

International Current Affairs in December 2018

Romania celebrates 100th birthday

- Romanians turned out to celebrate 100 years since Romania became a modern-day state, amid concerns about rule of law and the state of democracy.

Former US President George H.W. Bush dead

- Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush, who helped steer America through the end of the Cold War, died at age 94.
- The war pilot and former CIA chief was a one-term President; he was denied a second term over a weak economy when he lost the 1992 election to upstart Democrat Bill Clinton.

U.S. proposes changes in H-1B application process

- The United States administration proposed major changes in the H-1B application process, including a new rule requiring companies to electronically register their petitions in advance, aimed at awarding this popular American work visa to the most skilled and highest paid foreign workers.

Qatar to leave OPEC from January 2019

- Qatar has announced its decision to leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) from January next year and focus more on the production of natural gas.
- Qatar is the world's largest exporter of LPG.

UNSC to meet on Iran missile launch issue

- The UN Security Council to meet on Iran missile launch issue. The world body is meeting at the request of France and Britain after they accused Iran of test-firing a medium-range missile at the weekend.

Earthquake in Pacific near New Caledonia

- A powerful undersea earthquake with a magnitude of 7.5 struck off the east coast of New Caledonia in the South Pacific.

US gives Russia 60 days to comply with nuclear treaty

- United States has warned Russia that it will withdraw from a major Cold War treaty limiting mid-range nuclear arms, if Moscow does not dismantle missiles within 60 days.

US re-establishes permanent diplomatic mission in Somalia

- The United States has reestablished a “permanent diplomatic presence” in Somalia for the first time in 27 years.

S.Korea, DPRK agree to verify withdrawal of guard posts

- South Korea and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) have agreed to verify the pilot withdrawal of guard posts in the inter-Korean border area.

US Congress passes bill to avoid government shutdown

- The US Senate and House of Representatives have passed legislation that would allow continuing funding the government for the next two weeks in order to avert a shutdown.

Trump agrees to reach trade deal with China

- Trump agreed to suspend plans to raise tariffs on 200 billion Dollars worth of Chinese products from 10 per cent to 25 per cent within the next 90 days.

UN launches new framework to combat terrorism

- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has launched a new framework to combat the scourge of international terrorism and coordinate efforts across the peace and security, humanitarian, human rights and sustainable development sectors.

President seeks martial law extension in southern Philippines

- President Rodrigo Duterte asked legislators to extend martial law across the southern Philippines until the end of next year in order to quell continuing violence in the restive region.

Japan government enacts new law to accept foreign workers

- Japanese government enacted a new law to bring more blue-collar foreign workers into the country to address chronic labour shortages.
- Under the new law, Japan plans to bring in 3 lakh 45 thousand foreign workers in construction, food services, nursing and other sectors for five years.

Women's representation in UAE's Federal National Council to be doubled

- A decree passed by the UAE President has directed the doubling of the current percentage of women's representation in the Federal National Council from 22.5 per cent to 50 per cent in the coming parliamentary term.

Nearly 85 percent of UN nations back migration deal

- Nearly 85 per cent of UN member states has agreed on a sweeping yet non-binding accord to ensure safe, orderly and humane migration.
- A total of 164 countries among the 193 UN members approved the agreement in a two-day migration conference in Marrakech, Morocco.

Increase in minimum wages and tax concessions in France

- French President Emmanuel Macron has promised an increase in minimum wages and tax concessions in response to weeks of violent protests.

Sweden to ban outdoor smoking

- Sweden is banning outdoor smoking in certain public places including playgrounds and train station platforms. According to the new law, the goal is to make the Scandinavian country smoke-free by 2025.

British PM wins vote of confidence in her leadership of Conservative party

- British Prime Minister Theresa May has won a vote of confidence in her leadership of the Conservative Party. She got the support of 200 MPs while 117 MPs voted against her.

Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns as Sri Lankan PM

- In Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned from the post of Prime minister.

Trump names budget director as acting chief of staff

- US President Donald Trump has named budget director Mick Mulvaney as the acting chief of staff.

Nigerian military lifts ban on UNICEF operations

- The Nigerian military has lifted a ban on UNICEF operations in the ravaged northeast.
- Earlier it had suspended the aid agency and accusing it of training spies supporting Boko Haram jihadists.
- The Nigerian army has accused UNICEF of 'aiding Boko Haram'

Germany to compensate hundreds who fled Nazis as children

- Germany has agreed to one-time payments for survivors, primarily Jews, who were evacuated from Nazi Germany as children, many of whom never saw their parents again.
- The New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany said the German government has agreed to payments of 2,800 US Dollars to those still alive from among the 10,000 people who fled on the Kinder transport.

Phasing out of Plastic shopping bags

- In New Zealand, regulations for mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic shopping bags will take effect from July 1, 2019. Retailers will no longer be able to sell or give away single-use plastic shopping bags from July next year.

Macedonian, Greek PMs get nominated for 2019 Nobel Peace Prize

- The Prime Ministers of Macedonia and Greece, Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras, have been nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. They have been nominated for signing the Prespa Agreement between the two countries.

EU to reduce new car emissions

- The European Union (EU) forged ahead with plans to slash carbon dioxide emissions from new cars and vans by 2030. The targets will require new cars sold in 2030 to emit 37.5 percent less carbon dioxide on average compared to 2021 levels. Emissions from new vans will have to be 31 percent lower.

France fines Uber 400000 euros

- France's data protection agency had fined the US ride-hailing group Uber 400,000 euros over a 2016 data breach that exposed the personal data of some 57 million clients and drivers worldwide.

US Senate approves legislation to fund government

- The US Senate has approved a legislation to temporarily fund the government in an effort to avoid partial shutdown over President Donald Trump's insistence on setting up border wall with Mexico.

UNGA adopts global framework on International migration

- The UN General Assembly has adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the first-ever negotiated global framework on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions.
- India voted in favour of the resolution while, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Poland, and US voted against it.

US starts withdrawing troops from Syria

- United States has started to withdraw its troops from Syria. United States has about 2,000 troops on the ground in Syria.

UN Security Council to vote on sending observers to Yemen

- The United Nations Security Council will vote to endorse the ceasefire agreed by the warring parties in Yemen's Hodeidah region and authorise an advance UN team to begin monitoring the deal.

US govt shutdown begins

- The US government began a Christmas shutdown early, after Congress adjourned without passing a federal spending bill or addressing President Donald Trump's demand for money to build a border wall.
- Trump has dug in on his demand for 5 billion dollars for construction of a wall on the US border with Mexico.

U.S. plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan

- President Donald Trump is planning to withdraw more than 5,000 of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Lankan parliament passes vote of account to meet govt expenditure

- Sri Lankan parliament passed the vote of account to meet government expenditure for the first four months of New Year.

Volcano-triggered tsunami in Indonesia

- A tsunami killed at least 280 people and injured hundreds on the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra following an underwater landslide believed caused by the erupting Anak Krakatau volcano.

- Anak Krakatau, roughly halfway between Java and Sumatra, has been spewing ash and lava for months. It erupted again just after 9 p.m. on December 22 and the tsunami struck about 30 minutes later, according to the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG).

Soviet-built nuclear reactor has been shut down after 45 years of service

- Russia's nuclear power company said that a Soviet-built nuclear reactor has been shut down after 45 years of service. Launched in 1973, the reactor became the first unit of the RBMK-1000 type to be built in the Soviet Union. A reactor of the same type exploded in Chernobyl in April 1986 in the world's worst nuclear accident.

Norway to build wind farm amid concerns about reindeer

- Norway has said it would build a wind park in an area used for reindeer grazing despite UN calls to suspend the project to study the impact on the indigenous herders' livelihoods. UN wanted the project suspended to study if it would disturb the animals

Iraq declares Christmas Day a public holiday

- Iraq has declared Christmas an official holiday across the country.

Thailand approves medical use of marijuana

- Thailand approved the licensed use of marijuana for medical use and research.
- The changes will legalize the production, import, export, possession and use of marijuana products for medical purposes.
- Thailand has become the first country in Southeast Asia to take such action.

UK ministers warn drone users of severe punishment

- Britain's security minister said that those who use drones either recklessly or for criminal purposes would face severe punishment.

North and South Korea to hold groundbreaking ceremony

- A South Korean delegation left for North Korea to attend a groundbreaking ceremony for reconnecting roads and railways across the divided peninsula despite stalled denuclearisation talks.

Russia expands economic sanctions on Ukraine

- Russia has expanded its economic sanctions on Ukraine, adding more than 250 people and businesses to a blacklist first announced at the start of November.

Japan decides to withdraw from IWC

- Japan has decided to withdraw from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and will resume commercial whaling July next year.
- The IWC, established in 1946 to conserve and manage the world's whale and cetacean population, introduced a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986.

Indonesia raises danger level for Anak Krakatoa volcano

- Indonesia raised the danger level for Anak Krakatoa volcano that triggered a tsunami killing nearly 430 people last weekend. The authorities have also widened a no-go zone around the volcano to five kilometres, up from a previous two kilometres.

Palestine to apply for full UN membership

- Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Malki declared that Palestine would apply for full state membership at the United Nations in January.
- To secure full state membership, the Palestinians need support from at least nine out of the UNSC's 15 member states.

4.8-magnitude earthquake hits Sicily

- A 4.8-magnitude earthquake has hit Sicily near Europe's most active volcano, Mount Etna, injuring at least 28 people. The epicentre was located north of Catania.

UAE resumes Damascus embassy in Syria

- United Arab Emirates has resumed its diplomatic service at Damascus in Syria after six years of suspension signaling a thaw in the relations between the two countries, as also with the Arab world.

India sends poll observers to Bangladesh

- India has sent observers to Bangladesh to witness the elections to be held. Three officials were designated from India to observe the elections in that country.

6.9 Magnitude earthquake strikes off Mindanao

- A 6.9-magnitude earthquake struck off the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre said, hazardous tsunami waves from this earthquake are possible along the coasts of Indonesia and the Philippines.

Storm Usman

- Storm Usman that resulted in heavy rain and triggered deadly landslides hit the Bicol region in Manila, Philippines.

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