

Now, an app to report roadkill in wildlife habitats

Now, a mobile-based application, 'Roadkills', launched by the Wildlife Conservation Trust, will help citizens report such wildlife deaths by uploading geotagged photographs to a public forum.

- The data generated can be used to identify crucial road or rail stretches that urgently require mitigation measures.
- 'Roadkills', an easy-to-use android app, accesses location information from phones and permits users to upload photographs of a dead wild animal on a road or a railway line.
- With the resulting geotagged photographs, users can also include what taxon the animal belongs to (bird, mammal, reptile or amphibian), the species' name (if known) and the area where the roadkill was seen.

The information from all records reported from across India with this citizen science initiative will be compiled as a database, which can soon be viewed on a map on the campaign's website (www.roadkills.in).

- The Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), an NGO which developed the app, will also share detailed data free of cost and under a Creative Commons licence to students, wildlife researchers or infrastructure agencies who may need it to study patterns of wildlife deaths on roads and railway lines.

The information generated from the application can help identify crucial sections of roads or railway lines where animal deaths are high to pinpoint regions that require urgent mitigation measures.

- The data can also help determine what species are more at risk on specific road or rail stretches and plan the ideal mitigation measures suited for the location – from underpasses or overpasses for large mammals to canopy bridges for arboreal ones, such as monkeys.

The information from the campaign will help plan our infrastructure needs better and devise win-win solutions for wildlife to make our infrastructure development smart and green.

Take interim steps for tribunal postings: SC

The Supreme Court directed Attorney General K.K. Venugopal and amicus curiae Arvind Datar to discuss an interim arrangement for the committee appointing judicial members to key tribunals.

The apex court is considering the question whether the Central Tribunal, Appellate and other Authorities (Qualifications, Experience and other conditions of Service of Members) Rules of 2017 is a blow to the independence of the tribunals.

- The development came on several petitions, challenging the provisions of the 2017 Rules and the Finance Act, 2017, introducing the modifications in key tribunal appointments.

EC pulled up for backing simultaneous polls

The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice discussed electoral reforms and questioned the Election Commission about its recent statements endorsing simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, saying it does not have the mandate to decide the issue.

- Members questioned the recent statement by Central Election Commissioner-designate O.P. Rawat in favour of simultaneous elections. He had said the EC was ready to hold simultaneous elections post-September 2018.
- Members observed “How can the EC seek simultaneous elections? It is not for them to decide; the call has to be taken by Parliament and the Assemblies.

Less nationalism, more connectivity: ASEAN leader

Connectivity projects can grow in the region only if there is a “political atmosphere”, and “nationalist rhetoric” is reduced, Chutintorn Sam Gongsakdi, Thailand’s Ambassador to India, said in reference to the challenges of free trade negotiations, border trade logistics and the infrastructure in the northeastern States.

- Connectivity is important, but we are also at a point across the region when nationalism and populism are on the rise. To have connectivity work to its full potential, it is necessary to dial down the nationalistic rhetoric, Mr. Gongsakdi observed
- Building of roads, that just needs engineering and money. But the other part, convincing all the parties that there will be more costs is the difficult one. In the end, regional integration and liberalisation can be good for your country, and make the leadership more popular, but people need to have patience to see the long-term benefits, he said.

IMF raises global growth forecast, sees U.S. tax boost

The International Monetary Fund revised up its forecast for world economic growth in 2018 and 2019, saying sweeping U.S. tax cuts were likely to boost investment in the world’s largest economy and help its main trading partners.

- However, the IMF, in an update of its World Economic Outlook, also added that U.S. growth would likely start weakening after 2022 as temporary spending incentives brought about by the tax cuts began to expire.

- The tax cuts would likely widen the U.S. current account deficit, strengthen the U.S. dollar and affect international investment flows.
- economic gains from the tax cuts would be partially paid back later in the form of lower growth as temporary spending incentives, notably for investment, expired and as rising federal debt took a toll.

The tax package by the US govt, the largest such overhaul since the 1980s, slashed the corporate rate from 35% to 21% and temporarily reduced the tax burden for most individuals as well.

The IMF also revised up its growth forecasts for the euro area, especially for Germany, Italy and the Netherlands “reflecting the stronger momentum in domestic demand and higher external demand”.

- revised up its growth forecast for Japan to 1.2% this year and 0.9% in 2019. It maintained its projection for Britain’s growth at 1.5% this year.
- maintained its forecast for growth in emerging markets and developing countries for this year and next. China’s economy was expected to expand 6.6% this year and slow to 6.4% in 2019.
- It said growth in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan was also expected to pick up in 2018 and 2019 but remain subdued at 3.6% this year.
- revised down its growth estimate for South Africa to 0.9% for this year and next amid concerns over political uncertainty.
- In Latin America, it said growth would be weighed down by an economic collapse in Venezuela despite a pick-up in economic activity in Brazil and Mexico.

Pointing to growth in the United States and China, the IMF forecast global growth to accelerate to 3.9% for both 2018 and 2019, a 0.2 percentage point increase from its last update in October.

IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde pointed to a “troubling” increase in debt levels across many countries and warned policymakers against complacency, saying now was the time to address structural deficiencies in their economies.

Bad loans to rise to Rs 9.5 lakh cr. by March

India’s banking sector will be saddled with gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) worth a staggering Rs 9.5 lakh crore by March-end, rising from Rs 8 lakh crore a year earlier, according to a study by Assocham-Crisil .

- It said GNPAs would increase to “Rs 9.5 lakh crore as on March 31, 2018, i.e. about 10.5% of total advances, while stressed assets are expected to be at Rs 11.5 lakh crore.”

- The high level of stressed assets in the banking system, however, provide enormous opportunity for asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) which are important stakeholders in the NPA resolution process.
- At the same time, it said, the growth of ARCs was expected to come down significantly owing to capital constraints.

WGC mulls global gold kilobars standard

The World Gold Council (WGC) is studying the creation of a global standard for gold kilobars so they can be deployed as collateral in futures markets and potentially encourage demand.

- Kilobars —1 kg gold bars — dominate Asian trade but a lack of transparency about their origin and the absence of a global standard hinders their use on exchanges elsewhere.
- Clearing houses, some of which allow bullion to be used as collateral on futures markets, might accept such bars if they all met a set of internationally recognised criteria.

London Metal Exchange clearing arm LME Clear cannot accept the kilobars used in Asia because they differ from London Good Delivery standard bars, typically around 400 ounces, as specified by the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA).

- Independent of the WGC initiative, the LME has been looking at accepting kilobars as collateral for all its contracts which include copper, aluminium and zinc.

The plan is to create a standard for kilobars that can be adopted around the world, delivered anywhere, possibly using blockchain to identify the bars, their origins

- Rigid standards and blockchain would bring in people who are worried they could be getting conflict metal.

NIIF, DP World to invest \$3 bn

Dubai's DP World and the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), a fund-managing entity of the Government of India have set up an investment platform to invest in ports, terminals, transportation and logistics businesses in India.

- The platform,will invest up to \$3 billion to acquire assets and develop projects in the sector.
- It will also look at opportunities beyond sea ports such as river ports and transportation, freight corridors, port-led special economic zones, inland container terminals, and logistics infrastructure including cold storage.

This is NIIF's first investment and is a good example of how NIIF can work with international capital and expertise to invest at scale to build critical infrastructure in India,said Sujoy Bose, CEO, NIIF .