Tamil Nadu government - to extend the free laptop scheme - to Class IX and X students of government and government-aided schools across the state

- A proposal in this regard is being prepared and will be soon forwarded to the Centre for financial approval
- The scheme is currently meant for higher secondary and college students
- Around 9.6 lakh students studying in Class IX and X will be benefited by the proposed scheme
- The scheme was first introduced in 2011-12 for Class XII students by the late chief minister, J Jayalalithaa
- In the current academic year, the government had allotted Rs 758 crore for the scheme to distribute 5.3 lakh laptops to the students
- In December 2018, Lenovo, a computer manufacturing company, won the tender to distribute 15.66 lakh laptops each at the cost of Rs 10,000 plus tax

A one-man committee under MA Siddique IAS—submitted his recommendations to the government on January 5 – regarding the rectification of the pay anomalies in implementing 7th pay commission recommendations

- M.A. Siddique is the Secretary to Government (Expenditure) in Finance Department
Andhra Pradesh – bags the Central Board of Irrigation and Power (CBIP) award - for speedy execution of Polavaram Multipurpose Irrigation project on the Godavari river

The award was given to the state in the category of "Best Implementation of Water Resources Project" for better planning, implementation and monitoring of the project

Polavaram Project - Factfile

The Polavaram project, considered as the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh, is expected to be completed by June 2019

As per the project, a dam is constructed across the Godavari River in West Godavari District and East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh

Designed to withstand massive floods, the Polavaram spillway is expected to have one of the highest discharge capacities in the world at 50 lakh cusecs

The total storage capacity of the water reservoir is 120,000 million cubic feet (TMC)

The project is expected to generate 960 MW of power by end of 2020

The project had entered the Guinness Book of World Records by pouring 32,000 cubic metres of concrete in 24 hours during the work of dam construction between January 6 and 7, 2019

The record was previously held by Abdul Wahed Bin Shabib, RALS Contracting LLC and Alfa Eng. Consultant in Dubai, where they had poured 21,580 cubic meters of concrete in a span of two days

The project was taken over by Navayuga Engineering Co Ltd

So far, a budget of around Rs 15,380.97 crore has been spent on the project
Maharashtra – has launched the Atal Solar Krishi Pump Yojana (ASKP) for farmers - with a subsidy of up to 95% on solar pumpsets

Moreover, to encourage farmers to use solar pumps, the Government has decided to give two LED bulbs, a DC fan and a mobile charging socket as freebies

The State plans to install one lakh solar pumps

The Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Co Ltd is the implementing agency of the scheme

Rail Kumbh Seva Mobile App – was launched by North Central Railway - to provide information to the devotees arriving for the Kumbh Mela in Prayag Raj (Allahabad)

The new app is designed to help the tourists getting information regarding the special trains, city navigation and passenger amenities
Kumbh Mela – Factfile (January 15 to March 4, 2019)

✓ Ardh (Half) Kumbh Mela - held every 6 years - at Haridwar and Allahabad (Prayag)
✓ Purna (Complete) Kumbh mela – held every 12 years – at Prayag (Allahabad), Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik
✓ Maha Kumbh Mela – held in Prayag after 144 years (i.e. after 12 ‘Purna Kumbh Melas’)
✓ Currently, 2019 marks the celebration of ‘Ardh’ Kumbh, which is halfway point between the two Kumbh Melas
✓ The city of Haridwar is located in the state of Uttarakhand, Nashik in Maharashtra, Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh and Prayag in Uttar Pradesh

Vijay Mallya – becomes the 1st person to be officially declared as India’s ‘Fugitive Economic Offender’ - by a special judge MS Azmi of ‘Special Prevention of Money Laundering’ (SPML) court in Mumbai

The declaration, under Section 12 of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, is based on the request by Enforcement Directorate in July 2018
✓ This means now the government can confiscate his assets of over Rs. 12,500 crore
✓ Under the new law, a fugitive economic offender is any individual against whom an arrest warrant is issued for involvement in economic offences involving amounts of Rs 100 crore or more and has left India to avoid criminal prosecution
✓ Mallya, accused of loan repayment defaults and money laundering, had left India in March 2016
✓ The embattled liquor baron owes around Rs 9,000 crore to a consortium of 13 banks
✓ In December, the Westminster Magistrates’ Court in London had ordered the extradition of Mallya to India
✓ The Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 was passed by both the houses of Parliament in July 2018 and came into force in August

➢ **Ministry of Human Resource Development - has introduced a 70-point grading index to assess the quality of school education offered by states**
✓ As per the new index, a state performance grading will be done wherein the states will be marked out of 1,000 scores on 70 parameters
✓ The move will give the correct picture of where every state stands so as to improve their performance accordingly

➢ **Prime Minister, Narendra Modi – lays foundation stone for Mandal Dam Project on the North Koel River (Jharkhand) on January 5**
✓ The dam will improve irrigation facilities of Palamu and Garhwa districts in Jharkhand

✓ Overall, it is expected to irrigate 1.11 lakh hectares of land, with around 91,000 hectares of land in Bihar and 20,000 hectares of land in Jharkhand
✓ It was started in 1972 but stopped mid-way in 1993 due to the concerns of the State’s Forest department regarding Palamau Tiger Reserve and Betla National Park
✓ The Rs 2,391 crore project was again approved for completion in August 2017 by the Union Cabinet
✓ The Prime Minister would also lay foundation of another project - Sujalam Sufalam - for rejuvenation of 5,000 ponds across the state
Cyclone Pabuk – crosses Andaman Islands and weakens as a deep depression on January 6

- It had originated over the Gulf of Thailand and travelled across many countries such as Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma and now India
- Earlier this same system was named ‘Usman’ when it majorly affected the Philippines region

Indian Railways – replaces ‘conventional’ ICF-designed coaches in all its long distance trains with modern ‘Linke Hofmann Busch’ (LHB) design coaches
- Presently, 18 pairs of trains, owned by the Northeast Frontier Railway, are being operated with modern LHB coaches

- LHB coaches have higher carrying capacity, speed, light weight, improved safety features and increased codal life
- They are being manufactured by the Indian Railways from the year 2018-19 onwards
- Till all long-distance trains get the new LHB coaches, Indian Railways is carrying out Project Utkrisht, under which ICF-design coaches are being upgraded
- As a main feature, the Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches are equipped with modern technology to prevent capsizing of coaches during derailments
Union Government – restructures ‘National Health Agency’ as ‘National Health Authority’ – for the effective implementation of Pradhan Mantri – Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)

- The new authority will speed up the decision making process and make it simple and efficient
- The Authority would be chaired by Union Health Minister and have representation from the Government and domain experts
- Pradhan Mantri – Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) is a scheme of the government under the flagship scheme ‘Ayushman Bharat’

Lok Sabha - passes the ‘New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill 2018’ on January 4, 2019

- It replaces the International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution, created in 1995 under the Societies Registration Act
- The proposed centre will be a statutory body, consisting of a Chairperson, two eminent persons having substantial knowledge in international and domestic arbitration, one representative of a recognized body of commerce, Secretary to the Ministry of Law & Justice, Finance Advisor and a Chief Executive Officer
- The Chairperson should have been a judge of the Supreme Court or High Court - appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India.
- It is being set up as per the recommendation of the Justice B N Srikrishna committee formed to explore the ways for the development of institutional arbitration in India

Lok Sabha - passes the Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2018 on January 4, 2019

- It seeks to amend the Companies Act, 2013 and replaces the ordinance promulgated on November 2, 2018
- The new bill seeks to improve ease of doing business, declog the Special Courts and National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and prescribe strong action against non-compliant companies.
- The bill was passed with amendments moved by the Minister of State for Corporate Affairs, P P Chaudhary
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs is implementing the Act
- Highlights of the Bill
  - About 16 types of corporate offences have been shifted from special courts to in-house adjudication, increasing the scope of in-house assessment from 18 to 34 Sections of the Act
  - It seeks to institute a transparent and technology-driven in-house ‘online’ adjudication mechanism along with the publication of the orders on the website
  - It removes the clause of imprisonment for officers for defaulting the rule, which prohibits issuing shares at a discount, and imposes a penalty instead
Lok Sabha - passes the Personal Laws (Amendment Bill), 2018 - that seeks to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce on January 7, 2019

The Bill seeks to amend five personal laws to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce namely -- Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939, Divorce Act (for Christians) 1869, Special Marriage Act 1954 and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956

Leprosy is being removed as a ground for divorce as it is now a curable disease

The Bill was introduced earlier in Lok sabha in August 2018 and will now be tabled in Rajya Sabha

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic, progressive infection caused by the bacterium, Mycobacterium leprae

National Green Tribunal (NGT) – had imposed a fine of Rs 100 crore on the Meghalaya government - for its failure to curb illegal coal mining in the state

The NGT had constituted the committee headed by retired Justice B P Kakoti of Gauhati High Court in August 2018

Allahabad railway station in Uttar Pradesh and Hubli in Karnataka – becomes the first 2 railway stations in the country to have airport-like security measures to monitor entry and exit of the passengers

The new Integrated security system (ISS), which includes installation of CCTV cameras, access control, personal and baggage screening system – will soon be implemented in 202 more railway stations
SUPREME COURT VERDICT

- Union Government - has set up a 9-member committee headed by M.P. Bezbaruah, former Union tourism secretary – to review the implementation of clause 6 of the Assam Accord

- The setting up of the committee was earlier approved by the Union Cabinet on January 2, 2019
- The Committee has been asked to submit its report within six months
- The Assam Accord was signed on August, 15, 1985
- The clause 6 of the Assam Accord seeks to protect, preserve and promote the heritage of Assam’s indigenous communities
- Bezbaruah was a member of the North Eastern Council
- He served as the Union Tourism Secretary under former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee
- He is also the permanent honorary representative of UN World Tourism Organisation.

INTERNATIONAL

- China – passes a new law to make ‘Islam’ compatible with ‘Socialism’ within the next 5 years
  - The new law aims to ‘sinicise’ Islam
  - China has around 20 million Muslims in the country
  - Islam is one of the five officially recognised religions in atheist China apart from Taoism, Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism
A ministerial group headed by Minister of State for finance, Shiv Pratap Shukla – submits its recommendations to ease GST burdens on MSME’s

- The other GoM, headed by Bihar’s Sushil Modi, sorted out the issue of allowing states such as Kerala to levy additional tax to meet expenditure related to natural calamities
- The GoM has recommended to the GST Council that Kerala be allowed to levy 1% cess for two years
- It also suggested that a cess can be levied by the state concerned but will need specific clearance from the GST Council

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- A new android app, titled ‘Forest Tree Diseases’- was released at the Silviculture conference held in Bangalore in December 2018
- It focused mainly on 16 major nursery and plantation diseases affecting forest trees
- The app also allows people to upload a picture of the diseased portion of the tree for more information on how to treat it
- The app was developed by the scientists from Chennai-based Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding
- Forest tree diseases are usually caused by fungi, bacteria and viruses
Delhi’s Anahat Singh (10 years old) - won the British Junior Open Squash title in the U-11 girls’ category in Birmingham.

- She defeated Malaysia’s top seed, Whitney Wilson in the final.
- With the win, she becomes the youngest and sixth Indian to win the tournament after Saurav Ghosal (boys U-19 in 2004), Mahesh Mangaonkar (boys U-15 in 2009), Velavan Senthilkumar (boys U-19 in 2017), Joshana Chinappa (girls U-17 in 2003 & U-19 in 2005) and Dipika Pallikal (girls U-17 in 2008).

Tamil Nadu's Kalaivani – won Silver medal in the 48 kg class final in women's National Boxing Championships at Vijayanagara.

- In the final, she lost to Manju Rani of Punjab with a 4-1 split verdict.
Ease of Doing Business Rankings 2018 for Indian states – released by Asia competitiveness institute (ACI) of University of Singapore

- 1st place – Andhra Pradesh
- 2nd place – Maharashtra
- 3rd place - Delhi
- Andhra Pradesh was ranked at 5th place in 2016

International Day

- United Nations - observed the first official ‘World Braille Day’ on 4th January, 2019
  - The observance of the day intends to create awareness about the importance of Braille for approximately 1.3 billion visually-impaired people
  - The day celebrates the birth anniversary of Louis Braille, the inventor of Braille script (January 4, 1809)