



# CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE (VOL-4)

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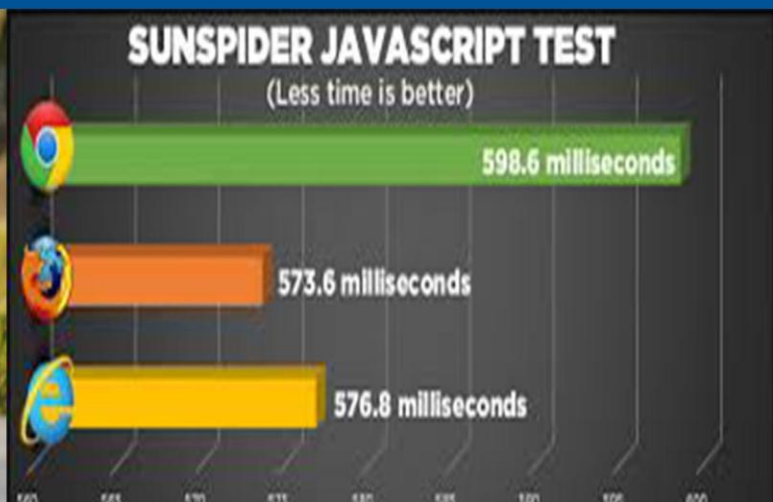
NATIONAL  
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INDIA & WORLD

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SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY  
SPORTS

FROM 1 MAY TO 31 MAY



## SUYOG EDUCATION





## **Fire in Uttarakhand still continuing after 10 days**

- As large parts of Uttarakhand's forests were engulfed by fire, three teams of the National Disaster Response Force were deployed for Kumaon and Garhwal regions and 6,000 forest staff struggled to contain the flames.
- The emergency in many districts is visible from several distant areas, as forests continue to burn, 10 days after the first fires were seen. Many areas are covered by smoke from burning forests.
- In response to the growing crisis, especially in Pauri, Nainital, Tehri and Dehradun districts, the government has deployed NDRF teams. Two IAF helicopters would join the operations in Kumaon and Garhwal on Sunday, he said.
- Mi-17 chopper of the IAF has been stationed near Bhimtal and it will spray water from the Bhimtal lake.
- Some 922 instances of fire have fanned across 2,000 hectares so far. Widespread fire could also be attributed to the presence of pine trees in 18 per cent of the forests.
- Since the British period there has been a monoculture of pine trees in many forests of Uttarakhand. Their leaves can catch fire easily.

## **Apex court ordered that only taxi's running with CNG should operate in Delhi**

- Applying the brakes on diesel-run cabs in Delhi, the Supreme Court ordered that only taxis running on compressed natural gas will be allowed from May 1.
- A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India T.S. Thakur said two extensions had been given to taxi operators to shift from diesel to CNG in the larger effort to curb air pollution.
- The Supreme Court on December 16, 2015 banned fresh registration of high-end cars with over 2000 CC engine capacity, continued with its October 2015 order to impose Environmental Compensation Cess (ECC) on commercial vehicles entering Delhi and ordered diesel taxis operating in NCR to shift to CNG.
- The omnibus order was based on a 1984 PIL filed by environmental activist and lawyer M.C. Mehta ringing the alarm bells on the untrammelled air pollution in Delhi.
- The court had originally given taxis time till March 1, 2016 to effect the change-over. When this did not work, the apex court stretched the deadline to March 31. Finally, a last opportunity was given till April 30.
- As cab operators protested that the order would be a roadblock and violate their right to earn a livelihood, the Supreme Court remained firm, saying they have no choice but to comply in the larger public interest and convert to CNG.
- 60,000 taxis are registered in Delhi and of them 21,000 run on diesel. About 40 lakh vehicles ply on Delhi's roads daily, including 10 to 12 lakh floating vehicles.
- A significant majority of these are goods carriers and cabs registered in Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon, Faridabad and other parts NCR.

## **Labour Minister says govt will look to increase min wages**

- Union Labour Minister has criticised trade unions for being politically motivated and said they are unable to accept the speed at which economic reforms are being undertaken by the Centre.

- The Minister said that the government was striving to raise minimum wages as well as the minimum monthly pension for EPF members.
- Union Labour and Employment Minister slammed trade unions for being politically motivated and said they are unable to make peace with the speed at which economic reforms were being undertaken by the government.
- At present, 8.33 per cent of a worker's salary up to Rs 15,000 a month, is remitted to the Employees' Pension Scheme of 1995.
- The UPA had offered a minimum pension of Rs.1,000 under the scheme in its last year in office, but hadn't provided funds for subsequent years. The government fixed that in September 2014.
- The Minister said the Labour Ministry is working on a formula to increase the minimum wages of all workers keeping in mind the consumer price index, variation of dearness allowance and guidelines given by the Supreme Court.
- The government has proposed Industrial Relations Bill tightening the norms to form trade unions.
- It has proposed that no outsiders be allowed to become officer bearer of a trade union in the organised sector and only two outsiders can be allowed in the unorganised sector.

## **Simhashta Kumbh Mela under way in Ujjain**

- The Simhashta Kumbh Mela under way in Ujjain will see not just the ritually sanctioned days of baths in River Shipra, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also scheduled to attend the unveiling of the "Simhashta Declaration" on May 14.
- BJP president Amit Shah, along with members of all 47 Scheduled Castes in Madhya Pradesh, will take a dip in the Shipra on May 11, the day of the 'shahi snan'. The event has been termed "social harmony bath"
- The Simhashta declaration will be a prescription on how "a duty-centred system, which had been the origin of Indian philosophy of life, has become the most relevant today.
- It will be the essence of a long exercise of seminars on religion, spirituality and its relationship with science, climate change and deep ecology to finally expound on how this can be leveraged for social and environmental challenges.
- Kumbh Melas in ancient India were not just about baths and holy days, but also the tradition of shastrarth or debate and discussions by socially influential people and dharma gurus on what is going on in society and how to deal with it.
- Religious and social leaders of all faiths and areas, including Judaism, practitioners of the Barelvi sect in Islam, Methodists, and members of the Russian Orthodox Church, had been part of this year-long exercise.
- Some of it was happening in Indore [near Ujjain] at the height of the debate on intolerance that was sweeping the rest of the country.

## **Government increased its efforts to douse forest fires**

- As Uttarakhand continued to fight the inferno across 2,269 hectares of forests, two IAF helicopters joined the operations, ferrying water through the Garhwal and the Kumaon hills and dumping it in areas inaccessible to forest personnel.
- Villages in many districts kept awake at night to try and protect their houses and cattle from the creeping blaze.
- Wild animals, including snakes, leopards, monkeys and barking deer, moved closer to human habitations, as they were pushed out of the forests by fire and smoke.

- Hoping to cut off the spread of fire, the IAF helicopters stationed near Nainital and Srinagar drew water from the Bhimtal lake and a river in Srinagar using 3,500-litre 'Bambi Buckets'. However, smoke and fog delayed the air operation.
- A third Mi-17 helicopter will reach Nainital on Monday. Two will function in areas near Nainital and one near Srinagar.
- The Forest Department's data show that till Sunday 1,082 incidents of forest fire had covered 2,269 hectares, and preliminary losses were put at Rs. 22 lakh.
- However, the blaze showed a declining trend. On April 27, there were 140 incidents, rising to 338 on April 28 and 477 on April 29.
- But on Apr 30, they were down to 219 and on May 1st, to 112. Home Minister Rajnath Singh reviewed the situation and held discussions with the Chief Secretary.
- Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said the Centre was taking the forest fires very seriously. The government would study the causes and prepare an action plan.

## **National consultation on drought shows various challenges**

- Over 54 crore farmers and rural populations across 13 States are in the grip of drought, and it is a multi-dimensional crisis. This fact was highlighted at a national consultation on drought here on Sunday.
- Owing to the drought, people were battling for drinking water, food had become scarce, domestic cattle were dying a nomadic death and farms had turned fallow.
- Good rains may end the water crisis, yet food shortage will continue until the new crop comes in; the government needs to ensure food security..
- Farmers in a dozen States struggling with severe drought conditions and experts participated in the consultation, which was organised by Swaraj Abhiyan and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).
- CSE director-general Sunita Narain said: "Drought in the 1990s was essentially the drought of a poor India. The 2016 drought is of richer and more water-guzzling India.
- This classless drought makes for a crisis that is more severe and calls for solutions that are more complex.
- The severity and intensity of drought is not about lack of rainfall; it is about the lack of planning and foresight, and criminal neglect. Drought is human-made.

## **PM launched Ujjwala scheme from Ballia**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which aims to provide five crore LPG connections to women in Below Poverty Line (BPL) households over the next three financial years, at a cost of Rs. 8,000 crore.
- The scheme, launched at Ballia in Uttar Pradesh, is to be partially funded from the savings accruing to the government from LPG users who gave up their subsidy as part of the Give It Up programme.
- Over one crore consumers have given up their subsidy, leading to savings of nearly Rs. 2,000 crore per year. This money would be utilised to provide LPG connections to BPL families.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had, in his Budget speech in February, announced a provision of Rs. 2,000 crore this financial year to provide LPG connections to 1.5 crore women from BPL households.
- The new users who receive LPG connections under the scheme will not have to pay the security deposit, while the Rs. 1,600 administrative costs, cost of pressure regulator booklet and safety hose will be borne by the government.
- Consumers will have the option to purchase gas stove and refills on EMI.
- The Prime Minister said nearly 10,000 new distributorships and infrastructure expansion plans were in the works to cater to the increased demand arising out of the new connections.

- The households will be selected using the socio-economic and caste census data.
- Currently, India has 16.64 crore active LPG consumers with a requirement of about 21 million tonnes per annum.
- Stating that LPG coverage is being increased, he said there are serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuels.
- According to World Health Organisation estimates, about 5 lakh deaths occur in India alone due to unclean cooking fuels. Experts say having an open fire in the kitchen is like burning 400 cigarettes an hour.
- Providing LPG connections to BPL households will ensure universal coverage of cooking gas in the country and this will empower women and protect their health, he said.
- India's demand for LPG is expected to see a double-digit growth over the coming years, the government said in a release. Towards this, several steps have been taken to increase infrastructure in order to meet the demand.
- Indian Oil is developing new import facilities at Dahej [by 2018-19], Paradip and Cochin [by 2017-18], Bharat Petroleum is developing its import facility at Haldia, apart from which East India Petroleum Private Limited [EIPL] capacity augmentation is also getting completed by December 2016.
- Apart from those who voluntarily gave up their LPG connections, those earning Rs. 10 lakh or more a year have been deemed ineligible for the subsidy.
- The recently-released income tax data shows that there were 13.3 lakh individuals who declared an income above Rs. 10 lakh a year in assessment year 2012-13.
- Using that number, back-of-the-envelope calculations show removing the LPG subsidy from these people would save the government Rs. 173 crore a year.

## **Rainwater may play an important role in earthquake triggering process**

- Rainwater may play an important role in the process that triggers earthquakes, says a new study.
- Researchers identified the sources and fluxes of the geothermal fluids and mineral veins from the Southern Alps of New Zealand where the Pacific and Australian Plates collide along the Alpine Fault.
- Chemical analyses showed that fluids from the mantle, the layer below Earth's crust, and fluids derived from rainwater, are channelled up the Alpine Fault.
- By calculating how much fluid is flowing through the fault zone at depth, the researchers showed for the first time that enough rainwater is present to promote earthquake rupture on this major plate boundary fault.
- Deep groundwaters may be important for the initiation of earthquakes as these fluids can weaken the fault zones by increasing pressures.

## **NamamiGange gets Rs 3000 crore**

- The Expenditure Finance Committee approved projects worth nearly Rs. 3,000 crore for the government's flagship programme, NamamiGange.
- This is the biggest-ever approval for projects meant to clean up the Ganga — till now a total of Rs. 4,000 crore has been spent on cleaning the river through many governments since 1985.
- A decision has been taken to fast-track the integrated Ganga conservation programme, a year after the Union Cabinet approved it in May 2015.

- Mr. Modi, who launched environment friendly e-boats at the Assi Ghat of the Ganga in Varanasi, is expected to review the progress after the end of the current session of Parliament.
- A meeting of the general body of the National Mission for Clean Ganga has also been called. This will be the first meeting of the body since it was set up in 2010. The post of its Mission Director that had been lying vacant for months was filled last week.
- Rajat Bhargava, a Joint Secretary in the Water Resources Ministry, has been appointed the new Mission Director.

## **IUCN report says western ghats threatened by industrial activities**

- Many natural and mixed World Heritage Sites, including the Western Ghats, are threatened by harmful industrial activities such as mining, says a report.
- The harmful industrial activities include oil and gas exploration and extraction, mining, illegal logging and large-scale constructions, according to the report, 'Protecting people through nature'.
- This is prepared by the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Three of the seven such Indian sites — Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, Sundarbans, and the serial sites of Western Ghats — have been listed as being under threat.
- The report highlights that the Western Ghats support "the single largest population of endangered Asian elephants and vulnerable Indian bison."
- The report concludes that "nearly half of all natural World Heritage Sites, including the Grand Canyon and the Great Barrier Reef, are threatened by industrial activities."
- On Western Ghats, the report says the sites are facing "extractive threats" in the form of "oil and gas concessions" and "mines and mining concessions."
- The Manas Wildlife Sanctuary faces unsustainable water use whereas Sundarbans has issues related to water management.
- The survey estimates that 11 million people directly depend on the World Heritage Sites for food, water, shelter, and medicine.
- The harmful industrial development poses a threat to these 'ecosystem services and the communities that depend on them.

## **SC formed three-member committee to oversee functioning of MCI**

- Supreme Court Endorsed a Parliamentary Standing Committee report of March 2016 that medical education and profession in the country is at its "lowest ebb" and suffering from "total system failure" due to corruption and decay.
- The Supreme Court used its powers under the Constitution to set up a three-member committee, headed by former Chief Justice of India R.M. Lodha, to oversee the functioning of the Medical Council of India (MCI) for at least a year.
- A Constitution Bench said that SC was constrained to exercise its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution as the government had not acted on the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare.
- The judgment referred to the parliamentary panel report, which described the MCI as an "ossified and opaque body" unable to cope with the "humongous" task of managing medical education in over 400 colleges across the country.
- "Quality of medical education is at its lowest ebb, the right type of health professionals were not able to meet the basic health needs of the country.
- Products coming out of medical colleges are ill-prepared to serve in poor resource settings like Primary Health Centres.

- Graduates lacked competence in performing basic health care tasks. Unethical practices continued to grow.

## **After criticism Mallya resigned from Upper house**

- Industrialist and independent Rajya Sabha member Vijay Mallya has resigned his membership of the Upper House.
- The Ethics Committee of the House seemed set to recommend his expulsion.
- In his resignation letter, he is believed to have said he did not want his reputation further sullied.
- Mr. Mallya left India early in March apparently for the U.K. after having “defaulted” on more than Rs. 9,000 crore of bank loans.
- Last week, the Centre sought his deportation from the U.K.

## **Apex court asks Centre to look for the possibility of floor test**

- The Supreme Court said that a “floor test is the ultimate test” to decide who is in power, and asked the Centre to consider having a trust vote in the Uttarakhand Assembly to determine whether the Congress government has a majority.
- The court said it would temporarily suspend President’s Rule to facilitate the floor test. Attorney general agreed to return on 4th with the government’s response.
- It had expressed its displeasure to both parties — the Centre and Mr. Rawat — for trading allegations on horse trading and the airing of a sting operation featuring the former Chief Minister allegedly discussing pay-offs.
- “Both horse trading and airing of sting operation create a dent in democracy. That is why we said that a floor test is the ultimate test,” Justice Misra had observed.
- But court’s proposal was shot down by Mr. Rohatgi in the last hearing. The A-G instead asked the court to first decide the validity of the proclamation (of President’s Rule) before a floor test was held.
- In fact, the Centre, which won a stay in the apex court against a High Court decision on April 21 to lift President’s Rule, had argued that what happened in the legislature on March 18 when the Money Bill was tabled was itself a floor test.

## **Union government approved assistance of 35000 crore for M.H. irrigation sector**

- The central government has approved a special assistance of Rs 35,000 crore to help Maharashtra tide over the mess in its irrigation sector, an area where successive governments have performed poorly.
- The funds will be diverted over three years towards completion of 199 ongoing projects in the drought-affected areas of Marathwada and Vidarbha.
- This will aim to double the state’s irrigated area to 126 lakh hectares from the existing 48 lakh ha.
- Of the shortlisted 132 projects in drought-prone talukas, 98 are from Vidarbha and 34 are from the districts of Marathwada with each getting an assurance of Rs 4,098 crore and Rs 3,090 cr respectively.
- Another 67 projects are the drought prone area projects (DPAP) in the districts. Aid was sought for completing the long-pending Ghosikhurd irrigation project and the Tapi recharge irrigation project.

- The Centre has announced setting up of a committee to look into the speedy approvals for the Ghosikhurd project.

## **NGT issued show-cause notices to both Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh**

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued show-cause notices to Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh voicing concern over the raging forest fires and sought details of plans to deal with the situation.
- A Bench of the green court headed by chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar asked the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) what it has done to control the situation.
- Responding to the query, the counsel for the Ministry said that a team of officials was working on the issue and choppers of Indian Air Force have been deployed in the firefighting operations.
- It, however, asked the advocates for the States to take instructions on this issue.
- The observations came while the NGT was hearing arguments on a petition filed by an NGO against alleged “unregulated” operation of rafting camps in Rishikesh and other areas on the banks of the Ganga.
- In other case NGT has ordered the Telangana Government to maintain status quo on its Rs 21,000-crore Strategic Road Development Project (SRDP) till the case comes up for hearing.
- The case was taken suomotu by the South Zonal Bench of the NGT, Chennai, based on newspaper reports that hundreds of trees would be cut to make way for the project.

## **Parliamentary standing committee on defence wants DRDO change itself**

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence has called on the Defence Research and Development Organisation to reorient itself with a technology road map, focussing its energy on developing certain key technologies.
- Low-end technologies should be assigned to private sector, it has said.
- The Committee, while appreciating the work done by DRDO, nevertheless, also feels concerned to note that even after 58 years, there is no clear-cut technological road map prepared.
- It has called for scientific, technical and concurrent audit of all ongoing DRDO projects by an independent agency, expressing its dismay over the closure of several projects at the initial stage itself.
- The committee criticised the DRDO for the delay in major projects.

## **SC refused to reduce the size of pictorial warnings on cigarette**

- The Supreme Court has refused to shrink the size of pictorial health warnings on cigarette and tobacco packets.
- SC asked manufacturers to abide by a Health Ministry notification on increasing the size of the warning messages to 85 per cent from the present 20 per cent of the principal display area on packets.
- A Bench of Justices said manufacturers should endeavour to comply with the ministry notification issued under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2008 (COTPA) until the Karnataka High Court takes a final decision on the challenges against certain amendments in the law.



- The Karnataka High Court, to which petitions from various high courts on the issue were transferred, had refused to stay the operation of the rules.
- During the hearing, the court observed that in public interest, tobacco companies should act responsibly and said the awareness created on the issue would help curb the ill-effects of tobacco usage.

## **Grading of higher educational institutions in the country is set to be tweaked**

- The official grading of higher educational institutions in the country is set to get a lot sharper, with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) tweaking its grading system.
- This is to ensure that top institutions do not share the same grade as ones that are 'below' them in quality.
- Instead of a four-point system, where an institutional CGPA of 3.01 to 4 out of 4 (A grade) means "very good", it will shift to a seven-point grading system in which 3.76 out of 4 will be A++, 3.51 to 3.75 will be A+ and 3.01 to 3.50 will be A.
- The NAAC is an autonomous organisation under the University Grants Commission that assesses quality of higher educational institutions in the country and offers them accreditation.
- The A grade — technically the highest one till now — is enjoyed by a number of institutions that are not perceived to have the same quality.
- Very few institutions will make it to the A++ bracket as per the new system Govt is implementing. This will distinguish the quality of the institutions in a much sharper way.
- The move has another thought, too, behind it. Universities coming anywhere in the top grade of A tend to become complacent, thinking there is no improvement to be made.
- The new system, however, would ensure that most institutions with a CGPA of above 3.01 feel motivated to strive for further improvement.
- As per the new system, grade B++ will fall between CGPA 2.76 and 3, B+ between 2.51 and 2.75, B between 2.01 and 2.5 and C between 1.51 and 2.
- Grade D, meaning a CGPA below 1.5, will mean "not accredited."

## **NGT quashed environmental clearances around Bellandur-Agara lakes**

- In what might be good news for those looking to protect the Bellandur-Agara wetlands, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) quashed the environmental clearances and sanctioned plans for the projects of Mantri around Bellandur-Agara lakes.
- It stayed further construction till the builders obtain fresh/amended clearances.
- The State Environmental Impact Assessment Agency (SEIAA) was directed to amend the environmental clearance of both projects and also monitor further construction.
- The Tribunal also directed that no further construction be allowed in a buffer zone of 75 metres around the lake and 50 metres from the edge of primary storm water drains. All existing structures in the zones have to be demolished.

## **NTPC asks BSES to pay 1300 crore dues by May 9**

- Delhi may be staring at a major blackout in the sweltering heat as the NTPC has threatened BSES discoms of snapping power supply if they fail to pay about Rs.1,300 crore dues by May 9.

- In separate notices issued to the two Reliance Infra-Backed Delhi discoms – BSES Rajdhani (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna (BYPL) – the NTPC has warned of curtailing power supply by up to 100 per cent from May 10 if they do not pay up.
- The two discoms, which supply power to 70 per cent households in the Capital, draw 2,027 MW (BRPL 1,349 MW and BYPL 678 MW) from the Centre's power generating major.
- The warning assumes significance as Delhi is reeling under a heat wave and power demand has surged to 5,149 MW. In case the discoms defy the notice, major power cuts are likely owing to a supply deficit.

## **Karnataka to build Asia's first Rice Technology Park**

- Karnataka government has decided to go ahead with the establishment of Asia's first Rice Technology Park at Gangavati and a Maize Technology Park at Ranebennur on the public-private participation model
- They will serve as a one-stop solution to all problems of rice and maize growers.
- These parks would pave the way for opening new avenues for rice and maize growers to add value to their produce and get better returns and also enhance quality of the produce.
- The establishment of the Rice Technology Park will convert Gangavati into a major agri business centre in the State and help rice growers in the region to end their dependence on mills in neighbouring States for processing paddy.
- Although the production of paddy has more than doubled in the recent years, the processing facility has not grown to match it. According to an estimate, more than 50 per cent of the paddy produced in the region is sent elsewhere for processing.
- As a value addition, the technology park would have facilities for rice flour, rice rava, rice bran oil, noodles, rice-based alcohol, animal and poultry feed and paddy husk used for power generation and brick-making.
- The proposed maize technology park would have mills for production of maize flour, maize flakes, poultry feed, dry maize, maize chips and popcorn to add value to the produce and enable farmers get better returns.

## **IMD predicts nearly double rainfall in Maharashtra this year**

- Maharashtra is on the verge of emerging from an extended drought and a devastated agricultural economy.
- The latest data from the weather bureau forecast average rainfall in Maharashtra this monsoon in the range of 106%, twice more than the 59% deficient monsoon recorded last year.
- This would result in a jump of nearly 80 lakh metric tonnes in agriculture production over the previous year.
- As per IMD data, the agriculture department is also planning to increase the total sowing area to 152.44 lakh hectare in 2016-2017 as opposed to 149.42 lakh hectare in 2015-2016.

## **Vice-Admiral Sunil Lanba has been appointed as next Chief of Naval Staff**

- Vice-Admiral Sunil Lanba, currently the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command has been appointed the next Chief of Naval Staff.

- Vice Admiral Lanba, 58, is a qualified specialist in navigation and direction course and will have a full three-year-term in office till May 31, 2019.
- In a service spanning nearly 38 years, Vice-Admiral Lanba has served in a variety of Command, operational and staff appointments.
- He has commanded four frontline warships — INS Kakinada (minesweeper), INS Himgiri (frigate) and destroyers INS Ranvijay and INS Mumbai .
- Vice Admiral Lanba is a recipient of the Param Vishist Seva Medal and the Athi Vishist Seva Medal for distinguished service of an exceptionally high order.

## **Cross-border treaties to confiscate overseas assets of wilful defaulters**

- Union government said it would enter into cross-border treaties to confiscate overseas assets of wilful defaulters and recover dues of banks even as the Lok Sabha approved a Bill that seeks to update related laws.
- This comes after the Congress indicated support, in principle, for the report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
- The Bill to overhaul India's century-old bankruptcy regulations is key to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda of improving the ease of doing business.

## **Supreme Court ordered floor test to end controversy over President's rule**

- The Supreme Court ordered a floor test in the Uttarakhand Assembly on May 10 for deposed Congress Chief Minister Harish Rawat to prove his numbers and "end the controversy over the proclamation of President's rule in the State."
- It held that the nine Congress MLAs disqualified by the Speaker would not be able to vote.
- "The learned Attorney-General said the Centre has no objection to a floor test," the Bench underscored, while ordering that President's rule, imposed on March 27, be lifted for the duration of the special session.
- However, the apex court clarified that there would be no "status quo ante" for Mr. Rawat.
- This means that Mr. Rawat would not be automatically restored as Chief Minister when President's rule is lifted for the duration of the test. He would have to first prove he had the numbers.
- In this the apex court has differed from the Uttarakhand High Court judgment of April 21, which had restored Mr. Rawat as Chief Minister even before the floor test initially scheduled on May 29.
- If he fails to prove his majority, the Governor can invite the leader of the majority group to form a new government.

## **PM to discuss drought situation with UP, Maharashtra and Karnataka CM's**

- Prime minister will meet Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka in Delhi to discuss the drought situation in their respective States.
- A package for the Bundelkhand region was being considered.

- Union Cabinet Secretary reviewed the drought and drinking water situation with Chief Secretaries and officials from the departments of drinking water, rural development, water resources and agriculture of 13 States.
- He directed all Ministries to release funds under various schemes as soon as the Finance Bill was cleared by Parliament. The Lok Sabha approved the Bill on 5th May.

## **Death penalty India report says 60 percent death row inmates are first time offenders**

- According to “Death Penalty India Report”, released on Friday, a total of 241 out of the 385 death row inmates in India were first-time offenders.
- For the study, 373 of all the 385 death-row inmates in India were interviewed from July 2013 to January 2015 by the Center of Death Penalty at National Law University, Delhi.
- The study found that around 60 percent of the prisoners did not complete secondary education and nearly 75 percent belonged to economically vulnerable sections.
- Education levels affect the extent to which the death row prisoners are able to understand details of the case filed against them; lack of which results in alienation from the system.
- While this finding does not imply direct discrimination, it reflects structural concerns which disempowered the marginalised.
- Pendency of legal proceedings greater than five years is considered a grave violation of speedy justice by the Supreme Court.
- While the median duration of trial for the death row prisoners was around four years, trials went beyond five years for 127 prisoners.
- Though lengthy trials happen to be a concern in general, it has more significance in the case of death penalty.
- The seriousness of charge forces the families to hire a private lawyer than rely on poor quality of free legal aid provided by the government.
- The report finds that while the high fee of private lawyers – opted by more than 60 per cent of the prisoners during trial and high court – deepens the economic vulnerability of the already poor families, it doesn’t ensure access to competent legal representation.
- This makes it difficult for an accused to “navigate through the various stages of the legal process without sufficient socio-economic and political resources.”
- The study found that median duration of trials and High Court proceedings in cases involving sexual offences is the lowest as compared to other cases. State-wise analysis also shows that trials were fastest in cases of sexual offence.
- According to researchers, it must be examined why the courts deliver faster decisions in cases of sexual offence when so is not the case for other offences.
- Access to legal representation is critical during interrogation and investigation phases.
- The study found that 185 of the 191 prisoners who shared information didn’t have a lawyer during interrogation. Most of them claimed they had experienced custodial violence and were tortured in police custody.
- Even at the time of being produced before a magistrate – where legal representation has been recognised as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court – 169 of 189 prisoners who shared information didn’t have a lawyer.

## **Prime minister meets Chief ministers of drought affected states**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka to discuss the drought situation in these States.
- The separate meetings with each Chief Minister — alongwith Central and State officials — are part of Mr. Modi's move to meet the Chief Ministers of the 11 drought-affected States.
- Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis sought additional Central assistance to deal with the situation, with as many as 28,000 villages being drought-affected.
- He added that the Centre had agreed to his request to submit a supplementary memorandum, as 11,000 villages have been affected by drought recently, apart from the ones hit by drought earlier.
- Days after refusing to accept a water train sent by the Centre for drought-hit Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav asked Mr. Modi for Central assistance.
- After the meeting, Mr. Yadav said there was water in the dams of Bundelkhand but arrangements had to be made for its distribution.
- Mr. Yadav told Mr. Modi that as against the Rs.7,543 crore sought by the State in 2015 to compensate for damage due to hailstorms, just Rs. 2,801 crore was received, and as against Rs. 2,057 crore sought for drought relief, only Rs. 934 crore was received.
- With Karnataka facing one of the worst droughts in the last 44 years, the State government has sought an additional Rs. 12,272.21-crore assistance from the Centre for drought-proofing measures.
- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah called on Prime Minister and submitted a detailed memorandum seeking Central aid in the form of increased assistance in existing schemes as well as special assistance for proposed drought mitigation measures.
- During 2015–16, the State declared 137 taluks in 27 districts as drought-affected during kharif and rabi cropping seasons.
- The water storage status in 13 major reservoirs as on May 4, 2016, was 152 tmcft, which constituted only 18 per cent of the total capacity.
- In a petition to Mr. Modi, the government said agricultural and horticultural crops in 29.96 lakh hectares of land have suffered more than 33 per cent damage, amounting to Rs. 15,635 crore.
- The State had submitted a memorandum to the Centre seeking Rs. 3,830 crore. But the Centre released Rs. 1,540 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

## **Child rights and You survey shows child marriage is declining but not at very fast pace**

- NGO Child Rights and You (CRY) said India has the highest number of child brides and the rate of child marriages has declined just by 11 per cent in the last 15 years in the country.
- CRY said recognising Mother's Day was a welcome step but raised concern about the young girls who were experiencing motherhood due to coercion, trafficking and in economic and social deprivation.
- Our country today has the highest rate of child marriage with globally the highest number of child brides.
- Over 50 per cent of them are in Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.
- The national strategy document on prevention of child marriage, compiled by the Women and Child Development Ministry in 2013, shows that in the last 15 years, the rate of child marriages in the country has declined just by 11 per cent.
- In Maharashtra, there were 2,12,993 married girls under 15 years of age, out of which 21 per cent have become mothers, Census figures cited by CRY showed.
- Child marriage gives rise to anaemic and weak and under-aged mothers who eventually end up giving birth to children who are malnourished.
- The NGO further said various socio-cultural, religious practices and beliefs were the reasons behind the social evil.



## **Scientists have detected atomic oxygen in the atmosphere of Mars**

- Scientists have detected atomic oxygen in the atmosphere of Mars for the first time since the last observation 40 years ago.
- These atoms were found in the upper layers of the Martian atmosphere known as the mesosphere.
- Atomic oxygen affects how other gases escape Mars and therefore has a significant impact on the planet's atmosphere.
- An instrument onboard the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA) detected only about half the amount of oxygen expected, which may be due to variations in the Martian atmosphere.
- Scientists will continue to use SOFIA to study these variations.
- To observe the far-infrared wavelengths needed to detect atomic oxygen, researchers must be above the majority of Earth's atmosphere and use highly sensitive instruments, in this case a spectrometer. SOFIA provides both capabilities.

### **:: International ::**

## **Worst flare-up of violence since 2014 war in Gaza**

- Israeli aircraft hit two Hamas targets in Gaza in response to rocket fire as the worst flare-up of violence since a 2014 war entered a fourth day.
- There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the rocket launch and most such fire since 2014 has been carried out by fringe Islamist groups but Israel holds Hamas responsible for all such attacks.
- It was the fourth day of the worst cross-border violence since the 50-day war between Israel and Hamas which left 2,251 Palestinians and 73 Israelis dead in 2014.
- Mortar fire by Palestinian militants and Israeli air strikes and shelling have raised concerns for the future of an informal truce that has held since the conflict ended.

## **Human rights lawyer of Pakistani descent became mayor of London**

- Newly elected London Mayor's opening words at his swearing-in ceremony – "Good Morning, I'm Sadiq Khan, and I'm the Mayor of London" – were drowned in claps and whistles by the audience at the Southwark Cathedral in London.
- The 44-year old human rights lawyer of Pakistani descent is not only the first Muslim head of London, but set a record by winning 1.1 million votes.
- Mr. Khan led an energetic campaign that was turned increasingly toxic by the personal attacks and slander levelled against him by his opponent, the billionaire Mr. Goldsmith, including the smear that he shared platforms with extremists in the past.
- Mr. Khan, a practising Muslim, is a liberal who received death threats from extremists for his support for the legalisation of gay marriage in 2013.

## **UN concerned with Sri Lanka handling with former LTTE functionaries**

- The United Nations has expressed concerns about the manner in which the Sri Lanka government has reportedly arrested former functionaries of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in recent weeks.
- The UN Special Rapporteur on torture said that the manner of “the arrests of rehabilitated persons alleged as happening recently... raise fears in the respective communities and only add to distrust about the motives for those re-arrests.”
- He was responding to questions on the reports of the Terrorist Investigation Department having arrested over 20 persons in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, including three former functionaries of the LTTE.
- The head of a rehabilitation centre informed him that 12,146 detainees “have been processed through the PTA [Prevention of Terrorism Act] to date”.
- However, the UN Rapporteur said he had not received figures on prosecutions, convictions and acquittals. He also called the authorities to release detainees if there was lack of sufficient evidence.

## **CJI again reiterate need to improve Judge-population ratio**

- Continuing to express the need to improve the judge-population ratio in the country, Chief Justice of India T. S. Thakur said access to justice was a fundamental right and the governments could not afford to deny the people their fundamental rights.
- CJI had an emotional outburst over the problem of ‘shortage of judges’ in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a conference last month.
- The CJI once again raised the issue while addressing a large gathering of legal luminaries on the occasion of centennial celebrations of circuit bench of High Court.
- Justice Thakur alleged saying around 170 proposals for appointment of High Court judges were currently pending with the government.
- This matter was brought to the notice of the Prime Minister recently with a request to make appointments quickly, Justice Thakur said. people could not be denied justice.
- Shortage of judges was one of the formidable challenges the judiciary was facing, the CJI said disclosing that out of some 900 sanctioned posts of judges in different High Courts, there were over 450 vacancies, which needed to be filled immediately.

## **Nihal Bitla, the country’s first progeria patient, is no more**

- Nihal Bitla, the country’s first progeria patient, is no more. The 15-year-old breathed his last following dehydration at his native Poosala village of Sultanabad mandal in Karimnagar district.
- Nihal and his parents Bitla Srinivas and Sridevi, who had migrated to Bhiwandi in Maharashtra a decade ago, came to their native village on April 18 to attend a marriage on April 23 and stayed back to spend some time with relatives.
- Due to the severe heat wave conditions prevailing in the region, he developed diarrhoea and was shifted to a private hospital here but died while undergoing treatment
- The youngster, who is the face of ‘progeria’ patient in India and one who inspired Amitabh Bachchan to essay a similar role in reel life, in the 2007 production ‘Paa’, was actually a big fan of Aamir Khan and loved him for ‘TaareZameen Par’.
- “Though my son is no more, I will continue my campaign to educate people about the proper treatment of people suffering from Progeria,” father said.

## **Introducing a noise net around airfields could save lives and money**

- Introducing a noise net around airfields that emit sound levels equivalent to those of a conversation in a busy restaurant could prevent collisions between birds and aircraft, saving lives and billions in damages, new research has found.
- Filling a controlled area with acoustic noise around an airfield, where the majority of collisions tend to take place, can reduce the number of birds in the area by 80 per cent, the findings showed.
- By playing a noise at the same pitch, we mask those sounds, making the area much riskier for the birds to occupy. The birds don't like it and leave the area around the airfields.
- The researchers set up speakers and amplifiers in three areas of an airfield in Virginia and observed bird abundance over eight weeks, the first four weeks without noise and the second four with the noise turned on.
- Results showed a large decrease in the number of birds in the 'sonic net' and areas just outside and found that it was particularly effective at deterring a number of species that were at high risk of bird strike such as starlings.

## **After completing visits to Gulf regions, PM to begin outreach to Africa**

- After completing visits to the energy rich Gulf region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to begin a new round of energy diplomacy and diaspora-outreach in Africa, with visits to Mozambique and South Africa this summer.
- The expected visit to Africa follows the Prime Minister's outreach to Saudi Arabia in April and Iran, which he will visit later this month.
- He is also scheduled to visit Qatar on his way back from the United States in June. Mr. Modi is also likely to travel to a third destination during this travel window which has not yet been confirmed.
- Mr. Modi's visit to Mozambique is significant as the country is home to a bulk of India's Africa-bound investment.
- Energy dialogue between two sides has been steadily growing since the India Africa Forum Summit, when Carlos Augustinho Do Rosario, Prime Minister of Mozambique discussed the possibility of expanding energy ties.
- Mr. Modi's visit will also be a reciprocation as Mozambique was among the first countries in Africa to engage the Modi government; in August 2015, both sides signed a crucial MoU to cooperate in the new and renewable energy sector during the visit of President Felipe Nyusi to India.
- Mozambique is expected to become a major energy exporter like Nigeria if it can set a proper legal framework to enable foreign firms to explore oil and gas in the country.
- India has been a major campaigner to facilitate the pro-energy legal framework in the country.
- South Africa has been a partner of India under the BRICS platform and the visit to Johannesburg is likely to provide an important dialogue to the run up to the BRICS summit to be held in Goa later this year.

## **SC ends uncertainty says NEET is the only way for students**

- After weeks of uncertainty, the Supreme Court finally “clarified” that National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is indeed the only way for students to get admission to undergraduate medical and dental courses across the country.
- It is clarified that only NEET would enable students to get admission to MBBS and BDS studies.
- The apex court’s order strikes a death blow to States’ entrance exams, some of which have already been held or are in the offing.
- All private medical and dental colleges, deemed universities, associations will have to go by NEET results.
- In Tamil Nadu, students would have to take NEET despite a 2007 law in existence banning entrance exams in the State.
- The Supreme Court is yet to sit in judicial review of the constitutionality of NEET.
- This decision has come despite pleas by the Centre and Medical Council of India to allow States’ exams alongside NEET for this year alone.

## **Govt may re-look at the Geospatial Bill**

- Govt agreed to review a much-criticised draft Bill that proposes jail term of seven years and a fine up to Rs. 100 crore for wrongly depicting the map of India.
- The Bill was first drafted in 2012 and the January 2 attack at the Pathankot airbase was the immediate trigger for reintroducing the Bill.
- Three days after the draft Geospatial Information Regulation Bill, 2016 was uploaded on the Home Ministry’s website seeking comments from the public, the government indicated that it was open to review its contents.
- The draft Bill has come under scathing criticism on social media and other online platforms for its draconian features.
- This Bill has been in the works since 2012. A committee of secretaries (CoS) had submitted a report, calling for a regulatory body to monitor the Internet giants like Google and Microsoft.
- the investigations in the Pathankot airbase attack revealed that the terrorists who got into the airbase had precise information about its topography.
- According to the draft Bill, it will be mandatory to obtain permission from a government authority before acquiring, disseminating, publishing or distributing any geospatial information of India.
- No person shall depict, disseminate, publish or distribute any wrong or false topographic information of India, including international boundaries, through internet platforms or online services or in any electronic or physical form.

## **Nepal Govt started the damage control**

- The government of Nepal has begun damage control efforts to calm political tensions at home and with India even as the main opposition Nepali Congress (NC) sharpened its attack.
- Shekhar Koirala, leader of Nepali Congress said his party would not remain in opposition forever and will replace Mr. Oli’s government and ruled out cooperation for Mr. Oli’s amendment plans which need the support of the NC, the largest party in the Nepali parliament with 207 seats in the 601-member House.
- Mr. Oli called the United Madhesi Democratic Front (Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha, SLMM) for talks after almost three months but the NC and several Madhesi parties have refused to participate.
- Mr. Oli’s government cancelled the trip to India by President Bidhya Devi Bhandari and dismissed Mr. Upadhyay, an important NC leader.
- The government in Kathmandu is yet to name the next ambassador to Delhi, giving Mr. Upadhyay some more days in Delhi.

## **UPSC declared final result of civil services**

- Tina Dabi, a 22-year-old Delhi girl, has topped the civil services examination for 2015, the results of which were declared.
- A graduate from Lady Shri Ram College, Tina cracked the examination, arguably the toughest in the country, in her first attempt.
- Athar Aamir Ul Shafi Khan, 23, from Jammu and Kashmir, came second while the third position went to another Delhiite, Jasmeet Singh Sandhu, an Indian Revenue Service officer.
- An ecstatic Tina told she was not expecting the first rank. “I am very happy. I cannot express my feeling in words. I would say the key to my success has been patience, focus, discipline and the support of my family.”
- She credited her mother, a former Indian Engineering Service officer, for her success and said she was the one who motivated her to pursue humanities in Class XII even when other toppers from her school were opting for science and commerce.
- Tina’s interest and hard work paid off and she scored 100 per cent in political science in Class XII. She also topped her batch in Lady Shri Ram College last year.
- Tina has chosen Haryana as her cadre because she wanted to contribute in empowerment of women there.

## **Apex court relaxed the verdict on diesel cabs**

- Making it clear that its final objective is a gradual phase out of diesel taxis, the Supreme Court tweaked its April 30 blanket ban to allow diesel-run All India Travel Permit taxis to operate till the expiry of their existing permits.
- The ban on plying of diesel taxis in Delhi from May 1 had led to widespread protests, forcing the AAP government and the Centre to urgently approach the Supreme Court for modification of its order.
- The Centre argued that the ban on diesel cabs with All India Travel Permits (AITP), numbering over 64,000, would severely cripple the burgeoning BPO businesses located mostly in the National Capital Region (NCR).
- BPOs contract AITP operators to conduct point-to-point ferrying of employees numbering to several thousands from Delhi to Gurgaon, in neighbouring Haryana, and other NCR areas.
- The ban — both on diesel taxis and fresh registration of diesel vehicles over 2000 CC engine capacity — has left many BPO and taxi operators in dire straits.

## **Govt told in lower house more than 1.5 villages are affected by drought**

- The government told the Lok Sabha that drought had affected nearly 1.5 lakh villages across the country and around a quarter of its population had been impacted.
- Rural Development Minister Birender Singh said 313 districts, 1,58,205 villages and 4,44,280 dwellings had been hit by drought and the government was taking efforts to deal with the situation.
- He was replying to the discussion on drought, water scarcity and inter-linking of rivers, with members voicing concern over the worsening situation and demanding waiver of loans of farmers.
- The Centre has allocated Rs. 1,360 crore to Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka well before the drought.



- Mr. Singh said the government had also increased funding under the MGNREGS from Rs. 37,000 crore to Rs. 45,000 crore and the man-days had been raised to 252 days.

## **India's indigenously built light combat helicopter closer to reality**

- India's indigenously built and under development Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) moved a step closer to induction as it is set to undergo weapon certification trials in July-August.
- The certification firing trials with integration of mission sensors such as electro optical system, helmet pointing system and weapon systems air to air missiles, turret gun and rockets are planned during July-August 2016.
- The LCH had earlier successfully undergone development trials under various conditions at Bangalore, Chennai, Leh and Jodhpur.
- The 5.8 tonne multirole attack chopper is being developed by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and is intended to play a major role in providing close air support to ground forces.

## **Apex court passed guidelines to Union and State for tackling the drought**

- In a scathing 53-page verdict on the "lack of will" shown by the Centre and States in combating drought and saving lives, the Supreme Court pronounced the Centre guilty of "washing its hands of" a national disaster.
- It also pulled up Gujarat, Bihar and Haryana for adopting an "ostrich-like attitude" towards declaring drought and driving their own people to suicide, starvation and mass migration.
- A Bench of Justices Madan B. Lokur and N.V. Ramana issued a slew of directions on tackling the drought situation on a petition filed by the NGO Swaraj Abhiyan.
- Among the steps it suggested were taking the help of the National Disaster Response Force and a Disaster Mitigation Fund.
- The PIL plea had alleged that parts of 12 States, such as Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Haryana and Chhattisgarh, were hit by drought.
- The court found that the total population in the districts affected by drought is about 33 crore.
- "Can we afford to ignore the plight of such a large population," the Supreme Court asked the government. It accused the Centre of taking refuge in the concept of "federalism" to pass the buck to the States.
- "The ostensible purpose of introducing this concept [of federalism] is to enable the Union of India to wash its hands of in matters concerning drought declaration and to give enough elbow room to a State government to decide whether to declare a drought or not," the Bench observed.
- Meanwhile, States such as Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana, the court observed, were not even willing to acknowledge a drought.
- Their failure to declare drought has robbed the poor of their fundamental right to dignity of life, the court held.

## **Low conviction rate under the Protection of women and domestic violence act**

- The government told the Rajya Sabhathat "some times" provisions of the Domestic Violence and Anti-Dowry Acts were misused and several NGOs had also given reports supporting it.

- MoS (Home) said that only 13 persons were convicted out of the 639 charge sheeted in 2014 under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005.
- After the reply of the Minister in question hour, Samajwadi Party member Javed Ali Khan raised the issue of misuse of the Act, a contention which was resented by women members vehemently but was supported by Vijay Goel (BJP).
- Mr. Rijju told the House that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) started collecting data on the Act only since 2014.
- According to the reply, 426 cases were registered under the Act in 2014, of which charge sheet was filed in 312 cases. Conviction happened in just nine cases. Trial was completed in 19.1 per cent cases.
- Of the 693 persons arrested in these cases, 639 were charge-sheeted. Only 13 were convicted.
- The Minister said that in many cases, the husband and wife reach a compromise at a later stage and that the offences under the Act were of “civil” nature.

## **Parliamentary standing committee favours bringing national space law early**

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee dealing with the Department of Space has favoured early enactment of a national Space Law to promote commerce and regulate Space-related activities in the country.
- While suggesting that the department's outlays should not be reduced during year-end revision of the budget, the committee pulls up the DoS for not fully using allocated funds and delaying a few projects in the preceding two years.
- The draft National Space Act of India which is in the making may take at least a year before it completes the mandatory processes and reaches the Cabinet or Parliament, says the department-related Standing Committee on Science & Technology and Environment & Forests of the Rajya Sabha.
- The draft law, it notes, must first get the approval of the Prime Minister, who holds the Space portfolio, and go through parliamentary procedures, public comments and inter-ministerial consultations.
- Coming at a time the DoS is increasing its engagement with public and private sector industries, a Space Law will cover licensing, authorisation, regulation and supervision of activities by other players in the sector.
- The report was tabled in the Lok Sabha and presented to the Rajya Sabha on Monday. The Department has also been urged to speed up its decision on an internal committee report relating to supporting start-ups in the Space sector.

## **WHO brings latest air quality report of most polluted cities**

- Delhi is no longer the most polluted city in the world, the latest air quality report from the World Health Organization (WHO) says.
- The national capital, which earned notoriety for the state of its environment, now stands 11th among 3,000 cities in 103 countries in terms of fine particulate matter or PM 2.5.
- The ‘Global Urban Ambient Air Pollution Database (update 2016)’ released by WHO placed the capital in the 25th place based on bigger particulate or PM 10 levels.
- Particulate matter affects everyone but causes harm faster to children and senior citizens
- Although Delhi improved its ranking, four Indian cities are among the world’s 10 most polluted.

- Ten out of the top 20 are also in the country. The data are for 2013, but the Delhi government was quick to put out a statement exulting in a “definitive positive trend” in the city.
- In 2014, Delhi was ranked the most polluted globally in terms of PM 2.5, for which the WHO had monitored 1,600 cities.
- Delhi’s place as the most polluted is taken by Zabol, in Iran. Gwalior and Allahabad, meanwhile, come a close second and third in terms of PM 2.5, while Patna and Raipur are ranked 6th and 7th.
- The WHO used data from government and research organisations to prepare the database.
- It is based on ground measurements of annual mean concentrations of particulate matter (PM 10 and PM 2.5) and “aims at representing an average for the city or town as a whole, rather than for individual stations.
- Years of measurements range from 2010 to 2015, unless the latest available data was older,” the report said.
- PM 2.5 refers to atmospheric particulates with a diameter less than 2.5 micrometres. Exposure to fine particulates is linked to premature death from heart and lung disease.
- They trigger or worsen asthma, heart attack, bronchitis and other respiratory problems. The WHO states that as urban air quality declines, the risk of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic and acute respiratory diseases.
- More than 7 million premature deaths due to air pollution occur every year, and 3 million of these are due to outdoor air quality.
- Common causes of air pollution include diesel-fuelled vehicles, heavy construction activities, temperature control in large buildings and use of coal or diesel generators.

## **Govt requests Interpol for issuance of a Red Notice**

- Even as the Enforcement Directorate has initiated proceedings for the extradition of businessman Vijay Mallya, the Central Bureau of Investigation forwarded to the Interpol its request for issuance of a Red Notice against him to facilitate this.
- After the U.K. authorities expressed their inability to deport Mr. Mallya on technical grounds, the ED wrote to the nodal agency CBI to forward its request for a Red Notice against him.
- In former IPL chief Lalit Modi’s case, Interpol has not yet issued a Red Notice despite repeated attempts by Indian agencies.
- According to sources, the ED is also preparing itself for launching extradition proceedings against Mr. Mallya in the U.K. through the External Affairs Ministry.
- Article 11 of the India-UK Extradition Treaty (1993) prescribes the procedure for extradition.
- The provision says that the request must be accompanied by an accurate description of the person, his nationality and residence; a statement of the facts of the alleged offence; legal provisions invoked and their definition and the maximum punishment prescribed there-under.
- If the request relates to an accused person, it must also be accompanied by a warrant of arrest issued by a judge, magistrate or other competent authority in the territory of the Requesting State.
- By such evidence as, according to the law of the Requested State, would justify his committal for trial if the offence had been committed in the territory of the Requested State.
- UK authorities may seek additional evidence or information in case they find that details provided are not sufficient for the purposes of the Treaty.
- Both the CBI and the ED have registered a case against Mr. Mallya, his now-defunct company Kingfisher Airlines and others for alleged criminal conspiracy and wilful default of Rs. 900 crore-loan from IDBI Bank.

## **Geospatial bill in current form is likely to be scrapped**

- Days after the Union Home Ministry publicised a draft geospatial Bill warning of fines of up to Rs. 100 crore and seven years of imprisonment, other sections of the government are looking to tone down its stringency.
- The Bill in its current form is likely to be scrapped. The fine will likely be capped at a “crore or two” and specific to companies that wrongly depict borders. The DST was among several government agencies that were involved with the Bill.
- The existing version of the draft Geospatial Information Regulation (GI) Bill will be “significantly changed” as it “goes against the spirit” of the National Geospatial Policy (NGP), 2016, spearheaded by the DST.
- The NGP, which was uploaded on the website of the Science Ministry and is open for comments, in tone and tenor, is tamer than the GI Bill.
- GDPSS refers to Geospatial Data, Products, Services and Solutions.
- “Geospatial data of any resolution being disseminated through agencies and service providers, both internationally and nationally be treated as unclassified and made available and accessible by Indian Mapping and imaging agencies,” the policy note adds.
- The Bill that appears on the Home Ministry website notes that it is open to comment.
- The Bill has been on the anvil since 2012 but the January terror attack in Pathankot, where terrorists infiltrated an airbase and relied on information from Google Maps, prompted the department to act on tightening policy on making geospatial maps.
- Another official from the Earth Sciences Ministry said they were “deluged” by concerns from the local and international geospatial industry.

## **Apex court upheld pre-constitutional law criminalising defamation**

- In a judgment that holds far-reaching implications for political dissent and a free press, the Supreme Court upheld a colonial and pre-Constitutional law criminalising defamation.
- The verdict dismissed apprehensions, raised by personalities across the political spectrum and media organisations championing the fundamental right under Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution.
- Apprehension was that criminal defamation may have a chilling effect on the freedom to circulate one’s independent view and “not to join in a chorus or sing the same song.”
- The judgment came on a batch of petitions filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, and media associations, among others.
- The court refused exhortations that penalisation of defamation is past its time, and the nation now risks the danger of being reduced to a “frozen democracy.”
- A Bench of Justices said the reputation of an individual was an equally important right and stood on the same pedestal as free speech.
- The court said it would be a stretch to say that upholding criminal defamation in modern times would amount to imposition of silence.
- “Mutual respect is the fulcrum of fraternity that assures dignity. It does not mean that there cannot be dissent. One has a right to freedom of speech and expression. One is also required to maintain the idea of fraternity that assures the dignity of the individual,” said Justice Misra.
- The court held that criminalisation of defamation to protect individual dignity of life and reputation is a “reasonable restriction” on the fundamental right of free speech and expression.
- “The right to reputation is a constituent of Article 21 of the Constitution. It is an individual’s fundamental right,” Justice Misra observed.

## **Govt announced the new IPR policy**

- The NDA government announced the long-pending, “all-encompassing” National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy.
- The Policy aims to push IPRs as a marketable financial asset and , promote innovation, while protecting public interest including ensuring the availability of essential drugs at affordable prices.
- Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said, “Our approach balances consideration of inventability, innovation and public health consideration.”
- Though the U.S. concerns include the “rejections” of patent applications for innovative pharmaceutical products due to “unpredictable” application of Section 3(d) of the (Indian) Patents Act, Mr. Jaitley clarified that the policy will ensure that no changes are made in that Section.

## **SC directed Centre and States for better implementation of MGNREGA**

- Directing the Centre and the States to make all efforts to encourage needy persons to come forward and take advantage of the MGNREGA scheme.
- The Apex Court slammed the government for not giving compensation to workers for delayed payment of wages under MGNREGA even during the current drought.
- A Bench of Justices Madan said the government had no provision for providing compensation to the workers. “A success rate below 50 per cent is nothing to be proud of,” the Bench observed.
- The court said it was also regrettable that the government cleared the pending wage bill for 2015-16 only during the pendency of this case and underlined that “The Government of India must shape up in this regard”.
- “A worker is entitled to compensation at the rate of 0.05 per cent per day for delayed payment of the wages due,” the court said.

## **India’s bid to Nuclear Security Group may be opposed by China**

- The U.S. has reiterated its support for India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in the face of opposition from China.
- The 48-member NSG that regulates trade in nuclear technology and material will have its plenary next month in New York where it is expected to consider India’s admission into the exclusive club.
- China, acting in concert with Pakistan, has thrown a spanner in the works for India, by linking New Delhi’s candidacy to Islamabad’s. NSG operates by consensus and all its current members are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- “Not only India, many other non-NPT members have voiced their aspirations to join the NSG.”said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman.
- Pakistan had earlier said it was coordinating with China to block India from the NSG. Bruised by the successful Indian diplomacy that recently stalled the U.S. sale of F-16 fighter planes to it, Pakistan has found an opportunity to hit back.

## **Due to malpractices in election poll dates in T. N. Deferred**

- The Election Commission of India late decided to defer the polls in the Aravakurichi Assembly constituency, in Karur district, following widespread seizure of cash and complaints of voters being bribed.



- Separately, the EC issued notices to the AIADMK and the DMK, asking them to explain the rationale behind the promises made in their election manifestos and indicate how they would meet the financial outlays (for freebies).
- Polling in Aravakurichi will now be held on May 23, and the results declared on May 25, a week after the results are announced in the remaining 233 constituencies where voting will take place on May 16.
- In a release, the EC said over Rs. 6.75 crore had been seized in the constituency, including from the house of one Anbunathan.
- In addition, 429 litres of liquor had been seized and 33 complaints of money distribution had been received, while seven FIRs have been registered.

## **Defence minister wants \$2 billion defence exports in two years**

- The Union government has set a target of \$2 billion in defence exports in the next two years, Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar said.
- The Ministry had noted the concerns expressed over the issue of strategic partners in manufacturing and would hold discussions with the industry.
- The government intends to identify major private companies eligible to take the lead in critical defence projects so as to boost domestic manufacturing.
- From a meagre \$140-150 million, this year I think we have crossed \$330-odd million. I have set a target for myself, in the next two years, why not touch \$2 billion. It is not an impossible target.” Said the Defence Minister
- Mr. Parrikar said offsets were an area where “exports and expertise can come.” During 2014 and 2015, offset obligations brought in \$990 million, and this was likely to touch \$2 billion in the next two years as major deals for fighter aircraft and helicopters were expected to be signed.
- As part of the offset requirements, foreign companies are required to invest a part of the contract value back in the country.

## **Space-based information system from ISRO for rural development**

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is working on a space-based information system for decentralised planning to help rural development.
- Though there are scores of rural development programmes and welfare measures launched in the country, there is little planning at the local level owing to lack of information.
- The space-based information system will reach out to the villages to enable them to plan and improve their economy.
- The system is expected to optimise the benefits of various welfare programmes to a maximum number of people in the areas of health, sanitation, infrastructure, etc. besides monitoring their benefits and impacts in the villages.

## **IMD says arrival of monsoon to be delayed**

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that the arrival of the southwest monsoon in Kerala will be delayed by at least a week beyond the normal of June 1.
- However, IMD also said while this could lead to reduced rainfall in June, it would not affect the overall quantum of rains across the country.
- This widely diverges from a forecast earlier this week by Noida-based forecaster Skymet, that the monsoon would set in over Kerala between May 28 and 31.

- June accounts for only 18 to 20 per cent of the monsoon rains but it marks the beginning of the kharif sowing season.
- July and August account for about two-thirds of monsoons and are critical for a good harvest. Last year, the monsoon arrived at the Kerala coast on June 5, later than the agency's predicted date of May 30.
- This was the only time, the IMD claims, its monsoon onset model failed to get the date within the model's error margin since it began issuing such forecasts in 2005.
- The monsoon is expected to set in at the Nicobar islands around May 17, and set in substantially over the Andamans by May 20. It's the timing of its subsequent journey into Kerala that's in doubt.
- "The cooling of the Pacific waters has been better than expected and we expect the La Nina to set in slightly earlier around the second half of monsoon," IMD said.
- The delay in onset over Kerala is because of the El Nino, which, though waning, is still strong, and the waters of the Indian Ocean being warmer than usual for this time of the year.
- Generally rain-bearing winds begin to be drawn across the equator by this time of the year.

## **Payment to Iran still un resolved**

- With less than a week to go for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Teheran, officials are working hard to seal an agreement to repay \$6.5 billion owed to Iran over the years when it was under sanctions.
- The effort has run into a brick wall over the reluctance of European banks to process the payments, officials in the Oil and External Affairs ministries have told The Hindu .
- The repayment agreement is among a slew of announcements India and Iran hope to make during Mr Modi's first visit to Teheran on May 22-23.
- Other announcements include the signing of a trilateral trade agreement, which includes Afghanistan, that has already been finalised, an MoU for the development of Chabahar port, progress on Indian exploration of the 'Farzad-B' gas oilfields.
- While the other agreements are on track, officials say it is the hunt for the repayment channel to Iran that is keeping them on tenterhooks.]
- This is despite several banks including the Danske bank of Denmark, Europaeisch-Iranische Handelsbank (EIH) of Germany, Central Bank of Italy and Halkbank of Turkey having been identified to carry out the transactions, and the RBI has identified corresponding banks in India.
- New Delhi has repeatedly said it is keen to pay back Iran the \$6.5 billion, most of it for oil transactions.

## **India test fired indigenous supersonic interceptor missile**

- In its effort to have a full fledged multi-layer Ballistic Missile Defence system, India successfully test-fired its indigenously developed supersonic interceptor missile, capable of destroying any incoming hostile ballistic missile.
- The interceptor was engaged against a target which was a naval version of Prithvi missile launched from a ship anchored inside Bay of Bengal, taking up the trajectory of a hostile ballistic missile.
- The target missile was launched at about 11.15 hours and the interceptor, Advanced Air Defence (AAD) missile positioned at Abdul Kalam island (Wheeler Island) getting signals from tracking radars.
- "The 'kill' effect of the interceptor was ascertained by analysing data from multiple tracking sources.
- The interceptor is a 7.5-metre-long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and an electro-mechanical activator.
- The interceptor missile had its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

## **Amended FCRA will allow foreign companies to fund NGOs and Political parties**

- The government has admitted that the amended Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010, will not only help foreign-origin companies fund NGOs here but has also cleared the way for them to give “donations to political parties”.
- Union Minister of State for Home told that the amendment, cleared by the Lok Sabha in the Budget session, would ensure that “donations made by foreign shareholding companies to entities including parties will be allowed.
- The statement assumes significance as such funding from foreign donors will bypass government scrutiny. The Representation of the People Act bars parties from receiving foreign funds.
- Both the BJP and the Congress have supported the amendment. They have been accused by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) of illegally receiving foreign funds for political activities from the U.K.-based Vedanta Group from 2004 to 2012.
- Mr. Rijiju said different definitions of foreign-origin company existed as per the Companies Act, 2013, the FCRA, 2010 and the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy of the government and they have clarified the foreign source now.
- As per the existing provisions any Indian company will fall in the category of foreign source if at any time more than 50 percent of its shareholding is acquired by foreign entity.
- Contributions made by the Indian companies with foreign holding up to the prescribed limit as per extant FDI policy will not be treated as foreign contribution.

## **Govt wants Christian Michel extradited**

- The Enforcement Directorate will approach the Ministry of External Affairs to initiate extradition proceedings with the UAE against Christian Michel, British middleman and prime accused in the AgustaWestland deal case.
- It had earlier sought his extradition from the United Kingdom, which wanted certain clarifications on the status of the case against him.
- Dubai agencies are also probing Mr. Michel’s role in a case of alleged cheating
- The investigating agencies have already got Inter- pol to issue Red Notice against Mr. Michel, who has been accused of routing 30 million euros to bribe Indian officials for swinging the deal in AgustaWestland’s favour.

## **Meeting between stakeholders involved in cleaning of Ganga called by NGT**

- The National Green Tribunal has convened a meeting of all stakeholders involved in cleaning of River Ganga from Haridwar to Kanpur to deliberate on the mechanism to make the river pollution-free.
- The green panel has divided the work of cleaning the river into different segments - Gomukh to Haridwar, Haridwar to Kanpur, Kanpur to border of UP, border of UP to border of Jharkhand and border of Jharkhand to Bay of Bengal.
- On December 11, last year, the tribunal had imposed a complete ban on use of plastic of any kind from Gomukh to Haridwar along the river from February 1 and decided to slap a penalty of Rs. 5,000 per day on erring hotels, dharamsalas and ashrams spewing waste into the river.

## Spaceplane launch by ISRO

- The first technology demonstrator (TD) launch of the Indian Space Research Organisation's Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV), or the spaceplane in popular parlance, will take place on May 23
- Visually, the RLV-TD is a rocket-aircraft combination measuring about 17 m, whose first stage is a solid propellant booster rocket and the second stage is a 6.5 m long aircraft-like winged structure sitting atop the rocket.
- In RLV-TD that is awaiting launch at SHAR, the first stage, weighing about 9 tonnes, is merely the Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV-3) flown in the 1980s.
- The objective is to achieve hypersonic speeds to basically test the hypersonic aero-thermodynamic characterisation of the winged body's re-entry, its control and guidance systems, autonomous mission management to land at a specific location at sea and testing of "hot structures" that make up the structure of the RLV.
- Also, while an LV experiences limited flight regime of say Mach 0 to Mach 2 or so, the RLV experiences a much wider range of flight regimes.]
- The ultimate objective of the RLV programme of ISRO is to enable the vehicle traverse a very wide range of flight regimes from Mach 0 to Mach 25 based on air-breathing propulsion for achieving two-stage-to-orbit (TSTO) launch capability.
- The present design is basically "a flying test bed to evaluate various technologies, namely hypersonic flight, autonomous landing, powered cruise flight and hypersonic flight using air-breathing propulsion using a scramjet engine.
- The HEX series of experiments will be followed by the landing experiment (LEX), return flight experiment and scramjet propulsion experiment (SPEX)

## Ken-Betwa project poses danger to ecology according experts

- A team of wildlife experts submitted a crucial report, which hinges the fate of the first-ever inter-State river linking project since India's independence.
- The submitted report — not yet public — warns of the dangers to the ecology and animal life due to the proposed Ken-Betwa project.
- The main feature of the project is a 230-km long canal connecting the Ken and Betwa rivers which will irrigate 3.5 lakh hectares of drought-prone Bundelkhand.
- However, it will also inundate about 400 of the 4300-hectare Panna Tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh.
- The report neither endorses nor disapproves of the Ken-Betwa project but notes that if the government were to go ahead it ought to ensure that the proposed canal does not hinder tiger movement and that there should be enough habitable forest land developed to compensate for the loss of tiger reserve land.
- The Ken-Betwa river inter-linking project is being vigorously promoted by the incumbent NDA government as the first in a series of projects to transfer surplus water from certain rivers into deficient ones and improve irrigation as well as hydropower availability.
- Given the threat to the tiger reserve, the Environment Ministry, whose clearance is mandatory for the project, tasked the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) with an expert analysis on the environmental impact.
- The number of tigers in the reserve had plummeted from 25 in 2006 to zero in 2009, sparking national consternation. In conservation efforts in the seven years since, tigers from other reserves were relocated and are now believed to number 18.
- The Environment Ministry's go-ahead will enable the National Water Development Agency (NWDA), a Water Resources Ministry body, to begin work on the project.

## **:: International ::**

### **China says US to stay away from the continent affairs**

- Asking the U.S. to respect the efforts by China and India to resolve their boundary dispute peacefully, a top Chinese official said the two nations are wise enough to deal with it.
- “The Chinese side is committed to safeguarding peace and tranquillity of the border areas between China and India and resolving the boundary question through negotiation,” the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.
- The U.S. military report also warned of increasing Chinese military presence in various parts of the world, particularly in Pakistan.
- “It is difficult to conclude on the real intention behind this,” Mr. Denmark said after submitting Pentagon’s annual 2016 re- port to the U.S. Congress.
- “It is difficult to say how much of this is driven by internal considerations to maintain internal stability, and how much of it is an external consideration,” he said in response to a question on China upgrading its military command in Tibet.

### **World powers are ready to arm Libya**

- World powers said they supported the lifting of an arms embargo on Libya and were ready to supply weapons to the country’s new unity government to help it fight the growing threat posed by the Islamic State (IS) group.
- The Government of National Accord has voiced its intention to submit appropriate arms embargo exemption requests to the UN Libya Sanctions Committee. We will fully support these efforts,” read a statement by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and 24 other top diplomats after talks in Vienna.
- The conference was co-chaired by Mr. Kerry and his Italian counterpart Paolo Gentiloni whose country has faced a major influx of migrants from Libya fleeing violence and poverty in the post-conflict years.

### **Centre is looking to make a bank of all its land holdings**

- The Centre is examining the possibility of making a bank of all its surplus land holdings across the country from which parcels could be auctioned to private industry.
- The move will ensure that non-availability of land doesn’t dampen new investments and economic growth. Other than for private industry such land identified in Delhi, Mumbai and other metros could be used for urban renewal projects.
- A committee set up under Economic Affairs Secretary Shaktikanta Das is inventorying all the holdings, including that of government companies, in coordination with the Urban Development Ministry.
- The decision comes in the wake of the Centre’s legislation on land acquisition reforms failing to clear Parliament even a year after an ordinance for it was allowed to lapse. Even the Government’s allies are opposed to this Bill.

### **Geospatial Information regulation Bill turned into diplomatic war**



- The Geospatial Information Regulation Bill, 2016, turned into a diplomatic war of words when India “firmly” rejected Pakistan’s objections to the draft Bill, saying Islamabad does not have any right to object to an internal matter of India.
- “The proposed bill is an entirely internal legislative matter of India, since the whole of the State of J&K is an integral part of India. Pakistan or any other party has no locus standi in the matter,” said Vikas Swarup.
- The draft Geospatial Information Bill plans to bring in a set of legally binding regulations regarding the geospatial information of India which may include provisions to penalise inaccurate depiction of India in maps. .
- The MEA’s response came after Pakistan wrote to the UN Secretary General raising “serious concerns” over the draft Bill, specifically criticising the depiction of Jammu and Kashmir in the bill as “incorrect and legally untenable”.
- The Pakistan Foreign Office issued a statement saying it has expressed “serious concern” to the UN over a draft bill in the Indian Parliament over the map of Kashmir and has asked the world body to uphold its resolutions and urge India to stop such acts which are in “violation of international law.”
- Reacting to Pakistan’s letter, Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju said it was the duty of the government to ensure that India’s geography is projected properly.

## **PM Modi could make Afghanistan visit after Iran**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Iran, the government announced, he might follow it up with a visit Afghanistan in June.
- Both visits — in what India considers its “extended neighbourhood” — will focus on infrastructure development.]
- The Chabahar port development project will top Mr. Modi’s agenda in Iran, while he is expected to visit Afghanistan to inaugurate the \$300-million Salma dam and hydroelectric power plant, known as the Afghanistan-India friendship dam.
- Mr. Modi’s visits will complete the triangle as he is expected to sign the trilateral trade treaty with Iran and Afghanistan for Chabahar, which was finalised during External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj’s trip to Tehran last month.
- The transmission lines [for the hydroelectric plant] have been handed over, and we are conducting the final testing for power generation
- The exact dates for the Prime Minister’s visit, that would come five months after his last visit to Kabul when he inaugurated the Parliament building, were “still being finalised.”
- The Ministry of External Affairs announced that Mr. Modi would visit Iran on May 22-23 to meet President Hassan Rouhani in an official visit that would “provide a timely thrust to the ongoing efforts of the two countries and their business entities.
- Visit will also expand bilateral cooperation and mutually benefit from new opportunities in the wake of lifting of secondary sanctions against Iran earlier this year.
- The Prime Minister will also meet the ‘Supreme Leader’ Ali Khamenei, marking his first visit to the country after the historic nuclear agreement with world powers was signed, and the U.S. lifted secondary sanctions in January 2016.
- Among issues on the agenda are agreeing on a channel for repayment of \$6.5 billion in unpaid dues from India to appropriate corresponding banks in Iran, an Memorandum of Understanding on developing the Chabahar port project.
- Other issues will be trilateral transit trade agreement with Afghanistan, India’s stake in the Farzad-B oilfields, the announcement of investments from Indian companies in the Chabahar “Free Trade Zone,” and security and defence pacts.
- Mr. Modi’s visit to Iran is a rare stand-alone visit indicating that India hopes to fast-track ties and build on the alternative route for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

## **Associate banks of SBI began merger with SBI**

- The State Bank of India has kick-started the process of merging its five associate banks with itself at one go.
- The merger is expected to be completed by the end of the current financial year.
- The SBI board discussed the issue, and also explored the possibility to merge Bharatiya Mahila Bank.

## **Tim Cook makes first visit to India**

- Tim Cook is in India and he is mixing business with pleasure, and spirituality. The CEO of the \$233 billion Apple Inc., on his maiden India trip, started his day with a visit to the Shree Siddhivinayak temple.
- Apple announced a \$1 billion investment in taxi-hailing company, Didi Chuxing, in China.
- Mr. Cook's first visit assumes significance as Apple reported its first quarterly drop in global iPhone sales last month, while its India revenues grew by 56 per cent.
- Coinciding with the visit, the company announced an iOS mobile app design centre in Bengaluru, intended to support and accelerate the growth of Apple's developer community.

## **IMD warns of intensifying Cyclonic activity**

- Even as officials at the India Meteorological Department have warned of searing heat waves in several parts of North India.
- IMD also said the torrential downpour in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala was due to a cyclonic depression that could well bring the season's first cyclone.
- The depression has moved towards Andhra Pradesh coast and will intensify into a cyclonic storm, after which it is likely to move towards the Northeast and off north Andhra Pradesh and Odisha coasts in the subsequent 48 hours.
- IMD also said that "there may be rains for two more days and then it will reduce as (depression) will move towards Myanmar.
- The IMD's latest update says the Southwest monsoon has advanced into some parts of Southeast Bay of Bengal, entire south Andaman Sea and Nicobar Islands.
- The conditions were favourable for further advance of the Southwest monsoon into some more parts of south Bay of Bengal, Andaman Islands and remaining parts of north Andaman Sea in the next three to four days.
- The IMD has said that monsoon in Kerala would likely be on June 7 but the overall forecast of above normal rainfall was unchanged.

## **Ahead of China visit President calls for all out fight against terrorism**

- Ahead of a state visit to China from May 24 to 27, President Pranab Mukherjee has called for an "all out" fight against terrorism, in which both India and China come together.
- "India and China, both huge countries —multicultural, multiracial — if they come together in fighting this menace, I am sure it will have its own impact." Mr. Mukherjee told Chinese CCTV channel.

- President Mukherjee's words are significant as they come weeks after China's decision to block India's moves to ban Pakistani terrorist Masood Azhar at the U.N. Taliban sanctions committee.
- The move led to a strain in ties as India expressed its unhappiness over what was seen as an effort to shield Pakistan and Beijing refused to change its stand.
- Mr. Mukherjee's visit marks the first Indian presidential visit to China since 2010 and is being seen as an effort to smooth over some of the issues that have come up in bilateral ties in his talks with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang.
- Among them, recent comments by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs refusing to support India's admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group(NSG) unless it signs the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- In New Delhi, visiting Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenmin struck a more conciliatory note, saying that China would work "with Indian colleagues together to find a solution" to the NSG issue.
- Officials said Mr. Mukherjee's programme, where he will visit Beijing and the south China industrial hub of Guangzhou, will include a meeting with businessmen at the India-China business forum and address students at Peking University.
- The Chinese Foreign Ministry announced the visit by President Mukherjee which is the first by a Head of State since 2010 and returns the visit by President Xi Jinping to Delhi in September 2014.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also expected to travel to Hangzhou for the G-20 summit in September this year, while President Xi will travel to Goa to attend the BRICS summit in October.

## **Muslim women moved to court against triple talaq**

- A Muslim woman moved the Supreme Court against the 'triple talaq' system to nullify the prevailing divorce practice.
- Afsan Rehman, a 25-year-old resident of Jaipur, filed a petition after receiving a divorce letter through speed post.
- Talaq-e-bidat refers to a Muslim man divorcing his wife by pronouncing more than one talaq in a single tuhr (the period between two menstruations) or in a tuhr , or pronouncing an irrevocable instantaneous divorce at one go (unilateral triple talaq).
- All-India Muslim Women Personal Law Board president Shaista Ambar has demanded the abolition of the triple talaq system.
- The Centre has set up a high-level committee to review the status of women in India and, according to reports, has recommended a ban on triple talaq, and polygamy.

## **Egypt flight from Paris to Cairo crashed into the Mediterranean sea**

- An EgyptAir flight from Paris to Cairo carrying 66 people crashed into the Mediterranean sea with possible wreckage spotted off a Greek island, as investigators probed whether it was downed by a bomb.
- Egypt's Aviation Minister said that while it was too soon to say why the Airbus A320 had vanished, "a terrorist" attack would be a more likely scenario than a technical failure.
- The plane had fallen 22,000 feet and swerved sharply twice in Egyptian airspace before it disappeared from the radar screens.
- The incident raised fears of a repeat of the bombing of a Russian passenger plane by the Islamic State jihadist group over Egypt last October, which killed all 224 people on board.
- The jet was flying from Paris to Cairo when it disappeared, without sending a distress signal.

## **India led the way for ‘Red Line Campaign’ for antibiotics packaging**

- India’s idea of putting a red line on antibiotic packages to curb their over-the-counter sale is now being cited as a model that can be used globally to counter the rising threat of superbugs.
- In its final report on tackling drug resistant infection released on May 19, the global Review on Antimicrobial Resistance says India has led the way so far with its idea of a ‘Red Line Campaign’ for antibiotics packaging.
- This was launched earlier this year, and should be considered as a starting point. It recommends that the labelling and symbols used can be improved if needed and then expanded globally.
- While stressing that convincing people to stop using antibiotics would not be effective unless they recognise antibiotics.
- “Labelling of antimicrobials, especially antibiotics, is crucial. We call on governments and international health organisations to agree on global labelling standards,” it adds.
- India’s Red Line campaign, launched in February this year, began marking prescription-only antibiotics with a red line to curb their irrational use and create awareness on the dangers of taking antibiotics without being prescribed.
- The report says laws prevent sale of antibiotics and other antimicrobials over-the-counter, but these may be weakly enforced in some countries and non-existent in many.
- It says 20-30 per cent of antibiotics are consumed without prescription in south and east Europe, and up to 100 per cent in parts of Africa.
- It is still early in India to map the impact of the Red Line initiative, but experts see better awareness.

## **Another month breaks temperature record**

- Due to the combination of global warming and an El Nino, the planet shattered monthly heat records for an unprecedented 12th straight month.
- The month of April smashed the old record for the month of April by half a degree.
- Previously various agencies has predicted that this could be the hottest year till date.

## **Report shows sexual abuse is frequent in India**

- Action Aid — a global charity — has set up various installations to represent women standing up against sexual violence. Its objective is to highlight the unsafe nature of cities in general for women.
- Action Aid has also commissioned a poll by YouGov, which interviewed women across the globe from countries like Brazil, India, Thailand and the United Kingdom.
- Forty per cent of women interviewed said they had experienced at least one of these forms of abuse — being groped in public transport or bus stops; getting stared at or being called names; being stalked or followed; or being sexually molested.
- In North India, according to the survey, 89 per cent of women said they had experienced harassment of some sort, with 50 per cent having experienced unwelcome physical contact of a sexual nature.
- The charity has asked the U.K. government to contribute at least £70 million from its existing aid budget to help protect women over the next three years.\

## Union brings ordinance against SC NEET order

- Facing pressure from the State governments, the Union Cabinet cleared an ordinance bypassing the Supreme Court's decision on the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), a common test for admission to medical and dental courses.
- Nearly 6.5 lakh candidates are to appear for the second round of the test, which is to be held on July 24.
- Health Minister J.P. Nadda will meet President Pranab Mukherjee to brief him on the ordinance that, once it comes into effect, will override the apex court's May 9 order and allow the State boards to hold their own entrance tests this year.
- Sources in the Health Ministry maintain that the exception is only for this academic session. "From next year, students will have a common entrance test nationwide,".

## Bangalore-based Medgenome committed to sequence 100,000 Asian genomes

- In a move to create one of the largest repositories of Indian genomes, Bangalore-based Medgenome has teamed up with a Southeast Asian consortium that has committed to sequence 100,000 Asian genomes.
- This could mean a consolidated storehouse of at least 30,000 Indian genomes and could help understand the wide genetic variety in India's various ethnic groups and midwife customised medications for cancer and heart disease, as well as identify possible new genetic aberrations that cause untreatable diseases.
- Ever since the human genome was first sequenced in 2003, that is the entire DNA pattern in the cell that lends people their unique identity was deciphered, several countries have announced initiatives to map genomes of their resident populations.
- The so-called 1000 Genomes project is a collection of gene samples from across the world to capture the variety of genes that are typical to different population groups.
- The United Kingdom announced a plan in 2014 to create a bank of 100,000 genomes in the nation and 100,000 Asia genomes project — called GenomeAsia 100K — echoes similar ambitions.
- The project will develop in phases with an initial 1000 genomes, consisting of India and East Asian populations, sequenced within this year, and the entire database to be ready by 2020. Medgenome already has a bank of 200 Indian genomes.
- The project will cost \$120 million, though only about half of that has been firmed up. Other key collaborators in the project are Singapore's Nanyang Technological Institute, Singapore, and MacroGen, a genetics diagnostic company in Seoul.
- Nearly 60 petabytes of data — equivalent to 30 trillion pages of text — are expected to be churned out in this study. Though all this data would be publicly available to researchers, access to it would be staggered.
- Though human genome sequencing is a frontier area of biotechnology, it was prohibitively expensive.
- Technology advancement has made prices dramatically drop, enabling several companies to offer genome sequencing services.
- While many diseases are linked to genes going awry, afflictions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, etc., are usually the result of several genes malfunctioning, and often in a domino-like effect.
- Identifying such culprits is impossible without comparing genes, across individuals and population groups, in large numbers.
- Thus BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 — genes associated with breast cancer — are found in as many as one-third of women.

- Several of them go on to live without ever contracting the cancer. These genes come in several varieties that can vary on the level of families as well as ethnicities. Genome sequence studies are effective in studying such variations.

## **Global Environmental Outlook report shows risks due to sea rise**

- Nearly 40 million Indians will be at risk from rising sea levels by 2050, with people in Mumbai and Kolkata having the maximum exposure to coastal flooding in future due to rapid urbanisation and economic growth, according to a UN environment report.
- The 'Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-6): Regional Assessments' said the worst impacts of climate change are projected to occur in the Pacific and South and South-East Asia.
- It said focussing on the population at risk from sea-level rise by 2050, seven of the 10 most vulnerable countries worldwide are in the Asia Pacific region.
- India tops the chart with nearly 40 million people in the country projected to be at risk from rising sea levels, followed by more than 25 million in Bangladesh, over 20 million in China and nearly 15 million in the Philippines.
- It said changes in settlement patterns, urbanisation and socio-economic status in Asia have influenced observed trends in vulnerability and exposure to climate extremes.
- The report said in many coastal areas, growing urban settlements have also affected the ability of natural coastal systems to respond effectively to extreme climate events, rendering them more vulnerable.
- It listed Mumbai and Kolkata in India, Guangzhou and Shanghai in China, Dhaka in Bangladesh, Yangon in Myanmar, Bangkok in Thailand, and Ho Chi Minh City and Hai Phong in Vietnam as projected to have the largest population exposure to coastal flooding in 2070.
- The report, published ahead of the UN Environment Assembly taking place in Nairobi next week, said the worst impacts of climate change are projected to occur in the Pacific and South and Southeast Asia.
- In 2011, six of the ten countries most vulnerable to climate change worldwide were in Asia and the Pacific. The report said livelihoods can be impacted negatively by natural disasters, economic crises and climate change.
- On coastal areas highly exposed to cyclones and typhoons, the poor tend to be more exposed to natural disasters because they live on hazardous land.
- By 2050, areas of storm surge zones are expected for Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with a combined total of over 58 million people at risk.
- The UN report further said global urban populations are projected to increase by 2.5 billion by 2050, with nearly 90 per cent of the increase in Asia and Africa.
- Asia, despite its current lower level of urbanisation, hosts 53 per cent of the world's urban population. In 2014, there were 28 megacities worldwide, home to 453 million people or about 12 per cent of the world's urban dwellers; 16 are in Asia.
- Tokyo in Japan is the largest with nearly 38 million people, followed by Delhi and Shanghai. By 2030, the world is projected to have 41 megacities.

## **Apple chief executive discusses sensitive issues with PM**

- Apple chief executive officer Tim Cook met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed sensitive issues relating to cybersecurity, data encryption, the possibility of manufacturing in the country and tapping India's young talent.

- The Apple CEO appreciated the breadth of young talent in India with significant skills that Apple would like to tap. He highlighted the immense potential for ‘app-development’ in the country, according to the statement.
- During his maiden visit to India, Mr. Cook announced the setting up of an app development centre in Bengaluru and another one in Hyderabad for maps.
- The PMO said Mr. Cook appreciated Mr. Modi’s initiatives on “ease of doing business” and renewable energy. Apple runs on 93 per cent renewable energy and plans to move its entire supply chain to renewable energy.
- Mr. Cook unveiled an updated version of the PM’s mobile app that includes a new volunteering network.

## **President is seeking clarifications on NEET**

- President Pranab Mukherjee has sought legal advice on the Ordinance to keep State boards out of the National Eligibility-cum- Entrance Test for this year.
- The President is seeking clarification on the Ordinance, he is consulting inhouse legal experts on certain questions.
- The Ordinance, cleared by the Union Cabinet, is aimed at “partially” overturning a Supreme Court verdict which said all government colleges, deemed universities and private medical colleges would be covered under NEET.
- Clarifying that the exemption is only for the State government seats, government sources had said State seats earmarked in the private medical colleges have also been exempted.
- Different States earmark anywhere between 12 and 15 per cent seats in various private medical colleges for State quota so that students from one State can get seat in another State.
- The remaining seats in such colleges are reserved for domicile students. Now with this Ordinance, the remaining seats meant for domicile students will come under NEET.

## **Artificial waterfall near Jog falls has raised ecological concerns**

- A proposal to create an artificial waterfall in the ecologically sensitive Jog Falls area has raised concerns over its possible impact on not just the environment and biodiversity, but also existing power projects around it.
- A Government Order (GO) has been issued approving the water recirculation project at Jog Falls even before receiving necessary clearances.
- The Forest, Environment and Ecology Department, and the Energy Department, have expressed their reservations and concerns about the proposed project, which aims at keeping the waterfall gushing right through the year at the popular tourist attraction.
- To be set up under the PPP model, the project intends to pump water at the rate of 400 cusecs during the summer months from a storage pond at the foot of the waterfall to the weir/anicut, which will be constructed upstream of the Sitakatte bridge.
- During monsoon, the project proposes to generate power using the same pipeline.
- But the Forest, Environment and Ecology Department is concerned about the impact the construction might have on the biodiversity of the forests and the effect the impounding of water during non-monsoon months may have on the hydrology of the area.
- The Sharavathi Wildlife Sanctuary and Aghanashini Lion-tailed Macaque Conservation Reserve are both situated between a 5 and 10-km radius of the proposed project.
- In addition, the Energy Department has said no water from the Linganamakki reservoir will be released for the scheme.
- It has also said the construction of the power house and pump house should not affect availability/discharge of water in the Mahatma Gandhi Hydro Electricity Power House.



## **India may become part of Tibetan rail network**

- China is keen that India join the Tibetan rail network, a senior adviser to the Chinese government on Tibetan affairs told a group of visiting journalists at the end of a tour deep into Tibetan territories spread across three provinces.
- The modern high-altitude rail network in Tibet that snakes through tunnels and rises to thousands of metres, is not just an engineering marvel, but a determined showpiece of China's ambitious financial intervention in regions where Tibetans live.
- Tibetans are a majority in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and have large settlements in a few other provinces such as Sichuan and Yunnan.
- Despite the slowdown in Chinese economy in recent times, the TAR continues to record two-digit growth, thanks significantly to the massive financial intervention from Beijing.
- According to the Chinese vision, by 2020 no region or ethnic group should be left behind in achieving a per capita of \$12,000. "Infrastructure growth will keep progressing.
- Farmers and herdsmen will get development, not just cities," Chinese side said, justifying the broad roads and flyovers that link up even remote Tibetan villages.
- As part of its aggressive investments in Tibetan regions, China is developing rail networks, roads and airports across the region at high altitudes.
- The world's highest railway station (Tanggula), the highest civilian airport (Daocheng Yading Airport) and some of the finest roads at a few thousand metres altitude are already built across provinces where Tibetans live.
- China has a two-front strategy for rail networks to Tibet and within TAR. One is to build a new rail line from TAR to the mainland, which would link Sichuan's capital Chengdu with Lhasa. This is in addition to the existing Qinghai-Tibet rail link.

## **India is looking to expand cooperation with the Iran**

- Lifting of international sanctions on Iran has opened up immense opportunities said PM Modi.
- He also said that India is looking forward to expanding cooperation with the Persian Gulf nation in sectors such as trade, investment, infrastructure and energy.
- Mr. Modi, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Iran in the last 15 years, was received at the Mehrabad International Airport by Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ali Tayyebnia, after which he left for a local gurudwara to meet people of Indian origin.
- Stating that both public and private sector firms from India were keen on investing in Iran, he said the signing of the agreement on the development of Chabahar port will provide wider connectivity.
- Besides signing a deal on the development of phase-1 of the port, India is looking at doubling oil imports from the Persian Gulf nation, which a few years back was its second-biggest oil supplier, as well as making progress on getting rights to develop the Farzad-B gas field.
- Mr. Modi, who will hold formal talks with President Hassan Rouhani on Monday, said he had indicated possibilities of cooperation in ports, fertiliser and petrochemical sectors during their last meeting at Ufa last year.
- ONGC is in talks to secure development rights for the gas field it had discovered in 2008. It has already invested about \$100 million in the project

## **Kiran Bedi to become the LG of Puduchery**

- BJP leader and former IPS officer Kiran Bedi was, on Sunday, appointed Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, a post that has been vacant for the past two years.

- Puducherry was under the additional charge of Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lt. Gen. Ajay Singh, since then.
- A Rashtrapati Bhawan communiqué said: “The President has been pleased to appoint Ms Kiran Bedi to be the Lt. Governor of Puducherry with effect from the date she assumes charges of her office.”
- The appointment comes three days after the Congress-DMK alliance won 17 seats in the 30-member State Assembly.
- The post of Lieutenant Governor in the Union territory had been lying vacant after the Narendra Modi Government sacked UPA nominee Virendra Kataria on July 2014, barely a year after he had been appointed.
- Ms Bedi, India’s first woman IPS officer, said she looked “forward to giving every bit of myself to the responsibility. I am there for the benefit of the country.... I am grateful for the government's decision. They trusted me.”

## **Gaya-model lantern in Colombo**

- Lanterns are an integral part of the Vesak Poya festival (Full Moon in May), which is celebrated to mark three important events in the life of Buddha — birth, enlightenment and death.
- This time, in Colombo, a Vesak lantern kept near the Gangaramaya temple is an additional attraction as it has been modelled on the “stupa” at the Mahabodhi temple in Gaya, Bihar.
- This has been arranged by the Indian government at the invitation of the Sri Lankan government..
- The lantern will be on display till Wednesday as part of the Buddha Rashmi Vesak celebrations organised by the Presidential Secretariat and the Gangaramaya temple.
- The Mahabodhi temple, one of the oldest brick structures in eastern India, was declared a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in June 2002.
- According to the UNESCO, this was the first temple built by Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century BC. However, the present temple is of the 5th-6th century CE, belonging to the late Gupta period.
- Another special feature is that the temple is believed to have had a significant influence on the development of brick architecture over the centuries.

## **UP government encouraging farmers to grow oilseeds**

- To help farmers recover from successive crop losses in drought-affected Bundelkhand, the Uttar Pradesh government is encouraging them to increase the cultivation of oilseeds, especially sesame (til), in the coming Kharif season.
- The State has increased subsidy on oilseeds. The government will now provide farmers a grant of Rs. 1,500 per quintal in the Kharif season (sesame, groundnut and soyabean) and Rs. 800 per quintal in the Rabi season (rye, mustard, rapeseed and linseed).
- The grant will be applicable to all species of oilseeds ageing 15 years. Relaxing the norms in Bundelkhand, a government spokesperson said the grant payable on oilseeds would not be limited to 50 per cent.
- In all seven districts of Bundelkhand, officials are holding ‘ghostis’ (small meetings) to educate farmers about the benefits of cultivating sesame.
- As farmers feared that increase in production will bring down the price, last season the government introduced an additional Rs. 80 per kg as subsidy on the crop.
- It becomes even more viable for farmers to grow sesame in view of the menace of “Annapratha” prevalent in the region.
- Annapratha is an age-old tradition in Bundelkhand where farmers let loose their cattle, especially the unproductive and pregnant cows, to graze freely.
- Regular droughts over the years have worsened the “Annapratha” as distressed Bundelkhand farmers are even more inclined to let loose their unproductive animals.

- The situation has aggravated due to the drying up of waterbodies, depletion of forest cover grazing areas.

## **Mann ki baat focuses on forest conservation and saving water**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his Mann Ki Baat address on radio, where he made a strong pitch for a mass movement to save forests and conserve “every drop” of water during the monsoons.
- “Most parts of the country are experiencing an intense heatwave. Be it humans, birds or animals, all are troubled. It is only because of environment that such problems continue to increase.”
- “Depletion of forests has been going on, trees continue to be cut. In a way, humankind itself destroyed the environment and put has set itself on the path of destruction,” the Prime Minister said.
- The Prime Minister said he had departed from past traditions of holding a common meeting with the Chief Ministers and decided to meet them separately to give individual attention to each of them.
- The Prime Minister praised States such as Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat for innovative efforts to save waters and water bodies.
- Referring to the results of the CBSE board examinations declared recently, he urged parents to not pressurise their children to get more and more marks.
- “Dissatisfaction is a reflection of negative mindset, dissatisfaction can lead to failures. Accept whatever result has come, welcome it and move forward. Life does not stop because of bad marks. The most important thing is not to lose confidence,”.

## **India and Iran signed various agreements including to develop chahbahar port**

- India and Iran signed a series of agreements that will allow New Delhi to use the port of Chahbahar to access Central Asia and Afghanistan.
- The first agreement, a bilateral, signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s May 22-23 visit, will provide India the right to develop and operate two terminals and five berths with multipurpose cargo handling capacities in the port of Chahbahar for 10 years.
- India and Iran also sealed 11 other agreements, covering culture, finance and conservation, during Mr. Modi’s official meetings with the Iranian President.
- Mr. Modi’s visit was preceded by those by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan when the contracts were finalised.
- “The agreement to develop the Chahbahar port and related infrastructure, and availability of about \$500 million from India for this purpose, is an important milestone. This major effort would boost economic growth in the region,” Mr. Modi said in his statement, following the signing of the agreement between IPGPL (India Ports Global Private Limited) and Arya Banader of Iran.

## **Kochi Special Circuit Bench of NGT prohibited older diesel vehicles**

- In an order with far-reaching implications, the Kochi Special Circuit Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) prohibited light and heavy diesel vehicles of more than 2000 cc engine capacity that are older than ten years from plying in six major cities of the State.

- The ban, which will cover vehicles in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kochi, Thrissur, Kozhikode, and Kannur, will come into effect in another 30 days.
- Each detected violation thereafter will entail a Rs.5,000 fine as environmental compensation. The fine should be collected by the traffic police or the Pollution Control Board.
- This means that out of the 96 lakh vehicles registered in the State, close to two lakh diesel vehicles, which are already 10 or more years old and have engine capacities of 2000 cc or more, have to be phased out.
- These include over 98,400 light motor vehicles, 44,524 medium motor vehicles, 41,121 heavy motor vehicles and 3,700 private stage carriers.
- The NGT Bench comprising Chairperson Swatanter Kumar and Expert Member Bikram Singh Sajwan has also directed the State government not to register any more diesel vehicle of 2000 cc and above, except Public Transport and Local Authority vehicles.

## **The Centre has told States to withdraw less pictorial warning tobacco product**

- The Centre has set May 31 deadline for the States and Union Territories to withdraw from the market tobacco products whose 85 per cent packaging space is not covered with pictorial warning.
- A communiqué from the Tobacco Control Division of Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has requested the Chief Secretaries of all States and UT's to take steps for strict enforcement of the new rules on pictorial warnings.
- The Pictorial Warning Rules under Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 had come into force from April 1, 2016.
- The communiqué said that packages not compliant with the new rules be allowed for sale “only by printing, pasting or affixing the new warnings thereon covering 85 per cent of the principal display area.”
- Though the Union Health Ministry’s notification on the larger size of pictorial warning was issued in September last year to come into force from April 1, the cigarette manufacturers continued to mislead the public by restricting the warning to 40 per cent of the display space on one side.

## **President gave his assent to the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test ordinance**

- President Pranab Mukherjee gave his assent to the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test ordinance before he embarked on his China visit.
- This prepared the ground for exempting State government medical colleges from the Supreme Court-mandated single all-India entrance exam for a year.
- Stating that the ordinance had given a “firm and statutory” support to the common entrance test, Health Minister J.P. Nadda told a press conference that all postgraduate (PG) admissions will be done through NEET this year.
- For undergraduate (UG) courses, an exemption has been made for ‘State quota’ seats in government medical colleges and private institutions for this academic session.
- The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2016, and The Dentists (Amendment) Ordinance, 2016, are being promulgated to amend the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956, and Dentists Act, 1948, respectively to make way for a uniform entrance examination for UG and PG courses.

- This is with a stipulation that for the 2016-17 academic session, the States can opt to conduct their own examinations for UG courses.
- The first phase of NEET was conducted on May 1, and the second phase is scheduled to be held on July 24.

## **21st edition of the European Union Film Festival in India**

- Actor-director Ralph Fiennes' Shakespearean drama Coriolanus will open the 21st edition of the European Union Film Festival here on May 27. The festival will showcase 24 films from 24 European countries.
- Organised by the Delegation of the European Union and embassies of EU Member States in partnership with local organisations, including the Federation of Film Societies of India.
- The festival will traverse through 11 cities, including Delhi, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Pune, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Coimbatore and Jodhpur till August 14.
- The European Union Film Festival has won a special place in the Indian film calendar and in the hearts of viewers by showcasing the wry, the unexpected, the beautiful and even the tragic events of ordinary lives in unfamiliar settings.

## **Rain in North India will be good for crop**

- Widespread rain in the past 24 hours across several parts of the north and central India will boost Kharif sowing, easing concerns over the possible late arrival of monsoon, officials and experts said.
- In its recent forecast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the monsoon would reach Kerala by June 7.
- The monsoon rains, that usually reach Kerala by June 1, are crucial for agriculture, more importantly this year after two years of back-to-back drought.
- Rain occurred in most places of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and in many places of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, besides many eastern States, in the past 24 hours, according to the IMD.

## **IT dept to 'name and shame' taxpayers who have above one crore default**

- The Income Tax department, beginning this financial year, has decided to 'name and shame' all category of taxpayers who have a default of Rs. one crore and above.
- The department has begun publishing the names of tax defaulters in leading national dailies since last year and has named 67 such defaulters till now with their addresses, contacts, PAN card number and shareholders in case of companies.
- The earlier exercise was restricted to people with huge defaults to the tune of about Rs. 20-30 crore.

## **One of the strongest El Niño in the history ended**

- Australia's weather bureau said the withering El Nino — among the strongest in history and responsible for two years of consecutive droughts and record summer temperatures in India — had ended.
- While that bodes well for the monsoon, weather officials in India said this could also be a precursor to floods during August and September and monsoon possibly spilling over to October.

- The Australian Bureau of Meteorology said on Tuesday that there was “...little chance of [sea surface temperatures] returning to El Niño levels, in which case mid-May will mark the end of the 2015–16 El Niño.”
- Typically, an El Niño — marked by above-average temperatures in the Pacific — that begins to cool is followed by a neutral phase before transitioning into La Niña.

## **Assocham study says India discards 18.5 lakh tones of e-waste annually**

- India, which has emerged as the world’s second largest mobile market, is also the fifth largest producer of e-waste, discarding roughly 18.5 lakh tonnes of electronic waste each year, a study says.
- Telecom equipment alone accounts for 12 per cent of the e-waste, a joint study by Assocham-KPMG said.
- The rising levels of e-waste generation in India have been a matter of concern in recent years. With more than 100 crore mobile phones in circulation, nearly 25 per cent end up in e-waste annually, it said.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified e-waste management rules, 2016, in which producers are for the first time covered under extended producers’ responsibility (EPR).
- The rules prescribe a waste collection target of 30 per cent waste generated under EPR for the first two years, progressively going up to 70 per cent in the seventh year of the rule.
- The rules prescribe stringent financial penalties for non-compliance. However, the study said the unorganised sector in India is estimated to handle around 95 per cent of the e-waste produced in the country.
- Given the huge user base and vast reach of telecom in India, it is practically difficult and expensive for the handset manufacturers to achieve the targets prescribed in the rules from first year, the study said.

## **Govt does not agree with SC’s estimate about judges vacancy**

- Union Law & Justice Ministersaid observations in the Law Commission report, on the basis of which Chief Justice of India Tirath Singh Thakur had said that 40,000 judges were needed in 1987, were not based on scientific data.
- In an emotional appeal to the government to increase number of judges, the Chief Justice of India referred to the report stating it had recommended 40,000 judges in the country to tide over the problem of pendency.
- The report said there were only 10 judges to a million when there should be at least 50 judges per 10-lakh population.
- Mr. Gowda said the Law Commission observations relied upon expert opinions. “In the report itself they said that this has to be calculated on the basis of scientific data. But no scientific data was available.
- Even in the Imtiaz Hussain case, the Supreme Court asked the Law Commission to once again look into the matter. They once again said it may not be possible unless we get the scientific data.
- Mr. Gowda said the Ministry is yet to receive the Supreme Court Collegium’s comments on the revised memorandum of procedure.
- Stating that the government had expedited the process of judicial appointments, the Minister said 86 additional judges were made permanent and 51 new judges had been appointed.
- “Appointment of another 170 judges in the higher judiciary is being processed. Judges’ sanctioned strength in the High Courts has been increased from 906 in June 2014 to 1,065 in April 2016. In the

case of district/subordinate courts, the sanctioned strength has been increased from 17,715 in 2012 to 20,502 in 2015, he said.

- On “ease of doing business”, the Minister said the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division, and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts Act (2015) was enacted by Parliament to ensure speedy and fair disposal of commercial disputes.
- Also, the Arbitration and Conciliation Act has been amended. This Bill was pending before the government since 2003.

## **Modi to address joint session of congress in US**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s busy day on Capitol Hill on June 8 will underscore the significance the U.S. legislature has acquired in promoting ties between the two countries.
- The Obama administration has to balance its policies to accommodate Pakistan, but the Congress has no such ambivalence. A series of legislative measures in the recent past demonstrates the bipartisan consensus in India’s favour.
- Mr. Modi will spend almost the entire day on the Capitol. Speaker will host him for an interaction with Congressional leaders in the morning; then there will be the address to the joint session of Congress, followed by a lunch.
- Unlike in the past, when the India Caucus hosted the Prime Ministers for Capitol Hill receptions, this time the U.S. Congress and its various committees host the entire series of events.
- The other recent Congressional initiatives that favour India include a Bill encouraging the administration to help India join the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, one restricting U.S. military aid to Pakistan and another one that blocked U.S. funding for a proposed sale of F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan.
- Unlike in India, U.S. foreign policy decisions made by the executive are subject to approval by the legislature.
- U.S. lawmakers are, however, increasingly impatient with India on one count: trade liberalisation.
- The lawmakers have also raised concerns over the reported incidents of intolerance in India. In February, six Senators and 26 Representatives wrote to Prime Minister, asking him to condemn religious violence.

## **Kerala exchequer to loose significant amount due to NGT orders**

- The State exchequer is to loose more than Rs.135 crore annually owing to curbs imposed by the National Green Tribunal’s Kochi Circuit bench on registration of diesel vehicles above 2000-cc in six cities in the State.
- Besides, the State will have to mobilise over Rs.270 crore for part repayment of motor vehicle tax to owners of 94,000 non-transport vehicles and 91,000 transport vehicles.
- More than 1.85 lakh motor vehicles powered by HSD and older than 10 years are to be phased out in the next five years, according to the NGT order.
- Rs.270 crore, the amount to be repaid, was worked out on the basis of 40 per cent depreciation to vehicles.
- The State collects one-time motor vehicle tax for a 15-year period. As diesel vehicles have to be phased out, the report said, the tax collected for the remaining five years would have to be repaid.

## **Apex court allowed salvagers Girone to go to Italy**



- With the Centre endorsing his plea to return to Italy on ‘humanitarian grounds’, the Supreme Court allowed Italian marine Salvatore Girone to go home.
- He will have to return if an international tribunal decides that India has jurisdiction to try the marines for the deaths of two Kerala fishermen in 2012.
- In September 2014, the court had allowed Mr. Girone’s compatriot and co-accused in the case, Massimiliano Latorre, to leave for Italy after he suffered a stroke.
- The decision to let Mr. Girone go was taken after the Supreme Court was informed that the tribunal may give its verdict only by December 2018.
- A Vacation Bench laid down conditions for releasing Mr. Girone, including that he continue to remain under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and report to the local police station in Italy once every month.
- Also, the Italian authorities will keep the Indian embassy informed.

## **PM appeal to every section for women empowerment**

- Marking two years of NDA rule at a well-attended farmers’ rally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke on women's issues, showcasing the Centre’s ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ scheme to improve the sex ratio and educate the girl child.
- “If India’s girl child is not empowered, how can the nation be empowered?” Mr. Modi asked.
- He suggested that doctors in the country treat poor women for free on the ninth day of every month.
- He also announced that the Union Cabinet would raise the retirement age of doctors working with the State as well as Central governments to 65.
- While Mr. Modi steered clear of criticising the Akhilesh Yadav government in the State that goes to polls next year, he said that as a former Chief Minister, he believed in putting money in the hands of States.
- Speaking before Mr. Modi, however, Home Minister Rajnath Singh was clear in his appeal, invoking Lord Ram to exhort the people to vote the BJP back to power.

## **Apex court asks centre to frame uniform policy for financial compensation of rape victims**

- The Supreme Court asked the Centre to frame a uniform national policy to financially compensate rape victims, while terming the Nirbhaya Fund a mere “lip service”.
- A Vacation Bench led by Justice P.C. Pant said there was too much dichotomy and contradiction among States regarding compensation schemes for rape survivors.
- The Bench issued notice to the Centre, States and Union Territories on the question of effective implementation of Section 357 A of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- This provision mandates States to co-ordinate with the Centre to prepare a scheme for providing funds to compensate and rehabilitate victims or dependents.
- “Setting up of the Nirbhaya Fund is not enough and it is just paying lip service. The Union of India must ensure that adequate relief is being provided to the victims of sexual offences,” the Bench observed orally.
- Senior advocate and amicus curiae Indira Jaising said the victim compensation scheme has been notified only in 25 States.

## **The Indian Air Force test-fired a land-attack version of BrahMos, in the western sector**

- The Indian Air Force successfully test-fired a land-attack version of the supersonic cruise missile, BrahMos, in the western sector.
- The flight-trial which took place in a firing range in the western sector, met its mission parameters, a BrahMos press release said. The missile destroyed a designated target.
- Its accuracy in mountain warfare mode was re-established during a campaign by the Army in the eastern sector last year and repeated last month.
- This brings to light that the IAF too has been equipped with the land-attack version of BrahMos, which flies at a supersonic speed of Mach 3. The Navy and the Army have already deployed the two-stage missile, which has a range of 290 km.
- The IAF had deployed the missile in the border areas to take out the enemy's communication towers, runways, and radar in case of a conflict.
- The IAF is preparing to fire the air version of BrahMos from its Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter aircraft in the coming weeks.

## **Defence minister says Tejas would be the mainstay of the Indian Air Force**

- Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar said the indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas would be the mainstay of the Indian Air Force and would likely replace the entire MiG-21 fleet of almost 250 fighters.
- "LCA is mainstay. There will be seven squadrons of it. It is 3-4 times better than MiG-21s," he told while giving an overview of the IAF modernisation plans.
- About 250 MiG-21s were in service, most of which would be phased out in the next 10-15 years, Mr. Parrikar said, adding that they would be "replaced by the LCA and another single-engine fighter."
- Mirage and Jaguar upgrade programmes were currently under way which, Mr. Parrikar said, would add 10-30 years to their life.
- The improved version of LCA referred to as Mk-1A with four major improvements over the Mk-1 variant has been offered by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) as an interim measure in view of the delay in LCA-MK2.
- However, the LCA being a single-engine, light-weight fighter, it has its limitations, which is why another twin-engine fighter would be needed other than the Rafale.
- Functionally, the LCA is better than many other foreign fighters. It reacts very smoothly, fly-by-wire, its turn radius is very good, manoeuvrability is very good but it has limitation in the sense that it is a light combatant.
- It cannot go into deep penetration... It is mostly good for dogfights in your own sky or to degrade the opponent Army's command posts," Mr. Parrikar observed

## **T.S.R. Subramanian committee submitted its report to the HRD Ministry**

- A committee headed by the former Cabinet secretary T.S.R. Subramanian for the evolution of the soon-to-be-announced national education policy submitted its report to the Human Resource Development Ministry.
- The Committee has examined the large body of outcome documents, recommendations and suggestions received from the various consultations.
- The Committee also had several meetings with various stakeholders and held regional consultations as well as undertaken field visits to educational institutions.

## **PM points out good work done by the government**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented his “report card” of two years at the helm of the NDA government in a five-and-a-half-hour television talkathon over the national broadcaster, Doordarshan.
- He said his government’s work as a the beginning of a “new dawn”, and the result of “keeping the interests of the common man front and centre.”  
Prime Minister Modi spoke about the general direction of his government and his strong measures to tackle graft across the board in the governmental system.
- “We have managed to save more Rs 36,000 crore in pilferage within the system. We caught more than 1.62 crore fake ration cards, fake schools with teachers on their rolls receiving salaries,” Mr. Modi said.
- “Facts like these, and the use of subsidised LED bulbs leading to a saving of over 20,000 MW of power every year do not make for headlines, but we must not allow a spirit of despondency to grip the nation,” he said.
- “My target is to provide five crore gas connections to those households which still rely on wood fired ovens for cooking,” Mr. Modi said.
- “We have three years of this term left; I promise to work hard to justify the confidence placed on me by the people. I will not stint when it comes to hard work,” the Prime Minister said.

## **Subramanian committee came up with recommendation for new education policy**

- The no detention policy in schools should be applicable till Class V and exams be held from Class VI onwards, the Subramanian committee formed by the government to formulate a New Education Policy (NEP) has recommended.
- Panel has suggested that foreign institutions be allowed to come to India to improve the quality of higher education.
- The panel has also given specific suggestions to raise the standard of education which are found wanting in many respects from primary to higher level.
- One of the key suggestions is to focus on “remedial coaching” and “hand-holding” to ensure the learning outcome of children does not suffer.
- It has recommended that the ‘No detention policy’ be reviewed and exams be held from Class VI. The Right To Education law prescribes the no detention policy for students till Class VIII.
- However, in case a child does not pass in the first instance, he or she should be given two more chances to appear in the exam.

## **PM Modi tried his hand in traditional Khasi drum in Meghalaya visit**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried his hand at beating the traditional Khasi drum as he wound up his two-day visit to Meghalaya.
- Mr. Modi expressed keenness about ‘rhythm’ and beat a drum together with Khasi tribal musicians.
- “The Prime Minister tried his hand at beating our ‘Ka Bom’ and also interacted with leaders from at least 10 Himas,” The chief priest of HimaMawphlang, said.
- Mr. Modi also expressed interest on sacred groves and forest fragments with religious connotation for the protectors and sought to know details of how they were managed by the local community.

- Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited within these sacred groves.
- Mr. Modi's visit to the sacred forest of Mawphlang, however, could not take place due to inclement weather. However, he was briefed on how the highly-regarded grove was managed, controlled and administered.

## **Indian Railways to come up with Clone trains**

- You arrive at the railway station armed with a waitlisted ticket for, say, Rajdhani Express, hoping for a miracle to find a berth.
- The train, however, leaves without you, but minutes later another Rajdhani Express pulls into the station — just to carry waitlisted ticket-holders like you.
- Such a dream scenario could turn into a reality starting June, when the Indian Railways plans to launch 'clone trains' on high-demand routes that will be run within an hour of a scheduled train's departure to accommodate those on the waiting list.
- The idea behind such real-time demand-driven trains is to ensure that they reach their destination around the same time originally scheduled.
- Moreover, passengers will be informed about their berths in the clone train soon after the reservation charts for the original scheduled train are firmed up four hours before departure.

## **Despite difficulties Kaveri engine still on radar**

- New efforts, tweaks and hopefully a Rs. 2,600-crore grant are being explored to salvage 25 years of work and resources of over Rs. 2,000 crore spent on the Kaveri and use the engine's derivatives in unmanned strategic projects of the future - probably with a different name.
- Already its spinoff version has been identified as the engine for 'Ghatak', a tentatively named future unmanned combat aircraft on which early studies have been taken up at two aeronautical labs based in Bengaluru.
- The military research establishment has not given up the quest for a potential Indian powerplant for future military systems, he indicated.
- Dr. Tamilmani said that the development of aero engine technology and product was long identified as a critical need in defence research.

## **India's diplomatic situation with Africa still tensed**

- India's diplomatic downturn with Africa intensified as the Ministry of External Affairs sent mixed signals on responding to the series of attacks on African nationals.
- Though the Delhi police arrested five men for the series of attacks on African nationals, the African Students Association in India announced that it would take out a 'March for Justice' rally in the national capital.
- Responding to the announcement, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said, "I have asked Gen V.K. Singh MoS and Secretary (ER) Amar Sinha to meet African students who have announced demonstration at Jantar Mantar."
- "Had detailed discussion with Delhi Police and media is blowing out of proportion minor scuffle as attack on African nationals in Rajpur Khurd," Mr Singh said in a tweet.
- Gen. Singh's tweets prompted sharp criticism with opposition parties and the Broadcast Editors Association calling it "absurd" and "irresponsible", while African students said they disagreed with his comments.

## **World highest Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon**

- The annual Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon, which began in 2003, is meant to mark the anniversary of the first summit of the peak by Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary on May 29, 1953.
- About 130 foreign runners, including from Britain, United States, China and Australia, joined another 30 from Nepal.
- The air at base camp contains only half as much oxygen as at sea-level, leaving many runners gasping for breath on even the slightest incline along the narrow, rocky mountain paths.
- The event organisers hailed the large number of participants as a further sign of the recovery of Nepal's mountaineering industry after two years of tragedy on the 8,848-metre peak.
- Only 55 took part last year and it was postponed until October after a massive earthquake hit the Himalayan nation in April, killing nearly 9,000 people and triggering a deadly avalanche on Everest base camp.
- An avalanche on Everest in 2014 also claimed the lives of 16 Nepali guides and forced a shutdown of the mountain.

## **First-of-its-kind multiple organ transplant in U.S.**

- In a first-of-its-kind procedure, doctors in the U.S. have successfully transplanted a “composite” skull and scalp flap, along with kidney and pancreas — all from the same donor.
- The patient was suffering from a non-healing scalp defect and declining organ kidney and pancreas function, researchers said.
- The experience may open the way to further procedures combining “vascularised composite allotransplantation” (VCA) with organ transplants, in patients who have already accepted the need for lifelong immunosuppressive therapy.
- VCA refers to transplant procedures combining different types of tissues, such as skin, muscle, blood vessels, nerves, and bone.
- However, they also have a major drawback — the need for immunosuppressive drugs to prevent the recipient's immune system from rejecting the transplant.
- Patients who also need or have already undergone organ transplantation have already accepted the risks of lifelong immunosuppressive therapy

## **Athirappally hydel power project facing protest**

- The new Kerala government's want to go head with the 163-megawatt Athirappally hydel power project across the Chalakudy river
- Project may run into trouble with the vulnerable tribal group of Kadar, who believe it will wipe out their livelihood, they are preparing to oppose it.
- he tribe, estimated to have around 2,000-odd people, seldom farm and mostly subsist on collecting minor forest produce, including honey, which they trade with outsiders for essentials. Many work as labourers too.
- Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Power Minister Kadakampally Surendran had announced that the project would be pushed, while factoring in objections and opinions.

## **President takes account of attack on African nationals**

- President Pranab Mukherjee said attacks on African nationals are painful to him personally given that as a student, political activist and Member of Parliament he had seen first-hand how India and Africa have always been close partners.
- “It would be most unfortunate if the people of India were to dilute our long tradition of friendship with the people of Africa and the welcome we have always extended to them in our country,” Mr. Mukherjee cautioned
- He said this while addressing the Seventh Annual Heads of Missions Conference at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

## **Closest images of Pluto sent by New Horizons**

- The most stunning and close-up images of Pluto’s surface have been beamed back to Earth by NASA’s New Horizons space probe.
- The mosaic — extending across the hemisphere that faced the New Horizons spacecraft as it flew past Pluto on July 14, last year — includes all of the highest-resolution images taken by the NASA probe.
- With a resolution of about 80 meters per pixel, the mosaic affords scientists and the public the best opportunity to examine the fine details of the various types of terrain on Pluto, and determine the processes that formed and shaped them.
- NASA has also released a video that moves down the mosaic from top to bottom, offering new views of many of Pluto’s distinct landscapes all along the way.
- The images were obtained by New Horizons’ Long Range Reconnaissance Imager about 15,850 kilometres from Pluto, about 23 minutes before the probe’s closest approach.

## **Patients going breast cancer surgery need less painkilling medication now**

- Patients undergoing breast cancer surgery need less painkilling medication post-surgery if they have anaesthesia that is free of opioid drugs, researchers have found.
- While opioid drugs provide an excellent painkilling effect throughout operations, they also have side-effects, researchers said.
- Post-operative complications, such as respiratory depression, post-operative nausea and vomiting, itching and bowel obstruction are well-known examples of such side-effects, the researchers said.
- Such patients require less analgesics about 24 hours after a non-opiate anaesthesia than after an opiate anaesthesia.

# **INTERNATIONAL**

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## **Copyright on Maurice Ravel’s ‘Bolero’ expired**

- Almost 90 years after it was first performed in Paris, the copyright runs out on Sunday on one of the most popular and unique pieces of classical music, Maurice Ravel’s ‘Bolero’.
- Written in 1928 and performed on November 22 of that year at Paris’ Opera Garnier, the symphonic work, which grows steadily louder as it progresses, was originally a ballet piece ordered by Russian dancer Ida Rubinstein.
- Immediately hailed by critics, it quickly became a worldwide success, even if the uniform melody and hypnotic, repetitive rhythm left some baffled.

- Mr. Petitgirard described it as “an experimental piece, a precision mechanism and a demonstration of genius.”
- But a contemporary of Ravel’s, the French composer Florent Schmitt, slammed the Bolero as “only error” in the composer’s career.
- Almost 90 years later, the work has been performed by some of the most prestigious orchestras in the world, under the baton of many of the top conductors, including Arturo Toscanini, Seiji Ozawa, Claudio Abbado and Pierre Boulez.
- It has been used in numerous ad campaigns, by British ice skaters Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean in their gold medal-winning performance at the Sarajevo Olympics in 1984.
- By some estimates Bolero has generated around 50 million euros (\$57 million) in royalties since 1960, part of more than 400 million for all of Ravel’s works.
- Ravel died unmarried and childless in 1937.

## **Moderate Iranian politicians make impressive comeback**

- Reformist and moderate Iranian politicians allied with President Hassan Rouhani won second round parliamentary elections, preliminary results said, capping a remarkable comeback after years of isolation.
- Of the 68 seats being contested, 36 went to the pro-Rouhani List of Hope coalition and 17 to conservatives with just four constituencies yet to be declared, according to official results.
- That would give reformists at least 131 seats in the new 290-member Parliament, 15 shy of a majority but more than their rivals’ 124 MPs.
- Remaining seats went to independents who could hold the balance of power. The second round was needed because no candidate won the minimum 25 per cent required in the first round.
- The outcome represents a significant realignment of competing factions in the Islamic republic, with conservative MPs losing their dominance and being outnumbered for the first time since 2004.
- The result is also an implicit public vote of confidence for Mr. Rouhani, who won a landslide election victory in 2013 and went on to clinch a historic deal with world powers over Tehran’s nuclear programme that lifted sanctions.
- Tallies also showed 17 women were elected — eight more than at present and the highest female representation since the country’s revolution in 1979.

## **China invited Asian countries in framing policy against U.S. rebalance to Asia**

- China has invited Asian countries to join Beijing in framing a security governance model with “Asian features” to counter the U.S. ‘rebalance’ to the region.
- China’s formal invite to neighbours to pursue a regional security doctrine that is led by Beijing, and not by the U.S., came during foreign ministerial Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in the Chinese capital.
- President Xi Jinping urged participants “to build consensus and step up dialogue” to foster “a security governance model with Asian features”.
- Details about what could emerge as China-centric collective security architecture in the Asia-Pacific are still a work-in-progress.
- The write-up grounded the rationale for its new initiative on the failure of the ‘Pivot to Asia’ or ‘rebalance’ doctrine of the Obama administration.
- It asserted that “the launch of the Asia-Pacific rebalance strategy by the U.S. in recent years did not bring Asia peace, but only uncertainty”.



- Tensions between the U.S. and China have spiked after the Chinese responded to the ‘pivot’ with fresh activism in the South China Sea, including construction of artificial islands within waters claimed and controlled by Beijing.
- Washington has dubbed the growing Chinese assertion as a danger to “freedom of navigation” which could hamper the \$5.3 trillion trade that passes through the South China Sea— a charge that Beijing denies.
- In the run up to the espousal of its new doctrine, the Chinese have launched a regional diplomatic offensive to reinforce that an Asian home-grown solution was the best way to resolve maritime disputes confronting the region.
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi embarked on a whirlwind visit to Cambodia, Laos and Brunei, to cull out what the Chinese Foreign Ministry described as “an important consensus” on the South China Sea issue.

## **Permanent court of Arbitration gave verdict on Italian Marine case**

- The lone Italian marine, Salvatore Girone, facing a murder charge in India could return home soon in the wake of a decision of an international tribunal at The Hague.
- The verdict is the first big pronouncement of the PCA (Permanent Court of Arbitration, The Hague), after Italy approached it in June 2015.
- Two Italian marines — Massimiliano Latorre and Mr. Girone are facing the charge of murdering two Indian fishermen in 2012 off the Kerala coast.
- The fishermen were killed when the marines on duty aboard MV Enrica Lexie, an Italian-flagged oil tanker, fired at them.
- Mr. Latorre is back in Italy after a stroke in 2014 while Mr. Girone is staying at the Italian embassy.
- However, differences have cropped up between the two countries over the details of the verdict which will govern the marine’s return.
- While India has claimed that the verdict upholds the Supreme Court’s authority, Italian officials have said it is a vindication of their position that India has no jurisdiction.
- “The Tribunal left it to the Supreme Court of India to fix the precise conditions of Sergeant Girone’s bail.”
- “This could include him reporting to an authority in Italy designated by our Supreme Court, surrendering his passport to Italian authorities and not leaving Italy without the permission of our Supreme Court,” said a statement from MEA.

## **India gets a major diplomatic coup in F-16**

- In a diplomatic coup for India that sets the stage for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the U.S. capital in June, the Obama administration announced that the U.S. would not be financing the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan.
- The administration’s turnaround, by now aligning itself with the bipartisan sentiments expressed in the U.S. Congress against giving aid to finance the deal, also signifies a change in its attitude towards Pakistan.
- Congress has approved the sale, key members have made clear that they object to using Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to support it. After objections, US has told the Pakistanis that they should put forward national funds for that purpose.
- The original plan was to sell eight F-16s to Pakistan and finance most of the \$699 million deal through FMF.

- Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman announced that they would not approve FMF for Pakistan until it demonstrated “behavioural changes” in its support for terrorism and its dealings with India.
- India has been strongly protesting the U.S. decision to give these fighters to Pakistan, and the matter figured in Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar’s meetings with U.S. Officials.
- The State Department announcement came on the fifth anniversary of the U.S. raid in Pakistan that killed al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden.
- Meanwhile, Pakistan said it will acquire jets from elsewhere if the United States doesn’t arrange funding for F-16s.
- Mr. Obama said in the interview that the U.S. had “excellent counter terrorism cooperation with Pakistan”, and Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Olson argued that F-16s improved Pakistan’s counter-terror capabilities.
- Pakistan has not been able to get the Taliban to the negotiating table in Afghanistan as it had promised, and the U.S. is increasing its engagement with India on Afghanistan, much to the discomfort of Pakistan establishment.
- The new order is for 13 F-35s, the fifth generation stealth fighters. The Joint Strike Fighter programme is estimated to cost \$379 billion for adding 2,457 aircraft, the costliest Pentagon acquisition ever.

## **A special Bangladesh’s court sentenced more for crimes during independence war**

- A special war crimes court in Bangladesh sentenced four men to death for killing, torture, arson and looting during the nation’s independence war against Pakistan in 1971.
- The court, accused by rights groups of holding flawed proceedings, said the four were involved in the deaths of nine people.
- Only one suspect, Shamsuddin Ahmed, was in court for the verdict. Authorities are still hunting for the other three— Gazi Abdul Mannan, Hafiz Uddin, and Shamsuddin Ahmed’s brother, Nasiruddin.
- The three-judge tribunal also sentenced a fifth man, Azharul Islam, to life in prison on two murder charges.
- Past convictions have led Islamist groups to call for public strikes and protests against what they say is a witch hunt by the government.
- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the war crimes trials, carried out by special tribunals established in 2010, represent a long-overdue effort to obtain justice more than four decades after Bangladesh split from Pakistan.
- Dozens of people have been convicted so far, including at least 29 who were sentenced to death. Most were leaders of the opposition party Jamaat-e-Islami.

## **Fierce fighting raged in the war-ravaged Syrian city of Aleppo**

- Fierce fighting raged in the war-ravaged Syrian city of Aleppo and air strikes pounded rebels east of the capital Damascus as top diplomats scrambled to salvage a collapsing truce.
- Intense international efforts to bring a halt to the latest surge in Syrian fighting continued, with talks expected in Berlin and the UN Security Council set for an urgent meeting.
- The renewed violence has threatened the complete breakdown of a landmark ceasefire between President Bashar Al-Assad’s regime and non-jihadist rebels brokered by Moscow and Washington in late February.

- Fighting has been especially intense in and around Syria's devastated second city of Aleppo, with more than 280 civilians killed since April 22.
- Some of the heaviest clashes in Aleppo in months continued on Wednesday as rebel forces pressed an offensive against regime troops on the city's western outskirts.
- There was no immediate word on any casualties from the renewed fighting. Moscow and Washington reached a deal last week on a temporary "freeze" in fighting in Eastern Ghouta and in the Mediterranean coastal province of Latakia.
- The so-called "regime of silence" is meant to reinforce a broader truce brokered by the two world powers in February.
- The halt in fighting was initially set for 24 hours in Eastern Ghouta but was extended twice, according to Syria's armed forces, and finally expired on 3rd may night.
- Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) gave conditional backing to visa-free travel for Turks and unveiled an overhaul of its asylum system under which member states that refuse to take a quota of refugees will be fined.
- In its latest bid to tackle the biggest migration crisis since World War II, the European Commission proposed making countries pay a "solidarity contribution" of €250,000 (\$290,000) for every refugee that they decline to take.

## **Brazil's embattled President Dilma Rousseff ignited the Olympic flame**

- Brazil's embattled President Dilma Rousseff ignited the Olympic flame, as a nationwide torch relay got under way with protests highlighting the country's deep political and economic crisis.
- Ms. Rousseff presided over the flame ceremony in Brasilia, even though she faces impeachment and is unlikely to be in office when South America's first Olympics open in less than three months.
- Ms. Rousseff is expected to be suspended from office next week as the country's Senate hears an impeachment case against her, which means Vice- President Michel Temer is likely to be President during the games.
- "Brazil is completely ready to offer protection to the athletes, the technical staffs, heads of delegations, tourists, and journalists to all our visitors," she said.

## **Caves in Gobi desert shows various historical aspects**

- Hewn out of solid rock in the middle of the bone dry Gobi desert, there exist hundreds of caves, whose intricately painted walls and magnificent statues have become markers in describing the epic journey of Buddhism.
- The grottoes of Dunhuang are an emblem of an exceptionally powerful cultural cross-current that had, for centuries, threaded the Indian and Chinese civilisations.
- Geography, and specifically the ancient Silk Road, had indeed played a foundational role in bringing about the India-China confluence of the past.
- Dunhuang was a major point of intersection along the Silk Road. From this oasis town, the Silk Road, which had started from the not-so-distant Xian, and after having passed through the Gansu corridor, stood at a prominent junction.
- After making way through the famous Jade Gate on the edge of Dunhuang, the Silk Road bifurcated along two lines. Both the trails eventually re-converged at Kashgar—another equally important junction along the Silk Road, on the edge of Central Asia.
- These settlements are all on the foothills of the "celestial" Tien Shan mountains, on the way to Kashgar.

- It is, however, the back-and-forth among people and goods along a branch of the southern route, which proved critical in channelling a masterly artistic fusion that is evident at Dunhuang's magnificent Mogao caves.
- Among Chinese officials in Dunhuang, the impulse for a cautious revival of India-China cultural ties, rooted in a common Buddhist heritage, is now palpable.

## **Democratic Tamil National Front formed with ten Tamil parties in Sri Lanka**

- Ten Tamil parties and groups in Sri Lanka have come together to form a coalition — Democratic Tamil National Front.
- Among the parties are the Tamil United Liberation Front of V. Anandasangaree; Eelam People's Democratic Party of Douglas Devananda and Democratic People's Congress of Praba Ganesan.
- Only a few days ago, Mr. Devananda and Mr. Ganesan had met President and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party chief Maithripala Sirisena and declared their allegiance to him.
- Explaining the purpose behind the coalition's formation, Mr. Devananda told that the parties which claimed to have brought in the existing government had not been able to take care of the interests of Tamils.
- The new coalition would campaign for the adoption of the "Indian model of federalism", which could be accomplished by enlarging the scope of the 13th Constitutional Amendment, which created provincial councils.

## **China will take part in Rim of the Pacific exercise (RIMPAC)**

- China will take part in a regular U.S.-led naval exercise starting next month, despite tensions over Beijing's territorial claims in the South China Sea.
- The U.S. will host multi-national naval drills called the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) off Hawaii in June and July.
- Although the Chinese navy has previously joined the exercises, held every two years, the latest drill comes as the country more aggressively asserts its maritime claims in Asia.
- It prompted the US to say in March that it was "reassessing" Beijing's participation.

## **US might block military aid to Pakistan for failing to control terrorism**

- The U.S. Congress has initiated a move to block \$450 million in aid to Pakistan for failing to "demonstrate its commitment" and taking action against the Haqqani terror network.
- The provision in the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) for the fiscal year 2017, if passed by the Congress, would not allow the U.S. government to waive this condition in 'national interest'.
- According to NDAA 2017 of the total amount of reimbursement and support authorised for Pakistan (\$450 million) would not be eligible for a national security waiver unless govt certifies that Pakistan continues to conduct military operations against the Haqqani Network in North Waziristan.
- The Defence Secretary also needs to certify that Pakistan is demonstrating commitment to prevent the Haqqani Network from using North Waziristan as a safe haven and is actively coordinating with

Afghanistan to restrict the movement of militants, including the Haqqani Network, along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

- There is similar certification requirement in the current fiscal 2016 ending on September 31, 2016, but the amount is \$300 million.

## **Pope dreams of Europe where being a migrant is not a crime**

- Pope Francis said he dreamed of a Europe in which “being a migrant is not a crime”, as he urged EU leaders to “tear down the walls” and build a fairer society.
- Invoking the memory of the EU founding fathers’ pursuit of integration after the WW II, he said they inspired because they “dared to change radically the models” that led to war.
- “Today, more than ever, their vision inspires us to build bridges and tear down walls,” he told a Vatican audience, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel.
- German chancellor has been at the centre of the EU’s attempts to resolve its biggest refugee crisis since the war ended in 1945.

## **Kim Jong-un said North Korea will not use nuclear weapons first**

- North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said his country will not use its nuclear weapons unless its sovereignty is invaded and announced a five-year economic plan at the congress of North Korea’s ruling party.
- Mr. Kim said he is ready to improve ties with “hostile” nations, and called for more talks with South Korea to reduce misunderstanding . He also urged the United States to stay away from inter-Korean issues.
- He announced a five-year plan starting this year to develop the North’s moribund economy, and identified improving the country’s power supply and increasing its agricultural and light-manufacturing production as critical parts of the plan.
- He also said the country must secure more electricity through nuclear power.

## **China digging cultural roots to revive ancient Silk Road**

- China is digging deep into its cultural roots to anchor a seamless revival of the ancient Silk Road, in tune with a growing domestic focus on tapping the achievements of its past.
- In Dunhuang, the oasis town along the ancient Silk Road in northwestern China, dozens, under the authority of the Dunhuang Academy, are patiently restoring the priceless artwork in Mogao caves.
- The caves, whose intricately painted walls and statues depict the life and thought of Buddha, and much more, are an icon of the vigorous cultural cross-currents that, for centuries, energised ties between India and China, through a branch of the ancient Silk Road.
- In September, thousands will descend in Dunhuan for the first Silk Road International Cultural Expo, whose mascot would be the Mogao grottos.
- Organisers say that 72 countries have been invited to participate in the mega event, which draws inspiration from China’s traditional engagement with a diverse set of people and cultures along the Silk Road.
- By leveraging culture, the Chinese wish to send a message to the world that the One Belt One Road (OBOR) connectivity project, is an extension of China’s peaceful engagement of Asia and Europe that ran for over a millennia along the Silk Road super-highway.
- With China as the fulcrum, the OBOR hopes to link Asia with Europe, while reviving the ancient Silk Road

- The scale of the infrastructure being established in Dunhuang is stunning. A legion of yellow cranes operate round the clock as workers in blue uniforms race against time to complete three main buildings, including the main convention centre, by July, well ahead of the expo.
- The focus on culture and tourism also aligns well with China's "new normal" economy, which aims to override low-end manufacturing with services and consumption.
- The overall contribution of the "culture industry" to the total GDP of the city had already crossed the 55 per cent mark last year, and the figure is expected to rise.

## **Bangladesh has summoned the Pakistan envoy over reaction to Supreme Court verdict**

- Bangladesh has summoned the Pakistan envoy to lodge a 'strong protest' over Islamabad's reaction at a recent Supreme Court verdict.
- Pakistan's Foreign Office had expressed "deep concern and anguish" over the Bangladesh apex court's decision to uphold the death sentence of Jamaat-e-Islami leader Motiur Rahman Nizami in a war crimes case.
- Mizanur Rahman, Secretary (bilateral) at the foreign ministry, handed over a protest note to Pakistan High Commissioner Shuja Alam on Monday.
- Nizami led the notorious al Badr Militia that carried out indiscriminate killings of the top secular intellectuals during the 1971 Liberation War.]
- Meanwhile, the authorities in the Dhaka Central Jail have reportedly taken "all preparations" to carry out the execution of Nizami "any time".
- His death warrant was issued by the war crimes tribunal after the Supreme Court published the full copy of its verdict on March 16. He was brought to the Dhaka Central Jail from Gazipur's Kashimpur Jail.

## **Indian aid for Ramayana trail may be finalised soon**

- India's assistance for the Ramayana trail in Sri Lanka may be finalised in a high level meeting between the two governments next month.
- India's help has been sought for development of infrastructure or amenities in the sites that form part of the Ramayana circuit.
- About a dozen places have been identified as part of the circuit and Sita Eliya in Nuwera Eliya of the Central Province is one of them.
- Legend has it that it is in this place that Sita was held captive by Ravana. About a week ago, Mr. Sugathadasa visited the Sita Eliya where the renovation of a temple for Sita was under way.
- To be held in the third week of June, the meeting, part of the Joint Working Group on Tourism, would pick up from where the officials held discussion four months ago in New Delhi. It would also deliberate on developing the Buddhist circuit in India.
- Indian High Commission said legal and other issues would also be examined. The finalisation of the details would lead to signing of a memorandum of understanding which may take place later.

## **Imams and Muslim scholars are fighting IS through theology**

- As the military and political battle against the Islamic State escalates, Muslim imams and scholars in the West are fighting on another front — through theology.

- The IS, however, has taken notice. The group recently threatened the lives of 11 Muslim imams and scholars in the West, calling them “apostates”.
- The recent issue of the IS’s online propaganda magazine, Dabiq , called them “obligatory targets”, and it said that supporters should use any weapons on hand to “make an example of them”.
- The danger is real enough that the FBI has contacted some of those named in the magazine “to assist them in taking proper steps to ensure their safety.
- The death threats are a sign that Muslim religious leaders have antagonised the IS, according to analysts who are studying the militant group.
- Their growing influence also contradicts those who claim that Muslim leaders have been silent in the fight against violent extremism.
- Several of the targeted Muslim leaders said in interviews that, while they were taking the threat seriously, they had no intention of backing off.
- These scholars ridicule the IS’s claim to have created a “caliphate”.
- Instead, in a highly effective bit of rebranding, they call the IS Kharijites, a reviled group of Muslims who killed women and children and rebelled against the caliphs in the seventh century.
- The imams named by the IS are based in the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia. They represent a broad spectrum of Islamic thought — from spiritual Sufis to puritanical Salafis, and even the more militant “Salafi Jihadis”.

## **Obama to become the first US president to visit atomic bomb site**

- Barack Obama will become the first U.S. President to visit Hiroshima, the first target of an atomic bomb 70 years ago, the White House announced..
- Mr. Obama will fulfil a desire he had expressed in 2009 — to travel to either of the two Japanese cities on which the U.S. dropped atomic bombs in 1945. Many historians believe it was necessary to end the Second World War. Jimmy Carter visited Hiroshima in 1984, after he had left the White House
- President Obama will be travelling to Japan for his final G-7 summit.
- Only months ahead of the November presidential election, Mr. Obama’s trip to Hiroshima is fraught with serious risks — to his own legacy and the chances of the Democratic nominee.
- The Republicans have accused Mr. Obama of being on a perpetual global apology tour — referring to his various remarks that sought to recalibrate U.S. positions towards Europe, the Muslim world and the war on terror.
- In a preemptive move, the White House said the President would not revisit the decision to use the atomic bomb.
- The Hiroshima bombing and America’s relations with Japan have cropped up in the ongoing presidential campaign.
- Mr. Trump has said he would rather allow Japan and South Korea to develop their own nuclear arsenals than having U.S. deployment in the region to provide them protection.
- Mr. Obama’s visit to Hiroshima will highlight America’s commitment “to pursue the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” Mr. Rhodes said.

## **Bangladesh is working on a strategy to fight extremism with US**

- The U.S. and Bangladesh are working out a strategy to fight violent extremism in the South Asian nation, which saw a number of killings in recent months of activists and writers by alleged Islamists.

- The plan, mooted by the U.S., is currently being discussed. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Nisha Desai Biswal had visited Bangladesh on May 5 following the recent murder of a USAID employee and his friend in Dhaka.
- Another U.S. delegation is expected to visit Dhaka soon to discuss the counter-terrorism plan.
- Ms. Biswal had met Indian High Commissioner Harsh Vardhan Shringla and reportedly discussed security issues when she was in Dhaka last week.
- The U.S. envoy's comment came two days ahead of Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar's visit to Dhaka.
- Indian officials denied the reports of a trilateral counter-terror partnership saying that Mr. Jaishankar's visit to Dhaka would discuss a "range of issues", but they would be "strictly bilateral".
- Officials also pointed to the fact that there are many "divergences" between the American and Indian positions on extremism in the region, most notably over the ongoing war crime trials, as well as the groups responsible for the killing of bloggers.

## **Tension in Bangladesh after Jamaat leader hanging**

- Activists from the Islami ChatraShibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, clashed with police in parts of Bangladesh after their party chief Motiur Rahman Nizami was hanged for 1971 war crimes.
- They also organised funeral prayers for Nizami. As part of their countrywide plan, the Jamaat activists held prayers at the BaitulMukarram national mosque in Dhaka and at the port city of Chittagong.
- Clashes erupted at the Parade Grounds near the Chittagong College when activists from the Bangladesh Chaatra League, student wing of the ruling Awami Party, tried to stop the prayers.

## **China opens its first deep-sea research institute**

- China has opened its first deep-sea research institute, which experts said will be useful to identify marine resources and to improve naval technology.
- The Institute of Deep-Sea Science and Engineering (IDSSE) located in Sanya, Hainan province passed an acceptance inspection and began official operations.
- It is the first scientific research base for study of the deep seas and is also China's first public platform for deep-sea research.
- The deep sea has a wealth of resources including mineral, biotic and petroleum resources, and there are more than 40 billion tonnes of petroleum in the South China Sea alone.

## **Brazilian President suspended**

- Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was suspended to face impeachment, ceding power to her Vice President-turned-enemy Michel Temer in a political earthquake ending 13 years of leftist rule over Latin America's biggest nation.
- Defiant to the end, Ms. Rousseff denounced a "coup" aimed at driving her from power, and urged her supporters to mobilise as she braces for an impeachment trial that is set to drag on for months.
- Hours earlier, a nearly 22-hour debate in the Senate closed with an overwhelming 55-22 vote against Ms. Rousseff.



- Only a simple majority of the 81-member Senate had been required to suspend Ms. Rousseff for six months pending judgment on charges that she broke budget accounting laws.
- A two-thirds majority vote will be needed at the end of the impeachment trial to force Ms. Rousseff (68) from office altogether.

## Meeting between India and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary

- Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar said that India and Bangladesh will “work together” to combat terrorism.
- After a meeting with his Bangladesh counterpart, the Indian foreign secretary told reporters that the two countries would “further strengthen their existing counter-terrorism structure.
- He also said that the government of India is strongly in support to Bangladesh as it is battling terrorism and extremism. He said “This is an issue of direct concern for us as a neighbour.”
- In a separate development, India came out with open support for Bangladesh’s ongoing war crimes trial, which has sentenced several Islamist leaders to death.
- India has also been supportive of a judicial process to address pending issues of retributive justice for war crimes committed during the movement for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.
- Meanwhile, Dhaka handed over a protest note to Pakistan in response to Islamabad’s condemnation of Nizami’s execution. For the second time this week, Shuja Alam, the Pakistani envoy, was summoned to the foreign office and handed over the note.
- Pakistan’s Parliament had passed a unanimous resolution on Wednesday condemning the execution. In another incident of protest against the hanging, Turkey has reportedly recalled its Ambassador to Bangladesh.

## Belgium to take fight against IS into Syria

- Belgium will extend its F-16 air strikes against Islamic State jihadists in Iraq into Syria, Belgium grapples with the aftermath of deadly IS-claimed bomb attacks in Brussels.
- In accordance with UN Resolution 2249, the engagement will be limited to those areas of Syria under the control of IS and other terrorist groups.
- The objective will be to destroy these groups’ refuges,” Govt also said that the strikes would begin on July 1.
- Belgium launched its first attacks against IS in Iraq in late 2014 as part of the U.S.-led coalition, but decided against strikes in Syria amid public fears over getting dragged into a wider conflict.
- However, the November 13 Paris attacks which left 130 people dead brought home the IS threat to the heart of Europe and changed sentiment sharply.
- Earlier, Belgian Foreign Minister said the government was reconsidering its position, as it did not make sense to attack IS in Iraq but not in Syria.

## Nepal on turmoil again

- Madhesi protesters under the leadership of the United Madhesi Democratic Front (UMDF) of Nepal declared that they would start a new round of agitation and enforce a blockade on the capital Kathmandu.
- The protest comes three months after the end of a crippling economic blockade that the UMDF had launched demanding citizenship rights for the Madhesis of Nepal.
- “We will not let the government function unless it carries out amendments to the Nepali Constitution guaranteeing citizenship rights.” UMDF said

- May 13th declaration of protest was made exactly a week after Nepal cancelled the visit of President Bidhya Devi Bhandari to India and recalled its ambassador.

## **Sri Lankan Govt to tone down emphasis on Eelam war**

- The Sri Lankan government, in continuation of its policy of de-emphasising the military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, has decided not to have any military parade this year at an event to mark the conclusion of the Eelam War.
- Last year, after Maithripala Sirisena became President, the government renamed the Victory Day as Day of Remembrance, marking the shift from triumphalism to commemoration.
- Since the end of the civil war in May 2009, military parades constituted an important element of the celebration on May 19.
- Between 2010 and 2015, such parades were held either on the Galle Face Main, Colombo, or in Matara, a city in the Southern Province. Even last year, the southern city witnessed one such event.
- Instead, on May 18, a function would be held at the War Memorial near the Parliament, which would be attended by the President. A cultural show would take place at the Independence Square in the evening.
- The statement said that as the Independence Day was celebrated in a grand manner, the funds that would have otherwise been spent for “lavish shows” would be used for welfare schemes of war heroes and their families.
- The government also clarified that as in the previous year, there would be no bar on remembering those who died during the civil war but the authorities would not allow any event to hail the LTTE.

## **Venezuela declares emergency**

- Embattled Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro declared a three-month state of emergency to face “threats from abroad”, as his emboldened foes geared for a vote to oust him.
- In an address to the nation, Mr. Maduro said he had signed a new state of emergency decree “to neutralise and defeat foreign aggression”, which he says is closing in on the country. Mr. Maduro said the measures will likely last through 2017.

## **Chinese ‘Guam killer’ can attack 5500 km away**

- China’s new ‘Guam killer’ missile, capable of hitting targets some 5,500 km away, is raising new fears of a growing Chinese threat to key American military facilities and stability in the Pacific Rim, the Congress has been warned.
- A congressional panel has issued a report warning of the dangers of the DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missile, during a week in which U.S.-China tensions flared anew with a U.S. Navy destroyer sailing close to a Chinese-claimed island in the disputed South China Sea.
- The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission said this week that China’s DF-26 missile — dubbed by analysts the “Guam killer” and unveiled at a high-profile military parade in Beijing last September — allows China to bring unprecedented firepower to bear on the U.S. territory of Guam.
- The territory, 4,023 km from Beijing, sits well within the missile’s range, says the report.

## **Deadly IS attack on Yemen**

- A suicide bombing claimed by the Islamic State group and a second blast killed 47 people in the Yemeni port of Mukalla where a year of al-Qaeda rule ended last month.
- It was the second attack in days claimed by IS in the city of 200,000 people that was recaptured by government forces from the rival jihadists of al-Qaeda with U.S. backing.
- The suicide bomber killed at least 41 police recruits on the southwestern outskirts of the city, the capital of Hadramawt province, medics said after earlier giving a toll of 31 dead.
- A IS statement posted online claimed the suicide attack, a second rare operation by the jihadist group in an area which is known to be a stronghold of its al-Qaeda rivals.
- The attacks included a suicide bombing that targeted the residence of the commander of Hadramawt's second military region, General Faraj Salmeen, but he escaped the attack unharmed.

## **White House says blocking aid to Pak could complicate bilateral ties**

- The Obama administration has opposed the Republican-controlled Congress's move to block \$450 million in aid to Pakistan for failing to "demonstrate its commitment" and taking action against the Haqqani network.
- A White House statement in this regard came as the bill made its way to the House of Representatives from House Armed Services Committee.
- The White House asserted that it shares the view of the lawmakers with regard to the Haqqani network, but such a move would "unnecessarily complicate progress" in bilateral ties.
- According to the National Defense Authorization Act 2017, of the total amount of reimbursement and support authorised for Pakistan during the period beginning on October 1 this year, and ending on December 31, 2017, \$450 million would not be eligible for a national security waiver unless the Secretary of Defence certifies that Pakistan continues to conduct operations against Haqqanis.
- Under this new proposed provision, the Defense Secretary also needs to certify that Pakistan is demonstrating commitment to prevent the Haqqani Network from using North Waziristan as a safe haven.
- It also needs to show that it is actively coordinating with Afghanistan to restrict the movement of terrorists, including the Haqqani Network, along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.
- There is similar certification requirement in the year ending on September 31, 2016, but the amount is \$300 million.
- The Defence Secretary has not been able to give necessary certification for the release of the fund to Pakistan so far.
- The House Armed Services Committee says that it will continue to review the reimbursements made to Pakistan and how it aligns with the future of U.S. policy, including key counter-terrorism objectives, in the region.
- The Obama Administration has opposed any move to either restrict or condition U.S. military aid to Pakistan, arguing that its ties with Islamabad are very important.

## **A conference on typeface process between Israel and Palestine postponed**

- A conference on the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, due to be held on May 30 in Paris, has been postponed, French President Francois Hollande said.

- U.S. Secretary of State cannot come on May 30 so it has been delayed. It will take place in the summer,” he told French radio.
- He also said it was vital for France to take “a strong initiative” in the dispute. “If not... what will happen? Settlement building, attacks.
- The original date for the conference falls on the U.S. Memorial Day holiday honouring members of the armed forces who died in combat.
- French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault was in Jerusalem and Ramallah to present the French peace initiative to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas.
- Ms. Ayrault received support from the Palestinians but objections from Israel. Mr. Netanyahu questioned French “impartiality” after Paris voted in favour of making Palestine a UNESCO member five years ago.
- Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said on Twitter that Mr. Hollande’s announcement of the delay was “further evidence of the failure of the [peace settlement] option and the project of [Palestinian President] Mahmud Abbas”.

## Sykes-Picot pact completes hundred years

- One hundred years ago on Monday, Britain and France signed a secret agreement carving out “spheres of influence” that ultimately created the modern Western Asia.
- Yet no one was celebrating the anniversary as Secretary of State John Kerry and his counterparts from Europe, the Arab States and Iran began gathering in Vienna for the latest international effort to end the civil war in Syria.
- The effort is also supposed to usher in what is delicately called a “political transition” that would ease out President Bashar Al-Assad.
- The Sykes-Picot Agreement, named for its British and French authors and the map it produced, is now widely considered a low point in colonial efforts to manipulate the region to fit the interests of outsiders.
- And yet the remnants of the agreement, which came to light after documents proving its existence emerged during the Russian Revolution in 1917, loom over everything Mr. Kerry and his fellow foreign ministers are doing here.
- Rarely in the past century have the shifting borders established by the agreement looked blurrier, and the effort to maintain them shakier.
- One of the few players who observed the anniversary at all was Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region.
- He allowed for the possibility of a form of decentralisation in which different groups — the Kurds, Mr. Assad’s government and the opposition — receive some autonomy. But the goal, he said, was an intact Syria.
- While the official American position is that he has to go, the reality is that few in Washington are in a rush: The last thing they want is a power vacuum in Damascus that the Islamic State would try to fill.
- Still, it seems safe to say that if anyone has come out of the Syrian debacle nearly as hated in the region as Mr. Assad, it is probably the diplomats who rearranged the region: Sir Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot.
- Sykes, an aristocratic racehorse breeder and Boer War veteran, died three years after the agreement was reached, killed by the Spanish flu while in Paris during the 1919 peace talks after World War I.
- Picot, the son of a historian and known for his skills as a lawyer and a diplomat, lived to be 80. He died in 1951, three years after the creation of Israel.
- Out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the British ultimately obtained mandates over Palestine and Iraq; the French got what is now Syria.

- Areas experiencing some of the hardest-fought battles now, like Mosul, were attached to the Kingdom of Iraq.

## **Hillary Clinton closer to getting nominations**

- Hillary Clinton claimed victory in Kentucky and Bernie Sanders took Oregon in Democratic primaries, but the outcomes would do little to change the dynamics in the race.
- Ms. Clinton has a clear lead over her rival in terms of the number of delegates who will elect the party's candidate for November's presidential election.
- Meanwhile, a national match-up poll showed that Ms. Clinton is leading the presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump, by just three percentage points.
- Ms. Clinton gets 48 per cent against Mr. Trump's 45 per cent. In their respective party bases, they have the same support—87 per cent.
- In 'unfavourable' ratings, Ms. Clinton is doing better than Mr. Trump, but there are danger signals for her.
- In an improvement of two points over a month, 56 per cent see her unfavourably; for Mr. Trump, the unfavourable rating dropped from 65 per cent to 60 per cent and his favourable rating rose from 33 per cent to 37 per cent over the previous month.

## **US senate allowed sept 11 victims to sue Saudi Arabia**

- The U.S. Senate approved legislation that would allow September 11 victims and their relatives to sue Saudi Arabia over its possible role in the 2001 attacks, a bill which could trigger a diplomatic firestorm.
- Senators unanimously approved the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act which now heads to the House of Representatives, where Speaker Paul Ryan has voiced reservations.
- The White House has repeatedly stated that President Barack Obama, who visited the kingdom in April to soothe strained ties, opposes the law because it would waive the doctrine of sovereign immunity.

## **US President to visit Vietnam and Japan**

- Barack Obama's visit to Vietnam and Japan next week will reiterate the "rebalance to Asia" policy that many critics say has faltered after the initial push.
- Mr. Obama's visit will also resuscitate the memories of the U.S.'s difficult past of war and conflict with these two current partners in Asia.
- Mr. Obama will be the first serving U.S. President to visit Hiroshima, one of the two Japanese cities on which the U.S. dropped atomic bombs in 1945.
- The visit will also underscore the significance the Obama administration attaches to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement that is the cornerstone of the U.S.'s Asia-Pacific policy, despite it being hotly contested in the ongoing presidential campaign.
- Maritimes disputes on the South China Sea will be part of the discussions at the G-7 meeting in Japan.

- The U.S. opened full diplomatic ties with Vietnam in 1995 but the relationship is far from smooth. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush visited Vietnam once each and this will be Mr. Obama's first trip to the country that shares a border with China
- But concerns regarding human rights violations in the country still rattle U.S. administrations, and Mr. Obama will interact with civil society organisations in Hanoi.
- The White House had earlier said the President would not revisit the decision to use the atomic bomb while visiting Hiroshima.

## **Seventh anniversary of end of Eelam war observed**

- Even as Sri Lanka observed the seventh anniversary of the end of the Eelam War, issues of reconciliation and accountability remained “largely unaddressed”, according to the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG).
- The group said the government “appears to be backtracking” on transitional justice plans, particularly on the role of foreign judges and experts.
- “Mechanisms promised to the UNHRC [United Nations Human Rights Council] feed Sinhala nationalist suspicions, while attempts to reassure Sinhalese and the military encourage doubts among Tamils about [the] government's willingness”, it added.
- It added that though the “national unity” government has “expanded the political centre and isolated hard-line nationalists”, the window for change has begun to narrow.

## **Syria regime takes back key town**

- Syrian troops backed by fighters from the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah retook a key town and nine surrounding villages outside Damascus from rebels.
- Pro-regime fighters used clashes between rival rebel factions Jaish al-Islam and Faylaq al-Rahman as an opportunity to retake the town of Deir al-Assafir, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.
- As rebels summoned their fighters from Deir al-Assafir to the frontline, regime forces launched “a violent attack and heavy air campaign resulting in them controlling the town” in the opposition bastion of Eastern Ghouta.

## **Wreckage from EgyptAir plane found in Mediterranean**

- Egypt found wreckage, including seats and luggage, from the EgyptAir plane that crashed in the Mediterranean, as investigators tried to unravel the mystery of why it swerved and plummeted into the sea.
- Search teams spotted personal belongings of passengers and parts of the Airbus A320 about 290 km north of Egypt's coastal city of Alexandria.
- The country's Aviation Minister has said a “terrorist attack” was a more likely cause than technical failure for the plane's disappearance on a flight from Paris to Cairo with 66 people on board.
- The tragedy raised fears of a repeat of the bombing of a Russian passenger jet by the Islamic State (IS) over Egypt last October that killed all 224 people on board.
- Relatives of some of the passengers and crew met EgyptAir officials and later gathered at a hotel near Cairo airport to exchange information.
- The plane disappeared between the Greek island of Karpathos and the Egyptian coast in the early hours of Thursday, without its crew sending a distress signal.

- It had turned sharply twice in Egyptian airspace before plunging 22,000 feet (6,700 metres) and vanishing from radar screens, said Greek Defence Minister Panos Kammenos.
- A multinational operation involving aircraft and ships has been launched to find the plane.
- Fifteen French citizens, a Briton and at least one Canadian were among 26 foreigners on the plane.
- The disaster also entered the U.S. presidential election campaign, where national security is a prominent issue.

## **Sri Lanka facing big floodproblem**

- India has dispatched military ships and an aircraft with rescue and relief material to Sri Lanka, where torrential rains and landslides have resulted in several deaths and massive devastation over the last few days.
- Two Navy ships — one Naval Offshore Patrol INS Sunayna and one survey ship INS Sutlej — had set sail from Kochi with 30-40 tonnes of relief material and are scheduled to reach Colombo harbour on May 21 during the morning hours.
- In addition to providing the relief material, India would also be participating in the rescue and relief efforts, the officer added. The Navy has also kept two Dornier aircraft on standby in Kochi for any emergency requirement.
- Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena had said that his government had appealed to friendly nations to provide whatever possible assistance for the supply of relief materials and construction of houses.
- Terming the flood situation “disastrous”, the President said the Foreign Ministry briefed diplomats of the present status. He also thanked those countries that had come forward to help Sri Lanka.
- According to a report by the government’s Disaster Management Centre on Friday morning, the number of deaths stood at 64, of which 35 were in Kegalle district where a huge landslide occurred.
- Totally, 4.27 lakh people were affected and about 3.2 lakh removed to safe locations.

## **Moscow's Joint air strike in Syria proposal rejected by US**

- Moscow on Friday proposed that Russia and United States, which have been flying separate bombing campaigns in Syria, launch joint air strikes against jihadists from next week, a proposal the Pentagon swiftly rejected.
- “We are proposing to the U.S., as the head of the International Syria Support Group, to take part as of May 25 in joint operations between the Russian air force and the air force of the coalition,” Russian Defence Minister said.
- Hours later Pentagon spokesman rejected Moscow’s proposal, saying the U.S. military does “not collaborate or coordinate with the Russians on any operations in Syria”.
- “Russian operations are supporting and enabling the Assad regime and our focus is solely on degrading and defeating [the Islamic State]” Captain Davis said.

## **US house passed amendment to National defence authorisation act**

- The U.S. House of Representatives has passed amendments to the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA)-2017, seeking to enhance the country’s defence cooperation with India.
- A similar bill is under the consideration at the Senate as well. The bipartisan move of Congress seeks to bring India at par with NATO allies for technology and equipment sale.
- Once signed into law by the President, these provisions will liberalise the sale of a wide range of technologies to India, bypassing legislative approvals.

- The move also seeks to open a special office in the Pentagon dedicated exclusively to the U.S.-India Defence Technology and Trade Initiative.
- The Senate is likely to pass the bill before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to a joint session of Congress on June 8.
- The U.S.-India Defence Technology and Partnership Act in the Senate was introduced by Senators Mark Warner and John Cornyn, co-chairs of the Senate India Caucus. Senator Marco Rubio has also joined as a sponsor.
- In further amendments, the House has tightened the flow of aid to Pakistan. The Secretary of Defence must now certify to Congress that Pakistan is not using funds or equipment provided to persecute minority groups.
- The amendments also put new conditions to be met before Pakistan can access \$450 million next year in Coalition Support Fund, which is for reimbursing costs incurred in Afghanistan.

## **China threatening to suspend talks with Taiwan**

- China threatened to suspend talks with Taiwan if the newly sworn-in Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen does not acknowledge the "1992 consensus", which refers to a purported understanding that they belong to a single sovereign nation.
- Only by confirming the adherence to the common political foundation of the 1992 Consensus that embodies the 'one China' principle can cross-strait affairs authorities continue with their regular communication.

## **India to raise visa curb issue with Canada**

- India will raise its concerns over Canada's restrictions on temporary work visas for skilled professionals, as these curbs put in place two years ago have been hurting the domestic Information Technology (IT) sector.
- The matter would be taken up by India in a meeting with Canadian authorities early June. The issue may also figure in bilateral talks during the likely visit of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in November.
- The 'coalition' will in turn forward them to a Canadian Parliamentary panel that will comprehensively review the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).
- As per Nasscom estimates, Canada is among the top five markets for Indian IT companies, the others being the U.S., the U.K., Germany and Switzerland. Annual revenue of Indian IT firms from the Canadian market is around \$2-3 billion.
- India has already taken up with the U.S. and U.K. the issue of curbs imposed by them on temporary work visas for skilled professionals. India has even dragged the US to the World Trade Organisation on the issue.
- Until 2013, Canada had, according to sources in the Indian IT industry, a liberal policy for foreign skilled workers (including for intra-corporate transfers).
- However, reports in 2013 of several Canadian employees at the nation's largest bank — Royal Bank of Canada — being allegedly replaced by temporary foreign workers, including Indian employees, due to an outsourcing arrangement, had led to a huge controversy.
- There were also reports of alleged displacement of Canadian workers by temporary foreign workers at McDonald's restaurants.
- These incidents put pressure on the Canadian government, which then announced an overhaul of its TFWP in June 2014.
- The new rules, besides being more complicated due to elaborate questionnaires, have also increased the costs (in terms of fees etc) of employers bringing in temporary foreign workers.



- The Indian IT industry, according to Nasscom, expects the presence of Indian-origin ministers in the Canadian government and Indian-Canadians in the Canadian Parliament to help push their case to relax the TFWP.

## **US President's Vietnam visit to give push to his Asia orientation**

- When Bill Clinton landed in this lake-studded capital 16 years ago, the first U.S. President to visit since the end of the Vietnam War, his mission was to put that conflict behind him, and the trip was among the most remarkable of his presidency.
- When President Barack Obama arrives, his task may be a bit less dramatic, but is in many ways far more ambitious.
- These two countries, bedevilled by decades of misunderstandings, violence and wariness, now have the chance to create a partnership that seemed unlikely even three years ago.
- Since then, China's expansion in the South China Sea has deeply shaken a new Vietnamese government.
- While the leadership here has not let up on its repression of its people it now appears more interested in playing one superpower off against the other, perhaps even giving the Pentagon some rotating access to key Vietnamese ports.
- It would not be an alliance; neither side seems ready for that. But it could throw Beijing off balance in the daily shadow boxing over who will dominate one of the world's most strategically vital waterways.
- In many parts of Asia, Mr. Obama's strategy of focusing on the region is still more of a slogan than an operational plan.
- However, in this part of Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, he seems on the verge of the kind of progress Mr. Clinton could only imagine during that first visit, only 10 months before the Sept. 11 attacks changed America's priorities.
- The Chinese, who hindered U.S. efforts during the Vietnam War, are making things easier for the United States.
- For years, the Communist Party leadership in Vietnam, headed by Nguyen Phu Trong, ignored Chinese activity off the country's coast.
- But in 2014, China placed a deep-sea drilling rig to explore for oil and gas right off Vietnam, and Mr. Trong, the party's general secretary, could not even get his phone calls to Beijing returned.
- Ahead of Mr. Obama's visit, a parade of U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Daniel Russel, the State Department's most senior Asia hand, have been showing up in Hanoi.
- Their goal has been to get enough human rights guarantees from the Vietnamese to allow for the lifting of sanctions on arms sales to Vietnam and perhaps the return of U.S. military units to its shores for the first time since the chaotic helicopter evacuation from Saigon that is seared in American memory.

## **France looking to solve the Israel-Palestine issue**

- French Prime Minister Manuel Valls visited Israel to advance his country's plan to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts in the face of opposition from his counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu.
- Mr. Valls is to meet Mr. Netanyahu on Monday before holding talks in Ramallah on Tuesday with Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah.
- Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas has welcomed the French initiative to hold a meeting of Foreign Ministers from a range of countries on June 3, without the Israelis and Palestinians present.

- Another conference would then be held in the autumn, with the Israelis and Palestinians in attendance. The goal is to eventually restart negotiations that would lead to a Palestinian state.
- Mr. Netanyahu has criticised the initiative and called for direct negotiations between the two sides.

## **The political crisis in Kathmandu escalated further**

- The political crisis in Kathmandu escalated further after a 29-party alliance agitating against the Nepali government boycotted the political talks held in Kathmandu under the leadership of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli.
- They said that they did not attend the talks as the government did not extend them a formal invitation.
- After the talks, Prime Minister Oli issued a two-page note mentioning the government's response to the demands for constitutional amendments made by the Madhesi parties.
- However, the Madhesi criticised it as an insincere attempt.
- The Madhesi have been on the warpath since May 14 demanding amendments. The first agitation from September 2015 to February 2016 took place under the Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha (SLMM).
- The present agitation has other groups as well, making it more representative.

## **President begins his Chinese visit**

- President Pranab Mukherjee was given a rousing welcome by Chinese officials as he landed in Beijing on the second of a four-day visit to China.
- Speaking at a reception in Beijing presided over by Chinese Vice-President Li Yuanchan, the President emphasised cultural and people-to-people links as key to expanding relations between the two countries.
- Mr. Mukherjee harked back to the past to refer to strong cultural linkages between India and China, including the exchange of knowledge to set the context for the present.
- Arguing that Indians and Chinese today “rely on borrowed prisms and secondary sources to understand each other”, he emphasised the need for direct exchanges between the civil societies.
- Mr. Li said that both India and China were engaged in the projects of national rejuvenation and domestic reform. China had increased its investment and participation in railway projects and industrial parks in India, he said.
- Mr. Mukherjee wrapped up his visit to Guangzhou, by inviting Chinese investors to expand their foreign direct investment in India and to leverage the various flagship initiatives launched by the Indian government such as Make in India, Digital India and the Smart City projects.
- While the trade deficit between the two countries was a concern, “India would like to see a greater market for our products ... in IT and IT-related services, pharmaceuticals and drugs and agro-products... in China”, he said.
- He added that he was confident about greater engagement and enhancement of ties between Guangdong and India.
- Initiatives such as sister-province relationship, for example between Gujarat and Guangdong which was established in 2014, were also discussed in the meeting.

## **Pakistan condemns drone attack on Pakistan's soil**

- The U.S. drone attack on Pakistan's soil to kill Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Mansour is detrimental to bilateral ties, Pakistan army chief General Raheel Sharif said.
- Gen. Sharif told this to U.S. Ambassador David Hale who visited the military's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, the Army said, adding that the situation arising after U.S. drone strike in Balochistan on May 22 came under discussion.
- While expressing his serious concerns over the said drone strike, the Chief of the Army Staff said such acts of sovereignty violations are detrimental to relations between both countries and are counter-productive for ongoing peace process.
- It is for the first time that Army has spoken on the issue.

## **Indian investment in Chabahar port assessed positively**

- Two commentaries: one on Xinhua and another in Global Times, assessed positively the Indian investment in the Chabahar port project in Iran.
- The Global Times commentary strongly objected to the perception that the project "is aimed at countering the [Gwadar sea port project in Pakistan that is part of the] China-Pakistan Economic Corridor".
- It argued that the port offers a strategic foothold for India in the "northern Indian Ocean [the Arabian Sea]" and access to Central Asia and this must not be seen as detrimental to Chinese interests in the region.
- The Xinhua commentary blamed the West for the distorted narrative on the perceived competition between India and China with respect to the Chabahar and Gwadar ports.

## **Clear discussions on boundary negotiations between India and China**

- Cordial and clear discussions on sensitive issues marked India-China talks during President Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Beijing but no significant change in divergent positions was realised.
- Meetings with President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li Keqiang and National Peoples' Congress chairman Zhang Dejiang marked a busy third day of a four-day visit by Mr. Mukherjee to China.
- Mr. Mukherjee's delegation apprised its Chinese counterparts about India's aims to rapidly expand its civilian nuclear programme in line with the country's energy needs. He also asked Mr. Xi to give this matter "personal attention".
- Director-General of Asian region in China's ministry of foreign affairs, briefing the press following the meeting also said that the two leaders "agreed to strengthen cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy".
- Mr. Mukherjee led a delegation to meet Mr. Xi after receiving a grand welcome in a ceremony held at the Great Hall of Peace in Beijing.
- The two leaders discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in "investment, trade and tourism".
- Specifically, China has also agreed to accommodate more Indian tourists (seven batches or around 400 people this year) to visit Kailash Mansarovar via the Nathu La pass into Tibet.
- The two leaders also agreed to advance the ongoing boundary negotiations under the 'Special Representatives' mechanism, and at the same time resolved to take actions to maintain peace and tranquillity in the boundary regions.
- Mr. Jaishankar said that the Indian delegation had conveyed to the Chinese the need to eliminate cross-border terrorism.

## **Donald Trump gets required delegates for nominations**

- Donald Trump secured the support of enough delegates to clinch the Republican presidential nomination, after unbound delegates pledged to back the billionaire, according to U.S. media counts.
- Mr. Trump now has the backing of 1,238 delegates, one more than the 1,237 needed, according to the U.S. news agencies.
- It said the real estate tycoon's delegate count rose when a small number of unbound Republican delegates, including Oklahoma party chairwoman Pam Pollard, said they would support him at the convention.
- The Republican Party will not make the results official until its national convention in July.
- U.S. President Barack Obama said that global leaders are "rattled" by some of Mr. Trump's statements, blasting the ideas as demonstrating "ignorance" of how the world works.
- "They are not sure how seriously to take some of his pronouncements," he told reporters on the sidelines of the G7 summit. "But they're rattled by them, and for good reason," he added.

## **US President paid moving tribute to victims of the first atomic bomb**

- Barack Obama paid moving tribute to victims of the first atomic bomb, offering a comforting embrace to a tearful man who survived the devastating attack on Hiroshima.
- In a ceremony loaded with symbolism, the first sitting U.S. President to visit the city clasped hands with one survivor and hugged another after speaking about the day that marked one of the most terrifying chapters of World War-II.
- Mr. Obama also chatted with a smiling Sunao Tsuboi (91), who had earlier said he wanted to tell the U.S. President how grateful he was for his visit.
- The trip comes more than seven decades after the Enola Gay bomber dropped its deadly atomic payload, dubbed "Little Boy", over the western Japanese city.
- The bombing claimed the lives of 140,000 people.
- As expected, Mr. Obama offered no apology for the bombings, having insisted that he would not revisit decisions made by Truman at the close of a brutal war.
- Shinzo Abe praised the "courage" of the visit, which he said offered hope for a nuclear free future.

## **Russian President in Greece to reinforce their relationship**

- Russian President Vladimir Putin was in Greece in a visit aimed at reinforcing a relationship with one of his few friends in the European Union (EU) amid tensions with the West.
- The visit comes at a low ebb in relations between Russia and Europe over the conflict in Ukraine that broke out in 2014, with sanctions still in force against Moscow.
- It also comes as Athens desperately seeks to come out of recession. Greek officials say increased trade with Russia could play a part in recovery efforts.
- EU leaders are to discuss next month whether to renew sanctions on Russia's banking, defence and energy sectors that expire in July.
- While the sanctions are likely to be extended, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said resistance is growing within the EU to extending them, and a unanimous vote is required.
- Italy and Hungary have been among the most sceptical while Poland and the Baltic states have repeatedly pressed for maintaining pressure on Moscow.

- Greek leader Alexis Tsipras, urged Europe to cooperate with Russia, and to move away from what he branded a futile cycle of sanctions and militarisation.

## **Presumptive Republican presidential nominee promises to increase oil and gas production**

- With a view to overturn the existing U.S. policies, presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has promised to increase oil and gas production and to incentivise fracking, while ridiculing renewable energy technologies.
- This is the first time that he has promised to scrap the deal altogether. Throughout his campaign season, he has been stating that he would “at minimum renegotiate” the Paris deal.
- Republicans and conservatives have been increasingly sceptical of the science of climate change, while Democrats and liberals are convinced of the phenomenon and that human interventions caused it.
- For Hillary Clinton, Mr. Trump’s position could turn out to be advantageous.
- While there is convergence between Mr. Trump and Mr. Sanders on a range of popular issues, climate change is one topic that places them miles apart.
- Jobs and wages are the primary issues likely to determine the polls this year and both Mr. Trump and Ms. Clinton articulate their respective positions within that framework.
- Mr. Trump has said that a regulation or rule should be tested by the single question of whether or not it is “good for the American worker”.
- He holds that climate priorities are damaging the American economy and its workers. Ms. Clinton on the other hand, has been trying to project the challenges posed by climate change as a big opportunity to create jobs in clean technologies.
- When it comes to the India-U.S. bilateral ties, combating climate change has been repeatedly cited as a key area of cooperation.
- One of the main arguments in favour of the civil nuclear deal was that it will reduce carbon emissions in a fast growing economy.

## **India gets big diplomatic success**

- Pakistan seems to have failed to seal the \$700 million deal for the purchase of eight F-16 fighter jets from the U.S. following a row between the two countries over their financing.
- The Pakistani government was required to provide the Letter of Acceptance for purchase of the jets by May 24, but Dawn reported that the document was not issued leading to expiry of the offer.
- Initially, the \$700 million deal for eight F-16 multi-role fighters, was to be partially financed through the U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme but the Congress disallowed subsidising the sale.
- The subsidising was disallowed over concern that Pakistan had not done enough to end the dreaded Haqqani network’s terror sanctuaries on its soil as well as fears over Islamabad’s nuclear programme.
- Pakistan, which expected to get the fighters at the subsidised rate of \$270 million, was subsequently asked by the U.S. administration to make the full payment for the eight aircraft from its national resources.
- Pakistan Prime Minister’s Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said last month that Pakistan could look to buy the aircraft from some other country if the deal did not go ahead.

## **US asked Pakistan to go after terrorists**

- The U.S. has asked Pakistan to go after terrorists, especially the Taliban leadership, days after an American drone killed Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour in Balochistan Province.
- “We continue to cooperate closely with Afghanistan, but also urge Pakistan to go after terrorists, especially Taliban leadership, and that cooperation continues,” State Department Deputy Spokesman said.
- Meanwhile, a former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, James B. Cunningham, said the drone strike that killed Taliban leader Mullah Mansour inside Pakistan should send a signal that the U.S. will not tolerate terrorist safe havens.

## **US again reiterates its support for India’s bid for NSG**

- In an apparent snub to Pakistan for its opposition to India’s bid to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the U.S. has said it is not about an arms race, but about the peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- “This is not about an arms race and it’s not about nuclear weapons. This is about the peaceful civil use of nuclear energy, and so we would certainly hope that Pakistan understands that,” State Department Deputy Spokesman said.
- He was responding to questions about India’s application for NSG membership and Pakistan’s opposition to it on the grounds that it will lead to a nuclear arms race in the region.

## **UNHCR says more than 500 people died off Syria this week**

- A week of shipwrecks and death in the Mediterranean culminated with harrowing testimony from migrant survivors who said another 500 people including 40 children had drowned, bringing the number of feared dead to 700.
- Brought to safety in the Italian ports of Taranto and Pozzallo, survivors told the UN’s refugee agency (UNHCR) and Save the Children how their boat sank.
- With some 100 people missing after a boat sank earlier, and 45 bodies recovered from a wreck that happened, the UNHCR said it feared up to 700 people had drowned in the Mediterranean this week.
- The first boat, carrying some 500 people, was reportedly towing the second, which was carrying another 500. But the second boat began to sink. Some people tried to swim to the first boat, others held onto the rope linking the vessels.
- Italy’s Interior Minister Angelino Alfano said that Europe needed “a quick agreement with Libya and African countries” to halt the crisis.
- The chaos in the North African country since Muammar Qadhafi’s fall in 2011 has been exploited by people traffickers.
- European Parliament President said in an interview that Italy’s “migration compact” idea was “the best proposal so far” for stopping the boat crossings and preventing deaths.

## **Breakaway Taliban faction willing to hold peace talks with the Afghan government**

- A breakaway Taliban faction is willing to hold peace talks with the Afghan government but will demand the imposition of Islamic law and the departure of all foreign forces.

- Mullah Abdul Manan Niazi told a group of around 200 followers in eastern Afghanistan that his faction had no faith in the government but was willing to negotiate without preconditions.
- Niazi is deputy to Mullah Mohammad Rasool, who split from the Taliban last summer after Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was chosen to succeed the group's late founder, Mullah Omar.
- Mansoor was killed earlier this month in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan.

## **: International ::**

### **Iraqi forces pressing advantage against IS**

- Iraqi forces thrust into the city of Fallujah from three directions marking a new and perilous urban phase in the week-old operation to retake the jihadist bastion.
- The drive to recapture the first city to be lost from government control in 2014 came as fighting also raged in neighbouring Syria, leaving huge numbers of civilians exposed.
- Iraqi forces entered Fallujah under air cover from the international coalition, the Iraqi air force and army aviation, and supported by artillery and tanks.
- The involvement of the elite CTS marks the start of a phase of urban combat in a city where in 2004 U.S. forces fought some of their toughest battles since the Vietnam War.
- The week-old operation had previously focused on retaking rural areas around Fallujah, which lies just 50 km west of Baghdad.
- It had been led by the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force, which is dominated by Tehran-backed Shia militias.
- Only a few hundred families have managed to slip out of the Fallujah area ahead of the assault on the city, with an estimated 50,000 civilians still trapped inside, sparking fears the jihadists could try to use them as human shields.
- Fallujah is one of just two major urban centres in Iraq still held by IS jihadists.
- They also hold Mosul, the country's second city and de-facto jihadist capital in Iraq, east of which Kurdish-led forces launched a fresh offensive. The jihadists holed up in Fallujah are believed to number around 1,000.
- Fallujah is expected to give Iraqi forces one of their toughest battles yet but IS has appeared weakened in recent months and has been losing territory consistently over the past year.
- According to the government, the organisation that has sewn havoc across Iraq and Syria over the past two years now controls around 14 per cent of the national territory, down from 40 per cent in 2014.
- However, as the "caliphate" it declared two years ago unravels, IS has been reverting to its old tactics of bombings against civilians and commando raids.
- A fresh wave of bomb attacks struck the Baghdad area on Monday, killing 11 people in three separate blasts.
- The IS onslaught has threatened tens of thousands of people, many of them already displaced from other areas, who have sought refuge in camps near the Turkish border.

### **Britain's PM calls against Brexit**

- Prime Minister David Cameron put aside recent animosity with London Mayor Sadiq Khan to make a joint call for Britain to stay in the European Union (EU), as personal attacks from within his own party intensified.
- Mr. Cameron told a campaign event in London that he and the new Labour Mayor backed Britain's EU membership because "we love our country and we want our country to be the best it possibly can".

- Last month, Labour MPs had branded Mr. Cameron racist after he told Parliament he was “concerned” about Labour’s mayoral candidate who had “appeared again and again and again” on stage with “extremists”.
- While Mr. Cameron was building bridges with former adversaries, dissent within his own ranks escalated with some Tory MPs demanding he quit even if the country voted to remain in the bloc at the June 23 referendum.
- Mr. Cameron admitted he himself was “a eurosceptic”, but said his campaign’s criticisms of the European Union were a strength because “we are levelling with people, which is something the other side refuses to do”.

## **Former Chadian dictator Hissene Habre sentenced to life**

- A special court in Senegal sentenced former Chadian dictator Hissene Habre to life in prison for war crimes, crimes against humanity and a litany of other charges, including rape.
- The verdict brings a long-awaited reckoning to families of the up to 40,000 people killed and the many kidnapped, raped or tortured under his 1982-1990 rule as President of Chad.
- Victims groups who had travelled to Dakar to hear the verdict were visibly moved by a judgement that comes a quarter century after the abuses they suffered.
- The case was heard by the CAE special tribunal set up by the African Union under a deal with Senegal, and is the first time a country has prosecuted a former leader of another nation for rights abuses.
- Reed Brody, a lawyer for Human Rights Watch, said the conviction was a warning to other despots.

## **INDIA & WORLD**

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### **Islamic state kills more than 30 in Iraq**

- The Islamic State group carried out rare attacks in Iraq’s deep Shia south, killing at least 33 people with twin suicide car bomb blasts in the city of Samawa.
- They said at least 50 people were also wounded in the blasts in Samawa, 230 km south of Baghdad.
- IS issued a statement later on social media claiming two suicide attackers detonated their car bombs against members of the security forces.
- It named the bombers as Abu Dayyaryl-Qurashi and Abu Zubayral-Zaidi, saying that the second blew up his car bomb as security forces rushed to the scene of the first blast.
- Samawa is the capital of Muthanna and lies deep in Iraq’s Shia heartland and such attacks there are rare. Muthanna also borders Saudi Arabia and a vast Iraqi desert that connects the troubled province of Anbar with the south.

### **India is keen to step up engagement in the hydrocarbon sector with Iran**

- India has conveyed to the Iran that it is ready to clear nearly \$ 6.5 billion of the dues for oil import from that country at the earliest, provided there is clarity on payment channel.
- The message was conveyed even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit the oil-rich country later this month.
- Government sources said there had been a series of discussions at various levels both in Tehran and here and both sides were confident of resolving the issue soon.



- Following lifting of sanctions against it in January under a historic nuclear deal, Iran terminated a three-year-old system with India of getting paid for half of the oil dues in rupees and was insisting on being paid in Euros for the oil it sold to Indian refiners.
- It also scrapped free delivery of crude oil. Though Western sanctions against Iran were lifted, problems persist in banking channels due to which regular transactions were not possible yet.
- Refiners such as Essar Oil and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MPRL) owe nearly \$ 6.5 billion in dues to Iran.
- During their visit to Iran last month, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj conveyed to Iranian leaders that India wanted to significantly ramp up engagement in the oil and gas sector.

## **Commerce minister points out protectionists measures by rich nations**

- Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman hit out at the protectionist measures of many developed nations.
- She referred to protectionist measures of many in the G20 and said if India took any measure the rich nations perceived to be negative, they went on a campaign to brand India protectionist.
- Ms. Sitharaman said the “huge trade-distorting” agricultural subsidies of rich nations had not yet been properly discussed at the World Trade Organisation.
- She also referred to subsidies “given by China to its industry” and said this was hurting Indian manufacturers in sectors including steel.
- In the backdrop of competitive devaluations of currency by several countries including China to boost their exports, she cited the persisting contraction in India’s exports and said she personally felt the Indian currency needs to be devalued a bit.

## **First agreement under the Indo-U.S. Civil nuclear deal could be signed during PM visit**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend a dinner hosted by the U.S –India Business Council (USIBC) on June 7 that will bring together around 400 CEOs, investors and business leaders during his two-day visit to the U.S capital.
- The Prime Minister is scheduled to address a joint session of the U.S Congress on June 8, and will also attend an event of the Indian community.
- Details of the Prime Minister’s address to the joint session of the Congress and the community event that will also have several U.S lawmakers participating, will be finalised after Mr Modi’s schedule on the Capitol is final.
- Curiously, India has not formally announced the PM’s visit yet, which is taking place at the behest of President Barack Obama.
- The photo-op of the visit could be the signing of the first commercial agreement under the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear deal, between the Westinghouse Electric and the Nuclear Power Corporation India Ltd(NPCIL), to build six nuclear reactors in Gujarat.

## **Next Malabar exercise in east of Japan**

- In a move that is sure to raise eyebrows in Beijing, four Indian warships will join the navies of the United States and Japan in the second half of June for the next edition of Malabar exercises east of Okinawa, a Japanese island.
- Last December, India and the U.S announced formal expansion of the bilateral exercises into a trilateral format with the edition of Japan.
- Two stealth frigates, a guided missile corvette and a fleet replenishment tanker of the Indian Navy would take part in the exercises.
- In September 2007, the navies of Australia, Japan and Singapore joined India and the U.S. in the Malabar exercises which forced China to issue a demarche to New Delhi. This is also not the first time these exercises will be held near Okinawa.
- Australia has repeatedly expressed interest in joining Malabar on a permanent basis and the United States had been pushing its inclusion, but India has so far resisted the move so as not to antagonise China.

## **New problems in strained Indo-Nepal relationship**

- The political crisis in Nepal deepened as Kathmandu recalled its ambassador to India hours after cancelling President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's visit to the Simhashta Kumbh at Ujjain.
- Ambassador Deep Kumar Upadhyay told that the decision was taken after a Cabinet meeting during which his role in the latest political crisis came under criticism. Mr. Upadhyay had "counselled against the cancellation of the President's visit."
- There is a lack of trust between the governments and I am being recalled to Kathmandu owing to a major misunderstanding between the two governments," he said, after a telephone conversation.

## **Nepal accuses India of destabilising political situation**

- A day after Nepal cancelled the visit of its President to India and recalled its ambassador, problem in bilateral ties is due to battle of nerves during which Kathmandu accused New Delhi of backing a plot to topple the government.
- Nepal govt claims that the plot to break the ruling alliance, led by Mr. Oli, received support from India.
- The crisis was triggered on May 3-4 when the former Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' of the United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-Maoist), invited Sher Bahadur Deuba, leader of the Nepali Congress (NC), to form a combine and replace the government of Mr. Oli with a national unity government.
- Nepal accused India of facilitating Mr. Prachanda's sudden rebellion. Mr. Prachanda's UCPN-Maoist is an alliance partner of Mr. Oli's Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML). The shaky coalition continues as of now.
- However, India has rejected Kathmandu's charges. The govt says the setbacks are due to Mr. Oli's "petulant and un-diplomatic behaviour."

## **Pakistan says bilateral dialogue could resume soon**

- Pakistan High Commissioner to India Abdul Basit expressed the hope that the bilateral dialogue stalled by the Pathankot airbase attack would resume soon.
- “Although we do not have a date I expect good things to happen sooner than later,” he said, when asked how optimistic he was.
- “I feel we do have problems. We all understand that and in order to overcome those, we need to talk to each other. As agreed to between the two countries last December we should resume the dialogue process,” he said.

## **Defence Minister to visit UAE and Oman to deepen security and defence cooperation**

- Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar will leave for Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to deepen security and defence cooperation with a region which has traditionally been viewed only as politically important.
- “While political ties with the region has been deepening over the years, security and defence cooperation were the missing pieces in the relationship. It had been low key,” Govt said.
- As India’s strategic interests stretched to the Middle East and beyond, the thinking in India too had changed. The big thing that happened in the recent past is the evacuation of Indian nationals from Yemen under Operation Rahat.
- It gave a sense of what our forces have to face. Yemen made it very clear that we need to focus on structures and processes in these countries.”
- Mr. Parrikar’s trip to the UAE would be the first bilateral visit by an Indian Defence Minister and the idea was to take forward the understanding reached during Mr. Modi’s visit last year.
- Oman is India’s strongest defence partner in the Gulf and both sides have extensive defence and security ties in place. Oman has been hosting Indian warships on anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden.

## **India and Sri Lanka looking for permanent solution to fishermen issue**

- Seeking a permanent solution to the issue of frequent arrests of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy, India reiterated the need to build a dedicated mechanism.
- PM Modi stressed the need to develop a mechanism and find a permanent solution to the issue of fishermen straying into each other’s waters, following a meeting here between PM Modi and the visiting President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena.
- The Ministry of External Affairs informed that Sri Lanka currently holds 34 Indian fishermen and 96 Indian fishing boats in custody.
- Creation of a dedicated mechanism has been in the making for several years but has not moved ahead. Mr. Modi and Mr. Sirisena reviewed a number of bilateral issues during their talks but the free trade agreement between the two countries which has been discussed earlier was not taken up.
- Mr. Sirisena is in India to attend the Vaicharik Mahakumbh in Ujjain, an inter-faith event which will take place on the sidelines of the SimhasthaKumbh.
- He will also visit Sanchi, where he will unveil a bust of Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala.
- Mr. Sirisena’s visit is likely to provide an opportunity for India to deepen ties with Sri Lanka, especially in view of the growing Chinese influence over Colombo.

## **Pentagon warned India of increased Chinese military presence**

- China has increased defence capabilities and deployed more troops along the Indian border, the Pentagon has said, as it warned of increasing Chinese military presence including bases in various parts of the world, particularly Pakistan.
- “We have noticed an increase in capability and force posture by the Chinese military in areas close to the border with India,” Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for East Asia told reporters.
- The Defence Department also warned of China’s increasing military presence including bases in various parts of the world, in particular Pakistan — with which it has a “longstanding friendly relationship and similar strategic interests”
- The Pentagon in its report expressed its concerns about Chinese military build-up near the Indian border. Tensions remain along disputed portions of the Sino-Indian border, where both sides patrol with armed forces.
- “After a five-day military standoff in September 2015 at Burtse in Northern Ladakh, China and India held a senior-level flag-officer meeting, agreed to maintain peace, and retreated to positions mutually acceptable to both sides,” it said.
- The Pentagon also said that the defence capabilities possessed by the U.S., Russia and India are among the main factors driving China to modernise its nuclear force and bolster its strategic strike capabilities.
- It said that China insists that the new generation of mobile missiles are intended to ensure the viability of its strategic deterrent in the face of continued advances in the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Russian capabilities.

## **First round of discussions under Maritime security dialogue between India and US**

- Towards deepening the evolving partnership in the maritime domain, India and the U.S. held the first round of discussions under the recently-constituted maritime security dialogue between officials of two countries.

## **India in favour of a fair and reasonable settlement of boundary question**

- Ahead of his visit to China, President Pranab Mukherjee said on Friday that India was in favour of a “fair, reasonable” and mutually acceptable settlement of boundary question.
- Talking to state-run Chinese Central Television (CCTV) and Xinhua news agencies, the President spoke on various issues including India’s concerns on terrorism, bilateral trade and cultural and educational exchanges.
- Mr. Mukherjee said India would like to expand and diversify its engagement with China across various fields while “proactively addressing outstanding issues” including the boundary question.
- “Both sides should strive to ensure that the outstanding issues are addressed in a manner that demonstrates mutual sensitivity to each other’s concerns and aspiration,” he said.
- Only then can “we ensure that these differences will not come in the way of continued development of bilateral relations.”

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- Among the issues discussed were Asia-Pacific maritime challenges, naval cooperation, and multilateral engagement.
- The dialogue was one of the several new initiatives agreed between Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar and his U.S. counterpart Ashton Carter during the latter's visit to India last month as part of the maritime security objectives under the India- US Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region.
- Security Dialogue, cochaired by officials at the Joint Secretary/Assistant Secretary-level of the Indian Ministries of Defence and External Affairs and the U.S. Departments of Defence and State,”
- U.S. Ambassador to India, Richard Verma, who participated in the discussions, noted that the creation of this dialogue “is a further sign of the growing relations between our two countries.”
- The other initiatives agreed include the conclusion of a “white shipping” technical arrangement to improve data sharing on commercial shipping traffic and Navy-to-Navy discussions on submarine safety and anti- submarine warfare.

## US to support India's bid to NSG

- The U.S. Senate is likely to pass an amendment to the 2017 National Defence Authorisation Act that seeks to ease defence trade with India to the level of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies and close partners of the U.S.
- The House of Representatives has already passed amendments similar to the proposed Senate Bill, but the details vary between the two.
- U.S. legislative process requires both Chambers to reconcile their individual versions of similar Bills, and pass a combined version before sending for the approval of the President.
- Once the President signs them into law, the amendments will enable defence trade between the U.S. and India on automatic route for a range of equipment, bypassing the bureaucratic and legislative hurdles in the existing case by case approval process.
- The amendment Bill incorporates provisions from the stand-alone ‘Advancing U.S.-India Defence Cooperation’ Bill moved earlier by Senators Mark Warner and John Cornyn earlier this month.

## BUSINESS & ECONOMY

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### Telecom panel for auction of all spectrum at TRAI prices

- The Telecom Commission has favoured auctioning all available spectrum at the reserve price suggested by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). A sale at such price could fetch the government about Rs.5.36 lakh crore.
- The Telecom Commission was also of the view that companies winning spectrum in higher frequency bands, above 1GHz (1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz and 2500 MHz), should make 50 per cent upfront payment instead of 33 per cent.
- For spectrum purchased in the below 1GHz band (700 MHz, 800 MHz and 900 MHz), companies would require to pay 25 per cent as upfront payment and the rest over 10 years after two years of moratorium.
- The auction of airwaves, which is to be held in July this year, will include 700 MHz spectrum for the first time in the country at a pan-India reserve price of about Rs.11,500 crore per MHz.
- The 700 MHz spectrum is considered to be the most suitable for offering high speed broadband services.

- However, the operators had asked the sale to be held back till the device ecosystem is put in place.
- The cost of delivering mobile services in 700 MHz band is also approximately 70 per cent cheaper than 2100 MHz band (used for 3G services).
- For 1,800 MHz spectrum, widely used for offering voice services, the telecom regulator had recommended the reserve price of Rs.2,873 crore.
- For spectrum in 900 MHz band, 800 MHz band, 2100 MHz band and 2300 MHz band, the reserve price was kept at Rs.3,341 crore, Rs.5,819 crore, Rs.3,746 crore and Rs.817 crore, respectively.
- The regulator has recommended that the reserve price for 2500 MHz spectrum, which is also on the offer for the first time, to be kept equal to that of 2300 MHz spectrum.

## **The Centre's ambitious National LED programme will go nationwide**

- The Centre's ambitious National LED programme — Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) — will be implemented across the country by 2019, Minister for Power and Coal said.
- Since the UJALA scheme was launched a year ago on May 1, a total of 9 crore LED bulbs were sold in the country, which means people will get the benefit of Rs 5,500 crore in their electricity bills. It will be implemented across the country by 2019.
- Nearly 77 crore incandescent bulbs will be replaced till 2019 in the country which will ensure an annual benefit of Rs.40,000 crore to the people in their electricity bills and this will lead the country to fulfil its need of energy security.

## **Foreign exchange reserves continue to increase**

- India's foreign exchange reserves increased marginally to \$361.60 billion as on April 22 against \$360.25 billion on April 15, the Reserve Bank of India said.
- Foreign Exchange Reserves in India averaged 193419.62 USD Million from 1998 until 2016.

## **RBI governor says despite the same constraints private and foreign banks are doing better**

- Asked to explain the “real causes” of ballooning bad loans at public sector banks, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan has put the blame on “overall economic downturn,” among other reasons, in his submission.
- Congress leader K. V. Thomas-led Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has examined Mr. Rajan's response but can ask the RBI Governor to appear before it in future once it is reconstituted.
- Various public sector banks may also be asked to appear before the panel again to explain their position.
- The Parliamentary panel had suo motu decided to examine the non-performing assets of the public sector banks, which touched Rs.3.61 lakh crore at the end of December 2015.
- The state-owned companies had first refused to appear before PAC, but agreed later and made their submission.
- During the examination of bad loan recovery process of the banks, the PAC found that in a number of cases the same bankers were trying to retrieve the bad loans who had earlier sanctioned the loans.
- In its questionnaire for the RBI Governor, the panel observed that private sector banks and foreign banks do not have as much NPAs as the Public Sector Banks.

- This was despite the constraints under which the entire banking sector operates being the same, except for the Priority Sector Lending (PSL) requirements.
- Noting that Private Sector Banks and Foreign Banks have 2.2 per cent NPA whereas the Public Sector Banks have 5.98 per cent NPAs, the PAC felt “it is hard to believe that the difference is only due to the PSL”.
- The PAC Chairman also sought to know the “real causes for the present spurt in NPAs and stressed assets” and whether these are really different from those listed by the Narsimham Committee that went into the NPA issue in 1998.
- Mr. Rajan listed six primary reasons for a spurt in stressed assets that have been observed in recent times.
- These included domestic and global economic slowdown, delays in statutory and other approvals especially for projects under implementation and aggressive lending practices during upturn as evidenced from high corporate leverage.
- Other reasons cited by Mr. Rajan were laxity in credit risk appraisal and loan monitoring in banks and lack of appraising skills for projects that need specialised skills resulting in acceptance of inflated cost and aggressive projections.
- Besides, he also listed wilful default, loan frauds and corruption in some cases among the key reasons.
- The gross NPAs ratio had steadily declined from 15.7 per cent in 1996-97 to 2.36 per cent in 2010-11.
- As on March 25, the gross NPA ratio was 4.62 per cent. As on June 2015, the gross NPA ratio was 4.97 per cent and the ratio of restructured standard assets to gross advance was 6.50 per cent.
- Mr. Rajan also informed the panel about seven key methods evolved by way of recent regulatory measures by RBI to tackle the problem of NPA.

## **SEBI will put mechanism to check misuse of investors money**

- To check any possible misuse of investors’ money, markets regulator SEBI will soon put in place a mechanism for enhanced supervision of stock brokers and wants stock exchanges to evolve an automated alert-generation system.
- Stock exchanges will be required to continuously monitor the client assets lying with the brokers and generate alerts to determine potential misuse of these assets by brokers.
- Besides, the stock exchanges will monitor financial strength of stock brokers by continuously reviewing certain financial ratios and indicators of brokers.
- The proposed measures, based on recommendations made by a high-level committee, will be soon implemented in consultation with the stock exchanges.
- The Committee, consisting of SEBI officials and representatives of stock exchanges, depositories and stock brokers, was set up to suggest measures to further enhance the current regulatory and supervisory mechanisms for protection of clients’ assets with stock brokers.
- The Committee deliberated on various issues pertaining to enhanced supervision of stock broker’s including augmented disclosures, periodic reconciliation, continuous information sharing and others.
- Among various recommendations, the Committee suggested there should be no netting between client and proprietary obligations — meaning, client obligations and own obligations of the broker shall be settled separately.
- This will ensure that brokers’ obligation and payment thereof are separated from the clients’ obligation and payment thereof.
- Another proposed measure required prescription of uniform nomenclature for bank and demat accounts, which are maintained by stock brokers in order to ensure maintenance of an audit trail.
- SEBI also wants strengthening of the existing internal audit system for stock brokers in line with the requirements for auditors as mentioned in the Companies Act, 2013.

## **Indian factories are becoming more and more efficient**

- Factories in India are becoming increasingly efficient, with the net value added per factory increasing by 24 per cent in the five years from 2009-10 till 2013-14, the latest period for which the government released data.
- The net value added per factory in operation increased from Rs.3.88 crore in 2009-10 to Rs.4.82 crore in 2013-14, according to the Annual Survey of Industries 2013-14.
- Similarly, the net value added per person engaged also increased from Rs. 5.02 lakh to Rs. 6.6 lakh over the same period.
- Output per unit of capital employed has been increasing. Also, companies are becoming more capital intensive, which may imply that labour-saving technology is being used.
- The survey data shows the value of fixed capital per factor in operation increased from Rs. 1,212 lakh in 2012-13 to Rs. 1,278 lakh in 2013-14, which is much higher than the Rs. 886 lakh it was at in 2009-10.
- Coupled with this, the number of people engaged per factory has come down, albeit marginally, from 77 in 2009-10 to 72 in 2012-13 and 73 in 2013-14.
- This is symptomatic of jobless growth, which is when factories are trying to automate and increase technology usage to improve productivity while keeping employment constant.
- This push for automation and decreased labour costs has resulted in the overall output per person engaged also seeing a steady increase, growing from Rs. 31.6 lakh in 2009-10 to Rs. 48.4 lakh in 2012-13.
- The overall view is that, with the global economy still being subdued, companies are looking to use their existing capacity more efficiently rather than investing in capacity expansion.
- And, with capacity utilisation still relatively low, this suggests that there is still more room to improve efficiencies.

## **India's infrastructure sectors clocked highest growth in more than one year**

- India's infrastructure sectors clocked their highest growth in 16 months in March 2016, with the index for core industries climbing 6.4 per cent, buoyed by a sharp uptick in the output of cement, electricity, fertilisers and refinery products.
- The advance in the index in March followed a growth of 5.7 per cent in February, leading economists to cautiously consider it a sign of likely recovery in the economy.
- This is clearly a sign of recovery setting in the economy. The reforms that took place in both coal and power sectors will start to bear fruit now.
- The fertiliser sector grew at 23 per cent in March 2016, up from 16.3 per cent in February. The cement sector saw a growth of 11.9 per cent in March 2016, slower than the 13.5 per cent it saw in February.
- The electricity sector grew at 11.3 per cent in March 2016, significantly faster than the 9.2 per cent seen in February.
- This shows that the government's support for developing infrastructure is finally kicking in."
- However PMI data is not so optimistic. It is unusual that the core sector numbers are up, but PMI in manufacturing has gone down.
- Growth in the coal sector slowed to 1.7 per cent in March compared to 3.8 per cent in February, while the crude oil sector contracted sharply by 5.1 per cent in March compared to a growth of 0.8 per cent in February.



- Another reason why the jubilation over a recovery might be premature is that the strong growth in March 2016 could likely be a result of a base effect brought on by the contraction seen in the index in March 2015.
- The index of eight core industries contracted 0.7 per cent in March 2015.
- This comparison shows that the index grew 5.6 per cent in March 2016 over its level two years previously.

## **Developing countries face double problems in WTO**

- Developing nations, including India, are facing a double disadvantage at the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Dispute Settlement Body (DSB).
- Commerce Secretary said these nations are challenged not only by the lack of a sufficient pool of trade law experts to represent them effectively at the DSB but also by certain efforts to bring within the body's ambit non-trade issues such as labour and environment.
- She said "Labour and environment cases would pose a great challenge for developing nations because very often these are conditions that add as restrictions in the freedom of trade particularly for developing countries."
- With the global trade slowdown and the consequent rise in trade restrictive measures taken by many countries, the world is witnessing increasing use of trade remedies.
- There are only a few Indian law firms in trade law practice, Ms. Teatota said. Therefore, to handle India's trade disputes with other countries, the government has been engaging both international and Indian law firms.
- The official said the commerce ministry was trying to build capacity to comprehensively track the trade restrictive measures taken by other countries, especially those that hurt India's exports.
- The developed world, however, is keen that the WTO addresses, what they call, global trade's "new challenges", including labour and environment.

## **The seventh pay commission has recommended to abolish overtime allowance**

- The Seventh Pay Commission has recommended that overtime allowance, except for operational staff and industrial employees governed by statutory provisions, should be abolished.
- This is recommended after data showed that the expenditure under the head for the Railways and Defence ministries more than doubled in seven years ending 2012-13.
- Overall, the overtime paid by the Government increased from Rs.797 crore to Rs.1,629 crore in the period, prompting the Commission to observe that government offices need to increase productivity and efficiency.
- "Government employees should be paid for results, not to spend time in the office, but overtime is mandated by law in organisations like railways and in such cases payments must be realistic and not frozen in time.
- Overtime allowance paid in just the Ministry of Railways and to civilian employees in the Ministry of Defence, accounts for more than 90 per cent of all overtime paid by the Centre, the Commission found.
- While the Ministry of Defence has achieved some success in controlling payment of the allowance, the efforts of the Railways Ministry have not borne fruit as yet.

- The allowance decreased to 6.54 per cent of pay in 2012-13 from nearly 8 per cent in 2006-07 in the Ministry of Defence. It increased to 2.58 per cent in the Ministry of Railways in 2012-13 from 2.09 per cent in 2006-07.
- Overtime paid to employees in the Railways is rising faster than even their pay. The compounded annual growth rate of 17.2 per cent for overtime in the ministry exceeds that of pay which is 13.2 per cent.
- If the government decides to continue with the allowance for those categories of staff for which it is not a statutory requirement, then it should be increased by 50 per cent, the panel recommended.

## **Apex court settled the tips issue**

- Tips to waiter had become a bone of contention between a leading hospitality group and the taxman.
- The matter landed in court, which passed a landmark judgment. The issue was whether tips constituted salary-income or income from other sources and whether the employer was obliged to 'withhold' the tax.
- The Tax Authority, in this case the Commissioner of Income Tax (TDS), contended that such tips constituted the salary-income of waiters and the tax-payer (employer) was obliged to withhold taxes and remit them to the authorities.
- The authority treated the taxpayer as assessee-in-default and sought to recover the tax shortfall with interest. It also levied a penalty.
- Its contention was that tips from customers were salary-income of waiters as "profits in lieu of salary" and salary included salary paid or allowed to an employee by or on behalf of an employer.
- However, the tax payer, ITC Gurgaon's contention was that tips were received directly by the waiters from customers and the tax-payer merely acted as a trustee, collecting tips and passing it on to the employees.
- Since tips did not constitute salary-income of the employees, the taxpayer had no obligation to withhold tax and could not be treated as a defaulter-assessee.
- The apex court, in its recent ruling, held that since tips werereceived voluntarily from customers and employee-waiters had no vested right against the employer to claim any such amount, it did not constitute salary-income.
- There is no dispute that tips are taxable income, but it is income from other sources, the court said.

## **The government is planning to introduce verification through ordinary mobile phones**

- The government is planning to introduce a system wherein verification, at the time of availing public service benefits, can be done through an ordinary mobile phone.
- The beneficiary needs to inform the authorities of his or her unique registration number in the government-sponsored scheme following which a one-time password (OTP) will be sent to the beneficiary through SMS to verify the individual's identity.
- Efforts would be made to educate the beneficiaries, especially in the rural areas, to keep their latest mobile phone numbers registered or updated with Aadhaar so as to easily avail benefits in various social sector schemes of the government.
- To begin with, the government will test this technology in the National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) that it proposes to roll out soon for under-privileged households.
- Under the scheme, announced in this year's Budget, health insurance cover of up to Rs.1 lakh per family will be given in case of serious illness of family members.
- An additional insurance cover of Rs. 30,000 will be provided for each senior citizen in the family.

- Once the family is enrolled under NHPS, its members can go to any of the empanelled hospitals to avail the health insurance benefits.
- Hospitals having good Internet connectivity will do online authentication of the beneficiary using biometrics of any of the family members.
- However, in a few hospitals, situated in remote or unconnected areas, where there is a lack of good Internet connectivity, mobile phone numbers registered with Aadhaar will be used to verify the identity of the beneficiary.
- The system would also have safeguards to ensure that no other person can avail benefits by using a genuine beneficiary's mobile phone.
- This will also ensure speedy treatment of the patient in case of medical emergency.
- For smart phone users, the government will unveil UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance), which will consolidate about 200 major central and state services under a single unified platform.

## **Government started the process to set up a National Committee on Trade Facilitation**

- The government has started the process to set up a National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) in the country to coordinate and implement the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).
- TFA is aimed at easing customs norms to expedite global trade flows.
- The NCTF, which is in line with the government's "Ease of Doing Business" initiatives, is meant to institutionalise co-ordination on trade facilitation between the 35-plus central government departments, private players and state governments.
- India had ratified the TFA in April. For the TFA to be operational, two-thirds (or 108) of the 162 WTO members will have to ratify it. So far, 77 countries have ratified it.

## **India's airline industry says capping air fares during periods of crisis impractical**

- India's airline industry has termed the government's proposal to cap air fares during periods of crisis such as natural calamities or agitations as an impractical and misinformed idea.
- The civil aviation ministry is expected to issue a draft concept note on containing airfares during crises in the public domain within a month.
- Civil Aviation Minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju said that the government will hold discussions with stakeholders, including airlines, to "contain" fares on affected routes in times of distress.
- The Minister had pointed out that fares were capped at Rs. 2,000 on a few sectors during the Chennai floods
- Airline pricing is dynamic and highly complex as it varies with many factors, including availability of seats, booked cabin class, etc.
- Airlines said they are inherently committed to do whatever is possible to help communities.

## **Government is planning for independent regulators for services such as medicine, law etc**

- The government is planning to appoint independent regulators for services such as medicine, law, chartered accountancy, cost accountancy and company secretaryship.
- The existing structure of a regulator-cum-professional body for these services has resulted in several alleged instances of conflict of interest.
- This hurt the credibility and reputation of these bodies and hampered India's attempts to secure Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA) with other countries to enable easier temporary movement of skilled workers across borders.
- The independent regulators will maintain distance from the professional bodies similar to the situation in developed countries.
- MRAs are pacts where two or more nations recognise each other's compliance assessments to ensure that services, products and processes meet relevant technical norms.
- The bodies being referred to include Medical Council of India (MCI), Bar Council of India (BCI), Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Institute of Cost Accountants of India and Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI).
- All these are statutory bodies under an Act of Parliament.
- The ministry was initially considering preparing a comprehensive plan for appointing independent regulators for all these service segments and then coming out with a Cabinet note for inputs from other ministries. However, the "wholesale approach" has been junked.
- The current plan is to initiate discussions with each of the ministries concerned. Then, separate Cabinet notes can be put up by the ministries on the need for independent regulators for these services.
- The move comes in the backdrop of the Supreme Court recently citing a Parliamentary panel report to state that the MCI "was repeatedly found short of fulfilling its mandated responsibilities" and that the "quality of medical education was at its lowest ebb".
- The apex court, noting the instances of corruption in MCI, had set up an Oversight Committee to supervise the council's functions and scrutinise its policy decisions.
- Bar Council of India (BCI) Chairman Manan Kumar Mishra dismissed allegations of conflict of interest regarding the council and objected to the proposal of appointing a super-regulator for the body.
- The BCI involves former Supreme Court judges, chief justices of high courts and top academicians in its legal education and disciplinary committees.

## **Civil aviation policy plans to auction international traffic rights**

- The government's plan to auction international traffic rights to foreign airlines may find its place in the final version of the civil aviation policy that will be submitted to the Cabinet soon, despite opposition from domestic airlines.
- The draft civil aviation policy, released in October last year, was sent for inter-ministerial comments last month before being sent for the Union Cabinet's approval.
- "We have received most of the comments (from ministries). The civil aviation policy will be sent for the Cabinet's approval within next 10 days," Civil Aviation Secretary R.N. Choubey.
- If the Cabinet approves the proposal, India will become the first country to bid out traffic rights to foreign players.
- In a first, the government has proposed bidding out traffic rights to foreign carriers flying on short-haul routes (within a 5,000 km radius from India).
- As per the proposal, the auctioning would, however, be done only in cases where the foreign carrier or country has utilised the existing bilateral rights but the Indian counterpart has not.
- The seats will be auctioned for flying into metro airports in India for a period of three years.
- At present, countries sign air service agreements, which decide the equal number of flights or seats per week that can fly into each other's country depending on their requirements.
- Then, the government distributes the allocated seats to the respective airlines.

- However, some foreign carriers have asked the Indian government to increase the seat entitlement as they exhaust the limit.
- But since domestic carriers are unable to utilise their quota, the government does not opt to increase the seat entitlement or sign fresh bilateral agreements.
- According to official estimates, while Indian carriers utilised 32 per cent of the allotted capacity in 2014 on international routes, foreign carriers utilised, on average, 62 per cent of the seats allocated to them.
- Domestic airlines and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) have both strongly opposed the idea.
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- The TFA will help in the world's best trade practices being shared among the WTO member countries ratifying the pact.
- While India has made rapid strides in streamlining its processes on the lines of international best practices, the country needs to ensure speedy legislation so that there are visible beneficial outcomes.
- Industry and its various associations would be consulted while implementing the different provisions of the TFA.
- The agreement is supposed to enable domestic manufacturers connect more easily to regional and Global Value Chains.
- Govt also unveiled a user-friendly analytics dashboard to provide easy access to the public on export and import trends of India, including commodities, export destinations, ports of export, countries of import, ports of import, as well as balance of trade for different regions, countries and ports.
- The dashboard on export and import will enable small businesses to foray into global trade based on reliable information.

## **Lok Sabha clears bill to curb governor's powers in monetary policy**

- The Lok Sabha approved the Finance Bill 2016 which included an amendment to the RBI Act clipping the central bank governor's powers to set monetary policy.
- The amendment made to the RBI Act through the Finance Bill removed the governor's powers to singularly set monetary policy vesting them in a six-member Monetary Policy Committee.
- Of the six members, the government will nominate three. The RBI Governor will chair the committee and have a second or casting vote in case of a tie.
- The Deputy Governor in-charge of monetary policy and another officer to be nominated by the central bank's board will also be members. Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.
- The passage of the finance bill marks the completion of the three-stage process in the passage of the General Budget in the lower house.
- With the passage of the Bill, the government has also succeeded in amending retrospectively the definition of foreign companies in the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010.
- This would pave the way for political parties to receive funds from Indian registered foreign companies, where Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is allowed.
- Replying to the debate on the Finance Bill 2016, Mr. Jaitley said the government had no intent to impose Income-Tax on agriculture income as under the Constitution, the Centre had no powers to levy tax on agriculture income.

## **Central banks wants bank licensing process to become continuous**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed a relaxation of norms for on-tap licenses for universal banks, as the banking regulator seeks to open the key economic sector to wider participation.
- This is first time since the financial industry was opened up in 1991 that the RBI has decided to make the bank licensing process continuous as opposed to a 'stop-and-go' approach.
- While the broad contours of the norms are in line with guidelines issued for bank licensing in 2013, the central bank has now made it clear that business houses predominantly in financing activities.
- Groups in the private sector that are 'owned and controlled by residents' and have a successful track record for at least 10 years, provided such a group has total assets of Rs.5,000 crore or more, the non-financial business of the group does not account for 40 per cent or more in terms of total assets or in terms of gross income would be eligible as promoters.
- Preference will be given to promoting entities having diversified shareholding, according to the central bank.
- Individuals can also apply for a licence but they should have at least 10 years of experience in banking and finance.
- The central bank has allowed individuals as well as companies who are directly or indirectly connected with large industrial houses to have 10 per cent stake in a bank, as compared to 5 per cent earlier.
- However, the regulator said such shareholders should not have any director on the board of the bank on account of shareholder agreements or otherwise.
- The initial capital requirement to open a bank has been set at Rs.500 crore and the entity has to maintain 13 per cent capital adequacy ratio for three years.

## **In order to boost export government may come up with coastal corridors**

- The government has suggested setting up 29 port-based coastal industrial corridors across 14 coastal economic zones to boost exports and employment.
- These corridors, envisaging a total investment of Rs.1 lakh crore, would provide employment opportunities to nearly one crore people and boost exports by \$110 billion in the next 10 years.
- The project is part of the National Perspective Plan 2016. The plan contains details of Sagarmala, the government's flagship programme to promote port-led development in the country
- The industrial clusters will be built near 12 major and 13 non-major ports which have surplus land for development.
- Smart Port industrial cities are proposed to be developed at Kandla and Paradip and their feasibility reports are currently under preparation.

## **Taxpayers information can be revealed under Income declaration scheme**

- Govt can reveal information related to taxpayers disclosing previously concealed income under Income declaration scheme, if it is deemed to be in public interest.
- The Income Declaration Scheme offers people with undisclosed income to declare it by paying a penal tax rate of 45 per cent on such income.

- The final version of the Finance Bill okayed by the Lok Sabha has imported Section 138 of the Income Tax Act into the declaration scheme's ambit.
- Bringing in Section 138 to the Scheme brings in objectivity on confidentiality of income tax information and the limitations thereof.
- This is appropriate to ensure that people don't misunderstand the confidentiality aspect.
- In other words, the aim behind bringing in this section is to dispel the perception that the details disclosed under the scheme are confidential under any circumstances — they can be disclosed if it is deemed to be in public interest.
- The discretion has been given to the Chief Commissioner who is a very senior authority and he has to see if it is in public interest to share the information.

## **Fund under NIIF will address capital requirements of domestic steel companies**

- Government is looking at creating a fund under India's first sovereign wealth fund, NIIF, which will address capital requirements of domestic steel companies.
- The government in December created the Rs.40,000-crore National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects.
- Government is also working on operationalising National Infrastructure Fund, the sovereign fund, and that is envisaged as a mother fund and within that there will be specific sectoral funds.
- The Finance Ministry had signed an MoU with Abu Dhabi and Russian nano-technology company and is also having discussions with some funds with the UK for investments in NIIF.
- While the government will invest Rs.20,000 crore in NIIF, the remaining amount will come from private investors.
- NIIF is set up as a Fund of Funds (Category II Alternate Investment Fund) with a proposed series of funds.
- High capital cost is one of the major reasons that affect the competitiveness of Indian steel industries and the government is working on a two pronged strategy to deal with that.
- One is that right now as government is looking at developing long-term funding for sectors like steel and RBI has brought the 5/25 format.
- The stressed assets are a major challenge. The RBI, Department of Financial Services and the banks are working to see how government can help clean up the balance sheets so that banks can get capital at lower costs.

## **Process of issuing unique business identification number started**

- The government has started the process for issuance of Unique Business Identification Number (UBIN) to enable budding entrepreneurs set up their business without any delays, a top official said.
- Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) has begun an exercise for issuance of UBIN for budding entrepreneurs to start their new businesses without any delay.
- The top bureaucracy has been activated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to produce results well within targeted time and in India it is no longer a business as usual.

## **The Agrihub, a digital platform for the farm sector, will raise \$3 million**

- The Agrihub, a digital platform for the farm sector, will raise \$3 million over the next four months for scaling up operations, according to the co-founder of the Bengaluru-based start-up.
- Over 3,600 farmers and well-known brands such as John Deere, Yara Fertilizers, Rallis, Namdhari Seeds, Tafe, KF Bioplants, New Holland Agriculture, Known You Seed, Ginegar and Nagarjuna have already been listed on the platform.
- The product category offered by the company includes: seeds and plants; irrigation products; fertilizers and plant protection products; farm tools and equipment and hi-tech agriculture and allied products.

## **Forgery and fraud big reason for NPA's in State-owned banks**

- State-owned banks are seeing a sharp jump in non-performing assets on account of forgery and fraud even as they struggle to cope with bad loans from distressed commodities and infrastructure sectors.
- Bad loans extended on the basis of fake documents and outright cheating, soared to almost Rs.13,000 crore in 2015-16, more than double the amount two years ago and more than 16 per cent higher than the Rs.11,125 crore recorded in 2014-15, official data showed.
- While Canara Bank recorded a 12-fold jump in fraud-triggered non-performing assets (from Rs.131.6 crore in 2014-15 to Rs.1,584.3 crore in 2015-16), just five big banks accounted for almost 60 per cent of such loans reported last year.
- These are Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, Corporation Bank, State Bank of India, and Syndicate Bank, who together have Rs.7,680 crore of advances at stake in 2015-16.
- State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, identified loans worth Rs.1,841 crore in 2015-16 that were related to cheating cases, far higher than the Rs.248 crore in 2013-14.
- Syndicate Bank's fraud-related bad loans rose from Rs.123 crore in 2013-14 to Rs.1,385 crore in 2015-16.
- Just two cases of a banker-borrower nexus accounted for almost Rs.1,100 crore of those loans last year, according to separate data provided by the finance ministry about bank employees found to have colluded with such cheating borrowers.
- The total amount reportedly stuck in fraud-related bad loan cases jumped from Rs.5,591 crore in 2013-14 to Rs.12,935 in 2015-16, according to data submitted by the Ministry of Finance to the Lok Sabha.
- The number of cases of loans given on the basis of forged documents or cheating increased steadily from 1,520 in 2013-14 to 1,651 in the next year and 1,704 in 2015-16.
- Bank of India identified Rs.574 crore worth of loans as being granted on the basis of fake documents in 2015-16, up from just Rs 2.2 crore in 2013-14.

## **Facebook loses first round in suit over storing biometric data**

- Facebook Inc lost the first round in a court fight against some of its users who sued the social networking company, alleging it 'unlawfully' collected and stored users' biometric data derived from their faces in photographs.
- The judge in a California federal court last week turned down Facebook's motion seeking dismissal of the suit.
- Facebook filed the motion arguing that the users could not file a complaint under Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA) as they had agreed in their user agreement that California law would govern their disputes with the company."
- The court found that Illinois law applies and that the plaintiffs have stated a claim under BIPA.



- The complainants alleged that Facebook's face recognition feature that suggests 'tags' on photos unlawfully collected and stored biometric data, in violation of the BIPA.

## **Direct benefit transfer reaches more than 60000 crore**

- The government has electronically transferred more than Rs.61,000 crore in the last financial year to March 30 through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme, Finance Ministry data showed.
- According to the data presented in Parliament, Rs.61,824.32 crore was transferred to 30.8 crore beneficiaries in 59 schemes.
- Out of this, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) payments made up Rs.25,800 crore, or 42 per cent of total DBT schemes.
- This also means that 85 per cent of the MGNREGA payments made in 2015-16 were done directly into the beneficiary's bank accounts.
- The second largest head under which DBT transfers were made was the PAHAL scheme for the electronic transfer of LPG subsidies.
- The government transferred Rs.21,400 crore under the PAHAL scheme in 2015-16, which is 35 per cent of the total amount transferred through DBT.
- The Finance Ministry data also showed that 3.34 crore duplicate, fake, or inactive consumers were blocked under the PAHAL and related schemes as of April 1, 2015. That number may have increased since then.
- The savings in LPG subsidy on account of this blocked customers, calculated at an average cash subsidy of Rs.150 taking the average cylinders used by a consumer at 6.5 comes to an estimated savings of Rs.3,300 crore in 2015-16.
- The Department of Higher Education (Rs.1,975 crore), Ministry of Minority Affairs (Rs.1,134 crore) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (Rs.955 crore) were the other government agencies that made substantial payments using the DBT model.

## **Govt proposed a mechanism for the issue of non-payment by Venezuelan importers**

- The Commerce Ministry has proposed a mechanism to address the issue of non-payment of dues by Venezuelan importers to Indian exporters.
- However, Venezuela has not given its approval to the proposed payment mechanism. Talks on the issue will soon be held with the RBI.
- Venezuela, an economy that relies on oil exports, has been severely hit by a drastic fall in oil prices.
- This has in turn resulted in the value of the Venezuelan currency plunging to record lows and a high demand for dollars. India's goods exports to Venezuela in 2014-15 were \$258 million (registering a 31 per cent year-on-year growth).
- Owing to the crisis in Venezuela, India's exports in FY16 (April-February) have touched only \$125.5 million.
- India shipped mostly pharmaceutical products which amounted to \$143.55 million in FY15 and \$71.3 million in FY16. The sector is the worst affected due to the payment defaults.
- Under the proposed payment mechanism when Indian importers pay for oil and other imports from Venezuela, a certain portion (say around 30 per cent) of the payment will be held by an Indian public sector bank, say SBI, in Venezuela.
- Then through a vostro account that money will be kept in SBI's Mumbai branch and converted to Indian rupees. Vostro' is an Italian term meaning 'yours', and vostro account refers to holding 'your' money or Venezuela's money in this case.

- When India's exports to Venezuela, the Venezuelan buyer (importer) will certify that they have received the goods and instruct the concerned Venezuelan bank to release the payment to the concerned Indian exporters.
- This instruction will be passed on to SBI-Venezuela and then to SBI-Mumbai. Finally, SBI-Mumbai will release the payment to Indian exporters by debiting from the vostro account.
- The sources said due to the fear of losing the Venezuelan market to competitors from other countries including China, India's exporters have decided to hold on for the moment despite the payment problems.
- Though India's goods imports from Venezuela in 2014-15 were worth \$11.7 billion, most of this (\$11.6 billion) were oil imports.
- Therefore, if Venezuela withdraws the remaining amount (after paying for India's exports) in one go after a few years, it could have some impact on the Indian rupee.

## **Govt believes initiative taken will creat jobs**

- Labour and Employment Minister Bandaru Dattatreya said on Monday that the government's initiatives will lead to creation of one crore jobs by next year.
- "I agree, in the last two years, the (labour) policy decisions were delayed but now after framing these policies, we will activate them and definitely employment generation will improve."
- By next year, the NDA government will generate employment for a minimum of one crore people in the country," Mr. Dattatreya said.
- Employment generation slowed to a six-year low in 2015 – with just 1.35 lakh new jobs being created in eight labour-intensive industries, the lowest since 2009.
- The minister emphasised that the size of technically skilled workforce in India is very small compared to Japan, China and Germany and the government is focussing on providing skills to the workers.

## **India runs into trade deficit with countries with high-demand commodities**

- India has a trade deficit with as many as 27 major countries, including China, Australia, Iraq and Iran, during the last three years.
- With these countries, India has trade deficit continuously during the last three years, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.]
- India generally runs a deficit with those countries from which high-demand commodities are sourced.
- These include items like crude oil, gold, diamond and fertiliser. In 2015—16, India's trade deficit fell 14 per cent to \$118.35 billion.
- Other countries with which India has a trade gap include Indonesia, Korea, Germany, Canada, Taiwan, Russia and Ukraine.
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## **Centre will tax capital gains on investment from Mauritius**

- Starting next year, the Centre will tax capital gains on investments from Mauritius, the tiny island from where India has received nearly a third of its total FDI inflows since 2000.
- The source of the leak in tax revenue was plugged after the two countries signed a protocol at Port Louis, Mauritius.
- The protocol amends the convention for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and capital gains.
- However, following the agreement, Mauritius could cease to be the preferred route for FDI and portfolio investments into India.
- The amendment will tackle long-pending issues of treaty abuse and round-tripping of funds, attributed to the India-Mauritius treaty.
- It will also curb revenue loss, prevent double non-taxation, streamline the flow of investment and stimulate the flow of exchange of information between India and Mauritius.
- The 1983 Double Taxation Avoidance treaty made Mauritius, which taxes capital gains at near-zero rates, an attractive “post box address” for foreign investors to route investments into India.

## **According to WB India has largest offline population**

- India has the largest offline population in the world with nearly a billion Indians still not able to tap the benefits of a digital economy, the World Bank said.
- At least 8 in 10 individuals in India own a mobile phone and digital technologies are spreading rapidly, but the aggregate impact of digital technologies has fallen short and is unevenly distributed, noted a 2016 development report on Digital Dividends released by the Bank.
- The opportunities for increasing access to digital technology for creating higher growth, more jobs, and better public services are significant for India.
- At the end of 2014 India had more than 200 million Internet users, compared to 665 million in China, according to the report.

## **Process for Monetary policy committee will begin after notification of finance bill**

- The process to constitute a Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will begin once the Finance Bill 2016 has been notified as an Act.
- In his Budget speech, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had said that the Reserve Bank of India Act would be amended to facilitate the setting up of a committee tasked with setting interest rates in the economy.
- The proposed committee will have six members — three appointed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the remaining nominated by an external selection committee.
- Following the setting up of this MPC, each member will have a vote while the Reserve Bank of India governor will have a deciding vote in the event of a tie, therefore rendering him as first among equals.
- This is important in the context of the government pushing for lower interest rates to spur the sluggish demand in the economy.

## **Tax collection showing big jump**

- Indirect tax collections for April 2016 grew 42 per cent over their level in April 2015. April's collections amount to 8.3 per cent of the Budget Estimates for the financial year.

- The Budget Estimate for indirect tax collections for this financial year is Rs. 7,78,000, 9.7 per cent higher than the actual collections during 2015-16 of Rs. 7,09,022 crore.
- Central excise collections saw a 71 per cent increase in April 2016, coming in at Rs. 28,252 crore compared to the Rs. 16,546 crore in April 2015.
- Excise collections thus made up nearly 44 per cent of the government's total indirect tax collections in April.
- The growth in total indirect tax collections were mainly driven by the growth in excise collections due to several additional revenue generating measures taken by the government over the last year such as increasing the excise duty on petrol, diesel, and tobacco.
- Excluding such measures, the growth in total indirect tax collections stood at 17 per cent, according to the government.
- Service tax collections amounted to Rs. 18,647 crore in April 2016 compared to Rs. 14,585 crore during the same period of the previous year, a growth of 27.9 per cent.
- The third category of indirect tax collections, customs duty collections, came in at Rs. 17,495 crore in April 2016, up 22.5 per cent from the Rs. 14,286 crore seen in April 2015.
- This data comes at a time when the government announced on Tuesday that it has unearthed approximately Rs. 50,000 crore of indirect taxes evasion and undisclosed income of Rs. 21,000 crore over the last two years.

## **Govt will import more gas if long term affordable rates are secured**

- The government is ready to import at least 70 to 80 million metric standard cubic metres (mmscm) of natural gas for India's idle gas-based power plants if it can secure long-term 'affordable' rates.
- Obtaining the required gas will lead to the re-starting of 20,000 MW of idle power capacity in India.
- The minister recently visited Australia and secured assurances for gas supply at \$5 per mmbtu but suppliers were not willing to sign long-term contracts.
- If the government gets gas at \$5 per mmbtu, gives custom duty waiver, reduces marketing margins and gas transportation charges by half and reduces inter state transmission charges to zero, the industry will be able to absorb the price.

## **Government to bring clarity to Budget provisions**

- The government is likely to come out with a definition for the term 'new employees' for implementing its Budget promise of footing the bill for pension scheme contribution in a bid to create more formal sector jobs.
- Accordingly, 'new employees' may be defined as those in excess of the average employee base of a firm for the previous three years,
- The payment of the EPS contribution will be in the form of reimbursements to employers.
- The scheme will be applicable for the new employees, earning Rs.15,000 a month, who have worked for 240 days during a year in an establishment.
- About 3.5 lakh establishments, which hire more than 20 workers, will be covered under the scheme.
- The Finance Minister had said the government had decided to pay 8.33 per cent of wages to Employees Pension Scheme (EPS) on behalf of employers for workers during first three years of employment.
- For this an allocation of Rs.1,000 crore had been made in the Budget under the scheme, Pradhan MantriRojgarProtsahan Yojana .

## **Industry bodies express concern over large pictorial warning**

- Expressing concern over larger pictorial warnings on tobacco products, industry bodies CII and FICCI said that this had led to a spurt in illegal import of cigarettes.
- They urged the government to take steps to curb such activities while maintaining the status quo on the matter.
- In letters to Health Minister J.P. Nadda, the industry chambers said illicit cigarettes were threatening the “livelihood of crores of farmers and people employed in the industry.”
- An increase in unscrupulous trade activity had resulted in law and order problems as well as a threat to the livelihood of millions of farmers and the legal (tobacco) industry.
- CII urges the government to look into the matter and ensure that a balanced view on the issue of graphic health warnings is taken. Until we are able to rein in the illegal trade in the sector effectively, it would be desirable to maintain a status quo on pictorial warning.
- Companies making cigarettes had been compelled to shut operations due to lack of clarity on the warnings.

## **Index of Industrial production increased by 0.05 percent in March 2016**

- India’s industrial output growth slowed down to 2.4 per cent in financial year 2015-16 with the Index of Industrial Production remaining virtually flat in March 2016, growing by a mere 0.05 per cent.
- Consumer price inflation, on the other hand, accelerated to 5.4 per cent in April from 4.8 per cent in March, official data showed.
- The whole year IIP number and the March number indicate that the apparent recovery visible in February was not sustained and overall there are no signs of an upswing yet.
- The moderation in the industrial output index, which grew 2 per cent in February, was driven by a contraction in the mining and manufacturing sectors, a slowdown in the consumer durables sector and a worsening scenario in the capital goods sector that shrank for the fifth month in a row.
- The cumulative growth of industrial production, at 2.4 per cent, was slower than the 2.8 per cent recorded in 2014-15. In the last decade, industrial output has grown at a slower pace only on two occasions (1.1 per cent in 2012-13 and -0.1 per cent in 2013-14).
- The IIP and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) numbers indicate there are no real signs of a sustained recovery in the economy and suggest that the Reserve Bank of India will hold off on cutting interest rates in the near future.
- The IIP numbers come as a surprise since the core sector data for March showed a strong growth of 6.4 per cent, which had seemed to suggest that the economy was seeing green shoots of recovery.
- The mining & quarrying sector contracted 0.13 per cent in March following a strong growth in February of 5.1 per cent.
- The manufacturing sector contracted 1.2 per cent in March, compared to a growth of 0.7 per cent in February.
- By usage, the capital goods sector contracted 15.4 per cent in April compared to a contraction of 9.5 per cent in the previous month. Growth in the consumer durables sector slowed to 8.7 per cent from 9.6 per cent over the same period.

## **Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty with Mauritius will bring clarity**

- The amendment to the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty with Mauritius will push offshore fund management companies to set up shop in India.
- Under the new safe harbour rules, offshore funds' gains will be taxed as capital gains than as business income. This will require them to reconfigure their plans.
- Under the amended treaty signed with the island nation, India gets the right to tax capital gains on investments routed through Mauritius. The amendment to the 1983 treaty will come into force from April 1, 2017.
- Based on available information, it was, however, unclear if the amendment covered investments made using hybrid securities.

## **Christine Lagarde gives gloomy economic forecast to Brexit**

- A day after the governor of the Bank of England Mark Carney's dark warning that a Brexit vote could push the U.K. into recession, comes another prediction of economic doom.
- Head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, on Friday offered a gloomy economic forecast in the event of Britain voting to leave the EU in the in-out referendum to be held on June 23.
- A majority of economic analysts agree that a vote to leave the EU would be costly in the long run, even after the uncertainty has been resolved.
- And in the short term, "there is also risk of an adverse market reaction to a leave vote. This would imply a depreciation of the sterling and large contractions of investment and consumption," she said.
- U.S. President Barack Obama utilised his visit to the U.K. to openly canvas for Britain to stay in Europe, breaking the long-accepted convention of heads of countries not offering opinions on the domestic affairs of another country.
- Recently, five former NATO secretaries-general wrote to the Daily Telegraph warning of the security threat to the U.K. that a vote to leave would create.

## **Govt puts onus of securing grid connectivity and transportation on the developers**

- The Renewable Energy Ministry's draft guidelines for the development of onshore wind power projects lays the onus of securing grid connectivity and transportation on the developers, which experts say could dampen investor interest in the sector.
- The draft guidelines lay down the rules for setting up onshore wind projects ranging from land use permissions to metering and real-time monitoring to eventual decommissioning.
- India's wind potential is pegged at 302 GW, according to Niti Aayog, with the sector expected to contribute 60 GW to the target of 175 GW of renewable energy by 2022.
- The Ministry issued the draft norms and has sought comments from stakeholders until May 27. While the rules are comprehensive in their scope, experts argue that they could also be over-prescriptive.
- The states are guardians of providing such infrastructure for development." "The project developer should ensure that grid connectivity is technically and commercially feasible at the site selected," according to the draft guidelines.
- In some cases, the minutiae of the rules also render them redundant or too binding in the face of climatic factors that could affect the flow of wind.
- The project developer should judiciously select the size of the wind turbine for a particular site, considering the wind resource available at that site.

## **Inflation higher than RBI's liking**

- India's core inflation remains a bit higher than policymakers would like, but the economy's recovery should accelerate with a good monsoon, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan said.
- Consumer prices rose last month at a more-than-expected 5.39 percent annual rate, up from 4.83 percent in March. It was the first increase in the retail inflation rate since January.
- With Rajan targeting 5 percent retail inflation by March 2017, his comments will solidify the view that the RBI will hold interest rates steady at its June 7 policy meeting. The bank cut rates last month to a four-year low of 6.5 percent in April.
- “Broadly, core inflation has been fairly sticky, a bit higher than we would want. It hasn't moved up and down. We will continue on the task of anchoring expectations,” Rajan said
- Rajan said growth also seemed to be ticking higher. India's economy is among the world's fastest growing, at 7 percent-plus, but the 8 percent level needed to alleviate poverty remains elusive.
- I think we are at the beginning or maybe in the midst of a slow recovery. The signs of faster growth are there –e.g. auto, cement production and consumption. And a good strong monsoon would accelerate the process of recovery.
- One issue for India is that banks remain reluctant to lend and to reduce rates for borrowers, despite 150 bps basis points of rate cuts in the past year.
- To ensure rate cuts feed into the economy, the RBI has injected billions of rupees via open-market bond purchases and cut daily maintenance of bank cash reserve ratios.

## **Four-month window for declaring black money**

- The four-month window for declaring black money held in the country will open on June 1.
- Under the Income Declaration Scheme 2016, individuals can come clean by paying 45 per cent tax and penalty while avoiding scrutiny and enquiry by the Tax Department.
- The scheme also provides immunity from prosecution under the Income-tax Act and Wealth Tax Act.
- Immunity from prosecution is provided under Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988 subject to transfer of asset to actual owner within the period specified in the rules.
- The Income Declaration scheme 2016 will remain in force till September 30 for filing declarations.
- Tax, surcharge and penalty must be paid latest by November 30, according to a statement from the Union Finance Ministry.
- No scrutiny and enquiry under the Income-tax Act or the Wealth tax Act (now abolished) shall be undertaken in respect of such declarations.
- The scheme will apply to undisclosed income whether in the form of investment in assets or otherwise.

## **India's GDP is estimated to grow at 7.6 per cent in 2015–16 and 7.7 per cent in 2016– 17**

- India's GDP is estimated to grow at 7.6 per cent in 2015–16 and 7.7 per cent in 2016– 17 due to a favourable monsoon, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said.
- The Delhi-based think-tank said the numbers mark significant revision upwards from its January 2016 forecast, when it had predicted a 7.4 per cent growth for 2015-16 as well as for 2016-17.
- The current forecast is mainly due to monsoon prediction. But, it also sounded a note of caution by stating, “It is hard to conjecture whether the economy has finally reached the tipping point where positives outweigh the negatives.”

- Exports are expected to contract by 1.6 per cent while wholesale price inflation is projected to grow at 0.9 per cent for 2016-17.
- Current Account Balance as a percentage of GDP is expected to contract by 1 per cent. Fiscal deficit of the Centre as a percentage of GDP is forecast at 3.5 per cent for 2016-17.
- The agriculture sector witnessed feeble average growth rate of 0.5 per cent in 2014-15 and 2015-16 due to drought in two successive years.
- The manufacturing sector, after showing robust growth in the second quarter, slowed down consistently in the third and fourth quarters.
- The growth in Index of Industrial Production (IIP) slowed to 2.4 per cent in 2015-16 from 2.8 per cent in 2014-15. In the fourth quarter, manufacturing was in “recession” (-1.1%) and the overall IIP barely grew 0.2 per cent, it said.
- Even as select indicators show improvement, it is much too early to conclude that the economy is on course to a full-fledged recovery as the improvement is not sufficiently broad-based.
- It red-flagged the much slower growth in services exports, notably software and business service exports which together account for approximately 50 per cent of the total service exports.
- Inflation ranged between 3.66 per cent in August 2015 and 5.7 per cent in January 2016.

## **FM ruled out any depletion of FDI due to imposition of capital gains tax**

- With a revised Mauritius pact in place to check round-tripping, Finance Minister said investors must pay taxes on money earned in India and ruled out any depletion of FDI due to imposition of capital gains tax on investments through the island nation.
- He asserted that India no longer needs any “tax-incentivised route” to attract foreign investments as India economy is now “strong enough” and said there was no “serious apprehension” of investors shifting base to other tax havens
- By checking round-tripping of funds, the amendment would help boost domestic consumption.
- After toiling for almost a decade to redraw the tax treaty with Mauritius, India will begin imposing capital gains tax on investments in shares through Mauritius from April next onwards.
- This has been made possible with amendment to the 34-year-old tax treaty between the two countries.
- As markets reacted cautiously to India expanding its crackdown on tax treaties to make it harder for investors to use tax havens as a shelter to avoid levies.
- Stating that the Mauritius tax treaty created a “tax-incentivised route” at a time when India was looking at foreign investments to boost economy, he said the economy has become strong enough and “now those who earn must pay taxes”.
- The original treaty, signed almost a decade before India opened up its economy in 1991, has helped channelize more than a third of the \$278 billion (nearly Rs 19 lakh crore) foreign direct investment India received in the past 15 years.
- The imposition of taxes has been “done in a phased manner to avoid shock and I don’t expect any depletion to FDI because of this. Also eventually, markets have to operate on inherent strength of economy.
- Stating that the treaty provides for ‘grandfathering’ till March 2017, Jaitley said: “From then till up to two years, 50 per cent of the rate and then from April 2019, 100 per cent of the tax rate.
- But this concessional rate of 50 per cent would apply to a Mauritius resident company that can prove that it has a total expenditure of at least Rs 27 lakh in the African island nation and is not a ‘shell’ company with just a post office address.



## SC to decide on validity of levy on miners

- The Supreme Court would decide on the validity of the government's retrospective levy of additional royalties on miners to fund local development under the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana.
- The Mines Ministry, in charge of implementing the Mines and Mineral Development and Regulation Act of 2015, had notified the District Mineral Fund rules in September 2015.
- It made the additional levy of 10 per cent of royalties for mines auctioned under the new law and 30 per cent of royalties for mines allocated in the past applicable from January 12, 2015, when the Act came into force.
- The mining industry had challenged the move in a few high courts and had managed to secure a stay against the retrospective applicability of the rules — for the period between January 2015 and September 2015.
- For now, till the apex court takes up the case, industry has been told to pay their DMF liabilities on a prospective basis.
- The PM has said retrospective taxation like the one introduced by the UPA to tax Vodafone, is a thing of the past. But these rules were made applicable retrospectively.

## WPI move out of deflationary territory after 17 months

- Wholesale prices moved out of deflationary territory after 17 months in April, rising by 0.3 per cent compared to a contraction of 0.8 per cent in March—driven largely by rising food prices.
- With consumer price inflation in April rising to 5.4 per cent, prospects for a fresh interest rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have dimmed for the next few months.
- On the food side, there were some alarming signals as pulses saw an increase of close to 4 per cent from the previous month showing that supply constraints in certain pockets can lead to flaring up of food inflation.
- The food articles category, among primary articles, saw inflation accelerating to 4.2 per cent in April, compared to 3.7 per cent in March. Manufactured food inflation surged to 8 per cent from 4.5 per cent over the same period.
- Inflation in manufactured products moved into positive territory after 13 months, rising to 0.7 per cent in April from a contraction of 0.13 per cent in the previous month.]
- The situation in the fuel and power segment eased somewhat in April with inflation in the sector contracting 4.8 per cent compared to a contraction of 8.3 per cent in March.
- There are, however, other factors that could drive inflation up in the future such as monsoon and fuel prices.
- If the outlook on the monsoons turns negative, the prices of food products may go up further with traders trying to hedge their positions now to gain in the future.

## World Bank approves \$625 million loan for rooftop solar power

- The World Bank Board announced it had approved a loan worth \$625 million for the government's initiative for rooftop solar power generation.
- The Board also approved a co-financing loan of \$120 million on concessional terms and a \$5 million grant from the Climate Investment Fund's Clean Technology Fund.
- The project will finance the installation of at least 400 MW of Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Photovoltaic (GRPV) across India," according to a statement from the World Bank.

- The project will also strengthen the capacity of key institutions, and support the development of the overall solar PV market.
- The project is to be implemented by the State Bank of India, which will on-lend the funds to solar photovoltaic developers and end-users.
- Despite energy shortages, and the high cost of backup supply, rooftop solar PV systems have not yet become widespread in India,” according to the World Bank.

## **A system similar to Tatkal to expedite examination of patent**

- The government has amended rules and introduced several measures including a system similar to ‘tatkal’, to expedite examination of patent applications by start-ups as well as entities choosing India for the first filing of patent.
- This comes in the backdrop of 2.37 lakh patent applications pending in the country.
- The government, incidentally, is aiming to bring down the time period for initial examination of patent applications from the present 5-7 years to 18 months by March 2018.
- It had also announced the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy to push IPRs as a marketable financial asset and economic tool, promote innovation and entrepreneurship/start-ups, while protecting public interest.
- Under the ‘tatkal’ like system applicants can opt for the ‘expedited examination’- route on the grounds that they have chosen India as the competent International Searching Authority or International Preliminary Examining Authority.
- The ‘expedited examination’-route is also available to all entities that qualify as a start-up as per the definition for start-up provided in the Patent Rules. The applications for this route have to be filed only electronically.
- Under the ‘expedited examination’ route, the fees for individuals and start-ups have been fixed at Rs.8,000, while for small firms it is Rs.25,000 and for large companies, the fee is Rs.60,000.

## **Govt is finding it difficult to identify members for NPA of public sector bank**

- The government is finding it difficult to identify willing members for its recently announced high-level panel to suggest recovery and sale of non-performing assets (NPA) of public sector banks.
- According to bankers privy to the discussion with the government, the finance ministry had sounded out former Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), former Judge of Supreme Court, Justice B.N. Srikrishna and a former central vigilance commissioner to be a part of the committee.
- The formation of the panel was aimed at advising banks on bad loan recovery and one time settlement offers from defaulters.
- Banks often show reluctance in one time settlement offers from defaulters as they have to take haircut if such offers are accepted. They fear questions will be raised by the investigative agencies if they settle for less.
- While banks owe over Rs.9,000 crore to the defunct airline, Mr Mallya had offered Rs 4,000 crore as one-time settlement.
- Banks had rejected the Mr Mallya’s settlement offer as they fear adverse public opinion if the entire money is not recovered.
- Moreover, public sector banks come under the purview of the investigative agencies, and bankers fear these agencies could hound them if they settle for what was offered by the liquor baron.

- Anil Sinha, director of the Central Bureau of Investigation recently came down heavily on banks for not reporting frauds to the investigators, indicating that lenders had given wilful defaulters and fraudsters a long rope to escape law.
- The finance ministry has been advising banks to beef up their recovery efforts in the wake of sharp rise in non-performing assets.
- The stressed assets for the banking system as a whole, which stood at 9.8 per cent at the end of March 2012, moved up sharply to 14.5 per cent at the end of December 2015.

## **Gross market borrowing of the state Govt to increase**

- Only Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha would be eligible for additional borrowings of 0.5 per cent of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in FY17 while Gujarat, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh would be eligible for additional borrowings of 0.25 per cent, according to rating agency ICRA.
- With a limited number of states likely to be eligible for the additional borrowing in FY17, ICRA said that the ceiling for the gross market borrowing limit of the state governments would rise to Rs 3.5 lakh crore in FY17 against the actual borrowings of Rs.2.94 lakh crore in FY2016.
- However, if a majority of states revise pay scales in FY17 itself, the actual borrowings may be higher than this figure, given the flexibility to adjust borrowings raised in excess of the entitlement from the net borrowing limit for the subsequent year.
- The government has recently permitted eligible states to undertake a higher fiscal deficit and additional borrowings of up to 0.5 per cent of GSDP above the anchor of 3 per cent of GSDP.
- The eligibility criteria that decides the rate is the states' compliance with a curb in interest payments at or below 10 per cent of their revenue receipts, their ability to curtail debt below 25 per cent of their GSDP and the maintenance of a balanced or surplus revenue account.
- The government has also permitted the states to avail of any unutilised fiscal deficit amount, between FY17 and FY19, in the following year within the Fourteenth Finance Commission's (FFC's) award period.
- Similarly, borrowings raised in excess of their entitlement would get adjusted from the net borrowing limit for the subsequent year.

## **Consolidation of associates of SBI will help in global sized institutions**

- The proposal of SBI to merge its five associate banks with itself and acquire BharatiyaMahila Bank is in line with the government's policy of consolidation as the country needs global-sized institutions, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said.
- "Consolidation was part of the Indradhanush package. I had announced about consolidation in the Budget, therefore, the banks have acted. It is accordance with the government's policy," Jaitley said.
- The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) proposed merger of its five associate banks and the three-year old BharatiyaMahila Bank (BMB) with itself and sought the government's approval for the same.
- He said there is a need to reduce the number of banks by consolidating some of them.
- Further, he said the banks have given their own opinion and if some banks have a contrarian view, the government will "certainly respect that, look into it and take that into consideration".
- According to SBI Chairman Arundhati Bhattacharya, with the merger, the balance sheet size of the bank will soar to Rs.37 lakh crore, from Rs.28 lakh crore currently.

- The five associate banks that are under proposal to be merged with the banking major are State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Travancore, State Bank of Patiala, State Bank of Mysore and State Bank of Hyderabad.
- Among these, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Mysore and State Bank of Travancore are listed on bourses.
- Asked about the government's plan on strategic sale in public sector undertakings through divestment, he said suggestions from NITI Aayog are awaited.
- Speaking about the government having widened its policy for the first time, Mr. Jaitley pointed out to the available means such as divestment, strategic sale and privatisation, asset recycling and buybacks.

## **Anti-dumping duty imposed on seamless tubes, steel pipes**

- The Government has imposed a provisional anti-dumping duty for six months on seamless tubes, steel pipes, among others imported from China.
- In March, the Directorate General for Anti-dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) had recommended to the Revenue Department to impose provisional levy on import of certain types of iron and steel pipes from China used in oil and gas exploration in a bid to protect the domestic industry from cheap imports.
- The anti-dumping duty will be in the range of \$ 961.33-\$1,610.67.
- The duty imposed under this notification shall be effective for a period not exceeding six months (unless revoked, superseded or amended earlier) from the date of publication of this notification in the Official Gazette and shall be paid in Indian currency.

## **Govt increased age for drawing pension**

- The government has allowed Employees Pension Scheme (EPS) subscribers to defer drawing their pension until they attain 60 years of age, from the present 58 years.
- Under the present law, members are not allowed to contribute towards pension or defer withdrawing the pension after attaining 58 years of age.
- Also, an employee can receive pension only after minimum 10 years of service.
- The government's new rules to increase the age criteria to 60 years of age for pension contributions and benefits were notified on April 25.
- At present, 8.33 per cent of a worker's salary up to Rs.15,000 a month, is remitted to the Employees' Pension Scheme of 1995.
- This is a voluntary scheme that could be availed by EPS subscribers at their own will. The move is a part of the government's attempt to strengthen the employees pension scheme.
- Recently, labour and employment minister Bandaru Dattatreya had said that the government was looking to increase the minimum monthly pension amount.
- Under the present scheme, employees get a minimum pension of Rs.1,000 every month.

## **Apple opened its first development centre in India to work on Apple Maps**

- Apple Inc. opened its first development centre in India to work on Apple Maps, the company's digital maps and navigation service.

- The company's servers will be located in the U.S. but technical and support services would be provided in Hyderabad. It will work out of an existing software hub that is part of a special economic zone.
- "The talent here in the local area is incredible and we are looking forward to expanding our relationships and introducing more universities and partners to our platforms as we scale our operations," said Tim Cook.
- Apple didn't specify the amount of investment in the facility but in a statement it said the centre would accelerate development of maps and create up to 4,000 jobs.
- The Cupertino, California-based company has teamed with Noida-based RMSI, a global IT services company, to provide development expertise and software for geo-spatial services.
- It chose Hyderabad to set up its map development centre as the city had the largest number of engineers in the country specialising in mapping. The National Remote Sensing Agency that processed maps and images from India's earth observation satellites was based here.
- Several companies in the city offered GIS services, including spatial analysis, mapping and visualisation, content imagery and remote sensing.
- There were at least 50 small enterprises that supported the GIS and mapping industry. A significant amount of mapping done was used by the mobile phone industry.

## **TRAI issued a consultation paper on free data**

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India issued a consultation paper on free data seeking comments from stakeholders whether business models which provide free data or suitable reimbursement to users could be allowed without violating the differential pricing norms set by the regulator.
- This move is aimed at giving consumers more choices for accessing the Internet, according to a posting on the regulator's website.
- Earlier this year, TRAI had banned the practice of differential pricing of data or allowing telecom service providers to offer differential pricing for access to specific applications or websites.
- The move put the end to Facebook's Free Basics. Now, the regulator is looking at different models which can work within its regulatory framework.
- It is looking at whether a "Telecom Service Provider (TSP)-agnostic platform" that does not play the role of gate-keeper could be allowed in order to "give consumers more choices for accessing the Internet."
- The other models it talks about is that of a "don't charge" or toll-free API, where the telecom service provider doesn't act like a gatekeeper and direct transfer of money for Internet data charges.

## **The hybrid annuity model is beginning to find some traction**

- The hybrid annuity model for awarding highway contracts introduced by the government last year, is beginning to find some traction after an initial lukewarm response from infrastructure players, ratings agency ICRA said in a report.
- "After initial teething problems with no bids for the first project under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) and modest participation (average of three bids for the first few projects) during January-March 2016, NHAI (National Highways Authority of India)'s aggressive promotion of the model, through awareness campaigns to lenders and developers has yielded positive results," ICRA said in its report on Indian Road Sector.
- It said some of the recent bids witnessed good participation, as high as nine-ten bidders per project.
- The first bid under the hybrid annuity model, for four-laning of the Solan-Kaithalighat section in Himachal Pradesh had received no bids.

- Under this public-private partnership (PPP) model, the government invests 40 per cent of the construction cost for building highways over a period and the balance comes from the private developer.
- The government will invest money in five equal instalments based on the targeted completion of the road project.
- Also, unlike the build, operate and transfer (BOT) toll model, government will collect the highway toll tax.
- The private developer will recover his investment from the government by receiving annuity payments over a period of 15 years.
- The government also offers 80 per cent of prior land acquisition and forest clearance in such projects to the developers.

## **FM reiterates need for greater competition sectors such as public transport**

- There is a need to ensure greater competition in the country in sectors such as public transport, railways and power distribution, which are dominated by the public sector, to ensure better products and services, said Finance Minister.
- “Competition is at the heart of a market economy. Socialism, per se, is anti-competitive as it promotes state-owned monopolies and restrictions. That is never in the consumer interest. It is always competition which ensures that the best product and service wins,” he said
- Turning to the public transport in states where government-owned companies enjoy a monopoly, he said the Centre wants to free this sector up for competition and will work with the state governments on the matter.
- Referring to state government-owned power distribution companies, he said they were the third-largest contributor to bad loans - mostly due to the populist policies adopted by the state governments to score political brownie points.
- Opening up the power distribution to competition is an important reform that must be done soon, Mr. Jaitley said.

## **Money earned through corrupt practices not with in black money scheme**

- Persons who have earned money through corrupt practices cannot take advantage of the domestic black money disclosure scheme, says the Finance Ministry’s FAQ on Income Declaration Scheme issued.
- The four-month window which opens on June 1 provides an opportunity to people having undisclosed income to come clean by paying tax, penalty and surcharge totalling 45 per cent of fair market value.
- The 14 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) further said declarations made will remain confidential as in the case of return of income filed by an assessee.
- The declarant, it further said, will be liable for capital gains tax on sale of such assets in future.
- On a question whether a person can declare undisclosed income which has been acquired from money earned through corruption, the FAQ said “No.”
- The scheme will not apply in relation to prosecution of any offence punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

- As per the FAQ, if a declaration is held as void, the provisions of the Income Tax Act will apply in respect of such income as they apply in relation to any other undisclosed income.

## **Bank Board Bureau is working out an intermediate mechanism for NPAs**

- Worried over mounting bad loans, the Bank Board Bureau (BBB) is working out an “intermediate mechanism” to ensure early resolution of the problem and also to provide comfort to the bank management with regard to settlement of dues.
- “We are putting in place an intermediate mechanism which will analyse some of the processes which would be triggered to settle the NPAs that the banks are carrying on their balance sheets,” Vinod Rai, chairman of BBB told
- He said, adding there are two kind of issues, one is process of resolution, the other is the pricing at which the resolution takes place.
- “Pricing is the commercial judgement of the institution. And I don’t think it would be fair to have an outside agency take that decision,” he said.
- The entire thing will be rolled out in a fortnight, he said without giving much details of it. Asked if it will be under the Bureau, he said it will be outside BBB and would be in domain of banks.
- Last week Rai had stressed that the bad loans situations was not alarming and said all public-sector banks have got their strategies in place to tackle the stressed asset woes.

## **RBI Governor pitches for better business environment**

- Pitching for a better business environment for start-ups, Reserve Bank Governor Raghuram Rajan said India has done away with the licence raj, but ‘inspector raj’ continues to some extent.
- He also said that regulations should be for betterment of the industry and not to discourage entrepreneurs and suggested a system of self-certification for the industries with some checks on the part of the authorities to prevent any misuse.
- Advocating an easier set of regulations for small and medium enterprises in India, Rajan gave examples of the UK and Italy saying, “We have seen that while regulations are liberal in United Kingdom, it is very heavy in Italy.
- Calling for a need to focus on the development of small and medium enterprises that require ‘hand-holding’ by the state governments and other agencies, Rajan said,
- “Indian economy is in the midst of recovery. However, some areas are still under stress and need to be focused in order to get them better.”
- A good monsoon will be helpful for the growth of the economy, he added.
- Small and medium enterprise require focused attention, the governor said and mooted setting up new institutions to finance SMEs to ensure easy access to funds.
- Rajan said public sector banks have increased their credit to small and medium enterprises after RBI identified medium enterprises as priority sector and that he was optimistic about growth of start ups if provided required facilities to grow.

## **Benefits of lower prices will be extended to medium and long-term as well**

- The benefits of lower prices accrued through the e-bidding of power procurement will be extended to the medium- and long-term procurement as well, according to the government.
- The details of short-term procurement through the Discovery of Efficient Electricity Price (DEEP) e-bidding portal were unveiled.
- The process has resulted in substantial savings as the prices discovered through e-bidding are significantly lower than the prices at which power was procured during the similar period in the last year.
- According to a statement issued by the Power Ministry, “the scope of this portal shall be further expanded soon to cover medium-term and long-term procurement of power.”
- Four entities participated in the e-bid—the state governments of Kerala, Uttarakhand, and Bihar, and private sector company Torrent Power.
- For Kerala, the lowest power price for May in slot of the day was Rs.3.14 per unit compared with the Rs.4.7 per unit price at which the state procured short-term power last year, according to the statement.
- Uttarakhand saw a price of Rs.2.59 per unit for power for July on a round-the-clock basis through a reverse auction in the e-bidding process.
- Last year, the lowest price at which the state’s distribution companies (discoms) purchased power in July was Rs.3.41 per unit.
- Bihar got the lowest price of Rs.3.08 per unit for slot of the day for July. The state’s discoms did not buy any power during the last two years.
- The e-bidding process of Torrent Power saw a lowest price of Rs.2.95 per unit in slot of the day for May-June.
- The e-bidding portal was inaugurated by Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Power, Coal, and New and Renewable Energy Piyush Goyal in April.

## **RBI governor says speeding up structural reforms is politically difficult**

- It is ‘politically difficult’ to speed up structural reforms in India, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan said, even as he stressed on the need for cleansing the banks and checking inflation to ensure faster growth.
- Mr. Rajan also said labour market reforms can boost growth, but the process may draw opposition.
- He also called for the emerging markets like India to “speak up and raise their voice louder” to have a say in setting the global agenda.
- The Governor said India is fairly safe from volatile global economy and it has posted 7.5 per cent growth despite two droughts and weak international market.
- “Despite two droughts and weak international market scenario, we are registering about 7.5 per cent growth because of macro-level stability,” he said.
- While there is a need to ensure macro level stabilisation, the country would have to keep inflation under control and cleanse the banks, he said. “This can strengthen macro level stability,” he said.
- In addition to that, maintaining reforms would attract both international and domestic investors and spur activities, Mr. Rajan said.
- Stating that structural reforms are important for elevating the potential of economy, the RBI Governor said degree of competition and level of participation of different segments of society should be raised in order to bring more and more people into the workforce.
- However, it may be difficult politically to speed up structural reforms and while labour market reforms can boost growth, the process may draw opposition, the Governor told delegates attending the lecture.



## **India needs to tighten security norms to deal with the threats that cybercrime**

- India needs to tighten security and regulatory norms to deal with the threats that cybercrime, terrorism, fire and corporate espionage will pose to businesses in the coming years, according to a recent study.
- The report highlights the fact that while awareness about security issues is on the rise, there is a need to overhaul security standards and the regulatory framework.
- Besides, there is also a lack of confidence in facing natural disasters like earthquakes and floods.
- The 'Physical Security Environment Survey 2016' found that as many as 73 per cent opined that the number of security incidents had increased in the past two years.
- The report added that India ranked 143 on the global peace index, lagging behind Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

## **RBI warned banks to be on guard against misuse of jan dhan account**

- Raising concerns that Jan Dhan accounts can be misused by 'money mules', the RBI today warned they are "very vulnerable" to frauds and asked banks to be on guard against such activities.
- The newly opened accounts under the PMJDY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana) could be very vulnerable to fraud practises.
- Third-parties can be used to launder the proceeds of fraud schemes (such as phishing and identity theft) by criminals who gain illegal access to deposit accounts by recruiting them as 'money mules'.
- Failure to guard against misuse of customer accounts, might result in banks incurring supervisory sanctions and enforcement action from the RBI.
- He also expressed displeasure with entities surrendering their payments bank licences and said the RBI would explore the possibility of a levying processing fee on the applicants.
- In August, the RBI granted in-principle licences to 11 entities. While Cholamandalam Investment dropped out in March, last week Sun Pharma promoter, Dilip Shanghvi, surrendered the licence.

## **Govt. relaxes licence fees for India-controlled ships**

- The government said domestic shipping firms will have to pay only a one-time licence fee of Rs.20,000 to own foreign flag vessels, in a bid to give a boost to the maritime sector.
- Vessels of Indian Controlled Tonnage will now be required to pay only a one-time processing fee of Rs.20,000 towards issue of licence.
- Till now, they were being charged Rs. 20,000 on a monthly basis by the Directorate General of Shipping as processing fee for issue of licence.
- The government said the move would boost the Indian Controlled Tonnage Scheme and be a step towards promoting 'ease of doing business' in the maritime sector.

## **IOR nations decided to evolve mechanism on Special Economic Zones**

- India and several other nations bordering the Indian Ocean have decided to evolve a regional mechanism for cooperation on Special Economic Zones (SEZ) – or duty-free enclaves with tax holidays — to boost exports.
- The first-of-its-kind meeting between SEZ authorities from these Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) nations was held on May 19-20 at Chabahar, Iran, which houses a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) – a synonym for SEZs.
- The meeting comes at a time of global economic and trade slowdown and attempts are being made by countries to boost growth through trade.
- Participants at the Chabahar meet also considered a proposal to form a “joint FTZ” among the IOR Association (IORA) member countries since most of these FTZs are situated or are being built in coastal regions.
- The meeting also assumes importance given that India had on Monday signed a pact with Iran to develop the Chabahar port, and agreed to provide \$500 million for the purpose.
- A World Bank said, “More and more countries have begun to implement this instrument (SEZs) for their industrialization process, especially as a way of attracting foreign direct investments mostly in the manufacturing sector, creating jobs, generating exports and foreign exchanges.”
- It noted that some countries have been successful while others, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, were still struggling.

## **Govt. aims at top 30 slot for ease of doing business**

- Amitabh Kant, Niti Aayog Chief Executive Officer, said the government wants India to be among the top 30 countries in terms of ease of doing business over the next three to four years.
- According to the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2016, India ranks 130 out of 189 countries.
- “This is one government that is focused on innovation and trying to make India an easy, simple place to do business,” Mr. Kant said.
- India had gained 12 positions in ease of doing business, Mr. Kant said.
- The government had taken various steps, which include bringing in a bankruptcy law, an e-biz platform for single channel of approvals and a national company law tribunal, he said.
- India could be a leading player and attract \$7 billion or 4.5 per cent of the world's investments by 2020, according to the report.

## **Cabinet approved the first-ever policy for capital goods sector**

- The Cabinet approved the first-ever policy for the capital goods sector in the country that aims to triple the value of production of these goods to Rs.7.5 lakh crore by 2025 and create more than 21 million jobs.
- The policy also envisages increasing exports to 40 per cent of production from the present 27 per cent.
- The share of domestic production in India's demand will also be increased from 60 per cent to 80 per cent, making India a net exporter of capital goods.
- This is first ever policy for Capital Goods sector with a clear objective of increasing production of capital goods from Rs.2,30,000 crore in 2014-15 to Rs.7,50,000 crore in 2025.
- “The policy will help in realising the vision of ‘Building India as the World class hub for Capital Goods’. It will also play a pivotal role in overall manufacturing as the pillar of strength to the vision of ‘Make in India’,’ according to the statement.
- The objectives of the policy will be met by the Department of Heavy Industry in a time-bound manner through obtaining approval for schemes as per the roadmap of policy interventions.

- The Union Cabinet also approved financial restructuring of Hindustan Steel Works Construction Limited (HSCL) and its takeover by National Buildings Construction Corporation Limited (NBCC), which is a PSU under the Ministry of Urban Development.
- HSCL will become subsidiary of NBCC with the latter holding 51 per cent equity. The shareholding of Government of India in HSCL will be reduced to 49 per cent.
- As per the proposal, the government's loan along with accumulated interest and outstanding guarantee fee worth Rs.1,502.2 crore will be converted into equity and equity capital of the company will be raised to that extent.
- The paid-up equity capital of the company will become Rs.619.3 crore from Rs.117.1 crore at present. After writing off of the accumulated losses, the equity and paid up capital of HSCL will become Rs.34.3 crore.
- Further, NBCC will infuse funds of Rs.35.7 crore as equity into HSCL. The equity and paid up capital of HSCL will become Rs.70 crore.
- The Cabinet also approved waiving off of loan Rs.1,916.14 crore and the outstanding interest of Rs.7,163.35 crore on the loan owed by Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation Ltd (HFCL) as part of a financial restructuring package for the PSU.
- The transfer of 56 acres of ash dyke land of Barauni unit to Bihar State Power Generation Company Limited (BSPGCL) to settle dues of HFCL for faster revival of Barauni Unit was also given a nod.
- The Cabinet also granted ex-post facto approval to the proposal for undertaking cadre review of the Indian Postal Service.
- It will also reduce the existing stagnation and improve the career prospects of Indian postal service officers.
- The proposal will be implemented through measures that include creation of various posts at different levels. However, there will be no change in overall number of posts in the cadre.

## **Govt to auction small and marginal oil fields**

- The first round of auctions of discovered small and marginal fields will start on July 15 and conclude on October 31, the government said. As many as 67 fields,clubbed into 46 contract areas, will be auctioned.
- Bids are being invited for developing and monetising these contract areas having an estimated 625 million barrels of oil and oil equivalent gas in-place volumes spread over 1,500 square kilometers in on-land, shallow water and deepwater areas.
- India is now moving towards a new era of hydrocarbon production, driven by a forward-looking Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) and a new fiscal model based on revenue sharing contracts,” Mr. Pradhan said.
- The fields, with resources worth Rs.70,000 crore, were surrendered by the ONGC and Oil India after being deemed non-renumerative, he said.
- In March 2016, the Cabinet approved HELP which replaced the existing New Exploration Licensing Policy and introduced significant reforms in the sector.
- The main changes made to the previous policy include a uniform policy for the exploration and production of all hydrocarbons, both conventional (oil and gas) and unconventional (shale oil, shale gas and coal bed methane).
- “The contracts would not allow the production of unconventional hydrocarbons because they were meant only for conventional sources. “The new policy does away with this distinction.”
- The second major change had to do with the time period of exploration.

## **India to WTO Dispute Settlement Body for adjudicating its dispute with the U.S.**

- India will soon ask the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Dispute Settlement Body to establish a panel of experts to adjudicate its dispute with the U.S. over the increase in visa fees, government sources said.
- This follows the failure of India and the U.S. to arrive at an amicable solution during the consultations held on May 11 and 12 under the auspices of the WTO, they said.
- India's decision to seek the setting up of the panel is likely to be announced after Prime Minister's June 7-8 visit to the U.S.
- According to WTO norms, if consultations fail, the complaining country can ask the settlement body to appoint a panel.
- India notified the WTO Secretariat that it has "initiated a WTO dispute proceeding against the U.S. regarding measures imposing increased fees on certain applicants for two categories (H-1B and L-1) of non-immigrant temporary working visas into the U.S., as well as measures relating to numerical commitments for some visas."
- According to India, the measures appear to be inconsistent with the U.S. commitments under the General Agreement on Trade in Services.
- India said the visa fee increase is "discriminatory" against Indian firms as these (H-1B and L-1) are the same categories that are most extensively used by Indian service suppliers, especially in the information technology sector.
- India warned that the U.S.'s decision to continue with the implementation of the visa fee increase could result in other nations deliberately raising customs duties on goods to increase revenue for their domestic programmes.
- During the talks, the U.S. denied that there was anything in its legislation specifying that the visa fee hike is applicable only to Indian companies.
- The U.S. said there was nothing discriminatory in the legislation against Indian information technology companies, adding that since the visa fee increase is general in nature, it was not violative of any WTO rule.
- Washington also informed that the visa fee hike was part of a legislation (the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016), and therefore it would not be possible to make any changes without addressing the legislation as a whole.
- Indian IT industry body Nasscom said the financial implications of the visa fee increase for the technology sector would be around \$400 million a year.

## **Food processing sector to attract more FDI**

- Foreign direct investment (FDI) in the food processing sector is expected to cross \$1 billion in the next two years, helped by reforms in FDI space and streamlining of FSSAI regulations, Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal has said.
- The government has announced 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products produced and processed in India in this year's Budget.
- Besides food parks, she said the rules and regulations of the food regulator FSSAI had been streamlined to boost food processing sector.
- The food processing sector has attracted \$463 million worth of FDI during April-February of the last fiscal, she added.
- According to Ms. Badal, growth of the food processing sector will help farmers get better price for their produce as well as lead to reduction in wastage and lower prices of fruits and vegetables.

- To achieve this, the government has taken various steps to create infrastructure at the farm gate level. The ministry had allocated 17 food parks and about Rs.50 crore per food park will be given as grant.
- “In the last two years, seven food parks have become operational while during the UPA’s 10-year tenure, only two parks were operationalised,” Ms. Badal averred, adding that the target is to operationalise all 42 mega food parks by 2019.
- The minister said once the processing level reaches 20 per cent, consumers would have the option of processed fruits and vegetables and that too, at affordable prices.

## **RBI governor says China may face sharp slowdown**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan cautioned about a “sharp” slowdown in Chinese economy which, he said, remained a “significant risk” for the global economy.
- A sharp contraction in China’s imports over the past year, for instance, had already led to spill-overs through the trade, confidence, tourism and remittance channels and SAARC nations had not been able to avert its impact, Mr. Rajan said.
- The RBI Governor also lauded the efforts taken by the government in implementing structural reforms to revive growth.
- “Leaving aside the Goods and Services Tax (GST) reform, a number of other significant reforms have also taken place, including the recent passage of the new Bankruptcy bill, which is likely to speed up the resolution of distress tremendously,” Mr. Rajan said.

## **FDI inflow recorded \$40 billion**

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into India increased by 29 per cent to a record \$40 billion during in the financial year ended March.
- If re-invested earnings (\$10 billion), other capital (\$4.4 billion) and equity capital of unincorporated bodies (\$1 billion) are taken into account along with \$40 billion worth equity inflows, the total FDI flows in FY'16 is the highest-ever at \$55.4 billion.
- The FDI equity inflows in March 2016 went up by 16.5 per cent to \$2.46 billion, according to data released by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).
- Of the FDI inflows (equity) in FY'16, services sector attracted maximum investments of \$6.88 billion followed by computer hardware and software (\$5.90 billion), trading business (\$3.84 billion) and automobile industry (\$2.52 billion).
- Maximum inflows (equity) were from Singapore (\$13.69 billion), followed by Mauritius (\$8.35 billion), the US (\$4.19 billion), the Netherlands (\$2.64 billion) and Japan (\$2.61 billion).
- The previous highest FDI inflow was in FY12 when the country received \$46.55 billion, which was a 34 per cent increase over \$34.8 billion it got in FY11.
- However, India recorded its largest-ever percentage increase in FDI when it received \$22.8 billion in FY07, representing a 155 per cent increase over the \$8.9 billion in FY06.

## **The Centre is set to regulate private employment agencies**

- The Centre is set to regulate private employment agencies by amending the contract labour law of 1971.
- The agencies won't be allowed to take money from candidates for jobs and hiring agencies who “dupe workers' would soon be weeded out.

- The labour ministry would have to amend the contract labour Act of 1970. According to him, some quarters have looked upon contract workers as undesirable due to the industrial unrest in recent years, stemming from poor quality of jobs and the individuals being vulnerable to false hopes.
- There are several staffing agencies that dupe people in the guise of getting them employed after charging them hefty amounts.
- Trade unions are also in favour of the regulation. “The number of staffing agencies is growing and is largely unregulated and they mislead the workers.
- There is no official website to check the authenticity of a particular agency. We need transparency and trade unions are willing to make the regulation a success,” Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh general secretary said.

## **Tata group made foray into e-commerce through TataCLiQ.com**

- The 148-year-old Tata Group has made a foray into the Indian e-commerce market through TataCLiQ.com.
- The venture will sell apparel, electronics and footwear among other products.
- Currently, there are only 30 million regular online shoppers in India and there is immense potential to bring the next 100 million.
- The group said it developed the Tata Cliq website over a year-and-a-half at a cost of “several hundred million dollars”.
- The site would act as a marketplace for its in-house and partner companies. The venture marks a new direction for the salt-to-steel conglomerate which has so far focused on physical retail stores.
- Customers can order online at TataCLiQ and get the items home-delivered or pick them up at designated stores, a model the company termed “phygital,” a combination of physical and digital.
- “Phygital” play can be a game changer in e-commerce, significantly enhancing customer experience while reducing logistics and delivery costs for a long-term, profitable business.
- Start-ups Flipkart, Snapdeal and U.S.-based Amazon are battling it out for market share in the country.
- E-commerce giant Alibaba is looking to enter the India market. By 2025, online merchandise sales will hit \$220 billion in India from \$11 billion last year, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

## **Certain changes might be required for Bankruptcy code**

- The government has brought in this Code, largely modelled on the U.S. Bankruptcy Law, with the good intention of facilitating timely resolution of corporate bankruptcy.
- Under the Code, where a corporate debtor fails to pay a debt that is due, the corporate insolvency resolution process may be initiated by a financial creditor or by an operational creditor or by the corporate debtor itself.
- A financial creditor is a creditor to whom a financial debt is owed by the corporate debtor. An operational creditor is a creditor who has provided goods or services to the corporate debtor, including employees, central or state governments.
- When a corporate debtor fails to pay a debt due to an operational creditor, such an operational creditor can demand payment of the same.
- If the corporate debtor fails to pay the amount due within 10 days of the demand or fails to dispute the debt, the operational creditor may file an application before the adjudicating authority for initiating a corporate insolvency resolution process.

- A dispute regarding the debt would be one where there is a record of a suit or arbitration proceedings having been filed before a demand for payment is made. Here lies the difficulty.
- To file a suit is expensive. Therefore, corporate debtors would dispute an operational debt by merely filing an arbitral reference regarding the dispute which is also arbitration proceedings in law, without really intending to pursue actual arbitration for resolving the dispute.
- Even if the arbitration award is given resolving the dispute, the corporate debtor would seek to set aside the award in the High Court which may take a long time to reach final resolution.
- Thus, the Code does not make much sense for the operational creditor.
- One of the ways of remedying the situation is to empower the adjudicating authority to finally determine whether the dispute is bonafide or not and to say that such a determination is a question of fact and hence not appealable.
- As far as financial creditors are concerned, they can straight away approach the adjudicating authority for an insolvency resolution process, even if there are certain disputes regarding the financial debt.
- Under the Code once an application of an operational creditor is admitted by the adjudicating authority an interim resolution professional gets appointed and the management of the corporate debtor passes to the interim resolution professional.
- Displacement of management of corporate debtor on account of a few unpaid operational creditors and financial creditors can cause great damage to the cause of entrepreneurship.
- Since the management of the corporate debtor under the Code passes to the insolvency resolution professional immediately after the application is admitted by the adjudicating authority.
- the adjudicating authority should be expressly empowered to order disgorgement by the resolution professional of all illegal and illicit gains if made by him when in management of the corporate debtor.
- The Code does not clearly say that the management of the corporate debtor would be restored once the insolvency resolution plan is fully implemented. This should be put down very clearly in the cause of entrepreneurship.
  - The insolvency resolution professional has to submit an insolvency resolution plan within 180 days to 270 days and if insolvency professional fails to do so or if the insolvency resolution plan is rejected by the adjudicating authority, the adjudicating authority has no option but to order liquidation of the corporate debtor.
  - Before ordering the liquidation of the corporate debtor it is not clear whether the corporate debtor can be heard by the adjudicating authority for granting any reliefs. This has to be clearly laid down.

## **Transition to Bharat Stage VI norms a big challenge to industries**

- The transition to Bharat Stage VI (BS-VI) emission norms for vehicles will pose a significant technological challenge, according to a top official of Wheels India.
- Even for Europe, the transition from Euro 5 to Euro 6 norms took a lot of time.
- Technologies had to be adapted, innovations relating to manufacturing had to be done, and, more importantly, testing and validation to the new standards had to be performed.
- The climatic conditions, driving habits and road conditions, leave alone fuel conditions and maintenance practices, were significantly different in India compared to Europe.
- Significant developments in terms of automotive technology and pace of innovation must happen first if the industry had to meet the target that had been set for BS-VI.
- The government recently announced that India would leapfrog from BS-IV emission norms that are now in force to the BS-VI norms by 2020.
- Introduced in 2000, the Bharat norms are emission control standards put in place by the government to check air pollution.
- Based on European regulations (Euro norms), these standards prescribe specifications/limits for the release of air pollutants from equipment using internal combustion engines, including vehicles.

- Implementation of the BS-V standard was originally scheduled for 2019. This has now been skipped. BS-VI, originally proposed to come in by 2024, has now been advanced to 2020 instead.

## **Twitter considering roll out of Twitter Seva to other countries**

- Micro-blogging platform Twitter is now considering the roll-out of the Twitter Seva service in other countries such as the U.K. and the UAE.
- This follows the success of the service, developed for the India market to help delivery of e-governance services.
- Twitter Seva helps process a large volume of tweets and assigns them to the relevant authority for real-time resolution.
- It is currently being used by Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Railways, besides the Bengaluru Police.
- The product had been designed and developed in the country, and the processes that Twitter had built into it are 'absolutely' India exclusive.
- Twitter India is also exploring the roll-out of the product with more ministries and state governments.
- "The detailed analysis of the tweets also presents insights about their audience along with the receptiveness and impact of their tweets," Twitter representative said.
- Through the service, the Railway Ministry processes about 5,500 tweets per day, responding to any citizen query related to catering, cleanliness, or even urgent medical support on board a train.
- Similarly, Ministry of External Affairs processes over 6,000 tweets in a month, while the number is over 40,000 per month for Commerce Ministry and over 3,000 in a month for Bengaluru Police.
- In the two years of being in power, Prime Minister Modi's following on Twitter has grown by 400 per cent from 4 million to 20 million followers, making him the most-followed political leader in India and second in the world after American President Barack Obama.

## **Start-up backs new e-learning model**

- Online education start-up Emeritus Institute of Management is betting on a feedback and outcome-based paid executive learning model to achieve the desired completion rates.
- The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has suffered from poor completion rates of 5-7 per cent.
- The diplomas will have accreditation of the founding schools unlike the usual MOOCs model which does not have any accreditation to any institute.
- The foundation for the model emerged when Mr. Damera first identified the gap in executive training while evaluating training options for 350 global employees at his maiden startup Travelguru.

## **To encourage solar power generators a policy on solar zones**

- To encourage solar power generators and equipment manufacturers, the New and Renewable Energy Ministry will unveil a policy on solar zones.
- Govt has been working on a new policy for solar zones, which would be spread over one or even more districts of a State to encourage generators as well as equipment manufactures.
- The work on the policy is almost complete and it will be launched next month. Under the policy, the developer will be provided with inputs like land availability and power evacuation locations for planning his project.



## Cloud Technology is improving the experience

- Around 25 news and entertainment channels are beaming region-specific ads.
- With the trend of geo-targeted advertising catching on, more companies are making use of technology to beam adverts to only areas where their products have strong presence.
- Advertisements tailored to the location or browsing pattern of a person is common on websites.
- What is common on websites is coming to television. Airing of region-specific content is determined by triggers as varied as the user's GPS location or watermarks on the video stream.
- On television, it happens differently. Normally, local cable operators have decoder boxes for each channel that receive and relay the programmes to households.
- To enable geo-targeted advertising these boxes are replaced with smart boxes that not only store data but also intelligently identify the spot where the location-specific ad has to replace the nationally telecast one.
- The trigger for the geo-targeted ad comes from a unique watermark inserted on the video, which gives the cue to the smart box to run the local ad. Watermark is an invisible and inaudible identifier, like a product barcode.
- There are at least two companies that have the technology for geo-targeted advertising. While Amagi was founded by three technologists in 2008, Star TV came out with AdSharp in 2014.
- The KPMG-FICCI Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2016 speaks of considerable scope for geo-targeting, considering that the Indian market is underpenetrated and India is a heterogeneous market.
- The traditional mode of television broadcast, which involves use of satellites, too is changing.
- Internet is providing a way out and it involves a reversal of the traditional sequence of broadcast.
- Normally, what should go on air is decided first, and the playout is delivered using satellite to local operators.
- In the Internet-based method, all contents are stored in the cloud, and delivered to playout servers at different locations: they could be anywhere in the world.
- The platform then does everything from managing the contents to graphics, subtitling, scheduling, editing, quality checks and the like.
- B4U is another channel that uses the technology. The scheduling of the 12 channels is done in Mumbai, the contents are pushed from London, and they are viewed across all time zones.
- The technology can be used to even set up a TV channel without taking recourse to satellite.

## India's global competitiveness rank rose three notches to 41 from a year ago

- India's global competitiveness rank rose three notches to 41 from a year ago due to significant improvement in exchange rate stability, fiscal deficit management and efforts to tackle corruption and red tape.
- This was published in a survey by the Switzerland-based IMD World Competitiveness Centre (WCC).
- The Centre also found about 70 per cent of the executives surveyed on attractive economic indicators rated cost competitiveness, skilled workforce and a dynamic economy as India's biggest plus points
- Half the executives also identified high education levels as a positive factor while 33 per cent said the government's competency made the economy more attractive.
- India was ranked 44th in 2015, according to IMD. The current ranking is lower than the 35th position it secured in 2012.

- Higher consumer price inflation, lower public spending on education, tax revenue collection and merchandise exports proved to be the biggest drags on the country's economic competitiveness, according to the Centre.
- The biggest challenges for the economy in 2016 would be sustaining its high growth rate, increasing the share of research and development in the economy and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax Regime.
- Infrastructure development and disbursing public benefits digitally would also be keenly watched, according to the IMD WCC.
- The U.S. is ranked third this year yielding the numero uno position to China Hong Kong followed by Switzerland.
- China Hong Kong fosters innovation through a low and simple taxation and imposes no restrictions on capital flows while offering a gateway for foreign direct investment into mainland China.
- Within Asia-Pacific, India is now the 11th most competitive economy with peers like Taiwan, Malaysia, Korea and Indonesia seeing a significant fall in their rankings this year.
- The rankings are based on analysis of over 340 criteria derived from four principal factors: economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency and infrastructure.
- Data gathered since the first ranking was published in 1989 also lend weight to fears that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer.

## **With the increased vigil of SEBI, P-Notes investment at 20 months low**

- Investments into India's capital markets through participatory notes (P-Notes) declined to a 20-month low of Rs.2.11 lakh crore at the end of April with SEBI keeping a strict vigil on funds coming through this route.
- SEBI, earlier this month, tightened norms to check any misuse of controversy-ridden P-Notes by making it mandatory for users of these overseas instruments to follow Indian anti-money laundering law and report any suspicious transactions immediately.
- P-Notes are typically instruments issued by registered foreign institutional investors to overseas investors who wish to invest in Indian markets without registering themselves directly in India to save on time.
- But they still need to go through a proper due diligence process.
- According to SEBI data, the total value of P-Notes investment in Indian markets (equity, debt and derivatives) declined to over Rs.2.2 lakh crore at the end of April, from over Rs.2.23 lakh crore in March-end.
- This also marked the lowest level since August 2014 when the cumulative value of such investments stood at Rs 2.11 lakh crore.
- Market experts opine that stricter set of norms will make it costlier to invest in India through P-Notes, as one of the major attractions of such instrument is cost-effectiveness and easier access.
- The share of P-Notes has been falling over the years on SEBI tightening disclosure norms and other related regulations.
- It used to be much higher at 25-40 per cent in 2008 while the reading was as high as 55 per cent at the peak of stock market bull run in 2007.

## **Govt mulling over local sourcing norms for Apple**

- Commerce and Industry ministry is in talks with the Finance Ministry on Apple Inc.'s proposal seeking exemption from 30 per cent local sourcing norms for foreign direct investment (FDI) in single brand retail.

- Ms. Sitharaman said the discussions would be on whether there is a need for separate guidelines on local sourcing pertaining to the waiver on ‘cutting-edge technology’ and what constitutes such high-end technology.
- However, these debates would not be stretched to other sectors such as fashion.
- The minister also said she was not in favour of relaxing rules for Apple to sell refurbished second-hand phones in India.
- Earlier, a government panel suggested that Apple can be exempted from local sourcing rules as a pre-condition to set up single brand retail stores in India since the electronic products maker’s proposal met the definition of ‘cutting-edge technology.’
- Apple is learnt to have sought the waiver on the ground that it manufactures ‘cutting-edge technology’ items for which it is not possible to source as much from India.
- The Finance Ministry then had turned down the government panel’s decision.
- On measures to boost start-ups, Ms. Sitharaman said her ministry had suggested to the Finance Ministry to increase the tax holiday for start-ups from three to seven years.

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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### **International team of scientists discovered trio of Earth-like planets**

- An international team of scientists said that they had discovered a trio of Earth-like planets that are the best bet so far for finding life outside our solar system.
- The three orbit a dwarf star a mere 39 light-years away, and are likely comparable in size and temperature to Earth and Venus, they reported in a study, published in Nature .
- This is the first opportunity to find chemical traces of life outside our solar system.
- The planets had the “winning combination” of being similar in size to Earth, “potentially habitable” and close enough so their atmospheres can be analysed with current technology.
- Scientists calibrated a 60-centimetre telescope in Chile, known as TRAPPIST, to track several dozen dwarf stars neither big nor hot enough to be visible with optical telescopes.
- They zeroed in on a particularly promising one — now known as TRAPPIST-1 — about one eighth the size of the Sun, and significantly cooler.
- The astronomers noticed that its infrared signal faded slightly at regular intervals, evidence of objects in orbit. Analysis confirmed they were exoplanets — planets revolving around stars outside our solar system.
- The innermost two circle their dwarf star every 1.5 and 2.4 days. The more distant orbit of the third planet takes between four and 73 days.

### **Antibiotics can also make body prone to infection**

- Antibiotics are essential for fighting bacterial infection, but, paradoxically, they can also make the body more prone to infection and diarrhoea by allowing gut pathogens to “breathe”, says a study.
- Antibiotics benefit pathogen growth by disrupting oxygen levels and fibre processing in the gut, the study said.
- The findings could lead to development of new strategies to prevent the side effects of antibiotic treatment.
- Exactly how the resident “good” microbes in the gut protect against pathogens, such as Salmonella, and how antibiotic treatments foster growth of disease-causing microbes have been poorly understood.

- The reduced ability to metabolise fibre prevents these cells from consuming oxygen, increasing oxygen levels in the gut lumen that favour the growth of Salmonella.
- Most persons infected with Salmonella develop diarrhoea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection, according to the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## **Google chrome became the most used browser**

- Google Chrome became the top Internet browser, officially ending the long reign of Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE).
- Mozilla's Firefox browser was third, according to market tracker NetMarketShare.
- Google Chrome had 41.7 per cent of desktop browser share.

## **Gravitational waves detection won special breakthrough prize in fundamental physics**

- The LIGO team's detection of gravitational waves, announced in February, has won the Special Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics.
- The \$3 million award, instituted by Yuri Milner, will be shared between two groups of laureates: the three founders of the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) and 1012 contributors to the experiment
- First will each equally share \$1 million (Rs. 6.65 crore); and 1012 contributors to the experiment, who will each equally share \$2 million (Rs. 13.31 crore).
- The founders are Ronald W.P. Drever; Kip Thorne and Rainer Weiss. The 1012 contributors include 1,005 authors of the paper and seven others.
- K.G. Arun of Chennai Mathematical Institute is among the 1012 contributors.
- Dr. Arun joined the LIGO scientific collaboration through the INDIGO consortium in 2012.
- The calculations done by his team occupies three paragraphs in the 11-page paper.

## **A rare astronomical phenomenon to occur on 9th may**

- Planet Mercury will be seen as a dot on the solar disc from several parts of India, a rare astronomical phenomenon that occurs only 13 times in a century.
- The planet will be seen as a small black dot travelling from one limb of the solar disc to the other as the Sun, Mercury and the Earth will be lined up in one plane.
- The last transit of Mercury had occurred on November 6, 2006, when just the end of the event was visible from the extreme north-eastern parts of India at sunrise.
- In Delhi, the event can be seen for about 2 hours 20 minutes, as it will start at 4.41 p.m. and sunset will take place at 7.01 p.m.
- The planet appears as a dot on the disc because its angular size is very small compared to that of the Sun as seen from the Earth.
- The phenomenon is relatively rare and occurs 13 or 14 times in a century. It occurs in May and November.
- The interval between one November transit and the next November transit may be 7, 13 or 33 years whereas the interval between one May transit and the next May transit may be 13 or 33 years.

- The transit of Mercury will be visible from most parts of Asia. The next transit of Mercury will take place on November 11, 2019, but the event cannot be seen from India as the same will begin after the sunset time in the country.
- The transit of Mercury on November 13, 2032 will be visible again from India.
- The Sun should never be viewed with the naked eye. Safe technique to observe is using filter like aluminised mylar, black polymer or welding glass of shade number 14.

## **Kepler mission has announced the largest collection of exoplanets**

- NASA's Kepler mission has announced the largest collection of exoplanets ever discovered after it verified 1,284 new planets outside the solar system.
- Of the nearly 5,000 planet candidates found to date, more than 3,200 now have been verified, and 2,325 of these were discovered by Kepler.

## **Leo Minor, can shed new light on birth of the universe**

- A faint blue galaxy situated about 30 million light years from the Earth and located in the constellation "Leo Minor" can shed new light on birth of the universe.
- Astronomers from Indiana University (IU) found that a galaxy nicknamed Leoncino or "little lion" contains the lowest level of heavy chemical elements or "metals" ever observed in a gravitationally bound system of stars
- Finding the most metal-poor galaxy ever is exciting since it can help contribute to a quantitative test of the Big Bang.
- There are relatively few ways to explore conditions at the birth of the universe, but low-metal galaxies are among the most promising.
- This is because the current accepted model of the start of the universe makes clear predictions about the amount of helium and hydrogen present during the Big Bang.
- The ratio of these atoms in metal-poor galaxies provides a direct test of the model. To find these low-metal galaxies, however, astronomers must look far from home.
- Our own Milky Way galaxy is a poor source of data due to the high level of heavier elements created over time by "stellar processing," in which stars churn out heavier elements.
- Low metal abundance is essentially a sign that very little stellar activity has taken place compared to most galaxies.
- Leoncino is considered a member of the "local universe," a region of space within about one billion light years from Earth and estimated to contain several million galaxies.
- Leoncino is unique in several other ways. A so-called "dwarf galaxy", it is only about 1,000 light years in diameter and composed of several million stars.

## **Hypersonic test flight promises to shrink world**

- A two-hour flight from Sydney to London is a step closer to reality after the latest successful test of hypersonic technology in the Australian desert.

- A joint U.S.-Australian military research team is running a series of 10 trials at the world's largest land testing range, Woomera, in South Australia, and at Norway's Andoya Rocket Range.
- It is a game-changing technology and could revolutionise global air travel, providing cost-effective access to space.
- Scientists have said hypersonic technology could cut travelling time from Sydney to London to as little as two hours for the 17,000-km flight.]
- Hypersonic flight involves travelling at more than five times the speed of sound.
- Scientists involved in the programme — called Hypersonic International Flight Research Experimentation (HIFiRE) — are developing an engine that can fly at Mach 7.
- He added that the scramjet was a supersonic combustion engine that uses oxygen from the atmosphere for fuel, making it lighter and faster than fuel-carrying rockets.
- The experimental rocket in the trial reached an altitude of 278 kilometres and a target speed of Mach 7.5, Australia's defence department said.
- The first test was conducted in 2009 with the project expected to be completed in 2018.

## **Nuclear capable indigenously developed Prithvi-II missile test-fired**

- India successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear capable Prithvi-II missile as part of a user trial by the army from a test range at Chandipur in Odisha.
- The trial of the surface-to-surface missile was carried out from a mobile launcher from launch complex-3 of the Integrated Test Range.
- With a strike range of 350 km, the Prithvi-II is capable of carrying 500 kg to 1,000 kg of warheads and is thrust by liquid propulsion twin engines. It uses advanced inertial guidance system with manoeuvring trajectory to hit its target.
- Inducted into the armed forces in 2003, the nine-metre-tall, single-stage, liquid-fuelled Prithvi-II is the first missile to be developed by the DRDO under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.

## **New research opens many possibilities**

- In a breakthrough, scientists have discovered a new form of light, which will impact our understanding of the fundamental nature of light.
- One of the measurable characteristics of a beam of light is known as angular momentum.
- Until now, however, it was thought that in all forms of light the angular momentum would be a multiple of Planck's constant — the physical constant that sets the scale of quantum effects.
- Now, researchers from Trinity College Dublin's School of Physics and CRANN Institute have demonstrated a new form of light where the angular momentum of each photon (a particle of visible light) takes only half of this value.
- In the 1830s, mathematician William Rowan Hamilton and physicist Humphrey Lloyd found that, upon passing through certain crystals, a ray of light became a hollow cylinder.
- The team used this phenomenon to generate beams of light with a screw-like structure.
- Analysing these beams within the theory of quantum mechanics they predicted that the angular momentum of the photon would be half-integer, and devised an experiment to test their prediction.
- Using a specially constructed device they were able to measure the flow of angular momentum in a beam of light. They were also able, for the first time, to measure the variations in this flow caused by quantum effects.

- The experiments showed a tiny shift, one-half of Planck's constant, in the angular momentum of each photon.
- Theoretical physicists since the 1980s have speculated how quantum mechanics works for particles that are free to move in only two of the three dimensions of space.

## **NASA led study found out contrast about Antarctica and Arctic ice cover**

- Why has the sea ice cover surrounding Antarctica been increasing slightly, in sharp contrast to the drastic loss of sea ice occurring in the Arctic Ocean? A new NASA-led study has found the geology of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean is responsible.
- The researchers used satellite radar, sea surface temperature, land form and bathymetry (ocean depth) data to study the physical processes and properties affecting Antarctic sea ice.
- They found that two persistent geological factors — the topography of Antarctica and the depth of the ocean surrounding it — are influencing winds and ocean currents, respectively, to drive the formation and evolution of Antarctica's sea ice cover and help sustain it.
- The researchers analysed radar data from NASA's QuikScat satellite from 1999 to 2009 to trace the paths of Antarctic sea ice movements and map its different types.
- They focused on the 2008 growth season, a year of exceptional seasonal variability in Antarctic sea ice coverage.
- Their analyses revealed that as sea ice forms and builds up early in the sea ice growth season, it gets pushed offshore and northward by winds, forming a protective shield of older, thicker ice that circulates around the continent.
- The persistent winds, which flow down slope off the continent and are shaped by Antarctica's topography, pile ice up against the massive ice shield, enhancing its thickness.
- This band of ice, which varies in width from roughly 100 to 1,000 km, encapsulates and protects younger, thinner ice in the ice pack behind it from being reduced by winds and waves.
- Older, thicker sea ice returns a stronger radar signal than younger, thinner ice does. They found the sea ice within the protective shield was older and rougher (due to longer exposure to wind and waves), and thicker (due to more snow accumulation).
- As the sea ice cover expands and ice drifts away from the continent, areas of open water form behind it on the sea surface, creating "ice factories" conducive to rapid sea ice growth, the researchers said.

## **India takes baby steps towards developing a reusable launch vehicle**

- The test flight of the RLV-TD represented the first step towards the ISRO programme to master the reusable launch vehicle technology.
- Termed the Hypersonic Flight Experiment, it was the first of a sequence of four test flights to validate various technologies.
- Designed and developed by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at a cost of Rs. 95 crore, the RLV-TD weighing 1.75 tonnes used a thermal protection system (TPS) including 600 heat-resistant silica tiles and a Carbon-Carbon nose cap to withstand the high temperature during atmospheric re-entry.

- Taking baby steps towards developing a reusable launch vehicle capable of sending spacecraft into orbit and returning to the earth's surface.
- The technology, when developed completely, would launch spacecraft, including satellites, into space and re-enter the earth's atmosphere withstanding extreme pressure and heat conditions and land in an intended spot, helping to cut costs on launch vehicles substantially.
- The design of the air frame, development of mono propellant thrusters for guidance and control and advanced avionics for mission management were other challenges.
- As many as 600 engineers from ISRO centres, National Aerospace Laboratories, IITs and Indian Institute of Science were involved in the development of the RLV-TD over a period of eight years.

## **CSE puts alarming report on bread**

- Your daily bread could contain cancer-causing chemicals — including potassium bromate and potassium iodate — substances that are banned in many countries, but not in India, warns the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).
- The study tested bread sold in Delhi and found residues of potassium bromate/iodate in commonly consumed varieties of the food item.
- The use of potassium bromate — classified as a category 2B carcinogen (possibly carcinogenic to humans) — is banned in most countries. Potassium iodate contributes to thyroid-related diseases.
- The CSE has now recommended the immediate ban of these two chemicals to prevent their routine exposure to the Indian population.
- The study, conducted by the CSE's Pollution Monitoring Laboratory (PML), says Indian bread manufacturers use potassium bromate and potassium iodate to treat flour while making bread.
- The PML tested 38 commonly available branded varieties of pre-packaged breads, pav and buns, ready-to-eat burger bread and ready-to-eat pizza breads of popular fast food outlets in Delhi.
- The study found that 84 per cent (32/38) samples were found to contain potassium bromate or iodate in the range of 1.15-22.54 parts per million (ppm).
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on Monday said it has decided to remove potassium bromate from the list of permitted additives while it is examining evidence against potassium iodate before restricting its use.
- In 1999, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified potassium bromate as possibly carcinogenic to humans. It was found to cause tumour of the kidney and thyroid, and cancer of the abdominal lining in laboratory animals.
- Considering potassium bromate as a 'genotoxic carcinogen', the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives in 1992 said "use of potassium bromate as a flour treatment agent was not appropriate".
- The EU had already banned its use in 1990 and so did the U.K. Subsequently, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Nigeria, Peru and Columbia too decided against its use.

## **Digitising data on 'stolen' Buddhist relics**

- Chinese authorities are engaged in a major international effort to digitally accumulate information on the priceless cultural treasures of the Buddhist caves in Dunhuang
- Most of the artworks, controversially removed from the iconic Mogao caves, hewn out of the imposing sandstone cliffs, found their way in the British Museum in London, the National Museum in New Delhi and The Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.
- Part of the collection, sometimes after a change of hands, also found its way to The Tokyo National Museum and The National Museum of Korea.
- Dunhuang Buddhist caves, housing 2,000 painted sculptures and half a million square feet of wall paintings, are in the Gobi desert, at a major junction of the ancient Silk Road.
- The Silk Road snaked between Xian in China, and Rome, passing through treacherous terrain of deserts and mountains.



- Lured by the promise of large commercial fortunes, or spiritual solace, countless perished on this route as victims either to the calamities of nature or attacks by armed brigands.
- Stein's role was pivotal in this controversial chapter, which soon acquired a sharp emotive edge in the backdrop of nationalistic stirrings in China against imperial powers.
- In three expeditions, mounted between 1900 and 1916, the former principal of Oriental College, Lahore, whose prime interest was in exploration of Central Asia, China, India and West Asia, removed 24 trunks of ancient Buddhist scriptures and five boxes of paintings, embroideries, and other artworks from the Mogao caves, all for a princely sum of £130.
- More than a century after Stein's arrival in Dunhuang in 1907, a major collaborative effort to 'reunite' information on the treasures of the Dunhuang caves has commenced.
- This enterprise aims to unite information on "all these artefacts through the highest quality digital photography by coordinating international teams of conservators, cataloguers and researchers".
- The National Museum in New Delhi is a founding member of the IDP.

## **Barack Obama will not apologise for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima**

- Barack Obama will not apologise for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima when he this week becomes the first sitting U.S. President to visit the city, he told Japanese television.
- The comments are the clearest yet from his administration over an issue that raises hackles in the United States and has been the subject of heated debate for decades.
- "It's a job of historians to ask questions and examine them, but I know as somebody who has now sat in this position for the last seven and a half years, that every leader makes very difficult decisions, particularly during war time."
- American airmen launched the world's first atomic strike on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, causing the deaths of about 1,40,000 people.
- Tens of thousands were killed by the fireball that the powerful nuclear blast generated, with many more succumbing to injuries or illnesses caused by radiation in the weeks, months and years afterwards.
- The southern city of Nagasaki was hit by a second bomb three days later, killing 74,000 people, in one of the final acts of World War-II.
- Mr. Obama will visit Hiroshima after attending the Group of Seven summit hosted by Japan.

## **Actions on Air Quality reports says air pollution is rising**

- The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) meeting at Nairobi noted that air pollution has increased by 8 per cent and progress and policies on air quality fall short of what is needed to save millions of lives each year.
- The UNEA report "Actions on Air Quality", said the declining air quality across the globe was threatening to add to the seven million air pollution deaths across the world in what was described as a 'global public health emergency.'
- A snapshot on the actions on air quality taken by countries across different regions saw India figure high among those with stringent air quality laws and regulations but it was also among those countries where burning of both agricultural and municipal wastes is not regulated and commonly practised.
- This underlined the glaring gap between expression of intent and the ground that needs to be covered in implementing the policies.

- While India was ranked among countries where major investments have been made in public transport in the last 5 years, it also figures among nations with neither low sulphur fuels (50 ppm) nor advanced vehicle emission standards.
- The report noted that “India with major air quality challenges in many cities has established air quality laws besides regulation and implementation strategies for them.”
- The report comes close on the heels of World Health Organisation (WHO) findings which listed 13 of India’s cities among the world’s top 20 polluted cities.
- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Achim Steiner spoke of “reclaiming our air” as more and more people around the world are affected by air pollution and the negative health affects.
- More than 80 per cent of the people live in urban areas and are exposed to pollutants that exceed the WHO limits and have a bearing on lives, productivity and the economy of the countries concerned, according to the report.
- The cost of reducing air pollution in 2010 for India was pegged at \$0.5 trillion and \$1.4 trillion for China.
- However, on an optimistic note, the report said there have been improvements in access to cleaner cooking fuels and efforts point to a growing momentum for change.

## **Solar storms may have provided the crucial energy needed to warm Earth**

- Solar storms four billion years ago may have provided the crucial energy needed to warm Earth and seed life despite the Sun’s faintness, new research has revealed.
- Some four billion years ago, the sun shone with only about three-quarters the brightness we see today, but its surface roiled with giant eruptions spewing enormous amounts of solar material and radiation out into space.
- The eruptions also may have furnished the energy needed to turn simple molecules into the complex molecules such as RNA and DNA that were necessary for life, said NASA researchers.
- That means Earth should have been an icy ball. Instead, geological evidence says it was a warm globe with liquid water.
- Understanding what conditions were necessary for life on our planet helps us both trace the origins of life on Earth and guide the search for life on other planets.
- Until now, however, fully mapping Earth’s evolution has been hindered by the simple fact that the young Sun wasn’t luminous enough to warm Earth.
- Scientists are able to piece together the history of the Sun by searching for similar stars in our galaxy. By placing these sun-like stars in order according to their age, the stars appear as a functional timeline of how our own Sun evolved.
- Such flares are often accompanied by huge clouds of solar material, called coronal mass ejections or CMEs which erupt out into space. NASA’s Kepler mission has found stars that resemble our Sun about a few million years after its birth.
- The Kepler data showed many examples of what are called “superflares” — enormous explosions so rare today that we only experience them once every 100 years or so.
- Yet the Kepler data also show these youngsters producing as many as 10 superflares a day.

## **New Biochip for cancer detection**

- Scientists have created a hydrogel-based biochip with 3D cells to help diagnose colorectal cancer — the third most common type of cancer.

- Bowel cancer i.e. colorectal cancer (CRC) is the third most common type of cancer and it develops with minimal clinical symptoms in the early stages. Despite doctors' efforts, the 5-year survival rate does not exceed 36%.
- Treatment is only effective, and patients only have a good chance of recovery, if the cancer is detected early.
- Diagnostic methods that are currently in use are not sufficient.
- Analyses carried out in vitro have low specificity and invasive studies such as colonoscopy are not only traumatic.
- they are also not always suitable for an early diagnosis, as they do not give a complete picture of the development and distribution of colorectal cancer.

## SPORTS

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### **Vijender Singh gets his fifth knockout win**

- Indian boxing star Vijender Singh's power-packed punches went unchallenged yet again as he notched up his fifth successive knockout win by battering Frenchman Matioze Royer.
- Vijender was declared winner little over a minute into the fifth round of the six-round super middleweight contest, which was incidentally his longest bout so far
- The 30-year-old was up against his most experienced rival till date in Royer, who came into the bout with an accumulated 250 rounds under his belt.
- Vijender spent the first round getting a measure of his overtly cautious rival, who preferred to keep a shell guard and hardly attempted a hit at his taller opponent.
- But that could not save him from a couple of telling body blows from Vijender, who was also impressive with his jabs.

### **SC says state cricket associations will have to comply with R.M. Lodha committee report**

- The Supreme Court said State cricket associations would have no choice but comply with the Supreme Court-appointed Justice R.M. Lodha Committee recommendations to reform Indian cricket once the apex court gives the final word.
- The court said that some of the suggestions of the Justice Lodha panel report had already been incorporated by the BCCI, and the court was presently weighing those the BCCI was objecting to.
- "The committee constituted in wake of match-fixing and spot-fixing allegations was a serious exercise and not futile exercise," Chief Justice Thakur observed.
- The observations were directed at various cricket associations and sports bodies who set to either lose their memberships in full or would be reduced from their status as full members to associate members.
- They will have no voting rights on the Board in case the 'one State, one member, one vote' recommendation of the Justice Lodha panel gets the apex court's green signal.
- The court referred to the Lodha report to say that whatever structural changes done within the cricket administration mechanism so far was only cosmetic and more needs to be implemented.

## **V.R. Raghunath, Dharamvir Singh and Ritu Rani nominated for the Arjuna Award**

- V.R. Raghunath, Dharamvir Singh and Ritu Rani have been nominated for the Arjuna Award for sporting excellence for 2016.
- The trio has been nominated by Hockey India, along with veteran Sylvanus Dung Dung, who has been recommended for the Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award, while coach C.R. Kumar has been named for the Dronacharya Award.
- India captain Ritu is not only one of the most experienced and talented midfielders of all time but also has the distinction of leading the side to an Olympic qualification for the first time in 36 years.
- A product of the hockey nursery of Shahbad, Ritu is considered among the most astute readers of the modern game.
- Drag-flicker Raghunath has been part of the Indian team's defence for more than a decade, having made his international debut during the bilateral series against Pakistan in 2005.
- He has been part of most of the Indian team's recent successes, including the 2014 Asian Games gold, the HWL Finals bronze and the 2007 Asia Cup gold.
- Dharamvir was also part of the Asiad gold-winning team and the silver-winning Commonwealth Games 2014 side.
- The 70-year-old Dung Dung struck the winning goal to help India claim gold at the 1980 Olympics, the last time the team managed to do so, while Kumar is currently part of the senior women's team staff and has been associated with various teams for almost two decades.

## **Shashank Manohar elected as ICC chairman**

- The 58-year-old Manohar was elected unopposed as the first independent chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) for an initial period of two years from May 12.
- Although he will assume charge straightaway, he will formally preside over meetings at the ICC's annual conference at Edinburgh, Scotland in June.
- Manohar was the unanimous choice of the ICC's 13-member executive board; even England and Wales Cricket Board's Giles Clarke — who was supposed to succeed India's N. Srinivasan by a 2014 arrangement, proposed his name.
- The cricket world had seen it coming after he had confided to many of his BCCI colleagues and friends that he will not stay for a minute as the BCCI president the moment the Supreme Court validates the recommendations of the Justice R.M. Lodha Committee's report on reforms in cricket, either in full or in part.

## **Vijender Singh gets sixth straight knockout**

- Indian boxing star Vijender Singh's rampaging winning streak remained intact as he carved out a sixth successive knockout victory by battering Poland's Andrzej Soldra.
- Fighting the first eight-round contest of his fledgling pro career, Vijender completed yet another dominating win barely a minute into the third round.
- The experience of 81 rounds, which Soldra brought into the bout, hardly made a difference to the strapping six-footer from Haryana, who went about dismantling the Pole with ease.

## **India loses to China in Uber cup**

- India's women's badminton team had to be content with a second straight bronze medal after being crushed by China 3-0 in the semifinals of the Uber Cup.
- India, which lost to Japan in the 2014 edition in the semifinals, failed to show some resistance against the invincible Chinese, who wrapped up the tie in just three matches.
- India's hopes fizzled out as Saina Nehwal failed to win her match against reigning Olympic champion Li Xuerui.
- World No. 3 Xuerui's 21-15, 12-21, 21-17 triumph in an hour and four minutes over Saina decimated Indian dreams at the Kunshan Sports Centre.
- In the next contest, double World Championship bronze medallist P.V. Sindhu lost to world No. 6 Wang Shixian 13-21, 21-23 in 50 minutes as China took a 2-0 lead.

## **Anurag Thakur appointed as BCCI chairperson**

- It took less than five minutes for Anurag Thakur to be formally elevated to the post of president from being the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).
- Thakur's promotion, forced by the untimely resignation of Shashank Manohar on May 10, was confirmed a day before 22nd May's special general meeting (SGM) since his was the only nomination filed for the post.
- As a result, the SGM, chaired by Delhi's C.K. Khanna, one of the five vice-presidents, unanimously elected Thakur as the president. That was followed by the BJP's member of Parliament from Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, resigning as secretary.
- Thakur, thus, became the sixth BCCI official to have been a secretary and president. The others are Anthony S. D'Mello, A.N. Ghose, S. Sriraman, Ranbir Singh Mahendra and N. Srinivasan.

## **India enters final of Asian snooker championship**

- Pankaj Advani and Aditya Mehta combined to power India into the final of the Asian snooker team championship in Abu Dhabi thrashing Pakistan 3-0.
- India will take on Iran in the final. Mehta gave India a grand start, drubbing Mohammed Asif 73-16.
- Advani, recently-crowned continental 6-Red champion, outclassed Asjad Iqbal 83-25 and joined hands with Mehta to trounce Asif and Asjad 92-8.
- Meanwhile, Iran defeated Malaysia 3-0 margin in the other semifinal. Earlier, India had defeated the UAE 3-0.



