

World News

WEF launches Global Centre for Cybersecurity

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) on 24 January 2018 launched the Global Centre for Cybersecurity to safeguard the world from hackers and growing data breaches.
- The centre will help bring all the stakeholders together in warding off cyber criminals.
- Headquartered in Geneva, the centre will become operational from March 2018.
- Initially, the centre will reach out key industry players and G-20 countries to make this platform a success for dialogue and real-time action on cyber threats.

In a first, scientists clone monkeys by process that made Dolly the sheep

- Scientists in China have created the first monkeys cloned by the same process that produced Dolly the sheep more than 20 years ago, a breakthrough that could boost medical research into human diseases.
- The two long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) named Hua Hua and Zhong Zhong were born at the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) Institute of Neuroscience in Shanghai, and are the fruits of years of research into a cloning technique called somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Brisbane to become world's 'first' digital currency airport

- BNE has partnered with local startup TravelbyBit to allow travellers to use cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, Dash and Ethereum to pay for goods and services at the airport's stores and F&B outlets.
- The airport says it is working with a number of terminal retailers to bring 'decentralised block chain enabled payments into its terminal shopping' to enable travelling customers to use TravelbyBit's cryptocurrency payment system.

Facebook bans cryptocurrency ads on its platforms

- Facebook has banned ads that promote initial coin offerings (ICOs), cryptocurrency like Bitcoin and binary options trading from its platforms, including Instagram, Audience Network and Messenger.
- The new policy prohibits ads that promote financial products and services that are frequently associated with misleading or deceptive promotional practices, Facebook said in a statement late in January, 2018.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos becomes richest man in history

- Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is now the world's richest man, not just at present, but of all time.
- Both Bloomberg and Forbes have put Bezos on top of their billionaire lists. Bloomberg said Bezos' net worth reached \$106 billion while Forbes put it at \$105 billion as of Wednesday, Xinhua news agency reported.
- The previous record was held by Microsoft founder Bill Gates with \$100 billion in 1999.
- The majority of Bezos' net worth comes from the 78.9 million shares of Amazon stock he owns. Shares of Amazon (AMZN) climbed nearly 57 per cent in 2017.
- The Seattle-based corporation managed to make up 89 per cent of online spending among major retailers in the five-week period beginning on Thanksgiving, according to an analysis of transaction data by Earnest Research in New York.

Iceland enforces historic law to ensure equal pay for men and women

- Iceland, on January 1, enforced a law ensuring that companies operating within the nordic country pay their male and female employees equally. The new rules make Iceland the first country in the world to introduce such a legislation, Al Jazeera reported.

- The bill was tabled in the Icelandic Parliament in April 2017. The new law will make it mandatory for private and public companies with 25 or more employees to prove that their salary structure is not biased by gender. Erring companies will be fined.

Saudi Arabia lifts 35-year cinema ban by screening *The Emoji Movie*

- Saudi Arabia has started screening feature-length movies from Saturday in a makeshift theatre. The first movie it chose to screen is animated *The Emoji Movie*—a film featuring various talking emoticons reported Reuters.
- This is the first time an officially sanctioned public screening of a movie took place after 35 years. Earlier, in December, on the initiative of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, the ban on film screening was lifted.

China launches new guided-missile frigate 'Wuhai'

- China has launched a new guided-missile frigate called 'Wuhai', which has stronger anti-submarine capabilities.
- Wuhai is the latest member of the Type 056 corvettes family. Following the retirement of China's older generation corvettes, Type 037 and Type 053, the Type 056 family has become the Chinese navy's main fleet for offshore defense.

China to fight pollution with world's largest air purifier

- China has constructed an experimental air purifying tower called the Xian smog tower, which is touted to be the 'world's biggest air purifier' with a height of over 100 meters, to combat smog and air pollution.
- The tower is undergoing tests by researchers of the Institute of Earth Environment at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It is reported to be having a positive effect on the air quality in the area.

UK appoints 'Minister for loneliness'

- The Prime Minister of United Kingdom, Theresa May on 17 January 2018 announced the appointment of Sports minister Tracey Crouch as the country's first 'Minister for loneliness'.
- The move has been made to tackle the isolation felt by more than one in ten people in the UK. In her additional role, Tracey Crouch would be required to develop a strategy to address loneliness in the nation.
- According to research, Britain has in fact, a serious problem with loneliness.

Britain announces world's first public register against money laundering

- Britain has announced the world's first public register that requires overseas companies that own or buy property in the country to provide details of their ultimate owners.
- The government is set to publish relevant draft laws and the register will go live by early 2021. Speaking on the development, British Business Secretary Greg Clark said that this register will build on their reputation for corporate transparency as well as help create a hostile environment for economic crimes like money laundering.

Japan launches New Earth Observation Satellite into Space

- Japan successfully launches an earth observation satellite with third generation Epsilon rocket from the Uchinoura Space Center, located in Kagoshima, Japan.
- It was also confirmed that after approximately 52 minutes into the flight, ASNARO-2 successfully separated from the rocket.

Google develops human-like text-to-speech Artificial Intelligence

- In a major step towards its "AI first" dream, Google has developed a text-to-speech artificial intelligence (AI) system that will confuse you with its human-like articulation.
- The tech giant's text-to-speech system called "Tacotron 2" delivers an AI-generated computer speech that almost matches with the voice of humans, technology news website Inc.com reported.

Saudi Arabia, UAE become first Gulf nations to introduce VAT

- Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) introduced the Value Added Tax (VAT) for the very first time on 1 January 2018. The move is a first for the Gulf region, which has long boasted of a tax-free system.
- VAT is a five per cent tax that will be levied on most goods and services to boost revenue. It will be applied on food, clothes, electronics and gasoline, phone, water and electricity bills, as well as hotel reservations. Some services that will be exempted from the tax include medical treatment, financial services and public transport.

No more aid to Pakistan: Trump

- Showing zero tolerance towards terrorism, the US President issued a tough warning to Pakistan and said that United States will no longer give any fund to Pakistan. The statement comes soon after the recent talks that the Trump administration was considering cutting off aid to Pakistan.
- In this changing scenario the US President Donald Trump slammed the Pakistan, saying that this South Asian country has given nothing but the lies and deceit to US. It has provided safe heaven to terrorists.

NASA to launch GOLD, ICON Missions to explore nearest space

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on 4 January 2018 announced to launch two missions to explore 60 miles (96 KM) of area above Earth's surface.
- The Global-scale Observations of the Limb and Disk (GOLD) mission will be launched aboard a commercial communications satellite in January 2018 itself, while the other mission Ionospheric Connection Explorer (ICON) will be launched later in 2018.

Volcano erupts for first time in Papua New Guinea

- A dormant volcano erupted for the very first time in a dramatic fashion, spewing lava and sending an ash cloud at around two kilometres above the sea level.
- The local media reported that the volcano, located on the Kadovar Island, situated in north-eastern Papua New Guinea, lay dormant until yesterday when it began to erupt at around noon. The volcano is still spewing lava, stripping large parts of land in the island.

SpaceX launches Secret Zuma Mission for US Government

- Private spaceflight company SpaceX on 7 January 2018 launched the secret Zuma Mission for the United States government. SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launched the secret Zuma spacecraft from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida.
- SpaceX' live webcast did not show video coverage of the Zuma spacecraft after it separated from the first stage of the rocket, but confirmed that the payload was well on its way to low-Earth orbit.
- Zuma mission remains a secret as its nature or purpose and the agency behind it remains a mystery.

World's largest Ice Festival at China's Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival

- The 34th Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival and the third China International Ice and Snow Tourism Summit officially opened in January, 2018 in Harbin, capital of northeast China's Heilongjiang Province.
- The festival mainly features ice and snow-themed scenic spots such as the world's largest ice and snow park and a snow sculpture art expo as well as diverse ice and snow sports and entertainments.

AirAsia, Uber partner for seamless, affordable travel

- Uber and AirAsia announced their partnership to help provide a seamless, affordable and convenient door-to-door experience for travelers, through joint marketing efforts and technological integration.
- The two companies will work together to help passengers get home or to work, or to the airport and back more seamlessly in the 52 cities in 16 markets across India, Asia Pacific and the US, where AirAsia operates and the Uber app is available.

Infosys signs agreement with US IRS for lower tax rate

- Global software major Infosys in January, 2018 said it has signed an agreement with the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) which will lead to an effective tax rate lower by about 100 basis points (bps) for future periods.
- According to the Bengaluru-based firm, the advanced pricing agreement (APA) -- the preliminary discussions on which were initiated with the IRS in 2015 -- is expected to result in the reversal of tax provisions of around \$225 million in the quarter ended December 31, 2017.

Danish wind energy sets new record in 2017

- Wind power accounted for a record high of 43.4 per cent of the total electricity consumption in Denmark in 2017, according to official data released in January, 2018.
- The new record surpasses the previous 2015 record of 42 per cent, keeping Denmark on track to reach its target of having 50 per cent of all electricity produced by wind power by 2020, figures from Danish Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate showed.
- In the coming years, higher records are expected as new offshore wind farms are developed in the Baltic sea and the North Sea to further increase the Danish wind production.

Ecuador grants WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange citizenship

- Ecuador in January, 2018 announced that it has granted citizenship to Julian Assange, the founder of the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks who has been holed up in the country's embassy in London for the past five and a half years, The Guardian reported. The country's Foreign Ministry said Assange was granted citizenship on December 12.
- Ecuador's Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa said at a press conference in Capital city Quito that the government was concerned about potential threats to Assange's life from unspecified nations, The Washington Post reported. She added that Ecuador was looking to resolve the impasse in a "dignified" way.

General Motors introduce a fully autonomous car with no steering or brake pedals

- There is no brake pedal, no accelerator pedal and even no steering wheel in this fully autonomous car recently unveiled by General Motors. The car is the fourth generation of GM's driverless cars that are being powered by its self-driving arm, Cruise.
- Now the automaker is seeking U.S. government's approval for this car to enter GM's first commercial ride-sharing fleet in 2019.

China launches two navigation satellites into space

- China successfully launched two BeiDou-3 satellites to provide navigation and positioning services to countries along the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) by the end of 2018.
- This is the first launch of the BeiDou satellites in 2018, which will see intensive launches in 2018.
- The March-3B carrier rocket took off from Xichang Satellite Launch Center in the south western province of Sichuan.

US Launches New Spy Satellite on Secret Mission

- The fleet of U.S. spy satellites has just welcomed a new member.
- The NROL-47 spacecraft soared into Earth orbit in January, 2018 (Jan. 12), riding atop a United Launch Alliance (ULA) Delta IV Medium rocket that lifted off from California's Vandenberg Air Force Base at 5:11 p.m. EST (2211 GMT, 2:11 p.m. local California time).