by Indonesian President Joko Widodo with 12.2 million followers.
- With 10 million followers, US President Donald Trump is at the third position on photo-sharing platform.
- The picture of newly married Indian cricket captain **Virat Kohli** and his wife, actress **Anushka Sharma** meeting the prime minister has become the most liked picture posted by any world leader. **The**

picture received 18,34,707 hearts since all three have a combined following of 55 million on Instagram.

India ranks 108 in WEF gender gap index in 2018, Iceland holds top spot

- India has been ranked 108th in World Economic Forum (WEF) gender gap index, same as 2017, while recording improvement in wage equality for similar work and fully closing its tertiary education gender gap for the first time.
- The global list was topped by Iceland having closed more than 85.8 per cent of its overall gender gap. Iceland holds the top spot in the index for the 10th consecutive year.
- Nordic countries **Norway** (2nd, 83.5 per cent), **Sweden** (3rd, 82.2 per cent), and **Finland** (4th, 82.1 per cent) dominated the top slots.

SDG India Index 2018: Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu ranked as Front Runners

- The NITI Aayog on December 21, 2018 released the **Baseline Report of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index 2018**, documenting the progress made by India's States and Union Territories (UTs) towards implementation of the **2030 SDG targets**.
- The SDG India Index was developed in collaboration with the **Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Global Green Growth Institute and United Nations in India**.
- The SDG India Index acts as a bridge between these mandates, aligning the SDGs with the Prime Minister's clarion call of '**Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas**', which embodies the five Ps of the global SDG movement – **People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership and Peace**.
- India's National Development Agenda is mirrored in the SDGs. India's progress in SDGs is crucial for the world as the country is home to about 17 percent of the world population.
- **Himachal Pradesh ranked high on providing clean water and sanitation**, in reducing inequalities and preserving mountain ecosystem.
- **Kerala's topped due to its superior performance in providing good health, reducing hunger, achieving gender equality and providing quality education.**

India perceives poorly, 12th on 'misperception index'

- According to the **MORI Perils of Perception Survey 2018**, done by Ipsos India, an independent market research company, **Indians stood at 12th rank in the "misperception index"**, behind several countries like, Italy, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Chile and Argentina, among others.
- The countries which performed poorer than India **were Thailand, Mexico, Turkey, Malaysia, and Brazil, which were ranked first in five**, in that order.
- The survey was conducted during September 28-October 16 this year in 37 countries online.

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Awards & Honors

Delhi minister Imran Hussain gets PETA 'Hero to Animals' award for banning Chinese manjha

- Delhi Minister of Food Supplies, Environment and Forest and Elections **Imran Hussain** was awarded by **the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)-India** for banning the **Chinese manjha**, or the glass-coated kite strings, across Delhi -- on December 1.
- The award, named '**Hero to Animals**,' was also given to three other individuals and companies that have pushed animal rights forward.

Sahitya Akademi Awards 2018 announced in 24 languages

- Sahitya Akademi In December, 2018 announced its annual Awards in 24 languages. Seven books of poetry, six novels, six short stories, three of literary criticism and two of essays have won the Sahitya Akademi Awards, 2018.
- Those who have won the award for their collection of poetry include **Sananta Tanti in Assamese, Paresh Narendra Kamat in Konkani, S Ramesan Nair in Malayalam and Dr Rama Kant Shukla in Sanskrit.**
- Writers who won the awards for short stories **include Sanjib Chattopadhyay in Bengali, Mushtaq Ahmed Mushtaq in Kashmiri and Prof Bina Thakur in Maithili.**
- **Inderjeet Kesar in Dogri, Anees Salim in English, Chitra Mudgal in Hindi** are among the awardees in the novel category.
- The Akademi said in a press release that the awards will be presented at a roadshow function to be held on 29th January next year at New Delhi during the **Festival of Letters to the organised by Sahitya Akademi.**
- An eminent short-story writer, **Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq**, bagged the Award for his collection of short stories "**AAKH**". An Indian Information Service officer Mushtaq Ahmad is presently posted as Head of the Regional News Unit at Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

TIME names Jamal Khashoggi, other journalists as 'Person of the Year'

- Saudi journalist **Jamal Khashoggi**, who was murdered in October at his country's Istanbul consulate, was on Tuesday named Time magazine's "Person of the Year" alongside several other journalists.
- The magazine also honoured Philippine journalist **Maria Ressa**, Reuters reporters **Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo** -- currently imprisoned in Myanmar -- and the staff of the **Capital Gazette in Annapolis, Maryland**, including five members killed in a June shooting.
- It is the first time someone has been chosen posthumously for the prestigious cover.

Rattan Lal wins Glinka World Soil Prize 2018

- **Rattan Lal**, a distinguished university professor of soil science at the Ohio State University, won the **'Glinka World Soil Prize 2018'** in a ceremony at the headquarters of UN FAO in Rome.
- He was awarded for his remarkable contribution to sustainable soil management.

Mary Kom honoured with Meethoileima title

- The Manipur Government on December 11, 2018 honoured AIBA World Women Boxing Gold medallist **MC Mary Kom** with the title "**Meethoileima**" (par excellent queen) at a function in **Imphal**.
- The state government conferred the title 'Meethoileima' in recognition of her unprecedented feat of winning the sixth gold medal in the recently concluded World Boxing Championship and her illustrious career in the field.

Author Amitav Ghosh honoured with 54h Jnanpith award

- Noted English writer **Amitav Ghosh** has been **honoured with this year's Jnanpith Award**, a literary award given to an author for "**outstanding contribution towards literature**".
- The decision was taken in a meeting of Jnanpith Selection Board chaired by eminent novelist, scholar and Jnanpith laureate Pratibha Ray.
- He is known for a series of novels such as "**Shadow Lines**", "**The Glass Palace**", "**The Hungry Tide**", and Ibis Trilogy -- "**Sea of Poppies**", "**River of Smoke**" and "**Flood of Fire**", which chronicled the Opium trade between India and China run by the East India Company.

Jharkhand gets "Krishi Karman" award in rice category

- **Jharkhand** has been selected for "**Krishi Karman**" award in the rice category from the **Union Ministry of Agriculture**.
- The award will be given away in February 2019. It carries a cash prize worth Rs 2 crore and a citation.
- Two progressive farmers, one male and one female, would also be given '**Agriculture Minister's Krishi Karman Award**'.

Miss Philippines Catriona Gray crowned Miss Universe 2018

- **Miss Philippines Catriona Gray** was crowned **Miss Universe** after she won the final round of the **Miss Universe 2018** pageant, held in Bangkok, Thailand on December 17, 2018. **Outgoing Miss Universe Demi Leigh Nel Peters** from South Africa crowned her successor.
- Miss Philippines made it to the **Top 5** along with **Miss Puerto Rico, Vietnam, Philippines, South Africa and Venezuela**.

Sonam Kapoor named PETA India's Person of the Year for 2018

- **Sonam Kapoor**, a vegan, has been named **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India's Person of the Year for 2018**.
- The past recipients of the PETA India's Person of the Year Award include Anushka Sharma, Sunny Leone, Shashi Tharoor, former Supreme Court Justice KS Panicker Radhakrishnan a Kapil Sharma, Hema Malini, R. Madhavan and Jacqueline Fernandez.

Asma Jahangir posthumously awarded with 2018 UN Human Rights Prize

- Late human rights activist, **Asma Jahangir** was on **December 18, 2018** awarded with the **UN Human Rights Prize 2018**, posthumously.

- Her daughter Munizae Jahangir received the award on her behalf at the award ceremony that took place at the UN Headquarters in New York, as part of activities to celebrate **Human Rights Day**.

Mamata Banerjee is the Skoch Chief Minister of the Year

- **West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been conferred the Skoch Chief Minister of the Year Award** for her contribution in the overall development of the state and emerging as the best chief minister in the country.
- **The state has this year bagged 31 Skoch Awards for its performance across different fields besides implementing unique projects.**

Chamba SP conferred 'Champion of Change' award

- **The Chamba superintendent of police was conferred the 'Champion of Change' award by Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu** for her exemplary administrative work. The award ceremony was held in Delhi on December 26, 2018.
- **Chamba SP Monika Bhutunguru was conferred one of the most prestigious award by the vice president at Vigyan Bhawan** for her immense contribution, exemplary work and bringing a significant change in the district.

Sports

Gautam Gambhir Retires From All Forms of Cricket

- Indian batsman **Gautam Gambhir has announced his retirement from cricket** In December, 2018 (December 4). The Ranji Trophy game between Delhi and Andhra starting Thursday at the Feroz Shah Kotla will be his last game.
- Gambhir, 37, has played 58 Tests, 147 ODIs and 37 T20Is for India scoring more than 10000 runs combined. He made his debut in 2003 and last played for India in a Test against England in Rajkot in 2016. He retires with nine Test centuries and 11 ODI centuries to his name.

Croatian Captain Luka Modric bags 2018 Ballon d'Or

- Croatian Captain and midfielder **Luka Modric**, who had led **Croatia** to its maiden Cup final before they lost to France in the summit clash, **has won the 2018 Ballon d'Or**.
- **Mbappe**, however, won the best young player of the year award at the Ballon d'Or ceremony.

PV Sindhu claims maiden BWF World Tour Finals Title

- Olympic silver medallist **PV Sindhu made history** on December 16, 2018 **by becoming the first Indian to win the BWF World Tour Finals**.
- **Sindhu claimed the coveted gold medal with a win over 2017 world champion Nozomi Okuhara in straight sets of 21-19, 21-17.**

Belgium crowned 2018 Hockey World Champions

- In Hockey, **Belgium has claimed their first ever World Cup title**. They defeated Netherlands 3-2 in a dramatic shoot-out in the final of the Men's World Cup in Bhubaneswar yesterday. Both the teams, goalless at full time, were at level 2-2 after five penalties.

- Belgium has won the trophy after sixteen years.

CA Kuttappa takes over as India's new chief boxing coach

- **CA Kuttappa**, a Dhronacharya awardee, **took over as India's new chief boxing coach during the beginning of the ongoing national camp**, on December 10, 2018. He succeeds veteran boxing coach SR Singh, who has now retired.
- The 39-year-old, who was an assistant coach earlier, is credited with shaping some of the country's most successful boxers such as Vijender Singh, M Suranjoy Singh and Shiva Thapa. The Army man said his elevation was High-Performance Director Santiago Nieva's idea.

Kohli surpasses Dravid for most overseas runs in calendar year

- Skipper **Virat Kohli** on December 27, 2018 **bettered Rahul Dravid's long-standing record of most runs scored by an Indian in a calendar year overseas**, adding another feather to his illustrious cap.
- With 82 runs at the MCG on the second day of the third Test against Australia, Kohli now has 1138 runs to his name. Dravid held the record for scoring 1137 runs in Tests away from home in 2002.

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting inducted into ICC Hall of Fame

- Former Australia captain **Ricky Ponting** was formally inducted into **the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame on December 26, 2018**.
- Ponting was named in the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame along with former India captain **Rahul Dravid** and England woman wicketkeeper-batter **Claire Taylor** during the ICC Annual Conference in Dublin in July.

Smriti Mandhana named ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year

- India's left-handed opener **Smriti Mandhana** has won the **Rachael Heyhoe Flint Award for the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year**. Mandhana was also adjudged as the **ICC Women's ODI Player of the Year**. The announcement was made by the International Cricket Council on December 31, 2018.
- The 22-year-old, who has also been named in the **ICC Women's ODI Team of the Year and the ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year**, scored 669 runs at an average of 66.90 in 12 ODIs and 622 runs at a strike-rate of 130.67 in 25 T20Is during the voting period, which ran from January 1 to December 31, 2018.

Saurabh Chaudhary sweeps men's air pistol national trials

- **Asian Games and Youth Olympic Games champion Saurabh Chaudhary swept the 10m air pistol trials at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range** by winning the second National trial competitions in both the men's and junior boy's categories on December 31, 2018.
- **Saurabh had won the first trial in both events on December 29** as well and in one final shooting event way above the existing world record score.

Sports Ministry earmarks Rs 100 Cr for funding athletes under TOPS: DGSAI

- The **Director General of Sports Authority of India, Neelam Kapur** said that the sports ministry has **earmarked Rs 100 crore for funding the athletes under the (TOPS) Target Olympic Podium Scheme** ahead of 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.
- The scheme was launched in September 2014 to provide financial assistance to potential Olympic medal winners.
- Under the scheme, **the athletes were also given financial assistance to prepare for Commonwealth Games and Asian Games**.

TTFI revokes suspension of Soumyajit Ghosh

- The **Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI)** meeting in Sonapat on December 30, 2018 revoked suspension of **former national champion Soumyajit Ghosh**.
- The suspension was handed out to him in March 2018 following allegations of rape against him by an ex-girlfriend.

Books

Vice President Venkaiah Naidu releases two volumes of selected speeches of President Kovind

- Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu has said that political parties must evolve a consensus on the Code of Conduct for their Members both inside the Legislature and out of it. He said, otherwise people might soon lose faith in the political processes and institutions.
- Mr Naidu said this after releasing two volumes of selected speeches of **President Ram Nath Kovind** - **The Republican Ethic and Loktantra ke Swar** in New Delhi this evening.

VVS Laxman's autobiography '281 and Beyond' launched by Sachin Tendulkar in Mumbai

- Former Indian Test batsman **VVS Laxman** was recently in Mumbai for the book launch of his **autobiography 281 and Beyond**.
- **The event was attended by Indian batting legend Sachin Tendulkar who also was a part of the event.** In fact, the book was launched by the Little Master as he and Laxman looked back to the golden era of Indian cricket.

Obituaries

Noted agriculturalist Jayaraman passed away

- Noted agriculturalist **Jayaraman**, who pioneered **the protection and propagation of indigenous paddy varieties in Tamil Nadu**, passed away in Chennai on December 6, 2018.
- Hailing from Thiruthuraipoondi, Jayaraman has been credited with documenting and protecting more than 170 paddy varieties.

Former Kerala minister, veteran Cong leader C N Balakrishnan passed away

- Veteran Congress leader and former Kerala minister **C N Balakrishnan** died at a private hospital here, party sources said Tuesday.
- Balakrishnan, a former Cooperation minister, undergoing treatment for pneumonia at a private hospital here and the end came late Monday night, the sources said.

Padma Shri historian and former Jamia VC, Mushirul Hasan passed away at 71

- **Professor Mushirul Hasan**, a renowned historian and former vice-chancellor Jamia Millia of Islamia, passed away at the age of 71 early In December, 2018 morning. Hasan was also formerly the director general of the National Archives of India.
- He also served as vice-chairman, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, president of the Indo-Iran Society of the Iran embassy and president of the Indian History Congress.

Renowned classical singer Pandit Arun Bhaduri passes away

- Renowned classical singer **Pandit Arun Bhaduri** passed away in Kolkata after a prolonged illness. He was 75 and survived by wife and son.
- Pandit Bhaduri, considered to be one of the masters of Bengali songs and Bhajans, was suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Veteran CPI (M) leader Nirupam Sen passed away

- **Nirupam Sen**, veteran CPI (M) leader, passed away on December 24, 2018 in Kolkata following a cardiac arrest. He was 72.
- The former **Commerce and Industry Minister of West Bengal** had been on life support since the early weeks of December.

Ex-Union Minister Jai Narain Prasad Nishad passed away

- **Former Union Minister Captain Jai Narain Prasad Nishad** died In December, 2018 at the age of 88.
- Nishad was a former **Union Minister and an ex-parliamentarian from Bihar's Muzaffarpur Lok Sabha Constituency**.

Noted film maker Mrinal Sen passes away

- **Legendary filmmaker Mrinal Sen** passed away at the age of 95 in Kolkata this morning. A **Padma Bhushan and Dada Saheb Phalke awardee**, Sen paved the way for parallel cinema in the country with films like **Ek Din Achanak, Padatik, Mrigaya, Akaler Sandhane, Chorus, Kharij, Khandahar, Bhuwan Shome, Akash Kusum and Calcutta 71**.

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