



# livelihoods

*today and tomorrow*

**January 2019**

## **Monthly Livelihoods Update**

*“A month that was !”*

**Agriculture & NTFP**

**Economy, Trade and Partnerships**

**Climate Change & Environment**

**Banking and Financial Services**

**Education, Health, Science & Technology**

**Updates from Weeklies**

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# Summary of Daily Livelihoods Update

## Agriculture & NTFP

- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) at their 160th meeting of council has approved India's proposal to observe 2023 as International Year of Millets. In addition, FAO has also approved India's membership to the Executive Board of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) for 2020 and 2021.
- Union Cabinet approved Agriculture Export Policy which is aimed at enhancing the farmer's income by 2022. It is aimed to double agricultural exports to \$60 million by 2022 from \$30 million currently.
- Chief Minister of Jharkhand Mr. Raghubar Das has said that the state government is planning to setup one cold-storage of 30-tonne capacity in each block. The uninterrupted power supply will determine the success of these cold storages. The CM said the government is planning to start separate feeder for agriculture by next year.
- Speaking at sidelines of 'Shaping the Future of Indian Agriculture' Mr. Adi Godrej said that farmers should get a larger chunk of what consumers pay for agricultural products. He also indicated on two critical issues that need to be addressed; 1. Efficient use of water and 2. Integration of women with agriculture.
- Baramati Agro plans to promote cultivation of beet for sugar production. Mr. Rohit Pawar, CEO – Baramati Agro said 'Beet is a short duration crop, requirement of water goes down and also helps in increasing sugar mills capacity utilisation'.
- Speaking at the award distribution ceremony of essay competition organized on "Waste to Wealth Management" Mr. Radha Mohan Singh said that 'The Government has initiated promotion of Agricultural Mechanization for in-situ management of crop residue in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and NCT of Delhi'.
- The economists at State Bank of India (SBI) research stated that loan waivers could be the worst solution to alleviate farmer's distress. They also said an income support scheme may be a better alternative in addition to ensuring them with better market prices for their produce.
- Rabi crop acreage has gone down across the states. As per the Agriculture Ministry, total acreages so far stood at 476.12 lakh hectares which is down by 5.2% from last year. The acreage of key winter crops such as wheat and rapeseed-mustard are slightly higher than the corresponding last year's levels. But, the acreage of gram has gone down by 13% percent. The reasons impacting the progress of rabi crop sowing are below normal south-west monsoon and lower water levels in the key reservoirs.
- In order to draw the government's attention towards the crisis faced by onion farmers. Farmer's delegation from Maharashtra met Hon'ble Prime Minister and demanded that the government provide a grant of Rs.500/ quintal to onion farmers to meet losses.
- Mr. Kamal Nath signed the farmer's loan waiver file and the Government Order said 'Madhya Pradesh government has taken a decision to write off short-term crop loans of eligible farmers up to the limit of Rs.2 lakh, as on March 31, 2018 from nationalised and co-operative banks'.
- In a statement by Agriculture Ministry, GoI procurement of pulses and oilseeds has increased by almost 13 times during the last four and half years as compared to the procurement done from 2009-2014
- In a cabinet meeting, the Government of Assam decided to waive off 25 percent of the loan amount of farmers. However, the maximum relief per farmer would be capped at 25 thousand rupees. The cabinet also decided that farmer can avail a Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loan at zero percent.

- At the very first cabinet meeting of the newly formed Chhattisgarh government it has been decided to waive off farm loans to the tune of Rs 6100 crores of more than 16 lakh farmers. They have also decided to provide Rs 2500 per quintal to farmers for their paddy being sold under the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- Bharatiya Krishak Samaj (BKS) a farmer body in a statement said due to substandard pesticides available in the market the farming community are incurring losses to a tune of Rs 30000 crore
- At the MSME conclave, MSTC – Chairman and MD, MSTC Ltd said it would start reverse e-auction of onions to aid Nasik farmers. Mother Dairy would lend support this purpose by procuring 20 tonnes of onion a day. Mother Dairy will in turn sell it through its 150-odd retail outlets in the Delhi – NCR region.
- Mr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog said that “Farm loan waiver is not a solution to farm distress, but only a palliative”. He said ‘Instead the focus should be on increasing investment rate, emphasis to convert farmers in to ‘agripreneurs’, unified national market, practising Zero Budget Natural Farming’
- In a soothing effect to the onion farmers the Maharashtra government approved an ex-gratia payment of Rs 200 per quintal rate for onions sold between November 1 -15. The compensation will cover a total of 75 lakh metric tonnes of onions.
- The Karnataka government has sought Central government assistance in relieving the farmers facing drought in the state. They have also requested to provide Disaster relief funds to farmers whose crop destruction is less than 50 percent.
- Karnataka Government has announced a bonus of Rs 425 per quintal for Tur (red gram) growers in addition to the existing Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 5675 for the pulses crop. A maximum of 10 quintals will be procured from each farmer.
- As per the data released by Agriculture Ministry, rice cultivation during the rabi season has reduced by 32 percent compared to the corresponding period last year. The states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh reported a substantial drop in the planting.
- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has decided to extend ban on milk and milk products from China for a further period of four months until 23 April, 2019. In a notification it said “ Prohibition on import of milk and milk products including chocolates and chocolate products and candies/ confectionaries / food preparations with milk and milk solids as ingredients from China is extended for four months i.e., up to 23 April or until further orders”.
- As part of the Kharif season 2018 – 19 procurement, the Government of Gujarat has purchased groundnut about 1.7 lakh tonnes of the oilseed worth Rs 865 crore. The state government has purchased the produce at MSP of Rs 4890 a quintal and an additional bonus of Rs 100 by the state government.
- According to sources in order to address the farm distress ahead of 2019 elections ‘the government is considering waiving interest on crop loans for farmers who can pay on time, costing an additional Rs 15000 crore to the exchequer. It is also said that there is also a proposal to completely waive off premium for taking insurance policy for food crops. The premium on horticulture crops could also be reduced.
- Based on the recommendations of Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACPC), the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs has approved for increasing the MSP of Milling Copra to Rs 9521 per quintal for 2019 season from Rs 7511 per quintal. The MSP of Ball Copra has been increased to Rs 9920per quintal for 2019 season from Rs.7750 per quintal.
- The Government has increased the export incentives granted for Onions under the Merchandise Exports for

Indian Scheme (MEIS) from existing 5% to 10% in the interest of farmers. This decision is intended to result in a better price for Onions in domestic markets.

- With excess production and depressing domestic sugar prices have led to accumulation of cane price arrears of farmers in key sugarcane growing states including Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The Central Government has made it clear that it has limited capacity to help the sugar industry. Production in the 2017-18 sugar season was about 322 lakh tonnes (lt), which was much higher than the consumption of 255 lt. The production during current season is estimated to be about 315 lt and consumption is seen as 260 lt.
- Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal has announced two programmes under 'Krishak Bandhu' to woo the state farming community. 1. An annual financial assistance of Rs 5000 per acre in two instalments – one during Kharif and one during Rabi for a single crop. 2. a life insurance cover of Rs 200000 in case of death, irrespective of the cause of an earning family member (farmer) aged between 18- 60 years of age. Farmers need not pay any premium for availing this insurance cover. It is intended to benefit 72 lakh farmers and share-cropper families in the state. She further said that 'The registration of farmers and share-croppers under this scheme will start from February 2019 onwards. Benefits will accrue from 01 January 2019'.
- In order to address the agrarian distress the government is mulling about three options sources familiar with the issue said; "a monthly income support to farmers, a cash handout plan for the shortfall between the actual sale-price and state set procurement rate and a revamped crop insurance program or a combination of all the three".
- The Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR) has setup an advanced facility for post-harvest technology at Kozhikode. It is expected to propel research on processing, food safety and value addition in spices.
- The Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in a statement said that the government has extended the import on restriction of peas for another three months till 31 March 2018. These measures help in curbing cheaper imports and boost local prices.
- Emphasis on non conventional agriculture products in Agriculture Export Policy. Indian exports have a strong position in the global market, but to take things to a next level, introduction of new products and new markets was essential, a senior official of the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry said.
- Governor of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana E S L Narasimhan in a statement said it is necessary for the agricultural scientists to ensure that the food that is available is pure and healthy. He said organic farming is the way forward to ensure this.
- Central government teams have been deputed to assess the drought situation in six states -- Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Jharkhand and Odisha, a senior agriculture ministry official said on Monday.
- The tea industry, which has been facing the pressure of rising costs outstripping price realisations over the past few years, is expecting to get some relief in the new agriculture export policy.
- Fall Armyworm detected on sugarcane crops in Tamil Nadu.
- To connect with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), an online portal "ENSURE" has been launched. The portal will provide a very simple, useful and transparent system to the beneficiary. Under EDEG subsidy payment for activities related to poultry, small ruminants, pigs etc. through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) goes directly to the beneficiary's account.
- During the "NITI Aayog Forum for Northeast" being held in Guwahati, Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State, Development of North Eastern region addressing the forum has mentioned that Northeast should focus on

bamboo industry and he has also mentioned that Government has setup National Bamboo Mission (NBM) to focus on this sector.

- The Government has revised the Minimum Support Price of 23 items of Minor Forest Produce items and has introduced MSP for 17 new items. The 23 items whose MSP has been revised include those Minor Forest Produce items which have been covered under the scheme since its inception in the year 2013-14. The revised MSP also includes those MFP items which were announced on 31.10.2016 except Palash Flower (wet variety). The details of the MSP are available at <http://pib.nic.in/PressReleseDetail.aspx?PRID=1557528>.

## **Economy, Trade and Partnerships**

- China agrees to import more from India and keen to import pomegranate, grapes, soya meal, fish oil and fish meal from India apart from non-basmati rice and sugar it had decided to buy earlier. India's exports to China touched \$33 billion in 2017-18 while imports from that country stood at \$76.2 billion. To achieve balance of trade, they are looking at importing high quality agricultural products from India.
- Ministry of Shipping has approved Development of a freight village in Varanasi adjoining the Inland Waterways Terminal on River Ganga. It will be developed at a cost of Rs 156 crores and it will serve as a cargo hub and a centre for aggregation and value addition.
- Government appoints Dr Krishnamurthy Subramanian as the new Chief Economic Advisor. He is currently working as Associate Professor in Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.
- The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved designating Shri A.N.Jha, IAS as Secretary, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance as Finance Secretary
- The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said that it has extended the due date for filing form GSTR-9, form GSTR – 9A and form GSTR-9C till March 2019.
- As per the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief, India retains its top position as the world's top recipient of remittances with USD 80 billion. China stands second with USD 67 billion followed by Mexico and Philippines standing at USD 34 billion each.
- Mr. Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of World Economic Forum (WEF) said that India is still in the "middle class" in ease of doing business and the country should work towards providing necessary ecosystem to boost entrepreneurship. He also said most jobs in the future will be self generated and the country should have an education system that is future-ready.
- As per the latest update by International Monetary Fund (IMF) the global debt has reached an all-time high of USD 184 trillion. The average debt per person now exceeds USD 86000 more than 2.5 times the average income per-capita. The top three borrowers (United States, China and Japan) account for more than half of the global debt.
- Anticipating a likely reduction of import duty by the Central Government on palm oil, there has been a dip in the imports of vegetable oil.
- As per the official data "The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation fell to 4.6 percent in November 2018 from 5.28 percent in October".
- Addressing the 91st Annual General Meeting of FICCI, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad said that India will become a trillion dollar digital economy in the next two to three years. He also said that India does not want to miss the digital revolution which is designed to transform the country and to bridge the urban-rural divide.

- Speaking at a private media summit Honourable Prime Minister indicated that the government is in the process to simplify Goods and Service Tax (GST) and said the government will ensure that 99 percent of all the items, including almost all the items used by common man are under the 18 percent GST slab. He also said that 28 percent GST slab will only be for selected items, such as luxury goods.
- NITI Aayog releases Strategy Document for New India. Segments in the Strategy Document include Governance, Infrastructure and Inclusion. Agriculture is a major focus area with strategies to double farmer's income. It is aimed to accelerate growth to 8 percent and propel the country towards a USD 5 trillion economy by 2030.
- Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) services may soon be kept out of the ambit of GST, ensuring that they won't face 18% tax. The law review committee of the GST council is in the process of preparing a directive to this.
- The Lok Sabha passed the Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 replacing the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The current bill seeks to establish Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions at District, State and National levels.
- The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has announced results of the first ever State's Start-up Ranking 2018. Gujarat tops the list followed by Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and Rajasthan.
- The GST council in their 31st Meeting of the Council have lowered GST on 17 items and six categories of services. The services supplied by the banks to Jan-Dhan account holders will be exempted from GST. Today's GST rate reduction will have an overall impact on revenue of Rs 5500 crore. The rate of GST reduction on movie tickets will alone cost Rs 900 crore to the revenue. The new GST rates will be effective from 01st January 2019.
- Mr. Arun Jaitley, Finance Minister said that as the tax revenues significantly increase, India will have GST slabs of 0 percent, 5 percent and a standard rate between 12-18 percent for commonly used items. Luxury and Sin goods will however continue to be taxed in a higher bracket. He said that of the 1216 commodities which are used, broadly 183 are taxed at zero rate, 308 at 5 percent, 178 at 12 percent, 517 at 18 percent and 28 items at 28 percent. He also said that in future the road map is towards a single standard rate instead of 12 and 18 percent.
- Senior Diplomat of Colombia on condition of anonymity said that after the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia rebels (FARC) decided to lay down arms he said there is huge opportunities for Indian companies in the areas of Agriculture, Rural Development, Renewable Energy, Infra both physical and human resource
- The Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises in their Year End Review state that the country's automobile sector has attracted USD 16.5 Billion in FDI between April 2000 and December 2016 and it is expected to attract USD 8 – 10 Billion more in local and foreign investment by 2023.
- The recent changes to the e-commerce policy have drawn mixed response from the e-commerce giants, customers and domestic retailers. A statement by the Ministry reads 'Online marketplaces must treat all vendors equally by providing them with the same terms'. This means the e-commerce giants cannot offer huge discounts/offers/cash-backs. But the government says this will promote fair trade and curb foreign companies influence in setting domestic prices.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today said that demonetisation resulted in the formalisation of economy and has increased the tax base.
- Direct Tax Collections for F.Y. 2018-19 up to November, 2018. Gross collections stand at Rs. 6.75 lakh crore which is 15.7% higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year.
- International Monetary Fund's Chief Economist Maurice Obstfeld has said that India's growth has been very solid over the past four years. He praised the fundamental economic reforms like the GST and the Insolvency

and Bankruptcy Code carried out by the Modi government.

- Nearly three decades after opening up its economy in 1991, India is on the brink of a quantum leap in wealth generation with the number of wealthy Indians and their affluence expected to rise by an astonishing 87% over the next five years, a study by IIFL Wealth Management and Wealth-X showed.
- Australia's West Sydney University (WSU) has established a partnership with Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) and thirteen state agricultural universities. The partnership is part of the new initiative designed to combat food security issues presented by climate change. WSU will invest AUD 5 million to leverage new research and developments, which is expected to make a significant contribution towards doubling farmer's income in the long run.
- The Government of India has decided to extend 1.4 billion dollars financial assistance to Maldives as budget support, currency swap and line of credit for the social and economic development of Maldives. Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi in a press statement said that both countries shall work together in maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Indian and Afghanistan in the field of Human Resource Development.
- Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi has announced a financial assistance of Rs 4500 crore to Bhutan for its five year plan after holding talks with Dr. Lotay Tshering, Prime Minister of Bhutan.
- The Government of India and ADB sign a \$31 Million Loan Agreement to develop Tourism and boost Jobs in Tamil Nadu.
- Marking its 75th anniversary of Independence, the country is to host the G20 summit in 2022
- The Annual Startup India Venture Capital Summit-2018 begun on 07-12-2018 in Goa. The Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry & Government of Goa is to host the programme. 'Mobilizing Global Capital for Innovation in India' is the theme.
- Sino-India Joint Exercise Hand-in-Hand held annually, to bridge and promote close relations between armies of both the countries is to be held between 10 to 23 December this year at Chengdu, China.

## **Climate Change & Environment**

- On 02 December a 13 day UN Climate conference has started in Katowice, Poland. The conference is aimed at finalising a rulebook for implementation of the Paris agreement post-2020. It is attended by representations from 200 countries from across the globe and India is led by Dr. Harsha Vardhan, Minister for environment along with 16 others.
- 05 December was celebrated as "World Soil Day". The United Nations has come with a slogan Be the Solution to Stop Pollution to raise awareness and call people to stop soil pollution.
- The Government of India has sanctioned 254 projects worth over Rs 24000 crore under National Clean Ganga Mission
- Union Minister Nitin Gadkari inaugurated India Water Impact Summit 2018 in New Delhi. This is an annual event and this year's discussions will be on the rejuvenation of Ganga River Basin.
- The Government of Maharashtra has submitted a proposal seeking central assistance to the tune of Rs 7963 crores from the centre for mitigation of drought.

- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has signed an agreement with Green Climate Fund (GCF) to infuse \$100 million. The project is designed to unlock private sector initiatives for creation of roof top solar power in India.
- In compliance with the directions of National Green Tribunal (NGT), The Central Ground Water Authority notifies revised guidelines for Ground Water Extraction. One of the important features of revised guidelines is introduction of Water Conservation Fee (WFC). The revised guidelines will be effective from 01st June 2019.
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India signed a \$60 Million Loan Agreement to continue financing riverbank protection works, renovation of flood embankments, and community-based flood risk management activities in critically flood-prone areas along the Brahmaputra River in Assam.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered reopening of the Sterlite copper smelter plant in Tamilnadu. The Tamilnadu government said it will move to Supreme Court against NGT order.
- Cyclone “Pethai” makes landfall near Katrenikona in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. In view of the cyclone schools and colleges remain closed in the coastal district of A.P. Post landfall in East Godavari district cyclone moved towards Odisha. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has evacuated 20000 people and moved them to relief camps. Crops in 14000 hectares were damaged in A.P
- Indian Meteorological Department in a statement said there is a lull in the movement of active western disturbances across North-West India and adjoining Central and West India which will further establish cold wave conditions over the parts of the region, and ground frost in others.
- Tsunami hits Sunda Strait in Indonesia, over 280 people killed and more than 1000 injured. It is reported that water swept 65 feet (20 metres) inland. Scientists say that ‘A large chunk of a flank of the volcanic Anak Krakatau Island slipped in to the ocean and that triggered a Tsunami’.
- In a reply to the draft National Mariculture Policy, the mechanised boat operators of Kerala suggested not to encroach on the areas vouched by traditional fishermen as their safest zone for fishing. They pointed out that the selection of area to the mariculture sector should be carried out after assuring that farming will not affect water currents.
- The Government of India has submitted its Sixth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It was submitted online to the CBD Secretariat by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Environment. The report provides an update of the progress in achievement of 12 National Biodiversity Targets (NBT) developed under the convention process in line with the 20 Global Aichi Biodiversity targets.
- Mr. Piyush Goyal, Minister of Railways said that the government will expand the Honey Bee plan that is successful in Assam that kept elephants away from the tracks. It is a simple device that amplifies the recorded sound of honey bees to keep elephants away from the rail track.
- The Centre is planning to ban use of burnt clay bricks in its construction projects across the country, a move aimed at giving a boost to environment-friendly products.
- The researchers of University of East Anglia (UAE) and the Global Carbon Emissions project the Global Carbon Emissions to touch 37.1 Billion Tonnes of CO2 in 2018, being an all-time high. The emission of India is also estimated to increase by 6.3%.
- High level Committee (HLC) meeting presided by Union Home Minister approves additional assistance from National Disaster Response Fund of Rs. 3048.39Crore to Kerala, Rs. 131.16Crore to Nagaland and Rs. 539.52Crore to Andhra Pradesh towards the damage caused by floods, landslides and cyclone Titli.

## Banking & Financial Services

- Micro Finance Institute Network (MFIN) recent report has mentioned that, during the second quarter of the current financial year Micro Finance industry has recorded 51% growth rate. At the end of second quarter the Gross Loan Portfolio of the sector stands at Rs 146741 crore.
- WhatsApp Chief has written to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seeking a formal nod to expand payment services to all its 200 million users in India.
- The Central Government has appointed Mr. Shaktikanta Das as Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a period of three years. He is currently member of the 15th Finance Commission and retired as Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs.
- Mr. Manoj Sinha, Minister of State for Communications launched the e-commerce portal of the Department of Posts (DoP). The Portal will provide an e-market place to seller's especially rural artisans, self help groups, and women entrepreneurs etc., to sell their products to buyers across the country. The buyers can purchase the products on the online portal by making digital payments.
- In order to match new-age banking and expand their businesses in the competitive market, the state owned lenders are planning to recruit around one lakh people during the current financial year.
- In order to meet the loan requirements in the rural areas, Union Bank is planning to leverage technology by coming up with the hub and spoke model. Under this concept, 15-20 rural branches within a radius of 20km are attached to a 'Union Samridhhi Kendra' in their vicinity. Loans/Leads generated by the rural branch manager/ banking correspondents are taken over by the agriculture officers in the Kendra.
- Banks remained closed during 21 – 26 December (Friday to Wednesday) except on 24 December. On 21 and 26 December bank unions have called for a strike, 22 and 23 December are fourth Saturday and Sunday respectively. 25 December is a national holiday on the eve of Christmas.
- Mr. Arun Jaitley, Finance Minister said that 'the government will infuse Rs 830 billion in state-owned banks to strengthen their capacity to lend'.
- Post Supreme Court's decision to forbid private companies from accessing the Aadhaar database the 'fintech' companies are finding it difficult to find a suitable alternative. The Aadhaar has made access to these companies reaching to rural areas and urban poor areas at a very nominal cost.
- Banking services in the Public Sector Banks continue were affected due to strike called by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) against the proposed merger of Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank with Bank of Baroda. This is the second strike within less than a week on the same issue.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in a statement said that it has constituted a six member committee headed by former RBI Governor Mr. Bimal Jalan to review the Economic Capital Framework of RBI. The ToR of the committee are 'review status, need and justification of various provisions, reserves and buffers presently provided for the RBI, keeping in mind public policy mandate of the RBI including financial stability considerations.
- According to the latest data released by RBI, the consolidated net loss of all the Payments Banks (PBs) in the country has more than doubled to Rs 516 crore from Rs 242 crore in the previous fiscal. The losses have been attributed to the high operating expenses, as many of these banks had to set up the initial infrastructure. The 'Payments Bank' is a concept championed by the RBI to further the cause of financial inclusion in the country.

## Education, Health, Science & Technology

- Inaugurating the 'Kala Utsav' at New Delhi Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Minister of HRD said that in order to provide enough time to students to develop their talents, the syllabus is proposed to be reduced to by half the current syllabus.
- Mr. Manish Sisodia in a statement said that "Delhi government will be developing a curriculum to inculcate habits of cleanliness and hygiene among school students".
- Shri Jual Oram, Minister for Tribal Affairs said that Every Block with more than 50% of ST population and at least 20000 tribal persons will have an Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) by the year 2022. Eklavya schools will be on par with Navodaya Vidyalayas and will have special facilities for preserving local art and culture besides providing training in sports and skill development. Currently, there are 102 EMRS and it is planned to establish 462 EMRS by the year 2022.
- UPSC declares Civil Services (Main) Examination, 2018 result. Personality interviews are likely to commence from 04th February 2019.
- NITI Aayog in its Strategy Document has recommended that the upper age limit for entry in to civil services be brought down to 27 years from the present 30 years for general category candidates in a phased manner by 2022-23.
- The government in a clarification stated that there is no proposal to alter the age criteria of eligibility of civil service examinations.
- The Minister of State, HRD in a reply to the Rajya Sabha said that government will soon establish a dedicated call centre and mobile application to attract more foreign students under study in India programme.
- The Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) has announced the date sheet for Class 10 and 12 Board exams. Examinations of Class 12 will commence from February 15 to April 3, 2019 and Class 10 from February 21 to March 29, 2019.
- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has asserted that schools cannot make the 12-digit biometric identifier a pre-condition for student admission. Mr. Ajay Bhushan, CEO – UIDAI said that asking for Aadhaar cards for admissions is not as per the provisions of law and doing so will be against the recent order of the Supreme Court.
- Shri Narendra Modi inaugurating the fourth edition of Partner's Forum, said that "India is committed to increasing its health spending to 2.5% percent of GDP by 2025, reaching to more than \$100 billion". He also said that India will meet its Sustainable Development Goals for maternal and child health, much ahead of the agreed date of 2030.
- Google will soon launch diabetic retinopathy clinics in India. It has developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) model that can detect diabetic retinopathy with a level of accuracy on par with human retinal specialists.
- Speaking on the sidelines of 04th WHO Global Forum on Medical Devices, Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Commerce & Industry has announced setting up of a National Medical Devices Promotion Council under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).
- The Irish Parliament passed a historic legislation allowing abortions. The new legislation allows terminations to be carried out up to 12 weeks of pregnancy or in conditions where there is risk to the life, or of serious harm to the health of the pregnant woman

- During a meeting with the Task Force constituted to tackle malnutrition in Palghar, The Maharashtra Health Minister has directed officials to carry out an integrated survey of anganwadis in Palghar district to understand the level of malnutrition among children.
- The Supreme Court has directed the Central Government to prepare a pan-India report on the number of old age homes and the kind of medical and geriatric care facilities provided to the elderly. It also said that 'Statutory rights over 10 crore elderly persons in India must be recognised and implemented'.
- Speaking on the sidelines of an International conference on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDC) at Hyderabad. Shri Venkaiah Naidu, Vice President of India has urged scientists, policy makers and planners to adopt new strategies to tackle the problem of malnutrition. He also suggested the involvement of local community at the grass roots to effectively communicate the message for consumption of nutritious food.
- The National Health Agency in a public advisory released list of 37 fake websites sharing information of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- The Delhi High Court said its stay on sale of drugs and prescription medicines by online pharmacies will continue till rules are framed to regulate such entities.
- The Lok Sabha passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill 2016, aimed at prohibiting commercial surrogacy and unethical practices relating to it. It permits surrogacy only for couples who cannot conceive a child. The intended couple must be Indian citizens and married for at least five years with at least one of them being infertile.
- Speaking at Indian Pharmaceutical Congress. Mr. Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice President of India said that India is rendering yeoman service in developing countries by providing access to life-saving medicines at affordable prices. He also said rural health programmes, lifesaving drugs, and preventive vaccines should also receive attention of policy makers and pharma companies. He stressed on the need for introduction of generic drugs in the market.
- Speaking at a function, Shri Ramnath Kovind, Hon'ble President said that there is a need for extending advanced medical services to rural India at par with urban areas. He also expressed concern over the huge number of children suffering from the sickle cell and blood disorders dispute availability of advance medical services.
- The NITI Aayog in its 'Strategy for New India @75' document has pitched for enactment of the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill, 2017. It recommended for the revamp of the regulatory system of nursing education to ensure quality training in nursing schools and also stressed on developing centres of excellence in nursing and enhancing the stature of government of nurses.
- Cabinet has approved setting up of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2018 which seeks to replace the existing regulator Central Council for Indian Medicine with a new body to ensure transparency. It also provides for the constitution of a National Commission with four autonomous boards entrusted with conducting overall education of Ayurveda under the board of Ayurveda and Unani, Siddha and Sowaigpa under the board of Unani, Siddha and Sowaigpa.
- Cabinet has also approved setting up of the National Commission for Homeopathy Bill, 2018 which seeks to replace the existing regulator Central Council for Homeopathy with a new body to ensure transparency. It also provides for constitution of a National Commission with three autonomous boards entrusted with conducting overall education of homeopathy by Homeopathy Education Board.
- As per the findings of WHO report, globally 7 million deaths and nearly \$5.11 Trillion welfare losses are caused due to exposure to air pollution.

- Speaking at the Start-Up India Global Venture Capital Summit, Union Minister Mr. Suresh Prabhu urged start-ups to explore various ways to increase crop yield using technology as the country has significant presence of small agricultural holdings in the country.
- The United Nations said that today more than 3.9 billion people are using internet which is more than half of the global population.
- The Government has planned a crisis management plan to counter cyber attacks. It will be implemented by all Ministries and Departments of the centre and the state governments in critical sectors.
- Addressing a seminar Mr. Manoj Sinha, Minister of State for Communications said that the National Digital Communication Policy 2018 is aimed at providing broadband services for all and creation of four million jobs. He also said this policy will be a catalyst to achieve the dream of Digital India.
- With increasing instances of misuse of social media and spreading of fake news the government has decided to amend the existing IT laws to curb them. Draft IT rules issued for public consultation. Public can submit their comments by 15th January 2019.
- The Union Cabinet has cleared the plan to send three Indians to space for 7 days by 2022. Two unmanned flights and one manned flight will be undertaken as part of the Rs 10000 crore indigenous human spaceflight programme, Gaganyaan.
- Rural Innovative Techno hunt - A technical challenge to identify rural problems and suggest solutions. The final round candidate will get funds to create prototypes and the final winners will get internship opportunities with reputed companies and institutes in India or abroad.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched GSAT – 11 from the Spaceport in French Guiana. It is a next generation ‘high throughput’ communication satellite and it is the heaviest satellite launched by India. The GSAT -11 will play a vital role in providing broadband services across the country and also be a platform to demonstrate new generation applications.

## Employment

- The National Commission for Women (NCW) will support Northeast livelihood programmes for women through Skill development and specialized training which are aimed at their empowerment and also support to earn their living. The target group of the programmes are young women.
- On 03.12.18, the Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed an \$85 million loan to improve skill development eco-system in Odisha. An advanced skill training center, the World Skill Center (WSC) will be established in the state capital Bhubaneswar.
- Crisis hit IL&FS indicated that it is likely to cut 65% of the job which will result in reducing the wage bill by 50%.
- The MD and CEO of National Skill Development Corporation in a statement said that the skill training centres in India are inadequate. Currently, the annual target to train is 2 crore per year but we are only able to train 1.05 crore a year.
- The Government is planning to roll out a mega apprenticeship programme targeting students of humanities and other non-technical courses across private and government funded higher education institutes. The three ministries human resource development, labour and skill development will together work towards execution of this programme.
- Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) signs MoU with Maruti Suzuki India Ltd for training youth under Deen

Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) .Through this partnership at least 5000 rural youth will be provided training by the automotive giant with assured placements.

- Speaking at the 15th Global SME Business Summit, Mr. Giriraj Singh, Minister of State for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) said that Indian MSEMs have the capability to compete with the global companies and become part of the fourth industrial revolution with the support from various government schemes.
- The Ministry of Textiles in a statement said ‘the country’s textile sector current employs 45 million people and it requires 17 million additional hands by 2022. In order to meet the demand the current government over the last four years have trained 8.58 lakh persons in partnership with 58 government and private partners.
- National Backward Classes Finance Development Corporation (NBCFDC) signed a MoU with BSE Institute Ltd for facilitating Skill Development Training to the target group of NBCFDC. The training by the partner will be commenced in the current financial year in selected locations and expanded on pan India in the coming years.
- Mr. Mohandas Pai, Chairman – Manipal Global Education Services in a statement said that India’s IT services sector and start-ups together are expected to hire up to 5 lakh people in 2019 as demand for fresher’s is on the upswing.
- The Maharashtra Government implemented the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission. This move will benefit as many as 20.50 lakh employees of the State Government. The Government will have to shell out Rs 7731 crores annually as arrears.
- The Extension Education Institute for North Eastern Region (EEI-NE) at AAU Jorhat kicked off a month-long skill development training programme on floriculture for rural youths.

### Miscellaneous

- The world’s tallest statue “The Statue of Unity” dedicated to Sardar Patel constructed in Narmada district of Gujarat is moving towards becoming one of the top tourist destination in the country with a daily visitor count of 30000.
- The demand of the armed forces for higher Military Service Pay (MSP) for over 1.2 lakh military personnel has been rejected by the government. The demand was to increase the monthly MSP from Rs 5500 to Rs 10000.
- The Hon’ble Supreme Court has approved the Central government’s draft Witness Protection Scheme and has asked all the states to implement it till parliament comes out with legislation. This scheme attempts at ensuring that witness receive appropriate and adequate protection. ‘This will go a long way in strengthening the criminal justice system in the country and will consequently enhance national security scenario’ the draft said.
- Three new PAN rules effective from today. Mentioning father’s name in PAN card applications not be mandatory for applications whose mother is a single parent and also the applicant will have to choose whether they wish to have their mother’s or father’s name on the PAN card.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development is formulating guidelines for children’s hostels, prescribing the minimum standards of care that should be provided to children. The draft guidelines will be notified under the Juvenile Justice Act.
- The Ministry of Tourism has formulated guidelines for approval of Online Travel Aggregators (OTAs). The guidelines shall be rolled out by the end of December this year.
- The Punjab Panchayat elections are scheduled to be held on 30 December and counting will take place on the same day. In total, 13,276 sarpanchs and 83831 panchs will be elected will be elected by about 12780000

voters.

- Frances Arnold and Gregory Winter winners of this year Noble Prize for chemistry said “Excessive concerns about genetically modified foods and other substances can inhibit mankind from developments in the field”.
- In a written reply in the Lok Sabha Mr. Mansukh L Mandaviya, Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways said that ‘The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) is constructing highway nests at toll plazas for a safe and comfortable journey of passengers’. The NHAI has directed construction and operation of these nests to be awarded to state government managed co-operatives.
- The Meghalaya High Court has directed Central Government to bring in a law to let people of religious and ethnic minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan get citizenship with-out any cut-off year or any other questions being asked.
- Mr. Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala said that the state government is planning to setup a Design Incubator to promote design based start-ups and creative talents. He also urged individuals and organisations to embrace at-least one sustainable lifestyle idea in rebuilding Kerala that generation to come will be proud of.
- The Railways have commissioned 41 projects at a cost of 700 crores for the Kumbh mela that will be held in Allahabad beginning January next year.
- Prominent writer Amitav Ghosh has been honoured with Jnanpith Award 2018.
- The Supreme Court dismissed all the petitions seeking a court monitored probe into the alleged irregularities in Rafale aircraft deal.
- The Government is speeding up the proposal to take Haj pilgrims by the sea route from next year. If the proposal is rolled out the travel expenses will be cut down by more than 50%.
- The Lok Sabha today passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill. The Bill prohibits discrimination against transgender person in areas such as healthcare, employment and education. It also directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes for them.
- New Chief Ministers have taken charge ; Mr. Ashok Gehlot – Rajasthan, Mr. Kamal Nath – Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Bhupesh Baghel – Chhattisgarh, Mr. K Chandra Sekhar Rao – Telangana and Mr. Zoramthanga - Mizoram
- Upholding the Supreme Court’s decision to impose restrictions on the usage of Aadhaar by private companies. The Union Cabinet has approved amendment to the Telegraphic Act and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to provide legal backing for seeding of biometric ID Aadhaar with mobile numbers and back accounts as an optional KYC.
- In a written reply to the Lok Sabha the government has said there is no proposal to extend the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to states other than Assam as of now.
- The National’s Women Party (NWP) launched in India.
- The Central Government has directed states to facilitate acceptance of driving license and other documents like vehicle registration certification in electronic format by enforcement agencies.
- The NITI Aayog released the baseline report of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) India index, which comprehensively documents the progress made by India’s States and Union Territories towards implementing the 2030 SDG targets. The SDG Index is developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Global Green Growth Institute and United Nations in India.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs has allowed 10 intelligence and investigating agencies and the Delhi police to

intercept, monitor and decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer. This decision has invited huge criticism from the opposition.

- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has changed the withdrawal norms of National Pension System (NPS) subscribers. Keeping in view the possibility of sudden financial needs of the subscribers, the requirement of minimum period under NPS for availing the facility of partial withdrawal from the mandatory Tier- I account of the subscriber has been reduced from 10 years to 3 years. The minimum gap of 5 years between two withdrawals has also been removed. The two changes are w.e.f 10th August 2017.
- Ministry of Power, Government of India has decided to make all meters smart prepaid in 3 years from 01st April, 2019. This move will help the customers as they need pay the whole month's bill in one go, instead they can pay as per their requirements. Manufacturing of these meters will also generate skilled employment for the youth.
- In a recent amendment to the Central Motor Vehicle (Eighteenth) Amendment Rules 2018, teenagers between 16 an 18 years will be able to obtain a licence for electric scooters with a maximum restricted speed of 70 km per hour. This is being promoted as part of India's aim to become an all-electric nation by 2030.
- India observed National Consumers Day. This year the theme is "Timely Disposal of Consumer Complaints".
- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has inaugurated the Bogibeel Bridge in Assam. The bridge which is 4.9 km in length spread over river Brahmaputra connects Dibrugarh and Dhemaji districts in Assam. It is the country's longest rail cum road bridge and it is said that train journey between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh gets reduced from 500 km to 100 km and Dibrugarh is accessible to the rest of the country without travelling to Guwahati.
- The Lok Sabha today passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, also known as Triple Talaq Bill. 245 members voted in favour of the Bill and 11 voted against the Bill. The Bill seeks to make the practice a punishable offence with imprisonment of up to three years. The Bill will replace the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance 2018.
- The Union Government has declared the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) a banned organisation.
- The NITI Aayog has released the Second Delta ranking for the Aspirational Districts. It measures the incremental progress made by the districts between June 1, 2018 to October 31, 2018 across six developmental areas of Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion, Skill Development and Basic Infrastructure. The most improved districts are Virudhunagar – Tamilnadu, Nuapada – Odisha, Siddarthnagar – Uttar Pradesh, Aurangabad – Bihar, Koraput – Odisha.
- Ministry of Railways has taken one more considerable step keeping in view the comfort and convenience of passengers. The combined reservation quota of lower berths in various general and Mail/Express trains has been increased for senior citizens and female passengers.
- The Cabinet has approved amendments to the POSCO Act to make punishment more stringent for committing sexual crime against children.
- As per the CSR Reporting Survey 2018, the top 100 listed companies of India spent over Rs. 7536.2 crore in 2017 -18 under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Fund. It is observed that most of the expenditure incurred was in the states which are already doing well in terms of social indicators.
- Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for a medical college in Ghazipur of Uttar Pradesh. He launched SAMPANN – the System for Authority and Management Pension, it will greatly facilitate pensioners of the telecom department and help in timely disbursement of pension. At Varanasi, he dedicated the campus

of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) to the nation.

- In order to rescue 15 miners trapped in a flooded rat-hole coal mine in Meghalaya since 13th December, a group of Indian Navy divers have joined the NDRF personnel to rescue them.
- The Government has appointed Mr. Sudhir Bhargava as the new Chief Information Commissioner (CIC). Along with him President has approved appointment of four new Information Commissioners in the Central Information Commission.
- Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs in a statement said that the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) loan subsidy for middle income group has been extended till March 2020.
- The price of non-subsidised cooking gas has been lowered by Rs 120.50 per 14.2 kg cylinder from 01 January 2019. This drop in price is a result of fall in the price of LPG in the international market and the strengthening of the US dollar – rupee exchange rate. The price of subsidised LPG cylinder has been cut by Rs 5.91.
- In The Rajya Sabha, the government has rejected the opposition's demand to send the contentious Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2018 to a joint select committee for further scrutiny.
- Prime Minister of Bangladesh Ms. Sheik Hasina alliance has won the just concluded Bangladesh election with a thumping majority. This will be her third straight term as Prime Minister. ❖

## Updates from Weeklies

### Livelihoods/Employment/Enterprises/Economy/Tribal and other issues

- ◇ **Work space safety matters** – Gender parity alone can boost the GDP by 27% according to an estimate by International Monetary Fund. On the contrary, India is one among the countries with least female labour force participation, standing at 27%. Though, the status in 2018 seems progressive when compared to 2005 with number of working age women currently at 470 Million. The expanding economy impedes the need for inclusive growth. Provision of infrastructure facilities, prompt grievance redressal mechanism for sexual harassment is considered essential instruments to impart gender balance. Survey shows that 31% of the stay-at-home women show their willingness to work in a job if given an opportunity. [For further reading: <https://thewire.in/women/to-reverse-decline-of-women-in-labour-force-india-must-make-its-working-spaces-safe>]
- ◇ **Status of NRDWP** – In the scenario where 163 Million Indians has no access to safe drinking water; National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP), one of the flagship programmes led by Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation, aimed at provisioning 35% of rural households, with water connections & 40 liters about two buckets of water per person per day as the first phase. On the status of the progress Government's auditor report for August 2018 identifies that the programme under-performed in relativity to the set targets, despite of spending 90% for the stipulated works. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/national-rural-drinking-water-programme-failed-to-achieve-targets-government-auditor-heres-why/>]
- ◇ **MP: Highest Average Agriculture Growth** – Madhya Pradesh with 72% of its population residing in rural areas and 55% practicing agriculture of the 72.6 Million population record the highest average agriculture GDP growth (10.9% per annum) for 2007-2015. MP also replaced Punjab to become the Food Bowl of the country. However the report highlights that, this is by far not reflected in the incomes of the farmers leading to mass unrest. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/indias-best-agriculture-growth-over-8-years-but-madhya-pradesh-is-still-bimaru/>]
- ◇ **Classification of Manual Scavenging** – Understanding the sanitation ecosystem of India as such and manual scavenging in specific. The protection of Manual scavengers act was institutionalized from 1993 as Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act which proceeded, until 2013 when Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation act preceded. However, the definition of a Manual scavenger is under question for its narrow applicability despite of huge numbers not being included for the various categorized works performed. A study called Sanitation Workers Projected estimates that nearly 5 Million people are engaged in sanitation works across India, essentially can be aggregated under 9 categories for better reachout of programmes. [For further reading: <https://thewire.in/labour/manual-scavenging-sanitation-workers>]
- ◇ **Death Is Getting Cheaper** – Adding to the number 3 more youth chose to die, from Alwar Rajasthan giving up, to the race to Civils. They felt lost their self-worth. With the increase in enrolment for higher education the skill acquisition factor is reducing which make youth less employable. This is the effect of the government drawing fake pictures for formal employment and gimmicks like Job melas etc. Failing to speak the truth, gives rise in false hope leading to such incidents. [For further reading: [https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2018\\_53/47/ED\\_LIII\\_47\\_011218\\_Death%20Is%20Getting%20Cheaper\\_1.pdf](https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2018_53/47/ED_LIII_47_011218_Death%20Is%20Getting%20Cheaper_1.pdf)]
- ◇ **Beneficiaries of Loan Waivers** – National Sample Survey Office's 2013 situation assessment survey off-farm household, Government of India clearly show the 78.9% of more than 10 hectare of land holders has accessed to formal institutional loans where as low as 14.9% of the marginal farmers having less than 0.01 hectare of land has

accessed to institutional loans. This may be due to various reasons like lack of awareness etc; whereas marginal land holders claim the largest proportion of the land owners. Thus, loan waiver would not be as effective as claimed to the marginal land holders who face more critical issues like lack of market, lower MSPs etc. Rather intervention in the supply chain holds better potential to solve the situation. [For further reading: [https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2018\\_53/47/CM\\_LIII\\_011218\\_Nilanjan%20Banik.pdf](https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2018_53/47/CM_LIII_011218_Nilanjan%20Banik.pdf)]

◇ **Policy rate Revision & Reflection** – The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) hiked the policy rate by 25 basis points from 6.25% to 6.5% in August 2018 (RBI 2018a). Two such consecutive policy rate hikes have happened for the first time since 2013. The reverse repo rate, marginal standing facility rate and the bank rate have also been hiked along with the increase in policy rates. The MPC has justified the hike in repo rate by stating that an inflationary spiral had been on the anvil, and therefore, it was essential to contain the retail inflation rate within the desired range of 4±2%. Although the MPC deliberated on a handful of domestic and international factors likely to trigger inflation, in its press conference held immediately after the announcement of the repo rate hike on 1 August 2018, the committee, however, overemphasised the impending impact of the recently announced minimum support price (MSP) for kharif crops as the primary driver for the price spiral. This article examines the role of MSP in pushing up inflation in the economy. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/47/commentary/minimum-support-price-and-inflation.html>]

◇ **Agrarian Social Crisis:** People (mainly marginal farmers and farm labourer) representing 206 organisations across the country assembled at Ramlila ground, Delhi, under the aegis of the Kisan Mukti March and marched towards Parliament on November 30. With following demands:

- ◇ Minimum support prices for agricultural goods according to the Swaminathan Commission
- ◇ Waivers of loans
- ◇ Fair prices for their produce
- ◇ Other economic rights for a sustainable livelihood It was also supported by academics and activists. *The agrarian crisis has now moved beyond crops to become a social crisis* as per senior journalist P. Sainath. [For further reading... <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/up-front/story/20181217-a-harvest-of-discontent-1404595-2018-12-08> ]

◇ **After Math of Cyclone Gaja:** on 16th November 2018 cyclone Gaja severely hit Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Pudukkottai and Thanjavur districts and parts of Tiruchi, Dindigul, Karur, Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram districts of Tamil Nadu and Karaikal in the Union Territory of Puducherry. As per Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami the assessed damaged with 46 deaths, 56,942 huts, partially damaged 30,404 huts, and affected 30,326 tiled houses, 39,938 electric poles, 374 distribution transformers and 3,559 km of power lines. It had also destroyed 88,000 hectares of standing agricultural and horticultural crops, 231 cows, 20 bulls, 19 calves, 1,181 goats and sheep and 14,986 poultry birds, 4,844 damaged fishing boats, 86,702 uprooted electric poles, and 841 damaged transformers and 201 sub-stations. To which total of 2.51 lakh people were accommodated in 514 relief camps, he said, and announced an interim relief package of Rs.1,000 crore. However, the farmers and people affected by the cyclone showed their discontentment with the relief operations in which failure of power and road blockades played a major role. [For further reading... <https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/article25662555.ece?homepage=true>]

◇ **Maharashtra Drought:** Maharashtra facing acute water crisis. The state is going through drought in Kharif as well as Rabi. The intensely effected areas are Nashik– north Maharashtra and Marathwada region. Yet another probably manmade disaster, this time initiated by schemes and interventions planned to drought mitigation and eradication. The figures displayed has failed to showcase the cost. [For further reading... <https://www.epw.in/>]

[system/files/pdf/2018\\_53/48/ED\\_LIII\\_48\\_081218\\_2-Drought%20in%20Maharashtra.pdf \]](https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/shielding-witnesses/article25682716.ece)

◇ **Witness Protection:** A firm step taken to strengthen the criminal justice system by introducing a witness protection scheme. Hostile witness being the major reason for most acquittals, the scheme will provide security to the witness based on three level as per the threat assessment. It will be funded by budgetary support from State governments and donations. Though advanced identity protection may be an upcoming challenge. However, the passage of time will mark the success of the idea. [For further reading... <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/shielding-witnesses/article25682716.ece> ]

◇ **Rights on Waste** - One day managing without a waste picker coming home is unimaginable. Heading to their huge role & responsibility in our day to day lives, another dimension exists. A large number of informal workers involved in this job are vulnerable to accumulation and loose in this process, where dispossession is needful. In this regards, 'Right to Waste' is emerging as a successful policy outlook. The initiative by SWaCH the country's first self-owned cooperative of self-employed waste pickers and allied urban poor to sign an MOU with the Pune Municipal Corporation for collection of waste in several city wards with certain terms and conditions on equipments & gears, costs, welfare benefits and partial subsidies on segregated wastes, stands out. Can this be a solution for the many issues faced? [Reading...[https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2018\\_53/48/SA\\_LIII\\_48\\_081218\\_V%20Kalyan%20Shankar%2C%20Rohini%20Sahni.pdf](https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2018_53/48/SA_LIII_48_081218_V%20Kalyan%20Shankar%2C%20Rohini%20Sahni.pdf)]

◇ **Introspection on Global Nutrition Report** - On account of the Global Nutrition Report'18 being out, an introspection on where we stand helps in progress. India as a country though projects a steady improvement in terms of longevity, health and well being since independence, there is other side to it. The country stands third in the composition of stunted children (with low height for age) under age five with 46.6 Million. Based on the district-wise data, Central and Northern states stand higher percentages compared to South. Owing to its impact and prevalence, the strengthening of national framework for improvement of Nutrition not compromising emphasis on existing institutions, maternity dynamics, access and availability of quality packaged foods for children holds essential. [For further reading ...<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/stunted-wasted/article25665759.ece>]

◇ **Artificial Intelligence Era** – We are heading to lesser human interference and higher precision in terms of technology. World running to establish a supremacy in this emerging trend. Where in, India decided to join this race with its nascent National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS). Aiming to develop technology, applications, skills, entrepreneurship, and start-ups in the wider field of CPS, India is ready to invest Rs.3660 crores in 5 years racing with USA and China (China particularly 150 billion dollars by 2030). [For further reading: <https://www.dailyo.in/technology/why-india-must-invest-more-in-developing-artificial-intelligence/story/1/28406.html>]

◇ **Bhils of Jhabua** – Bhil adivasis and some other small tribes contribute to 85% population of Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh. Famous for their festivals and scenic beauty this district is facing agricultural downfall due to forest depletion, reduction in soil fertility, and barrenness of land caused by urbanisation and increasing population. This gave rise to labour migrations. With various efforts on Culture, Education, Capacity Building, Promoting Organic Farming, Stress on backyard poultry practice etc. Nilesh Desai stood strong in development of the people. Where 352 villages of Jhabua, 35000 Bhil families farm poultry chicken, earning on an average 1 lakh per year. [For further reading: <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/specials/2018/12/14/lighting-up-the-darkness.html>]

◇ **Electric Vehicles in India** – Transport contributes to around one fourth of the total global emissions. In India air pollution has resulted in 1.24million deaths in 2017 as per IndiaSpends report till 7th December 2018. This has risen the urge for electric vehicles, where India aims to ensure 15% electric retreating from earlier ambition of going all electric by 2030. To push the cause various initiatives on policy support, subsidies, schemes etc. were designed to

boast both manufacturing as well as sales. The infrastructural requirement for charging and batteries has remained a challenge. Major debates on financing aspects on subsidies along with developing infrastructure, domestic manufactures or imports, Battery swapping or fast charging infrastructures are going on. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/global-climate-summit-urges-electric-vehicles-india-after-ambitious-plans-beats-quiet-retreat/>]

◇ **Underutilization in project Clean Ganga** – U River Ganga stretching across 2500Km Coast line is exposed to heavy pollution, majorly due to the discharge of untreated and partially treated sewage entering it. As per a government estimate, only 1400 MLD which is just 48% of the total sewage discharge/day of 2900Million litres stands treated. In this line of affair building sewage treatment capacity & cleaning the Ganga was a mission ever since 1986, with the earlier governments having spent Rs. 4000Crore until 2014. In this respect, the BJP led NDA government has set a target for accomplishing the revival and rejuvenation of this life-line streaming through states namely, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand & West Bengal. This being the biggest campaign ever, has been allocated Rs. 20000Crore budget to attain the target by 2019, further extended to 2020. Until now only 25% of the total budget dedicated to this project has been spent. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/as-2020-deadline-to-clean-ganga-looms-less-than-quarter-of-budget-spent-sewage-projects-behind-schedule-water-quality-deteriorates-official-data/>]

◇ **Quality of air affects living** – A perception study on Air Quality conducted across 17 cities with 5000 respondents quantifies that 80% of the sample perceived that air pollution can affect one's quality of life while 32% identify its' effect on lifestyle. Delhites were ranked top in terms of having heard on air pollution followed by Chennai, Bangalore, Pune. In terms of seeking information it was noted that only 13% were curious about air quality in their city. On the other hand 12% never heeded to it. The study was commissioned by Clean Air Collective comprising 80 civil society organizations, citizen groups and experts working on the issue of air pollution. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/80-of-indians-pollled-in-17-cities-believe-air-pollution-affects-quality-of-life-new-study/>]

◇ **The Deflation Issue** – N In a scenario where, retail inflation stands at 2.33% claimed as 17 month low greatly due to the fall in food items. While the response from Urban India & RBI comes positive, the lives of distressed farmers do not reflect the same. With fluctuating farm prices, prone price risks, cartelized agricultural marketing system, sparse farmer producer companies the distress of the farmers is not being eased. In this regards, the loan waivers offered to farmers in competitive spree may not be the solution. Proper implementation of Minimum Support Price may rest a solution by far. [For further reading: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/negative-signals/article25746103.ece>]

◇ **India Not On Track To Reach 2025 Nutrition Targets Or Achieve Zero Hunger By 2030** - Increased food security and access has led to fewer malnourished and anaemic Indians in 2017 than in the preceding decade, but India needs to do much more to meet its nutrition goals, the 2018 Global Nutrition Report (GNR 2018) has shown. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/india-not-on-track-to-reach-2025-nutrition-targets-or-achieve-zero-hunger-by-2030/>]

◇ **Ecologically responsible Assam** – With the efforts Ranjit Barthakur and Prabir Banerjee of forest restoration called "Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark" in Balipara has led to a rolling series of outcome. The initiative have not only served the purpose of ecological upgradation but also brought the biggest socio-economic movement in Balipur. The ecological works has added to the aesthetics of the scenario and with all the conversed spices has drawn attention of the tourists including the researchers. This trend has formed new livelihoods opportunity in hospitality and other services. With this emerging market the area is benefited by knowledge dissemination from both ways

(traditional and modern) with better agricultural practises. Also, this has encouraged ecologically sustainable livelihood practises thus making the local community ecological responsible. [For further reading: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20181231-foot-soldiers-of-the-forest-boom-towns-1414384-2018-12-23>]

◇ **Identifying Potential** – *Bixa orellana* (lipstick tree) growing as a unwanted bush for decades in various parts of West Bengal with crimson red fruit when crushed produce a riot of sunset orange. Dr Anupam Paul found new potential to these trees for its colour. Thereby it is been cultivated in Purulia, Birbhum and Bardhaman. Whilst the block development officer of Purbasthali in Bardhaman has popularised the plantation under MNREGA. It is been used for colouring laddoos, boondis, biryani and meat curry. It also has great marketing potential in cosmetics as it is 100 per cent safe and the colour fulfills all the permissible limits certified for no objection under the Food Adulteration Act. [For further reading: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20181231-fortune-seed-boom-towns-1414407-2018-12-23>]

◇ **Bin and Win** – Handling Municipal Solid Waste resulting in landfills has remained a challenge. A report on the Sustainable Solid Waste Management in India, 2012, estimates that 31 per cent of MSW is inert waste while 60 percent is either bio-degradable or recyclable. The moto is the only the inert waste should reach the landfills. Alappuzha has proved to be a model for zero landfills, which was achieved waste generators responsible for segregation at source, composting and sending the rest for recycling. A similar social as well as technological strategy is been promoted by Ganesh ecosphere by setting up recycling plants. Also initiatives like E-collectors (vending machine) for garbage collection and app integrating informal recyclers are getting good response showing a promising future for fighting the cause. [For further reading: <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/specials/2018/12/20/bin-and-win.html>]

◇ **Can we afford C-Section?** – Lancet report, 2018 recorded that the Caesarean deliveries have doubled in India between 2006-2016. In reference to the increase in Global scenario, 18.6% is that in India. Otherwise prescribed during medical complication for safe delivery of child, it has its own share of side effects due to the kind of incisions made for easing the process. Telangana ranks first among the states with highest number of C-sections in 2017 with 58% of women undergoing it. Also private hospitals record higher number of C-sections performed per year. The cost involved for recovering from a C-section is heavy. A serious introspection on rising number of unnecessary C-sections is the need of the hour. [For further reading: <https://healthcheck.indiaspend.com/caesarean-deliveries-have-doubled-in-india-mostly-in-urban-private-hospitals/>]

◇ **Carbon Polluters of the World** – India stands the 14th most vulnerable country on the event of Climate Change. On the recent winding up of the 24th Conference of Parties session in Katowice with 196 countries and EU brainstorming, a consensus to sign the Katowice Climate Package came as an output. The scenario still seem bleak as a study identifies that inspite of all the nations abiding by their commitments with respect to the global emissions, the earth would still get warmer by 3 degree Celsius by 2100. In these times of criticality India and Canada, two of the most carbon polluters of the world are appraised as the countries working essentially towards meeting the global commitments. However, a study identifies that no matter what the effort wouldn't suffice to limit the global warming. Amidst farm crisis getting no better and the rising inequalities, can we afford a bit more? [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/india-among-top-10-carbon-polluters-to-show-progress-but-farm-crisis-will-worsen-with-earth-on-course-to-get-3c-warmer/>]

◇ **Gender Budgeting impacts well being** – Gender lens is a popular and evolving terminology in terms of perspective. A study identifies the states which undertook appropriate planning with respect to gender contributed better in minimizing the spousal marriage which positively affected the well being of women. In India there are 16 states that have incorporated gender budgeting, Odisha being the first having appreciated in 2004. Gender inclusion

and Gender targeted budgeting in purview of health, education, safety are the dimensions taken care of. A positive impact was observed in maternal health and women safety outcomes when compared between Non-genders budgeted and Gender budgeted states. [For further reading: <https://gendercheck.indiaspend.com/gender-focussed-budgets-can-reduce-spousal-violence-improve-womens-well-being/>] ❖