Tamil Nadu Government – to develop Thuthukkudi (Tuticorin) Airport as the fifth international airport in the state within a period of 4 years

- As the first step, night landing facilities will commence from Thuthukudi by May 2018
- International flights are already being operated from 4 airports of the state including Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai and Trichy

Tamil Nadu – ranked 2nd in the areas of Health and well-being – as per the sustainable development goals report released by NITI Aayog in December 2018

- While Kerala topped the charts with 92 points, Tamil Nadu had 77 points compared to the national average of 52
- Telangana stood third with 73 points followed by Punjab with 71 points
- The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of the state was 66 per 1 lakh births compared to the national average of 130.
- Kerala has a maternal mortality ratio of 46 and Maharashtra has 61
- The three states have achieved the country’s target of reducing the ratio to 70 by 2030
Consumers Association of India (CAI) - has launched a new helpline number 044-24493443 - available between 10 am and 5.30 pm on weekdays
✓ It will provide free information and independent advice to all consumers on how to handle problems arising in their day to day dealings with traders, manufacturers, banks and other service providers
✓ Enquiries and complaints can also be sent through the email legal@caiindia.org

STATES

Uttar Pradesh government – to levy a new ‘gau kalyan’ or cow welfare cess, a 0.5% additional levy on excise items
✓ It will be imposed on items such as alcohol apart from toll tax, buildings and bridges
✓ It will be used to fund construction and maintenance of cow shelters across the state

Uttar Pradesh – to levy Spot fines for Open defecation in Kanpur
✓ Kanpur municipal corporation (KMC) has fixed spot fines for two types of ‘offences’ -
  ✓ a fine of Rs 200 if a person is caught urinating in public
  ✓ a fine of Rs 500 for defecating in the open
✓ The district was declared open defecation free by President Ram Nath Kovind on October 1, 2017

NATIONAL

Union Government - approved the proposal to rename ‘Allahabad’ as ‘Prayagraj’ by the Uttar Pradesh Government
✓ The name of Allahabad traces its origin to ‘Illahabad’ (Abode of God), as named by the 16th century Mughal Emperor, Akbar
✓ His grandson Shah Jahan renamed the entire city as ‘Allahabad’
✓ Before the renaming, the city was known as ‘Prayag’
✓ Abul Fazl, the Court historian of Akbar called the city as ‘Piyag’ in his literary texts
✓ The UP government had earlier changed the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj by its order dated October 18, 2018
✓ It had also renamed Mughalsarai railway station as ‘Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay’ Junction recently
- **Vanitha Mathil, a Women’s wall –** was formed in Kerala by around 35 lakh women standing shoulder to shoulder across the length of the state.

- The wall stretched from Kasaragod in the north to Thiruvananthapuram in the south for about 620 Kms.
- Kerala Health Minister, KK Shailaja became the first block of the chain in Kasaragod while CPI(M) Politburo member, Brinda Karat formed the final block in Thiruvananthapuram.
- With close to 35 lakh women attending the event, it is believed to be the largest women's gathering in the world.
- The event was organised by the Government of Kerala with the support of several other groups.
- During the event, participants took a pledge to protect the values of Kerala’s renaissance and uphold gender equality.
- A parallel ‘Solidarity Wall’ was formed by men in Kozhikode.

- **ISRO – has launched an outreach programme called ‘Samvad with Students’**

- As part of the programme, ISRO’s chairman, K Sivan interacted with 40 students and 10 teachers from select schools on January 1, 2019 – discussing about wide range of topics like rockets, satellites, Chandrayaan and Gaganyaan.
- The outreach programme was aimed at motivating young India to tap their scientific potential.
- Other ISRO efforts for Students:
  - Isro will organise guided tours thrice in a year, especially during summer and Christmas holidays for students of class 11 and class 12.
  - It plans to take the students to its facilities in Thiruvananthapuram and Bengaluru and the launch centre at Sriharikota.
  - Students would also be taken to space laboratories and allowed to make small satellites there.
Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to have separate High Courts from January 1, 2019

- Andhra Pradesh and Telangana - had a common high court at Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana, since the bifurcation of the state on June 2, 2014
- 16 judges have been allocated to Andhra Pradesh High Court and 10 to Telangana High Court

- Justice T B N Radhakrishnan was sworn in as the first Chief Justice of the Telangana High Court at Hyderabad
- Earlier, he was appointed as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Judicature at Hyderabad for both the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in July 2018
- A new High Court of Andhra Pradesh has been created from January 1 to function at Amaravati, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh
- With the creation of this new high court, the country now has 25 high courts
- Justice Ramesh Ranganathan, who is at present the Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court, will head the new Andhra Pradesh high court

100 days of Ayushman Bharat

- Union Government – announced that 6.85 lakh patients have been provided hospital treatment and an average 5,000 claims are being settled every day – as the launch of Ayushman Bharat crosses 100 days

- The scheme was rolled out on September 23, 2018 in Ranchi, Jharkhand
- It aims to provide an annual health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family to around 50 crore beneficiaries from nearly 10.74 crore deprived families
- Currently, over 16,000 public and private hospitals are empanelled under the scheme
Babies born on New Year’s Day, January 1, 2019

- According to UNICEF, an estimated 3,95,072 babies were born around the world on New Year's Day
- Of those, 25% were born in South Asia alone with India topping with 69,944 babies accounting for 17.7% of the total newborns

Country-wise breakup of Babies

- **India** - 69,944
- **China** - 44,940
- **Nigeria** - 25,685
- **Pakistan** - 15,112
- **Indonesia** - 13,256
- **The United States of America** - 11,086
- **The Democratic Republic of Congo** - 10,053
- **Bangladesh** - 8,428

- UNICEF will celebrate the year 2019 as the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF

- **UNICEF** - The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
- **Created** - by the United Nations General Assembly on 11 December 1946
- **Headquarters** – New York, United States
- **Objective** - to provide emergency food and healthcare to children in World War II ravaged countries

INTERNATIONAL

- **Pakistan** - has decided to launch ‘Panda Bonds’ in Chinese Yuan currency - to raise loans from Chinese capital markets

Thus, the country intends to give the Chinese currency a status ‘at par with’ that of the US dollar
- The strategy is mainly to bridge the foreign financing needs and build foreign exchange reserves in the country
From these bonds, it expects to raise $500 million to $1 billion in different tranches.

The size, tenure and pricing would be determined on the basis of market response at the time of issuance.

In recent years, China has become Pakistan’s largest trading partner and also the country with which it has the highest trade deficit.

The first two Panda bonds were issued in October 2005 - by the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank.

Philippines issued its inaugural Panda bonds in 2018, thereby becoming the first ASEAN member to do so.

COMMITTES

B V R Mohan Reddy Committee Recommendations to All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)

To stop setting up new colleges from 2020 and review the new capacity every year.

No additional seats should be approved in traditional engineering areas such as mechanical, electrical, civil and electronics.

To encourage institutes to convert current capacity in traditional disciplines to emerging new technologies.

To introduce undergraduate engineering programs exclusively for artificial intelligence, the block chain, robotics, quantum computing, data sciences etc.

Regarding additional seats in existing institutions, the approvals should be based on the capacity utilization of concerned institute.

Background

As per an earlier survey, 51% of the seats were falling vacant every year - out of the 15.5 lakh B.E/B.Tech seats in 3,291 engineering colleges across the country.

The investigation found that these vacant seats were due to the college’s poor infrastructure, labs, faculty along with poor linkages with the industry and the absence of a technological ecosystem.

For improving the situation, a committee was constituted to come up with solutions to expand the engineering education under B V R Mohan Reddy.

B V R Mohan Reddy, former NASSCOM chairperson and industrialist, is the current Chairman of IIT Hyderabad.
PERSONALITIES

- Bindu, 44, from Perinthalmanna and Kanaka Durga, 42, from Kannur – became the first Woman devotees between the age group of 10-50 – to enter the Sabarimala temple at 3.45 am on January 2, 2019

- The two women were accompanied by a group of policemen in civil uniform
- Bindu and Kanakadurga had tried visiting the temple late last month too, but failed amidst massive protests
- The Supreme Court had earlier thrown open the temple for all the woman devotees on September 28, 2018 which was implemented by the temple on October 17, 2018

- Arav Ajaykumar, an eight year old Indian-origin boy - got a gold award and the top marks in his school - for the ‘Primary Mathematics Challenge’ a logical reasoning test organized by the Mathematical Association

- Arav, a Class IV student, is from Leicester, UK, where his parents moved in 2009 from Mumbai
- His mother Varsha Ajaykumar, was raised in Bandra and used to work as a radiologist at the Advanced Radiology Centre in Andheri
- The Primary Maths Challenge is aimed at older kids in Class 5 and 6
- Arav was born in the UK and at the age of two could count to 1,000
- Arav had already entered Mensa with an IQ of 152 at the age of four
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- ISRO – to launch 32 missions in the year 2019 (14 rockets or launch vehicles, 17 satellites and one tech demo mission)
  - These rockets will include GSLV Mk III for Chandrayaan-2, which will be the 25th mission from the second launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota
  - ISRO also plans to celebrate the centenary birth anniversary of Vikram A Sarabhai, the founding father of Indian Space Programme from August 12, 2019

- NASA’s New Horizons spacecraft – completes a historic flyby of Ultima Thule, the most distant object ever visited by a spacecraft – on January 1, 2019

- Ultima Thule (officially designated 2014 MU69) lies at a distance of 4 billion miles (6 billion kilometers) from Earth in the Kuiper belt of our solar system, beyond the part inhabited by planets
- The spacecraft zoomed within a mere 2,200 miles (3,500 km) of Ultima — more than three times closer than New Horizons got to Pluto, which also lies in the Kuiper belt in July 2015
- The approximate size of MU69 is about 35 x 15 kilometres
- Kuiper belt is a band of dwarf planets, space rocks and icy debris left over from the formation of the solar system 4.6 billion years ago.
- The Spacecraft New Horizons was launched from Earth in 2006
- An Indian scientist, Shyam Bhaskaran of Nasa’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory is playing a key role in navigating the spacecraft
- On December 31, NASA’s OSIRIS-REx spacecraft successfully moved into orbit around the smallest space body yet, a near-Earth asteroid called Bennu
ECONOMY

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) - has launched ‘Survey on Retail Payment Habits of Individuals’ (SRPHi) – to capture the retail payment habits of people in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Guwahati
  - It has engaged Sigma Research & Consulting Pvt Ltd – to conduct the field work for the survey
  - The survey will cover a sample of 6,000 individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds

APPOINTMENTS

- Justice AK Sikri – appointed as Executive Chairman of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)
  - He replaces Justice Madan B Lokur, who retired recently on December 14, 2018
  - NALSA
  - It was constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987
  - It provides free legal services to the weaker sections of the society
  - It also organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes
  - The Chief Justice of India is its Patron-in-Chief
  - The senior-most judge in the SC traditionally takes over as the Executive Chairman of the Authority
  - Justice Arjan Kumar Sikri
  - He became the judge of Supreme Court in April 2013
  - Earlier, he had served as the Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court
  - Initially, he was appointed as Judge of the High Court of Delhi in July, 1999
  - Sikri was chosen as one of the 50 most influential persons in Intellectual Property in the world - in a survey conducted by Managing Intellectual Property Association (MIPA) for 2007
  - He was also a part-time lecturer in Campus Law Centre, Delhi University during 1984-89
- Pramod Kumar Singh - appointed as secretary of the Competition Commission of India (CCI)
  - Prior to this, he was the Adviser (law) in the CCI
  - The secretary would act as the Nodal officer for making or receiving all statutory information apart from signing of MoU’s with other agencies
  - The Commission was established in 2003 to replace the erstwhile Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission
  - It draws its power from the Competition Act, 2002
  - It has been empowered to check anti-competitive behaviour and regulate mergers and acquisitions