Haryana government – invited Nepal to be the partner Country for International Gita Jayanti Mahotsav scheduled to be held at Kurukshetra from 3-8 December 2019

- The Gita Jayanti Mahotsav symbolizes birth of Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita, the sacred text of Hindus with most pious scriptures of Hindu mythology
- The day marks the occasion of Lord Krishna offering his philosophical teachings to King Arjuna during battle of Kurukshetra
- Haryana has been celebrating Gita Jayanti Mahotsav of International Level for the last three years
- As part of celebrations an International Seminar on Shrimad Bhagwad Gita would also be organized on December 6 and devotees and scholars from Nepal could participate in it.
- Worldwide, Mauritius organized Gita Mahotsav in February 2019, United Kingdom is organising from 7-8 August 2019 and Canada has also proposed to organize similar Mahotsav.

The 36th GST Council meeting, chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, was held via video conferencing on July 27

- It had decided to reduce the tax rate on electric vehicles (EVs) to 5% from the existing 12%, effective from August 1
- It also slashed the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on EV chargers from 18% to 5%, in a welcome move for e-vehicles manufacturing industry in India
Hiring of electric buses with a capacity of more than 12 passengers by local authorities was also exempted from GST.

The latest cut in GST rate further widens the gap in tax rates between electrics and petrol and diesel vehicles.

The petrol and diesel vehicles attract a base GST rate of 28%, over and above which there is additional cess in line with the size and engine capacity of a vehicle.

Earlier, the Union Budget introduced an additional income tax deduction of ₹1.5 lakh on the interest paid on a loan taken to purchase an electric vehicle.

The government also removed import taxes earlier this month on some auto components to help boost electric vehicle sales and reduce the country’s dependence on fossil fuels.

The government hopes such measures would encourage more and more people to look at electric vehicles as a viable option.

The government has ambitious plans to increase the share of electric vehicles in India from the current less than 1% to 30% of all passenger vehicles by 2030.

The GST Council, headed by the Union Finance Minister, has state finance ministers as members.

The average monthly income per agricultural household from all sources in the country - is estimated to be Rs. 6,426.

This was announced by Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar in a written reply in Lok Sabha.

The estimation is based on Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households conducted by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the nodal agency for conducting surveys and collecting data, during its 70th round (January 2013-December 2013).

Since 2013 NSSO has not conducted any survey on income per agricultural household.
At this rate of growth, the Government admitted that it cannot double farmers income by 2022 as announced in its 2016-17 budget and needs to focus other agri-related sectors to improve growth rate in agriculture.

In April 2016, government constituted an Inter-Ministerial Committee to examine issues relating to doubling of farmers income and to recommend strategies to achieve the same.

The committee was headed by Ashok Dalwai, Additional secretary at the Union Agriculture Ministry.

It had submitted its Report to Central government in September 2018.

The Committee considered estimates of agricultural households income obtained from NSSO 70th round unit-level data as base level income and it kept 2015-16 as base year.

‘Waste to Wealth’, an interactive workshop – was inaugurated in New Delhi to discuss productive utilisation of bauxite residue, commonly known as Red Mud.

- It was organized by the Union Ministry of Mines in association with Jawaharlal Nehru Aluminium Research Development and Design Centre (JNARDDC) Nagpur.
- Top executives from all 3 primary Aluminium producing companies in India namely- NALCO, VEDANTA & HINDALCO and user industries like cement and ceramic industry also participated.
- Red Mud is a solid waste generated during Aluminium (Al) production process.
- As it contains impurities like caustic soda and others minerals, its generation, disposal and utilization are of prime environmental concern.
- Red mud generation in India is around 9 million tons per year.

INTERNATIONAL

The US - notifies its decision to approve $125 million worth of technical and logistics support for Pakistani F-16 fighter jets.

- However, the sale would have “24/7 end-use monitoring” of the F-16s, with 60 US contractor representatives being stationed in Pakistan to assist in the oversight of the programme.
- The move follows the visit of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan meeting President Donald Trump.
The Pentagon simultaneously notified the US Congress about the proposed $670 million follow-on support programme for the 11 C-17 Globemaster-III strategic air-lift aircraft of the Indian Air Force

But, the US still maintains that there is no change to the security assistance suspension announced by the President Donald Trump in January 2018.

**Bangladesh – reports the highest incidence of Dengue outbreak in the past 18 years**

- According to the Government sources, 10528 patients have been infected with dengue as of July 2019 and close to 700 more people were reported in July last week alone with dengue infection
- The 1st case was detected in country in 2000.

**Jordan - has unveiled its 1st Underwater Military Museum on the bed of Red Sea off the coast of Aqaba**

- The military museum houses several military vehicles, including tanks, troop carriers and even a decommissioned Jordanian Armed Forces’ AH-1 Cobra helicopter in the waters of Red Sea
- Overall, 19 decommissioned pieces of military hardware were submerged at depths up to 28 meters (92 feet)
- Museum will be accessible to scuba divers, snorkelers, and tourists by using glass-floored boats.

**CONFERENCES & SUMMITS**

**The 5th International Dharma-Dhamma conference - is being held Rajgir International Convention Centre in Rajgir, Bihar from 27-28 July 2019.**

- It was inaugurated Union Minister of State Kiren Rijiju who is also the Chief Guest of Conference
- The conference addresses the topics of terror, violence and global warming prevalent in world.
- It also includes subjects of Sat-Chit-Ananda and Nirvana Dharma-Dhamma Tradition which are pivotal topics of Buddhism
The conference is organized by Nalanda University (NU) in collaboration with New Delhi’s Centre for Study of Religion and Society-India Foundation (CSRS-IF)

Almost 250 scholars and delegates from over 15 countries are participating in Conference, hosted by Rajgir for the second time

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Iran - test-launched Shahab-3, a Medium-Range Ballistic Missile inside its borders.

The missile was launched from southern coast of Iran and landed east of Tehran
It flew about 1,100 km, however did not pose threat to U.S. or other Western military or shipping bases in region.
Shahab-3 is a liquid-fueled, medium-range ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear weapon
It is derived from a North Korean missile called Nodong-A.
The missile launches are not forbidden under 2015 Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)
However a United Nation Security Council (UNSC) resolution, passed just as the nuclear agreement was reached in 2015, restrains Iran from launching such ballistic missile technology.

DEFENCE

The first four of the 22 Apache Guardian attack helicopters - arrived at the Hindon airbase on the outskirts of Delhi from the US in a heavy-lift C-17 aircraft on July 27

Apache helicopters are often called “tanks in the air” because they are armed with deadly missiles and rockets
Four more of the heavy duty helicopters will arrive next week, with all 22 slated for induction by March 2020
The ₹13,952 crore deal for the helicopters was inked with the US in September 2015.
The Boeing-manufactured Apaches will be based at the Pathankot and Jorhat airbases to cater for the western and eastern fronts.
The first squadron of Apaches, armed with Stinger air-to-air missiles, Hellfire Longbow air-to-ground missiles, guns and rockets, will be commissioned at Pathankot in September.
This comes shortly after the IAF also began the induction of another iconic US helicopter, the heavy-lift Chinook, in March.
The IAF had ordered 15 Chinooks, which are capable of transporting howitzers and troops to forward and high-altitude areas with China and Pakistan, under another ₹8,048 crore deal inked in September 2015.
The Chinooks will be based in Chandigarh and Dinjan (Assam).

**APPOINTMENTS**

- **Badri Narain Sharma** – appointed as chairman of National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA) for 2 years

  - His name was cleared by Appointments Committee of Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
  - NAA, constituted in 2017, ensures that consumers get benefit of input tax credit and reduced prices under Goods and Services Tax (GST).
  - It has powers to cancel registration of any entity/business if it fails to pass on to consumers benefit of lower taxes under GST regime.
  - At present NAA has 3 members- J C Chauhan, Chairman, Tax Tribunal, Himachal Pradesh and Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers R Bhagyadevi and Amand Shah.

**SPORTS**

- **Six times World Champion MC Mary Kom** - claimed gold medal at 23rd President’s Cup held in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia

  - The 36 year old sensation defeated April Franks of Australia with 5-0 margin quite easily in the 51 kg final bout.
  - Mary Kom claimed her 6th world title in 2018 in New Delhi.
  - In May 2019 she had also won a gold medal at India Open boxing tournament.
The Indian boxers finished their campaign with nine medals, including seven gold and two silver, helping the contingent win the 'Best Team' award in the event.

The women boxers had a flawless record in the finals, winning all the four gold medals on offer.

Simranjit Kaur, Jamuna Boro and Monika too bagged gold medal apart from Mary Kom.

The men boxers had mixed fortunes and had to settle for two silver along with three gold.

Neeraj Swami, Ananta Prahlad Chopade and Ankush Dahiya also won gold medals for the country.

**American swimming sensation Caeleb Dressel – wins six Gold medals, including a hat trick of Gold medals on July 27, in swimming’s 2019 world championships in Gwangju, South Korea**

Dressel, 22, defended his 50m freestyle and 100m butterfly titles and helped the US win the 4x100m mixed freestyle relay with a new world record.

He tied Michael Phelps’ record of seven medals — all gold — at a single worlds in 2017.

Dressel had earlier broken the World Record set by Michael Phelps in the 100m butterfly semifinals with a timing of 49.50 seconds.

Michael Phelps set the world record in the 2009 World Championships.

Earlier, Dressel won seven gold medals at the 2017 world championships in Budapest, Hungary.

**Asian Championships silver medallist Ashish Kumar - bagged his first international gold at Thailand Open International boxing tournament in Bangkok.**
India finished with a gold, four silver and three bronze on the final day
Former world junior champion Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Asian Championships silver medallist Deepak (49kg), GeeBee Boxing silver medallist Mohammed Hussamuddin (56kg), and India Open silver medallist Brijesh Yadav (81kg) settled with the silver medal in the event
Ashish had earlier won silver medal in the India open

The 3rd edition of Khelo India Youth Games - will be held in Guwahati, Assam between 18-30 January 2020
This was announced by Union Minister of Sports Kiren Rijiju
The games will be conducted in partnership with Indian Olympic Association (IOA), School Games Federation of India (SGFI) & Assam as host State.
Khelo India Youth Games, earlier called as Khelo India School Games, are held annually in month of January or February
They are held in two categories - Under-17 years school students and Under-21 college students
The best performing 1000 participants from the games are given an annual scholarship of Rs 5,00,000 for 8 years to fund their preparations for international sporting events
Khelo India programme’s inaugural edition was held in New Delhi in 2018, while Pune hosted 2nd edition in 2019

RTI AMENDMENT BILL – A REPORT

The Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019 - was passed in the Rajya Sabha on July 25
Here are the changes being effected by the amended act
No fixed tenure or salaries - Centre says it’s a statutory body
The amendments abolish the fixed tenure of five years for the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and the Information Commissioners – Now the Government will decide the tenure of CIC and ICs
Also, the Centre can now determine the salary of the CIC and the ICs, even though the current incumbents’ salaries will not be affected by the amendment
The centre cites that the Information Commission is a statutory body whereas the EC is a constitutional body and hence the difference in salary
Earlier, the salary of CIC and ICs are on par with the salary of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the Election Commissioners, respectively, which in turn is benchmarked with the salary of a Supreme Court judge
It amounts to Rs 2.5 lakh per month, along with a monthly allowance of Rs 34,000 and the usual perks like rent-free furnished housing and 200 litres of fuel every month.
Centre to decide appointments, even for state CIC, ICs
Currently, the CIC and ICs are chosen by a three-member panel of the PM, the Leader of Opposition or leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha and a Cabinet minister nominated by the PM.

Similarly, the State Chief Information Commissioners (SCIC) and State Information Commissioners (SIC) are chosen by a three-member panel of the CM, the state’s leader of opposition or leader of the largest opposition party in the state assembly and a state Cabinet minister nominated by the CM.

The Amendments will ensure the centre nullifies the independence of the state legislatures and the appointees will serve at the pleasure of the government, more interested in ensuring the longevity of their tenures rather than serving the citizens’ interests.

**Extended tenures possible**

Currently, no CIC, IC, SCIC or SIC can serve more than one term, which is for a maximum period of 5 years or till the age of 65, whichever is earlier.

For ICs and SICs, if one of them is nominated to the post of CIC or SCIC, his/her total tenure as both IC and CIC or SIC and SCIC cannot exceed 5 years.

Henceforth, as the Government fixes the tenures, an incumbent will strive to be ‘friendly’ with the Centre to serve more than one term.

**And termination in Centre’s hands?**

In the original bill, the CIC and IC may be removed only by the President — and the state governor in case of SCIC and SIC — after an inquiry by the Supreme Court finds reason for their dismissal from office.

But, with the amendments, their removal from office may also be dependent on the Centre.