

# SPORTS UPDATE

# NATIONAL NEWS

# INTERNATIONAL



# PEOPLE IN NEWS

# DECEMBER 2019 SET-4

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# National News

## 1. 790 Tonnes Of Imported Onion Reach India: Government Official



The first batch of imported onion weighing 790 tonnes has reached India and some quantities are being distributed to Delhi and Andhra Pradesh at a landing cost of Rs 57-60/kg.

State-run MMTTC, which is importing the key kitchen staple on behalf of the government, has contracted 49,500 tonne of onion so far.

Andhra Pradesh and Delhi governments have already placed their demands and have started lifting imported onions. Onion has been imported from Turkey, Egypt,

and Afghanistan. More consignments are underway which should improve the domestic supplies.

The country had last imported 1,987 tonnes of onion way back in 2015-16 when the price has shot up significantly.

## 2. India constructs Girls Hostel for Nepal Armed Police Force School at Kirtipur

Govt. of India constructed Girls Hostel for Nepal Armed Police Force School, Kirtipur.

Nepal Armed Police Force (APF) School is an academic institution created under the APF Welfare Service Centre of Nepal Armed Police Force. The school was established in 2005 by over 21 percent of girls students. The infrastructure constructed with the Government of India's grant assistance of 40.42 million Nepali Rupees is a two-storied girls hostel. It comprises 32 rooms, including a dormitory, warden room, bathroom, sanitation facilities for girls on each floor and furniture. The built infrastructure expected to boost the learning environment of students. The government of India to be associated with the project complements the effort of the Government of Nepal in augmenting infrastructure in the field of education.

## 3. Arunachal to Mark Schools as 'Hard' and 'Soft'

Arunachal Pradesh has launched Teachers' Transfer & Posting Policy, 2020, for ensuring need-based distribution of teachers to protect the academic interests of students and optimise job satisfaction among the teachers in a free and transparent manner.

Under the policy, all government schools will be divided into three categories — hard, medium and soft — based on topography, accessibility and degrees of difficulty in staying at the place of posting.

Hard Schools includes areas with difficult accessibility and topography. All new recruits will be given a hard posting for a mandatory three years, inclusive of their probation period.

Medium Schools It includes areas with medium accessibility, connectivity and topography.



After completing hard schools phase the new teachers will be spending the next five years in schools with levels of medium difficulty.

Soft Schools includes areas with easy accessibility and connectivity majorly urban areas.

After completing hard and medium schools phase the teachers will be allotted soft schools.

Motto of the scheme:

Teacher absenteeism has been a major issue across government schools in Arunachal Pradesh. The student-teacher ratio has consequently been skewed in favour of urban centres with better connectivity.

The state has been facing difficulties in posting teachers in remote areas where schools have adequate students, but hardly anyone to teach them.

The policy also entails the transfer of teachers through online requests.

#### 4. Mumbai-Nagpur expressway to be named after Bal Thackeray: Govt.

The Maharashtra government said the upcoming Nagpur-Mumbai Expressway will be named 'Hindu HrudaySamratBalasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra SamruddhiMahamarg'.

The 701 kilometre long, eight lane expressway will connect Mumbai with Nagpur, and pass through 10 districts, 26 tehsils and 390 villages. It is expected to cost Rs 46,000 crore and will cut travel time between the two cities to around eight hours.

#### 5. Andhra Pradesh tops in organizing Fit India School Week more than 21,000 schools receive FIT India flag

Prime Minister NarendraModi's clarion call has laid a wonderful foundation to the FIT India movement, launched on August 29 this year. In his popular radio show Mann Ki Baat, Modi, on 24th November, urged all the schools to celebrate Fit India Week in December and get themselves enrolled in the Fit India Star Rankings.

The Fit India School week has so far been organized by 26,845 schools. Andhra Pradesh tops the chart with 13,839 Fit India Schools celebrating FIT India Week. Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh are distant second & third with 1,967 and 1,504 schools respectively.

During this week, various activities like Yoga, free-hand exercises, sports competitions, painting competitions, and essay and debate competitions on fitness were organized by the schools to emphasise on the importance of fitness in a student's life.

Currently, the Fit India Flag has been obtained by 21,344 schools. Again, Andhra Pradesh leads the movement with a whopping 8,117 – the highest number of Fit India-ranked schools across India. It is followed by Karnataka with 5,989 schools.

The Fit India School Ranking system is the first-ever fitness rating for schools introduced in India. Under this, the schools are given a Fit India Flag and 3-star and 5-star rating, depending on the fitness levels of the students and teachers,



infrastructure available and their participation in fitness activities. Obtaining FIT India Flag is precondition for getting FIT India school ranking.

## 6. Hyderabad - New Delhi Telangana Express adorned with “SingareniColours” starts its run from Hyderabad to New Delhi

In first of its kind initiative by South Central Railway, Hyderabad-New Delhi- Hyderabad Telangana Express, the iconic train that connects the State and the Nation’s Capital, has been wrapped with the colors of Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL), the Government owned Coal producing giant of India and also a premier freight customer of the Railways. The Secunderabad Division of SCR has tied up with M/s. SCCL and one rake of Hyderabad- New Delhi Telangana Express has been vinyl wrapped by SCCL.

This is an innovative scheme of Indian Railways of offering exteriors of coaching trains for advertisement to Government Departments / Public Sector Undertakings. This novel and potentially limitless advertising avenue of Vinyl Wrapping on trains lays stress on aesthetics of the trains. The Vinyl Wrapping is done from the window level to the bottom of the coach, so that the basic visibility is not compromised. The revenue generation potential of the innovative advertising model does not also compromise on various concerns such as Environment, Safety, Security, Sanitation, Fire Safety etc.as prescribed under Railway Rules. Indian Railways has formalized a policy on advertisements through mobile assets, based on the fact that the mass transport service provider enjoys the highest number of captive eyeballs.

## 7. PrezKovind releases mobile app of Red Cross Society of India in Hyderabad

President Ram NathKovind released the mobile app of the Red Cross Society of India in Hyderabad. The President is in Hyderabad on his Southern Sojourn.

Developed by the Telangana Centre for Good Governance in less than three months, the mobile app is accessible in all languages. So far, 13 lakh members including junior red cross members downloaded the app. The developers informed that the access to blood bank and Red Cross membership will become easy with the launching of the mobile app.

## 8. Urban India declared Open defecation free

Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban has achieved its target of creating Urban India Open Defecation Free. Urban areas of 35 states and Union Territories have become ODF. In all, 4,320 cities out of 4,372 have declared themselves ODF, of which 4,167 cities have been certified through third-party verification. This has been achieved by the construction of nearly 65.81 lakh individual household toilets against Mission target of 59 lakhs and 5.89 lakh seats of public toilets against Mission target of 5.08 lakh seats. Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has launched the ODF and ODF protocols, with a focus on sustaining ODF outcomes and achieving holistic sanitation.



Till date, 819 cities have been certified ODF plus, and 312 cities have been certified ODF plus plus. The Ministry has partnered with Google to map all public toilets on Google maps. Over 2,300 cities have uploaded more than 57 thousand public toilets mapped on Google maps, covering more than 50 per cent of India’s urban population. Government has [www.successmantra.in](http://www.successmantra.in)

launched star rating protocol for Garbage free cities and Indore, Ambikapur, Navi Mumbai and Mysuru have been certified as 5-star cities.

### 9. Govt notifies rules for fixation of microdots identifiers on vehicles

The government has notified rules for fixation of microdots identifiers on motor vehicles and their parts. Road Transport and Highways Ministry said, microdots will enhance the security of vehicles. The notification was issued after consideration of suggestions and objections on the draft notification issued in July this year. The invisible microdots will now come affixed on vehicles and their parts to prevent theft as well as to check fake spare parts. Microdot technology involves spraying the body and parts of the vehicle or any other machine with microscopic dots, which gives a unique identification.

### 10. India to Setup High-Tech Cameras Along China Border, New War-Time Shelters in North East

India is planning to set up high-tech surveillance cameras along the Line of Actual Control with China, while also focusing on establishing war-time and weather-proof aircraft shelters in the North-East. The developments came to light in a report of the Standing Committee on Defence. The Committee explained that during a visit to India's eastern sector from November 4-9, they came across a request for state-of-the-art surveillance cameras. About 16 such cameras were required for posts there. The Committee learnt that the defence ministry received a request for these cameras not only in the eastern sector, but along the northern borders as well.

### 11. India test fires Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile System



Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile System (QRSAM) developed by DRDO has been successfully flight tested on Monday from Integrated Test Range in Odisha's Chandipur.

The missile was flight tested with full configuration in deployment mode intercepting the target in mid-air and meeting mission objectives. The entire event was monitored by Ground Telemetry Systems, Range Radar Systems, Electro Optical Tracking System, etc. QRSAM weapon system, which operates on the

move, comprises of fully automated Command and Control System, Active Array Battery Surveillance Radar, Active Array Battery Multifunction Radar and Launcher. Both radars are four walled having 360 degree coverage with search on move and track on move capability. The system is compact with minimum number of vehicles for a firing unit. Single stage solid propelled missile has mid course inertial navigation system with two-way data link and terminal active seeker developed by DRDO. The missile successfully engaged the aerial target establishing its capability. Director General (MSS) Sri MSR Prasad was present during the trial.

With this mission, the developmental trials of the weapon system are successfully completed and the weapon system is expected to be ready for induction by 2021.

## 12. Assam govt. to approach Centre to declare Assamese as state language



While various organisations, students, artists, social-activists of Assam have intensified their protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, the government has decided several important schemes, measures by aiming to protect the Assamese language, land rights of the indigenous people. The Assam cabinet decided that the Assam government will approach the Union government to declare the Assamese language as the state language of Assam excluding Barak Valley, BTAD area and Hill districts by amending Article 345 of Constitution of India.

The Assam government will bring legislation in the next Assembly session making it mandatory that the Assamese language should be taught as a compulsory subject in all English and other medium schools including Kendriya Vidyalaya up to Class 10. Announcing the state cabinet decisions, Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said this law will not apply for hilly districts, BTAD, Bodo dominated areas and Barak Valley.

## 13. India is the first country in the world with a government-led, sub-national measure of progress on Sustainable Development Goals

NITI Aayog released the second edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, which comprehensively documents the progress made by India's States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets.

The SDG India Index—which has been developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), United Nations in India, and Global Green Growth Institute—was launched by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar.

The SDG India Index 2.0 and the dashboard enables India to both track and encourage accelerated progress to meet the SDGs across all its States and Union Territories. India's composite score has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019, thereby showing noticeable progress. The SDG India Index 2019 tracks progress of all States and UTs on 100 indicators drawn from the MoSPI's National Indicator Framework (NIF). The process of selection of these indicators included multiple consultations with Union ministries/departments and States/UTs.

The SDG India Index 2019 is more robust than the first edition on account of wider coverage of goals, targets, and indicators with greater alignment with the NIF. The Index spans 16 out of 17 SDGs with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17. This marks an improvement over the 2018 Index, which covered only 13 goals.



Additionally, this year, the SDG India Index Report has a new section on profiles of all 37 States and UTs, which will be very useful to analyse their performance on all goals in a lucid manner.

A composite score was computed in the range of 0–100 for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs, indicating the average performance of every State/UT towards achieving 16 SDGs and their respective targets. If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies it has achieved the 2030 national targets. The higher the score of a State/UT, the closer it is towards achieving the targets.

#### 14. Delhi cabinet approves policy on electric vehicles to curb pollution

The government approved a policy on electric vehicles (EVs) with a focus on two-wheelers, shared transport vehicles, and commercial vehicles to lead the change to electric mobility, at a time when the state is grappling with severe levels of pollution. The aim is to reduce air pollution and create large scale jobs. The policy will be valid for three years from the date of notification.



All new home and workplace parking spaces will have to be 'EV-ready' with 20% of the parking being EV-enabled. The government will give 100% subsidy for the purchase of charging equipment up to ₹6,000 per charging point for the first 30,000 charging points at homes and workplaces. This will be routed through power distribution companies responsible for charger installations.

There will be incentives for electric two-wheelers and three wheelers such as auto rickshaws and e-rickshaws, as well as four-wheeler purchases. An incentive of ₹5,000 per kWh of battery capacity will be given for two-wheelers.

#### 15. 'Oxygen Parlour' at Nashik Railway Station to combat air pollution

In a unique initiative to battle rising air pollution in cities, an 'Oxygen Parlour' has been opened at Nashik railway station to provide an experience of breathing clean air to the commuters.

The initiative comes with the efforts of Airo Guard in collaboration with the Indian Railways.

The co-founder of Airo Guard, Amit Amritkar said that the concept of Oxygen Parlour is based on the recommendation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

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### 17. Cabinet approves AtalBhujalYojana



The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the implementation of the AtalBhujalYojana (ATAL JAL), a Central Sector Scheme with a total outlay of Rs.6000 crore to be implemented over a period of 5 years (2020-21 to 2024-25).

The scheme aims to improve ground water management through community participation in identified priority areas in seven States, viz. Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Implementation of the scheme is expected to benefit nearly 8350 Gram Panchayats in 78 districts in these States. ATAL JAL will promote panchayat

led ground water management and behavioural change with primary focus on demand side management. Out of the total outlay of Rs. 6000 crore, 50% shall be in the form of World Bank loan, and be repaid by the Central Government. The remaining 50% shall be through Central Assistance from regular budgetary support. The entire World Bank's loan component and Central Assistance shall be passed on to the States as Grants.

ATAL JAL has two major components:

- A. Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building Component for strengthening institutional arrangements for sustainable groundwater management in the States including improving monitoring networks, capacity building, strengthening of Water User Associations, etc.
- B. Incentive Component for incentivising the States for achievements in improved groundwater management practices namely, data dissemination, preparation of water security plans, implementation of management interventions through convergence of ongoing schemes, adopting demand side management practices etc.

### 18. Cabinet Committee on Security approves creation of chief of defence staff

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved the creation of a chief of defence staff (CDS), who will be the single-point military adviser to the government as suggested by the Kargil Review Committee in 1999.

The CCS also approved the report of a high-level committee, headed by National Security Advisor AjitDoval, which finalised responsibilities and the enabling framework for the CDS.

In a landmark military reform, Prime Minister NarendraModi on August 15 announced that India would have a CDS as head of the tri-services.

Days after the prime minister's announcement, an Implementation Committee headed by Doval was appointed to finalise an enabling framework and determine the specific responsibilities for the CDS.

## 19. Cabinet approves Agreement on Social Security between India and Brazil

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the Agreement on Social Security between the Republic of India and the Federative Republic of Brazil.

India has been entering into bilateral Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with other countries in order to protect the interests of Indian professionals / skilled workers working abroad for short durations and enhance the competitiveness of Indian companies.

SSAs broadly provide the following three benefits:

- i. Avoiding making of double social security contributions by the workers (detachment);
- ii. Easy remittance of benefits (Exportability);
- iii. Aggregating the contribution periods (in two countries) to prevent loss of benefits (Totalization). The agreement will also provide for disability insurance benefits to the Indian nationals working abroad. As on date, India has signed SSAs with 18 countries.

## 20. Free WiFi to all villages connected via Bharat Net till March 2020: Ravi Shankar Prasad

WiFi services being provided through BharatNet in villages across India will be free of charge till March 2020. Currently, 48,000 villages connected under the BharatNet project have WiFi access.

Gurawara village in Rewari district of Haryana has been developed as a digital village by CSC. The CSC unit there, operated by village level entrepreneur SonuBala, facilitates access to government-to-citizen services through the digital seva portal.



A DigiGaon or digital village was conceptualised as a connected village where citizens can avail various e-services of the central government, state governments and private players.

These villages are projected to be change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods through community participation and collective action.

The scheme focuses on empowering the entire village community by providing

access to education, health or financial services through the digital medium.

In a digital village, residents are encouraged to become digitally literate. Residents can avail quality healthcare through tele-medicine consultations under allopathy, homeopathy and ayurvedic systems.

The digital village also promotes a financially inclusive society by providing banking, insurance and pension services at the doorstep of citizens. In addition, the entire village is WiFi enabled, so residents are digitally connected.

Such villages are also equipped with an LED assembly unit, a sanitary napkin unit, a paper bag-making unit and a rural BPO to promote employment among the youth.

## 21. 'Good Governance Index' launched by MoS (PP) DrJitendra Singh on 'Good Governance Day'



DrJitendra Singh launched the 'Good Governance Index' at an event organized by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, on the occasion of Good Governance Day. The Good Governance Day is observed on the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri AtalBihari Vajpayee. The Good Governance Index is a uniform tool across States to assess the Status of Governance and impact of various interventions taken up by the State Government and UTs. The objectives of GGI are to

provide quantifiable data to compare the state of governance in all states and UTs, enable states and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance and shift to result oriented approaches and administration. Various principles have been kept in mind while selecting the indicators, i.e. it should be easy to understand & calculate, citizen-centric & result driven, leading to improved results and applicable to all states and UTs, among others. Various consultation meetings were held with the stakeholders, including consultations with sector experts, ministries, states & UTs.

The GGI takes into consideration ten sectors: 1). Agriculture and Allied Sectors, 2). Commerce & Industries, 3). Human Resource Development, 4). Public Health, 5). Public Infrastructure & Utilities, 6). Economic Governance, 7). Social Welfare & Development, 8). Judicial & Public Security, 9). Environment and 10). Citizen-Centric Governance. These ten Governance Sectors are measured on total 50 indicators. Different indicators are given different weightage under one Governance Sector to calculate the value. E.g. Under Agriculture & Allied Sector, there are 6 indicators with different weightage, namely: Growth rate of agriculture and allied sector (0.4), growth rate of food grains production (0.1), growth rate of horticulture produce (0.1), growth rate of milk production (0.1), growth rate of meat production (0.1) and crop insurance (0.2). The states and UTs are divided into three groups: a). Big States, b). North-East & Hill States and c). UTs. The states and UTs are ranked on all indicators separately, at the same time composite ranking is also calculated for these states and UTs under their respective groups based upon these indicators.

## 22. Assam Gas Cracker Project moved to oil ministry

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the transfer of administrative control of Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Ltd (BCPL) from the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. BCPL, a central public sector undertaking, is implementing the Assam Gas Cracker Project (AGCP), which is seen as part of the implementation of the Assam peace accord, and would give impetus to the development of the

northeastern region. The CCEA, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the change of administrative control, an official statement said here.

It also approved feedstock subsidy to BCPL for 15 years of plant operation to maintain minimum internal rate of return on equity investment (IRR) of 10 per cent (after tax).

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas will make firm arrangements through concerned public sector undertakings (PSUs) for supply of committed quantity and quality of feedstock to the project as envisaged in the earlier CCEA approval of 2006. The Assam Gas Cracker Project involves setting up of facilities for the manufacture of two lakh tonnes of ethylene annually using gas as feedstock.

The first phase of long-delayed Rs 9,285-crore project, the first petrochemical project in the northeastern region, was commissioned in late 2015.

Then prime minister Manmohan Singh on April 9, 2007, had laid the foundation stone of the project at Lepetkata, 15 km from Dibrugarh. It was said at that time that the project will take 60 months to complete by April 2012.

But, the target declines were delayed -- first to December 2013, than to January 2014 and June 2015. The project is finally being commissioned in November 2015.

The delay resulted in the project cost going up. From an initial Rs 5,460 crore, it was revised to Rs 9,285 crore. Apart from changes in design, escalating costs of steel, cement and other construction materials were cited as the main factors responsible for the hike.

State-owned gas utility GAIL holds 70 per cent interest in BCPL, while the remaining 10 per cent is equally split between Oil India Ltd, Numaligarh Refineries Ltd and the Assam government.

The project came as part of the historic Assam Accord signed on August 15, 1985, with a view to bring socioeconomic development of the region. It was approved by the CCEA on April 18, 2006.

Subsequently, a joint venture, BCPL was incorporated on January 8, 2007.

The feedstock for the project is natural gas and naphtha. OIL and ONGC supply natural gas and naphtha is supplied by NRL.

### **23. PM Modi unveils statue of AtalBihari Vajpayee in Lucknow on his birth anniversary**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday unveiled a statue of former Prime Minister AtalBihari Vajpayee at the LokBhawan in Lucknow.

He also laid the foundation stone for AtalBihari Vajpayee Medical University in the Uttar Pradesh capital.

The state government has given 50 acres of land for the varsity.

The event coincided with the birth anniversary of AtalBihari Vajpayee, who represented Lucknow in the Lok Sabha five times.

Vajpayee was born in 1924 in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. He died on August 16, 2018 at AIIMS in New Delhi.



## 24. Shri Dharmendra Pradhan unveils India's First CNG Bus which can run 1000 Kms in one fill;

In major step towards making India a gas-based economy and making CNG as the eco-friendly option for long distance transport in the country, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Steel, unveiled India's first long distance CNG bus fitted with composite CNG cylinders, which can travel around 1000 kms in a single fill. The project has been executed by Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) and has been achieved through pioneering design of Type IV Composite Cylinders in buses, replacing traditional very heavy Type-I Carbon Steel cylinders.

Lauding the initiative, Shri Pradhan described it as a milestone in ease of living for the people of the country. Delhi has witnessed revolution in shift towards cleaner, gas based fuels. Over 500 CNG stations are operating in Delhi NCR today and about 12 lakh piped natural gas connections have been provided. Over 1,000 PNG connections are being provided daily in the NCR. Long haul CNG buses originating from Delhi to other locations will further drive this shift towards cleaner gas based fuels. This will improve overall ease of living of people by mitigating the problem of air pollution, ensuring a cleaner environment and reducing waiting time at CNG stations.

## 25. Earliest Sanskrit Inscriptions in South India found in A.P.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has discovered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India which is also an earliest epigraphic evidence (Epigraphy is the study of ancient inscriptions) for the Saptamatrika cult.

Saptamatrikas are a group of seven female deities worshipped in Hinduism as personifying the energy of their respective consorts.

Another inscription in Prakrit language and of Brahmi characters belonging to the 1st century A.D. was also found.

## 26. Railway recruitment only through UPSC, choose from 5 specialities: Indian Railways Chairman

All new recruits in railways will be inducted through the UPSC civil services exams under five specialities, Railway Board Chairman VK Yadav said, days after the Cabinet approved the merger of its eight services into one -- the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).

He said just like aspirants to the Union



Public Service Commission, candidates aspiring to get into railways will have to appear for their prelims after which they will indicate their preference for IRMS under five specialities.

Of the five specialisations being offered for Indian Railways recruitment, four are engineering specialities for 'technical' operations comprising of civil, mechanical, telecom and electrical, and one is a 'non-technical' speciality which will recruit officers for accounts, personnel and traffic.

Railway Board Chairman will be officer of Indian Railway Service only

He also clarified that the Chairman, Railway Board, who will also be the CEO of the national transporter, will be an officer of Indian Railway Service and not from any other service.

### **27. India's first university for transgender community to come up in UP's Kushinagar**

The country's first university for transgender community will be opened in Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar district to facilitate its members to study right from class one to PG and even do research and get PhD degree. The university, which will come up in Fazilnagar block of Kushinagar district, is being built by the AkhilBhartiyaKinnarSikshaSeva Trust (All-India transgender education service trust).

It is the first of its kind in the country where members of transgender community will be able to get education and the process of has already been initiated. From January 15 next year, two children who are brought up by the community members will get admission and from February and March other classes will start.

### **28. ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan implicated in fake spy case to get Rs 1.3 crore from Kerala govt**

The Kerala government has in principle decided to give Rs 1.3 crore as compensation to former Isro scientist Nambi Narayanan, who was falsely implicated in the 1994 espionage case.

The amount is for settling the case filed by 77-year-old Naryananan against the government in a sub-court here, seeking enhanced damages for his illegal arrest and harassment.

The compensation is in addition to the Rs 50 lakh provided by the government to the former scientist on a Supreme Court order and the Rs 10 lakh recommended by the National Human Rights Commission.

The settlement agreement would be submitted before the court after consulting legal experts and further action would be taken as per the court's directions, a government press release said.

The government had entrusted Former Chief Secretary K Jayakumar to examine the issues raised by Nambi Narayanan and settle the case amicably.

On the basis of Jaykumar's recommendations, the cabinet took the decision. The government had last year handed over Rs 50 lakh to the former scientist, three weeks after the apex court ordered the relief holding that he was "arrested unnecessarily, harassed and subjected to mental cruelty."

The espionage case, which hit the headlines in 1994, pertained to allegations of transfer of certain confidential documents on India's space programme to foreign countries by two scientists and four others, including two Maldivian women.



Narayanan had to spend close to two months in jail before the CBI concluded the allegations against him were false. The case was first probed by the state police and later handed over to the CBI, which found the charges to be false.

The scientist had moved the Supreme Court against the Kerala High Court order, which said no action was required to be taken against former DGP Siby Mathews and two retired Superintendents of Police KK Joshua and S Vijayan, who were later held responsible by the CBI for his illegal arrest.

### 29. Supreme Court outlines 3 conditions for stay

The Apex Court has outlined 3 aspects it usually considered while granting a stay order.

A Bench of Justice Deepak Gupta & Justice Aniruddha Bose, in a Judgment in Nov, said the 3 include: the balance of convenience does not favour the alleged violator; the stay order does not cause irreparable harm or injury; & there should be a prima facie case for granting the stay order. The observation came while deciding petitions filed by the State of Mizoram against a High Court order to keep in abeyance all paper lottery draws pursuant to the pending outcome of a writ petition filed by a lottery company.

The Supreme Court found that order would cause a loss of ₹20 lakh to the State Govt.

### 30. Farewell Bahadur: IAF's Kargil star MiG 27 takes to skies one last time

The MiG 27 fighter of the Indian Air Force, which played a stellar role during the Kargil conflict with Pakistan 20 years ago, roared through the skies for the last time. The MiG 27 has been the backbone of the Indian Air Force's ground attack fleet for the past four decades. The fighter jet took to the skies one last time at the Jodhpur air base where the only IAF squadron that operates the MiG 27 is based.



The MiG 27 currently in operation is an ungraded version inducted in 2006. It has been operating as part of the Indian Air Force's strike fleet. All the other variants, such as the MiG-23 BN & MiG-23 MF and the pure MiG 27 have already retired from Indian Air Force.

"These aircraft have made immense contribution to the nation, both during peace and war. The fleet earned its glory in the historic Kargil conflict when it delivered

rockets & bombs with accuracy on enemy positions. The fleet also took an active part in Op-Parakram. The upgraded MiG 27, because of its survivability, has also participated in numerous national and international exercises.

### 31. Foundation laid for country's first transit-oriented development project; Delhi to get tallest tower

Union Home Minister Amit Shah laid the foundation stone for the country's first transit-oriented development (TOD) project under which a state-of-the-art infrastructure zone, including the national capital's tallest tower, will be built in east Delhi.

The project -- 'East Delhi Hub' at Karkardooma -- spread over 30 ha, will come up in the next three-and-a-half years, officials said.

The hub will be developed around the existing two Delhi Metro stations at Karkardooma-- on the Blue and Pink Lines, and will include a massive open landscaped green area, besides a 48-storey signature tower that will come up in the first phase of the project.

"The vision of development that Modiji has for Delhi is being implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and this project will be the country's first TOD project. Delhi will prosper after this," Shah said in his address.

The land is owned by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) which has chosen National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) for implementing the project's first phase.

### 32. Assam Government Launches Abhinandan Education Loan Subsidy Scheme. Get to Know What's In-Store.

The Assam government recently announced a new education loan subsidy scheme to support the permanent residents of the state. The scheme launched by the Finance Minister of the state, Himanta Biswa Sarma, aims to support students



who wish to pursue higher education from good institutes or are already doing so.

The “Abhinandan Education Loan Subsidy Scheme” was launched along with the housing loan subsidy scheme “AponerAponGhar”. Under this scheme, the Assam government will provide a one-time subsidy of INR 50,000 to students who have availed education loan for higher studies. The scheme covers all commercial banks like the Federal Bank and HDFC and also the regional rural banks like Assam GraminVikash Bank within Assam.

### 33. Compulsory renewal of OCI cards goes

The Union Home Ministry has relaxed the provisions for Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) card holders that made it compulsory for those aged above 50 and below 20 to renew their cards on renewal of their passports.

# International News

## 1. OIC voices 'concern', flags impact of CAA

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation(OIC) has voiced concern over the Citizenship Amendment Act and the verdict in the Ayodhya case. The OIC has urged the Indian government to ensure the safety of the Muslim minority and the protection of their religious sites.



It also cautioned that any action, contrary to these principles and obligations, may lead to further tensions and may have serious implications on peace and security across the region.

OIC is an international organization which was established in 1969 upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco

The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the

spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.

It is the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states. Of these, 47 are Muslim Majority countries.

It is headquartered at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The OIC also has the permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.

The observer states of OIC are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central African Republic, the Kingdom of Thailand, Russian Federation and Turkish Cypriot State.

India is not a member of the OIC. However, India was invited as a guest of honour at 46th Session of the Council of Foreign Minister in 2019.

## 2. The Eco: Eight West African countries renamed common currency

Eight West African countries have announced a new common currency "Eco" to end French dominance from the region. These Eight countries - Mali, Niger, Senegal, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Ivory Coast.

These countries have decided to abolish the existence of the French colonial period, and they will use a new currency "Eco" in their country instead of the currently prevalent currency 'CFA franc'. This new currency will come into circulation in 2020.

The President of Ivory Coast said that after changing the name of the currency, any interference of France in relation to the currency of these countries will stop.

CFA Franc was initially linked to the French currency Franc. It was later added to the euro nearly two decades ago. Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo in West Africa are currently using this currency. All of these countries except Guinea-Basau were colonies of France.

Earlier, one French franc was worth 100 CFA francs but when France joined the European Union the rate became 1 euro to 656 CFA francs. Prior to this, CFA franc was remained unchanged from 1948 to 1994 but it was devalued by fifty percent to boost exports from the West African region. The region had been using CFA francs for the last 74 years in Western Africa and France acted as a guarantor of any financial crisis.

### 3. Ecuador Declares Emergency After Fuel Spill in Galapagos Islands

Ecuador activated emergency protocols to contain the environmental impact of a fuel spill in the Galapagos Islands, after a barge carrying 600 gallons of diesel fuel sank.

The Galapagos archipelago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is home to one of the most fragile ecosystems on the planet.

### 4. CBERS-4A: New China-Brazil earth resource satellite launched into space

A new satellite, jointly developed by China and Brazil, was sent into space pushing forward the aerospace cooperation between the two countries, according to the China National Space Administration (CNSA).

The China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite-4A (CBERS-4A) was launched on a Long March-4B carrier rocket from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in north China's Shanxi Province.



The satellite is the sixth satellite under the earth resource satellite cooperation program between the two countries. It will obtain global optical remote-sensing data and support the Brazilian government's monitoring of the Amazon rainforest and the country's environmental changes.

The CBERS-4A will replace CBERS-4, which was launched in 2014, to improve the resolution of the remote-sensing data, said CNSA.

It is equipped with three optical payloads: a wide-range panchromatic multispectral camera developed by China, and a multispectral camera and a wide-field imager developed by Brazil.

It has a better imaging capacity and higher positioning accuracy than CBERS-4, and can better meet the urgent needs of both countries in land and resources exploration, land classification, environmental protection monitoring, climate change research, disaster prevention and mitigation, crop classification and yield estimation, according to CNSA.

It can also provide services for Asian, African and Latin American countries.

In July 1988, China and Brazil signed the agreement establishing the joint research and production of the earth research satellites. The first such satellite was launched from China in 1999.

### 5. Trump Officially Establishes US Space Force with 2020 Defense Bill Signing

President Trump has signed the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act and with it directed the establishment of the U.S. Space Force (USSF) as the sixth branch of the armed forces.

The Space Force is part of the Department of the Air Force, much as the U.S. Marine Corps is part of the Department of the Navy. The new branch will be stood up over the next 18 months.

He appointed Gen. Jay Raymond to be the first Chief of Space Operations, the senior military member of the new branch.

Space Force will help the United States prepare itself against threats in an "evolving space environment." Other military officials echoed his sentiments.

The Space Force will be headquartered at the Pentagon, like the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force, the fact sheet states. And the Space Force's duties will be wide-ranging.

### **6. Afghanistan presidential election: Ghani set for second term after initial results**

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani appears set to win a second term, after preliminary election results showed he was on course to win a narrow majority. He secured 50.64% of the vote in the September 28 election. The initial results were delayed amid protests and allegations of fraud. MrGhani's main rival, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, won 39.52% of the vote.

But he has rejected the result and is expected to file an appeal before the final result is announced.

### **7. Russia, Ukraine Reach Five-Year Gas-Transit Deal**

Russia and Ukraine have signed a five-year, \$7 billion deal on the transit of Russian natural gas to Europe following intense negotiations ahead of a year-end deadline. The deal, negotiated in Vienna, was confirmed by the respective Russian and Ukrainian state gas companies, as well as Ukrainian President VolodymyrZelenskiy in a social-media post on December 30.



December 30.

The current agreement was set to expire on December 31, risking Europe's vital link to billions of cubic meters in gas from Russia via Ukrainian pipelines in the depths of winter.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev described the deal as "a compromise that had to be reached" in comments posted on his VKontakte page on December 31.

Under the new contract, Kyiv next year is expecting to ship a minimum of 65 bcm, or about 22 bcm less than it did in 2018. Minimum volumes will decrease further to 40 bcm in 2021-24.

The new deal has a "pump or pay" clause, meaning Russia must pay the minimum gas-transit fee even if it doesn't pump the contracted volumes through Ukraine. Russia has twice cut off gas supplies to Ukraine -- in 2006 and 2009, leaving households and businesses there and in countries farther west out in the cold.

### **8. Saudi Arabia sentences five to death for murder of Jamal Khashoggi**

Five men have been sentenced to death and another three face a total of 24 years in prison for their roles in the gruesome murder of the dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last year.

Eight of the 11 people on trial were found guilty of the killing, which triggered the kingdom's biggest diplomatic crisis since the 9/11 attacks as world leaders and business executives sought to distance themselves from Riyadh.

Three senior figures, including the de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's former top adviser, Saud al-Qahtani, were cleared of wrongdoing during the trial.

The verdict contradicts the conclusion of the CIA and other western intelligence agencies that Prince Mohammed directly ordered Khashoggi's assassination, an allegation the kingdom has strenuously denied.

Qahtani was found to have no proven involvement in the killing, after he was investigated and released without charge. He has, however, been sanctioned by the US for his alleged role in the operation.

Khashoggi, a US-based columnist for the Washington Post who was critical of the Saudi government, was killed after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October last year on a visit to pick up paperwork for his forthcoming marriage.

The murder of Khashoggi sullied the reputation of the newly appointed crown prince, who has attempted to portray himself as a liberal reformer of the conservative country and is popular at home.

### 9. Pakistan to import polio markers from India



The Federal Cabinet of Pakistan has decided to import polio markers from India in a bid to reduce the price of medicines. The Federal Cabinet took the decision to give a one-time permission for import of polio markers from India as it would reduce prices of 89 medicines by at least 15%.

The prices of 89 medicines were decreased in line with the Pricing Policy of 2018 as prices of innovator drugs have to be reduced by 10% after three years of their launch in the market. After considering all the aspects we decided to decrease the prices by 15%.

Pakistan had suspended trade ties with India following New Delhi's decision to abrogate Article 370 on August 5, 2019 to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. The markers used to mark the fingers of children after administering them polio vaccine are approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

There are only two WHO prequalified manufacturers in the world, India and China, which manufacture non-toxic markers to prevent children from swallowing the ink. Though WHO procures markers for us and, in the past, it had purchased markers from China, there were issues with the quality of markers. We had lodged a complaint that the marks faded before the post-monitoring team's visit, Safdar added.

### 10. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait End Dispute Over Shared Oil Fields

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have ended a nearly five-year-long dispute over shared oil fields and have agreed to resume oil production from the divided Neutral Zone, but stressed this would not change their OPEC commitments to crude oil production cuts.

About 300,000 barrels per day were being pumped from the area before the dispute halted production in early 2015. The divided zone, located between the two neighboring countries' land borders, can produce up to half-a-million barrels per day.

### 11. Typhoon Phanfone kills at least 16 as it hits the Philippines on Christmas Day



Typhoon Phanfone, known locally as Typhoon Ursula, first made landfall on Eastern Samar province, bringing heavy rain and storm surges. It hit as the equivalent of a Category 1 hurricane, packing sustained wind speeds of 150 kilometers (93 miles) per hour, with gusts of 195 kilometers (121 miles) per hour.

Phanfone continued to sweep west across the islands of the Eastern Visayas region, southern Luzon and Western Visayas, toppling electricity pylons and trees, tearing off roofs, damaging homes and causing widespread travel disruption

over the busy Christmas period.

The region is majority Catholic and many people were preparing for family celebrations when the typhoon hit.

### 12. China, Russia and Iran to hold joint naval drills

China, Iran and Russia will hold joint naval drills in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman, amid heightened tension in the region between Iran and the United States.

The drill was a "normal military exchange" between the three armed forces and was in line with international law and practices.

The Gulf of Oman is a particularly sensitive waterway as it connects to the Strait of Hormuz - through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes - which in turn connects to the Gulf.

### 13. Israel: Netanyahu wins landslide in battle for Likud party leadership

Benjamin Netanyahu has won a landslide victory in a primary election for leadership of the ruling Likud party in Israel. Netanyahu captured 72% of the votes, compared with 28% for challenger Gideon Saar. Earlier, Netanyahu had declared a huge victory following an exit poll that put him on course for more than 70% of the vote.

The prime minister, head of Likud for the past 14 years, retained the famously loyal rightwing party's leadership in the internal ballot, despite battling three damning corruption indictments.



#### 14. Russia deploys Avangard hypersonic missile system

Russia's first regiment of Avangard hypersonic missiles has been put into service. It is a nuclear-capable missile and can travel more than 20 times the speed of sound and put Russia ahead of other nations. The system could penetrate current and future missile defence systems, adding:

In December 2018, the weapon hit a practice target 6,000km (3,700 miles) away in a test launch at Dombarovsky missile base in the southern Ural Mountains.

The New START accord, which expires in February 2021, is the last major nuclear arms control treaty between Russia and the US.

#### 15. China successfully launches its heaviest communications satellite on new powerful rocket



China launched its heaviest and most advanced communications satellite on the country's largest new carrier rocket Long March-5 that will lay the foundation for the development of highly sensitive space probes. Aboard the third Long March-5 rocket, Shijian-20, a new technology test and verification satellite, successfully entered its orbit Friday night, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Launched from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre in south China's Hainan Province, Shijian-20, weighing more than eight tonnes, is the country's heaviest and most advanced

communications satellite in geosynchronous orbit, according to its maker, the China Academy of Space Technology (CAST) under the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC).

The Long March-5, China's most powerful rocket and a critical ingredient in the nation's ambitious space programme, can carry a maximum payload of 25 tonnes into low Earth orbit and 14 tonnes into geosynchronous orbit. The successful launch is a major step forward for its planned mission to Mars in 2020. The satellite will carry out orbit experiments for a series of key technologies.

It will demonstrate in orbit its heat transfer technology based on cryogenic loop heat pipes, an efficient thermal control device for space applications, to lay the foundation for the development of highly sensitive space probes. The satellite will test the controllable deformation of shape memory polymers, a type of smart material that can switch between temporary shapes, to pave the way for the development of large variable space structures.

It will also carry out satellite-ground communication tests using Q/V bands, which lie between 33-75 GHz, within the extremely high frequency (EHF) area of the radio spectrum. These frequencies are used mainly for satellite communications.

#### 16. Tropical Cyclone Sarai barrelled off coast of Fiji

Tropical Cyclone Sarai barrelled off the coast of Fiji, forcing hundreds of residents to move to higher ground ahead of possible flooding.

The Category Two storm passed off the southwest of the main island of VitiLevu with forecast average winds of 95 kilometres per hour and gusts of 130 kph at the centre of the storm.

The Fiji Meteorological Service warned of damaging gale-force winds and heavy rain with coastal flooding expected in some areas as the cyclone intensified late today. The National Disaster Management Office said, around 360 people have taken shelter in 15 evacuation centres across the country as flash flood warnings were put in place.

Meanwhile, the plans of thousands of tourists who flock to the South Pacific island nation over the Christmas-New Year holiday period were upended as flights were cancelled or delayed.

Many day cruises around the islands have been called off while Fiji Airways has cancelled several inter-island flights, and flights to Australia and New Zealand.

Flights to the United States have been brought forward several hours to avoid the advancing cyclone. In February 2016, 44 people were killed when Cyclone Winston destroyed tens of thousands of homes and caused an estimated 1 billion US dollar in damage when it hit Fiji.

# Economy, Business and Defence News

## 1. First Tripartite Agreement on Fisheries and Aquaculture Development Fund

Shri Giriraj Singh, Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry dedicated fund created, namely the Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund, a total of Rs. 7522.48 crore to address the infrastructure requirement for the fisheries sector. The coastal states to pay attention to deep-sea fishing, post-harvesting, cage culture, and export promotion.



The cooperatives, individuals, and entrepreneurs for the development of identified fisheries infrastructure. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) scheduled banks are Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs) to provide concessional finance under the (FIDF).

Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying under the FIDF provides interest subvention up to 3% per annum for providing concessional finance by the NLEs at the interest rate not lower than 5% per annum. Government of Tamil Nadu signed the first Tripartite MoA for availing the initial concessional finance of Rs 420 crore from NABARD for development of three fishing harbors in the State namely, (i) Tharangampadi in Nagapattinam District, (ii) ThiruvottriyurKuppam in Thiruvallur District and (iii) Muthu Nagar in Cuddalore District. These will create safe landing and berthing facilities for a large number of fishing vessels plying in the area, augment fish production in the regions, facilitate hygienic post-harvest handling of fish, stimulate the growth of fisheries-related economic activities and employment opportunities.

NABARD, as one of the Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs), provides concessional finance for the development of fisheries infrastructure facilities through State Governments/State Entities under the FIDF after the execution of the Tripartite MoA. Proposals to the tune of Rs.1715.04 crore received from various State Governments, and other Eligible Entities (EEs) recommended as the date by the Central Approval and Monitoring Committee constituted in the Department for consideration under FIDF. The Government of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh for the development of fishing harbors in their respective States form a significant part of these recommended projects.

## 2. Sign boards in Chinese language have been set up at 5 ASI protected archaeological sites - Shri Prahlad Singh Patel

Union Minister of State for Culture and Tourism (IC) Shri Prahlad Singh Patel has said that sign boards in Chinese language have been put up at 5 ASI protected archaeological sites located in Uttar Pradesh. They include the archaeological site at Sarnath, the Buddhist relics at Chaukhandi Stupa, Kushinagar and the Mahaparinirvana Temple, Piprahwa and Shravasti .

Shri Patel said that keeping in mind the convenience of foreign travelers, Ministry had instructed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) that sign boards of foreign languages will be installed at all the iconic archaeological sites in India where more than 1 lakh tourists from a particular country visit those places every year. A total of 5 such foreigncountry

languages can be included in it. He told that in this series, the work of installing sign boards in Sinhala language has been completed in November 2019 in view of the large number of Sri Lankan tourists visiting Sanchi.

### 3. Isro's 2020 target: Sun mission, Gaganyaan test, 10 satellite launches

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will aim to touch new heights in 2020 as it is planning to launch around a dozen key satellite missions, high profile interplanetary mission Aditya (sun) and first unmanned test-flight of the Gaganyaan mission carrying a humanoid next year.

The Aditya L1 mission will be the country's first solar mission that will help scientists study the solar corona. A PSLV will be used to carry the spacecraft, work on which is going on. The 400kg class satellite, which will carry six scientific payloads, will be inserted into a halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1), which is 1.5 million km from the Earth, so that there is a major advantage of continuous viewing the Sun without any eclipse.

### 4. Cabinet approves Rs 3,941 crore for NPR, Rs 8,754 crore for Census 2021



The Union Cabinet approved the conduct of Census of India 2021 and updating of National Population Register (NPR). It is self-declaration, no document, no biometric is required for it.

The cabinet has approved the expenditure of Rs 8,754.23 crore for Census of India 2021 and Rs. 3,941.35 crore for NPR. Census is held every 10 years and NPR was started during the UPA government.

People will not be required to fill out forms and information will be gathered on a mobile app.

### 5. Indian Railways starts special see-through Vistadome train on Kalka-Shimla route

In a Christmas gift for its passengers, Indian Railways unveiled Him Darshan Express comprising all-new Vistadome coaches from Kalka railway station to Shimla. This special train will commute between Kalka and Shimla station for the next one year till December 24, 2020. Commuters travelling in Him Darshan Express will enjoy the beautiful scenic view of the Himalayas as the train will have swanky Vistadome AC coaches with glass roof. Modified in carriage and wagon depot at Kalka, this is a first-of-its-kind train on the Kalka-Shimla route. The train will have seven coaches including one



first-class sitting cum luggage room coach (FCZLR) and six first class AC Vistadome coaches. With the new modern design, the Vistadome coaches will feature top modified windows and air conditioning system, modern windows and LED bulbs. Along with the new window blinds, there will be cushioned wooden interiors for a comfortable journey.

## 6. Defence Ministry approves additional 1 lakh Senior Division NCC seats

Defence Ministry has approved an additional one lakh Senior Division NCC (National Cadet Corps) seats on a self-financing basis. Approximately 100 to 150 schools/colleges will benefit from the move.

## 7. World's longest mountain tunnel under Rohtang Pass named after AtalBihari Vajpayee



The government named the strategic tunnel under the Rohtang Pass in Himachal Pradesh after former prime minister AtalBihari Vajpayee in a tribute to him on his 95th birth anniversary.

The construction of the ₹4,000-crore tunnel will be completed by 2020. The historic decision to construct the strategic tunnel below the Rohtang Pass was taken in 2000 when Vajpayee was the prime minister. The 8.8-km-long tunnel will be the world's longest above an altitude of 3,000 metres and will reduce the distance between Manali and Leh by 46 kilometres.

Once thrown open, the tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to remote border areas of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh which otherwise remain cut off from the rest of the country for about six months during winters. The project is being implemented by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

## 8. RBI introduces new prepaid payment tool for transactions upto Rs 10,000 a month

The Reserve Bank has introduced a new type of prepaid payment instrument (PPI) which could be used only for purchase of goods and services up to a limit of Rs 10,000 per month.

PPIs are financial instruments that facilitate the purchase of goods and services against the value stored on such instruments.

As per the circular, such PPIs shall be issued by banks and non-bank 'PPI Issuers' after obtaining minimum details of the holder. The PPI issuers shall provide an option to close the instrument at "any time and also allow to transfer the funds 'back to source' at the time of closure".

## 9. 'Fund raising through initial public offering lowest since 2014; only 16 IPOs in 2019'

Reflecting the weakness in the broader market and weak investor sentiment in companies beyond the blue chip stocks, the Indian primary market witnessed lowest activity in the last five years. Fund raising through initial public offering (IPO) in 2019 stood at Rs 12,362 crore, lowest since 2014 when companies raised Rs 1,201 crore through IPOs.

According to data collated by Prime Database, while the amount raised through IPOs in 2019 was down 60 per cent from Rs 30,959 crore raised in 2018, it is significantly down from Rs 67,147 crore raised in 2017. The year saw only 16 initial public offerings (IPOs) as against 24 in 2018 and 36 in 2017.

What is more worrying is the fact that during 2019, 47 companies that looked to raise over Rs 51,000 crore allowed their Sebi approval to lapse, despite approvals being valid for a period of one year and after having incurred a lot of time and costs.

### 10. India set to cross 100-GW renewable energy capacity mark in 2020

India is set to cross the 100-Gw renewable energy capacity mark in 2020 and can make rapid strides towards the ambitious 175 Gw clean energy target by 2022 provided the government keeps a close eye on key issues and deals with those well in time. The government, however, needs to promote storage to ensure 24x7 clean energy supply as coal fired thermal power still remains the base load in the country.



Presently, the issues hampering growth of renewables in India are lack of interest of financial institution to fund renewable energy projects, safeguard duty on imported solar panels, ambiguity over goods and services tax (GST) on solar equipment and low investor sentiment due to delayed or non-payment by discoms to clean energy developers.

India's installed renewable energy generation capacity touched around 86 Gw by November-end. This includes solar, wind, small hydro, biomass, waste to energy and others.

Around 30 Gw renewable capacity, including 18 Gw solar and 10 Gw wind energy, is under implementation. Besides, around 40 Gw including 36 Gw solar and 3.4 Gw wind energy, is being tendered.

### 11. Amazon to open first farm collection centre in Pune

Amazon Retail India Pvt Ltd, the retail arm of e-commerce giant Amazon, will soon open its first farm collection center in Pune. Under its farm-to-fork initiative, Amazon will directly purchase vegetables from farmers, who would be paid within 24 hours. This is pursuant to Amazon's focus on using technology to enable farmers to directly offer the products to customers and unlock greater value.

A full-fledged operational launch of the center is expected soon, top sources said. Amazon's foray into fresh food retail business in India follows a \$500 million investment the company made into food and grocery segments after getting government approval in 2017.



The online marketplace's rival Flipkart has already signed up local farmers and strengthened its fresh food offerings with the help of Walmart's best-price wholesale stores.

### 12. AIIB announces \$210 million loan for irrigation & solar energy projects

The Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) announced a total loan of \$210 million for irrigation and solar energy projects in India.

The multilateral institution will lend \$145 million to improve irrigation services and strengthen flood risk management in West Bengal, while \$65 million has been earmarked for a 250-megawatt (MW) solar project in Rajasthan promoted by Hero Future Energies. India is the second-largest shareholder of the bank and the largest recipient of its loan and equity commitments. The total commitments to the country stand at \$3 billion, which is about a third of total of \$10 billion.

The irrigation project in West Bengal is co-financed by the World Bank and is expected to strengthen the management of the Damodar Valley Command Area irrigation scheme. The funds will also be used to modernise irrigation infrastructure at main, branch, distributary and minor canal levels and invest in structural measures to reduce flooding in the project area, it said.

The body has also approved a \$65-million 250-megawatt solar power project in Jodhpur promoted by independent power producer Hero, it said adding that there are plans to ramp up the capacity to 616 MW by 2022. The announcement comes a month after the bank had announced a \$575 million funding to strengthen suburban rail network Mumbai and also a renewable energy project promoted by Tata.

### 13. Allahabad Bank, IOB, UCO to get ₹8,655 crore for preferential allotment



The government has approved releasing ₹8,655 crore to three public sector lenders -- Allahabad Bank, Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) and UCO Bank -- for preferential allotment of shares. The Ministry of Finance has approved infusing fresh capital amounting to ₹2,153 crore in Allahabad Bank, ₹2,142 crore in UCO Bank and ₹4,630 crore in IOB via for preferential allotment of shares.

Fresh capital infusion by the government is a part of the announcement made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her maiden Budget on 5 July.

Sitharaman had first proposed a capital infusion ₹70,000 crore in public-sector banks in two phases. First, banks were to subscribe to bonds floated by the government and in the second phase, the government was to infuse the money into these banks.

As of 20 November, the government had infused ₹60,314 crore in public-sector banks of the total of ₹70,000 crore that was announced for these banks.

### 14. 1.25 billion residents of India now have Aadhaar card, says UIDAI

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) on Friday said that 125 crore residents of India now have Aadhaar. The achievement comes along with the rapidly increasing use of Aadhaar as the primary identity document by the Aadhaar holders. This is evident from the fact that Aadhaar-based authentication services have been used close to 37,000 crore times since inception. At present, the UIDAI receives about 3-4 lakh Aadhaar update requests daily, the release pointed out.

### 15. First Trial Run of Double Stack Train conducted on newly built Rewari-Madar section of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)

An inaugural Trial-Run of Indian Railways (IR) freight train on the newly built Rewari-Madar section of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC), covering a distance of about 306 kms (Total 663 track Km) was conducted. The

Rewari-Madar section is in Haryana State (for approximately 79 Km in Mahendragarh&Rewari districts) and Rajasthan State (for approximately 227 Km in Jaipur, Ajmer, Sikar, Nagaur&Alwar districts). This section contains 16 major bridges and viaduct (1 viaduct & 15 major bridges), 270 minor bridges, 4 Rail Fly Overs, 19 Road Over Bridges (11 completed and 8 under construction) & 178 Road Under Bridges eliminating 148 Level crossings. There are 9 newly built DFC stations in this section, six crossing stations (i.e. New Dabla, New Bhagega, New Sri Madhopur, New PacharMalikpur, New Sakun and New Kishangarh) and three junction stations (i.e. New Rewari, New Ateli and New Phulera).

DFCCIL will run freight trains at the maximum speed of 100 Kmph hour as against the current maximum speed of 75 kmph on Indian Railway tracks whereas the average speed of freight trains will also be increased from existing speed of 26 kmph on Indian Railways lines to 70 kmph on Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC).

# People in News

## 1. Cuba names Manuel Marrero Cruz prime minister. He's the first person to hold that position in 43 years

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel named Manuel Marrero Cruz as the country's prime minister, a nonexistent role within Cuban politics for more than four decades. Marrero served as Cuba's tourism minister for almost 16 years and was named prime minister for a five-year term.

He was a colonel in Cuba's armed forces before being tasked with heading the state tourism industry, which provided badly needed hard currency for the communist-run island.

Fidel Castro was the country's last prime minister. He held the post from 1959 to December 1976, when he took the title of president of the State Council, a title which replaced the posts of president and prime minister.

Diaz-Canel remains head of state and Raul Castro remains the first secretary of the Communist Party, where the real power lies.



The prime minister is expected to manage the day-to-day operations of the Cuban government but will still report to the president.

In February 2019, Cuban voters approved a new constitution to replace the 1976 Soviet-era charter enacted under Castro. It protects private property and foreign investment, and for the first time places two five-year terms on the office of the presidency.

Under the new constitution, the Communist Party is still the only political party allowed in Cuba, and it remains the guiding force for all government policy.

## 2. Sangita Reddy is FICCI President

Sangita Reddy, Joint Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Group, has taken over as the President of industry chamber FICCI for 2019-20. She succeeds Sandip Somany, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director, HSIL. The Walt Disney Company APAC President and Star & Disney India Chairman Uday Shankar has been elevated as Senior Vice-President of the chamber, and Sanjiv Mehta, Chairman and Managing Director, HUL, has taken charge as Vice-President, the chamber said in a statement.

### 3. DrMonisha Ghosh Is First Woman CTO At US Federal Communications Commission



Indian-American DrMonisha Ghosh has been appointed as the first woman Chief Technology Officer at the US government's powerful Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

She will advise Indian-American Chairman of the FCC AjitPai and the agency on technology and engineering issues, and work closely with the Office of Engineering and Technology. Ghosh will take charge on January 13 next year and replaces Dr Eric Burger, according to a PTI report.

The FCC regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and US territories.

An independent US government agency overseen by Congress, the FCC is the federal agency responsible for implementing and enforcing America's communications law and regulations.

### 4. Hemant Soren sworn in as 11th Jharkhand CM amid Opposition show of strength

Hemant Soren, working president of Jharkhand MuktiMorcha (JMM), took oath as the 11th chief minister of the in a swearing-in ceremony in Ranchi that was a show of strength by Opposition parties. This is the second time that Soren, 44, has taken oath as the chief minister of the state. The JMM-Congress-RashtriyaJanata Dal (RJD) alliance won 47 of the 81 seats in the assembly elections, with the JMM winning 30. The coalition government also has the support of other parties in the assembly, including the Jharkhand VikasMorcha (Prajatantrik), which won three seats.

### 5. Senior diplomat Harsh VardhanShringla appointed new foreign secretary

The government approved the appointment of Indian ambassador to the United States Harsh VardhanShringla as the next foreign secretary. He has replaced Vijay Gokhale.

An order issued by the government on Monday said that Harsh VardhanShringla will take over next month after the completion of Vijay Gokhale's two-year term on January 28, 2020.

A 1984-batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer and a fluent French speaker, Harsh VardhanShringla served as an ambassador to Bangkok from 2014 to 2016 and later as a High Commissioner to Dhaka for two years.



Harsh VardhanShringla has also served at UNESCO in France, UN in New York besides Vietnam, Israel and South Africa.

He served in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) as Joint Secretary for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Maldives and therefore understands the neighbourhood well.

## 6. Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg to step down immediately

Boeing's CEO is resigning amid ongoing problems at the company over the troubled Max 737 aircraft. The board of directors said that Dennis Muilenburg is stepping down immediately. The plane was involved with two deadly crashes.

## 7. MalalaYousafzai's most famous teenager of the decade: UN

Nobel laureate MalalaYousafzai was declared as the 'most famous teenager in the world' by the United Nations in its 'decade in review' report released on December 23, 2019.



The UN review stated that from a young age, Yousafzai was known for speaking out in favour of education for girls. She has also been extremely vocal about the atrocities committed by the Taliban on common people.

MalalaYousafzai gained the world's attention when she got featured in a documentary by a prominent international media house. The documentary traced her life in the volatile Swat Valley, which lies in the

northwest of Pakistan. The valley has been a victim of violent clashes between the Pakistani military and Taliban fighters.

The young activist was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman while taking a bus from school in October 2012. Though she was hit in the head, Yousafzai survived and recovered. The attack was widely condemned and a special tribute was paid to Malala at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on Human Rights Day in the same year.

The special tribute urged more action towards advancing girl's education as an urgent priority, to ensure every girl can exercise her right to go to school. The assassination attempt only helped grow Malala's activism. She was honoured with several awards to recognize her outstanding work.

MalalaYousafzai was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 2014 along with Indian social reformer KailashSatyarthi, becoming the youngest recipient of the coveted award. She was also appointed as the UN Messenger of Peace in 2017 with a special focus on girls' education.

The UN report retraced some of the biggest stories that unfolded in this decade, between 2010 and 2019, in a three-part decade in review.

Part one of the review focuses on events that took place between 2010 and 2013, which includes the devastating Haiti earthquake, the beginning of the ongoing Syrian conflict, the rise of MalalaYousafzai as an advocate of girl's education and the world's most dangerous UN mission in Mali.

# Awards

## 1. 66th National film awards 2019 announced

The 66th national film awards were announced on August 9, 2019 after a delay of 3 months. Uri Director Aditya Dhar won the national film award for Best Director and AyushmannKhurrana and Vicky Kaushal shared the Best Actor award for their performances in Andhadhun and Uri respectively. Andhadhun won the national film award for Best Hindi Film, Padman won the Best Film on Social Issues award and Badhaai Ho won the Best Popular Film award.

The announcement of the 66th national film awards was held at ShastriBhawan in New Delhi. The delay in the announcement of the national awards 2019 was due to the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections. The national awards were announced after the jury members submitted their report to I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar with their final recommendations in various categories.



The national film awards are announced every year in April and the awards conferral ceremony is generally held in May but it was delayed this year due to the elections. In 2018, Bollywood veterans Sridevi and Vinod Khanna were conferred the national film award posthumously.

66th National film awards 2019 Winners

Best Film: Hellaro

Best Hindi Film: Andhadhun

Best Direction: Aditya Dhar (Uri)

Best Actor: AyushmannKhurrana, Vicky Kaushal

Best Actress: Keerthy Suresh

## 2. Kamareddy wins Unicef-2019 Award for Swachh Bharat implementation

Kamareddy district of Telangana has secured the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (Unicef)-2019 Award. The district has won the award for effective implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission in water sanitation and hygiene sectors.

Kamareddy district was on top in the country among other districts in construction of individual sanitary lavatories, swachhdarpan wall paintings, swachhsurvekshan, swachhsundarshauchalay and many other activities.

# Days and Events

## 1. 'Chilai-Kalan' begins in Jammu & Kashmir

In Jammu & Kashmir, the 40-day period of extreme cold, known as 'Chilai-Kalan', began whileas the region is continuously reeling under intense cold wave and chill for the past over ten days now.

The night temperature across Kashmir Valley improved by several degrees last night due to the cloudy sky.

Srinagar recorded minimum temperature at 1.2 degree Celsius with day temperature settling at 9.6 degrees Celsius.

## 2. 11th National Street Food Festival 25th to 29th December 2019

Street vendors constitute an important segment of Indian cities as they provide goods and services at better costs and convenient places. Street vendors put in hard work to take care of their families. It is a good occupation for poor to learn entrepreneurship and move away from poverty.

National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) is a network and advocacy platform of 636 street vendor organizations representing 8,67,426 vendors across 26 states of India. In its advocacy efforts, NASVI adopted a new strategy by organizing National Street Food Festival in Delhi bringing the food vendors from different parts of the country at one platform.



In its 9th edition now National Street Food Festival is being presented this year by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) in association with NASVI from 25th to 29th December 2019 from 12:00 Noon to 10:00 Night at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi.

The purpose of the festival is to bring street food vendors in the mainstream food scene so that they get their deserved space in the cities and respect by people.

## 3. Ladakhi New Year celebrated with traditional fervour and enthusiasm

People in Ladakh region are celebrating Ladakhi New Year, Losar with festive fervor. Ladakh Lieutenant Governor RK Mathur participated in the celebrations, organized by the Ladakh Buddhist Association and Leh Hill Council, in Leh.

This is first Losar Ladakh Region celebrating as Union Territory. People gathered at ChokangVihara for Losar celebrations in traditional attire. Celebrations began with a puja for world peace and brotherhood. LG RK Mathur paid homage to Buddha Dharma. He also hoisted the Traditional Flag, Tarchen to mark the beginning of new year. Artists from various parts of Ladakh region performed Cultural programmes and traditional events relating to Losar.

As Union Territory, this year Losar is special even after realising the dream of 70 years and several sacrifices. People and administration took pledge for the over all development of Ladakh region on Losar.

#### 4. National Tribal Dance Festival begins in Raipur



National Tribal Dance Festival begun in Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh, The inaugural function presided over by Chief Minister BhupeshBaghel.

The National Tribal Dance Festival organized in Chhattisgarh for the first time. Around 1300 participants from 25 states & UTs of the country and six countries participating in this three-day dance fest. These folk dance teams will present their respective folk art cultures. The three days, 29 tribal troupes present more than 43 styles of four different dance forms.

The National Tribal Dance Festival is an annual festival celebrated by the aborigines and tribal of India in the National Capital Region of India i.e. New Delhi. This Tribal Dance Festival annually during the month of December. It is organized by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India in collaboration with IGRMS, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

#### 5. Mandu Festival begins at Mandu Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh, the 5-day Mandu festival, started in Mandu, a world-famous picturesque tourist destination located in Dhar district of the state. The Mandu festival will redefine the essence of the city & bring about the joy of establishing a new tourism hub in the state.

The Mandu festival celebrated till January 1. The rich classical and traditional folk arts of dance, singing, and playing once again come alive through the Mandu festival. The idea of Khojne Me Kho Jao, the Mandu festival, is offering an eclectic mix of performing arts, workshops, nature trails, food, architecture, and music to the visitors. The trail on cycling tours, walking tours, or jump onto the Hop-In-Hop-Out buses to dive deep into the rich history of the city.

# Sports News

## 1. MS Dhoni named captain of Cricket Australia ODI team of the decade, ViratKohli Test skipper



World Cup-winning India superstar MS Dhoni has been named the captain of the ODI Team of the Decade compiled by Cricket Australia. 3 Indians are part of the 11-man team, which includes some of the best one-day players of the 2010s.

MS Dhoni, who led India to World Cup glory in 2011, also handles the wicketkeeping duties in CA's ODI team.

Apart from MS Dhoni, India captain ViratKohli and opener Rohit Sharma also find a place in the team of the decade. Rohit

opens along with HashimAmla in CA's team and Kohli, as usual, comes at No. 3.

Meanwhile, ViratKohli is the only Indian cricketer to have found a spot in Cricket Australia's Test team of the decade.

## 2. Mary Kom Beats NikhatZareen in 51kg Trials to Represent India in Olympic Qualifiers

MC Mary Kom defeated NikhatZareen in the summit clash of the 51 kg category at the ongoing women's boxing trials for the Olympic qualifiers in New Delhi. The six-time world champion and Olympic bronze medallist got the better of her 'challenger' with a 9-1 split decision victory.

With the win, Mary Kom will now represent India at the Olympic qualifiers, which are scheduled to be held in China in February next year.

## 3. Pakistan wins first Test at home in 10 years with victory over Sri Lanka

Pakistan celebrated the return of Test cricket for the first time in over 10 years with a convincing 263-run win over Sri Lanka in the second Test in Karachi, taking the series 1-0.

The first Test of the series in Rawalpindi marked the return of Test cricket in Pakistan, but it ended in a draw after being spoiled by bad weather.

# Books and Authors

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## 1. S Gurumurthy releases book titled Politics of Opportunism



Political Analyst S Gurumurthy released a book titled Politics of Opportunism at a function in New Delhi. The book written by R P N Singh throws light on the subject related to the rise of regional parties and Centre -States relation. The Citizenship Amendment Act grants citizenship to the minority communities faced religious persecution in three neighbouring countries. The granting citizenship to such minority communities stands of Mahatma Gandhi and former Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.

## 2. Book to chronicle India's Olympic journey

"Dreams of a Billion: India and the Olympic Games" written by BoriaMajumdar with Nalin Mehta will be brought out by HarperCollins India in January 2020.

The book provides an inside view of what goes on backstage in the Indian Olympics world alongside a quick history of how India has fared at the Olympics over the past century and a look at how the Indian Olympics world has changed in the last decade.