Table of Contents

MoU on Cooperation in Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy ...................... 7
Signing and ratifying the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Dry Ports of International Importance ........................................................................................................... 7
Cabinet approves gas pooling for fertilizer sector ..................................................................... 8
Operation Raahat launched ........................................................................................................ 8
Gujarat anti-terror Bill passed finally .......................................................................................... 9
RSBY to be implemented by Health Ministry from April 1 ............................................................ 10
Indradhanush Mission: children who missed immunisation get another chance ..................... 11
270 on death row in India, 64 sentenced last year: Amnesty ..................................................... 11
HC upholds Kerala’s liquor policy ............................................................................................... 12
In Karnataka, learn in Kannada ................................................................................................... 12
Around half of Indian children under 5 stunted ........................................................................ 13
Unravelling the ‘blood rain’ mystery ........................................................................................... 13
Palestine joins ICC ....................................................................................................................... 14
Government Issues Guidelines for Administration and Operationalization of ‘Nirbhaya Fund’ .................................................................................................................. 15
Government unveils new foreign trade policy ............................................................................ 15
Indirect tax collection exceeds target .......................................................................................... 16
Rajasthan brings Bill against witchcraft ....................................................................................... 16
Nabard expects 50% credit growth in AP, Telangana ................................................................ 17
Sebi for including family trusts, NBFCs in QIB segment ............................................................ 18
India ranks 119 on Global Business Resilience Index ................................................................ 19
Rain-hit areas to get NREGS boost ............................................................................................. 19
Centre extends food law deadline again by 6 months ................................................................. 20
Meet revisits judicial values, to review selection process ............................................................ 21
Iran nuclear deal ......................................................................................................................... 22
DU students harness wind energy from Metro trains .................................................. 23
Agreement signed to pave way for Ambedkar’s memorial in Mumbai ......................... 24
Ready to link Silk Road plans with India’s ‘Mausam’: China ........................................ 24
Need to relook law on juveniles, SC tells govt. ............................................................. 24
Govt. moves to clear the air ........................................................................................... 25
Dena Bank ties up with LIC ............................................................................................ 25
Ministry of Culture takes over the management of Lalit Kala Akademi ....................... 26
First of Scorpene Submarines-Kalvari ‘Undocked’ ...................................................... 27
RBI keeps rates unchanged ......................................................................................... 27
Intelligence agencies silent on RTI: study ................................................................. 28
Union Cabinet clears Real Estate Bill ........................................................................... 29
NGT bans decade-old diesel vehicles in Delhi, NCR ............................................... 30
SC seeks govt. response on plea on criminal defamation ........................................... 32
Remove ‘leper’ from the book, says law panel ............................................................ 32
NJAC rollout may take months .................................................................................... 33
India ranks lower than even Nepal: Social Progress Index (SPI) ................................. 34
Voluntary retirement is no excuse to skip alimony: SC ............................................... 35
PM launches Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana ........................................................ 35
Killing of woodcutters violates SC ruling ................................................................. 36
President of India presents Padma Awards .................................................................. 36
Bio-fences to ward off straying elephants in Assam .................................................... 37
Thane named India’s Earth Hour Capital .................................................................... 37
Growth in Euro zone and India accelerating, says OECD ........................................... 38
NGT bars construction on riverbeds in Maharashtra .................................................. 39
Rajasthan to cover 4 lakh children under immunisation plan .................................... 39
UNESCO report lauds India’s progress ....................................................................... 40
Victims must get full treatment: SC ............................................................................ 41
India, France agree on deal for 36 Rafale jets ................................................................. 41
India, France sign deal for Jaitapur N-project ................................................................. 41
Centre links disaster compensation to farmers with headline inflation .................. 42
RBI’s forex reserves climb to an all-time high of $343 bn ........................................ 42
Rajasthan gears up to prevent child marriages on Akshaya Tritiya .......................... 43
Election Commission sets up committee to allow migrants to vote ......................... 43
Curbs on Governors’ outstation visits ........................................................................ 44
NCBC likely to get statutory powers soon, says its chairman ................................. 45
Government notifies NJAC, puts an end to collegium .............................................. 45
Clamour for Net neutrality grows online .................................................................. 46
Gujarat launches industrial tourism ....................................................................... 47
Diesel vehicles get a two-week breather .................................................................. 48
Taiwan rejected from China-led Asia bank ............................................................... 48
Mars might have transient liquid water ................................................................. 49
Is re-promulgation of land ordinance valid, SC asks Centre ................................. 50
Panel to look into post-66A security concerns ......................................................... 50
Will support India’s U.N. bid: Cameron .................................................................. 50
Visa scheme renamed to avoid confusion: MHA ...................................................... 52
Legislators entering govt contracts after election liable for disqualification: Supreme Court ........................................................................................................ 52
China issues white paper on Tibet ............................................................................ 53
Govt. forms panel to review Official Secrets Act ..................................................... 53
Bike ambulance to serve accident victims in Bengaluru ....................................... 54
RBI allows differential interest rates for term deposits above Rs. 15 lakh ............ 54
New visa scheme for tourists from Sri Lanka .......................................................... 55
India’s ‘Parrot Lady’ to fly back home ..................................................................... 55
Free speech not an excuse for abusing nationally revered figures, says SC ........ 56
New I-T return forms to curb black money ................................................................. 56
Moon formed 4.47 billion years ago, says study ..................................................... 57
India is below Bhutan in broadband reach: TRAI ................................................. 57
Patel statue on green tribunal radar ..................................................................... 58
Pudukottai CEO office gets ISO certification ....................................................... 58
Nod for climate change action plan ..................................................................... 59
Manipur on high alert to tackle bird flu ................................................................. 59
Uttarakhand gets new tiger reserve ..................................................................... 60
India fifth biggest generator of e-waste in 2014: U.N. report .............................. 61
Protection only for honest public servants: apex court ....................................... 62
Price Stabilization Fund ....................................................................................... 62
India has 988 species on IUCN ‘Red List’ ............................................................. 63
Navy’s stealth destroyer launched ....................................................................... 63
Centre extends food security Act deadline ......................................................... 64
NCDC team in Goa to study Kyasanur Forest Disease ......................................... 65
India to hand over three Cheetal copters to Kabul ............................................... 66
‘One rank, one pension scheme in this session’ ................................................... 66
China, Pakistan launch economic corridor link worth $46 bn ............................ 67
E-Samiksha launched ........................................................................................... 67
Three new havens for tigers ................................................................................ 68
Green tribunal’s thumbs up for waste-to-energy projects .................................... 68
IMD forecasts deficit monsoon ............................................................................. 70
Cabinet nod for juvenile law changes ................................................................. 70
ZSI to erect memorial at its founder’s grave ......................................................... 71
India ranks second in Cyber Attacks through social media ............................... 72
Supreme Court seeks govt. view on Army’s exit promotion policy ..................... 72
The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting gets ISO 9001:2008 Certification 73
Proposal to permit Reserve Bank of India to enter into Currency Swap Agreement with the central bank of Sri Lanka ................................................................. 73
Nai Roshni Scheme .............................................................................. 74
Gorkha Rifles complete 200 years .......................................................... 74
Chile volcano erupts after 50 years ......................................................... 75
Reserve Bank revises norms for priority sector lending ................................ 75
RS passes Bill on transgender rights ....................................................... 76
eVisa to Chinese nationals likely ......................................................... 77
Opposition stalls GST Bill, Sonia leads walkout ................................... 77
Army Launches Operation Maitri ......................................................... 78
Earthquake .......................................................................................... 79
Indian-origin scientist wins Heinz Award ............................................. 80
High costs push surgical care out of reach ............................................ 80
U.S., Japan agree on new defence rules ................................................ 80
China to integrate Mongolian, Russian initiatives with MSR .................... 81
3 more NDRF teams leave for Kathmandu ........................................... 82
‘Gender gap becoming a chasm in labour market’ .................................. 82
Trifed Bags National Award in Training Innovation ............................... 83
PMNRF fund ......................................................................................... 83
Kannagi temple renovation possible, says archaeologist ....................... 84
‘NREGA, the only insurance for India’ .................................................. 84
Sri Lanka adopts 19th Amendment ....................................................... 86
100 cities to turn smart ........................................................................ 86
AMRUT Mission .................................................................................... 88
Protests against Road Transport Bill ................................................... 88
Changes in Act will make graft ‘heinous crime’ ..................................... 89
Cabinet delinks Assam from new border pact ....................................... 90
MoU on Cooperation in Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister recently gave its approval for the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy between India and Mauritius.
- Both India and Mauritius share several cultural, historical, linguistic and literary similarities. Traditional medicine including medicinal plants are promising areas which need to be further explored and can prove to be mutually beneficial to the people of the two countries.

How will this be helpful?
- The MoU will enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the areas of traditional medicine including medicinal plants.
- This will be of immense importance to both countries, considering their shared cultural heritage.

Resources:
- The financial resources necessary to conduct research, training courses, conferences/meetings and deputations of experts will be met from the existing allocated budget and existing plan schemes of the Ministry of AYUSH.

India and Mauritius:
- India has well-developed systems of traditional medicine, including medicinal plants which have potential in the global health scenario. The Government of Mauritius also has a long history of traditional medicine in common with India. Both countries share a common culture with respect to the Ayurvedic System of Medicine. Moreover, there are a large number of medicinal plants, particularly those found in the tropical region. These are common to the two countries given similar geo-climatic factors.

Similar MoUs:
- The Ministry of AYUSH as a part of its mandate to propagate Indian Systems of Medicine globally has entered into MoUs with the People’s Republic of China, Malaysia, Trinidad & Tobago, Hungary, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Signing and ratifying the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Dry Ports of International Importance

- The Union Cabinet recently gave its approval for signing and ratifying of the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Dry Ports of International Importance for signature at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.
- This is a follow up of the Resolution of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) regarding development of dry ports within member countries of UNESCAP, including India.

How will this be helpful?
- This agreement promotes international recognition of dry ports, facilitates investment in infrastructure, improves operational efficiency of inter modal transport services, establishes guiding principles for development and operation of dry ports and enhances the environmental sustainability of freight transport.
- The agreement will help in connectivity and integration of the Asian highway network, the trans-Asian railways network and other modes by working towards development of dry ports.
There is need to promote and develop an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in Asia with its neighbouring regions. The agreement will facilitate and expand international goods transport as a consequence of growing international trade in the region.

The agreement will also lead to strengthening of connectivity and seamless international movement of goods, facilitate increased efficiency and reduce cost of transport and logistics as well as extend reach to inland areas and wider hinterlands.

17 countries have signed this Agreement so far. These are Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Iran, the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam. The agreement is an outcome of the ESCAP resolution on the implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the request contained to work towards the development of an inter-Governmental agreement on dry ports.

A dry port is an inland intermodal terminal directly connected by road or rail to a seaport and operating as a centre for the transshipment of sea cargo to inland destinations.

Cabinet approves gas pooling for fertilizer sector

The Cabinet recently approved a proposal to pool or average out prices of domestic natural gas and imported LNG used by fertilizer plants.

Why? To make the cost of fuel uniform and affordable.

Advantages:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved averaging of different rates of domestic and imported gas to ensure supply of fuel to all urea plants at a uniform delivery cost.
- This would help in focusing on improving plant efficiency and might help in price advantage in sourcing of LNG.
- The move would help bring down the cost of fuel and help save subsidy.

Details:

- Fertiliser plants consume about 42.25 million standard cubic metres a day (mscmd) of gas for manufacture of subsidised urea. Out of this, 26.50 mscmd comes from domestic fields and the balance 15.75 mmscmd is imported liquefied natural gas (LNG).
- The $5.18 per million British thermal unit price of domestic gas is about half the cost of LNG. Gas pooling would help save Rs.1,550 crore in subsidy, and would benefit 30 urea plants.
- The cost of gas, which is the most important component for production of urea, varies from plant to plant owing to differential rates at which imported LNG is contracted as well as the cost of transportation.

Operation Raahat launched

- What is it?
- It is an operation of the Indian Armed Forces to evacuate Indian citizens from Yemen.
- Op. Raahat plan is to deploy all naval ships and four aircraft, including two IAF C-17 Globemasters and two Air India flights stationed in Muscat all together to launch a composite evacuation effort.
- Background:
• The 2015 military intervention in Yemen began in March, 2015 when the Royal Saudi Air Force led a coalition of Arab states in attacking Shiite Houthi rebels. This was preceded by weeks of turmoil during which Houthi guerrillas toppled the government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and took over the large parts of the country.

• Yemen is lurching closer to civil war as the Houthi militants who rule its capital try to consolidate their control over the rest of the country and challenge the embattled president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

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**Gujarat anti-terror Bill passed finally**

• The Gujarat Assembly recently passed the landmark Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime Bill 2015.

• The new Bill is a re-worked version of the Gujarat Control of Organised Crime Bill (GUJCOC), 2003, which was earlier rejected twice by the President due to some of its contentious provisions.

**Why was it needed?**

• Citing past terror attacks in Gujarat, the state government has raised concerns over Pakistan’s attempts at cross-border terrorism, Gujarat’s vulnerable coastline and the proliferation of criminal gangs, while underscoring the need for a strong law.

• The government also says that the organised criminal syndicates make a common cause with terrorist gangs and foster macro terrorism which extends beyond the national boundaries. There is reason to believe that organised crime syndicates are operating in the State and thus, there is immediate need to curb their activities and hence this bill.

**Controversial provisions in the Bill:**

• The Bill was respectively returned twice to the State legislature in 2004 and 2008 by then Presidents A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Pratibha Patil recommending the deletion of some controversial clauses. Some of the controversial provisions in the Bill are as follows:
  
  • Clause 16, which makes confessions before police officers admissible in court.
  • Empowers police to tap telephonic conversations and submit them in court as evidence.
  • Extends period of probe from stipulated 90 days to 180 days before filing of charge sheet.
  • The legislation makes offences under the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime Act, 2015, non-bailable. Clause 20 (4) of the Bill states, “Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, no person accused of an offence punishable under this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond.”
  • The Bill makes “evidence collected through the interception of wire, electronic or oral communication” admissible in the court.
  • The Bill provides immunity to the State government from legal action. Clause 25 of the Bill states, “No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against the State government or any officer or authority of the State government for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done in pursuance of this Act.”

**Opposition:**

• Opposition parties have termed this as an undeclared Emergency intended to muzzle dissent in the State.

• Some say that the legislation goes against nationally applicable criminal laws such as the National Security Act, CrPC and the Indian Evidence Act.
RSBY to be implemented by Health Ministry from April 1

- Starting April 1, the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) of the Labour and Employment Ministry will now be implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It was previously being implemented by the Ministry of Labour.

Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY):
- RSBY was launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India to provide health insurance coverage for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.
- Objective: To provide protection to BPL households from financial liabilities arising out of health shocks that involve hospitalization.

Details:
- Beneficiaries under RSBY are entitled to hospitalization coverage up to Rs. 30,000/- for most of the diseases that require hospitalization.
- Government has even fixed the package rates for the hospitals for a large number of interventions.
- Pre-existing conditions are covered from day one and there is no age limit.
- Coverage extends to five members of the family which includes the head of household, spouse and up to three dependents.
- Beneficiaries need to pay only Rs. 30/- as registration fee while Central and State Government pays the premium to the insurer selected by the State Government on the basis of a competitive bidding.
- The scheme has won plaudits from the World Bank, the UN and the ILO as one of the world’s best health insurance schemes.

Unique Features of RSBY:
- The RSBY scheme differs from other schemes in several important ways.
- Empowering the beneficiary – RSBY provides the participating BPL household with freedom of choice between public and private hospitals and makes him a potential client worth attracting on account of the significant revenues that hospitals stand to earn through the scheme.
- Business Model for all Stakeholders – The scheme has been designed as a business model for a social sector scheme with incentives built for each stakeholder.
- Hospitals – A hospital has the incentive to provide treatment to large number of beneficiaries as it is paid per beneficiary treated.
- Intermediaries – The inclusion of intermediaries such as NGOs and MFIs which have a greater stake in assisting BPL households.
- Information Technology (IT) Intensive – For the first time IT applications are being used for social sector scheme on such a large scale. Every beneficiary family is issued a biometric enabled smart card containing their fingerprints and photographs. All the hospitals empanelled under RSBY are IT enabled and connected to the server at the district level. This will ensure a smooth data flow regarding service utilization periodically.
- Safe and foolproof – The use of biometric enabled smart card and a key management system makes this scheme safe and foolproof. The key management system of RSBY ensures that the card reaches the correct beneficiary and there remains accountability in terms of issuance of the smart card and its usage. The biometric enabled smart card ensures that only the real beneficiary can use the smart card.
- Portability – The key feature of RSBY is that a beneficiary who has been enrolled in a particular district will be able to use his/ her smart card in any RSBY empanelled hospital across India. This makes the scheme truly unique and beneficial to the poor families that migrate from one place to the other. Cards can also be split for migrant workers to carry a share of the coverage with them separately.
• Cash less and Paperless transactions – A beneficiary of RSBY gets cashless benefit in any of the empanelled hospitals. He/ she only needs to carry his/ her smart card and provide

**Indradhanush Mission: children who missed immunisation get another chance**

• The Karnataka State Government has said that children, aged below two, who have missed their routine immunisation in the five Hyderabad-Karnataka districts of Kalaburagi, Yadgir, Raichur, Koppal, Ballari, Bengaluru (Urban) and in the jurisdiction of Bengaluru Bruhat Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) will be covered under the Centre’s ‘Mission Indradhanush’ that will be launched in the city on April 7.

**Mission Indradhanush:**

• Mission Indradhanush was launched by the Health & Family Welfare Ministry recently.

**Aim:**

• The Mission Indradhanush, depicting seven colours of the rainbow, aims to cover all those children by 2020 who are either unvaccinated, or are partially vaccinated against seven vaccine preventable diseases which include diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, measles and hepatitis B.

**Details:**

• The Mission will be implemented in 201 high focus districts in the country in the first phase which have nearly 50% of all unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children (Of the 201 districts, 82 districts are in just four states of UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and nearly 25% of the unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children of India are in these 82 districts of 4 states).

• These districts will be targeted by intensive efforts to improve the routine immunization coverage.

• Between 2009-2013 immunization coverage has increased from 61% to 65%, indicating only 1% increase in coverage every year. To accelerate the process of immunization by covering 5% and more children every year, the Mission Mode has been adopted to achieve target of full coverage by 2020.

• The focused and systematic immunization drive will be through a “catch-up” campaign mode where the aim is to cover all the children who have been left out or missed out for immunization.

• Under Mission Indradhanush, four special vaccination campaigns will be conducted between January and June 2015 with intensive planning and monitoring of these campaigns.

• The learnings from the successful implementation of the polio programme will be applied in planning and implementation of the mission.

• The Ministry will be technically supported by WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and other donor partners. Mass media, interpersonal communication, and sturdy mechanisms of monitoring and evaluating the scheme are crucial components of Mission Indradhanush.

### 270 on death row in India, 64 sentenced last year: Amnesty

• New data from Amnesty International shows that Indian courts handed down at least 64 death sentences last year, but no executions took place, largely as a result of court rulings. Globally, executions fell by a fifth, and two-thirds of the world has abolished the death penalty.
Details: The study shows that:
- China continues to execute the most people globally — thousands every year but does not publish any data. Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia accounted for nearly three-quarters of the rest of the world’s executions in 2014.
- The United States of America executed 35 people, its fewest in 20 years.
- In India, which saw the execution of Ajmal Kasab in late 2012 and Afzal Guru in early 2013 after a gap of eight years, several executions scheduled for 2014 were put on hold.
- In January, a landmark Supreme Court ruling laid down guidelines for death sentences, including classifying delay in the disposal of mercy petitions as grounds for commutation, as also mental disability. Information reported by the Death Penalty Research Project of the National Law University in Delhi indicated that 270 people were on death row in various Indian prisons, and eight mercy petitions were rejected in 2014.
- Pakistan lifted a six-year moratorium on executions after the Peshawar school massacre. Seven people were executed in 2014. 66 people have been hanged since the lifting of the moratorium, and 8,000 more persons were on death row.

**HC upholds Kerala’s liquor policy**
- In a momentous judgment, a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court recently upheld the liquor policy of the United Democratic Front (UDF) government that permitted bars to function only in hotels of five-star and above categories.

**High Court’s observations:**
- The High Court Bench observed that the liquor policy of the government for the year 2014-15 could not be termed arbitrary or unreasonable. Nor did it violate Article 14 of the Constitution, which guaranteed equality before law. In fact, it was for the State government to evolve a policy, taking into account various factors, including the welfare of the public.
- The court was of the view that the government had taken into account all relevant material while evolving the liquor policy.
- The new liquor policy was envisaged to shut down bars attached to hotels below the five-star category as part of the new government’s plans to reduce availability of liquor. And according to the policy 10% of the retail liquor stores in the state would be closed every year till there is none left by 2023.

**In Karnataka, learn in Kannada**
- The Karnataka State Assembly, recently, passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Karnataka Amendment) Bill 2015, which seeks to provide primary education (standard I to V) in the child’s mother tongue or in Kannada.
- However, the Bill needs Presidential assent to become law.
- The government has left the schools affiliated to CBSE and ICSE out of the ambit of this Bill at present. However, there are only 700 such schools in Karnataka.

**Why was it required?**
- The State Government has defended its move by saying that the Bill was brought in the wake of the State’s language policy being turned down by the Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court. The policy had been turned down as it had been brought through a government notification instead of legislation.
Around half of Indian children under 5 stunted

- Leading up to World Health Day on April 7, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in partnership with Amway has launched the Malnutrition Mapping Project, which they describe as “A new education and advocacy tool that shows the multiple impacts of malnutrition around the world using global data from 30 low-, middle- and high-income countries.” The project aims to map global malnutrition trends and raise awareness about a preventable problem.

Important findings:
- The project has found that while India is home to third-highest number of obese people after the U.S. and China, 48% of women of reproductive age and 59% of children under the age of five are anaemic, and close to 48% of children under the age of five are stunted.
- The project found that the country has over 58 million children under the age of five who were stunted and 2.3 million children in the age cohort who were obese.
- The project also notes that high among the causes of childhood malnutrition in India are vitamin and mineral deficiencies, as well as sub-optimal breastfeeding practices.
- The project report says the high proportion of anaemic women of reproductive age is linked to 62% of children in the country showing insufficient vitamin A status, which raises the risk of decreased immune function, increased morbidity and mortality and blindness.
- The GAIN-Amway project highlighted the deleterious effects of this malnutrition status, arguing that several non-communicable diseases were associated with unhealthy diet, sedentary lifestyles and obesity in India.

Unravelling the ‘blood rain’ mystery

- A recent study by Indian and Austrian scientists has led to the discovery of the cause of the ‘Blood Rain’ phenomenon to be dispersal of spores of micro algae. Since 1896, reports have been coming in of sporadic instances of red coloured rain over parts of Kerala and Sri Lanka. The latest one was in 2013 over Kerala.

Details of the new study:
- The study confirmed that the red colour in the rain was caused by the presence of spores of a European species of green microalgae, Trentepohlia annulata that was reported previously only from Austria — a Central European country.
- The study confirmed that the blood rain is nothing but a mechanism employed by this alga to disperse its spores (similar to plant seeds) to a very large area at once, so that algae can quickly colonize a large area.
- The study revealed that DNA sequence of this species from Kerala and that from Austria had very little differences — and they evolve slowly, which suggests that the alga got introduced from Europe not very long ago.
- The research also confirmed the likelihood that the introduction happened through clouds over ocean — a phenomenon of intercontinental species dispersal previously reported for bacteria and fungi, but first time for alga.
- Scientists have said that spores of this alga from Europe get transported to India via clouds that drift across the Arabian Sea.
- But if the spores travelled across the Arabian Sea all the way to Kerala and Sri Lanka, why did the phenomenon not occur in intermediate regions like Gujarat, MP?
- Experts say that they do not have any proof for this “clouds over ocean” hypothesis, but probability is high because this is how spores of Trentepohlia get transported.
• How exactly these lower stratospheric clouds got into Kerala remains unknown but aerial route from Austria to Kerala won’t pass through other states like Gujarat, MP etc. they also note that It might be related to monsoon as well, as Kerala is the first state which the SW monsoon strikes together with Sri Lanka.
• The study is yet to be completed.

**Palestine joins ICC**

• Palestine has formally joined the International Criminal Court (ICC). Palestinians now hope that this could open the door to the possible prosecution of Israelis for alleged war crimes.
• The accession was marked at a closed-door ceremony at ICC headquarters in The Hague, exactly 90 days after Palestine joined the court’s founding Rome Statute.
• The Palestinians called on Israel to also join the global court, which was set up in 2002 to try crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.
• Exasperated after decades of failed negotiations with Israel and no prospect of achieving statehood anytime soon, Palestinians have been waging a campaign for recognition at international bodies including the ICC.

**ICC:**

• The International Criminal Court (ICC), located in The Hague, is the court of last resort for prosecution of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. It is the first permanent, treaty based, international criminal court established to help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.
• Its founding treaty, the Rome Statute, entered into force on July 1, 2002.
• Presently, the ICC had 123 states parties, opened investigations in eight countries, and issued two verdicts (Lubanga case and Ngudjolo case).
• The governments on which the ICC depends to carry out its mandate have been inconsistent in their support, particularly when it comes to arrests.
• The ICC is an independent international organisation, and is not part of the United Nations system.
• Although the Court’s expenses are funded primarily by States Parties, it also receives voluntary contributions from governments, international organisations, individuals, corporations and other entities.
• The Court’s management oversight and legislative body, the Assembly of States Parties, consists of one representative from each state party. Each state party has one vote and “every effort” has to be made to reach decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions are made by vote.
• The Assembly is presided over by a president and two vice-presidents, who are elected by the members to three-year terms.

**India and the ICC:**

• The government of India has consistently opposed the Court. It abstained in the vote adopting of the statute in 1998, saying it objected to the broad definition adopted of crimes against humanity; the rights given to the UN Security Council to refer and delay investigations and bind non-states parties; and the use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction not being explicitly criminalized. Other anxieties about the Court concern how the principle of complementarity would be applied to the Indian criminal justice system, the inclusion of war crimes for non-international conflicts, and the power of the Prosecutor to initiate prosecutions.

http://www.insightsonindia.com
Government Issues Guidelines for Administration and Operationalization of ‘Nirbhaya Fund’

- The Government of India has issued the Guidelines for utilization of ‘Nirbhaya Fund’ with the approval of the Union Finance Minister. The Guidelines are as follows:
  - Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) is the nodal authority which can be approached by various Ministries/Departments with the proposals/schemes, to be funded from ‘Nirbhaya Fund’ targeted to strengthen the safety and security of women in the country.
  - Ministry of WCD would appraise these schemes to decide their suitability to qualify for getting funds from the ‘Nirbhaya Fund’.
  - Ministry of WCD shall forward the suitable proposals to Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) for necessary budgetary allocations in the respective Demands. DEA shall appraise the proposal on financial and other aspects to avoid any duplicity of schemes/Government efforts to strengthen safety and security of women in the country.
  - Budget Division (DEA), with the approval of Finance Minister would approve the funding of schemes from the fund and would also be the nodal Ministry for any accretion into and withdrawal from the fund.
  - The respective line Ministries/Departments shall take necessary action for approval of SFC/EFC/PIB and Cabinet for implementation of the scheme on the ground.
  - Ministry of WCD shall be the nodal Ministry to review and monitor the progress of these schemes in conjunction with the line Ministries/Departments.

Nirbhaya Fund:
- Announced by the government of India in its 2013 Budget, the Fund was established to support initiatives by the government and NGOs working towards protecting the dignity and ensuring safety of women in India.
- The Fund was created with a corpus of Rs. 1000 Crores for empowerment, safety and security of women and girl children.
- The Fund is administered by Department of Economic Affairs of the finance ministry.
- Utilization of Nirbhaya Fund would be preceded by formulation of viable schemes and necessary approvals from the competent authority.
- The fund was set up after the horrific rape and murder of a 23-year old medical student in the national capital in 2012.

Government unveils new foreign trade policy

- The government recently unveiled a five-year plan for lifting India’s exports in a policy that seeks to make the country a bigger player in global trade by doubling overseas sales to $900 billion by 2019-20 while giving a boost to the Make in India initiative.

Details:
- In a drastic change of stance in keeping with global trading norms under the World Trade Organization (WTO), the new FTP sought to consolidate all previous export incentive schemes under two: Merchandise Exports From India Scheme (MEIS) and Services Exports From India Scheme (SEIS).
- The Merchandise Exports From India Scheme has replaced five existing schemes: Focus Products Scheme, Market-linked Focus Products Scheme, Focus Market Scheme, Agriculture Infrastructure Incentive Scrips and Vishesh Krishi Grameena Udyog Yojana (VKGUY).
- Services Exports From India Scheme has replaced the existing Served From India Scheme (SFIS).
• In a big relief for exporters, all scrips issued under MEIS and SEIS and the goods imported against these scrips will be fully transferable. This means that scrips issued under export from India schemes can now be used for payment of customs duty for import of goods, payment of excise duty on domestic procurement of inputs or goods, and payment of service tax.
• In an effort to push the domestic content requirement, measures have been adopted to encourage procurement of capital goods from indigenous manufacturers under the EPCG scheme by reducing specific export obligation to 75 per cent of the normal export obligation.
• The FTP also introduced a concept of import appraisal mechanism which will be done on a quarterly basis by the commerce department. In a view to boost exports from Special Economic Zones (SEZs) the government also expanded the benefits under MEIS and SEIS to the units located inside the tax-free zones.
• The FTP from now on will have a mid-term review after two and a half years, except for exigencies. In an attempt to achieve greater policy coherence and mainstreaming of all export incentive schemes, the commerce department will now direct state governments to prepare their own export strategies based on the new FTP.
• The new policy has come at a time when India’s merchandise exports continue to log a decent growth, having expanded by just 0.88% in the first 11 months of the current fiscal.

**Indirect tax collection exceeds target**

• The indirect taxes collection has surpassed the revised estimates by Rs.4,000 crore to reach Rs.5,46 lakh crore for the fiscal ended March 2015, despite a slowdown in the manufacturing sector.
• The total collection as on March 31 is Rs.5,46,479 crore, based on the provisional report against revised estimates of Rs.5,42,325 crore for 2014-15.

**Indirect Taxes:**

• Indirect tax is a tax collected by an intermediary (such as a retail store) from the person who bears the ultimate economic burden of the tax (such as the consumer). The intermediary later files a tax return and forwards the tax proceeds to government with the return. In this sense, the term indirect tax is contrasted with a direct tax which is collected directly by government from the persons (legal or natural) on which it is imposed.
• Some of the significant indirect taxes include Value Added Tax, Central Sales Tax, Central Excise Duty, Customs Duty, stamp duties, Goods and services tax (GST) and expenditure tax.

**Rajasthan brings Bill against witchcraft**

• The Rajasthan state government recently tabled Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill in the Assembly.

**Details of the Bill:**

• The Bill provides for life imprisonment if witch-hunting causes death, and imprisonment up to five years and a fine for practising witch-hunting, witchcraft and so on. At least 60% of the fine will go to the victim for her treatment and rehabilitation.
• The Bill proposes to impose a collective fine on the inhabitants of a place who abet the crime, harbour persons committing it, suppress evidence or fail to render all assistance in their powers to discover or apprehend the offenders. The fine shall be spent on the rehabilitation and resettlement of the victim.
The Bill prohibits any acts derogatory to human dignity such as forcing a woman to drink or eat any inedible or obnoxious substance or parading her naked or in scanty clothes or with painted face or body. Displacing her from her house and other property will be a punishable offence. At present, there is no penal provision in the law to prohibit or punish those accused of witch-hunting and such practices in the State.

The State government has proposed to roll out one or more schemes for the rehabilitation and resettlement of the victim and to conduct awareness programmes on superstitions and such practices.

**Glossary:**

**Who is a Witch, according to the Bill?**
- In the Bill, the term “witch” is described as a woman, locally known as “Dayan”, “Dakan” or “Dakin”, who has been identified by any person or persons believing her to be in possession of, or as having, any evil power for causing any harm to any person or property.

**What is Witchcraft?**
- “Witchcraft” has been described in the Bill as use of supernatural or magical powers with evil intention to call up a spirit or cast a spell or discover stolen goods.
- It includes such other practices which are known as “Tona-Totaka”, “Tantra-Mantra”, “Jadu-Tona” and “Jhad-Phunk”.

**Who is a Witch Doctor?**
- “Witch doctor” means a person who is locally known as “Gunia”, “Tantrik” or otherwise and claims that he has supernatural or magical power to control or cure a witch or performs any ritual purportedly to free a woman from evil spirit.

**What is Witch Hunting?**
- “Witch-hunting” means any act or conduct on the part of any person, identifying, accusing or defaming a woman as a witch or harassing, harming or injuring such woman whether mentally or physically or by damaging her property.

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**Nabard expects 50% credit growth in AP, Telangana**

- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) expects a 50% growth in credit disbursals to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to Rs 21,000 crore during fiscal 2015-16.
- The bank also has formed regional advisory groups (think tanks) and technical groups for both the states to assist in advancing the lending mechanisms. It is also taking up a self-help group (SHG) digitisation drive, with the pilot to be taken up in Medak district in Telangana this year.

**Nabard:**
- It is an apex development and specialized bank established on 12 July 1982 by an act by the parliament of India. Its main focus is to uplift rural India by increasing the credit flow for elevation of agriculture & rural non farm sector.
- It was established based on the recommendations of the Committee set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under the chairmanship of Shri B. shivaraman.
- It replaced the Agricultural Credit Department (ACD) and Rural Planning and Credit Cell (RPCC) of Reserve Bank of India, and Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC).
- It has been accredited with “matters concerning policy, planning and operations in the field of credit for agriculture and other economic activities in rural areas in India”.
- NABARD is active in developing financial inclusion policy and is a member of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion.
Its role and functions:
- It looks after the development of the cottage industry, small industry and village industry, and other rural industries.

The Bank has been given certain roles as follows:
- It serves as an apex financing agency for the institutions providing investment and production credit for promoting the various developmental activities in rural areas.
- It takes measures towards institution building for improving absorptive capacity of the credit delivery system, including monitoring, formulation of rehabilitation schemes, restructuring of credit institutions, training of personnel, etc.
- Co-ordinates the rural financing activities of all institutions engaged in developmental work at the field level and maintains liaison with Government of India, State Governments, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other national level institutions concerned with policy formulation.
- It undertakes monitoring and evaluation of projects refinanced by it.
- NABARD refinances the financial institutions which finances the rural sector.
- It regulates the institution which provides financial help to the rural economy.
- It provides training facilities to the institutions working the field of rural upliftment.
- It regulates the cooperative banks and the RRB’s, and manages talent acquisition through IBPS CWE.
- NABARD is also known for its ‘SHG Bank Linkage Programme’ which encourages India’s banks to lend to SHGs.

Sebi for including family trusts, NBFCs in QIB segment
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has proposed including ‘systematically important’ non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) and some registered family trusts in the qualified institutional buyers (QIB) category. Further, the regulator has suggested any other entity registered with Sebi and having a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore may also be considered a QIB.

Impact:
- The move will put such entities at a par with institutional investors like banks and mutual funds (MFs).

Who are qualified institutional buyers?
- Currently, QIBs are defined under Sebi regulations as institutional investors generally perceived to possess expertise and the financial muscle to evaluate and invest in capital markets.
- The existing QIBs include public financial institutions like scheduled commercial banks, MFs, foreign institutional investor and venture capital funds.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India. It was established in the year 1988 and given statutory powers on 12 April 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992.

Composition:
- SEBI is composed of
- The chairman who is nominated by Union Government of India.
- Two members, i.e., Officers from Union Finance Ministry.
- One member from the Reserve Bank of India.
- The remaining five members are nominated by Union Government of India, out of them at least three shall be whole-time members.
- For the discharge of its functions efficiently, SEBI has been vested with the following powers:
To approve by-laws of stock exchanges.
To require the stock exchange to amend their by-laws.
Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognized stock exchanges.
Inspect the books of accounts of financial intermediaries.
Compel certain companies to list their shares in one or more stock exchanges.
Registration of brokers.

India ranks 119 on Global Business Resilience Index

India ranked 119th among 130 countries on an index measuring business resilience of nations based on economic, risk quality and supply chain factors, dropped seven notches from last year.

Details of the 2015 FM Global Resilience Index:

- The Index has been topped by Norway for being the country best suited for companies seeking to avoid disruptions in their global supply chain operations. Venezuela is ranked last on the list.
- On the economic parameter, which takes into account gross domestic product, political risk and oil intensity, India is ranked 115th, the same as last year.
- In the risk quality factor, it ranked 109th for its quality of natural hazard and fire risk management, a slight improvement from its 113th rank in 2014.
- In the third category of supply chain, which looks at corruption control, infrastructure and local supplier quality, India is ranked 89th, falling 11 spots from the previous year.
- Among the top 10 countries that are most resilient, Norway is followed by Switzerland (2), Netherlands (3), Ireland (4), Luxembourg (5), Germany (6), Qatar (7), Canada (8), Finland (9) and the US (10). At the 123rd spot, Pakistan is in the bottom 10 countries on the index.
- The other least resilient nations to business supply chain disruption are Dominican Republic (126), Nicaragua (127) and Kyrgyz Republic (129).

The report also says that:

- Economically, India suffers from a formidable tangle of problems. A third of its population still live in extreme poverty — one of the highest incidences outside sub-Saharan Africa. The implementation of economic reforms has been identified as a priority by India’s new government. The exception is the country’s relatively low exposure to natural hazards, which suggests that India’s destiny, to an encouraging extent, lies in its own hands.
- The index provides an annual ranking of 130 countries and territories according to their business resilience to supply chain disruption.

Rain-hit areas to get NREGS boost

- The Union government is planning to increase the number of work days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme from 100 to 150 in places where the recent unseasonal rain and hailstorms have affected crops. The relief package will include cash compensation.
- The Finance Ministry and the Agriculture Ministry are readying a relief package that will include cash compensation for damaged crops to farmers hit by the unseasonal rain and hailstorms.

MGNREGA:
The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, also known as the “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act” is an Indian labour law and social security measure.

**Aims:**
- To guarantee the ‘right to work’ and ensure livelihood security in rural areas.
- To create durable assets that would augment the basic resources available to the poor.
- To follow the Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in Part IV of the Constitution of India and conforms to the Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that defines the right to work as a basic human right.
- How? By providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

**More Details:**
- The provisions of the law also adhere to the principles enunciated in the Constitution of India under Article 21 of the Constitution of India that guarantees the right to life with dignity to every citizen of India.
- This law guarantees the right to work to the people of India and hence is termed as a “People’s Act”.
- It is believed that targeting poverty through employment generation is the effective way to alleviate poverty.
- Employment under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is a guaranteed legal right.
- The major responsibility of the implementation rests with Panchayati Raj institutions.
- Previous employment guarantee schemes (EGS) like ‘Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana’ (SGRY) Programme and National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP) were merged with MGNREGA to make it more effective.
- The Act sets a minimum limit to the wages, to be paid with gender equality. The states are required to evolve a set of norms for the measurement of works and schedule of rates. The unemployment allowance must be paid if the work is not provided within the statutory limit of 15 days.

**Criticism:**
- Activists say that the outlay for the scheme has remained nearly constant for the past three years, which, adjusting for inflation, amounts to a decrease.
- The release of funds to the States is being delayed and the amounts have been capped. As a result, there has been a 16 per cent decline in employment from the 2013-14 figure.
- Compared with 147 lakh person days generated in December 2013, only 123 lakh person days were generated in December 2014, with the decline sharper in poor States such as Bihar and Chhattisgarh.
- Till December 2014 in the financial year 2014-15, 72 per cent of the total wages disbursed were delayed. And delays in wage payments have actually increased over time.
- However, Evidence from independent research studies have shown that the MGNREGA has successfully curbed distress migration, had large effects on consumption and poverty of Dalit and Adivasi households, increased nutritional standards of households, provided risk resilience to small and marginal farmers and vastly expanded the financial inclusion net in the country.

**Centre extends food law deadline again by 6 months**
- The Centre has given another six months to the States for rolling out the National Food Security Act (NFSA). The deadline has already been extended twice.
- Only 11 States and Union Territories have so far implemented the Act which was passed by Parliament in September 2013.
• Despite the extension of the deadline twice, only Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi and Chandigarh have so far implemented the Act, some fully and others partially.

About National Food Security Act, 2013:
• Also called as the Right to Food act, this act aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India’s 1.2 billion people.
• It extends to the whole of India.
• Under the provisions of this Act, beneficiaries are able to purchase 5 kilograms per eligible person per month of cereals at the following prices:
  - Rice at 3 Rupees per kg
  - Wheat at 2 Rupees per kg
  - Coarse grains (millet) at 1 rupee per kg.

Salient features:
• 75% rural and 50% of the urban population are entitled for three years from enactment to five kg food grains per month at 3 Rupees, 2 Rupees, 1 Rupee per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains (millet), respectively.
• The states are responsible for determining eligibility.
• Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a nutritious “take home ration” of 600 Calories and a maternity benefit of at least Rs 6,000 for six months.
• Children 6 to 14 years of age are to receive free hot meals or “take home rations”.
• The central government will provide funds to states in case of short supplies of food grains.
• The state government will provide a food security allowance to the beneficiaries in case of non-supply of food grains.
• The Public Distribution System is to be reformed.
• The eldest woman in the household, 18 years or above, is the head of the household for the issuance of the ration card.
• There will be state- and district-level redress mechanisms and State Food Commissions will be formed for implementation and monitoring of the provisions of the Act.
• The poorest who are covered under the Antodaya yojana will remain entitled to the 35 kg of grains allotted to them under the mentioned scheme.
• The cost of the implementation is estimated to be $22 billion (1.25 lac crore), approximately 1.5% of GDP.

Meet revisits judicial values, to review selection process
• A conference of chief justices of all the high courts has begun. It will discuss ways and means to speedily dispose of cases involving crimes against women and marginalised sections of society. Further the higher judiciary wants to devise a mechanism to fast-track corruption cases.
• The conference will be led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.

Details:
• The judges will lay special emphasis on fast-tracking cases of crime against women, children, senior citizens, differently abled and all the marginalised sections of the society.
• The Chief Justices will discuss how to cut down delay caused in cases involving juveniles. A mechanism to ensure expeditious disposal of cases registered under the Prevention of Corruption Act is also on the conference agenda.
Another significant issue which will be discussed is that of ‘e-Courts’. The e-Courts project was conceptualised on the basis of the “National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of information and communication technology (ICT) in the Indian Judiciary – 2005” submitted by e-Committee (Supreme Court of India). Essentially e-Court involves widespread use of video-conference, including recording of evidence and pronouncing judgements.

Apart from these, chief justices will present papers on “financial autonomy for high courts, computerisation of courts” and “post-retiral benefits for judges”. A national vision and mission for the next year will also be finalised.

On the problem of case backlog, the Chief Justices would consider the establishment of an arrears committee at the High Court level and create uniformity in giving the pendency figures. There are 2.64 crore undecided cases in the subordinate courts and 42 lakh pending in the High Courts.

The conclave is proposing to make the High Courts financially independent and further increase the salaries, emoluments and post-retirement benefits for High Court Chief Justices and judges.

The judiciary’s code of conduct:

The judiciary’s code of conduct was adopted 18 years ago, in May 1997 in a Full Court Meeting of the Supreme Court. This document, the ‘Restatement of Values of Judicial Life,’ serves as a guide to be observed by judges in the impartial administration of justice.

This code was the outcome of a resolution passed in Chief Justices’ Conference held in September 1992. The cardinal rule of the 1997 document is that “justice must not merely be done but it must also be seen as done.” Its first tenet being that the “behaviour and conduct of members of the higher judiciary must reaffirm the people’s faith in the impartiality of the judiciary.”

Iran nuclear deal

Iran and six world powers reached a preliminary nuclear agreement recently outlining commitments by both sides as they work for a comprehensive deal aiming at curbing nuclear activities Tehran could use to make weapons and providing sanctions relief for Iran. The six world powers are— U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China and Germany.

According to the New Agreement:

- All the excess stockpile and nuclear parts will be kept at an IAEA-monitored location, while the U.N., the U.S. and the EU will withdraw all sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy for years.
- Iran has committed to enriching uranium substantially below weapons-grade and to reduce its enriched uranium stockpile from about five tons to 300 kilograms (less than 700 pounds) for 15 years.
- Iran will reduce the number of installed centrifuges by two-thirds and turn its nuclear facility in Fordow into an R&D facility.
- The Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has asked the government to take a fresh look at the Mines Act, 1952 to contain the alarming spread of occupational diseases and effectively deal with violators.

Why?

- It is mainly due to a significant increase in silicosis prevalence in the region.
- What else has the Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) said?
- • The commission has recommended the constitution of an independent agency with adequate powers to deal with all issues relating to occupational diseases and another panel to conduct studies and research.

http://www.insightsonindia.com
• The SHRC has also said that it should be made compulsory for mine owners to use modern technology for extraction of sandstone and other dimensional stones.

**Silicosis:**
• Silicosis is an incurable respiratory disease caused by inhaling silica dust and is widespread among miners.
• The problem will be prevalent among workers engaged in several other occupations such as stone crushers, quartz mining and processing, foundries, sand blasting, ceramic industries, gem cutting and polishing, slate and pencil industries, glass manufacturing, and construction workers.

**Present Scenario:**
• The majority of stone mines are in the unorganised and small-scale sector and provide employment to lakhs of people living around the mines. Reliable data about these workers are not available since employment details are not maintained, though rough estimates suggest that 25 lakh workers are engaged in mining operations in Rajasthan.
• Roughly 57 silicosis deaths have been reported from the State since 2009-10 and over 891 cases detected. These workers are among the poorest of the poor.
• Working conditions in stone quarries are far from satisfactory. Most of the small mine operators are reluctant to adopt safety and health measures and do not comply with the provisions of the Mines Act, 1952.

**Recommendations made by the Rajasthan SHRC:**
• A medical examination at the time of employment and periodic medical examination prescribed under the Mines Act and the Factories Act should be made mandatory for contract and casual labour in hazardous occupations.
• The commission has pointed out that the requirement of certification of silicosis by the Pneumoconiosis Board for claiming compensation in the case of death and disability is a futile exercise as far as most of the mineworkers are concerned since even the Board members do not have any expertise on the disease.
• The panel has said that the doctors in the districts with adequate training in pneumoconiosis may be appointed as Certifying Physicians or a Pneumoconiosis Medical Board consisting of a group of doctors posted in the district may be authorised to issue such certificates.

**DU students harness wind energy from Metro trains**
• Delhi University students have discovered an innovative way of harnessing wind energy churned out by Metro trains to generate electricity.
• The project has got the backing of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), which allowed the students to install a turbine on trial basis at one of the underground stations.

**Details of the Project:**
• Without obstructing the operation, safety and security of Metro services, turbine was put up along the underground tracks at the mouth of tunnel where the maximum wind velocity available is 6.5 metre per second (m/s).
• In the first phase, a three-blade turbine was installed and later a five-blade light rotor turbine with a cut-in speed of less than 1.5m/s. It was connected to a battery and the power generated was measured.
Agreement signed to pave way for Ambedkar’s memorial in Mumbai

- Bharat Ratna B R Ambedkar’s memorial is proposed to be built in Mumbai at a place where his last rites were performed, with an agreement being signed to resolve the long-pending issue of land transfer.

Details:
- It is a tripartite agreement involving the Union Textiles Ministry, the Government of Maharashtra and the National Textile Corporation.
- The agreement paves the way for resolving the long-pending issue of transfer of land from the National Textiles Corporation to the government of Maharashtra to enable construction of a befitting memorial for Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar.

Ready to link Silk Road plans with India’s ‘Mausam’: China

- China has expressed its readiness to work with India to link its ambitious Maritime Silk Road plans with India’s ‘Mausam’ project in a bid to address India’s strategic concerns and derive common benefits.

Project ‘Mausam’:
- It is a Project under which the Government of India has proposed to establish cross cultural linkages and to revive historic maritime cultural and economic ties with 39 Indian Ocean countries.
- The 39 countries include Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritius, Singapore, Thailand, Yemen, South Africa, Philippines, Pakistan among others.
- Project ‘Mausam’ was launched in the 30th Session of World Heritage Committee meeting which was held at Doha, Qatar in June, 2014 and since then it has received positive response from countries such as China, UAE, Qatar, Myanmar, Iran and Vietnam.
- It is a Ministry of Culture project with Archaeological Society of India (ASI) as the nodal agency and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) as its Research Unit.
- The endeavour of Project ‘Mausam’ is to position itself at two levels: at the macro level it aims to reconnect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world, which would lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns; while at the micro level the focus is on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu.
- The central themes that hold Project ‘Mausam’ together are those of cultural routes and maritime landscapes that not only linked different parts of the Indian Ocean littoral, but also connected the coastal centres to their hinterlands.

Need to relook law on juveniles, SC tells govt.

- The Supreme Court recently asked the government to re-visit the Juveniles law so that a juvenile accused of rape and murder cannot get away by claiming he is too young to understand the consequences of his crime.

Observations made by the Supreme Court:
- The Apex court has observed that it can no longer shut its eyes to the danger posed to society by juveniles accused of heinous crimes like rape, dacoity, murder and drug-peddling.
The court has also observed that there can be a situation where a commission of an offence may be totally innocuous or emerging from a circumstance where a young boy is not aware of the consequences. But in cases of rape, dacoity, murder, which are heinous crimes, it is extremely difficult to conceive that the juvenile was not aware of the consequences.

**Background:**
- The court was hearing a plea by a murder accused, who claimed that he was less than 18 years old at the time of the alleged crime in May 2000.
- **Section 2 (k) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000** defines “juvenile” or “Child” as a person who has not completed eighteenth year of age. According to International Law, a ‘Child’ means every human being below the age of 18 years. Today this is a universally accepted definition of a child which comes from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

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**Govt. moves to clear the air**

- The government recently launched the National Air Quality Index (AQI) that will put out real time data about the level of pollutants in the air and inform people about the possible impacts on health.

**Details:**
- The new index will initially cover 10 cities — Delhi, Agra, Kanpur, Lucknow, Varanasi, Faridabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad — each of which would have monitoring stations with Air Quality Index display boards.

**Background:**
- The government has been under immense pressure to take a strong stand on air pollution after a World Health Organization study of 1,600 cities released last year showed that Delhi was the world’s most polluted capital.
- Another study, conducted by economists and public policy experts from the Energy Policy Institute at Chicago, Yale and Harvard University found that India’s poor air quality reduces the lifespan of the average citizen by 3.2 years.
- Last year, the environmental preference index ranked India 174 out of 178 countries for air quality. WHO study also found that 13 of the most polluted 20 cities in the world were in India.

**About the Index:**
- The AQI is a global standard used to understand air quality.
- It takes multiple data on pollution already available with the country’s Central Pollution Control Board and presents it as a color coded scale with six levels. Dark green, the first level, indicates good quality air while maroon at the other end indicates severe pollution.
- For each category, the index identifies associated health impacts. For example when the scale touches maroon, the advisory reads: “May cause respiratory impact even on healthy people, and serious health impacts on people with lung/heart disease. The health impacts may be experienced even during light physical activity.”
- It gives current as well as 24-hour average data on particulate matter – PM2.5 or very fine particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres in diameter, and PM 10 which are less than 10 micrometers in diameter – as well as other pollutants including nitrogen dioxide, ozone and carbon monoxide. PM 2.5 levels are commonly used as the best indicator of severe air pollution, while PM 10 particles are also a cause of public health concern, but less lethal.
Dena Bank ties up with LIC

- Dena Bank recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India under the Prime Minister’s Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJBY) scheme to provide insurance cover to all Aadhaar-linked savings account holders of the bank in the age group of 18 to 50 years.
- The scheme will come in effect from June 1, 2015.
- Prime Minister’s Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJBY) scheme:
  - The Scheme is to benefit people in case of death for any reason.
  - It is available to people in the age group of 18 to 50, having a bank account.
  - People who join the scheme before completing the age of 50, can continue to have the risk of life cover up to the age of 55 years, subject to the payment of premium.
  - The scheme has an annual premium of Rs 330, with a risk coverage of Rs 2 lakh. The premium will be directly auto-debited by the bank from the subscriber’s account.
  - A person can opt for the scheme for a year or prefer to continue it as a long term option. In case of long term option, his account will be auto-debited every year by the bank.
  - Under the scheme, a risk of Rs 2 lakh will be covered in case of death and a premium sum of Rs 330 per annum will be auto-debited to the account holder’s account. As per the terms of risk coverage, a person has to opt for the scheme every year.

Ministry of Culture takes over the management of Lalit Kala Akademi

- The government has taken over the management control of Lalit Kala Akademi, an autonomous organisation of the Culture Ministry, following several complaints regarding alleged administrative and financial irregularities in its functioning.
Why?
- Over the past few years, Ministry of Culture had been receiving complaints regarding alleged administrative and financial irregularities in Lalit Kala Akademi. The Akademi’s General Council and Executive Board are also non-functional since 2013 due to certain court cases. Also, the Akademi’s principal executive officer i.e., the Secretary is currently under suspension with departmental inquiry proceeding having been ordered against him by the Akademi’s Chairman.
- Due to above mentioned reasons and keeping in view the Akademi’s beleaguered administration and the substantial public interest involved in the Akademi’s vibrant and transparent functioning, the Central government has taken over the management control of Lalit Kala Akademi.

Lalit Kala Akademi:
- The Lalit Kala Akademi or National Academy of Art is India’s National Academy of Fine Arts. It was an autonomous organization, established at New Delhi in 1954 by Government of India to promote and propagate understanding of Indian art, both within and outside the country. It does so through providing scholarships, a fellow program, and sponsoring and organizing numerous exhibitions in India and overseas.
- It is funded by the Union Ministry of Culture.
**First of Scorpene Submarines-Kalvari ‘Undocked’**

- Kalvari, first of the Indian Navy’s Scorpene class stealth submarines being built under the Project 75, under collaboration with M/s DCNS, France, achieved a major milestone recently with her ‘undocking’ at the Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL).
- The six Scorpenes are being built by Mazagon Docks Ltd in collaboration with French firm DCNS.
- The project 75 which has already seen a delay of almost 40 months has now been brought on track and the delivery schedule for the successive submarines have been reduced.
- The Scorpene submarines are the precursor to the Navy of tomorrow and their induction into the Navy justifies the Indian Navy’s credo of “Glorious wake, Vibrant future.”

**Scorpene-class submarine:**
- The Scorpene class submarines are a class of diesel-electric attack submarine jointly developed by the French DCN and the Spanish company Navantia and now by DCNS. It features diesel propulsion and an additional air-independent propulsion (AIP) system.

**Air-independent propulsion:**
- Air-independent propulsion (AIP) is any technology which allows a non-nuclear submarine to operate without the need to access atmospheric oxygen (by surfacing or using a snorkel). AIP can augment or replace the diesel-electric propulsion system of non-nuclear vessels. The DCNS system, known as MESMA (Module d’Energie Sous-Marine Autonome), is based on the combustion of stored oxygen and ethanol to augment battery-powered propulsion.

**Significance of AIP:**
- Notably, a submarine is about stealth. It is a weapons platform not visible to the naked eye. AIP significantly improves stealth because it enables a submarine to generate electricity for services and battery charging and propulsion while completely submerged.
- AIP systems are auxiliary, like a smaller hull inserted in the main body. They generate electricity, powering a submarine’s to operate and also generate oxygen, lighting and amenities for crew. Accordingly, they enable conventional diesel-electric submarines to remain submerged for two to three weeks at a time. Without AIP, diesel-electric submarines have to come up to snorkeling depths just below the surface or surface at shorter intervals so that the diesel engines can recharge their batteries. This significantly increases the risk of detection.
- A submarine’s diesel engines can only be started once the snorkel has cleared the surface to take in oxygen in the fresh air. Snorkeling depth is about the same as periscope depth. AIP significantly improves stealth because it enables a submarine to generate electricity for services and battery charging and propulsion while completely submerged.
- A benefit of this approach is that it can be retrofitted into existing submarine hulls by inserting an additional hull section. AIP does not normally provide the endurance or power to replace the atmospheric dependent propulsion, but allows it to remain submerged longer than a more conventionally propelled submarine.
- A typical conventional power plant will provide 3 megawatts maximum, and an AIP source around 10% of that. A nuclear submarine’s propulsion plant is usually much greater than 20 megawatts. Another advantage is that the Non-nuclear submarines running on battery power or AIP can be virtually silent.

**RBI keeps rates unchanged**

- The RBI in its recent monetary policy review has kept the repo rate unchanged at 7.5% and kept the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) at 4%.

*Why?*
RBI has kept policy rate unchanged awaiting clarity on impact of unseasonal rains on food inflation. Unseasonal rains and hailstorm have impacted rabi crops across North and Western India, raising fears of spike in food prices.

What else has the RBI said?

RBI wants banks to pass on benefits of previous two rate cuts. It says that transmission of policy rates to lending rates has not taken place so far despite weak credit off take and the front loading of two rate cuts. Hence, the RBI says that with little transmission, and the possibility that incoming data will provide more clarity on the balance of risks on inflation, it will maintain status quo in its monetary policy stance in this review. In an effort to bolster economic growth, the central bank had cut rates twice, by 25 basis points each, outside the regular policy reviews. However, only a very few banks passed on the benefits through reduction of their lending rates.

RBI has said for monetary transmission to occur, lending rates have to be sensitive to the policy rate. With introduction of the base rate on July 1, 2010, banks could set their actual lending rates on loans and advances with reference to the base rate. At present, banks follow different methods in computing their base rate — on average cost of funds (liabilities), marginal cost or blended cost.

What is monetary transmission?

Monetary transmission is the process through which changes in a central bank’s monetary policy gets reflected in the real economy. So, for instance, if a central bank reduces interest rates it charges borrowing banks, it would expect that reduction to be passed on to eventual customers as a result of the monetary transmission process. Usually, there is a lag between the actions of the central bank and those of the commercial banks. The lag is less when central banks raise interest rates.

Intelligence agencies silent on RTI: study

A new, recently released data shows that India’s top security and intelligence agencies consistently refuse to give out any information about the Right to Information requests they receive, and those that do, reject the bulk of queries they receive.

What the Law says?

Twenty-five of India’s top security agencies are exempt from most of the requirements of the RTI Act, but are required to provide access to information if it relates to allegations of corruption and human rights violations.

These exempted agencies also need to appoint public information officers and submit reports to the Central Information Commission about the number of RTI applications received, amount of fees collected and details of cases where access to information was rejected. But the data shows that many of these institutions have never reported any RTI information to the CIC.

RTI Act:


The Act applies to all States and Union Territories of India except Jammu & Kashmir. J&K Right to Information Act is in force.

Under the provisions of the Act, any citizen may request information from a “public authority” (a body of Government or “instrumentality of State”) which is required to reply expeditiously or within thirty days.

The Act also requires every public authority to computerise their records for wide dissemination and to proactively certain categories of information so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request for information formally.
Private bodies are not within the Act’s ambit directly. In a decision of Sarbajit Roy versus Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission, the Central Information Commission affirmed that privatised public utility companies continue to be within the RTI Act.

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has also held that the political parties are public authorities and are answerable to citizens under the RTI Act.

Exclusions:
- Central Intelligence and Security agencies specified in the Second Schedule like IB, Directorate General of Income tax (Investigation), RAW, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence etc. are excluded from providing the information.
- Agencies specified by the State Governments through a Notification will also be excluded.
- The exclusion, however, is not absolute and these organizations have an obligation to provide information pertaining to allegations of corruption and human rights violations. Further, information relating to allegations of human rights violation could be given but only with the approval of the Central or State Information Commission.

CIC:
- The Central Information Commission (CIC) is set up under the Right to Information Act and is the authorised body, established in 2005, under the Government of India.
- The Chief Information Commissioner heads the Central Information Commission, the body that hears appeals from information-seekers who have not been satisfied by the public authority, and also addresses major issues concerning the RTI Act.
- The Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee consisting of—
  - The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee;
  - The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; and
  - A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

Union Cabinet clears Real Estate Bill
- The Union Cabinet recently approved the Real Estate (Regulation and Development Bill) which will address a long-standing demand to bring in a regulator for the real estate sector.

Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Bill:
- The Real Estate (Regulation & Development) Bill seeks to protect the interests of consumers and establish regulatory bodies at the Centre and States for ethical and transparent business practices in the real estate sector.
- Aim of the Bill: The bill aims at regulating contracts and transfer of property, both of which are under concurrent list. The bill will override the provisions of state real estate laws if found inconsistent.

Features of the bill:
- The Bill regulates transactions between buyers and promoters of residential real estate projects. It establishes state level regulatory authorities called Real Estate Regulatory Authorities (RERAs).
- Residential real estate projects, with some exceptions, need to be registered with RERAs. Promoters cannot book or offer these projects for sale without registering them. Real estate agents dealing in these projects also need to register with RERAs.
50% of the amount collected from buyers for a project must be maintained in a separate bank account and must only be used for construction of that project. In the original Bill, 70% of the amount had to be kept for this construction.

The Bill establishes state level tribunals called Real Estate Appellate Tribunals. Decisions of RERAs can be appealed in these tribunals.

The Bill provides for mandatory registration of all projects and real estate agents who intend to sell any plot, apartment or building with the Real Estate Regulatory Authority.

It makes mandatory the disclosure of all information for registered projects like details of promoters, layout plan, land status, schedule of execution and status of various approvals.

The Bill also includes a condition that prohibits a developer from changing the plan in a project unless 2/3rd of the allottees have agreed for such a change.

**Benefits:**
- The Bill is expected to ensure greater accountability towards consumers, and to significantly reduce frauds and delays.
- It is expected to promote regulated and orderly growth of the real estate sector through efficiency, professionalism and standardization.
- These measures are also expected to boost domestic and foreign investment in the sector and help achieve the objective of the Government of India to provide ‘Housing for All by 2022’, through enhanced private participation.

**NGT bans decade-old diesel vehicles in Delhi, NCR**

The National Green Tribunal recently banned all diesel vehicles over ten years old from plying in Delhi and the National Capital Region and also cracked the whip on rampant construction activity adding dust to the air.

**Why?**
- The SC has said that diesel vehicles are major source of pollution in the ambient air quality.
- The order comes 22 days after the NGT asked Delhi government to consider the proposal of banning diesel vehicles.

**What else has the tribunal said?**
- The Tribunal has directed Delhi government to ensure vehicles are checked for weight, age and pollution levels at all entry points of Delhi and overloaded and polluting vehicles are prevented from entering the city limits.
- The NGT also expressed its disquiet on how rampant unchecked construction in Delhi and NCR was adding dust to the air which when combines with particulate matter turns into a lethal mix.
- It has directed State of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, Noida and Greater Noida authority, Haryana Urban Development Authority and the Delhi government to immediately stop construction activity like on the two-km stretch from NH-24 to Char Murti Chowk which are emanating dust.

**Present scenario:**
- There are more than six lakh diesel vehicles registered in Delhi, which include more than five lakh private cars. The entire public transport fleet in Delhi runs on CNG now.
- However, heavy goods vehicles are still on diesel.

**National Green Tribunal (NGT)**
- The National Green Tribunal has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement
of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

- It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues. The Tribunal shall not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
- The Tribunal’s dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

**Members:**

- The sanctioned strength of the tribunal is currently 10 expert members and 10 judicial members although the act allows for up to 20 of each.
- The Chairman of the tribunal who is the administrative head of the tribunal also serves as a judicial member.
- Every bench of the tribunal must consist of at least one expert member and one judicial member. The Chairman of the tribunal is required to be a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- Members are chosen by a selection committee (headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India) that reviews their applications and conducts interviews.
- The Judicial members are chosen from applicants who are serving or retired judges of High Courts. Expert members are chosen from applicants who are either serving or retired bureaucrats not below the rank of an Additional Secretary to the Government of India (not below the rank of Principal Secretary if serving under a state government) with a minimum administrative experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters. Or, the expert members must have a doctorate in a related field.

**Jurisdiction:**

- The Tribunal has Original Jurisdiction on matters of “substantial question relating to environment” (i.e. a community at large is affected, damage to public health at broader level) & “damage to environment due to specific activity” (such as pollution). However there is no specific method is defined in Law for determining “substantial” damage to environment, property or public health.
- The powers of tribunal related to an award are equivalent to Civil court and tribunal may transmit any order/award to civil court have local jurisdiction. The Act specifies that an application for dispute related to environment can be filled within six months only when first time dispute arose (provided tribunal can accept application after 60 days if it is satisfied that appellant was prevented by sufficient cause from filling the application).
- Also Tribunal is competent to hear cases for several acts such as Forest (Conservation) Act, Biological Diversity Act, Environment (Protection) Act, Water & Air (Prevention & control of Pollution) Acts etc. and also have appellate jurisdiction related to above acts after establishment of Tribunal within a period of 30 days of award or order received by aggrieved party.
- The Act says that decision taken by majority of members shall be binding and every order of Tribunal shall be final. Any person aggrieved by an award, decision, or order of the Tribunal may appeal to the Supreme Court within 90 days of commencement of award but Supreme Court can entertain appeal even after 90 days if appellant satisfied SC by giving sufficient reasons.
**SC seeks govt. response on plea on criminal defamation**

- The Supreme Court recently took up a plea to de-criminalise defamation as it infringes on freedom of speech and expression.
- The Apex Court has directed the Centre and Tamil Nadu government to respond within four weeks to petition challenging the constitutional validity of Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- **Section 499 defines the offence ‘defamation’ and Section 500 prescribes imprisonment up to two years if a person is found guilty of defaming another’s reputation.**

**What the petition says?**

- The petitioner says that criminal defamation under Sections 499 and 500 of IPC travels beyond the restrictions of Article 19 (2) and really constricts the freedom of speech beyond reasonable limit.

**Remove ‘leper’ from the book, says law panel**

- The Law Commission has recommended that India needs to repeal or amend urgently laws which discriminate against persons with leprosy, and stop the official use of the word “leper”.
- The Law Commission recently submitted its 256th report to the Law Ministry.
- The commission has prepared a draft Bill to eliminate discrimination against persons affected with leprosy.

**What has the commission said?**

- The commission has recommended the repeal or amendment of all laws carrying discriminatory provisions. The panel recommended an end to the segregation of persons with leprosy, many of whom live in 850 “leprosy colonies” across India.
- The commission observes that although leprosy may cause irreversible disabilities, with medical advances, it is now a completely curable disease. However, a major obstacle is the social stigma associated with Leprosy, and many persons affected by leprosy continue to be outcast from society.
- It also says that Indian laws continue to directly and indirectly discriminate against persons affected by leprosy.
- Recommending amendments to Personal Laws, the Commission said under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939, the amended Indian Divorce Act, 1869, Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, leprosy affecting either spouse constitutes a ground for divorce, annulment of marriage or separation without forfeiture of maintenance.

**Discriminatory laws:**

- Under several personal laws of all religions, leprosy for more than two years serves as a legitimate ground for divorce or separation between spouses.
- Under the State Beggary Acts, persons with leprosy are put under the same category as those with mental ailments, and medical examination, arrest and detention of persons affected by leprosy is allowed.
- The Life Insurance Corporation Act charges higher premium rates from persons with leprosy.
- Several State Municipal and Panchayat Raj Acts bar persons with leprosy from holding or contesting civic posts.
- In 2014, India had the largest number of new leprosy cases globally (58 per cent). From 2005 to 2014, the National Leprosy Eradication Programme has recorded 1.25 lakh to 1.35 lakh new cases every year, a majority of those affected being children.
Leprosy is a disease caused by bacteria called Mycobacterium Leprae. It affects mainly the skin and the nerves. This may result in a lack of ability to feel pain and thus loss of parts of extremities due to repeated injuries. Weakness and poor eyesight may also be present.

NJAC rollout may take months

Though the Supreme Court recently refused to stay the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act and referred a batch of petitions challenging it to a larger Bench, it may still be several months before the Commission is even active.

Why the implementation is being delayed?

Though President has given his assent to the NJAC along with an enabling Bill providing for the panel on December 31 last year, the framing of rules and procedures under which the Commission will operate has not yet been finalised.

There are also a host of logistical and procedural issues still to be addressed. For one, the government will have to appoint two eminent persons to serve on the six-member Commission along with the Chief Justice of India, the two seniormost judges of the Supreme Court and the Law Minister.

These two persons will have to be appointed by a panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha. Till date, this panel is yet to hold an official meeting to consider names.

Besides this, the government is yet to allocate an office to the NJAC or appoint a secretariat to serve it.

The NJAC will likely require several officials at various levels who will have to compile the background information on the various persons that the Commission will consider for appointment as judges.

There are three vacancies in the Supreme Court and 358 vacancies for judges in the 24 High Courts, according to numbers put out by the Law Ministry.

NJAC:

NJAC is a proposed body responsible for the appointment and transfer of judges to the higher judiciary in India. It seeks to replace the collegium system of appointing the judges of Supreme Court and 24 High Courts with judicial appointments commission wherein the executive will have a say in appointing the judges.

Details:

A new article, Article 124A, (which provides for the composition of the NJAC) will be inserted into the Constitution.

The NJAC Act also seeks changes in articles 124,217,222 and 231.

The commission will consist of the following members:

Chief Justice of India (Chairperson, ex officio)
Two other senior judges of the Supreme Court next to the Chief Justice of India – ex officio
The Union Minister of Law and Justice, ex-officio
Two eminent persons (to be nominated by a committee consisting of the Chief Justice of India, Prime Minister of India and the Leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha or where there is no such Leader of Opposition, then, the Leader of single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha), provided that of the two eminent persons, one person would be from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes or OBC or minority communities or a woman. The eminent persons shall be nominated for a period of three years and shall not be eligible for re-nomination.

Functions of the Commission:
• Recommending persons for appointment as Chief Justice of India, Judges of the Supreme Court, Chief Justices of High Courts and other Judges of High Courts.
• Recommending transfer of Chief Justices and other Judges of High Courts from one High Court to any other High Court.
• Ensuring that the persons recommended are of ability and integrity.
• Under the present Collegium system, the Chief Justice of India would consult the four senior most judges of the Supreme Court for Supreme Court appointments and two senior-most judges for high court appointments.

**How the NJAC will help:**
• The NJAC, once it came into existence, is expected to usher in transparency in judicial appointments in the highest courts and end the highest judiciary’s two-decade-old grip over appointments of judges through the collegium system.
• It would restore an equal role for the executive in higher judicial appointments.

**Allegations:**
• Some people contend that by passing the NJAC Bill, Parliament had “altered the basic structure of the Constitution” and encroached into judicial independence. They say Independence of the judiciary includes the necessity to eliminate political influence even at the stage of appointment of a judge. This is being violated.
• The amendment, as passed by the two houses of Parliament, “takes away the primacy of the collective opinion of the Chief Justice of India and the two senior most Judges of the Supreme Court of India”.
• Although the six-member Commission had the CJI as chairperson and two senior most Supreme Court judges as members, there was no “primacy” for them. Even their collective recommendation of a candidate as judge could be frozen if any two non-judicial members on the panel vetoed it.
• Under the present Collegium system, the Chief Justice of India would consult the four senior most judges of the Supreme Court for Supreme Court appointments and two senior-most judges for high court appointments.

**India ranks lower than even Nepal: Social Progress Index (SPI)**

• Social Progress Index (SPI) ratings will shortly be released globally. The SPI was launched in 2013 and is based on 52 indicators of countries’ social and environmental performance. It includes no economic indicators and measures outcomes. The UN’s Human Development Index and Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Index are also alternate measures for well being but they use GDP or other economic measures.

**Details of the Index:**
• Out of 133 countries rated on indicators of well-being such as health, water and sanitation, personal safety, access to opportunity, tolerance, inclusion, personal freedom and choice India has secured the 101th place. Nepal and Bangladesh rank higher than India. Norway has bagged the first rank. The U.S. is at the 16th place.
• On the parameter ‘Tolerance and inclusion’ India ranks 128th and is at the 120th place on ‘health and wellness’. The U.S. despite its high levels of spending on health and wellness ranks 68th.

**Performance of BRICS Nations:**
• Country: Rank
• Brazil: 42.
• Russia: 71.
Voluntary retirement is no excuse to skip alimony: SC

- Deciding the case of a man who took voluntary retirement and stopped paying maintenance to his divorced wife, the Supreme Court recently held that he has to continue paying her as long as he is “healthy, able-bodied and is in a position to support himself.”

Observations made by the Supreme Court?
- The Court has said that reasons given by estranged husbands like “they do not have a job, the business is not doing well” to skip payment are just bald excuses and these have no acceptability in law.
- It says that the right to get maintenance is absolute for a woman, and she cannot be reduced to the state of a beggar after being compelled to leave her matrimonial home. If the husband is healthy, able-bodied and is in a position to support himself, he is under the legal obligation to support his wife, for the wife’s right to receive maintenance under Section 125 Cr.PC, unless disqualified, is an absolute right.
- The court has held that the obligation of the man to pay maintenance is “heightened” when the couple’s children are with the wife. Again, the amount of maintenance should not be that which would only mean their “mere survival.” As per law, she should lead a life similar to the one she would have in her husband’s house. And that is where the status and strata of the husband comes into play and that is where the legal obligation of the husband becomes a prominent one.

Background:
- The court was deciding the case of a former Armyman who, according to his wife, took voluntary retirement so that he did not have to pay her the monthly maintenance of Rs. 4,000.
- The High Court had felt that his means had been considerably reduced after retirement, and halved the maintenance sum to Rs. 2,000. Aggrieved, the wife had moved the Supreme Court then.
- The SC found that the litigation on the maintenance had dragged on from 1998 to 2012 in the High Court. Terming such procrastination “unacceptable”, the Supreme Court observed that such prolonged court battles only further corrode human relationships and take a toll on society.

PM launches Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana

- The Prime Minister recently launched the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) Yojana.

Details:
- The MUDRA scheme is aimed at “funding the unfunded”.
- The scheme, which has a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore, can lend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 10 lakh to small entrepreneurs.
- MUDRA will be set up through a statutory enactment. It will be responsible for developing and refinancing all micro-finance institutions (MFIs) which are in the business of lending to micro and small business entities engaged in manufacturing, trading and service activities.

Role of MUDRA bank?
MUDRA Bank will refinance Micro-Finance Institutions through a Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. In lending, priority will be given to SC/ST enterprises.

It will also partner with State and regional-level coordinators to provide finance to last-mile financiers of small and micro business enterprises. Its proposed role includes laying down policy guidelines for micro enterprise financing business, registration, accreditation and rating of MFI entities.

The agency will also lay down responsible financing practices to ward off over-indebtedness and ensure proper client protection principles and methods of recovery.

Benefits:
- These measures will greatly increase the confidence of young, educated or skilled workers who would now be able to aspire to become first generation entrepreneurs.
- Existing small businesses, too, will be able to expand their activities.
- By floating MUDRA bank, the Centre has ensured credit flow to SMEs sector and has also identified NBFCs as a good fit to reach out to them.
- People will now be able to get refinance at subsidised rate and it would be passed on to the SMEs. Moreover, it would enable SMEs to expand their activities.

Killing of woodcutters violates SC ruling

Recently, Andhra Pradesh police shot dead 20 woodcutters from Tamil Nadu. They were found felling red sanders.

Controversy:
- The reason given by Andhra Pradesh Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force officials is that they feared for their own lives and shot dead 20 woodcutters from Tamil Nadu. But, experts say that it is hardly a legal defence, especially when the Supreme Court has held that the act of extrajudicial killing by the police, if not justified, amounts to culpable homicide.

What the law says?
- It is not an offence for a police officer to use force in private defence, but Section 46 of the Criminal Procedure Code, dealing with the procedure of arrest, mandates that a police officer has no right to “cause the death of a person who is not accused of an offence punishable with death or with imprisonment for life.”
- The law further mandates that a police officer should use only “reasonable force” to arrest an offender. In this case, the police resorted to fatal force to counter stones and sickles allegedly hurled at them by the woodcutters.

What has the Supreme Court said?
- In its 2012 decision in the Om Prakash versus State of Jharkhand case, the Supreme Court categorically warned policemen that “it is not the duty of police officers to kill,” even dreaded criminals.
- The SC had further said that the duty of the police is to arrest an accused and put him up for trial. Such killings must be deprecated. They are not recognised as legal by our criminal justice administration system. They amount to State-sponsored terrorism.

President of India presents Padma Awards

The President of India recently presented Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri awards to 50 people.

About Padma Awards:
• Padma Awards – one of the highest civilian Awards of the country, are conferred in three categories, namely, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. They were instituted in the year 1954.
• The Awards are given in various disciplines/ fields of activities, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.
• Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; (it is a second degree honour)
• Padma Bhushan is awarded for distinguished service of high order. (it is a third degree honour)
• Padma Shri is awarded for distinguished service in any field. (it is a fourth degree honour)
• The awards are announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year. The award is normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously if the demise of the person proposed to be honoured has been recent, say within a period of one year preceding the Republic Day on which it is proposed to announce the award.

**Bio-fences to ward off straying elephants in Assam**
• In a bid to reduce man-animal conflict in Assam, bio-fences are proposed to be set up replacing electric fences, to ward off straying elephants.
• To start with four tea estates in Assam will have these “bio-fenced” with thickets of thorny bamboos.
• Why bio fences are preferred over electric fences?
• Because electric fencing is considered costly and unreliable besides being hazardous.
**Benefits:**
• This would reduce man-elephant conflict.

**Thane named India’s Earth Hour Capital**
• An 11-member international jury has declared Thane the National Earth Hour Capital with the city emerging the winner from India in the Earth Hour City Challenge this year.
• Recently, Thane represented India in the Global Earth Hour Capital Competition of 16 countries in Seoul. The host city was declared the winner and acknowledged as the Global Earth Hour Capital 2015.
**Details of the Competition:**
• The year-long competition among cities is aimed at promoting renewable energy and preparing for climate change. In its third year in India, the contest had 13 participants.
• Thane, Rajkot and Pune were the finalists from India. Pune received a special mention from the jury for its city mobility plan and its solar and waste-to-energy initiatives.
• While all finalists were invited to the programme in Seoul, only the Mayor of Rajkot could attend the ceremony and was felicitated for the city’s performance in the field of renewable energy.
• Last year, Coimbatore was selected as the National Earth Hour Capital.
**Developments in Thane:**
• The notable actions by the Thane city administration include
The mandatory use of solar water-heating systems for municipal buildings and solutions such as wind-solar hybrid systems and use of solar energy for lighting and air-conditioning.

- The city plans solar rooftop net metering-based power generation and regular energy audits.
- An energy service company (ESCO) project for energy-efficient street lighting.
- Commissioning of a bio-methanation plant to treat municipal solid waste and generate electricity and three cyclic switching units for optimal use of streetlights.
- A five-year target has been set for developing a solar city project in the city.

**Earth Hour:**

- Earth Hour is a worldwide movement for the planet organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The event is held worldwide annually encouraging individuals, communities, households and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights for one hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. on the last Saturday in March, as a symbol for their commitment to the planet.
- It was famously started as a lights-off event in Sydney, Australia in 2007. Since then it has grown to engage more than 7000 cities and towns worldwide. Today, Earth Hour engages a massive mainstream community on a broad range of environmental issues. The one-hour event continues to remain the key driver of the now larger movement.
- Earth Hour 2015 was on Saturday, March 28, from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm in a location’s local time. Earth Hour 2016 will be on Saturday, March 19, from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. during participants’ local time.

**Growth in Euro zone and India accelerating, says OECD**

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently said that economic growth is accelerating in the euro zone and in India but slowing in China, Russia and Brazil.
- It has also said that within the euro zone, France and Italy were showing signs of better growth and the outlook is also improving in Germany, the euro zone’s largest economy.

**OECD:**

- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international economic organisation of 34 countries founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade. It provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems.

**Origin:**

- The OECD originated in 1948 as the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), led by Robert Marjolin of France, to help administer the Marshall Plan (which was rejected by the Soviet Union). In 1961, the OEEC was reformed into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and membership was extended to non-European states.

**The OECD promotes policies designed:**

- To achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in Member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy;
- To contribute to sound economic expansion in Member as well as nonmember countries in the process of economic development; and
- To contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral, nondiscriminatory basis in accordance with international obligations.
Most OECD members are high-income economies with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries. India is one of the many non-member economies with which the OECD has working relationships in addition to its member countries.

NGT bars construction on riverbeds in Maharashtra

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has declared riverbed construction as illegal in Maharashtra and has directed the State government to amend controversial government resolutions (GR) allowing the State Water Resources Department to permit the same.

What is the issue?
- According to green activists, two ambiguously worded government resolutions (GR), one issued in August last year and the other in March this year, allegedly encourage sanction by the State Irrigation Department to allow construction in the no-development zone (NDZ) area within the blueline and embankments of rivers. The blueline or the flood-line on the map depicts the limit beyond which construction near a river is prohibited to maintain a riverbed.
- The first GR, dated August 8, 2014, mentions that as per various city development plans, the Irrigation Department’s regional chief engineer can issue no-objection certificates for constructing roads, gardens and jogging tracks on riverbeds, flood protection walls on river banks, or laying sewerage pipes within the blueline area, claiming that these will neither erode the riverbed cross-sections nor interfere with the natural flow. The second GR allegedly empowers the department to alter bluelines ‘on demand’ without clearly setting forth the concerned authority.

What has the NGT said?
- The Tribunal has noted that the GRs were improper and gave ample scope for illicit construction by ignoring the precautionary principle enumerated in Section 20 of the NGT Act, 2010.
- The Tribunal has ruled that the blueline could be drawn by the Irrigation Department only on demand or urgent notification by the District Collector of any impending flood-like situation where a river flows above the danger level.
- The Tribunal has directed the Irrigation Department to conduct a geo-mapping of the State’s rivers and upload blueline maps on the official websites of the Environment and Irrigation Departments within 12 weeks.

Rajasthan to cover 4 lakh children under immunisation plan

Rajasthan will immunize four lakh children from the vulnerable sections of society under Mission Indradhanush, launched nationally on April 7. The immunization campaign will focus on unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children below the age of two.
- Rajasthan’s immunization coverage is 73% and the government has an ambitious target of 90% by 2020. Increased coverage will help in reducing child and maternal mortality.
- The programme provides immunisation against seven life-threatening diseases — diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, measles and hepatitis B.
- In addition, vaccination against Haemophilus influenza type B and Japanese encephalitis will be provided in select districts. Catch-up campaigns will also be organised to increase the coverage annually by five per cent.

Mission Indradhanush:
• Mission Indradhanush was launched by the Health & Family Welfare Ministry recently. The Mission was launched on Good Governance Day to mark the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Madan Mohan Malaviya and birthday of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

**Aim:**
• The Mission Indradhanush, depicting seven colours of the rainbow, aims to cover all those children by 2020 who are either unvaccinated, or are partially vaccinated against seven vaccine preventable diseases which include diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, measles and hepatitis B.

**Details:**
• The Mission will be implemented in 201 high focus districts in the country in the first phase which have nearly 50% of all unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children (Of the 201 districts, 82 districts are in just four states of UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and nearly 25% of the unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children of India are in these 82 districts of 4 states).
• These districts will be targeted by intensive efforts to improve the routine immunization coverage.
• The campaign is part of the Universal Immunisation Programme by 2020 and is being implemented under the National Health Mission across the country.
• Between 2009-2013 immunization coverage has increased from 61% to 65%, indicating only 1% increase in coverage every year. To accelerate the process of immunization by covering 5% and more children every year, the Mission Mode has been adopted to achieve target of full coverage by 2020.
• The focused and systematic immunization drive will be through a “catch-up” campaign mode where the aim is to cover all the children who have been left out or missed out for immunization.
• Under Mission Indradhanush, four special vaccination campaigns will be conducted between January and June 2015 with intensive planning and monitoring of these campaigns.
• The learnings from the successful implementation of the polio programme will be applied in planning and implementation of the mission.
• The Ministry will be technically supported by WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and other donor partners. Mass media, interpersonal communication, and sturdy mechanisms of monitoring and evaluating the scheme are crucial components of Mission Indradhanush.

**UNESCO report lauds India’s progress**
• A recently released UNESCO global education report says that India has reduced its out of school children by over 90% and has achieved universal primary education.

**Details:**
• The report says that India is predicted to be the only country in South and West Asia to have an equal ratio of girls to boys in both primary and secondary education.
• The report says that while globally 47% of the countries achieved universal pre-primary enrolment, 8% of the countries including India were close to achieving so.
• The UNESCO report also noted the achievement of gender parity in India but said the country is yet to achieve significant progress in adult literacy. It said 32% of the countries including India are still “very far” from achieving it.
• The report called upon all the countries to ensure that children and adolescents complete pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education by 2030.

http://www.insightsonindia.com
The report said that globally, just one-third of countries have achieved all of the measurable Education for All (EFA) goals set in 2000 and only half of all countries have achieved the most prominent goal of universal primary education.

**Victims must get full treatment: SC**

- The Supreme Court recently through an order made it mandatory for Private hospitals across the country to provide full and free medical treatment to the victims of acid attack.

**What else has the Court said?**

- The court has directed all States to take up with private hospitals and ensure that they do not deny treatment to acid attack victims.
- The order said the term “treatment” included reconstructive surgery, free medicines, bed, rehabilitation and aftercare.
- The court has directed the State governments to take action against the hospitals turning away victims.

**Effects of this order:**

- Now, private hospitals could neither turn away victims of acid attack nor wash their hands of after providing first aid.

**Background:**

- The order came on a public interest litigation petition filed by Laxmi, an acid attack victim, following nine years of fighting for the rights of victims.
- Laxmi was only 15 when three men, one of whom she had refused to marry, threw acid on her near Tughlaq Road in New Delhi. She has been fighting a lonely battle since 2006 in the Supreme Court, and in the process, succeeded in getting the Indian Penal Code amended to make acid attack a special offence.
- She further persuaded the court to increase the compensation for victims to Rs. 3 lakh, besides procuring a complete ban on over-the-counter sale of acid.
- The recent order dealt with Ms. Laxmi’s final demand for getting victims proper treatment, aftercare and rehabilitation.

**India, France agree on deal for 36 Rafale jets**

- Indian PM, during his visit to France, has announced that the Indian Air Force (IAF) would buy 36 Rafale fighters in fly-away condition.

**Details:**

- These will equip two IAF squadrons with 18 aircraft each.
- However, the announcement is silent about the plan to build the Rafale at Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), a central part of the tender. So far, this multi-billion dollar procurement, conceived as a springboard for the modernisation of India’s aerospace sector, will only benefit that of France.
- The recent announcement underlines the continuing failure by India and France to take to a logical conclusion the IAF’s August 2007 tender for 126 medium multi-role combat aircraft (MMRCA), of which 18 were to be supplied fully built and 108 built in India by HAL.

**India, France sign deal for Jaitapur N-project**

- India and France recently signed an agreement to fast-track the stalled nuclear project in Jaitapur in Maharashtra.
Details:
- The Jaitapur project, where French company Areva is to set up six nuclear reactors with a total power generation capacity of about 10,000 Mw, is stuck for long because of differences over the cost of electricity to be generated.
- The agreement signed between India’s Larsen and Toubro and France’s Areva is aimed at cost reduction by increasing localisation, thereby improving the financial viability of Jaitapur project.

Centre links disaster compensation to farmers with headline inflation
- With unseasonal rains and hailstorms leading to massive loss to agriculture in around 10 states, the Centre has increased the amount of assistance to farmers by 50%.
- The assistance will also be automatically reviewed in April each year based on the annual inflation derived from the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and rounded off to the next multiple of 100. This would ensure that from now on, assistance to farmers will be linked to the WPI and could get automatically increased.
- Aid to farmers is provided under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Fund (SDFR), in which the Centre contributes 75% while states share the rest.
- Headline inflation is a measure of the total inflation within an economy, including commodities such as food and energy prices (e.g., oil and gas), which tend to be much more volatile and prone to inflationary spikes.

RBI’s forex reserves climb to an all-time high of $343 bn
- The Reserve Bank of India’s foreign exchange reserves hit an all-time high of $343 billion for the week ending April 3.
- The rise in reserves was $1.63 billion. This is the ninth time this year foreign exchange reserves touched an all-time high. Foreign currency assets rose $2.40 billion to $318.64 billion.

Forex reserves:
- Foreign exchange reserves are an important component of the balance of payments and an essential element in the analysis of an economy’s external position.
- The components of India’s foreign exchange reserves are foreign currency assets (FCA), gold, SDRs and reserve tranche position (RTP) in the IMF.
- Foreign Currency Assets (FCA) is the biggest component of the forex reserves.

SDRs:
- It is an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries’ official reserves.
- Its value is based on a basket of four key international currencies, and SDRs can be exchanged for freely usable currencies. The SDR basket consists of the euro, Japanese yen, pound sterling, and U.S. dollar.
- The SDR is neither a currency, nor a claim on the IMF. Rather, it is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members.
- Holders of SDRs can obtain these currencies in exchange for their SDRs in two ways:
  - Through the arrangement of voluntary exchanges between members and
  - By the IMF designating members with strong external positions to purchase SDRs from members with weak external positions.
Rajasthan gears up to prevent child marriages on Akshaya Tritiya

- The Rajasthan government has asked its health workers and paramedical staff and non-governmental organizations to prevent child marriages on Akshaya Tritiya, which falls on April 21, and Peepal Purnima on May 4.

Why?
- On these days, considered auspicious, a large number of child marriages take place nationwide, especially in rural Rajasthan.

Details of a Survey:
- According to the Annual Health Survey for 2012-13, over 14% of the girls were married while they were still below the legal age of 18 in the State. However, this in itself, is an improvement from the 1998-2002 Family Health Survey-111 figures of 65% of the girls being married before the legal age.
- In rural areas of the State, 18% of the girls are married before the legal age, compared with just 5% in urban areas.
- Across the state there are wide variations in the prevalence of child marriages.
- A massive campaign is under way to drive home the point that besides parents and guests, all those involved in child marriages like priests, tent-house owners, cooks and band-owners could be booked under the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2006.
- **Akshaya Tritiya, also known as Akha Teej**, is a holy day for Hindus and Jains. It falls on the third Tithi (lunar day) of Bright Half (Shukla Paksha) of the pan-Indian month of Vaishakha and one of the four most important days for Hindus. It is an auspicious day of the birthday of Lord Parasurama who is the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. On this day Veda Vyasa and Lord Ganesha began to write Mahabharata. In Jain and Hindu calendars, some days of the month are absent in counting and some days (tithi in lunar calendars) come extra, but Akshay tritiya is one day which is never “absent” from the lunar calendar.
- The day is considered auspicious for starting new ventures. The legend is that any venture initiated on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya continues to grow and bring prosperity. Hence, new ventures, like starting a business, construction, etc. is performed on Akshaya Tritiya.

Election Commission sets up committee to allow migrants to vote

- The Election Commission has set up a committee of senior officers to consider whether electoral laws can be changed to empower voters who have migrated to other States within the country.

Effects:
- A relaxation of this law would prove beneficial to cadre-based parties in keeping their vote bank intact, especially in States such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu where many youths are migrating to other States for jobs.

Details:
- Recently, the government had given green light to NRIs to cast their votes from abroad.
- EC is considering whether inter-State migrant voters could retain their names on the electoral rolls of their native places, and also, if they could cast their votes through mechanisms such as postal ballot.
Present situation:
- Under the present law, a person can be enrolled only at the place he is residing. A migrant has to get himself enrolled in the new place.

Background:
- The Supreme Court in January, 2015 had issued a notice to the Election Commission on a plea made by UAE-based doctor, demanding electoral reforms to allow inter-State migrants the voting privileges like postal ballot, which is accorded to government servants.
- The petition has sought the same voting privileges accorded to government servants under Section 20(8) (d) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, read with Section 60(b) of the Representation of the People Act 1951, which allowed them to vote via postal ballot upon the consent of the Election Commission.
- Replying to the affidavit, EC has said that the committee was set up despite scepticism about the need to amend the Representation of the People Act. The commission said a person who migrated can be considered “ordinarily resident” in his new place even without owning or possessing a house there. It said the law was reasonable as it is now.

Curbs on Governors’ outstation visits
- The Union Home Ministry has notified a new set of rules to regulate official visits of Governors outside their States, mandating prior permission from the President and putting a cap of 73 days in a year as duration of such visits.
- Now, all outstation visits of Governors will require prior approval of the President. Any communication on this will have to be forwarded to the President’s Secretariat at least seven days in advance.
- The copies of all communications seeking approval of the President for visits should be sent to the Prime Minister’s Principal Secretary and the Union Home Minister.
- The Governor shall invariably obtain clearance under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act and political clearance before undertaking any foreign visit.

During extraordinary circumstances:
- Even under emergency or extraordinary circumstances, the Governor cannot undertake visits without intimating the President’s Secretariat.
- In case of emergent or extraordinary circumstances, if it is not possible to obtain permission then, intimation can be sent. The intimation shall contain details of the circumstances and the compelling reasons why it was not possible to obtain prior permission.

Regarding Private visits:
- The Governors have to seek permission from the President for private visits within India at least two weeks in advance, except under exceptional circumstances.
- Communications pertaining to private visits abroad have to be made at least six weeks in advance.
- Except under extraordinary circumstances, the Governors cannot undertake any outstation visit without prior approval. In case of visits due to extraordinary circumstances, the Governors have to intimate the President’s Secretariat as soon as the programme is finalised, providing details of the compelling reasons it was not possible to obtain permission. Once the schedule for the visit is approved, it cannot ordinarily be revised.
NCBC likely to get statutory powers soon, says its chairman

- The Chairman of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) recently said that the commission will soon get statutory powers on par with the National Commissions for SCs and STs.
- Investing constitutional powers will authorise the Commission to question the lapses in the implementation of 27% reservation to OBCs.
- The present commission had also made the central public sector undertakings to implement the creamy layer provisions.

NCBC:

- The commission was the outcome of the direction of the Supreme Court in the Mandal case judgement.
- The commission has five members: a Chairperson who is or has been a judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court; a social scientist; two persons, who have special knowledge in matters relating to backward classes; and a Member-Secretary, who is or has been an officer of the Central Government in the rank of a Secretary to the Government of India. Their term is of Three years.
- The commission considers inclusions in and exclusions from the lists of communities notified as backward for the purpose of job reservations and tenders the needful advice to the Central Government.

Government notifies NJAC, puts an end to collegium

- The Union government has finally notified the National Judicial Appointments Commission law and effectively brought to an end the two-decades-old collegium system of appointing judges.

Details:

- Now, the political class and civil society have an equal voice, along with the judiciary, in the appointment and transfer of judges in the highest judiciary.

Background:

- The notification was made possible by the Supreme Court on April 7. While referring the petitions to a larger Bench, the court had refused to pass a stay order on the law coming into force.

About the NJAC and 99th constitution amendment Bill:

- NJAC is a body responsible for the appointment and transfer of judges to the higher judiciary in India. JAC Bill seeks to replace the collegium system of appointing the judges of Supreme Court and 24 High Courts with judicial appointments commission wherein the executive will have a say in appointing the judges.
- A new article, Article 124A, (which provides for the composition of the NJAC) will be inserted into the Constitution.
- The Bill provides for the procedure to be followed by the NJAC for recommending persons for appointment as Chief Justice of India and other Judges of the Supreme Court (SC), and Chief Justice and other Judges of High Courts (HC).

According to the bill the commission will consist of the following members:

- Chief Justice of India (Chairperson, ex officio)
• Two other senior judges of the Supreme Court next to the Chief Justice of India – ex officio
• The Union Minister of Law and Justice, ex-officio
• Two eminent persons (to be nominated by a committee consisting of the Chief Justice of India, Prime Minister of India and the Leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha or where there is no such Leader of Opposition, then, the Leader of single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha), provided that of the two eminent persons, one person would be from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes or OBC or minority communities or a woman. The eminent persons shall be nominated for a period of three years and shall not be eligible for re-nomination.

**Functions of the Commission:**
• Recommending persons for appointment as Chief Justice of India, Judges of the Supreme Court, Chief Justices of High Courts and other Judges of High Courts.
• Recommending transfer of Chief Justices and other Judges of High Courts from one High Court to any other High Court.
• Ensuring that the persons recommended are of ability and integrity.
• Under the present Collegium system, the Chief Justice of India would consult the four senior most judges of the Supreme Court for Supreme Court appointments and two senior-most judges for high court appointments.

**How the NJAC will help:**
• The NJAC, once it came into existence, is expected to usher in transparency in judicial appointments in the highest courts and end the highest judiciary’s two-decade-old grip over appointments of judges through the collegium system.
• It would restore an equal role for the executive in higher judicial appointments.

**What are the allegations against it?**
• Petitions were filed in the SC contending that by passing the NJAC Bill, Parliament had “altered the basic structure of the Constitution” and encroached into judicial independence.
• Independence of the judiciary includes the necessity to eliminate political influence even at the stage of appointment of a judge. This is being violated.
• This bill, as passed by the two houses of Parliament, “takes away the primacy of the collective opinion of the Chief Justice of India and the two senior most Judges of the Supreme Court of India”.
• Although the six-member Commission had the CJI as chairperson and two senior most Supreme Court judges as members, there was no “primacy” for them. Even their collective recommendation of a candidate as judge could be frozen if any two non-judicial members on the panel vetoed it.
• The petition says the NJAC Act did not give any “suitability criteria” for appointment as judge, leaving it to the Commission to frame them.

**Clamour for Net neutrality grows online**
• Social media has been flooded with posts on Net neutrality, demanding that service providers treat all data online equally. People on social media have been saying that the Union government should strive to maintain Internet neutrality.
• The Telecom Ministry has constituted a committee to decide on the issue. A final call would be taken after a ministry committee submits its report in the second week of May.

**Background:**
Recently, telecom provider Airtel launched Airtel Zero, a scheme through which companies can pay Airtel and have users browse their service free of data charges. The practice of allowing apps to be free of data charges to the consumer is called zero rating in telecom parlance.

Airtel Zero is widely perceived as a violation of net neutrality which could potentially stifle innovation and startup growth. There is also an allegation that it effectively tilts the balance in favor of the bigger players.

By paying to be on Airtel Zero, companies can make sure that their users get free access to their service, while smaller players are at a disadvantage. However, Airtel has said that zero rating does not violate net neutrality as it lowers the cost of access and it is “non-discriminatory”.

In December 2014, Airtel had also tried to introduce a plan to charge Internet telephony companies like Skype and Whatsapp a higher tariff. However, the telecom operator withdrew the plan after public outrage.

**Net neutrality:**
- Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers and governments should treat all data on the Internet equally, not discriminating or charging differentially by user, content, site, platform, application, type of attached equipment, or mode of communication.
- Neutrality proponents claim that telecom companies seek to impose a tiered service model in order to control the pipeline and thereby remove competition, create artificial scarcity, and oblige subscribers to buy their otherwise uncompetitive services. Many believe net neutrality to be primarily important as a preservation of current freedoms.
- There are no laws enforcing net neutrality in India. Although TRAI guidelines for the Unified Access Service license promote net neutrality, it does not enforce it. The Information Technology Act 2000 also does not prohibit companies from throttling their service in accordance with their business interests.
- Proponents of the principle of net neutrality hold that all traffic on the Internet should be treated equally or in other words, service providers such as Airtel should allow access to all content without favouring any particular product or website.

**Telecom/service provider’s argument:**
- The telecom/ISPs argue that they have made huge investments in broadband capacity, and, therefore, they should be allowed to charge for the services, which generate lot of traffic. Preventing the service providers from charging for over-the-top services (OTT) services would mean that they would reduce their investments in building networks.

**What the TRAI says?**
- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India chief has said even though Airtel’s move is against net neutrality it is not illegal as there is no legal framework.
- The net neutrality debate becomes even more relevant in case of India where the penetration of smart phones is increasing and efforts are on to bring more people to the Internet, through the digital India campaign.

**Gujarat launches industrial tourism**

- In an initiative that is the first-of-its-kind in the country, the Gujarat government is promoting a tour package covering major industrial installations which have earned global acclaim for the State.

**Details:**
Some of the major attractions of this recently launched tour package include a visit to Tata Nano plant in Sanand, Pipavav port near Amreli, Alang ship breaking yard in Bhavnagar and Amul Dairy in Anand.

The package, called Industrial Tour of Gujarat, has been offered by city-based Akshar Travels Pvt Ltd, official partner of state-run tourism agency Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd (TCGL), which is promoting the tour on its website.

### Diesel vehicles get a two-week breather

- The National Green Tribunal has extended deadline by two weeks for its proposed ban on plying of diesel vehicles which were more than 10 years old in Delhi.

**Details:**
- The move comes as a reprieve for the Delhi government, which is grappling with difficulties in implementing the ban. The NGT ordered stay on impounding of decade-old vehicles for the next two weeks during which the agencies concerned will have to come up with scientific views on checking vehicular pollution.
- The NGT has also sought the Delhi government’s views on a number of issues including imposing higher registration charges and congestion charges for owning more than one vehicle.

**What else has the NGT said?**
- The NGT has directed that in these two weeks time, the Ministry of Surface Transport, MoEF, Urban Development, Ministry of Petroleum, Delhi government and other authorities concerned should submit their complete reasoned and scientifically supported views of all vehicles to be permitted to run in Delhi with reference to all sources of energy/fuel.
- It has also sought information on a cap on the number of vehicles to be registered in the NCR, Delhi with reference to sources of energy/fuel and incentives to those who adopt pool commutation/travel.

**Why stay was necessary?**
- The government, Ministry of Environment and Forests and other stake holders submitted that the prohibitory orders of the NGT are causing serious concern and practical difficulties to the government and the authorities.
- The Delhi government had also contended that the order was affecting supply of essential commodities like vegetables and basic amenities like waste collecting trucks were also being hit.

**Background:**
- The National Green Tribunal had recently banned all diesel vehicles over ten years old from plying in Delhi and the National Capital Region and also cracked the whip on rampant construction activity adding dust to the air. The SC had said that diesel vehicles are major source of pollution in the ambient air quality.

### Taiwan rejected from China-led Asia bank

- China has rejected Taiwan’s bid to become a founding member of the new Chinese-led infrastructure bank for Asia in a difference over the title the island uses, which could portend how Beijing will run the new institution.
- The Chinese government has said Taiwan will not be a member of a new regional bank, but would be welcome in the future under a different name.

**Details:**
Taiwan, which split from China in 1949, wanted to join the bank as an independent nation.

Taiwan’s government officially calls itself as the Republic of China. It goes by the name “Taipei, China” as a member of the Asian Development Bank, and is known as the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu at the World Trade Organization.

The two governments routinely spar over such issues as part of their larger tussle over Beijing’s claim that Taiwan is part of China.

Taiwan is not a member of the UN, World Bank or IMF but it has joined some international organisations under different names.

What China says?

China has expressed concerns that it goes against its one China policy under which it consider Taipei to be a part of it, even as it maintained that the island can join the bank with an “appropriate” identity.

About AIIB:

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is an international financial institution proposed by China. The purpose of the multilateral development bank is to provide finance to infrastructure projects in the Asia-Pacific region.

AIIB is regarded by some as a rival for the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which the AIIB says are dominated by developed countries like the United States and Japan.

The authorised capital of AIIB will be $100 billion. AIIB’s headquarters is to be located in Beijing.

India is the second largest shareholder in the Bank after China.

In October, 21 countries signed the memorandum of understanding establishing the bank.

It now has more than 40 members, with South Korea, Austria and Spain’s membership confirmed on Saturday.

The UK has applied to join the bank, earning a rare rebuke from the US in March which said it had “concerns” about whether the AIIB would meet governance standards and maintain environmental and social safeguards.

It is being called as a very positive development in the sense that it opens up more borrowing opportunities.

Mars might have transient liquid water

Scientists have found indirect evidence to support the presence of transient liquid water brine (very salty water) on Mars.

Details:

- The brine is likely to be present in the uppermost 5 cm of the Mars soil from sunset to sunrise during winter and for shorter windows of time during other seasons.
- At night, some of the water vapour in the atmosphere condenses as frost. Calcium perchlorate salt, which is globally present on Mars, absorbs the frost and forms brine by reducing the freezing temperature of water.
- The inference of transient liquid water on the red planet was based on the analysis of relative humidity, air temperature, and ground temperature data collected by Curiosity from the Gale Crater over one full Martian year. Scientists have also said that the transient nature of water is not conducive for the replication and metabolism of terrestrial micro-organisms.
Since the data collected by Curiosity is from the equator, the driest and warmest region of the red planet, the possibility of abundant brines in other regions of the planet is high due to greater atmospheric water content in the form of humidity and lower temperature. The presence of brine also affects the solubility of other salts in the uppermost 15 cm of soil.

**Is re-promulgation of land ordinance valid, SC asks Centre**

- The Supreme Court has agreed to examine the constitutionality of the President’s re-promulgation of the Land Acquisition Ordinance on the grounds that it subverted legislative process and ushered in ‘ordinance raj.’

**Why was it necessary?**

- Supreme Court, based on some petitions, has decided to do so. The farmers’ petition has termed the re-promulgation and the manner the government effected it by proroguing the Rajya Sabha on March 28, a “textbook example of blatant abuse” of the President’s power under Article 123 of the Constitution.
- The petition also said that the decision was a “clever device and ruse” to subvert the legislative process.
- The new Land Acquisition ordinance has incorporated all the nine amendments introduced when it was passed in the Lok Sabha. It now only requires the nod from the Upper House to become law.
- *An ordinance has a life of six months if promulgated when Parliament is not in session. Once the Houses are in session, the Land ordinance expires in six weeks.*

**Panel to look into post-66A security concerns**

- In the wake of the recent Supreme Court directive striking down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, the Union Home Ministry has set up a committee to recommend measures for addressing national security concerns.
- The committee is headed by Special Secretary (Internal Security) Ashok Prasad.

**Why was it necessary?**

- After the court declared Section 66A of the Information Technology Act unconstitutional, security agencies raised concerns about activities on digital media that threaten national security and inciting violence.

**Background:**

- The Supreme Court had on March 24 declared the Section 66A of the Information Technology Act unconstitutional, observing: “It is clear that Section 66A arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades the right of free speech and upsets the balance between such right and the reasonable restrictions that may be imposed on such right.”

**Will support India’s U.N. bid: Cameron**

- David Cameron, in his party manifesto, has promised that his party will support India’s bid for permanent representation on the United Nations Security Council.

**UNSC:**

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of
international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

**Why was it created?**

- Like the UN as a whole, the Security Council was created following World War II to address the failings of another international organization, the League of Nations, in maintaining world peace.

**Members:**

- The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body’s five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.
- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body’s presidency rotates monthly among its members.

**According to the UN Charter, the United Nations has four purposes:**

- To maintain international peace and security;
- To develop friendly relations among nations;
- To cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights;
- To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations.

- When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is brought before it, the Council’s first action is usually to recommend that the parties try to reach agreement by peaceful means. If a dispute leads to hostilities, the council’s primary concern is to bring them to an end as soon as possible by issuing ceasefire directives and by deploying military observers/peacekeeping force if necessary. The council may also opt for economic sanctions, blockade or even collective military action.

**Proposed reforms:**

- Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship.
- There is also a proposal admit more permanent members.
- Member States, regional groups and other Member State interest groupings developed different positions and proposals on how to move forward on this contested issue.
- The reform of the Security Council requires the agreement of at least two-thirds of UN member states and that of all the permanent members of the UNSC, enjoying the veto right.

**India and UNSC:**

- India was among the founding members of United Nations.
- It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.
- Today, India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN’s five big powers combined.
- India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it. It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.
Visa scheme renamed to avoid confusion: MHA

- The “Tourist Visa on Arrival—Electronic Travel Authorisation (TVoA-ETA)” scheme, which was launched last year to facilitate short-duration visits by travellers from as many as 44 countries, has now been renamed “e-Tourist Visa” to make it clear that it is not an on-arrival scheme.

Why was it changed?

- The name of the scheme [TVoA-ETA] is creating confusion among tourists, who are under the impression that the visa is being granted on arrival. However, in the present system, the pre-authorisation of visa has to be taken before travel.

Background:

- After some Indian embassies raised the issue with the Home Ministry seeking change of name, a committee comprising officials of the Bureau of Immigration, Home and External Affairs Ministries was formed to suggest a new name.
- Keeping in view the application process and the purpose of the scheme, the committee suggested ‘e-Tourist Visa’ as the appropriate name.
- The government has issued 1.1 lakh visas under the new scheme that was launched on November 27 last year. According to the MHA, it will be extended to more countries and airports in a phased manner.

Legislators entering govt contracts after election liable for disqualification: Supreme Court

- The Supreme Court recently ruled that a legislator shall stand disqualified not only if he has a business contract with the government and its instrumentalities at the time of filing nomination papers, but also if he does so after he is elected.

What has the SC said?

- The SC said that the purity of legislative process had to be considered paramount and the pertinent provision in the Representation of the People Act ought to be interpreted in a manner so as to “avoid conflict of personal interest and duty of the legislators.”
- Section 9A in the Act states that a person shall be disqualified if, and for so long as, there “subsists” a contract by him with the appropriate government. The Court said that the word “subsists” cannot be construed to mean that a person will not be allowed to contest only if he has a contract with the government at the time of polls.
- It also clarified its previous judgments over “office of profit” wherein the top court had taken the view that the expression should not be construed in a way that would shut out many prominent and eligible persons from contesting the election.
- While holding that the Governor’s order was appealable, the Court also removed an anomalous situation wherein the Election Commission was obligated to conduct a by-poll to fill up the vacant seat within six months but the decision on the appeal in the court could take longer. The bench fixed a time-frame of 16 weeks for a disqualified legislator to challenge the Governor’s order and a subsequent decision by the high court concerned.

Background:

- The judgment came as the SC upheld disqualification of BJP MLA Bajrang Bahadur Singh from Pharenda constituency in Uttar Pradesh over taking government contracts even after being elected. The Governor had issued the disqualification order on January 29, which Singh had challenged.
China issues white paper on Tibet

- The Chinese government has issued a white paper on southwest China’s Tibet Autonomous Region, applauding its development path and denouncing the “middle way” advocated by the Dalai Lama.

Details of the White Paper:
- The white paper, under the title “Tibet’s Path of Development Is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide”, holds that Tibet’s current development path is correct.
- It says that Tibet’s continual progress on its present path of development is an objective requirement of modern civilization. It accords with the progressive trend of human society, the prevailing conditions and the current reality in China, and the fundamental interests of all ethnic groups in Tibet.
- The report accuses the Dalai group of being opportunistic in the talks with the central government.
- The report presents a rich collection of evidence to prove that the Dalai Lama and his supporters have never abandoned the use of violence to promote their ultimate goal of “Tibetan independence”.
- China has also said that greater autonomy for Tibet was not up for discussion and has accused the spiritual leader of backing “ethnic cleansing”.
- Beijing uses this progress as evidence that its rule over Tibet is the only possible path for development. Any person or force that attempts to resist the tide will simply be cast aside by history and by the people.

Govt. forms panel to review Official Secrets Act

- A high-level committee formed by the Union government to look into the provisions of the Official Secrets Act in the light of the Right to Information (RTI) Act is all set to meet for the first time under the chairmanship of the Home Secretary.

Purpose of this meet:
- The meeting will start a long-awaited process to do away with excessive secrecy through amendments in the Official Secrets Act, a law enacted by the British in 1923.
- The committee was formed with aim to make changes to the Official Secrets Act to complete the transition from the secrecy regime of the past century to a more modern and democratic transparency regime.

Official Secrets Act:
- It is India’s anti espionage (Spy” and “Secret agent”) act enacted in 1923 during the British Rule.
- It states clearly that any action which involves helping an enemy state against India is illegal.
- It also states that one cannot approach, inspect, or even pass over a prohibited government site or area.
- According to this Act, helping the enemy state can be in the form of communicating a sketch, plan, model of an official secret, or of official codes or passwords, to the enemy.
- The disclosure of any information that is likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, or friendly relations with foreign States, is punishable by this act.
- Punishments under the Act range from three to fourteen years imprisonment. A person prosecuted under this Act can be charged with the crime even if the action was unintentional and not intended to endanger the security of the state. The Act only
empowers persons in positions of authority to handle official secrets, and others who handle it in prohibited areas or outside them are liable for punishment.

Conflict with the RTI Act:
- In Clause 6 of the Official Secrets Act, information from any governmental office is considered official information, hence it can be used to override Right to Information Act 2005 requests. This has drawn harsh criticism.

Bike ambulance to serve accident victims in Bengaluru
- Bengaluru has become the first city in the country to get an ambulance service on two-wheelers.
- The Karnataka government has taken the novel initiative to launch the Bike Ambulance service to reach out to patients and accident victims stuck in congested city areas.
- To begin with, the health department of Karnataka has launched 30 motorcycle ambulances.

Details:
- The two-wheeled ambulances are equipped with first-aid kits and oxygen cylinders, and the rider will be a trained paramedic with a driving licence.
- The 30 First Responder Bikes, launched alongside the already existing 711 ‘Arogya Kavacha’ 108 Ambulances, are stationed at hotspots in Bangalore so that they reach accident spots within “Platinum 10” minutes to provide care to the affected.

RBI allows differential interest rates for term deposits above Rs. 15 lakh
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has said that banks will have the discretion to offer differential interest rates for term deposits above Rs. 15 lakh.

What else has the RBI said?
- All term deposits of individuals — held singly or jointly — of Rs.15 lakh and below should, necessarily, have premature withdrawal facility. All term deposits above Rs.15 lakh, banks can offer deposits without the option of premature withdrawal as well.
- Banks that offer term deposits should ensure that at the customer interface point, the customers are, in fact, given the option to choose between term deposits either with or without premature withdrawal facility.
- Banks are told to disclose in advance the schedule of interest rates payable on deposits.
- Banks are allowed to offer differential rates of interest on term deposits on the basis of tenor for deposits less than Rs.1 crore and on the basis of quantum and tenor on term deposits of Rs.1 crore and above. However, they are not permitted to differentiate on the basis of any other parameter of the deposit contract.
- RBI also said that banks should have a board approved policy with regard to interest rates on deposits including deposits with differential rates of interest and ensure that the interest rates offered are reasonable, consistent, transparent and available for supervisory review/scrutiny as and when required.
New visa scheme for tourists from Sri Lanka

- India has launched e-tourist Visa Scheme (eTV) aimed at making visa facility easier for India-bound Sri Lankans.
- **Who can avail this facility?**
- Those Sri Lankans holding ordinary passports can avail themselves of the facility.
- **Validity of these Visas:**
- Visas to be issued under the new scheme will be for single-entry and valid for only 30 days’ stay from the date of arrival in India.
- **Details:**
- Entry into India must be through any of the nine designated airports.
- A fee of $60 will be levied per person for the new scheme.
- The launch of the scheme follows the announcement made by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Colombo last month.

India’s ‘Parrot Lady’ to fly back home

- Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently handed over to his counterpart, Narendra Modi, the 800-year-old Indian sandstone sculpture of a woman holding a parrot.
- **Details about the Sculpture:**
- The three-foot high statue of ‘Parrot Lady’ turned up in Canada in 2011 in the possession of an individual who did not have proper documentation; it was seized under the Cultural Property Export and Import which controls antiquities and other cultural objects being imported from foreign states.
- The sculpture dates back to the 12th century.
- The Parrot Lady is what is known as a naayika, or heroine. She is voluptuous, scantily clad, posed in a manner that is a tad saucy, and has a parrot on her back. She is just one of many erotic stone ladies that were created to adorn the Khajuraho temples.
- It was returned in accordance with the 1970 UNESCO Convention.

1970 UNESCO Convention:

- It is the first international instrument dedicated to the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property.
- It was adopted at the 16th General Conference of UNESCO on 14 November 1970 in Paris and came into force on 24 April 1972.
- 127 states are parties to the treaty.
- The provisions contained in the 1970 Convention aim to protect cultural property against theft and looting while emphasizing the restitution of such items. The Convention stresses three main principles for States to follow.
- Preventive measures Firstly, States Parties are requested to take preventive measures to impede the illicit import and export of cultural property from their territory. These measures include, among others, inventories, export certificates, monitoring of trade, imposition of penal or administrative sanctions and educational programs.
- Restitution provisions (Art.7 of the Convention) Secondly, States are requested to return cultural property. Under the restitution provisions of the Convention, States Parties take appropriate steps to recover and return cultural property illicitly stolen from the territory of another State party to the Convention and imported into their territory after the entry
into force of this Convention for both States concerned. Innocent purchasers and persons with a valid claim to such cultural property are entitled to a just compensation. Restitution requests are made through diplomatic offices.

- International cooperation

Lastly, the Convention strives to set up an international cooperation framework to strengthen ties between States Parties to the Convention. In particular, such cooperation allows for States whose cultural heritage is in jeopardy due to pillaging of archaeological or ethnological materials, to ask other affected States for assistance, through the creation of import and export controls and general measures to prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural property.

- Under the provisions of the 1970 Convention, a State Party can seek the recovery and return of any illegally exported or stolen cultural property imported into another State Party only after the entry into force of this Convention in both States concerned. However, the 1970 Convention does not in any way legitimize any illegal transaction of any nature which has taken place before the entry into force of this Convention nor limit any right of a State to make a claim under provisions of relevant national legislations or international instruments.

**Free speech not an excuse for abusing nationally revered figures, says SC**

- The Supreme Court recently observed that one cannot resort to abusive language against historical figures in the guise of artistic expression and free speech to accentuate sensationalism.
- The court said though a person might have the liberty of thoughts, it could not be an excuse for abusing nationally revered figures.

**Background:**

- The Court was dealing with a plea of a Marathi writer, who faced a criminal case over writing an “obscene” poem on Mahatma Gandhi.
- The poem was published in the in-house magazine of the Bank of Maharashtra Employees Union in 1994.
- The editor of the Magazine faced charges of publishing the ‘vulgar and obscene’ poem.

**New I-T return forms to curb black money**

- As per the new income tax return forms, notified by the Central Board of Direct Taxes Indian taxpayers have to disclose details of all bank accounts held by them in the country and also foreign trips.

**Details:**

- This new disclosure will start with the assessment year 2015-16.
- Individuals having income from salary, pension, one house property and other sources like interest file the returns in ITR-1 form. Apart from this if they earn income from capital gains and foreign assets they file returns in ITR-2 forms. The new forms require an assesse to furnish the number of accounts he/she holds including those opened and closed during the previous year and the balance in the account as on March 31.
- The assesse will also have to furnish the name of the bank, account number/numbers, its address, The Indian Financial System Code (IFSC code) and any possible joint account holder.
On foreign travel, tax payers are required to disclose passport number, the issuance place of the passport, countries visited, number of times such visits are made and in case of a resident taxpayer, the expenses incurred from own sources in relation to such travel.

The new ITR forms, this time, also feature a new column to include the Aadhaar number of the assessee.

Another feature now is if an assessee has forgotten to file his return or revised return within deadline, he can approach the CBDT directly and get permission to file the return, which the authority will decide on the merits.

The requirements for additional disclosure come, as the government is trying hard to curb black money and improve tax collections.

Moon formed 4.47 billion years ago, says study

According to a new study of meteorites, that provides clues to the giant collision which formed Earth and the lunar body, the moon may have been created about 4.47 billion years ago.

Details of the Study:

The Study says that a giant impact between a large protoplanet and the proto-Earth formed the Moon. The timing of this giant impact, however, is uncertain, with the ages of the most ancient lunar samples returned by the Apollo astronauts still being debated.

Research indicates numerous kilometre-sized fragments from the giant impact struck main belt asteroids at much higher velocities than typical main belt collisions, heating the surface and leaving behind a permanent record of the impact event.

Collisions on these asteroids in more recent times delivered these shocked remnants to Earth, which scientists have now used to date the age of the moon.

By modelling the evolution of giant impact debris over time and fitting the results to ancient impact heat signatures in stony meteorites, the team was able to infer that the moon formed about 4.47 billion years ago, in agreement with many previous estimates.

The most ancient solar system materials found in meteorites are about 100 million years older than this age. The impact signatures provide insights into the last stages of planet formation. They can also help researchers deduce the earliest bombardment history of ancient bodies like Vesta, one of the targets of NASA’s Dawn mission.

India is below Bhutan in broadband reach: TRAI

Telecom regulator TRAI recently said that India is ranked below Bhutan and Sri Lanka in terms of broadband penetration and the multi-layered structure involved in the decision making for the sector needs to be overhauled.

Details:

India ranks 125th in the world for fixed broadband penetration.

In the wireless or mobile broadband segment, India is ranked at 113th with a penetration of 3.2 per 100 inhabitants.

Suggestions made by TRAI:

To promote the use of fixed-line broadband, TRAI proposed that the licence fee on the revenues earned from fixed line should be exempted for 5 years.

TRAI suggested the need to revamp government bodies involved in decision making that impact spread of broadband including that of Wireless Planning Commission (WPC) — custodian of spectrum at Department of Telecom.
TRAI said WPC should be converted into an independent body by de-linking it from DoT and suggested that it could be converted into a statutory body reporting to Parliament or any other existing statutory body.

It has also said that multi-layered structure for decision making, for National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN), was not suitable and structure needs immediate overhaul. TRAI has also called for an audit of spectrum held by all the bodies.

NOFN project aims to spread broadband across 2.5 lakh village panchayats by 2016 but has missed its target of completing roll out in first 50,000 panchayats by March 2015.

Patel statue on green tribunal radar

- The National Green Tribunal has asked the Gujarat government to file a reply before May 8 to allegations of irregularities in the Sardar Patel Statue project made by activists.
  
  **Why?**
  
  - Activists allege violation of environmental rules.
  - The activists say the project has not obtained the mandatory permissions required under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification. Moreover, the site was on an active tectonic plate in a fault line area.
  - They say that the statue is just one part of a big tourism project for which environmental and wetland laws and safety and disaster-management norms had been given the go-by.
  
  **About the Project:**
  
  - The plan is to erect a giant statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, called the “Statue of Unity”, on the Sadhu Bet island on the Narmada near Vadodara.
  - It is expected to be the tallest in the world at 182 metres when completed. The Statue of Unity will be double the height of the Statue of Liberty in the USA and five times taller than the Statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
  - It is a tribute to the Iron Man of India.
  - The project would require extensive construction work on the active riverbed of the perennial Narmada and is likely to fall within a critical wetlands area to be notified under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010.
  - A glance at some of the world’s tallest statues:

Pudukottai CEO office gets ISO certification

- The office of the Chief Educational Officer, Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu, has bagged the ISO 9001:2008 certification.
- This is said to be the first Education Department office to get the certification.
- The certification is valid for three years. The agency would take up annual review on the services of the office for the next three years.

**Details of the Assessment:**

- Representatives of Max, a Swedish-based agency for ISO, ascertained the performance of employees of the office during the academic year 2014-15 and ascertained their efficiency in service during the start and end of the assessment.
- Service to people, leadership, system-based management, commitment to service, decision making on rational grounds, design in office, uniform clothes for employees on the lines of corporate sector and above all service to students and teachers were some of the factors which were analyzed.

**About ISO 9001:2008:**
• ISO 9001:2008 specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

• To get certified the organization should aim to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

• All requirements of ISO 9001:2008 are generic and are intended to be applicable to all organizations, regardless of type, size and product provided.

• Third-party certification bodies provide independent confirmation that organizations meet the requirements of ISO 9001.

Nod for climate change action plan

• Kerala is all set to launch a long-term programme to develop resilience to climate change.

• The Ministry of Forest, Environment, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has approved the Kerala State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC), strengthening the hands of the State in taking up a slew of climate change mitigation and adaptation projects.

Details of the Plan:

• It is a five-year package which envisages a budget requirement of Rs.1,170 crore for projects in eight key sectors, namely agriculture and animal husbandry, fisheries and coastal ecosystem, forest and biodiversity, water resources, health, energy, urban front, and transport and tourism.

• It seeks to address the negative consequences of climate change and reduce the associated risks.

• It also aims at integrating climate change strategies into the development planning process.

Challenges posed by changing Climate?

• According to the projected climate change scenario, the atmospheric temperature across Kerala would rise by 2 degrees Celsius by 2050. It estimates that if the sea level rises by one metre, 169 sq km of the coastal region surrounding Kochi would be inundated.

• Paddy production in Kerala would drop by 6% with each degree rise in temperature. Crops such as cardamom, coffee, tea, and black pepper will also be affected by higher temperature and changing rainfall pattern.

Manipur on high alert to tackle bird flu

• The Manipur government has officially confirmed outbreak of bird flu in the State.

• Culling of the chickens, ducks and other fowls will start soon in 1 km radius of Imphal and the operation will gradually be widened to a radius of 10 km which is regarded as the affected zone for the time being. The government will pay adequate compensation to the owners and chicken farmers.

Avian flu:

• Avian influenza (AI), commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds often causing no apparent signs of illness.

• Spread: AI viruses can sometimes spread to domestic poultry and cause large-scale outbreaks of serious disease. Some of these AI viruses have also been reported to cross the species barrier and cause disease or subclinical infections in humans and other mammals.
**Effects on Humans:**
- Most avian influenza viruses do not infect humans; however some, such as A(H5N1) and A(H7N9), have caused serious infections in people.
- The majority of human cases of A(H5N1) and A(H7N9) infection have been associated with direct or indirect contact with infected live or dead poultry. There is no evidence that the disease can be spread to people through properly cooked food.
- Controlling the disease in animals is the first step in decreasing risks to humans.
- Initial symptoms include high fever, usually with a temperature higher than 38°C, and other influenza-like symptoms (cough or sore throat). Diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, chest pain, and bleeding from the nose and gums have also been reported as early symptoms in some patients.

**Treatment:**
- Evidence suggests that some antiviral drugs, notably oseltamivir, can reduce the duration of viral replication and improve prospects of survival.
- In cases of severe infection with the A(H5N1) or A(H7N9) virus, clinicians may consider increasing the recommended daily dose or/and the duration of treatment.

**History:**
- The A(H5N1) virus subtype, a highly pathogenic AI virus, first infected humans in 1997 during a poultry outbreak in Hong Kong SAR, China. Since its widespread re-emergence in 2003 and 2004, this avian virus has spread from Asia to Europe and Africa and has become entrenched in poultry in some countries, resulting in millions of poultry infections, several hundred human cases, and many human deaths. Outbreaks in poultry have seriously impacted livelihoods, the economy and international trade in affected countries.
- India had declared itself free from H5N1 Avian Influenza (bird flu) as there had been no occurrence of the disease for three months.

**Usually, what measures are taken by the Government?**
- The entire infected poultry population and its eggs, feed, litter and other infected material will be stamped out within a radius of one km.
- Restrictions on the movement of poultry will be imposed and the affected area will be cleaned up and disinfected.
- Regular surveillance will be maintained, especially in vulnerable areas bordering infected countries and in areas visited by migratory birds.

**Uttarakhand gets new tiger reserve**
- Uttarakhand now has a second tiger reserve, besides the Corbett Tiger Reserve.
- Uttarakhand is the State with the second highest tiger population after Karnataka.
- The Rajaji National Park has now been notified as the Rajaji Tiger Reserve by the Centre.

**Project Tiger:**
- Project Tiger is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, providing central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves. It was launched in 1973.
- The Project Tiger aims to foster an exclusive tiger agenda in the core areas of tiger reserves, with an inclusive people oriented agenda in the buffer.
- From 9 tiger reserves since its formative years, the Project Tiger coverage has increased to 48 at present, spread out in 17 of our tiger range states. This amounts to around 2.08% of the geographical area of our country.
• The tiger reserves are constituted on a core/buffer strategy. The core areas have the legal status of a national park or a sanctuary, whereas the buffer or peripheral areas are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.
• The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 was amended in 2006 keeping in view the needs of the Project Tiger for providing enabling provisions for constitution of the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Tiger and Other Endangered Species Crime Control Bureau.

The functions of NTCA are as follows:
• Ensuring normative standards in tiger reserve management
• Preparation of reserve specific tiger conservation plan
• Laying down annual/audit report before Parliament
• Instituting State level Steering Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister and establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation.
• According approval for declaring new Tiger Reserves.

Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF):
• Creation of Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) was announced in 2008.
• A onetime grant of Rs. 50 Crore was provided to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for raising, arming and deploying a Special Tiger Protection Force for 13 tiger reserves. The rest of the reserves were taken up later.

India fifth biggest generator of e-waste in 2014: U.N. report
• The ‘Global E-Waste Monitor 2014’, compiled by U.N.’s think tank United Nations University (UNU), has warned that the volume of global e-waste is likely to rise by 21% in next three years.

Important observations made by the Report:
• At 32%, the U.S. and China produced the most e-waste overall in 2014. India is behind the U.S., China, Japan and Germany. India is the fifth biggest producer of e-waste in the world.
• Most e-waste in the world in 2014 was generated in Asia at 16 Mt or 3.7 kg per inhabitant. The top three Asian nations with the highest e-waste generation in absolute quantities are China (6.0 Mt), Japan (2.2 Mt) and India (1.7 Mt).
• The top per capita producers by far are the wealthy nations of northern and western Europe, the top five being Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Denmark, and the U.K.
• The lowest amount of e-waste per inhabitant was generated in Africa (1.7 kg/inhabitant). The continent generated 1.9 Mt of e-waste in total.
• In 2014, people worldwide discarded all but a small fraction of an estimated 41.8 Mt of electrical and electronic equipment — mostly end-of-life kitchen, laundry and bathroom equipment like microwave ovens, washing machines and dishwashers.
• While only 7% of e-waste last year was made up of mobile phones, calculators, personal computers, printers, and small information technology equipment, almost 60% was a mix of large and small equipment used in homes and businesses, such as vacuum cleaners, toasters, electric shavers, video cameras, washing machines, electric stoves, mobile phones, calculators, personal computers, and lamps.
Protection only for honest public servants: apex court

- In a judgment with far-reaching effect on numerous cases pending under the Prevention of Corruption Act, the Supreme Court has held that a public servant cannot by default claim legal protection of prior sanction against prosecution.

What has the Supreme Court said?

- Under Section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.PC), no court should take cognisance of criminal charges against a public servant unless previous sanction to prosecute him is received from a competent authority.
- This safeguard is meant to help government servants perform their duties honestly without fear of malicious prosecution. However, the provision has largely become a ruse to delay prosecution in corruption cases.
- Besides, this protection cannot be claimed immediately after a complaint is lodged. The question of prior sanction would be considered later, during stages in the criminal trial, as and when the need arises, the apex court observed.

Background:

- The judgment came in a clutch of criminal appeals filed by the Andhra Pradesh police in 2013 against a High Court order quashing criminal proceedings against two revenue officials who successfully claimed protection under Section 197 of CrPC.
- The duo figured among 41 people, including revenue officials, stamp vendors and document writers, against whom the police registered an FIR in 1999 for allegedly manipulating registers and undervaluing property, causing loss to the government.
- Setting aside the High Court order to quash the criminal proceedings against them, the SC held that the trial should be completed expeditiously before December 31 this year.

CrPC section 197:

- Public servants have been treated as special category under Section 197 of CrPC to protect them from malicious or vexatious prosecution. Such protection from harassment is given in public interest.

Price Stabilization Fund

- The Department of Agriculture & Cooperation has approved the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) as a Central Sector Scheme, with a corpus of Rs.500 crores.

Why?


How it will be used?

- PSF will be used to advance interest free loan to State Governments/Union Territories and Central agencies to support their working capital and other expenses on procurement and distribution interventions for such commodities.
- Initially the fund is proposed to be used for onion and potato only.
- The one time advance to the States/UTs based on their first proposal along with matching funds from the State/UT will form a revolving fund, which can then be used for all future market interventions to control prices of onions and potatoes based on approvals by State level Committee set up explicitly for this purpose.
- In case of North Eastern States, the State level corpus will comprise of 75% funds from Centre and 25% from the State. While the advance is returnable, the Central Government will share 50% of losses (75% in case of NE states), if any, at the time of settlement of the advance on 31st March, 2017. The Central Government also intends to share the profits, if any, in the same ratio.
The States could also request Central Agencies to undertake such operations on their behalf to be supported out of the State corpus. Additionally, the Centre can also request the Central Agencies like SFAC, NAFED, etc. to undertake price control operations for onion and potato.

**Fund management:**
- The Price Stabilization Fund will be managed centrally by a Price Stabilization Fund Management Committee (PSFMC) which will approve all proposals from State Governments and Central Agencies.
- The PSF will be maintained in a Central Corpus Fund account to be opened by Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), which will act as Fund Manager.
- Procurement of these commodities will be undertaken directly from farmers or farmers’ organizations at farm gate/mandi and made available at a more reasonable price to the consumers.

**India has 988 species on IUCN ‘Red List’**
- India has added 15 more species to the “Red List” of threatened species published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2014.

**Details:**
- India is at the 7th position now with 988 threatened species on the list. In 2013, the number was 973. With 659 species in 2008, the increase over seven years is 50%, in part due to better research identifying more threatened species and deforestation.
- By adding 37 species, China seemed to have helped India improve its rank.
- A recent World Bank mapping of endangered mammals shows India as having the fourth largest number of threatened species in the world, 31 of them endemic to the region.

**IUCN:**
- IUCN was founded in October 1948 as the International Union for the Protection of Nature (or IUPN) following an international conference in Fontainebleau, France.
- It was renamed as International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1956 with the acronym IUCN.
- IUCN is the world’s first global environmental organization. Today it is the largest professional global conservation network.
- The Union’s HQ is located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland.
- It demonstrates how biodiversity is fundamental to addressing some of the world’s greatest challenges such as climate change, sustainable development and food security.
- The IUCN Red List is set upon precise criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species and subspecies. These criteria are relevant to all species and all regions of the world. The aim is to convey the urgency of conservation issues to the public and policy makers, as well as help the international community to try to reduce species extinction.
- Species are classified by the IUCN Red List into nine groups, set through criteria such as rate of decline, population size, area of geographic distribution, and degree of population and distribution fragmentation.

**Navy’s stealth destroyer launched**
- The Indian Navy recently launched the stealth destroyer INS Visakhapatnam at Mumbai’s Mazagon dock.

**Details:**
- INS Visakhapatnam is the first of P15-B stealth destroyers.
The 163 m long ship, which will be propelled by four gas turbines, is designed to achieve a speed of over 30 knots at a displacement of approximately 7300 tons.

This indigenously designed stealth destroyer will have state-of-the-art weapons, sensors, an advance Action Information System, in Integrated Platform Management system, sophisticated Power Distribution System and a host of other advanced features.

It will be fitted with supersonic surface-to-surface missile system. The system enables the ship to engage shore-based and naval surface targets at long range making it a lethal platform for strike against enemy targets.

The ship’s air defence capability, designed to counter the threat of enemy aircraft and anti-ship cruise missiles, will revolve around the vertical launch and long range surface to air missile system.

Indigenously developed twin tube torpedo launchers and rocket launchers will add punch to the ship’s anti-submarine capability.

The vessel is follow-on of P15A-Kolkata class destroyers with enhanced features.

Centre extends food security Act deadline

The period for identification of households eligible for coverage under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) has been extended up to September 30, 2015 through an order issued by the Department of Food and Public Distribution.

The deadline has been extended, for the second time, because States have not yet identified beneficiaries, and also due to lack of preparedness in 25 States/Union Territories for implementing the Act.

Though the law stipulates that any such orders made under the Act are tabled in Parliament, the Centre has no such plans.

What the Act says

As per Section 42 of the NFSA Act, “if any difficulty arises in giving effect to the provisions of this Act, the Central government may, by order, published in the Official Gazette, make such provisions, not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, as appear to it to be necessary or expedient for removing the difficulty.” But this is upon the condition that “every order made under this Section shall be laid, as soon as may be after it is made, before each House of Parliament.”

About National Food Security Act, 2013:

Also called as the Right to Food act, this act aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India’s 1.2 billion people.

It extends to the whole of India.

Under the provisions of this act, beneficiaries are able to purchase 5 kilograms per eligible person per month of cereals at the following prices:

- Rice at 3 Rupees per kg
- Wheat at 2 Rupees per kg
- Coarse grains (millet) at 1 rupee per kg.

Salient features:

- 75% rural and 50% of the urban population are entitled for three years from enactment to five kg food grains per month at 3 Rupees, 2 Rupees, 1 Rupee per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains (millet), respectively.
- The states are responsible for determining eligibility.
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a nutritious “take home ration” of 600 Calories and a maternity benefit of at least Rs 6,000 for six months.
- Children 6 to 14 years of age are to receive free hot meals or “take home rations.”
The central government will provide funds to states in case of short supplies of food grains.

The state government will provide a food security allowance to the beneficiaries in case of non-supply of food grains.

The Public Distribution System is to be reformed.

The eldest woman in the household, 18 years or above, is the head of the household for the issuance of the ration card.

There will be state- and district-level redress mechanisms and State Food Commissions will be formed for implementation and monitoring of the provisions of the Act.

The poorest who are covered under the Antodaya yojana will remain entitled to the 35 kg of grains allotted to them under the mentioned scheme.

The cost of the implementation is estimated to be $22 billion (1.25 lac crore), approximately 1.5% of GDP.

**NCDC team in Goa to study Kyasanur Forest Disease**

A team from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi, is presently in Goa carrying out detailed investigation of the outbreak Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) and also give expertise in prevention and control measures in the affected areas.

**About the Disease:**

KFD is caused by the Kyasanur Forest Disease Virus (KFDV). The virus was identified in 1957 when it was isolated from a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest in. Since then, between 400-500 humans cases per year have been reported.

Hard ticks (Hemaphysalis spinigera) are the reservoir of the KFD virus and once infected, remain so for life.

Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick. KFDV can cause epizootics with high fatality in primates.

Transmission to humans may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal, most importantly a sick or recently dead monkey. No person-to-person transmission has been described.

The disease as of now is stated to be transmitted through monkeys. Large animals such as goats, cows, and sheep may become infected with KFD but play a limited role in the transmission of the disease.

These animals provide the blood meals for ticks and it is possible for infected animals with viremia to infect other ticks, but transmission of KFDV to humans from these larger animals is extremely rare. Furthermore, there is no evidence of disease transmission via the unpasteurised milk of any of these animals.

**Symptoms:**

After an incubation period of 3-8 days, the symptoms of KFD begin suddenly with chills, fever, and headache. Severe muscle pain with vomiting, gastrointestinal symptoms and bleeding problems may occur 3-4 days after initial symptom onset. Patients may experience abnormally low blood pressure, and low platelet, red blood cell, and white blood cell counts.

After 1-2 weeks of symptoms, some patients recover without complication. However, the illness is biphasic for a subset of patients (10-20 %) who experience a second wave of symptoms at the beginning of the third week. These symptoms include fever and signs of neurological manifestations, such as severe headache, mental disturbances, tremors, and vision deficits.

**Vulnerable Group:**
• People with recreational or occupational exposure to rural or outdoor settings (e.g., hunters, herders, forest workers, farmers) are potentially at risk for infection by contact with infected ticks.
• Seasonality is another important risk factor as more cases are reported during the dry season, from November through June.

**Diagnosis:**
• Diagnosis can be made in the early stage of illness by molecular detection by PCR or virus isolation from blood. Later, serologic testing using enzyme-linked immunosorbent serologic assay (ELISA) can be performed.

**Prevention**
• Doctors say there is no specific treatment for KFD, but early hospitalisation and supportive therapy is important. Supportive therapy includes the maintenance of hydration and the usual precautions for patients with bleeding disorders.
• A vaccine does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India. Additional preventative measures include insect repellents and wearing protective clothing in areas where ticks are endemic.

**Previous outbreaks:**
• The disease has historically been limited to the western and central districts of Karnataka State, India. However, in November 2012, samples from humans and monkeys tested positive for KFDV in the southernmost district of the State which neighbours Tamil Nadu State and Kerala State, indicating the possibility of wider distribution of KFDV.

**India to hand over three Cheetal copters to Kabul**
• India has planned to hand over three indigenously-built **Cheetal multi-role helicopters** to Afghanistan during the upcoming visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Afghanistan.
• This comes amid increasing perception that India’s strategic space in Afghanistan is under threat after formation of the new Unity government there and its major policy shift towards Pakistan and China.

**Cheetals:**
• Cheetals are the upgraded variants of Cheetah light utility, multi-role helicopters built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.
• They can be used for personnel transport, casualty evacuation, reconnaissance and aerial survey, logistic support and rescue and can operate in high-altitude areas, a critical requirement for Afghanistan’s mountainous regions.
• They have been customised as per the requirements of Afghanistan and will not be armed.
• Choppers are being supplied under the strategic partnership agreement between the two countries signed in 2011. Afghanistan has in the past repeatedly requested India for military assistance and lethal hardware, including tanks, helicopters and artillery guns among others in addition to training of military personnel. But India had been reluctant to antagonise Pakistan which views India’s role in Afghanistan with suspicion.

**‘One rank, one pension scheme in this session’**
• The government is planning to introduce the one rank, one pension scheme for all military personnel in the current session of Parliament.

http://www.insightsonindia.com
This is a scheme which will ensure that soldiers of the same rank and the same length of service receive the same pension, irrespective of their retirement date. In simple words, it demands equal pensions for those who have retired in one particular year, as those who retire in another year at the same position, and for the same duration of services rendered.

The difference in the pension of present and past pensioners in the same rank occurs on account of the number of increments earned by the defence personnel in that rank.

So far, there was no such rule. While every pay commission bumps the salaries of government servants, pensions of ex-servicemen remain the same.

The implementation of one rank, one pension is also expected to push up the Centre’s defence pension payments by a record 40 per cent, posing fresh challenges to keep the Centre’s fiscal deficit within the budgetary target of 4.1 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product.

**China, Pakistan launch economic corridor link worth $46 bn**

China and Pakistan recently launched a plan for energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan worth $46 billion, linking their economies and underscoring China’s economic ambitions in Asia and beyond.

**Details:**

- The plan, which would eclipse US spending in Pakistan over the last decade or so, is part of China’s aim to forge “Silk Road” land and sea ties to markets in West Asia and Europe.
- The corridor would transform Pakistan into a regional hub and give China a shorter and cheaper route for trade with much of Asia, West Asia and Africa.
- The Corridor will link China’s underdeveloped far—western region to Pakistan’s Gwadar deep—sea port on the Arabian Sea via PoK through a massive and complex network of roads, railways, business zones, energy schemes and pipelines.
- The corridor will pass through Pakistan’s poor Baluchistan province, where a long-running separatist insurgency that the army has vowed to crush will raise questions about the feasibility of the plan.
- The corridor — expected to be ready in three years and provide about 10,400 MWs of electricity — gives China direct access to the Indian Ocean and beyond.
- The planned Chinese spending exceeds that of the US, which has given $31 billion to Pakistan since 2002, according to the Congressional Research Service. About two-thirds of that was earmarked for security.

**E-Samiksha launched**

The Indian Railways recently launched E-Samiksha, an online monitoring mechanism.

**Why?**

- To monitor implementation of various ongoing projects including Rail Budget proposals.

**Benefits:**

- This portal would help to keep an eye on the implementation of budget commitments. This portal will mainly focus on Budget Review, Board Meetings, Zonal Railway Review, Infrastructure Targets and Project Implementation Review.

**Details:**

- E-Samiksha is a real time, on-line system for monitoring of follow-up action on the decisions taken during the presentations made by different Ministries/Departments to the Prime Minister.
The follow-up action in respect of each decision is to be updated by the concerned Ministry/Department/Agency as and when the status changes or at least every month.

The software is designed by NIC.

The software is currently being used by Cabinet Secretariat, PMO and other Ministries for monitoring progress implementation of various programmes and follow-up of meetings.

**Three new havens for tigers**

- The Centre has planned to form three new tiger reserves.

**Their locations:**
- In-principle approval has been accorded by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for creation of reserves in:
  - Ratapani in Madhya Pradesh.
  - Sunabeda in Odisha.
  - Guru Ghasidas in Chhattisgarh.

**Other decisions taken by the NTCA:**
- The NTCA has accorded final approval to a proposal to declare Kudremukh National Park in Karnataka and Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand as tiger reserves.
- Seeking to provide more protected spaces for the endangered species, State governments have been asked to send conservation proposals for the following areas: Suhelwa in Uttar Pradesh, Mhadei in Goa, Srivilliputtur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary/ Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary/ Varushanadu Valley in Tamil Nadu, Dibang in Arunachal Pradesh and Cauvery-MM Hills in Karnataka.
- Punishments for violation of tiger reserve rules and hunting or altering the boundaries of tiger reserves have been enhanced. As per the Ministry’s country-level assessment, India hosted an estimated 2226 tigers in 2014.

**NTCA:**
- The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 was amended in 2006 keeping in view the needs of the Project Tiger for providing enabling provisions for constitution of the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Tiger and Other Endangered Species Crime Control Bureau.

**The functions of NTCA are as follows:**
- Ensuring normative standards in tiger reserve management
- Preparation of reserve specific tiger conservation plan
- Laying down annual/ audit report before Parliament
- Instituting State level Steering Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister and establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation.
- According approval for declaring new Tiger Reserves.

**Green tribunal’s thumbs up for waste-to-energy projects**

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has permitted the States, including Karnataka, to use incinerator technology for producing Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF), commonly known as waste-to-energy. This is being seen as a setback to those opposing burning of municipal solid wastes (MSW).

What else has the Tribunal said?
• The Tribunal has said that no waste could be directly put into the incinerators or for power generation, except the specifically permitted. Only those wastes that are found unrecyclable after segregation should be put into the incinerators.
• Also, the tribunal emphasised that it was not putting any absolute restriction on Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) being used as power generation fuel, but first effort should be made for composting of wet waste. The States are free to use RDF for generating fuel with due care and caution by framing necessary guidelines.
• The NGT has also directed dividing the State into clusters for locating sufficient number of incinerator plants. Authorities are asked to provide maximum space for plants to have large storage and processing area for wastes; ensure green belt of higher density around plants, and adopt new technologies.
• The Central Pollution Control Board and the Ministry of Environment and Forests were directed to prescribe specific guidelines for emissions from incinerators.

**Background:**
• The directions were issued on a case between MSW expert Almitra H. Patel vs. Union of India that was referred to the NGT by the Supreme Court, which since 1996 had issued several directions on management of MSW across the country.
• Based on this case, the Centre had formulated the MSW (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000.

**Refuse-derived fuel (RDF):**
• Also called **as Solid recovered fuel/ specified recovered fuel (SRF)** is a fuel produced by shredding and dehydrating solid waste (MSW) with a Waste converter technology.
• RDF consists **largely of combustible components of municipal waste** such as plastics and biodegradable waste.
• RDF is extracted from municipal solid waste using a mix of mechanical and/or biological treatment methods.

**The production of RDF may involve the following steps:**
• Bag splitting/Shredding
• Size screening
• Magnetic separation
• Coarse shredding
• Refining separation

**Uses of the Fuel:**
• RDF can be used in a variety of ways to produce electricity.
• It can be used alongside traditional sources of fuel in coal power plants.
• RDF can be fed into plasma arc gasification modules, pyrolysis plants and where the RDF is capable of being combusted cleanly or in compliance with the Kyoto Protocol, RDF can provide a funding source where unused carbon credits are sold on the open market via a carbon exchange.
• However, the use of municipal waste contracts and the bankability of these solutions is still a relatively new concept, thus RDF’s financial advantage may be debatable.

**Incinerator technology:**
• It is a waste treatment technology, which includes the combustion of waste for recovering energy.
• Incineration coupled with high temperature waste treatments are recognized as thermal treatments.
• During the process of incineration, the waste material that is treated is converted in to IBM, gases, particles and heat. These products are later used for generation of electricity.
The gases, flue gases are first treated for eradication of pollutants before going in to atmosphere.

- Incineration reduces the mass of the waste from 95 to 96%. This reduction depends upon the recovery degree and composition of materials. This means that incineration however, does not replace the need for landfilling but it reduced the amount to be thrown in it.

**IMD forecasts deficit monsoon**

- According to the recently released India Meteorological Department (IMD)’s annual monsoon forecast the southwest Monsoon’s overall rainfall prediction for 2015 is 93%, three percentage points below normal. The probability of deficit rainfall is higher at 33% over normal rainfall pegged at 28%.
- The report also notes that El Nino conditions are likely to persist during the south-west monsoon.

**India Meteorological Department (IMD):** It is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India. It was established in 1875.
- It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology.
- IMD is headquartered in New Delhi and operates hundreds of observation stations across India and Antarctica.
- It has the responsibility for forecasting, naming and distribution of warnings for tropical cyclones in the Northern Indian Ocean region, including the Malacca Straits, the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.
- IMD became a member of the World Meteorological Organization after independence in April 1949.
- In collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), the IMD also uses the Indian Remote Sensing series and the Indian National Satellite System (INSAT) for weather monitoring of the Indian subcontinent.
- IMD was the first weather bureau of a developing country to develop and maintain its own satellite system.

**Cabinet nod for juvenile law changes**

- The Union Cabinet recently cleared amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act that would allow juveniles aged between 16 and 18 to be tried as adults for heinous crimes such as murder and rape.

**Details:**
- The Bill, which seeks to amend the Juvenile Justice Act 2000, will be presented before Parliament in this session.
- The proposed new law gives the Juvenile Justice Board the power to assess whether the perpetrator of a heinous crime aged between 16 and 18, had acted as a ’child’ or as an ’adult.’
- The board will be assisted in this process by psychologists and social experts.
- The amendments to the draft Bill strike a fine balance between the demands of the stakeholders asking for continued protection of rights of juveniles and the popular demand of citizens in the light of increasing incidence of heinous crimes by young boys.
**Impacts of this decision:**
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development says that this two-stage trial brings about a balance that is sensitive to the rights of the child, protective of his legitimate interests and yet conscious of the need to deter crimes, especially brutal crimes against women.

**Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill 2014:**
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development had introduced the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill 2014 in the Lok Sabha in August 2014.
- Aim of the Bill: This Bill sought to make more robust, effective and responsive the legislative framework for children in need of care and protection as well as children in conflict with law.

**Important provisions in the Bill:**
- The bill clearly defines and classifies offences as petty, serious and heinous, and defines differentiated processes for each category. Keeping in view the increasing number of serious offences being committed by persons in the age group of 16-18 years and recognizing the rights of the victims as being equally important as the rights of juveniles, special provisions are proposed to tackle heinous offences committed by individuals in this age group.
- It also proposes to streamline adoption procedures for orphaned, abandoned and surrendered children.
- It establishes a statutory status for the Child Adoption Resources Authority (CARA).
- It also proposes several rehabilitation and social integration measures for institutional and non-institutional children. It provides for sponsorship and foster care as completely new measures.
- Mandatory registration of all institutions engaged in providing child care is required according to the Bill.
- New offences including illegal adoption, corporal punishment in child care institutions, the use of children by militant groups, and offences against disabled children are also incorporated in the proposed legislation.

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**ZSI to erect memorial at its founder’s grave**
- ZSI has decided to set up a plaque on the grave honouring its founder’s contribution to the organisation and science at large. ZSI is celebrating 2015 as its centenary year.

**Who was the founder?**
- **Thomas Nelson Annandale** was the first Director General of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) who travelled across the country and also to China, Malaya, Japan and Morocco looking for different species of fauna in the beginning of 20th century.
- He was a Scottish zoologist.

**About ZSI:**
- Established in 1916, it is a premier organization in zoological research and studies. It has its genesis in the establishment of the Zoological Section of the Indian Museum at Calcutta in 1875.
- It was established to promote the survey, exploration and research of the fauna in the region.
- The activities of the ZSI are coordinated by the Conservation and Survey Division in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

**Main objectives:**
- Exploration and Survey of Faunal Resources
- Taxonomic Studies
• Status Survey of Endangered Species
• Publication of Results through Departmental Journals
• Publication of Fauna of India
• Maintenance and Development of National Zoological Collections
• Red Data Book: Similar to the Red Data Book produced by IUCN, ZSI also releases a Red Data Book on Indian Animals. It was first published in 1983.
• The ZSI also participates in the Indian Antarctic Program, since its inception in 1989.

India ranks second in Cyber Attacks through social media

• According to a report from Symantec, a Security Solutions provider, India ranked second among nations that were most targeted for cyber crimes through the social media in 2014, after the US.

Notable observations made by the Report:
• While email remains a significant attack vector for cybercriminals, they continue to experiment with new methods across mobile devices and social networks to reach more people with less effort. India’s growing social media population proved to be a ready base for them.
• In 2014, India had the second highest number of social media scams globally and the highest in the Asia Pacific region. Over 80% of these scams were shared manually as attackers took advantage of people’s willingness to trust content shared by friends.

Supreme Court seeks govt. view on Army’s exit promotion policy

• The Supreme Court has sought the Centre’s response on whether it approved of the Army’s “command exit promotion” policy, quashed by the Armed Forces Tribunal, for officers of the rank of Colonel and above from January 2009.

Background:
• The Bench is hearing the appeal of the Defence Ministry against Armed Forces Tribunal’s decision to quash Army’s “command exit promotion” policy on the ground that it is violative of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution. The Supreme Court had on March 25 stayed the March 2 decision of AFT to quash the Army’s promotion policy.
• Some Army officers had claimed that the new promotion policy had adversely affected them as it is arbitrary and highly skewed in favour of Infantry and Artillery, as compared to other branches of the Army.

What is command exit promotion policy?
• It was implemented in 2009. The policy rigged promotions in favour of the two biggest arms – the infantry and artillery – by allocating them an unfairly large number of promotion vacancies at the “commanding officer” rank of colonel.

Issues:
• The infantry, which has 350-odd battalions, is also allocated responsibility to command 110 battalions of Rashtriya Rifles (RR) and Assam Rifles (AR), which are manned by officers from every arm/service. Reserving command for the infantry increased its colonel vacancies by 30%, from 350 to 460.
• To compound this advantage, the command tenure for the infantry was kept the shortest, just 2½ years. With 460 infantry colonels needed every 2½ years, that meant 184 colonel vacancies each year. The engineers and signals, both combat support arms, were
arbitrarily given command tenures of 4 years, reducing the number of colonels required from those arms. The logistics services were given 5 year command terms.

- The artillery’s command tenure was shortened from 3½ to just 3 years, similarly boosting its colonel vacancies.
- Overall, this has resulted in up to 60% of infantry and artillery lieutenant colonels being approved for promotion to colonel rank, while some other branches had approval ratings as low as 26%. This goes “against the fundamental right of equality of opportunity”.

**The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting gets ISO 9001:2008 Certification**

- British Standard Institute (BSI) has conferred the certificate of registration to Ministry of Information & Broadcasting for the Quality Management System as per the requirement of ISO 9001:2008 in respect of various permissions / licenses issued by the Ministry for the broadcasting, print and films sectors.
- These include permission / license for satellite television channels, teleports, multi-system operators, community radio stations, direct-to-home services, publication of Indian editions of foreign, technical and scientific foreign magazines of news and current affairs sector and facsimile edition of foreign newspapers and grant of permission for foreign film producers.
- The Ministry has been taking several initiatives to bring in more transparency and efficiency in the processes relating to grant of various permissions / licenses to the eligible applicants.
- The Ministry has put in place a well defined procedure and measures for ensuring quality of services offered to the customers on the basis of ISO 9001:2008. This will ensure delivery of services by the Ministry in a qualitative manner.
- The ministry of steel was the first central ministry to be awarded ISO 9001:2008, Quality Management System certification.

**About ISO 9001:2008:**

- ISO 9001:2008 specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.
- To get certified the organization should aim to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.
- All requirements of ISO 9001:2008 are generic and are intended to be applicable to all organizations, regardless of type, size and product provided.
- Third-party certification bodies provide independent confirmation that organizations meet the requirements of ISO 9001.

**Proposal to permit Reserve Bank of India to enter into Currency Swap Agreement with the central bank of Sri Lanka**

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, has given its ex-post-facto approval for entering into an agreement with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka for extending US$1.1 billion as a special /ad-hoc swap outside the Framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC Member Countries.
India has a Framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC Member Countries since 2012.

The facility is available to all SAARC member countries with a floor of US $100 million and ceiling of US $ 400 million within overall limit of US$ 2 billion and is valid till November 14, 2015.

RBI has proposed to make available US$400 million to Sri Lanka under this Framework and the remaining US$1.1 billion as a special/ad-hoc swap facility outside the Framework, but with the same terms and conditions, for 6 months against the request of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

**How would this help Sri Lanka?**

This will help Sri Lanka in availing a safety net against the probable volatility of their currency and provide short-term liquidity that would contribute to Sri Lanka’s economic recovery. This will also strengthen India’s bilateral relations and economic ties with Sri Lanka.

**What is this Currency Swap Arrangement (CSA)?**

This is an arrangement, between two friendly countries, which have regular, substantial or increasing trade, to basically involve in trading in their own local currencies, where both pay for import and export trade, at the pre-determined rates of exchange, without bringing in third country currency like the US Dollar.

In such arrangements no third country currency is involved, thereby eliminating the need to worry about exchange variations.

### Nai Roshni Scheme

The Minister of Minority Affairs recently said that the government has been successfully implementing the “Nai Roshni” Scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women from 2012-13.

**About the Scheme:**

- The scheme aims to empower and instill confidence among minority women by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, Banks and other institutions at all levels.
- The scheme is implemented through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The scheme is implemented with the involvement of the Gram Panchayat at village level and Local Urban bodies at the District level.

### Gorkha Rifles complete 200 years

The Gorkha Rifles, who have made a name for themselves across the globe with their exemplary courage and bravery, have completed 200 years of soldiering.

**Brief history:**

- It was raised in 1815.
- During the early 18th century, the Gorkhas from Nepal had extended their empire into Kumaon, Garhwal and Kangra Hills. This led to a confrontation with the British East India Company, resulting in the Gorkha War of 1815.
- Impressed by the fighting qualities of the Gorkhas, the East India Company offered to raise a Gorkha Regiment from the remnants of General Amar Singh Thapa’s army after the treaty of Sigauli.
• Thus, the First Nusseree (meaning friendly or loyal) Battalion came into being on April 24, 1815 at Subathu in Shimla Hills, the present home of the 14 Gorkha Training Centre.
• Since its raising, the Regiment has undergone a number of changes in its titles, the present being Third Gorkha Rifles.
• The war cry of the Battalion is “Aayo Gorkhali”.
• There are roughly around 30,000 Nepalese Gorkhas currently serving in the Indian Army’s seven Gorkha Rifles or regiments (1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th), each of which has five to six battalions (around 600 fighting soldiers each). The 200 years of service of the Gorkhas is also being marked by the British Army.

**Chile volcano erupts after 50 years**

• A volcano in Chile that had been inactive for 50-plus years has suddenly erupted, blasting huge clouds of ash into the air and forcing the evacuation of some 5,000 people.
• Chile has about 90 active volcanoes, of which Calbuco is considered one of the most dangerous.
• Chile is an American country in the south-west point of South America occupying a long, narrow strip of land between the Andes mountains to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. It borders Peru to the north, Bolivia to the northeast, Argentina to the east, and the Drake Passage in the far south. Chilean territory includes the Pacific islands of Juan Fernández, Salas y Gómez, Desventuradas, and Easter Island in Oceania. Chile also claims about 1,250,000 square kilometres (480,000 sq mi) of Antarctica, although all claims are suspended under the Antarctic Treaty.
• Barren Island Volcano is the only confirmed active volcano in India.

**Reserve Bank revises norms for priority sector lending**

• The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revamped priority sector lending (PSL) norms.

**Details:**
• Now, loans to sectors such as social infrastructure, renewable energy and medium enterprises will also be treated as PSL.
• The distinction between direct and indirect agriculture has been done away with. This means banks can meet their entire agriculture lending target – 18% of their net loans disbursed in the previous year – by funding to indirect agriculture, which includes loans to companies engaged in the agriculture sector.
• Loans to build agriculture infrastructure such as storage, as well as those for soil conservation and watershed development, will now be considered as farm lending. Loans for ancillary activities such as setting up agro clinics and agribusiness centres will also be part of farm lending.
• In the renewable energy segment, bank loans of up to Rs 15 crore for solar-based power generators, biomass-based power generators, wind mills, micro-hydel plants, etc, will be considered part of PSL. For individual households, the loan limit will be Rs 10,00,000 a borrower.
• On the home finance front, loans of up to Rs 28 lakh to individuals in metropolitan centres and up to Rs 20 lakh in other centres will qualify as PSL, provided the overall cost of the dwelling unit is Rs 35 lakh in the metropolitan centres and Rs 25 lakh in other centres.
• Bank advances to microfinance institutions (MFIs) for lending to individuals, members of self-help groups and joint liability groups will also qualify as PSL, provided the MFIs meet the norms prescribed for micro lending (loan pricing, amount, etc).

• Direct agriculture refers to individual farmers or groups directly engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Now, food and agro processing units will form part of agriculture.

**PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING:**

• Priority Sector Lending is an important role given by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the banks for providing a specified portion of the bank lending to few specific sectors like agriculture or small scale industries. This is essentially meant for an all round development of the economy as opposed to focusing only on the financial sector. Typically, these are small value loans to farmers for agriculture and allied activities, micro and small enterprises, poor people for housing, students for education and other low income groups and weaker sections.

**What is meant by Priority Sector?**

• Priority sector refers to those sectors of the economy which may not get timely and adequate credit in the absence of this special dispensation.

**CATEGORIES OF PRIORITY SECTOR:**

• Agriculture
• Micro and Small Enterprises
• Education (educational loans granted to individuals by banks)
• Housing
• Export Credit
• State sponsored organizations for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
• Consumption loans (under the consumption credit scheme for weaker sections)
• Loans to the software industry (having credit limit not exceeding Rs 1 crore from the banking system)

**Minimum Limits:**

• The limits are prescribed according to the ownership pattern of banks. While for local banks, both the public and private sectors have to lend 40 % of their net bank credit, or NBC, to the priority sector as defined by RBI, foreign banks (with 20 branches) have to lend 32% of their NBC to the priority sector.

**Specific targets within the priority sector:**

• Domestic banks have to lend 18 % of NBC to agriculture and 10 % of the NBC has to be to the weaker section. However, foreign banks have to lend 10 % of NBC to the small-scale industries and 12 % of their NBC as export credit.

• The rate of interest on various priority sector loans will be as per RBI’s directives issued from time to time, which is linked to Base Rate of banks at present. Priority sector guidelines do not lay down any preferential rate of interest for priority sector loans.

**RS passes Bill on transgender rights**

• A private member’s Bill was passed in Rajya Sabha for the first time in over three decades, with MPs cutting across party lines to unanimously endorse by voice vote a proposed legislation that aims to promote the rights of transgenders, including reservations and financial aid.

**Details:**

• The Bill aims at formulation and implementation of a comprehensive national policy for the upliftment of transgenders. After Act comes into force, there will be strong provisions to prevent abuse and violence towards transgenders.
• A National Transgender Welfare Commission and a special transgender court will also be set up.
• There are 58 clauses and 10 chapters in the Bill depicting different aspects of transgenders life from childhood to oldage, so that they are supported and integrated in the society.
• The bill demands reservation for the community in education, financial assistance and social inclusion.
• Introduction of a private member’s bill is a common practice. But such bills, soon after being introduced, are either withdrawn, left pending, or are taken up in the other house.
• Tamil Nadu was the first State to constitute a welfare board for the transgender community in the Country.

eVisa to Chinese nationals likely

• India is planning extend e-visa on arrival facility to Chinese nationals, a move that has been held up for several years due to opposition from security agencies.

eVisa:
• eVisa facility is available for citizens of over 40 eligible countries.
• The application for e-Tourist Visa must be made minimum 4 days in advance of the date of arrival.
• Visa is valid for 30 days from the date of arrival and can be obtained twice in a calendar year.
• e-Tourist Visa allows arrival at only 9 airports in the country.

Who is not eligible?
• Not available to Diplomatic/Official Passport Holders.
• Not available to individuals endorsed on Parent’s/Spouse’s Passport i.e. each individual should have a separate passport.
• Not available to International Travel Document Holders.

Opposition stalls GST Bill, Sonia leads walkout

• The GST Bill has met with stiff resistance from the opposition parties in the Lok Sabha.
• The Congress-led Opposition wants the bill to be sent to a parliamentary panel called the standing committee for scrutiny of the changes made in it before the house debates and votes on it.
• The bill amends the Constitution and so requires a two-thirds majority in both houses to vote for it, already has the consent of states, who are key stakeholders.
• The bill on GST, which will be the biggest tax reform after 1947, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December last year. A single rate of GST will replace central excise, state VAT, entertainment tax, octroi, entry tax, luxury tax and purchase tax on goods and services to ensure seamless transfer of goods and services.
• While liquor has been completely kept out of the GST, petroleum products like petrol and diesel will be part of the new regime from a date to be decided at a future date by the GST Council, which will have two-third of its members from states.

GST:
• The goods and services tax (GST) is a comprehensive value-added tax (VAT) on goods and services. It is an indirect tax levy on manufacture, sale and consumption of goods as well as services at a national level.
Through a tax credit mechanism, this tax is collected on value-added goods and services at each stage of sale or purchase in the supply chain. The system allows the set-off of GST paid on the procurement of goods and services against the GST which is payable on the supply of goods or services. However, the end consumer bears this tax as he is the last person in the supply chain. Experts say that GST is likely to improve tax collections and boost India’s economic development by breaking tax barriers between States and integrating India through a uniform tax rate.

What are the benefits of GST?

- Under GST, the taxation burden will be divided equitably between manufacturing and services, through a lower tax rate by increasing the tax base and minimizing exemptions.
- It is expected to help build a transparent and corruption-free tax administration. GST will be levied only at the destination point, and not at various points (from manufacturing to retail outlets).
- Currently, a manufacturer needs to pay tax when a finished product moves out from a factory, and it is again taxed at the retail outlet when sold.

How will it benefit the Centre and the States?

- It is estimated that India will gain $15 billion a year by implementing the Goods and Services Tax as it would promote exports, raise employment and boost growth. It will divide the tax burden equitably between manufacturing and services.

What are the benefits of GST for individuals and companies?

- In the GST system, both Central and State taxes will be collected at the point of sale. Both components (the Central and State GST) will be charged on the manufacturing cost. This will benefit individuals as prices are likely to come down. Lower prices will lead to more consumption, thereby helping companies.

Why are some States against GST; will they lose money?

- The governments of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu say that the information technology systems and the administrative infrastructure will not be ready by April 2016 to implement GST. States have sought assurances that their existing revenues will be protected.
- The central government has offered to compensate States in case of a loss in revenues.
- Some States fear that if the uniform tax rate is lower than their existing rates, it will hit their tax kitty. The government believes that dual GST will lead to better revenue collection for States.
- Some states also say that the information technology systems and the administrative infrastructure will not be ready by April 2016 (deadline) to implement GST.
- However, backward and less-developed States could see a fall in tax collections. GST could see better revenue collection for some States as the consumption of goods and services will rise.

Army Launches Operation Maitri

- As part of the Nation’s overall relief effort for Nepal, Indian Army has launched Operation Maitri.
- The following resources have been allocated so far as part of Operation Maitri, in support of the Nepalese Army’s relief effort:-
  - Medical Teams.
  - Engineer Task Forces(ETFs) consisting of manpower, skid steers and JCBs.
  - Blankets and 1,000 tents are on standby.
  - 10 INMARSATs for satellite communications have reached Nepal.
Earthquake

- An earthquake with an intensity of 7.9 on richter scale with epicenter 77 kilometer north-west of Kathmandu has been experienced in some parts of India.
- The impact of the earthquake has been felt in almost all northern States in India particularly in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal.

Details:
- The Earthquake has occurred at a depth of 10 Km with its Epicentral Region located in Nepal about 80 Km NW of Kathmandu.
- More than 30 aftershocks have also been reported.
- In geological terms, the tremor occurred like clockwork, 81 years after the region’s last earthquake of such a magnitude, in 1934.

Specific cause of the Earth Quake:
- It was triggered by the India tectonic plate, which is moving northwards into central Asia. This results in thrust-faulting and has thrown up the Himalayan mountain range.
- The India tectonic plate moving north at about 45mm a year is pushing under the Eurasian plate beneath the Himalayas. Two tectonic plates meet beneath the Himalayas along a fault line.
- It has triggered several other significant earthquakes in this region, including the 1934 quake at Bihar, which reached a magnitude of 8.2; the 7.5 event at Kangra in 1905; and the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, which reached 7.6.
- The Indian subcontinent collided with the Eurasia plate about 40 million to 50 million years ago.

Effects of the Earthquake:
- As the plates push against each other, friction generates stress and energy that builds until the crust ruptures.

Why Nepal?
- Nepal is prone to destructive earthquakes, not only because of the massive forces involved in the tectonic collision, but also because of the type of fault line the country sits on. Normal faults create space when the ground cracks and separates. Nepal lies on a so-called thrust fault, where one tectonic plate forces itself on top of another.
- The most visible result of this is the Himalayan mountain range. The fault runs along the 1,400-mile range, and the constant collision of the India and Eurasia plates pushes up the height of the peaks by about a centimeter each year.

Continental Collision

As the Indian subcontinent pushes against Eurasia, pressure is released in the form of earthquakes. The constant crashing of the two plates forms the Himalayan mountain range.
Terminology:
- **Earthquakes** are the manifestations of sudden release of strain energy accumulated in the rocks over extensive periods of time in the upper part of the Earth.
- **Aftershock**: An earthquake that follows a large magnitude earthquake called, ‘main shock’ and originates in or around the rupture zone of the main shock. Generally, major earthquakes are followed by a number of aftershocks, which show a decreasing trend in magnitude and frequency with time.
- **Fault**: A weak plane in the Earth’s crust and upper mantle along which two blocks of rock mass rupture or slip past each other. Faults are caused by earthquakes and earthquakes are likely to reoccur on pre-existing faults, where stresses are accumulated.
- **Epicentre**: It is the point on the surface of the earth, vertically above the place of origin (hypocentre) of an earthquake. This point is expressed by its geographical Coordinates in terms of latitude and longitude.

**Indian-origin scientist wins Heinz Award**
- Sangeeta Bhatia at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has been named the recipient of the 2015 Heinz Award for Technology, the Economy, and Employment.
- The award includes an unrestricted prize of $ 2,50,000.
- The award was given for her work in tissue engineering and disease detection.
- Sangeeta Bhatia has developed **artificial human microlivers** for drug testing. Artificial human microlivers are being used by many biopharmaceutical companies to test the toxicity of drug candidates.
- The Heinz Awards annually recognise individuals for their extraordinary contributions to arts and humanities; environment; human condition; public policy; and technology, the economy, and employment.

**High costs push surgical care out of reach**
- The Global Surgery 2030 Study released recently says that five billion people globally do not have access to safe, affordable surgery and anaesthesia when they need them.
  - **Important observations made by the Study:**
  - A third of all deaths in 2010 — nearly 17 million lives lost in all — were from conditions treatable with surgery, such as appendicitis, fractures and childbirth complications.
  - Even among those who are able to access surgery, its costs often lead to financial ruin. A quarter of people worldwide who have a surgical procedure incur costs that they cannot afford, pushing them into poverty.
  - Areas with high incidence of acute abdominal mortality in India were more likely to be located further from a hospital capable of providing appropriate emergency surgical care than areas with low mortality. The odds only grew with distance from the hospital.
  - In the absence of surgical care, common, easily treatable illnesses become fatal.

**U.S., Japan agree on new defence rules**
- The United States and Japan have unveiled new rules for defence cooperation that will give Japanese armed forces a more ambitious global role amid concerns over China’s rising sway.
  - **Details:**
Under the revised guidelines, Japan could come to the aid of U.S forces. This agreement would expand the reach of Japan’s military — now limited to its own defense — allowing it to act when the United States or countries American forces are defending are threatened.

Under the previous rules, Japanese forces could assist American troops only if they were operating in the direct defence of Japan. This agreement replaces guidelines geared exclusively toward the defense of Japan with new rules that eliminate any geographic restriction.

The agreement also reflects worries about North Korea and, especially, China, whose territorial claims in the South China Sea and growing military spending have upset its neighbors.

**China to integrate Mongolian, Russian initiatives with MSR**

- In tune with its effort to interface India’s Mausam and Spice Route projects with its Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative, China is making headway in integrating a Mongolian and a Russian initiative to develop another spur of its ambitious Silk Road land corridor.
- **What China wants?**
  - China wants to include Mongolia’s “Steppe road” initiative, and link up with the Moscow-driven transcontinental rail plan to develop the China-Mongolia-Russia (CMR) economic corridor.
  - The China-Mongolia-Russia (CMR) initiative is similar to two other undertaking initiated by China: the recently inaugurated Pakistan-China economic corridor, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor.
- **What is ‘Project Mausam’?**
  - It is a Project under which the Government of India has proposed to establish cross cultural linkages and to revive historic maritime cultural and economic ties with 39 Indian Ocean countries.
  - The 39 countries include Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritius, Singapore, Thailand, Yemen, South Africa, Philippines, Pakistan among others.
- **More details:**
  - Project ‘Mausam’ was launched in the 30th Session of World Heritage Committee meeting which was held at Doha, Quatar in June, 2014 and since then it has received positive response from countries such as China, UAE, Qatar, Myanmar, Iran and Vietnam.
  - It is a Ministry of Culture project with Archaeological Society of India (ASI) as the nodal agency and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) as its Research Unit.
  - The endeavour of Project ‘Mausam’ is to position itself at two levels: at the macro level it aims to reconnect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world, which would lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns; while at the micro level the focus is on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu.
  - The central themes that hold Project ‘Mausam’ together are those of cultural routes and maritime landscapes that not only linked different parts of the Indian Ocean littoral, but also connected the coastal centres to their hinterlands.
3 more NDRF teams leave for Kathmandu

- Three teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) comprising 118 personnel, including doctors and nursing staff, have left for Nepal from India.
- It has carried medical supplies, communication equipment and devices to rescue people trapped under debris.

**NDRF:**
- The Disaster Management Act has made statutory provisions for the constitution of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for the purpose of specialized response to natural and man-made disasters.

**Why was it constituted?**
- Two national calamities in quick succession in the form of Orissa Super Cyclone (1999) and Gujarat Earthquake (2001) brought about the realization of the need of having a specialist response mechanism at National Level to effectively respond to disasters. This realization led to the enactment of the DM Act on 26 Dec 2005.
- NDRF has been proving its importance by highly skilled rescue and relief operations, regular and intensive training and re-training, capacity building & familiarization exercises within the area of responsibility, carrying out mock drills and joint exercises with the various stakeholders.

**ROLE AND MANDATE OF NDRF:**
- Specialized response during disasters
- Proactive deployment during impending disaster situations
- Acquire and continually upgrade its own training and skills
- Liaison, Reconnaissance, Rehearsals and Mock Drills
- Impart basic and operational level training to State Response Forces (Police, Civil Defence and Home Guards)
- Community Capacity Building Programme
- Public Awareness Campaign
- Exhibitions : Posters, Pamphlets, literatures

**Why it is said to be a UNIQUE Force?**
- It is the only dedicated disaster response force of the world.
- The only agency with comprehensive response capabilities having multi-disciplinary and multi-skilled, high-tech, stand alone nature.
- Experienced paramilitary personnel specially trained and equipped for disaster response.
- Capabilities for undertaking disaster response, prevention, mitigation and capacity building.

‘Gender gap becoming a chasm in labour market’

- A new report from UN Women has found that **South Asia has the world’s most skewed gender wage gap** and is among the few regions where the gender labour force participation gap is both large and growing.
- **The report says that:**
  - Since the Beijing Conference, significant advances have been made by many societies, particularly in advancing women’s legal rights. However, in an era of unprecedented global wealth, millions of women are still consigned to work in low paid, poor quality jobs, denied even basic levels of health care, without access to clean water and decent sanitation.
Globally, only half of women participate in the labour force, compared to three quarters of men. In India only a third of women are in the labour force.

In developing regions, up to 95% of women’s employment is informal, in jobs that are unprotected by labour laws and lack social protection. Simultaneously, women shoulder the bulk of the burden of unpaid care work.

In India women do nearly six hours of unpaid care and housework every day as compared to half an hour for men. While on average globally, women are paid 24% less than men, the gaps for women with children are even wider. In South Asia, the gender pay gap is 9% for women with children compared to 14% for those without.

**Trifed Bags National Award in Training Innovation**

- Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED) functioning under Ministry of Tribal Affairs, has bagged the “National Award for Excellence in Training for the Year 2015” in a contest organized by the Department of Personnel and Training, Government of India.
- **TRIFED:**
  - It is the only apex body of Govt. of India which is engaged in the development and marketing of traditional tribal products including Metal craft, Paintings, Textiles, Jewellery, Natural/ Organic/ Herbal products etc.
  - It works under Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
  - Its objective is to improve the livelihood of the tribal communities by creating a sustainable market and create business opportunities for them based on their cultural knowledge and traditional skills whilst ensuring fair and equitable remuneration for their products by organizing Tribal Crafts Mela.
  - TRIFED also focuses on trainings for skill up gradation and capacity building of tribal artisans and Minor Forest Produce gatherers.

**PMNRF fund**

- The readers of the newspaper “Dainik Savera Times” have contributed rupees 2 Crore towards the Prime Minister Nation Relief Fund (PMNRF).
- **PMNRF:**
  - In pursuance of an appeal by the then Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in January, 1948, the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund (PMNRF) was established with public contributions to assist displaced persons from Pakistan.
  - The resources of the PMNRF are now utilized primarily to render immediate relief to families of those killed in natural calamities like floods, cyclones and earthquakes, etc. and to the victims of the major accidents and riots.
  - Assistance from PMNRF is also rendered, to partially defray the expenses for medical treatment like heart surgeries, kidney transplantation, cancer treatment, etc.
- **Some facts:**
  - The fund consists entirely of public contributions and does not get any budgetary support.
  - The corpus of the fund is invested with banks in fixed deposits.
  - Disbursements are made with the approval of the Prime Minister.
  - PMNRF has not been constituted by the Parliament.
  - The fund is recognized as a Trust under the Income Tax Act and the same is managed by Prime Minister or multiple delegates for national causes.
• PMNRF is exempt under Income Tax Act.
• Prime Minister is the Chairman of PMNRF and is assisted by Officers/Staff on honorary basis.
• These contributions also qualify as CSR (corporate social responsibility) spend for companies, making it more attractive in terms of tax exemptions.
• **Type of contributions accepted in PMNRF:**
  - PMNRF accepts only voluntary donations by individuals and institutions.
  - Contributions flowing out of budgetary sources of Government or from the balance sheets of the public sector undertakings are not accepted.
  - At the time of natural calamity of devastating scale, Prime Minister, makes an appeal for donation to the fund.
• **Revival:**
  - In its effort to popularise the PMNRF, the PMO had in September 2014 asked the government departments to publicise the scheme of 100% tax exemption for contributions to the PMNRF, to encourage donations.

**Kannagi temple renovation possible, says archaeologist**

• Department of Archaeology, Kerala, has said that Mangala Devi Kannagi Temple can be renovated but a sketch or portrait of the original temple is required to restore it to its original shape.
• The temple was constructed 1,800 years ago and the structure was now in a dilapidated condition.
• The only evidence for the temple available in Tamil literature is in *Silappathikaram*.
• Since the temple is within the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR), prior permission from the Supreme Court, Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and National Board for Wild Life is essential before undertaking renovation work.
• **About Kannagi:**
  - Kannagi is a legendary Tamil woman who forms the central character of the Tamil epic *Silapathikaram* (100-300 CE).
  - The story relates how Kannagi took revenge on Pandyan King of Madurai, for a mistaken death penalty imposed on her husband Kovalan, by cursing the city.
  - One of Stree Shakti Puraskar (Women Power Award) awards is named after her.

**‘NREGA, the only insurance for India’**

• The World Bank recently said that the spike in ‘unmet demand’ for MGNREGA jobs is an indicator of increasing rural distress.
• Since the scheme is the only and the best bet India has for mitigating the impact on the poor of the recent unseasonal rains, it has asked the government to take steps aimed at arresting delays in wage payments and the rising unmet demand for jobs.

*Details of a Study:*
• The analysis of MGNREGA in a study shows that the programme’s impact on rural poverty in Bihar is only 1 percentage point as against its potential of reducing poverty by at least 14 percentage points.
• Among the main reasons why the potential is not being realised, the study says, is that the supply side is too slow to respond to the demand for work from the poor, workers not receiving the full scheme wage and delays in wage payments.
The study also says that if MGNREGA were to be implemented effectively, its design would ensure that there is no unmet demand for work.

**MGNREGA:**
- The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, also known as the “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act” is an Indian labour law and social security measure.

**Aims:**
- To guarantee the ‘right to work’ and ensure livelihood security in rural areas.
- To create durable assets that would augment the basic resources available to the poor.
- To follow the Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in Part IV of the Constitution of India and conforms to the Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that defines the right to work as a basic human right.
- How? By providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

**More Details:**
- The provisions of the law also adhere to the principles enunciated in the Constitution of India under Article 21 of the Constitution of India that guarantees the right to life with dignity to every citizen of India.
- This law guarantees the right to work to the people of India and hence is termed as a “People’s Act”.
- It is believed that targeting poverty through employment generation is the effective way to alleviate poverty.
- Employment under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is a guaranteed legal right.
- The major responsibility of the implementation rests with Panchayati Raj institutions.
- Previous employment guarantee schemes (EGS) like ‘Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana’ (SGRY) Programme and National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP) were merged with MGNREGA to make it more effective.
- The Act sets a minimum limit to the wages, to be paid with gender equality. The states are required to evolve a set of norms for the measurement of works and schedule of rates. The unemployment allowance must be paid if the work is not provided within the statutory limit of 15 days.

**Criticism:**
- Activists say that the outlay for the scheme has remained nearly constant for the past three years, which, adjusting for inflation, amounts to a decrease.
- The release of funds to the States is being delayed and the amounts have been capped. As a result, there has been a 16 per cent decline in employment from the 2013-14 figure.
- Compared with 147 lakh person days generated in December 2013, only 123 lakh person days were generated in December 2014, with the decline sharper in poor States such as Bihar and Chhattisgarh.
- Till December 2014 in the financial year 2014-15, 72 per cent of the total wages disbursed were delayed. And delays in wage payments have actually increased over time.
- However, Evidence from independent research studies have shown that the MGNREGA has successfully curbed distress migration, had large effects on consumption and poverty of Dalit and Adivasi households, increased nutritional standards of households, provided risk resilience to small and marginal farmers and vastly expanded the financial inclusion net in the country.
**Sri Lanka adopts 19th Amendment**

- The Sri Lankan Parliament has adopted the 19th Constitutional Amendment Bill with an overwhelming majority.

**What is it about?**
- The legislation envisages the dilution of many powers of Executive Presidency, which had been in force since 1978.

**Important features of the Bill:**
- The reduction in the terms of President and Parliament from six years to five years.
- Re-introduction of a two-term limit that a person can have as President.
- The power of President to dissolve Parliament only after four and a half years [unlike one year, as prevalent now].
- The revival of Constitutional Council and the establishment of independent commissions.
- The President remains the head of Cabinet and he can appoint Ministers on the advice of Prime Minister.

**100 cities to turn smart**

- The Union Cabinet has cleared the Smart Cities Mission — under which 100 smart cities would be built.
- Aim of the Mission: The aim of the mission is to more efficiently utilise available assets, resources and infrastructure to enhance quality of urban life and provide a clean and sustainable environment.

**Selection of the Cities:**
- Cities to be developed will be selected through a ‘competition’ intended to ascertain their ability to achieve mission objectives. Each state will shortlist a number of smart city aspirants, which will prepare proposals for the Centre.
- Each selected city would get central assistance of Rs 100 crore per year for five years.
- To begin about 20 cities would be selected after the state governments come forward with names of cities they want nominated.
- There will be special emphasis on participation of citizens in prioritising and planning urban interventions.

**Implementation:**
- The Mission will be implemented through ‘area based’ approach, which includes retrofitting, redevelopment, pan-city initiatives and development of new cities.
- Under retrofitting, deficiencies in an identified area will be addressed through necessary interventions.
- Redevelopment enables reconstruction of an area that is already built but not amenable for any interventions.
- Pan-city components could be interventions like intelligent transport solutions that benefits residents by reducing commuting time.
- The focus will be on core infrastructure services like adequate and clean water supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transportation, affordable housing for the poor, power supply, robust IT connectivity, governance, especially e-governance, and citizen participation.

**What are Smart Cities?**
- A ‘smart city’ is an urban region that is highly advanced in terms of overall infrastructure, sustainable real estate, communications and market viability. It is a city where
information technology is the principal infrastructure and the basis for providing essential services to residents.

- There are many technological platforms involved, including but not limited to automated sensor networks and data centres.
- In a smart city, economic development and activity is sustainable and rationally incremental by virtue of being based on success-oriented market drivers such as supply and demand. They benefit everybody, including citizens, businesses, the government and the environment.

**Origin:**
- The concept of smart cities originated at the time when the entire world was facing one of the worst economic crises. In 2008, IBM began work on a ’smarter cities’ concept as part of its Smarter Planet initiative. By the beginning of 2009, the concept had captivated the imagination of various nations across the globe.
- Countries like South Korea, UAE and China began to invest heavily into their research and formation.

**Are they necessary?**
- Across the world, the stride of migration from rural to urban areas is increasing. By 2050, about 70% of the population will be living in cities.
- The idea will work as millions of poor are migrating to cities for job opportunities and better standard of living. Existing cities are unable to bear any extra load of migrants.
- Urbanisation in India has for the longest time been viewed as a by-product of failed regional planning. Though it is inevitable, and will only change when the benefits of urbanisation overtake the costs involved, it is an opportunity for achieving faster growth.
- With increasing urbanisation and the load on rural land, the government has now realised the need for cities that can cope with the challenges of urban living and also be magnets for investment.

**Challenges:**
- The concept is not without challenges, especially in India. Some of the Major challenges are:
  - The success of such a city depends on residents, entrepreneurs and visitors becoming actively involved in energy saving and implementation of new technologies.
  - There are many ways to make residential, commercial and public spaces sustainable by ways of technology, but a high percentage of the total energy use is still in the hands of end users and their behaviour.
  - There is the time factor — such cities can potentially take anything between 20 and 30 years to build.
  - Land acquisition will also obviously be the biggest hurdle while setting up smart cities.

**Benefits:**
- Smart cities can be developed over a minimum area of 500 acres and will require at least Rs 6,000 crore of investment for basic and back-end infrastructure. Experts say it can generate employment for at least 200,000 people per city.
- 10 such new cities can bring in about Rs 9 lakh crore investment (including investments by users) and usher in unprecedented economic growth.
- The smart cities will result in new orders for city planning, engineering, designing, and construction companies.
- The project will also generate huge interest among the global players who might want to partner such projects. One sector where results can be made visible almost instantly is urban development, where both public and private sectors can identify 500-5000 acres at a single location and kickstart the development process.
AMRUT Mission

- In a bid to recast the country’s urban landscape, the Centre has given nod to the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), with an outlay of Rs 50,000 crore.

What is AMRUT?

- AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). But in a significant departure from the earlier mission, the Centre will not appraise individual projects.

Details of the Mission:

- AMRUT adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.
- Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.
- AMRUT, which seeks to lay a foundation to enable cities and towns to eventually grow into smart cities, will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above.
- It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
- Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities and in their execution and monitoring.
- States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.
- Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.

Protests against Road Transport Bill

- The nationwide transport strike called by various trade unions against the Road Transport and Safety Bill is likely to affect normal life across the country.

Why the protest?

- Protestors are against some provisions in the proposed bill. They say that the proposed fines are too high.
- According to provisions of the Bill, the Motor Vehicle Act 1988 will be scrapped and State RTOs will close. Instead, a Central authority will be created and private entities will issue and renew licences. This move is not being welcomed.
- The provisions in the Bill are said to be against the principles of jurisprudence.

Road Transport and Safety Bill:

- It is a Bill which aims to provide a framework for safer, faster, cost effective and inclusive movement of passengers and freight in the country thus enabling the mission of ‘Make in India’.

Highlights of the Bill:

- 2 lakhs lives to be saved in first 5 years due to reduction in road traffic accident deaths
- 4% GDP improvement on account of increased efficiency and safety of road transport sector
- 10 lac Jobs to be created with increase in investment in the sector
• The new Bill makes significant departures from the 1988 Motor Vehicle Act as it includes safety in construction, design, maintenance and use of motor vehicles and roads as a major component.
• The Bill provides for more stringent penalties to offenders. A graded penalty point system would now act as a deterrent and improve traffic condition whereas electronic detection and centralized information of offences would facilitate to identify repeat-offenders.

New proposed Agencies and systems:
• The Bill proposes to introduce an independent agency called the National Road Safety Authority of India, which will be an independent, legally empowered and accountable expert lead agency. It shall be accountable to the Parliament and Central Government.
• The new Bill provides for the establishment of State Safety Authorities which shall act in accordance with the directions issued by the National Authority.
• The Bill seeks to establish a unified driver licensing system in India which will be transparent. Such a system shall facilitate any time anywhere licence application mechanism in the country and mitigate duplication of licences from various regional transport offices.
• According to the Provisions of the Bill there will be a unified vehicle registration system to enable electronic and online submission of applications for registration at any registering authority leading to real time interchange of data relating to such an activity.
• On the safety issues, the Bill envisages for enforcement of modern safety technologies.
• It also contains the provision for creation of a motor vehicle accident fund for immediate relief to the accident victim. It gives special emphasis on safety of school children and security of women.
• The Bill also includes the setting up of a Highway Traffic Regulation and Protection Force (HTRPF).

Changes in Act will make graft ‘heinous crime’
• The Union Cabinet has approved amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, that provide for classifying corruption as a heinous crime and longer prison terms for both bribe-giver and bribe-taker.
• The proposed amendment will also ensure a speedy trial, within two years, for corruption cases.
• The proposed amendments would fill in perceived gaps in the domestic anti-corruption law and also help in meeting the country’s obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption more effectively.

Proposed amendments to the Act:
• The amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, approved by the Union Cabinet include enhancing punishment from the minimum 6 months to 3 years and from the maximum five years to seven years.
• The ambit of the existing Act will be enhanced to make commercial entities liable for inducement of public servants. Under the present law, only individuals are liable. The proposed amendment bill also provides for issue of guidelines to commercial organisations to prevent persons associated with them from bribing a public servant.
• Non-monetary gratification will also be covered within the definition of the word gratification in the existing Act.
• The amendments approved by the government are in line with recommendations of the Law Commission to the proposed amendments to the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2013.
Cabinet delinks Assam from new border pact

- The Union Cabinet has approved the long-pending – and controversial – Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh, ahead of bringing the Constitution Amendment Bill associated with it in Parliament next week.
- However, in a major departure, it has de-linked Assam from the agreement for now.

About the land swap deal:
- The swap will involve handing over 17,000 acres of land to Bangladesh in return for 7,000 acres in 111 enclaves in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, and was first decided under the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between India and Bangladesh, but never ratified by Parliament.
- It will require an amendment to the Constitution (the 119th amendment) ratified by both Houses of Parliament with a two-thirds majority.
- The deal relates to demarcation of boundary under the Land Boundary Agreement between the two countries. India and Bangladesh have been negotiating the land swap for years to resolve a long-running border conflict.

How will it affect the existing citizens:
- The number of people to be involved in the whole swap is approximately 52,000, of which about 15,000 are on the Indian side of the border.
- Under this intended agreement, the enclave residents could continue to reside at their present location or move to the country of their choice.
- A number of Indian nationals living in Indian enclaves in Bangladesh territory are going to be adversely affected as they would lose their claim to Indian citizenship.
- Now, it becomes the responsibilities of the governments of India and Bangladesh to ensure that there is no “discrimination” against them.

Opposition:
- Some people have been opposing the deal on the ground that Assam will stand to lose more territory as compared to Bangladesh in the exchange of enclaves.