Table of Contents

Lok Sabha passes Finance Bill 2015 .................................................. 6
Finance minister offers breather to FIIs on minimum alternate tax .................. 6
Govt. buys more time, NGT extends stay .............................................. 7
Lay citizens cannot select judges, says SC ............................................. 7
May Day celebrated .............................................................................. 8
Maharashtra to file FIR against Snapdeal ............................................. 9
Moderate quake hits Andaman ............................................................... 9
Messenger crashes into Mercury ......................................................... 10
Sherpas face uncertain future after avalanche ..................................... 10
New database of High Courts unearths a 57-year-old case ..................... 10
High point in Indo-French strategic ties .............................................. 11
Centre’s nod for India’s associate membership in CERN ......................... 11
States dragging their feet on food security law ..................................... 12
Rethink on AFSPA in Arunachal ........................................................... 13
Opposition stalls GST Bill, insists on relook by panel ............................ 15
Assam included in Bill for land swap with Bangladesh ......................... 16
Akash inducted .................................................................................... 16
Govt. softens stand on real estate Bill .................................................. 17
Rs. 2,800 crore unspent under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana: CAG ................ 18
Government Disagrees with SC Verdict Giving Primacy to the CJI ............ 19
MPs want India to reclaim Katchatheevu .............................................. 20
Whistle Blowers Act amendment cleared ............................................. 21
U.S. sounds caution as India inks port deal with Iran .............................. 22
Pollution: particulate matter in India higher than WHO limit .................... 23
Adult laws will cover 16-18 year olds .................................................. 24
Rs. 140 crore fine for harming lakes ............................................................... 25
Union Home Minister felicitates NDRF teams for their relief & rescue assistance in Nepal ................................................................. 26
Cabinet clears 3 social security pension schemes .................................................. 27
NPPA fixes prices of 30 formulation packs ............................................................ 28
Cameron and Conservatives get majority in British election ..................................... 29
Lion numbers up in Gir .................................................................................. 30
WHO declares Liberia Ebola-free ........................................................................ 31
INS Sardar Patel .............................................................................................. 31
Justice Cyriac Joseph appointed NHRC acting chief .............................................. 32
Lok Sabha clears black money Bill ..................................................................... 32
The New Development Bank: ............................................................................. 34
CBDT Breather for FIIs on MAT Issues ................................................................. 34
Banks told to appoint internal ombudsman ............................................................ 35
Nepal Earthquake ............................................................................................... 35
Governors appointed for four States ................................................................... 37
Mission Mangroves in Sri Lanka .......................................................................... 38
Delhi Govt. not to allow FDI in retail .................................................................... 39
Politicians lose space in govt. ads ......................................................................... 40
Camphor-scented leaves found in Western Ghats .................................................. 41
India, a victim of e-waste crime ............................................................................ 41
Achal K Jyoti takes over as new Election Commissioner ....................................... 42
India way behind on WHO health targets ............................................................ 42
Nod for Bill to check benami transactions .......................................................... 44
Cabinet nod for changes to child labour law ......................................................... 44
Goce gravity boost to geothermal hunt .................................................................. 45
Free speech is not an absolute right: SC ............................................................... 45
RBI relaxes norms for IDF-NBFCs ................................................................. 46
Ordinance route not possible for special category ........................................ 47
India grants e-visas for Chinese nationals ....................................................... 48
 Manipur’s Ngapang revealed to world as new catfish species ......................... 48
IS seizes Ramadi, closes in on Palmyra ......................................................... 49
475th birth anniversary year celebrations of Maharana Pratap ...................... 50
A special gift from Indian PM ........................................................................ 50
SC upholds validity of Company Law Tribunal ............................................. 51
CVC appointments soon ............................................................................. 52
First tribal woman to be Jharkhand Governor ............................................. 53
Assurance on Polavaram project .................................................................. 53
Seoul to provide aid for smart cities in India ................................................ 54
68th World Health Assembly opens in Geneva ............................................. 54
PAC can’t take suo motu notice of report’ .................................................... 54
Make parties’ funding public: petition .......................................................... 55
Experts differ on L-G’s powers ..................................................................... 56
Dust storm in Rajasthan ............................................................................... 57
India’s eye on universe ready for tests ......................................................... 57
Heat wave warning issued in Telangana ....................................................... 58
Court allows polygraph test on three ‘suspects’ .......................................... 58
£52,000 to save the bustard .......................................................................... 59
SEBI notifies norms for MFs managing offshore money .............................. 60
RBI wins battle to keep debt management role .......................................... 60
Electronic toll set to roll out at 33 places .................................................... 61
Forward communities panel formed ............................................................ 61
Norms eased for investments by NRIs, PIOs, OCIs ..................................... 62
Nelong Valley opens for tourists first time since 1962 ................................ 62
L-G well within his powers to appoint officials, says Centre ..............................................62
Trial run of Dhaka-Guwahati bus service .................................................................................63
Law panel moots joint custody of minors of divorced parents ..................................................63
SC panel sets deadline for road safety directives ....................................................................64
China sets up Silk Road gold fund ............................................................................................65
Bilateral Exercise SIMBEX .......................................................................................................66
Balance in accounts opened under PMJDY in Gujarat exceeds Rs 550 cr ...............................66
ACB can act against Delhi police ............................................................................................67
Jaitapur project will roll through, come what may ....................................................................68
Supreme Court to hear plea on A-G’s selection ........................................................................69
Ganga-Brahmaputra basin mapped ..........................................................................................69
China doesn’t recognise ‘illegal’ McMahon Line .....................................................................70
Curiosity on new journey on Mars ............................................................................................71
DD Kisan – India’s first television channel dedicated to farmers ............................................71
India and Vietnam Sign a Joint Vision Statement on Defence Cooperation ..........................72
Government Notifies Amendments to Companies Act ............................................................72
Tripura withdraws AFSPA, says insurgency on the wane .......................................................73
PM’s interaction through PRAGATI ..........................................................................................74
Cancer cases on the rise but death rate is falling .....................................................................75
Republican Nebraska bans death penalty ................................................................................75
Kasturirangan report to be implemented by year-end ...............................................................75
Digital Locker – 1,00,000 Mark in 100 Days .........................................................................76
Mega Food Park Inaugurated at Nalbari, Assam ......................................................................77
India tops world hunger list with 194 million people ...............................................................78
GDP grows by 7.3 % but fails to overtake China .....................................................................79
Leak not radioactive, says AERB .............................................................................................79
Revamp on cards .....................................................................................................................79
No date set to roll out one-rank one-pension........................................................... 80
Lok Sabha passes Finance Bill 2015

- The Lok Sabha recently passed the Finance Bill 2015 through voice vote. The Bill contains the government’s tax proposals for the fiscal FY16.
- The Bill was passed after the Finance Minister moved as many as 41 official amendments. The amendments include a slew of tax concessions to foreign companies on the minimum alternate tax (MAT) front, exempting the sponsors/promoters of real estate investment trusts from MAT on the notional gains arising from shares of a special purpose vehicle to a business trust in exchange of units allotted by that trust.
- The biggest relief to foreign companies is that they will not henceforth be subjected to MAT on any interest, royalty or fees for technical services. This would mean that incomes earned by foreign companies (including foreign institutional investors) on investments in Government and other fixed income securities will not be covered under MAT provisions.

Why is Finance Bill?

- The Finance Bill which deals with the taxation measures proposed by Government is introduced immediately after the presentation of Budget. It is accompanied by a memorandum explaining the provisions of the Bill and their effect on the finances of the country.
- The government proposals for the levy of new taxes, alterations in the present tax structure or continuance of the current tax structure beyond the period approved by Parliament, are laid down before Parliament in this bill.
- The Parliament approves the Finance Bill for a period of one year at a time, which becomes the Finance Act.
- Finance Bill is taken up for consideration and passing after the Appropriation Bill is passed.
- Parliament has to pass the Finance Bill within 75 days of its introduction.
- As the Finance Bill contains taxation proposals, it is considered and passed by the Lok Sabha only after the Demands for Grants have been voted and the total expenditure is known.
- The procedure in respect of Finance Bill is the same as in the case of other Money Bills.

Finance minister offers breather to FIIs on minimum alternate tax

- Finance minister recently clarified that minimum alternate tax (MAT) would not be applicable on foreign companies’ earning from capital gains on securities, royalty, fee on technical services and interest, providing a huge breather to foreign investors.
- The exemption would apply prospectively only in those cases where the normal tax rate is below the MAT rate of 18.5%.
- The minister also clarified that the MAT would not be applicable on sale of units of real estate investment trusts (REITs).
- Relief granted for overseas government funds, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds for special tax regime.

What is MAT?

- The concept of Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) was introduced in the direct tax system to make sure that companies having large profits and declaring substantial dividends to shareholders but who were not contributing to the government by way of corporate tax,
by taking advantage of the various incentives and exemptions provided in the Income-tax Act, pay a fixed percentage of book profit as minimum alternate tax.

- The objective of introduction of MAT is to bring into the tax net “zero tax companies” which in spite of having earned substantial book profits and having paid handsome dividends, do not pay any tax due to various tax concessions and incentives provided under the Income-tax Law.

**Govt. buys more time, NGT extends stay**

- Acting on a request made by the government, the National Green Tribunal has again extended the stay on ban of 10-year-old diesel vehicles till May 18.
- This is the second time the government has sought a stay.
- Previously, NGT had asked the agencies concerned to come up with scientific views on checking vehicular pollution.
- Before the order was passed the government, along with its various departments, were pulled up by the NGT for not coming up with suggestions on issues such as capping the number of vehicles on road, hike in parking charges, incentives for car pooling etc. as highlighted by the Court earlier in several hearings.

**Details:**

- The move comes as a reprieve for the Delhi government, which is grappling with difficulties in implementing the ban.
- 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 Supreme Court had said that diesel vehicles are major source of pollution in the ambient air quality.

**Lay citizens cannot select judges, says SC**

- The Supreme Court has questioned the government’s attempt to include laymen as members of the National Judicial Appointments Commission, saying the idea may work well for appointments to entry-level courts but not for the highest judiciary.

**Background issue:**

- **Article 124A of the 99th Constitution Amendment Act, 2014** allows two “eminent persons” to be selected from civil society to be members of the NJAC.
- The duo is selected by a three-member panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha. The **Article does not define term “eminent persons”**.
A five-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court is hearing a batch of petitions challenging the legal validity of the new government’s twin laws that establish the NJAC and replace the existing in-house collegium system of appointing judges to the superior courts.

Other areas of concern as pointed out by Petitioners:

- The statement of objects and reasons of the law states that the president of India may, if necessary, require the commission to reconsider the recommendation. However, if the commission makes unanimous recommendations on such a reconsideration, then the president shall make the appointment. This makes the NJAC fragile, fraught with mischief and places the judiciary in a position of vulnerability.
- The petitioners also pointed out that the chief justice would be sandwiched between politicians and laypersons appointed by a majority of politicians in the process.
- The issue of reservation was also raised. According to the eminent persons’ clause in the law, reservation is provided to women and other minority groups in filling up the two seats meant for them on the NJAC.
- The Supreme Court too is not happy with the law. The Court has expressed its disquiet over the use of certain phrases, such as the law being intended to give a “meaningful role” to the judiciary in appointments and ensure “accountability” of participants in the selection process.
- 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.

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.

May Day celebrated

- May Day, also known as Labour Day, was celebrated on 1st May.
- It corresponds to the International Workers’ Day that is celebrated in many countries around the world proclaiming the international labour movement.
- Brief History:
  - The history of May/Labour Day goes back to 1886 in Chicago, USA, when a gathering of people during a general strike for the eight-hour workday became violent. A bomb was thrown into the crowd, police began to shoot and dozens of people were killed or injured.
  - Over the next few years, an international movement began with demonstrations and riots occurring each year on May Day. In 1904, the International Socialist Conference met in Amsterdam and called on “all Social Democratic Party organisations and trade unions of
all countries to demonstrate energetically on May First for the legal establishment of the eight-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace.”

- **In India, the first Labour Day, or May Day, was celebrated in 1923 in Chennai.**
- 1st May is also celebrated as Maharashtra Day and Gujarat Day to mark the date in 1960, when the two western states attained statehood after the erstwhile Bombay State was divided on linguistic lines.

### Maharashtra to file FIR against Snapdeal

- Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has said that it has ordered an FIR to be filed against the CEO and the directors of Internet shopping company Snapdeal for allegedly selling prescription drugs online.
- The FDA found that 45 of the displayed drugs were with objectionable claims which contravened the provisions of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954.
- **What the law says?**
- Selling of drugs without prescription contravenes Section 18 (c) 18 A of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- **What the Snapdeal says?**
- The Snapdeal’s argument is that it cannot be held responsible for what merchants sell although it says it takes precautions and educates sellers about following rules.

### Moderate quake hits Andaman

- An earthquake of moderate intensity hit Andaman Islands yesterday afternoon.
- The earthquake measured 5.4 on the Richter scale. Its epicentre was at latitude 10.8 degrees north. The depth of the earthquake was measured as 10.
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands is a seismically active region as it is located in a subduction zone where the Indian Plate is going underneath the Burmese Plate.
- Andaman Islands fall under Zone V which is the most seismically active region.

#### Earthquake Prone Zones:

- Bureau of Indian Standards, based on the past seismic history, has grouped the country into four seismic zones, viz. Zone-II, -III, -IV and –V.
- Of these, **Zone V is the most seismically active region, while zone II is the least.**
- Seismic Zone Intensity on Modified Mercalli (MM) intensity scale associated with various zone is as follows:
  - II (Low intensity zone) VI (or less)
  - III (Moderate intensity zone) VII
  - IV (Severe intensity zone) VIII
  - V (Very severe intensity zone) IX (and above)

#### Different zones:

- Zone-V comprises of entire northeastern India, parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, parts of North Bihar and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- Zone-IV covers remaining parts of Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, Union Territory of Delhi, Sikkim, northern parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, parts of Gujarat and small portions of Maharashtra near the west coast and Rajasthan.
Zone-III comprises of Kerala, Goa, Lakshadweep islands, and remaining parts of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, parts of Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Karnataka.
Zone-II covers remaining parts of the country.

**Messenger crashes into Mercury**

- NASA’s Messenger spacecraft has crashed into the surface of Mercury, ending its historic 11-year mission that provided valuable data and thousands of images of the planet.
- **Details:**
  - Messenger, launched on August 3, 2004, began orbiting Mercury on March 18, 2011. The spacecraft completed its primary science objectives by March 2012. It was the first spacecraft to orbit Mercury.
  - Because Messenger’s initial discoveries raised important new questions and the payload remained healthy, the mission was extended twice.
  - With no way to increase its altitude, Messenger was unable to resist the perturbations to its orbit by the sun’s gravitational pull and slammed into Mercury’s surface at around 14,000 kmph, creating a crater up to 52 feet wide.
  - The **MESSENGER mission** was designed to study the characteristics and environment of Mercury from orbit.

**Sherpas face uncertain future after avalanche**

- The Nepal Earthquake, which had triggered a massive avalanche in the Himalayan Region, has affected the lives of **Sherpas** who live there.
- Sherpas are the people living in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas who support climbing teams as porters, guides, rope-fixers, cooks and cleaners.
- Regions with significant Sherpa populations: Nepal, China (Tibet), Bhutan and India.

**New database of High Courts unearths a 57-year-old case**

- A Bangalore-based research organisation DAKSH has released a new database which gives insights into the functioning of High Courts across the country. The organization currently has information for 10 High Courts.
- **Details of the Database:**
  - The database shows that nearly a quarter of the cases pending in High Courts are still at the admission stage. In the Karnataka High Court alone, a Company Petition has been awaiting admission since 1985. There is a case with the Jharkhand High Court that has been pending for 57 years.
  - The database shows that over 40 lakh cases are pending before High Courts.
  - The compilation also showed that there exist large differences of definition and data standards between High Courts.
  - It has found that of the five High Courts for which the dates on which cases were filed were available — Gujarat, Jharkhand, Patna, Hyderabad and Karnataka — the majority of pending cases were less than two years old.
  - In Patna, Gujarat and Hyderabad, 10% of cases were more than ten years old. The oldest pending case in Jharkhand dated back to January 1958, in Patna to May 1970, in Gujarat to December 1980, in Karnataka to January 1985 and in Hyderabad to July 1989.
Among nine High Courts for which comparable data was available, Gujarat disposed of the maximum cases proportionate to the total cases in its system during the first quarter of this year, while Calcutta disposed the fewest.

**High point in Indo-French strategic ties**

- The 14th edition of the **Indo-French naval exercise (Varuna)** recently concluded at Goa. It was a ten day long exercise and included both a harbour and sea phase.
- VARUNA aims at deriving mutual benefit from the experiences of the two navies.

**Details:**

- The scope of Exercise VARUNA included the entire gamut of maritime operations ranging from Aircraft Carrier Operations, Anti Submarines Warfare Exercises, Maritime Interdiction Operations to multi-ship replenishment exercise.
- The confidence gained through such exercises helps develop Standard Operating Procedures, particularly in the fields of Joint Maritime Air Operations Planning with exchange of Carrier Operational Capabilities.
- The exercise goes a long way in enhancing interoperability between the two navies and also showcases the close ties between the two countries.

**Centre’s nod for India’s associate membership in CERN**

- The Centre has approved the long-standing demand of Indian scientists that the country be an associate member of CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research).
- **Currently, India has observer status** in CERN, which has 21 member states.
- To be an associate member, India will have to pay $10.7 million annually. The status of associate member is also the pre-stage to full membership. As an associate member, India would have been entitled to attend open and restricted sessions of the organization.
- The associate membership will open the doors of mega science experiments for Indian scientists and will also allow Indian industry to participate in bids for Cern contracts across various sectors. **India was given “Observer” status in Cern in 2002.**

**About CERN:**

- The European Organization for Nuclear Research, known as CERN is a European research organization that operates the largest particle physics laboratory in the world. The CERN convention was signed in 1953 by the 12 founding states and entered into force on 29 September 1954.
- It has 21 European member states. Israel is the first (and currently only) non-European country granted full membership.
- Member states have special duties and privileges. They make a contribution to the capital and operating costs of CERN’s programmes, and are represented in the council, responsible for all important decisions about the organization and its activities.
- CERN’s main function is to provide the particle accelerators and other infrastructure needed for high-energy physics research – as a result, numerous experiments have been constructed at CERN as a result of international collaborations.
- CERN is also the place the World Wide Web was first implemented.
- It also operates the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).
- Some states (or international organizations) for which membership is either not possible or not yet feasible are observers. “Observer” status allows non-member states to attend
council meetings and to receive council documents, without taking part in the decision-making procedures of the organization.

- Observer states and organizations currently involved in CERN programmes include the European Commission, India, Japan, the Russian Federation, Turkey, UNESCO and the USA.

**Large Hadron Collider:**
- The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is the world’s largest and most powerful particle accelerator.
- Built by: European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)
- Aim: to allow physicists to test the predictions of different theories of particle physics and high-energy physics, and particularly prove or disprove the existence of the theorized Higgs boson and of the large family of new particles predicted by supersymmetric theories.

**Details:**
- The LHC consists of a 27-kilometre ring of superconducting magnets with a number of accelerating structures to boost the energy of the particles along the way.
- Inside the accelerator, two high-energy particle beams travel at close to the speed of light before they are made to collide.
- The beams travel in opposite directions in separate beam pipes – two tubes kept at ultrahigh vacuum. They are guided around the accelerator ring by a strong magnetic field maintained by superconducting electromagnets.
- The electromagnets are built from coils of special electric cable that operates in a superconducting state, efficiently conducting electricity without resistance or loss of energy. This requires chilling the magnets to -3°C – a temperature colder than outer space. For this reason, much of the accelerator is connected to a distribution system of liquid helium, which cools the magnets, as well as to other supply services.
- Just prior to collision, another type of magnet is used to “squeeze” the particles closer together to increase the chances of collisions. The particles are so tiny that the task of making them collide is akin to firing two needles 10 kilometres apart with such precision that they meet halfway.

**States dragging their feet on food security law**
- A parliamentary panel has taken dim view of the delay in implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013 which provides for distribution of discounted food grains to 67% of the population.
- It has asked the Union Food Ministry to set up a task force for quickening the pace of work in the non-compliant States.
- Only 11 States have so far operationalised the Act with 25 States unable to comply with preconditions to improve the Public Distribution System.
- Even the States which are implementing the Act are doing so partially as most of them have continued with the old set of beneficiaries primarily with the aim of not losing any quota of the concessional food grains under the targeted PDS.
- The Central government has given several extensions since April to States for carrying out the requirement of displaying the list of beneficiaries, computerisation of the targeted PDS, setting up vigilance committees and building modern storage facilities at strategic points for quick movement of food grains.

**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 5 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.

Rethink on AFSPA in Arunachal

• The Union Home Minister recently assured a delegation of the All-Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union that his Ministry would look into the demand for lifting the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from the State.
• The Home Ministry, through a March 27 notification, had ordered that the AFSPA be extended to all the districts of Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam, triggering strong opposition from the State government.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act:
• It is an Act empowering armed forces to deal effectively in ‘Disturbed Areas’. Any area which is declared ‘Disturbed’ under the disturbed areas act enables armed forces to resort to the provisions of AFSPA.

Who declares an area as disturbed?
• The choice of declaring any area as ‘disturbed’ vests both with state and central government.
• Special powers provided to armed forces:
  • After an area comes under the ambit of AFSPA, any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or another person of equivalent rank can use force for a variety of reasons while still being immune to the prosecution.
The act was passed on 11 September 1958 by the parliament of India to provide special legal security to the armed forces carrying out operations in the troubled areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura (seven sisters).

In 1990 the act was extended to the state of Jammu and Kashmir to confront the rising insurgency in the area.

In Manipur, despite opposition from the Central government, state government withdrew the Act in some parts in Aug, 2004.

**The government can declare AFSPA in the following conditions:**

- When the local administration fails to deal with local issues and the police proves inefficient to cope with them.
- When the scale of unrest or instability in the state is too large for the police to handle.

**Legal provisions of AFSPA:**

- In an area declared, “disturbed” an army officer is legally free to carry out following operations:
  - Fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law” against “assembly of five or more persons” or possession of deadly weapons.
  - Destroy any shelter (private or govt.) from which armed attacks are made or likely to be made or attempted to be made.
  - Arrest any person without warrant who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence.
  - Enter and search, without warrant, any premises for purpose of arrest or to recover any person, arms, explosives.
  - To search and seize any vehicle suspected to be carrying an offender or any person against whom any reasonable suspicion exists that he has or is about to commit an offence.
  - To provide legal immunity to the army personnel found involved in any violation or ethical breach i.e., they cannot be sued or prosecuted.

**Why do armed forces need AFSPA?**

- The forces are aware that they cannot afford to fail when called upon to safeguard the country’s integrity. Hence, they require the minimum legislation that is essential to ensure efficient utilization of combat capability. This includes safeguards from legal harassment and empowerment of its officers to decide on employment of the minimum force that they consider essential.
- The absence of such a legal statute would adversely affect organizational flexibility and the utilization of the security capacity of the state. This would render the security forces incapable of fulfilling their assigned role.
- Common people see it as ‘Right to Kill’ Act. Since its inception many Human Rights organizations and civil societies have been opposing it for the following reasons:
  - It makes no distinction between a peaceful gathering of five or more people and a berserk mob.
  - The law also states that, “no prosecution can be initiated against an officer without the previous sanction of the Central government”.
  - The decision of the government to declare a particular area ‘disturbed’ cannot be challenged in a court of law.
  - In 2005 the Jeevan Reddy Commission said that AFSPA should be repealed and the clauses that are required should be included in other Acts.
Opposition stalls GST Bill, insists on relook by panel

- Several Opposition parties have raised serious concerns on a number of clauses in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Bill. With this chances of the Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill for introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) clearing Parliament in the current session have dimmed.
- Even if the Government manages to push the Bill through the Lower House, it may encounter stiff resistance in the Upper House. The government does not have a majority in the Upper House.
- The Opposition’s strategy in the Rajya Sabha will be to force the government to accept the referring of the Bill to a Select Committee on the ground that there are substantial changes which have not been scrutinised.
- However, the government is not willing to refer the bill to the committee. It says that if the GST Bill is sent back to the Standing Committee on Finance, it would delay the benefits to the States by another financial year as yet another deadline of April 1, 2016 would be missed.

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.
• 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.
• 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.
• The central government has offered to compensate States in case of a loss in revenues.
• The GST Bill’s passage will require a constitutional amendment, which means a two-thirds majority is required in Parliament. The Assemblies too will have to approve the Bill ahead of the April 2016 deadline.

Assam included in Bill for land swap with Bangladesh

• Faced with opposition from the Assam Chief Minister and the Congress in Parliament as well as unhappiness from the Hasina government in Dhaka, the Centre has reversed its decision on excluding Assam from the purview of its Bill on exchanging land with Bangladesh.
• The Constitution (119th Amendment) Bill, 2013, which will allow the operationalisation of the 1974 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, was cleared by the Cabinet recently. However, the cabinet had de-linked Assam from the agreement.
• The envisaged exchange of land includes enclaves and adverse possessions from West Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam.

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.

Akash inducted

• The Army recently inducted the supersonic surface-to-air missile Akash, capable of targeting aerial threats up to a range of 25 km.
Akash Missile:

- It is a medium range Surface to Air missile. It is India’s first indigenously designed, developed and produced air defence system missile.
- The missile system can target aircraft up to 25 km away, at altitudes up to 18,000 m.
- A nuclear warhead could potentially give the missile the capability to destroy both aircraft and warheads from ballistic missiles.
- It can be used by both Army and Air Force.
- The Akash system is fully mobile and capable of protecting a moving convoy of vehicles.
- The system provides air defence missile coverage for an area of 2,000 km².
- Akash flies at supersonic speed, reaching around Mach 2.5.
- A self-destruct device is also integrated. It is propelled by an Integrated Ramjet Rocket Engine. The use of a ramjet propulsion system enables sustained speeds without deceleration throughout its flight.
- The Missile has command guidance in its entire flight.
- Akash missiles are designed to be launched from static or mobile platforms, including battle tanks and wheeled trucks, providing flexible deployment.
- It can handle multiple targets and destroy manoeuvring targets, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, fighter aircraft, cruise missiles and missiles launched from helicopters.
- It is developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Govt. softens stand on real estate Bill

- In the light of the demand from large sections of the Opposition, which is in a majority in the Upper House, the government has decided to refer the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Bill 2013 to a Select Committee.
- The Opposition, which had submitted a notice for referring the Bill to a Select Committee, is of the view that the draft legislation favours builders at the cost of home buyers.
- 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.
Insights Current Events - May 2015

- 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.

**Rs. 2,800 crore unspent under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana:**

**CAG**

- The report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) on the performance of the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) since its launch in 2007 to 2013 has detected shortfalls in achieving targeted outputs in 62 projects costing Rs. 1,405 crore in 19 States. The report was tabled in the Parliament recently.
- The CAG report highlights numerous instances of the expected benefits of the RKVY not reaching the farmers.
- The report also revealed that RKVY funds to the tune of Rs. 91.24 crore were diverted for other purposes in nine projects.

**Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY):**

- Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana is a Special Additional Central Assistance Scheme launched in 2007 as a part of the 11th Five Year Plan by the Government of India.
- It was launched under the aegis of the National Development Council.
- It seeks to achieve 4% annual growth in agriculture through development of Agriculture and its allied sectors.
- The Scheme was essentially launched to incentivize the states that increase their investment in Agriculture and allied sectors.

**Eligibility:**

- A State is eligible for funding under the RKVY if it maintains or increases the percentage of its expenditure on Agriculture and its Allied Sectors with respect to the total State Plan Expenditure, where the Base Line for this expenditure is the average of the percentage of expenditure incurred by a State Government for the previous three years on Agriculture and its Allied Sectors minus any funds related to Agriculture and its allied sectors that it may already have received in that time under its State Plan.

**Important features of the Scheme:**

- It is a State Plan scheme
- The eligibility of a state for the RKVY is contingent upon the state maintaining or increasing the State Plan expenditure for Agriculture & Allied Sectors
- The base line expenditure is determined based on the average expenditure incurred by the State Government during the three years prior to the previous year.
- The preparation of the district and State Agriculture Plans is mandatory.

**Preparation of Agriculture Plans:**
The Scheme requires the States to prepare District and State Agriculture Plans for creation of such infrastructure, which are essential to catalyse the existing production scenario for achieving higher production. Additional Central Assistance (ACA) is made available to the States as 100% grants.

The District Agriculture Plans would reflect the financial requirement and the sources of financing the agriculture development plans in a comprehensive way. The DAP will include animal husbandry and fishery, minor irrigation projects, rural development works, agricultural marketing schemes and schemes for water harvesting and conservation, keeping in view the natural resources and technological possibilities in each district.

Each State is further required to prepare a comprehensive State Agricultural Plan (SAP) by integrating the DAPs. The State will have to indicate resources that can flow from the State to the district.

The States have been provided flexibility and autonomy in the process of selection, planning, approval and execution of schemes to make investments in interventions as per their priorities and agro-climatic requirements so that the outcomes are as envisaged in the RKVY objectives.

The projects of the State Governments are approved by the State Level Sanctioning Committees (SLSCs) under the Chairmanship of Chief Secretary of the respective States. The funds are routed through the State Agriculture Department, which is the nodal Department for the scheme.

The sub-schemes under RKSY are:-

- Bringing Green Revolution to Eastern Region.
- Initiative on Vegetable Clusters.
- National Mission for Protein Supplements.
- Saffron Mission.
- Vidharbha Intensive Irrigation Development Programme.
- Promotion of Oil Palm.
- Nutri Cereals.
- Accelerated fodder development programme.
- Rainfed area development programme.

### Government Disagrees with SC Verdict Giving Primacy to the CJI

The Centre recently said that the 1993 judgment of the Supreme Court, which led to the creation of the Collegium System for appointment of judges to the higher judiciary, was not correct as it created an empire within an empire.

What has the Attorney General said?

- The Attorney General representing the centre has said that 1993 majority judgment (Second Judges case) by a nine-judge Bench managed to upset the delicate equilibrium achieved by the Constitution makers by giving the CJI primacy over judicial appointments.
- He also argued that the Second Judges case and the Presidential Reference of 1998 (popularly called the Third Judges case) effectively made the CJI the final word on judicial appointments.

Arguments regarding the Primacy given to CJI:

- The AG has said that the nine judge-bench judgment then was based on wrong premises since neither the Constitution nor the Constitution framers ever intended to give primacy
to the CJI in appointment of judges or make it a part of basic structure. Collegium was never envisaged under the Constitution. **While independence of judiciary forms the basic structure, primacy of the CJI does not.**

- Since the 1993 Judgement needs reconsideration, the A-G said a larger Constitution Bench should hear the batch of petitions challenging the National Judicial Appointments Commission law replacing the Collegium system.

**Observations made by the Supreme Court:**

- Calling it a dangerous proposition, the Supreme Court has questioned the government for demanding a reconsideration of its two-decade-old judgments, which had established collegium as the system for appointing judges and gave primacy to the Chief Justice of India.
- The Bench also said that it would be dangerous to let the Centre seek review of a verdict now and told the AG the real test was going to be whether the new system was better and whether it ensured independence of judiciary.

**What is Collegium System:**

- It is a system under which appointments and transfers of judges are decided by a forum of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.
- **It has no place in the Indian Constitution.**

**What the Constitution says?**

- Article 124 deals with the appointment of Supreme Court judges. It says **the appointment should be made by the President after consultation with such judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court as the President may deem necessary.** The CJI is to be consulted in all appointments, except his or her own.
- Article 217 deals with the appointment of High Court judges. It says **a judge should be appointed by the President after consultation with the CJI and the Governor of the state.** The Chief Justice of the High Court concerned too should be consulted.

**Evolution of the Collegium System:**

- The collegium system has its genesis in a series of three judgments that is now clubbed together as the **“Three Judges Cases”**.
- **First Judge Case:** The S P Gupta case is called the “First Judges Case”. It declared that the “primacy” of the CJI’s recommendation to the President can be refused for “cogent reasons”.
- **Second Judge Case:** However, after 12 years in 1993, came a nine-judge bench decision in the Supreme Court Advocates-on Record Association vs Union of India case — the “Second Judges Case”. This was what ushered in the collegium system. The verdict said “justiciability” and “primacy” required that the CJI be given the “primal” role in such appointments. It overturned the S P Gupta judgment, saying “the role of the CJI is primal in nature because this being a topic within the judicial family, the executive cannot have an equal say in the matter.
- **Third Judge Case:** In 1998, President issued a presidential reference to the Supreme Court as to what the term “consultation” really means in Articles 124, 217 and 222 of the Constitution. In reply, the Supreme strongly reinforced the concept of “primacy” of the highest judiciary over the executive. This was the “Third Judges Case”.

**MPs want India to reclaim Katchatheevu**

- Few Rajya Sabha members recently asked the Centre to renegotiate with the government of Sri Lanka to reclaim the island of Katchatheevu.
- Buoyed by the passage of the Constitution Amendment Bill to ratify the land border agreement with Bangladesh, these MPs said the government must reconsider the
exchange of Katchatheevu as it was not done through a constitutional amendment and has not served India’s interest.

What is the need?
- These MPs have said that the ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka without any constitutional amendment, has adversely affected the livelihood of fishermen of Tamil Nadu.
- And it is also being said that the ceding of Katchatheevu is in total violation of the views given by the Supreme Court in a Presidential reference in the Berubari case.

Background:
- The island of ‘Katchatheevu’ was ceded to Sri Lanka, in the year 1974. It was done in order to maintain good relationship with Sri Lanka.
- It was argued that as a result of this hand over, the Tamil Indian Fishermen lost their rights which they exercised over the island and the surrounding seas for over thousand years. However, the government then had said that fishing and navigation rights were safeguarded for the future.
- According to the agreement on the island, which falls in the Sri Lankan territory, Indian fishermen can rest and dry their nets during fishing in international waters. But this has often been violated by the SL Coast Guards.

Whistle Blowers Act amendment cleared
- The Union Cabinet recently approved amendments in the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2011

Why is it being done?
- This is being done with a view to incorporate necessary provisions aimed at strengthening safeguards against disclosures which may prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of the country, security of the State, etc.

Aims and objectives of these amendments:
- The amendments would address concerns relating to national security.
- This would strengthen the safeguards against disclosures which may prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of the country, security, strategic, scientific or economic interest of the State, relations with a foreign State or leads to incitement of an offence.
- Safeguard have also been provided in respect of such disclosures which have been exempted under section 8(1) of the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- However, Anti-corruption activists have argued that the new provisions could weaken the fight against corruption in key sectors like defence. In the past, several dubious deals like the Bofors, Scorpene, Tatra truck and AgustaWestland scams have been exposed by whistle blowers.
Background:
- In order to give statutory protection to whistle blowers in the country, the Public Interest Disclosures and Protection to Persons making the Disclosures Bill, 2011 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in August, 2010. The said Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha, in December, 2011, as the Whistle Blowers Protection Bill, 2011 and was passed by the Rajya Sabha on 21.02.2014. The Bill has received the assent of the President on 9th May, 2014.

Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2011:
- Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2011 provides a mechanism to investigate alleged corruption and misuse of power by public servants and also protect anyone who exposes alleged wrongdoing in government bodies, projects and offices.

Salient features:
- The Act seeks to protect whistle blowers, i.e. persons making a public interest disclosure related to an act of corruption, misuse of power, or criminal offense by a public servant.
- Any public servant or any other person including a non-governmental organization may make such a disclosure to the Central or State Vigilance Commission.
- Every complaint has to include the identity of the complainant.
- The Vigilance Commission shall not disclose the identity of the complainant except to the head of the department if he deems it necessary. The Act penalizes any person who has disclosed the identity of the complainant.
- The Act prescribes penalties for knowingly making false complaints.
- This Act aims to balance the need to protect honest officials from undue harassment with protecting persons making a public interest disclosure.

U.S. sounds caution as India inks port deal with Iran
- India and Iran recently signed an inter-Governmental Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding India’s participation in the development of the Chabahar Port in Iran.
- With the signing of this MoU, Indian and Iranian commercial entities will now be in a position to commence negotiations towards finalisation of a commercial contract under which Indian firms will lease two existing berths at the port and operationalise them as container and multi-purpose cargo terminals.

Concerns raised by the US:
- However, the US has cautioned India against rushing in with investments as the nuclear deal being negotiated was not final and said there was need to maintain the international solidarity that has brought this hard fought diplomatic victory.

Why is India interested in Chabahar Port?
- Chabahar is located close to the strategic Persian Gulf. It will impart significant strategic leverage to India giving it access to Afghanistan and to the energy-rich Central Asia bypassing Pakistan. It also cuts down transit time by a third accruing significant time and cost savings.

Further plans:
- India, which has invested over $2 billion in Afghanistan, plans to link the Chabahar port with the Zaranj-Delaram road, the garland highway, India built in Afghanistan by upgrading the Chabahar-Milak road opening alternative access to sea port for Afghanistan's connectivity to regional and global markets. India has already committed $100 million to develop the port.
- The Chabahar deal has been long pending due to U.S. pressure on India in light of the severe sanctions imposed on Iran.
Pollution: particulate matter in India higher than WHO limit

- A recent study by the WHO shows that a significant population of Indian subcontinent breathes air with much higher particulate matter that is lesser than 2.5 micrometre (PM2.5) in size than the limit set by the WHO.
- The Report says, in 2010, air pollution killed nearly 600,000 people in India. The situation has not changed in the last five years.
- Outdoor air pollution as a whole, especially the particulate matter, has been declared as class-1 cancer-causing agent (carcinogen) in 2013 by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) which is part of the WHO. Besides, it causes other respiratory and heart diseases.
- The PM2.5 is particularly dangerous and can cause adverse health effects owing to its greater penetrability into the human respiratory system and eventual accumulation in human organs and blood.

Vulnerable Section:
- Rural women, children and elderly population are more prone to diseases caused by air pollution. Rural women, in particular, face a greater risk from indoor pollution — locally made mud stoves fuelled by solid biofuel emit a far greater amount of finer particulate matter.
- Compared with peninsular India and coastal regions, the situation is far worse in the Gangetic Basin, especially during winter months. The Himalayas act as a barrier to dissipation of pollution plumes emanating from the cities located in the Basin. As a result, cities in the Basin are more prone to sustained bad air quality.

Why pollution level rises during winter?
- Air quality of any area depends on local emissions, long-range transport, local and regional weather patterns, and to some extent the topography of the region. Due to increased buoyancy and efficient ventilation in summer, pollution plumes rise effortlessly to the free atmosphere. This leads to a reduced level of surface level PM2.5 concentration in our breathing zone.
- The problem gets aggravated during winter. Adverse conditions during winter help trapping of pollution leading to elevated level of surface PM concentration.

Recent initiatives:
- India has begun taking steps in the right direction. The National Air Quality index, introduced recently, has created greater awareness of air pollution amongst the people. Recently, plying of diesel vehicles older than 10 years has also been prohibited.
- But the situation demands more action in order to restore good air quality and clear visibility. The economic gain due to avoidable loss of human life is too huge to be ignored.

What else can be done?
- Technical intervention through efficient cooking stoves can significantly improve the lives of rural women.
- Improved power situation, especially in cold days, together with better handling of municipal waste and trash, can also help in achieving better air quality in the cities.
- Central Pollution Control Board can be divested into various regional air boards that will be responsible for securing the environment in a more proactive manner. If mandatory, more laws need to be enacted and strictly enforced to accomplish these goals.
Adult laws will cover 16-18 year olds

- The Lok Sabha has finally passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill which paves the way for children in the age group of 16-18 years to be tried as adults if they commit a heinous crime.
- Opposition parties and child rights experts, however, have termed the move a disaster and have claimed that the government used its brute majority to get the bill through.
- The amended Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2014, which would replace the existing Juvenile Justice Act, 2000, will be taken up in the Rajya Sabha shortly.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill was passed after the government agreed to delete a controversial clause which said that if a minor commits a crime at an age between 16 and 18, but is caught when he has turned 21, should be tried under the Indian Penal Code and not juvenile laws.
- At least 42 official amendments were moved by the government to the bill, which were adopted.

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. But it was referred to the standing committee which recommended keeping the legally defined age of juvenile at 18 years.
- 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.
- 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 Bill strikes 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.
- The Supreme Court, in April 2015, had 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.
Rs. 140 crore fine for harming lakes

- In one of the largest punishments for building and environment violations, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently imposed a penalty of nearly Rs. 140 crore on two builders constructing a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on Bellandur wetlands in Karnataka.

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.

Union Home Minister felicitates NDRF teams for their relief & rescue assistance in Nepal

- The Union Home Minister has congratulated the teams of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for their exemplary work done in rescue and relief operations in recent earthquake in Nepal.
- Indian relief and rescue teams were the first to reach Nepal immediately to join hands with friendly neighbour in their hour of need.

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.
- The NDRF works under the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) which lays down the policies, plans and guidelines for disaster management.
Cabinet clears 3 social security pension schemes

- The Union Cabinet recently gave its approval to three mega social security initiatives – one pension and two insurance.
- The initiatives are aimed at providing affordable universal access to essential social security protection in a convenient manner linked to auto-debit facility from bank accounts.
- The schemes are also expected to address the issue of very low coverage of life or accident insurance and old age income in the country.

Details:
Atal Pension Yojna (APY):
- Under the APY, subscribers would receive a fixed minimum pension of Rs. 1000 per month, Rs. 2000 per month, Rs. 3000 per month, Rs. 4000 per month, Rs. 5000 per month, at the age of 60 years, depending on their contributions, which itself would vary on the age of joining the APY.
- The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.
- The minimum age of joining APY is 18 years and maximum age is 40 years. The benefit of fixed minimum pension would be guaranteed by the Government.

Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY):
- Under PMJJBY, annual life insurance of Rs. 2 lakh would be available on the payment of premium of Rs. 330 per annum by the subscribers.
- The PMJJBY will be made available to people in the age group of 18 to 50 years having a bank account from where the premium would be collected through the facility of “auto-debit”.

Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY):
- Under PMSBY, the risk coverage will be Rs. 2 lakh for accidental death and full disability and Rs. 1 lakh for partial disability.
- The Scheme will be available to people in the age group 18 to 70 years with a bank account, from where the premium would be collected through the facility of “auto-debit”.

Every household to pay environmental compensation, says green tribunal

- The National Green Tribunal recently, through an order, reminded denizens of Delhi of their fundamental duty towards protecting and cleaning environment as it announced that every household, including unauthorised, will have to pay a monthly environmental compensation for “Maily se Nirmal Yamuna”.

Other Details:
- The NGT has also extended its order of a fine of Rs 5,000 on throwing waste in the Yamuna to the smallest act of throwing municipal solid waste **in any drain**.
- The compensation to be paid would be directly proportional to the property tax or water bill, whichever is higher, payable by a particular household as every house generates waste which finally reaches the Yamuna which has now been reduced to a stinking drain of effluents and sewage.
- The Tribunal also said that where the household or person is not paying property tax and water bill or is living in unauthorised colonies, Rs 100 or Rs 500 per month would be levied as compensation.
The ‘environmental compensation’ will be added to electricity bills which the power suppliers will deposit with the Delhi government. The Department of Delhi Jal Board has said Rs 3,659 crore is required towards ensuring clean Yamuna.

**Yamuna River:**
- The Yamuna is the **Second largest tributary river of the Ganges**, (Ganga) in India.
- It originates from the Yamunotri Glacier at a height of 6,387 metres on the south western slopes of Bandarpooch peaks in the uppermost region of the Lower Himalayas in Uttarakhand.
- It merges with the Ganges at Triveni Sangam, Allahabad, the **site for the Kumbha Mela every twelve years**.
- The river accounts for more than 70% of Delhi’s water supplies.

**Yamuna Action Plan:**
- Government of India has sanctioned Yamuna Action Plan (YAP)-I and YAP-II schemes for river Yamuna in Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and YAP-III in Delhi under **financial assistance from Japan International Coorperation Agency (JICA)** for taking up works for sewerage/interception and diversion of drains, Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), low cost sanitation/community toilet complexes, electric/improved wood crematoria, etc.
- The Yamuna Action Plan (YAP) is a bilateral **project between the Government of India and Japan**.
- It is one of the largest river restoration projects in India.
- The government of Japan, via the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), has provided financial aid of 17.7 billion yen to carry out the project, which is being executed by the National River Conservation Directorate, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and the Government of India.

---

**NPPA fixes prices of 30 formulation packs**

- Drug price regulator NPPA has fixed prices of 30 formulation packs, including drugs used to treat various diseases such as tuberculosis, diabetes, asthma and antibiotics.
- NPPA has already fixed the ceiling prices in respect of 521 formulations out of 680 till date which comes under the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).

**Who caps prices of essential drugs in India?**

- At present, the government caps prices of essential drugs based on the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than one per cent. And the government regulates prices of all other medicines and companies are allowed to hike prices of such drugs by only up to 10% in a year.

**National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA):**
- NPPA is an organization of the Government of India which was established, inter alia, to fix/ revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995.
- The organization is also entrusted with the task of recovering amounts overcharged by manufacturers for the controlled drugs from the consumers.
- It also monitors the prices of decontrolled drugs in order to keep them at reasonable levels.

**Functions of National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority**
- To implement and enforce the provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order in accordance with the powers delegated to it.
- To deal with all legal matters arising out of the decisions of the Authority;
- To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps;
- To collect/maintain data on production, exports and imports, market share of individual companies, profitability of companies etc, for bulk drugs and formulations;
- To undertake and/or sponsor relevant studies in respect of pricing of drugs/ pharmaceuticals;
- To recruit/appoint the officers and other staff members of the Authority, as per rules and procedures laid down by the Government;
- To render advice to the Central Government on changes/revisions in the drug policy;
- To render assistance to the Central Government in the parliamentary matters relating to the drug pricing.

**Cameron and Conservatives get majority in British election**

- Prime Minister David Cameron and his Conservatives have won a resounding victory in the British general election. The party has secured an overall majority in Parliament.
- Cameron will continue as Prime Minister for the second term.

**Basic facts regarding United Kingdom general elections:**

- There are six types of elections in the United Kingdom: United Kingdom general elections, elections to devolved parliaments and assemblies, elections to the European Parliament, local elections, mayoral elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.
- The United Kingdom general election of 2015 was held on 7 May 2015 to elect the 56th Parliament of the United Kingdom.
- There are 650 parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom and each elects one Member of Parliament to seats in the House of Commons, the lower house of Parliament using the “first past the post” system.
- If one party obtains a majority of seats, then that party is entitled to form the Government. If the election results in no single party having a majority, then there is a hung parliament. In this case, the options for forming the Government are either a minority government or a coalition government.

**First-past-the-post:**

- A first-past-the-post election is one that is won by the candidate receiving more votes than any others. Under first-past-the-post, a country/area is divided into numerous voting areas, i.e. constituencies or wards.
- It is one of the several plurality voting systems.
- First-past-the-post voting methods can be used for single and multiple member elections. In a single member election the candidate with the highest number, not necessarily a majority, of votes is elected.
- In a multiple member first-past-the-post ballot, the first number of candidates, in order of highest vote, corresponding to the number of positions to be filled are elected.

**Following features of the Indian constitution were borrowed From the Constitution of U.K:**

- Nominal Head – President (like Queen)
- Cabinet System of Ministers
- Post of PM
- Parliamentary Type of Govt.
- Bicameral Parliament
- Lower House more powerful
- Council of Ministers responsible to Lowe House
- Speaker in Lok Sabha
Govt. set to grant citizenship to Hindus from Bangladesh

- The government is set to move forward on the question of granting citizenship to Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh and is expected to submit a policy document to the Supreme Court soon.
- The Document regarding this is being prepared by the Union Home Ministry. This will decide the fate of thousands of Bangladeshi Hindus living in 18 States.

Background:

- The Centre is submitting the document in response to a case filed in 2012 by two NGOs, which pleaded that Hindus and persons of other minorities from Bangladesh migrating to India to escape religious persecution must not be bracketed with illegal migrants and sent back.
- The petitions had also demanded grant of refugee status to these persons, which could later be converted to citizenship.
- Initially the focus of the case was on Assam where animosity towards refugees from Bangladesh is a strong political issue.
- However, in July 2013, the Supreme Court made the case into a national issue — the Bench hearing the case made 18 States a party to it, observing that the problem of religious minorities coming from Bangladesh to India was not confined to Assam alone.
- The previous government did not show much interest in this case since it involved the question of granting rights on the basis of religion. Since the new government came to power, it has proactively followed the case.

Assam Accord:

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
- The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
- The Assam agitation dates back to 1979 against illegal foreign nationals, which culminated in the signing of the Assam Accord. Assamese people had assimilated Bangladeshis who had migrated till 1966.
- As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.
- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

Lion numbers up in Gir

- The population of Asiatic lions has been found to have increased considerably in the Gir wildlife sanctuary — from 411 during the last census in 2010 to 523 in 2015.
- The census data also reveals that the lions’ habitat area has increased to 22,000 square kilometres, which has almost doubled in five years.

Notable facts:

- The Gir forest is the only place in the whole of Asia where the Asiatic lion is now found.
- It is situated in Gujarat.
• It is considered to be one of the most important protected areas in Asia due to its supported species. The ecosystem of Gir, with its diverse flora and fauna, is protected as a result of the efforts of the government forest department, wildlife activists and NGOs.

• Major perennial rivers of the Gir region are Hiran, Shetrunji, Datardi, Shingoda, Machhundri, Godavari and Raval.

**WHO declares Liberia Ebola-free**

• The U.N. health agency has declared Liberia Ebola-free. WHO hailed its eradication as an enormous development in the long crisis.

**EBOLA**

• Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans. It is a disease of humans and other primates caused by an ebolavirus.

• Symptoms start two days to three weeks after contracting the virus, with a fever, sore throat, muscle pain and headaches.

• Typically, vomiting, diarrhea and rash follow, along with decreased functioning of the liver and kidneys. Around this time, affected people may begin to bleed both within the body and externally.

• The virus may be acquired upon contact with blood or bodily fluids of an infected animal.

• Fruit bats are believed to be a carrier and may spread the virus without being affected.

• In order to reduce the spread, the World Health Organization recommends raising community awareness of the risk factors for Ebola infection and the protective measures individuals can take. These include avoiding contact with infected people and regular hand washing using soap and water. Traditional burial rituals, especially those requiring washing or embalming of bodies, should be discouraged or modified.

**Quarantine**

• Quarantine, also known as enforced isolation, is usually effective in decreasing spread. Governments often quarantine areas where the disease is occurring or individuals who may be infected.

**Vaccine**

• No vaccine is currently available for humans. The most promising candidates are DNA vaccines or vaccines derived from adenoviruses, vesicular stomatitis Indiana virus (VSIV) or filovirus-like particles (VLPs) because these candidates could protect nonhuman primates from ebolavirus-induced disease. DNA vaccines, adenovirus-based vaccines, and VSIV-based vaccines have entered clinical trials.

**Treatment**

• No specific treatment for the disease is yet available. Efforts to help those who are infected are supportive and include giving either oral rehydration therapy (slightly sweet and salty water to drink) or intravenous fluids.

• The recent outbreak in West Africa is the largest and most complex Ebola outbreak since the Ebola virus was first discovered in 1976. The most severely affected countries were Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

**INS Sardar Patel**

• Adding to a series of recent boosts for India’s defence sector, Indian Navy’s latest Naval establishment, INS Sardar Patel, was commissioned at Gujarat’s Porbandar recently.
Details:
- The Navy says the commissioning of INS Sardar Patel would enable it to qualitatively augment its infrastructure and organisational effectiveness in Gujarat, which would improve coordination and synergy with other maritime agencies of the government.
- The base would improve the logistic support being provided to the Indian Navy units deployed in the Northern Arabian Sea, including that along the International Maritime Boundary Line with Pakistan.
- Gujarat has a coastline of 1600 km interspersed with 43 ports. Of these, besides Kandla being a major port, 11 are intermediate and 31 are minor ports. The ports of Gujarat handle 300 million tons of cargo annually, which is 43% of the total maritime trade handled by the various ports of India.

Justice Cyriac Joseph appointed NHRC acting chief
- According to the orders issued by the President, the National Human Rights Commission Member Justice Cyriac Joseph will act as the Chairperson of the Commission until the appointment of a new Chairperson in place of Justice K.G. Balakrishnan who has completed his tenure.

About NHRC:
- It is a statutory body established in 1993.

Members:
- It consists of a Chairman and 4 members. Chairman should be a retired Chief Justice of India. Members should be either sitting or retired judges of the Supreme Court or a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court and 2 persons having practical knowledge in this field.
- Ex officio members are the chairmen of National Commission for Scheduled Caste, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Minorities and National Commission for Women.
- The chairman and members are appointed on the recommendation of a 6 member committee consisting of Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, leaders of opposition in both the houses of parliament and Union Home Minister.
- Term of the chairman and members is 5 years or 70 years whichever is earlier.
- After retirement they are not eligible for further reappointment.
- Removal: President has to refer the matter to Supreme Court and if after enquiry Supreme Court holds it right then they can be removed by the President.

Other details:
- The commission is not empowered to enquire into matters which were committed one year before.
- Its recommendations are just advisory and not binding in nature.
- It submits Annual report to the Central government and to the concerned state governments.

Lok Sabha clears black money Bill
- The Lok Sabha recently passed The Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets (Imposition of Tax) Bill, 2015, after the government once again turned down the Opposition’s demand for referring the legislation to a standing committee.
However, opposition parties say that the Bill does not prevent the generation of black money in the country and some members are apprehensive that this could become another tool in the hands of enforcement agencies to harass innocent people.

The bill will now go to the Rajya Sabha, which will debate and return the bill since it has been termed a money bill. If it does not return the bill in 15 days, it would be deemed to be passed.

The Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets (Imposition of Tax) Bill:

The Bill will apply to Indian citizens and seeks to replace the Income Tax (IT) Act, 1961 for the taxation of foreign income. It penalizes the concealment of foreign income, and provides for criminal liability for attempting to evade tax in relation to foreign income.

Important provisions in the Bill:

- According to the provisions of the Bill, those who conceal income and assets and indulge in tax evasion in relation to foreign assets can face rigorous imprisonment of up to 10 years. The offence will be non-compoundable and the offenders will not be permitted to approach the Settlement Commission for resolution of disputes.
- There will also be a penalty of 300% of taxes on the concealed income and assets.
- According to the Bill, undisclosed foreign income or assets shall be taxed at the flat rate of 30%. No exemption or deduction or set off of any carried forward losses which may be admissible under the existing Income-tax Act, 1961, shall be allowed. And concealment of income in relation to a foreign asset will attract penalty equal to three times the amount of tax (90% of the undisclosed income or the value of the undisclosed asset). This would be over and above tax at a flat rate of 30%.
- The Bill also proposes to make concealment of income and evasion of tax in relation to a foreign asset a ‘predicate offence’ under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, which will enable the enforcement agencies to attach and confiscate the accounted assets held abroad and launch proceedings.
- The Bill seeks to make non-filing of income tax returns or filing of returns with inadequate disclosure of foreign assets liable for prosecution with punishment of rigorous imprisonment of up to 7 years. To protect persons holding foreign accounts with minor balances which may not have been reported out of oversight or ignorance, it has been provided that failure to report bank accounts with a maximum balance of upto Rs.5 lakh at any time during the year will not entail penalty or prosecution.
- The tax liability on an overseas property would be computed on the basis of its current market price, not the price at which it was acquired.
- The Bill provides for a short window for those holding overseas assets to declare their wealth, pay taxes and penalties to escape punitive action. Failure to furnish return in respect of foreign income or assets shall attract a penalty of Rs.10 lakh. The same amount of penalty is prescribed for cases where although the assessee has filed a return of income, but he has not disclosed the foreign income and asset or has furnished inaccurate particulars of the same.
- The Income Tax assesses with overseas assets will get a one-time opportunity for declaring them. The time-frame of the short window will be notified after the passage of the bill.
- Sources: The Hindu, prindia, NDTV.
The New Development Bank:

- It is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as an alternative to the existing US-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund.
- The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013.
- The bank is set up to foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets.
- The bank will be headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

What it does?

- The New Development Bank will mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

Benefits:

- The establishment of the Bank will help India and other signatory countries to raise and avail resources for their infrastructure and sustainable development projects.
- It would also reflect the close relations among BRICS countries, while providing a powerful instrument for increasing their economic cooperation.
- It is expected to allow India to raise and obtain more resources for the much needed infrastructure development, the lack of which is coming in the way of inclusiveness and growth as of now.
- It will make available additional resources thereby recycling the savings accumulated in emerging countries which are presently being locked up in Treasury bonds having much lower returns.

CBDT Breather for FIIs on MAT Issues

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has said that it would hold off from issuing fresh demands for minimum alternate tax (MAT) from foreign investors, and has advised taxmen not to take coercive action on demands already made, as a government-appointed committee looks into the issue.

Background:

- The government uses the minimum alternate tax to get companies, which pay less or zero tax due to the available exemptions to pay some tax. The issuance of such tax demand on foreign institutional investors has caused an outcry among them and the issue is cited as one of the reasons for the stock market fall.
- Foreign institutional investors have been exempted from paying such taxes from April 1, 2015, but the tax demands have been made in respect of previous years.
- A panel headed by Justice A.P. Shah was constituted to look into the issue.

About CBDT:

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory authority functioning under the Central Board of Revenue Act, 1963. The officials of the Board in their ex-officio capacity also function as a Division of the Ministry of Finance dealing with matters relating to levy and collection of direct taxes.
The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India. It provides essential inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India and is also responsible for administration of the direct tax laws through Income Tax Department.

It is India’s official Financial Action Task Force unit.

Initially the Board was in charge of both direct and indirect taxes. However, when the administration of taxes became too unwieldy for one Board to handle, the Board was split up into two, namely the Central Board of Direct Taxes and Central Board of Excise and Customs in 1964.

The CBDT Chairman and Members of CBDT are selected from Indian Revenue Service (IRS), a premier civil service of India, whose members constitute the top management of Income Tax Department.

**Banks told to appoint internal ombudsman**

In a move to further beef up the quality of customer service, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has advised all public sector banks and some private and foreign banks to appoint an internal ombudsman.

The internal ombudsman would be designated Chief Customer Service Officer (CCSO).

RBI has also made it clear that the CCSO should not have worked in the bank in which he/she is appointed as CCSO.

**Why is it required?**

The RBI is keen to ensure that there is undivided attention to resolution of customer complaints in banks. Hence, it has suggested the appointment of an internal ombudsman.

**Other details:**

RBI has said that all public sector banks will have to appoint a Chief Customer Service Officer.

The private sector and foreign banks which have been told to appoint such officers (or internal ombudsman) are: ICICI Bank Ltd., HDFC Bank Ltd., Axis Bank Ltd., Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd., IndusInd Bank Ltd., Standard Chartered Bank, Citi Bank N.A. and HSBC Ltd. These banks have been selected on the basis of their asset size, business-mix, etc.

**Background:**

The Reserve Bank introduced the Banking Ombudsman Scheme (BOS) in 1995 to provide an expeditious and inexpensive forum to bank customers for resolution of their complaints relating to certain services rendered by banks.

Commercial banks, regional rural banks, and scheduled primary co-operative banks are covered under the Scheme.

The Reserve Bank operates the BOS, free of cost, so as to make it accessible to all.

The bank’s internal ombudsman will now be a forum available to bank customers for grievance redressal before they can even approach the Banking Ombudsman.

**Nepal Earthquake**

A deadly magnitude 7.3 earthquake has struck Nepal and sent aftershocks through neighbouring India, two weeks after a devastating quake.
A 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on April 25, killing at least 8,046 people and injuring more than 17,800.

The epicentre this time is about 80km north-east of Kathmandu, halfway to Everest. On 25 April, the big quake began 80km to the north-west of the capital.

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.

What experts say?
- However, experts are of the opinion that the 7.3 magnitude event and the subsequent tremors that rocked Nepal were aftershocks and could not be construed as fresh earthquakes.

Why the experts say so?
- Experts say that if there had been a fresh earthquake on a new fault, many aftershocks would have occurred along a larger length of the fault. Usually a 7.8 magnitude earthquake would rupture a length of 150-200 km, which was observed in the April 25 event. No similar thing had happened due to recent quake and all the events were concentrated in a few kilometres on the eastern end of the April 25 fault zone. Besides the 7.3 magnitude event, the other aftershocks due to recent quake, ranged from 4.2 to 6.3 magnitude.
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.

**Governors appointed for four States**

- President of India recently appointed Governors for four States, bringing down the number of Governors who had been holding the additional charge of more than two States for the past few months.

**Details:**

- **Droupadi Murmu**: Governor of Jharkhand.
- **P. Rajkhowa**: Governor of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Tathagata Roy**: Governor of Tripura.
- **Shanmuganathan**: Governor of Meghalaya.

**Transfers:**

- Nirbhay Sharma: Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, has been transferred and appointed Governor of Mizoram for the remainder of his term.
- Jharkhand Governor Syed Ahmed has been transferred and appointed Governor of Manipur for the remainder of his term.

**Governor:**

- In the Indian Republic, the state Governor stands at the head of the Executive power of any state in India, just like the President who is the head of the executive power in the Union.
• The Governor is the nominal head of a state, unlike the Chief Minister who is the real head of a state in India. In other words, although all executive actions of an Indian state are taken in the name of the Governor, and all executive powers are vested in the Governor, in reality, the Governor merely gives his consent to the various executive actions. He or she is devoid of taking any major decisions. The real powers needed in the executive dealings of a state lie with the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers.
• According to an amendment in the Constitution of India, brought about in 1956, the same person can be the Governor of two or more states.
• The functions of the Governor of a state are equivalent to the functions of the Lieutenant Governor in an Union Territory in India.
• Like the President of India, the Governor of any state in India is vested with certain executive, legislative and judicial powers. He or she also possesses certain discretionary or emergency powers. But one major difference in the powers enjoyed by the President and those enjoyed by the Governor is, the Governor does not have any diplomatic or military powers.
• The governors and lieutenant-governors are appointed by the president for a term of 5 years.
• Article 157 and Article 158 of the Constitution of India specify eligibility requirements for the post of governor.
• The term of governor’s office is normally 5 years but it can be terminated earlier by: Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister of the country, at whose pleasure the governor holds office or Resignation by the governor. There is no provision of impeachment, as it happens for the president.
• The first woman to become a Governor of a state in India was Sarojini Naidu. She remained the Governor of Uttar Pradesh in independent India.

Mission Mangroves in Sri Lanka

• More than half the world’s mangroves have been lost over the last century, but all of those surviving in Sri Lanka, one of their most important havens, are now to be protected in an unprecedented operation.
Details of the Scheme:
• In an initiative designed to prevent any more being cut down in Sri Lanka and to boost some of the poorest communities in the world, women will be offered small loans and training to start businesses. In return for the microloans, the women will be expected to stop using the trees for firewood and to guard the forests near their homes.
• Conservationists behind the scheme, which is backed by the Sri Lankan government, believe the focus on women will bring huge benefits to living standards in coastal communities.
Why Mangroves are important?
• Mangroves are an important protection against climate change as they sequester up to five times more carbon than other forests, area for area.
• They protect coastlines against flooding and tsunamis, and provide a vital habitat for marine animals, especially crabs, shrimp and juvenile fish.

Mangroves in India:
• Mangroves in India account for about 3% of the world’s mangrove vegetation. Mangrove cover in India is 4,662 sq. km, which is 0.14% of the country’s total geographical area. Sundarbans in West Bengal accounts for almost half of the total area under mangroves in the country. Mangrove in India is famous for its rich variety of flora and fauna.
The forest survey report, 2013, notes down that the overall Mangrove cover in the county in 2013 has decreased compared to 2011. The reasons for the decrease in the mangrove cover may be:

- Grazing by domestic cattle and exploitation of mangrove woods for fuel and timber.
- The neo-tectonic movement of river courses.
- Abatement of upstream freshwater discharges due to construction of dams and reservoirs.
- Rapid trend of reclamation of mangrove forests for habitations.
- Pollutant discharges from cities and industries etc.
- Composition of Mangroves in India: The very dense mangrove comprises 1,403 sq. km (30.10% of the total mangrove cover), moderately dense mangrove is 1,658.12 sq. km (35.57%) while open mangroves cover an area of 1,600.44 sq. km (33%).

**Sundarbans:**

- The Sundarbans is a natural region in West Bengal and Bangladesh. It is the largest single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.
- The Sundarbans covers approximately 10,000 square kilometres (3,900 sq mi) of which 60% is in Bangladesh with the remainder in India.
- It is a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](http://www.unesco.org).  

**Delhi Govt. not to allow FDI in retail**

- The Delhi Government has said that it will not allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail sector in the Capital as it would hurt the interests of traders and lead to unemployment.

**Background:**

- Multi-brand retail was opened up for foreign direct investment, with a 51% cap, in September 2012, when the Congress-led UPA government was in power.
- In its latest edition of the annual FDI document, the new government had retained the previous UPA regime’s decision allowing foreign retailers to open multi-brand stores with 51% ownership, notwithstanding the political slugfest over the issue.
- The consolidated FDI circular released recently has incorporated the changes made in the last one year, including liberalisation of sectors such as railways, defence, medical devices, insurance and construction.
- FDI in defence has been raised to 49% from 26%. 100% foreign investment is allowed in railway infrastructure, construction, operation and maintenance of suburban corridor projects through PPP, high-speed trains, dedicated freight lines, railway electrification and mass rapid transport systems.

**Quick facts:**

- The [consolidated foreign direct investment (FDI) policy will be released by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)](http://www.dipp.nic.in). The document includes all changes in India’s FDI policy over the last year.
- The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), which is under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, is the nodal agency on FDI policy. It compiles all policies related to India’s FDI regime into a single document to make it simple and easy for investors to understand.

**FDI in Multi-brand Retail:**

- State governments have some discretionary powers with respect to this matter in India.
- A key condition is that multi-brand retail outlets can only be set up in those states, which agree to allow FDI in Multi Brand Retail Trading (MBRT). So far, the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu &
Kashmir, Maharashtra, Manipur, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli have approved FDI in MBRT.

- A foreign investor proposing to invest in MBRT in other states can seek specific consent from the relevant State Government.
- The policy is so framed because the Constitution of India categorizes “trade and commerce within the State” as a state subject. State Governments have also been given the discretion to prescribe additional conditions to regulate MBRT stores set up in their jurisdiction.

**Preconditions:**

- The foreign investor must infuse a minimum of $100 million in the entity, which will engage in MBRT in India (MBRT entity).
- At least 50% of the total FDI into the MBRT entity must be invested in backend infrastructure within three years from the first tranche of FDI. “Backend infrastructure” includes capital expenditure on all activities (excluding that on front-end units, land cost and rentals) such as investment made towards processing, manufacturing, distribution, quality control, packaging, logistics, warehouse, agriculture market produce infrastructure etc.
- Investment by the MBRT entity in backend infrastructure must be in greenfield assets only i.e. not through acquisition of supply chain/backend assets or stakes from an existing entity; or use of backend facilities of any existing wholesale trading/cash and carry wholesale trading arrangement in India.
- The front-end stores of the MBRT entity must be company owned and company operated only – the MBRT entity cannot adopt a franchisee model. The front-end stores must be set up as new stores and not through acquisition of existing retail stores.
- At least 30% of the value of the manufactured or processed products purchased by the MBRT entity must be sourced from Indian “small industry” units which have a total investment in plant and machinery not exceeding $1 million as certified by the District Industries Centre. Procurement of fresh produce is not covered by this MBRT Condition since it wouldn’t qualify as a “manufactured or processed product”.
- Multi-brand retail stores can be set up only in cities with a population of more than 1 million (determined by the 2011 census).
- The MBRT entity cannot engage in retail trading by e-commerce or any form of distribution, including undertaking cash & carry wholesale trading. MBRT and cash & carry wholesale trading businesses must be undertaken through different entities.
- Every application seeking approval for FDI in MBRT will first be scrutinized by DIPP before being considered by the Foreign Investment Promotion Board for Government approval.

---

**Politicians lose space in govt. ads**

- The Supreme Court, in a landmark judgement, has restrained the government from publishing the photographs of political leaders, Ministers or prominent persons in government advertisements.

**Why?**

- The court has said that such photos tended to portray a government project as the achievement of a particular individual and thus paved the way for a personality cult. Such personal glorification and image-making at public expense was a direct antithesis of democratic functioning. Hence the court has held that taxpayers’ money cannot be spent to build the personality cults of political leaders.

**Exception:**
However, the court has drawn an exception to this restraint in the case of the President, the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of India. The Judgement adds that the President, Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of India have to decide for themselves whether or not their photographs should appear in a government advertisement. By this, the judgment, in a way, makes them personally accountable for the publication of their photographs.

The judgment also gives space for publishing the photos of acknowledged personalities like Mahatma Gandhi to commemorate their anniversaries.

**Background:**
- The verdict was based on petitions filed by NGOs, which said taxpayer’s money was being spent liberally on gaining political mileage.

**Other Details:**
- The verdict applies to the frequent ads that are placed by the centre and state governments to publicize schemes.
- The apex court has also directed the central government to constitute a three-member committee consisting of persons with unimpeachable neutrality and impartiality to regulate the issue of public advertisements and rejected the plea that it should be done by the court itself.
- The central government had recently said that judiciary should not encroach into government policies and executive decisions and can step in only if there is no policy or law in place.

---

**Camphor-scented leaves found in Western Ghats**

- A new tree species that gives out strong smell of camphor when its leaves and stem are crushed has been reported from southern Western Ghats.

**Details:**
- The species is named as *Cinnamomum agasthyamalayanum* after the type locality, Agasthyamala hills, from where it was reported.
- The species is **endemic to the Ghats region of Kerala in India**
- The find attains significance as this is considered the only endemic species that gives out the smell of camphor.

**Uses:**
- Camphor has a wide range of medicinal applications especially in Ayurveda.
- Camphor has pain-relieving effect.
- It is an ingredient in a few externally applied oils to relieve muscle spasm.
- It also has mild mucolitpic property and can reduce bronchospasm.
- It is also used in mild dosage in internal medicines.

**Other Camphora Species:**
- Natural camphor is extracted by distilling the leaves and bark of *Cinnamomum camphora*, a native to China, Taiwan, southern parts of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. It is also synthetically produced.
- Though Cinnamomum camphora would grow in Indian climatic conditions, it need not yield camphor at commercially viable levels.

---

**India, a victim of e-waste crime**

- A report released recently by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) says that much of the 40 million tonnes of electronic waste produced around the world — old

---
smartphones, TVs, laptops and obsolete kitchen appliances — finds its way illegally to Asia and Africa every year.

Important observations made by the Report:

- Close to 90% of the world’s electronic waste — worth nearly $19 billion — is illegally traded or dumped each year, to destinations half way across the world.
- While the European Union the U.S. and Japan are the primary origins of e-waste shipments, China, India, Malaysia and Pakistan are the main destinations. In Africa, Ghana and Nigeria are the biggest recipients of e-waste.
- Illegal trade is driven by the relatively low costs of shipment and the high costs of treatment in the developed countries. Exporting e-waste to Asia worked out 10 times cheaper than processing it in within these countries.
- The Indian subcontinent has turned into an important destination for European waste. This goes beyond e-waste to include household waste, metals, textiles and tires — which are exported to India and Pakistan.
- The vast majority of illegal e-waste ends up in landfills, incinerators, and in ill-equipped recycling facilities. The waste is dumped in areas where local residents and workers disassemble the units and collect whatever is of value. What is not reusable is simply dumped as waste, creating immense problems and leading to what has been described as a ‘toxic time bomb’.
- While Europe and North America are by far the largest producers of e-waste, Asia’s cities are fast catching up as consumers of electronic goods and as generators of e-waste.

Achal K Jyoti takes over as new Election Commissioner

- Achal Kumar Jyoti recently took over as the new Election Commissioner, filling one of the two vacancies in the three-member body.

Quick facts:

- Election Commissioner of India is a member of Election Commission of India, a body constitutionally empowered to conduct free and fair elections to the national and state legislatures.
- He is usually a member of the Indian Civil Service and mostly from the Indian Administrative Service.
- He has a tenure of six years in office or till he or she attains the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- The President of India based on a recommendation from the Government of India appoints the Election Commissioners.
- Election Commissioners can be removed by the President on recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

India way behind on WHO health targets

- The WHO’s annual World Health Statistics for 2015, which was released recently in Geneva, says that India has met only four targets under the Millenium Development Goals (MDG), and has made next to no progress on another four.

Important observations made by the Report:

- Globally, life expectancy at birth has increased by six years for both men and women since 1990.
- By the end of this year if current trends continue, the world will have met global targets for turning around the epidemics of HIV, malaria and tuberculosis and increasing access...
to safe drinking water. It will also have made substantial progress in reducing child undernutrition, maternal and child deaths, and increasing access to basic sanitation.

- Progress in child survival worldwide is one of the greatest success stories of international development and pre-term birth complications have replaced neo-natal complications and disease as the biggest source of mortality for children under the age of five.
- Since 1990, child deaths have almost halved — falling from an estimated 90 deaths per 1000 live births to 46 deaths per 1000 live births in 2013. Yet the world will not achieve the MDG target of reducing the death rate by two-thirds. Less than one-third of all countries have achieved or are on track to meet this target by the end of this year. The top killers of children aged less than 5 years are now: pre-term birth complications, pneumonia, birth asphyxia and diarrhoea.
- In India, life expectancy grew by eight years between 1990 and 2013. While India has sharply reduced its infant mortality between 2000 and 2013, it still contributes for the most infant deaths globally. Non-communicable diseases are the top killers, followed by communicable diseases and injuries.
- In September, countries will decide on new goals for 2030. In addition to finishing the MDG agenda, the post-2015 agenda needs to tackle emerging challenges, including the growing impact of non-communicable diseases, like diabetes and heart disease, and the changing social and environmental determinants that affect health.

**MDGs: What are they?**

- These are eight international development goals that were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. They were set to be achieved by 2015.
- These are time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability.
- They are also basic human rights—the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security.
- Since the adoption, there has been significant progress in many of the goals. But the progress has not been uniform. The progress differs from country to country and even within the country.

**The eight millennium development goals are:**

- Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty
- Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- Reduce Child Mortality
- Improve Maternal Health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases
- Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Each goal has specific targets, and dates for achieving those targets.

**India and MDGs:**

- In India, considerable progress has been made in the field of basic universal education, gender equality in education, and global economic growth. However there is slow progress in the improvement of health indicators related to mortality, morbidity, and various environmental factors contributing to poor health conditions. Even though the government has implemented a wide array of programs, policies, and various schemes to combat these health challenges, further intensification of efforts and redesigning of outreach strategies is needed to give momentum to the progress toward achievement of the MDGs.
India is unlikely to achieve all the set targets by September 2015.

Nod for Bill to check benami transactions

In a bid to tackle generation of black money within the country, the Cabinet recently approved the new Benami Transaction (Prohibition) Bill to curb unaccounted-for wealth stashed away in foreign bank accounts.

Details of the Bill:
- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) (Amendment) Bill, 2015 provides for attachment and confiscation of benami properties and imposes fine with imprisonment.
- Apart from confiscation, the Bill provides for prosecution and aims to act as a major avenue for blocking generation and holding of black money in the form of benami property, especially in real estate.
- The Bill defines benami transaction as an arrangement where a property is held by a person (other than in fiduciary capacity) on behalf of another person who has paid for it; or the transaction is made for a property in a fictitious name; or the owner of the property is not aware of or denies knowledge of such ownership. A benamidar is a person or fictitious person in whose name the property is held or transferred.
- The Bill restricts the right of any person who is claiming to be the real owner to recover such property. In addition, no person shall be able to re-transfer such property to the beneficial owner.
- The Bill provides that the Adjudicating Authority and the Appellate Tribunal established under the Prevention of Money laundering Act, 2002, shall also be the same for the purposes of this Act.
- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act was earlier enacted in 1988, but the rules could not be formulated.

Cabinet nod for changes to child labour law

The cabinet has approved a proposal to amend the child labour law to impose stricter punishment on those employing children below the age of 14 but allowed minors to work in non-hazardous family enterprises, a move that has been criticized by child rights activists.

Details of the approved proposal:
- Children younger than 14 can work in family enterprises and farms after school hours and during holidays.
- Double fines and the jail term for people employing minors.
- Children working as artists in the audio-visual entertainment industry, including advertisement, films, television serials or any such other entertainment or sports activities, except the circus, have also been granted exemption, provided the work does not affect their school education.
- Employment of adolescents (14-18 years of age) in hazardous occupations and processes such as chemicals and mines is also banned.
- Offences under the Child Labour Act have been made a cognizable offence.
- The changes in the labour law also provide for stricter punishment for employers for violation. While there is no penalty provision for parents for the first offence, the employer would be liable for punishment even for the first violation.
- Now, the Government will move official amendments to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2012 in Parliament.
**Goce gravity boost to geothermal hunt**

- The hunt for sources of geothermal energy is getting a boost from new observations of the Earth made from space. The data comes from **Europe’s Goce satellite**. It mapped Earth’s gravity field from 2009 to 2013 at high resolution.

**How data collected from satellite will help?**

- Information about variations in gravity across the planet could help prospectors find promising locations where sub-surface heat can be exploited to generate electricity.
- This keen sensing is expected to narrow the search for prime spots to put future power stations.
- Goce’s maps are expected to shortcut some of the effort by pinpointing regions of the world with the best characteristics, such as where the continental crust is at its thinnest.
- By processing Goce’s data in special ways, scientists can also tease out details of the different rock layers and structures within the Earth.
- Although a large potential resource, geothermal currently accounts for less than 1% of the world’s electricity generation. Part of that comes down to the huge costs of exploration.

**GOCE satellite:**

- The Gravity Field and Steady-State Ocean Circulation Explorer (GOCE) was the first of **European Space Agency’s Living Planet Programme satellites intended to map in unprecedented detail the Earth’s gravity field**.
- The spacecraft’s primary instrumentation is a highly sensitive gravity gradiometer consisting of three pairs of accelerometers which measures gravitational gradients along three orthogonal axes.

**Why was the Satellite launched?**

- To determine gravity-field anomalies with an accuracy of \(10^{-5}\) m·s\(^{-2}\) (1 mGal). To increase resolution, the satellite flew in an unusually low orbit.
- To determine the geoid with an accuracy of 1–2 cm.
- To achieve the above at a spatial resolution better than 100 km.
- The final gravity map and model of the geoid will provide users worldwide with well-defined data product that will lead to:
  - A better understanding of the physics of the Earth’s interior to gain new insights into the geodynamics associated with the lithosphere, mantle composition and rheology, uplift and subduction processes.
  - A better understanding of the ocean currents and heat transport.
  - A global height-reference system, which can serve as a reference surface for the study of topographic processes and sea-level change.
  - Better estimates of the thickness of polar ice-sheets and their movement.

**Free speech is not an absolute right: SC**

- The Supreme Court recently held that freedom of speech had **constitutional limitation** attached to it and this right cannot be exercised to attribute obscene expletives to historically respected personality such as Mahatma Gandhi.
- The Supreme Court has held that poetic licence does not mean having nationally revered figures like Mahatma Gandhi mouth obscene words. The Court also noted that free speech is not an absolute right.

**Background:**
The Court set these standards while considering the plea of Devidas Ramachandra Tuljapurkar, who was charged with publishing the obscene Marathi poem titled Gandhi Mala Bhetala (I Met Gandhi) in which the Mahatma is a character. The poem was published in 1994 in an in-house bank magazine.

Details of the Judgement:
- The apex court said in its judgment that when the name of Mahatma Gandhi is alluded to or used as a symbol speaking or using obscene words, the test of contemporary community standards of what is vulgar and obscene language becomes applicable with more vigour.
- The verdict said freedom of speech and expression has to be given a broad canvas, but it is also subject to inherent limitations within the constitutional parameters.

What the Constitution says?
- Freedom of speech and expression is the most basic of all freedoms granted to the citizens of India.
- The Right to freedom of speech and expression is a guaranteed Fundamental Right under Article 19 (1) of the Indian Constitution.
- However, the freedom of speech is not an absolute right. Clause (2) of Article 19 of the Indian constitution enables the legislature to impose certain restrictions on free speech under following heads:
  - security of the State,
  - friendly relations with foreign States,
  - public order,
  - decency and morality,
  - contempt of court,
  - defamation,
  - incitement to an offence, and
  - sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Reasonable restrictions on these grounds can be imposed only by a duly enacted law and not by executive action.

RBI relaxes norms for IDF-NBFCs
- In a bid to ensure flow of funds to infrastructure projects, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently allowed Infrastructure Debt Fund-Non-Banking Financial Companies to invest in public-private partnerships (PPPs) and infrastructure projects which have completed at least one year of satisfactory commercial operation.
- What else has the RBI said?
  - The maximum exposure that an IDF-NBFC can take on individual projects will be at 50% of its total capital funds. An additional exposure up to 10% could be taken at the discretion of the board of the IDF-NBFC.
  - The RBI has said that it could permit additional exposure up to 15 per cent (over 60%) subject to such conditions as it may deem fit to impose regarding additional prudential safeguards.
  - It has also said that all assets covering PPP and post-commercial operations date (COD) infrastructure projects in existence over a year of commercial operation would be assigned a risk weight of 50%.

What are Infrastructure Debt Funds?
Infrastructure Debt Funds (IDFs) are investment vehicles to accelerate the flow of long term debt to the sector. IDFs aims at taking out a substantial share of the outstanding commercial bank loans.

IDFs are set up by sponsoring entities either as Non-Banking Financing Companies (NBFC) or as Trusts/Mutual Funds (MF). A trust based IDF would normally be a Mutual Fund (MF), regulated by SEBI, while a company based IDF would normally be a NBFC regulated by the Reserve Bank.

RBI has allowed Indians as well as foreign investors to invest in debt instruments floated by IDFs.

**Ordinance route not possible for special category**

Union Minister for Urban Development M. Venkaiah Naidu recently made it clear that it would not be possible for taking the ordinance route to give special category status to Andhra Pradesh.

The Minister also said that a detailed procedure had been laid down to grant special category status to States.

The process for granting special category status will be set in motion based on the recommendations of the National Development Council (NDC), and later, the bill has to get the approval of Parliament.

The NDC has bestowed special category status on as many as 11 States based on parameters like low resource base, hilly and difficult terrain, low population density or sizeable share of tribal population.

**Special category states in India:**

- The decision to grant special category status to States lie with the National Development Council composed of the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers and members of the Planning Commission.
- Initially, three states namely Assam, Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir were accorded special category status and later on eight other states were also given special category status namely: Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, and Sikkim and thus the list is now increased to eleven.

The bases on the basis of which NDC decides whether a State should be accorded special status or not includes:

- hilly and difficult terrain.
- low population density and or sizeable share of tribal population.
- strategic location along borders with neighboring countries.
- economic and infrastructure backwardness and non-viable nature of state finances.

**Resource allocation:**

- At the time of resource allocation by the centre to States, these special category States are at a beneficial position. Based on the Report of Fifth Finance Commission, a formula was fixed for the distribution of resources between the states. This formula was named after the then deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Dr. Gadgil Mukherjee.
- For allocation among special category states, there are no explicit criteria for distribution and funds are allocated on the basis of the state’s plan size and previous plan expenditures. Allocation between non special category states is determined by the Gadgil Mukherjee formula which gives weight to population (60%), per capita income (25%), fiscal performance (7.5%) and special problems (7.5%).
- In order to achieve the status of a special category state, a state has to project itself as socioeconomically or strategically vulnerable state.
• The Finance Commission is entrusted with the work of distribution of central tax revenues among states. The Finance Commission also recommends the principles governing non-plan grants and loans to states.
• The special category states get 30% of the total assistance for all states while the other states share the remaining 70%.
• The nature of the assistance also varies for special category states. Normal Central Assistance (NCA) is split into 90% grants and 10% loans for special category states, while the ratio between grants and loans is 30:70 for other states.

**India grants e-visas for Chinese nationals**

• Prime Minister of India, during his Chinese tour, has announced that India has decided to extend electronic tourist visas to Chinese nationals.
• The Prime Minister also said that it was part of a concerted effort by Indian government to bring the world’s two largest populations in closer contact.
• The e-visa facility would enable Chinese applicants to apply for visas online a few days before they travel.
• The e-visa announcement will boost an MoU on tourism cooperation, as 2015 and 2016 have been designated ‘Visit India’ and ‘Visit China’ years respectively, given that Chinese tourists to India now number less than two lakh a year.

e-visa:
• e-Tourist Visa Facility is available for holders of passport of over 40 eligible countries.
• Validity of these Visas: Visas to be issued under this scheme will be for single-entry and valid for only 30 days’ stay from the date of arrival in India.
• Entry into India must be through any of the nine designated airports.

Eligibility:
• International Travellers whose sole objective of visiting India is recreation, sight seeing, casual visit to meet friends or relatives, short duration medical treatment or casual business visit.
• Passport should have at least six months validity from the date of arrival in India. The passport should have at least two blank pages for stamping by the Immigration Officer.
• International Travellers should have return ticket or onward journey ticket, with sufficient money to spend during his/her stay in India.

Non 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.

**Manipur’s Ngapang revealed to world as new catfish species**

• Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) have discovered a new species of catfish, **Glyptothorax senapatiensis**, in the Chindwin river drainage in Senapati district of Manipur.

About the Fish:
• It is a small but edible fish with high nutritional value and a lot of oil content.
• The fish has a thoracic adhesive apparatus that helps it cling on to the rocky riverbed in mountains against strong currents. **All Glyptothorax-genus fish have this characteristic.**
Insights Current Events - May 2015

- Manipur has a high diversity of aquatic fauna because of the two important river drainage systems. The western half is fed by the Barak-Brahmaputra drainage and the eastern and central valleys are crisscrossed by the Chindwin river drainage, and these account for the variety in the aquatic fauna.

**IS seizes Ramadi, closes in on Palmyra**

- Extremists from the Islamic State group have closed in on Syria’s ancient metropolis of Palmyra.
- Jihadist fighters have advanced to within one km of Palmyra, a UNESCO world heritage site featuring Roman colonnades and an impressive necropolis.

**UNESCO world heritage site:**
- A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.
- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.
- Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.
- The List of recorded sites on the World Heritage now stands at 981 which include both cultural and natural wonders.
- Italy is home to the greatest number of World Heritage Sites with 50 sites.

**Selection criteria:**
- Until the end of 2004, there were six criteria for cultural heritage and four criteria for natural heritage. In 2005, this was modified so that there is only one set of ten criteria. Nominated sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one of the ten criteria.

**Cultural criteria:**
- represents a masterpiece of human creative genius and cultural significance.
- exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time, or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning, or landscape design.
- to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.
- is an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural, or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history.
- is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture, or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- is directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

**Natural criteria:**
- contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- is an outstanding example representing major stages of Earth’s history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.
• is an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems, and communities of plants and animals.
• contains the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.
• There are 32 World Heritage Properties in India out of which 25 are Cultural Properties and 7 are Natural Properties.

**475th birth anniversary year celebrations of Maharana Pratap**

• The Union Home Minister recently unveiled a statue of Maharana Pratap at Pratapgarh in Mewar region of Rajasthan. He also said that the Centre has decided to celebrate the 475th birth anniversary year of Maharana Pratap all over the country in a big way and a committee has been formed at the Central level to commemorate the event.
• The Rajasthan state government has declared Maharana Pratap Jayanti as a holiday.
• The Uttar Pradesh government has declared May 9 (Maharana Pratap’s birth anniversary) as a public holiday.

**Quick facts:**
• Maharana Pratap was born on **May 9th 1540 in Kumbhalgarh, Rajasthan.** His father was Maharana Udaipur Singh II and his mother was Rani Jeevant Kanwar. Maharana Udaipur Singh II ruled the kingdom of Mewar, with his capital at Chittor. Maharana Pratap was the eldest of twenty-five sons and hence given the title of Crown Prince. He was destined to be the 54th ruler of Mewar, in the line of the Sisodiya Rajputs.
• Maharana Pratap became the ruler of Mewar when he was 32.
• He ruled the region from 1572 to 1597.
• He took on Akbar’s forces and challenged his army through his guerilla warfare techniques.
• **Battle of Haldighati:** On 21 June 1576, the armies of Pratap and Akbar led by Sayyed Hashim Barha son of Sayyed Mahmud Khan met at Haldighati, near the town of Gogunda, in which Pratap’s army was defeated. But Pratap organised another attack, known as **the Battle of Dewar**, in which the Mewar army was victorious. Pratap was able to claim back much of the lost territories of Mewar and freed much of Rajasthan from the Mughal rule.

**A special gift from Indian PM**

• Prime Minister of India recently presented Mongolian President, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, a specially commissioned reproduction of a rare 13th century manuscript on the history of Mongols, considered by many as the first world history.

**Details:**
• The manuscript is Called **Jamiut Tawarikh. This work was one of the grandest projects undertaken by the Ilkhanate king Ghazan Khan.** The king’s wazir Rasheeduddin Fazlullah Hamedani wrote it in Persian and chronicled the history up to the reign of Oljeitju (1304–1316).
• The manuscript from the Rampur Raza Library, Rampur (Uttar Pradesh), has over 80 fine miniature illustrations. It is a part of Volume 1 of the work and no other copy of it is known to exist.
The breadth of coverage of the work often caused it to be dubbed as the first world history.

The Prime Minister of India also received traditional fiddle- morin khuur- as a gift from Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj. The ‘morin khuur’, also known as horse-head fiddle, is one of the most important musical instruments of the Mongol people, and is considered a symbol of the Mongolian nation.

India and Mongolia:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on a two-day visit to Mongolia. He is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Mongolia.
- India established diplomatic relations in December 1955. India was the first country outside the Soviet bloc to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia. Since then, there have been treaties of mutual friendship and cooperation between the two countries in 1973, 1994, 2001 and 2004.
- Mongolia is a landlocked country. Mongolia lies in central Asia between Siberia on the north and China on the south. It is slightly larger than Alaska.
- The name Mongol comes from a small tribe whose leader, Ghengis Khan, began a conquest in the 13th century that would eventually encompass an enormous empire stretching from Asia to Europe, as far west as the Black Sea and as far south as India and the Himalayas. After his death the empire was divided into several powerful Mongol states, but these broke apart in the 14th century.

**SC upholds validity of Company Law Tribunal**

- The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and its appellate forum under the Companies Act of 2013. Thus, it has paved the way for setting up the National Company Law Tribunal and the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, a move that will help in faster disposal of corporate disputes and improve the ease of doing business in India.
- Now, these tribunals would adjudicate cases which were so far being dealt by high courts, Company Law Board , Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction and Appellate Authority for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction.
- However, the SC has held a few provisions as invalid. It noted that the selection committee was made a five-member body under the 2013 Act even though previous judgement held that it should have four-members, comprising the CJI or his nominee, a senior Judge of the Supreme Court or high court chief justice and Secretaries in Ministry of Finance and Company Affairs and in Ministry of Law and Justice. Now, the selection committee would be composed of four members, instead of the five as provided by the law. The four members would be the chief justice or his nominee with a casting vote, a senior apex court judge, finance or company affairs secretary, and secretary of the law ministry.
- The court has also quashed Section 409(3)(a) and (c) and Section 411(3) of the Act providing for qualifications of technical members. It held that for appointment of technical members to NCLT, directions contained in the 2010 judgment should be scrupulously followed. According to the court’s directions, the technical members would now be limited to only the ranks of additional secretary and secretary, as determined by an earlier constitution bench ruling from 2010.

**Background:**

- Lawyers’ body Madras Bar Association (MBA) had approached the Supreme Court claiming that the government had not incorporated changes in the companies law
regarding the two tribunals—the NCLT and the NCLAT—which the apex court had directed in a 2010 verdict.

Effects of the decision:
- Entities will now have the option of approaching the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) to appeal against a judgment of NCLT.
- To challenge a NCLAT decision, they can now directly approach the Supreme Court.

National Company Law Tribunal:
- National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a proposed quasi-judicial body that will govern the companies in India.
- It will be established under the Companies Act, 2013 and is a successor body of the Company Law Board.
- NCLT will have the same powers as assigned to the erstwhile Company Law Board (which are mostly related to dealing with oppression and mismanagement), Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR)(revival of sick companies) and powers related to winding up of companies (which was available only with the High Courts).
- The setting up of NCLT as a specialized institution for corporate justice is based on the recommendations of the Justice Eradi Committee on Law Relating to Insolvency and Winding up of Companies.

Powers of NCLT:
- Most of the powers of the Company Law Board under the Companies Act, 1956.
- All the powers of BIFR for revival and rehabilitation of sick industrial companies;
- Power of High Court in the matters of mergers, demergers, amalgamations, winding up,
- etc.;
- Power to order repayment of deposits accepted by Non-Banking Financial Companies;
- Power to wind up companies;
- Power to Review its own orders.

CVC appointments soon
- Days after the Supreme Court gave the go-ahead for the appointment of Chief Vigilance Commissioner and a Vigilance Commissioner, Union Minister of State for Personnel has said that the top vacancies would be filled soon.
- The Supreme Court had last week given its approval for the appointments asking the government to ensure transparency by providing the high-powered selection committee headed by the Prime Minister with names and details of all 130 applicants and not just of those shortlisted by a scrutiny panel of three senior bureaucrats.
- The key posts fell vacant last September after CVC Pradeep Kumar and Vigilance Commissioner J.M. Garg completed their terms.

Basic facts: Central Vigilance Commission:
- It was created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003.
- It is the apex vigilance institution.
- Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
- They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- It submits its report to the President of India.
• The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.
• CVC is advisory body.

First tribal woman to be Jharkhand Governor

• Draupadi Murmu recently took oath as the ninth Governor of Jharkhand, the first tribal woman to occupy the position in the State.

Governors of States in India:

• Governor is the head of the Executive power of any state in India, just like the President who is the head of the executive power in the Union. But, Governor is the nominal head of a state, unlike the Chief Minister who is the real head of a state in India.
• According to an amendment in the Constitution of India, brought about in 1956, the same person can be the Governor of two or more states.
• Like the President of India, the Governor of any state in India is vested with certain executive, legislative and judicial powers. He or she also possesses certain discretionary or emergency powers. But one major difference in the powers enjoyed by the President and those enjoyed by the Governor is, the Governor does not have any diplomatic or military powers.
• The governors and lieutenant-governors are appointed by the president for a term of 5 years.
• Article 157 and Article 158 of the Constitution of India specify eligibility requirements for the post of governor.
• The term of governor’s office is normally 5 years but it can be terminated earlier by: Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister of the country, at whose pleasure the governor holds office or Resignation by the governor. There is no provision of impeachment, as it happens for the president.
• The first woman to become a Governor of a state in India was Sarojini Naidu. She remained the Governor of Uttar Pradesh in independent India.

Assurance on Polavaram project

• The Union Minister for Water Resources has assured that the Centre would do everything for completion of the Polavaram project on time. The Union Water Resources Ministry may approach the government seeking an increase in allocation of funds for Polavaram Multi-Purpose Irrigation Project in Andhra Pradesh.

Polavaram Project:

• Polavaram Project, also called as Indira Sagar Project, is a multi-purpose irrigation project which has been accorded national project status by the central government.
• This dam across the Godavari River is under construction located in West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh state and its reservoir spreads in parts of Chhattisgarh and Orissa States also.
• The project is multipurpose major terminal reservoir project on river Godavari for development of Irrigation, Hydropower and drinking water facilities to East Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.
The project is likely to displace over 1.88 lakh people across 222 villages and so far, 1,730 persons in six villages have been rehabilitated by the government.

**Seoul to provide aid for smart cities in India**

- South Korea has decided to provide $10 billion to India for infrastructure, development of smart cities, railways, and power generation. The two countries have also agreed to upgrade their bilateral relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership.

**Details:**
- Both Countries have agreed to increase their defence and security cooperation and have also inked seven agreements, including on avoidance of double taxation and for cooperation between their National Security Councils.
- As part of the Special Strategic Partnership, both countries would hold annual summit meetings; hold annual joint commissions led by their foreign ministers and boost cooperation between their defense education institutions.

**68th World Health Assembly opens in Geneva**

- After a gap of 19 years, India has assumed presidency of the 68th Session of the World Health Assembly (WHA), the top decision-making body of the World Health Organisation. Union Health Minister J P Nadda presided over the WHA session.
- India would contribute $2.1 million to the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a reflection of its commitment to the global health body and its mandate.
- The presidency of World Health Assembly, the top decision-making body of the WHO, is based on a regional rotation practice and saw India assuming the presidency after 18 years.

**World Health Assembly (WHA):**
- The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the forum through which the World Health Organization (WHO) is governed by its 194 member states. It is the world’s highest health policy setting body and is composed of health ministers from member states.
- The members of the World Health Assembly generally meet every year in May in Geneva, the location of WHO Headquarters.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

**PAC can’t take suo motu notice of report’**

- Public Accounts Committee’s chairman K.V. Thomas recently said that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament cannot take suo motu notice of any Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report. He said the PAC would have to wait for one of the two Houses of Parliament to refer the report to the committee.

**Background:**
- Thomas was responding to questions on whether the PAC would look into CAG naming Union Minister Nitin Gadkari as one of the “promoters and/or directors” of Purti Sakhar Karkhana Ltd, a company reportedly sanctioned a loan of Rs. 84.12 crore by the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency in violation of guidelines.

**Facts–Public Accounts Committee:**
The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is a committee of selected members of Parliament, constituted by the Parliament of India, for the auditing of the expenditure of the Government of India.

The Committee is formed every year with strength of not more than 22 members of which 15 are from Lok Sabha and 7 from Rajya Sabha.

The Chairman is appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha. Since 1967, the chairman of the committee is selected from the opposition. Earlier, it was headed by a member of the ruling party.

Its chief function is to examine the audit report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) after it is laid in the Parliament. CAG assists the committee during the course of investigation.

A Minister is not eligible to be elected as a member of the Committee and if a member, after his election to the Committee, is appointed as a Minister, he ceases to be a member of the Committee from the date of such appointment.

The term of office of members of the Committee does not exceed one year at a time.

The Committee is assisted by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the examination of Accounts and Audit Reports.

**Make parties’ funding public: petition**

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court recently to declare political parties “public authorities” under the Right to Information Act, making them liable to disclose their financial assets for public scrutiny.

The plea arraigns political parties for not complying with repeated orders by the Central Information Commission (CIC) to disclose their assets.

What the CIC had said?

The CIC, in both 2013 and in March, 2015, had declared all national and regional parties public authorities under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

What the Petition says?

The petition argues that the orders issued by the CIC were final and binding. The petition questions the non-compliance of the parties with these two orders, and wants the Supreme Court to direct national and regional parties to disclose complete details about their income as well as expenditure, entire details of donations and funding received by them irrespective of the amount donated and full details of donors making donations to them and to electoral trusts.

The petition argues that political parties should come under the RTI law as they play a core role in governance, and enjoy a stronghold over their elected MPs and MLAs under Schedule 10 of the Constitution. The Schedule makes it compulsory for MPs and MLAs to abide by the directions of their parent parties, failing which the member stands to be disqualified.

The plea also contended that it will be within the average voter's fundamental right to information to know the financial details of political parties to make an informed choice.

What the Representation of the People Act says?

Under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, all political parties must affirm their allegiance to the Constitution of India and such allegiance is made compulsory for the purpose of registration under sub-section (7) of Section 29A. And hence petitioners argue that political parties so registered must furnish information to the public under the right of information under Article 19(1)(a), since right of
information has been held to be a part of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a).

**Experts differ on L-G’s powers**

- The AAP government has appointed senior bureaucrat Arvind Ray as Principal Secretary to the General Administration Department, bypassing Lt Governor’s opinion. With this the ongoing tussle between the Delhi government and Lt Governor has further escalated.

**Background:**

- The tussle started when Lt-Governor Najeeb Jung appointed Shakuntala Gamlin as acting chief secretary without consulting the Council of Ministers of Delhi Government.

**What the Law says?**

- Section 41 of the Government of National Capital Territory Act of Delhi says that Lt. Governor can use his discretion only in matters which fall outside the purview of the Legislative Assembly.

- Article 239AA (3) (a) of the Constitution reserves only two matters under the State List which allows the LG to use his discretionary powers – police and land. This Article was incorporated into the Constitution by the 69th Amendment in 1991, by which the Union Territory of Delhi was called the ‘National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi’ with the Lt. Governor as its administrator.

- Section 44 of the 1991 Act has left it to the President to frame the procedure in case there is a “difference of opinion” between the LG and the Council of Ministers. The same provision provides that “all executive action of Lieutenant Governor whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the Lieutenant Governor.”

- Section 45 mandates that it is the duty of the Chief Minister to communicate to the Lieutenant Governor all decisions of the Council of Ministers relating to the administration of the affairs of the Capital and proposals for legislation.

**Who deals with matters related to Land and Police?**

- In matters of police and land, the Union Ministries of Home Affairs and Urban Development are in direct charge.

- The Lt Governor is the chairperson of the Delhi Development Authority or DDA, and he does not act in tandem with the Chief Minister, but uses his discretion.

**What the experts say?**

- Legal experts give contradictory views on whether the Lt. Governor (LG) is empowered to use his discretion under Section 41 of the Government of National Capital Territory Act of Delhi of 1991, to appoint senior bureaucrats.

- Land and police are reserved subjects under Article 239AA of the Constitution. Some experts say that only in these two, the Lt. Governor has jurisdiction. In all other matters, including the appointment of senior bureaucrats, the parliamentary system of governance prevails. That is, the LG has to abide by Section 41 and act according to the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. Hence, he has no discretion in such matters.

- While some experts, pointing to the arguments in a pending case before the Delhi High Court on plastic ban, which touches on the power equations between the LG and the Chief Minister, say that the LG can use his discretion on appointment of officials as long as his decisions are proved “bonafide.” They call Delhi a hybrid State where the LG is vested with overriding powers. In Plastic ban Case the LG implemented the notification by the Central government for the ban without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. The decision is considered to be bonafide. The ban was subsequently upheld by the National Green Tribunal.
Dust storm in Rajasthan

- A severe dust storm swept across North India recently injuring many and damaging several houses in Rajasthan.

Dust storm:
- A dust storm or sand storm is a meteorological phenomenon common in arid and semi-arid regions.
- Dust storms arise when a gust front or other strong wind blows loose sand and dirt from a dry surface. Particles are transported by saltation and suspension, a process that moves soil from one place and deposits it in another.

Causes:
- As the force of wind passing over loosely held particles increases, particles of sand first start to vibrate, then to saltate. As they repeatedly strike the ground, they loosen and break off smaller particles of dust which then begin to travel in suspension. At wind speeds above that which causes the smallest to suspend, there will be a population of dust grains moving by a range of mechanisms: suspension, saltation and creep.
- Particles become loosely held mainly due to drought or arid conditions, and varied wind causes.
- In desert areas, dust storms are most commonly caused by either thunderstorm outflows, or by strong pressure gradients which cause an increase in wind velocity over a wide area. The vertical extent of the dust or sand that is raised is largely determined by the stability of the atmosphere above the ground as well as by the weight of the particulates.
- Drought and wind contribute to the emergence of dust storms, as do poor farming and grazing practices by exposing the dust and sand to the wind.

Why now in Rajasthan?
- According to Skymet Meteorology Division in India, a low level cyclonic circulation over Pakistan and adjoining Rajasthan region along with high day temperatures had triggered the dust storm.
- West Rajasthan becomes prone to such dust storms as it enters into the pre-monsoon season. This was the first widespread storm of the season covering a large area. The winds are usually westerlies due to which the dust storms travel a long way.

India’s eye on universe ready for tests

- Scheduled to be launched later this year, ASTROSAT, the first dedicated Indian astronomy mission aimed at studying distant celestial objects is now fully assembled.

Details:
- Astrosat is India’s first dedicated astronomy satellite and is scheduled to launch on board the PSLV in October 2015.
- ASTROSAT would be India’s first multiwavelength astronomy satellite. It will facilitate simultaneous observations of celestial bodies and cosmic sources in X-ray and UV spectral bands.
- It will be placed in a 650-km (400 miles) orbit with an 8° inclination for spectroscopic studies of X-ray binaries, supernova remnants, quasars, pulsars, galaxy clusters and active galactic nuclei at a number of different wavelengths simultaneously, from the ultraviolet band to energetic x-rays.

Astrosat will be a proposal-driven general purpose observatory, with main scientific focus on:
Simultaneous multi-wavelength monitoring of intensity variations in a broad range of cosmic sources
Monitoring the X-ray sky for new transients
Sky surveys in the hard X-ray and UV bands
Broadband spectroscopic studies of X-ray binaries, AGN, SNRs, clusters of galaxies and stellar coronae
Studies of periodic and non-periodic variability of X-ray sources

Other details:
It is significant to note that ASTROSAT is the first mission to be operated as a space observatory by ISRO.
ASTROSAT carries four X-ray payloads, one UV telescope and a charge particle monitor.
The mission will put India in an elite orbit with the U.S., Europe, Russia and Japan.

---

**Heat wave warning issued in Telangana**

The Indian Meteorological Department has issued warning that heat wave conditions would prevail in some parts of Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Nalgonda districts of Telangana for the next two-days. Temperature in these districts has crossed 46 degree celsius.

**Heat Wave:**
- A heat wave is a combination of temperature and humidity for a prolonged period. Generally, temperature is more above the average high temperature for the region. It is an extended period of very high summer temperature with the potential to adversely affect communities. High temperature are often accompanied by high humidity, that the body cannot tolerate are defined as extreme heat. A heat wave is a very dangerous situation and major threat to lives
- Heat Wave is said to occur when the maximum temperature exceeds 40°C in the plains and 30°C in the hills. Further, the departure from the seasonal average should be 5-6°C, while a severe heat wave is 7°C or more above average. In temperate countries, the ceiling is much lower.
- India’s biggest “hot-spot”, as measured by IMD stations, is Nellore in Andhra Pradesh. It suffered from as many as 30 heat wave days in 1964 and 35 in 1996, the biggest numbers recorded by any station. It figures most frequently among locations in India – as many as 18 years out of 39 – which have registered more than 15 heat wave days in a year over the half-century.
- Heat Waves affect human beings, animals and even damage crops.
- Occurance: Heat waves form when high pressure aloft strengthens and remains over a region for several days up to several weeks. This is common in summer (in both Northern and Southern Hemispheres) as the jet stream ‘follows the sun’. High pressure up traps heat near the ground, forming a heat wave.

**Court allows polygraph test on three ‘suspects’**

In a big development in the Sunanda Pushkar case, a Delhi court has allowed polygraph test on three “suspects”, who are being accused by the Delhi Police of lying in the case.
However, the court set a condition that the guidelines laid down by the National Human Rights Commission and the Supreme Court should be followed in conducting the procedure. The guidelines stipulate among other things that the lawyer should be present.
Lie Detector and Polygraph Tests:
- Lie detectors are called polygraphs because the test consists of simultaneously monitoring several of the suspect’s physiological functions – breathing, pulse, and galvanic skin response – and printing out the results on graph paper.
- The printout shows exactly when, during the questioning period, the biologic responses occurred. If the period of greatest biologic reaction lines up with the key questions on the graph paper – the questions that would implicate the person as being involved with the crime – stress is presumed. And along with this presumption of stress comes a second presumption: that the stress indicates a lie.
- Lie detector tests or polygraph tests are rarely used in criminal trials. The theory underlying a lie detector test is that lying is stressful, and that this stress can be measured and recorded on a polygraph machine.
- However, the courts in most jurisdictions doubt the reliability of lie detector tests and refuse to admit the results into evidence.

Supreme Court’s views:
- The Supreme Court of India in 2010 had ruled compulsory brain mapping, narco-analysis and lie detector tests unconstitutional as they violate individual rights.
- The SC had said that the tests can be administered to a person only with consent and even then National Human Rights Commission guidelines must be adhered to. The person needs to be assisted by a lawyer, his consent needs to be recorded before a magistrate, and he needs to be told about the implications of his consent and the fact that the information thus collected would not be used against him as evidence in court. But information or material collected with the help of a (voluntary) test can be admitted in court under section 27 of the Evidence Act.

£52,000 to save the bustard
- Pramod Patil, a Pune-based ornithologist, has planned to help conserve the great Indian bustard (Ardeotis nigriceps) with £52,000 (about Rs. 50 lakh), which he got as the prize money with the Whitley Award for his work to save the critically endangered bird.
- The money will be channelled through BirdLife International, an international non-governmental organisation involved in conserving birds and their habitats.
- The bulk of the funds will be devoted to projects in the Thar desert as it is one of the last refuges of this great bird.

Great Indian Bustard:
- The Great Indian Bustard is currently listed under the category of Critically Endangered birds, in the 2013 ‘Threatened Bird’ list by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- There are less than 250 bustards left in the country.
- It inhabits arid and semi-arid grasslands with scattered short scrub, bushes and low intensity cultivation in flat or gently undulating terrain. In India it is legally protected and there are severe penalties for killing an individual.
- It occurs in the Indian Subcontinent, with former strongholds in the Thar desert in the north-west and the Deccan tableland of the Peninsula. It has been extirpated from 90% of its former range and is now principally confined to Rajasthan, with smaller populations in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh.
**SEBI notifies norms for MFs managing offshore money**

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has Simplified norms for domestic funds to manage offshore pooled assets. It has dropped ‘20-25 rule’, which required a minimum of 20 investors and a cap of 25% on investment by an individual, for funds from low-risk foreign investors.

**Current norms:**
- As per the existing norms, a fund manager who is managing a domestic scheme, is allowed to manage an offshore fund, subject to three specific conditions.
- The first requires the investment objective and asset allocation of the domestic scheme and of the offshore fund to be the same.
- The second condition requires at least 70% of the portfolio to be replicated across both the domestic scheme and the offshore fund.
- The third condition, requires that the offshore fund should be broad-based with at least 20 investors with no single investor holding more than 25% of the fund corpus.
- A separate fund manager is required to be appointed for managing an offshore fund.
- The SEBI has also said that these restrictions would not apply if the funds managed are of Category I foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) and/or Category II foreign portfolio investors which are appropriately regulated broad based funds.

**RBI wins battle to keep debt management role**

- The Union Finance Ministry has finally decided to make some changes in its proposal for setting up the Public Debt Management Authority. With this the RBI seems to have won the battle.

**Details:**
- Now, the proposal no longer envisages the RBI to relinquish control over the task of managing the Centre’s borrowings. Instead, the proposed authority, to be housed in the Finance Ministry and staffed mainly by government officials, is being given limited functionality.
- It will take over merely the front office for the management of the Centre’s borrowings, while the control over the back office will remain with the RBI. Back office provides administrative and support services.
- The authority will be set up through an executive order. The new plan of the Ministry is to move amendments to the RBI Act for statutory status to the authority and for full transfer of control not before another year or two.
- The RBI had opposed the Ministry’s earlier proposal of complete transfer of control to the authority and hence not wanting to adopt a confrontational position, the Finance Minister has decided not to disturb the RBI set-up.

**Background:**
- The Finance Minister, in his budget speech, had proposed to set up Public Debt Management Agency by amending the RBI Act, which would be under the supervision of Centre.
- However, RBI had opposed this move and demanded that the agency should be independent of both RBI and Centre.
- Following this, the government withdrew the proposal to set up such agency.
**Electronic toll set to roll out at 33 places**

- Electronic toll collection will soon become a reality with tests currently being carried out at 33 plazas in the State.

**How electronic toll works?**

- The vehicles will have the radio frequency identity (RFID) tags. Equipment to scan radio frequency identity cards will be installed at the plazas.
- The banks will set up counters to sell recharge coupons and the radio frequency identity (RFID) tags that will be affixed on the vehicles.
- If there is no balance in the RFID tags, the gates at the plaza – boom barriers will not open.
- The funds thus collected by Banks will be transferred to the concessionaires (the firm holding the rights).
- Once money is deducted according to vehicle category the vehicle owner will receive a short messaging service alert from the bank. This technology is used world over and is already available in many plazas in the country.

**Advantages:**

- Electronic tolling will reduce waiting time at plazas and lead to fuel savings.
- This will also ensure that there is no over-charging by the concessionaires.
- One lane will be dedicated to vehicles with RFID tags at all toll plazas. Frequent travelers and heavy vehicles can avail these cards. There will be a one-time registration.
- However, truck owners are skeptical about the scheme. They say that they cannot invest huge amounts in advance.

**Forward communities panel formed**

- Governor of Kerala has issued an ordinance for formation of a Commission for Forward Communities.
- The Ordinance constituting the commission was cleared by the State Cabinet on May 7. Provisions of the ordinance have come into effect with the promulgation of the ordinance.

**About the Commission:**

- Under the provisions of the ordinance, the commission would be headed by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme or High Court and have two persons with specialized knowledge on forward communities as its members.
- The commission’s member secretary would be a person who had served for at least three years as an additional secretary to the government or a person who has served in the rank of an additional secretary for not less than three years.
- The tenure of the chairperson and members of the commission would be three years.

**Functions of the Commission:**

- The commission’s main task would be to submit to the government a list of forward communities in the State.
- It would also conduct studies on the problems faced by the economic backward sections in forward communities and suggest remedial measures.
- The commission would also hear sections or persons, if any, who wish to be included in a forward community and advise the government on the subject.
- It would also be required to give advice to the government on measures to be taken for the general welfare of forward communities.
The commission would have the power to summon any person from any part of the State, ensure the person’s presence, and try the person under oath and demand production of any document that it wishes to make use of.

Other details:
- The ordinance also stipulates that the government should issue forward community certificates to persons belonging to the forward communities in the format to be suggested by the commission.

Norms eased for investments by NRIs, PIOs, OCIs
- In a bid to increase capital flows into the country, the Union Cabinet, recently, announced a major shift in foreign direct investment policy by categorizing non-repatriable investments by non-resident Indians (NRIs), overseas citizens of India (OCIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIOs) as domestic investment.

Benefits:
- This will give PIOs & OCIs parity with NRIs in economy and education.
- The measure is expected to result in increased investments across sectors and greater inflow of foreign exchange remittance leading to economic growth of the country.
- This proposal was floated by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion and the government had formed a committee to deliberate on this matter last year.

Nelong Valley opens for tourists first time since 1962
- The picturesque Nelong Valley near the India-China border, which was closed for civilians after the 1962 war, has been opened for tourists.

About the Valley:
- Location: Gangotri National Park, Uttarkhand (45km from the India-China).
- Flora and fauna: It has an arid landscape and is a cold desert. Nelong boasts a rich wildlife, which includes the snow leopard, Himalayan blue sheep and musk deer, along with rare bird and plant species.
- Importance: Before the war, it was an important trade route.
- Interestingly, foreigners are not allowed in the valley.

L-G well within his powers to appoint officials, says Centre
- Amid the impasse over division of powers in Delhi, the centre has unequivocally backed Lieutenant-Governor Najeeb Jung, saying it was not mandatory for him to consult Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on matters such as appointment of officials.

Details:
- A Gazette notification, issued by the Union Home Ministry has said that the Lieutenant-Governor would have jurisdiction over matters connected with services, public order, police and land.
- It left matters pertaining to services of bureaucrats to be settled by the Lieutenant-Governor, allowing him discretionary powers to seek the opinion of the Chief Minister as and when the former deemed it fit.
- The notification has barred the Delhi government from registering any case against officers and political functionaries of the Union government, reiterating the fact that by a July 2014 notification, the Anti-Corruption Branch of the Delhi government
could file cases against only its officials and not against those of the Union government.

- The Delhi Assembly, in March, passed a unanimous resolution against the July 2014 notification, alleging that it diluted the powers of the said anti-graft body.

Background:
- The tussle started when Lt-Governor Najeeb Jung appointed Shakuntala Gamlin as acting chief secretary without consulting the Council of Ministers of Delhi Government.

What Laws says?
- Section 41 of the Government of National Capital Territory Act of Delhi says that Lt. Governor can use his discretion **only in matters which fall outside the purview of the Legislative Assembly.**
- Article 239AA (3) (a) of the Constitution reserves some matters under the State List which allows the LG to use his discretionary powers – public order, police and land. *This Article was incorporated into the Constitution by the 69th Amendment in 1991, by which the Union Territory of Delhi was called the ‘National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi’ with the Lt. Governor as its administrator.*
- Section 44 of the 1991 Act has left it to the President to frame the procedure in case there is a “difference of opinion” between the LG and the Council of Ministers. The same provision provides that “all executive action of Lieutenant Governor whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the Lieutenant Governor.”
- Section 45 mandates that it is the duty of the Chief Minister to communicate to the Lieutenant Governor all decisions of the Council of Ministers relating to the administration of affairs of the Capital and proposals for legislation.

Who deals with matters related to Land and Police?
- In matters of police and land, the Union Ministries of Home Affairs and Urban Development are in direct charge.
- The Lt Governor is the chairperson of the Delhi Development Authority or DDA, and he does not act in tandem with the Chief Minister, but uses his discretion.
- Since NCT of Delhi does not have its own State Public Services, the central government, through notification, has said that matters related Services are dealt by Lt Governor. And hence matters related to services fall outside the purvies of the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

**Trial run of Dhaka-Guwahati bus service**
- The Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati bus service had its first trial run recently. It is expected to be flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina early next month.
- The trial was to check the overall infrastructure on the 550-km route.
- The direct service would offer businesses an enormous opportunity. It would open up a new window for Bangladesh and India’s north-eastern States.

**Law panel moots joint custody of minors of divorced parents**
- The Law Commission, in its report, has recommended joint custody of minors to both parents in case of a divorce, saying that Indian custody laws must change with the times.
- The commission’s recommendations assume significance as in India the idea of shared parenting is still new to custody jurisprudence.
Details of the Report:

- In its 257th report on ‘Reforms in Guardianship and Custody Laws in India’, the commission said the change in laws will let courts to consider awarding joint custody of children in circumstances beneficial to the welfare of the child. Or in exceptional circumstances award custody to one, with visitation rights to the other.
- The report says that neither the father nor the mother of a minor can, as of a right, claim to be appointed by the court as the guardian unless such an appointment is for the welfare of the minor.
- It also says, wherever possible, courts should now grant joint custody of minors. Recommending changes in the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act and the Guardians and Wards Act, the panel said even after the Supreme Court’s judgment in the Gita Hariharan v. Reserve Bank of India case, the mother can become a natural guardian during the lifetime of the father only in exceptional circumstances.
- The Law Commission has suggested amendments to the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890 and the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956, to bring them in tune with modern social considerations.
- The commission has recommended involving trained mediators specialising in dispute resolution.
- The report also gives discretion to courts to extend child support from the existing age of 18 to 25 while considering the child’s academic and health needs. In case of a disability, child support can be extended up to whole life.
- The report also introduces several other new concepts such as submitting parenting plans to court, recognising grandparents’ rights by allotting visitation rights and guidelines for relocation of parents.
- The commission said the amendments were necessary in order to bring these laws in tune with modern social considerations. The two draft Bills proposed by the panel to amend the existing laws also deal with removal of preference for the father as the natural guardian under Hindu law.

Present scenario:

- At present, courts in India award a minor’s custody to one parent or the other depending on who they think will ensure the child’s welfare, though the legal position is different in Hindu law, which considers the father the natural guardian, and other secular laws, which consider the mother the natural guardian of a child.

**SC panel sets deadline for road safety directives**

- The Road Safety Committee formed by the Supreme Court to check lax enforcement of road laws has set the States a June 30 deadline to enforce 13 of its directives.
- The committee is headed by the former Supreme Court judge K.S. Radhakrishnan.

**Other details:**

- The panel has asked the Union Road Transport and Highways Ministry to introduce uniform crash tests for all categories of vehicles so that manufacturers do not discriminate between the base and higher models in the provision of safety features.
- The committee has directed that every State government has to formulate a road safety policy and set up a road safety council by June 30. The States have to draw up a protocol to identify black spots (where accidents are frequent) on roads and remove them. States should strengthen law enforcement to prevent drunk driving, speeding and jumping of signals and ensure use of helmet and seatbelt laws.
The directives issued by the committee include tightening of road patrols on highways, setting up of a road safety fund to which a portion of traffic fines would go to finance road safety expenses and removal of encroachments on pedestrian paths. Another directive is to introduce automatic headlights for two-wheelers. They also include removal of roadside advertisements and posters that obstruct the view of drivers or distract them and a ban on sale of liquor on National and State highways.

The panel has pointed out serious lapses by the States in the implementation of safety laws, leading to a rise in number of road fatalities. With just 1% of the vehicles in the world, India accounts for a staggering 10 per cent of deaths related to road accidents.

The Committee has also pointed out that More than 75% of privately owned vehicles including two wheelers do not have insurance cover.

**Background:**

The committee was formed in April, 2014, on a public interest litigation petition to monitor implementation of road safety laws.

---

**China sets up Silk Road gold fund**

China, the world’s biggest gold producer, has set up a gold sector fund involving countries along the ancient Silk Road which is expected to raise $16.1 billion.

The fund, led by Shanghai Gold Exchange (SGE), is expected to raise an estimated 100 billion yuan ($16.1 billion) in three phases and is said to be the largest fund set up by China.

In February 2015 China had also created a $40 billion infrastructure fund for Silk Road Initiative.

**Silk Road Initiative:**

The Silk Road, or Silk Route, is a series of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting the West and East by linking traders, merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads, and urban dwellers from China to the Mediterranean Sea during various periods of time.

The new project is an initiative by China to resurrect the ancient maritime Silk Road. It is perceived to be an attempt by China to ameliorate relations with South and Southeast Asia.

The new initiative is a pet project of President Xi Jinping for connecting Asia with Europe along a land corridor, with China as its hub.

Under the new Silk Route, the Chinese want to open up the transportation channel from the Pacific to the Baltic Sea, from which would radiate rail and road routes, which would also connect with East Asia, West Asia, and South Asia.

The Silk Road strategy’s ambitious vision aligns with Beijing’s goals much more closely than the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which is a reflection of the U.S. international trade model writ large.

The Silk Road strategy aims to facilitate large-scale infrastructure construction, energy sale and transport, and relocation of manufacturing industries.

This initiative aspires to deepen linkages between China and its neighbours via trade, investment, energy, infrastructure, and internationalization of China’s currency, the renminbi.

**Indian and Silk Road Initiative:**

Aware of India’s sensitivities regarding the perceived expansion of Chinese influence, a Beijing-Kathmandu-New Delhi trilateral development partnership is proposed as a confidence building step.
• Relations between China and India are mutually reinforcing. From a historical point of view India is the converging point of the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road on land.
• Based on that, the Chinese government believes inevitably that naturally India is one of the important partners to build one belt and one road.
• India also benefits from at least reasonable ties with most stakeholders in the New Silk Road, including Iran, where India has invested heavily in the Chabahar Port. But India must also make serious efforts to strengthen its links with Southeast Asia, and for this it must develop stronger ties with Bangladesh.
• India will also need to work towards a manageable relationship with Pakistan, which would not only facilitate pipeline projects like TAPI, but also enable access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
• India needs to change its approach towards border regions, and not allow security to cloud its overarching vision. One of the important cornerstones of China’s Silk Road vision has been its emphasis on utilizing border regions, while also making use of their strategic location.

**Bilateral Exercise SIMBEX**

• Two Indian naval ships, INS Satpura and INS Kamorta, are participating in the bilateral naval exercise SIMBEX with the Singapore Navy which began in Singapore recently.

**Background:**

• Operational interaction between Indian Navy (IN) and Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) commenced with Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) training exercises in 1994, which has grown steadily over the past 20 years. The operational interaction was formalised as an annual bilateral exercise ‘SIMBEX’ in 1999.
• Since its inception, SIMBEX has grown in tactical and operational complexity. It has transcended the traditional emphasis on ASW to more complex maritime exercises, involving various facets of Naval operations such as Air Defence, Air and Surface Practice Firing, Maritime Security and Search and Rescue.

**Balance in accounts opened under PMJDY in Gujarat exceeds Rs 550 cr**

• The latest data shows that balance in accounts opened under the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has exceeded Rs 550 crore in Gujarat by end of May 15, 2015.
• According to the data provided by the State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC) of Gujarat, balance in accounts opened under PMJDY has touched Rs 550.85 crore in the state. More than six million accounts have been opened in this scheme by May 15 this year.
• Urban areas constitute majority of the account openings. Close to 3.20 million accounts have been opened under PMJDY in urban areas while in rural areas, 2.85 million accounts have opened.

**PRADHAN MANTRI JAN DHAN YOJANA:**

• The PMJDY was conceived as a national mission on financial inclusion with the objective of covering all households in the country with banking facilities and having a bank account for each household.
• It is a scheme for comprehensive financial inclusion. Accounts can be opened with zero balance.
• The mission mode objective of the PMJDY consists of 6 pillars.
During the 1st year of implementation under Phase I (15th August, 2014-14th August, 2015), three Pillars namely:
- Universal access to banking facilities
- Financial Literacy Programme and
- Providing Basic Banking Accounts with overdraft facility of Rs.5000 after six months and RuPay Debit card with inbuilt accident insurance cover of Rs 1 lakh and RuPay Kisan card, will be implemented.

Phase II, beginning from 15th August 2015 upto 15th August, 2018 will address the other three pillars:
- Creation of Credit Guarantee Fund for coverage of defaults in overdraft accounts
- Micro Insurance and
- Unorganized sector Pension schemes like Swavlamban.

In addition, in this phase coverage of households in hilly, tribal and difficult areas would be carried out. Moreover, this phase would focus on coverage of remaining adults in the households and students.

The implementation strategy of the plan is to utilize the existing banking infrastructure as well as expand the same to cover all households.

Benefits under PMJDY Scheme:
- Interest on deposit.
- Accidental insurance cover of Rs.1.00 lac
- No minimum balance required.
- Life insurance cover of Rs.30,000/-
- Easy Transfer of money across India
- Beneficiaries of Government Schemes will get Direct Benefit Transfer in these accounts.
- After satisfactory operation of the account for 6 months, an overdraft facility will be permitted
- Access to Pension, insurance products.
- Accidental Insurance Cover, RuPay Debit Card must be used at least once in 45 days.
- Overdraft facility upto Rs.5000/- is available in only one account per household, preferably lady of the household.

Sources: The Hindu, Wiki., PMJDY.

ACB can act against Delhi police

The Delhi High Court recently ruled that the Delhi government’s Anti-corruption Branch (ACB) has the jurisdiction to arrest police personnel. The ruling comes in the middle of a high-stakes jurisdiction battle between the Delhi and the Union government.

Background:
- In July 2014 notification, the Union Government had said that the Anti-Corruption Branch of the Delhi government could file cases against only its officials and not against those of the Union government.
- Following this, the Delhi Assembly, in March, passed a unanimous resolution against the July 2014 notification, alleging that it diluted the powers of the said anti-graft body.

Context:
- The court’s recent ruling was part of a judgment denying bail to a head constable arrested by the ACB on a bribery charge. The Constable had contested his arrest, pointing to a notification passed by the Home Ministry last July saying the Branch’s jurisdiction extended only to employees of the Delhi government. It was contested that entries 1
and 2 on the State List of the Constitution — Public Order and Police — stood excluded from the legislative competence of the Delhi government under the Constitution.

Observations made by the Court:

- The court has said that the Centre’s notification barring the ACB from acting against Union government employees was suspect as it could not exercise executive power over matters falling under the legislative competence of the Delhi government.
- The Court observed that the State government was empowered to make laws in respect of matters on the Concurrent List and as such, with regard to entries 1 and 2 (Criminal Law and Code of Criminal Procedure), the Lieutenant-Governor could not act in his discretion and was bound to act upon the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.
- The Court also said that the Members of the Legislative Assembly are directly elected by the citizens from territorial constituencies in the NCT of Delhi, and the Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly. The mandate of the people, with whom the sovereign power resides, must be respected by the Lieutenant Governor.

What experts say?

- Senior lawyers say that the powers of the State government to investigate corruption stemmed not from the State List but from the Concurrent List (matters under both the State and the Union governments). Entries 1 and 2 on the Concurrent List covered criminal law, including all matters included in the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure at the commencement of this Constitution. Offences of corruption, now covered under the Prevention of Corruption Act, were originally part of the IPC and could, therefore, be investigated by the State government.
- The high court’s order came amid a bitter tussle between the AAP government and the Lt Governor over posting and transfers of senior officials as well as some other contentious issues.

Jaitapur project will roll through, come what may

- Maharashtra Chief Minister recently said that the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Park will roll through, come what may, sending a strong signal to the Shiv Sena that opposes the project.

Jaitapur project- some facts:

- It is a proposed 9900 MW power project of Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) at Madban village of Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra. If built, it would be the largest nuclear power generating station in the world by net electrical power rating.
- Reactor type: European Pressurized Reactor/Evolutionary Power Reactor.
- Reactor supplier: Areva, French state-controlled nuclear engineering firm.
- In December 2010 an agreement was signed for the construction of first set of two third-generation European Pressurized Reactors and the supply of nuclear fuel for 25 years in the presence of French president Nicolas Sarkozy and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
- Since Jaitapur being seismically sensitive area, the danger of an earthquake has been foremost on the minds of people. According to the Earthquake hazard zoning of India, Jaitapur comes under Zone III. This zone is called the moderate Risk Zone. Hence, citizens of the area are questioning about safety.
Supreme Court to hear plea on A-G’s selection

- The Supreme Court recently decided to hear a petition questioning the “unaccountable and non-transparent” manner of appointment of the government’s top law officer, the Attorney-General of India.
- The petition was filed last year by a law student.

What the petition says?

- The petition, which makes Attorney-General (A-G) Mukul Rohatgi a party along with the Union of India, contends that the appointment of the top law officer has been based on a “pick-and-choose policy at the behest of political masters.
- The petition says only a person who has all the qualifications to be a Supreme Court judge can be considered for appointment as A-G.
- It says that the qualifications required for appointment of a Supreme Court judge and the Attorney-General of India are the same, but the procedure for appointment adopted is completely different.
- It further says that the office of a Supreme Court judge is fully accountable, transparent, with oath, under public scrutiny and with an age bar, whereas the office of the Attorney-General is completely unaccountable, non-transparent, without oath, without any age bar.

Attorney General- Facts:

- The Attorney General for India is the central government’s chief legal advisor, and its primary lawyer in the Supreme Court of India.
- He is appointed by the President of India under Article 76(1) of the Constitution and holds office during the pleasure of the President.
- He must be a person qualified to be appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court.
- The Attorney General is necessary for giving advice to the Government of India in legal matters referred to him. He also performs other legal duties assigned to him by the President.
- The Attorney General has the right of audience in all Courts in India as well as the right to participate in the proceedings of the Parliament, though not to vote.
- The Attorney General appears on behalf of Government of India in all cases (including suits, appeals and other proceedings) in the Supreme Court in which Government of India is concerned.
- He also represents the Government of India in any reference made by the President to the Supreme Court under Article 143 of the Constitution.
- Unlike the Attorney General of the United States, the Attorney General of India does not have any executive authority. Those functions are performed by the Law Minister of India.
- The Attorney General can accept briefs but cannot appear against the Government. He cannot defend an accused in the criminal proceedings and accept the directorship of a company without the permission of the Government.
- The Attorney General is assisted by two Solicitor General and four Additional Solicitor Generals.

Ganga-Brahmaputra basin mapped

- Researchers, in a first first-of-its-kind study after mapping the rivers, have claimed that Ganga-Bramhaputra Basin together store around 960 cubic km of water. They have also
said that it will help understand droughts and floods to better manage water resources in the region.

- Scientists from India, the U.K., France and Bangladesh undertook mapping of the two rivers during 2003 to 2007 from the basins with the help of satellite images.
- The researchers believe that these new datasets will provide an opportunity to study the signatures of droughts and floods, and ultimately to help better manage water resources in the region.

**Details of the research:**
- Researchers found that both surface and sub-surface water storage in the basin show strong year-to-year variability. During the monsoon of 2006, which can be considered as a drought year, there was a 30% deficit in water storage in the basin when compared to that of the other years.
- The research was carried out using the satellites Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) and Envisat.
- The study also used in situ (field) observations, which were acquired from Bangladesh. However, with in situ observations, it is difficult to study large areas as measurements are done at single points. Hence, a multi-satellite approach, which gives a better understanding of the spatial variation of water-related observables, was necessary.

**Ganges-Brahmaputra basin:**
- The Ganges-Brahmaputra basin covers a large area, extending over India, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Bangladesh. The basin houses rivers, floodplains, lakes, wetlands and the largest delta in world, all of which contribute significantly to the regional climate; groundwater, surface water and rainfall form an interconnected cycle and are constantly affecting each other.
- The study was aimed at understanding the relationship between these elements by quantifying water storage at different levels, and variations across years.
- The Ganga-Brahmaputra basin constitutes the **second largest hydrologic region in the world**.
- The basin is nestled amidst the natural watersheds of Himalayas in the north, Vindhayas in the south, the Aravalis in the west, Patkai, Naga and Lushai hills in the east.
- The Ganga-Brahmaputra basin is a single, sprawling, integrated, transboundary drainage system with a common terminus.
- The basin consists of two major river systems of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra and one relatively smaller river system of the Barak, which becomes the Meghna in Bangladesh.
- About 63% of the basin is in India, 7% in Bangladesh, 8% in Nepal, and 2.5% in Bhutan. Almost 10% of the world’s humanity lives in this region, which contains only 1.2% of the landmass.

**China doesn’t recognise ‘illegal’ McMahon Line**
- China has again termed the McMahon Line on the India-China boundary as illegal and has said that it was ready to work with India to resolve the vexed border issue at an early date through friendly consultations to create more favourable conditions for bilateral ties.
- With this, China has reaffirmed its claims on Arunachal Pradesh, which, it says, is a part of Southern Tibet.

**McMahon Line:**
- The McMahon Line is a line agreed to by Britain and Tibet as part of the Simla Accord, a treaty signed in 1914.
• It is the effective boundary between China and India, although its legal status is disputed by the Chinese government.
• The line is named after Sir Henry McMahon, who was foreign secretary of the British-run Government of India and the chief negotiator of the convention at Simla.
• It extends for 890 km from Bhutan in the west to 260 km east of the great bend of the Brahmaputra River in the east, largely along the crest of the Himalayas.
• China rejects the Simla Accord, contending that the Tibetan government was not sovereign and therefore did not have the power to conclude treaties. The Simla Accord, or the Convention between Great Britain, China, and Tibet, in Simla, was an unequal treaty concerning the status of Tibet negotiated by representatives of the Republic of China, Tibet and the United Kingdom in Simla in 1913 and 1914. The Accord provided that Tibet would be divided into “Outer Tibet” and “Inner Tibet”.

**Curiosity on new journey on Mars**

• Unable to reach a comparable geological contact farther south on Mars, NASA’s Curiosity rover has now approached an alternative site for investigating a geological boundary. Curiosity has been exploring on Mars since 2012.

**Curiosity Rover:**
• Curiosity is a car-sized robotic rover exploring Gale Crater on Mars as part of NASA’s Mars Science Laboratory mission (MSL).
• The rover’s goals include: investigation of the Martian climate and geology; assessment of whether the selected field site inside Gale Crater has ever offered environmental conditions favorable for microbial life, including investigation of the role of water; and planetary habitability studies in preparation for future human exploration.
• On June 24, 2014, Curiosity completed a Martian year—687 Earth days—after finding that Mars once had environmental conditions favorable for microbial life.

**DD Kisan – India’s first television channel dedicated to farmers**

• Prime Minister Modi recently launched DD Kisan Channel, which would provide information about best agricultural practices and related content. It is Doordarshan’s channel dedicated exclusively to farmers.

**About the Channel:**
• Kisan Channel would facilitate the farmers in providing information regarding the policy initiatives undertaken in the Agriculture sector. It is the first such initiative of a Public Broadcaster to start a 24 hour channel exclusively dedicated to the farmers.
• The platform would enable the benefits of technology accruing to the farmers. This channel would inform, educate and update the farmers with the latest developments in the area of farming on a 24×7 basis.
• The non-Hindi speaking farming community would also be benefitted by the launch of Kisan channel as the various programmes would also be available in other regional languages.
• Advice of IMD Scientists and Agricultural Scientists would be broadcast periodically for the farmers so that they may know about the crop diseases, ways to protect crops from various diseases and on how to increase the crop yield.
• The Channel will give information on newer ways of agricultural practices being followed world over and the R&D in the agri sector across the world.
• The Channel has tie up with IMD, IARI, Agricultural Universities, Krish Vigyan Kendras etc.

India and Vietnam Sign a Joint Vision Statement on Defence Cooperation

• India and Vietnam recently signed a Joint Vision Statement on Defence Cooperation for the period 2015-2020.
• Along with this, MoU on cooperation between the coast guards of the two countries was also signed.
• The Vietnamese Defence Minister is on a 3-day official visit to India. Both sides have reiterated their commitment to further enhancing the ongoing defence engagements between the two sides for mutual benefit.

Government Notifies Amendments to Companies Act

• The government has notified amendments to the Companies Act, which makes it easier to do business and provides for stricter penalties for fraud cases.
• The amendments, which were passed by Parliament earlier this month, have been made to the Companies Act, 2013, mainly to deal with board resolutions, utilisation of unclaimed dividends and setting up of a firm, among others, as well as to bring the law in tune with global standards.

New Norms:
• The Act has removed threshold limit for minimum capital required for formation of a private or public sector firm.
• For setting-up a private company, new Act has done away with the norms of Rs 1 lakh minimum capital requirement and Rs 5 lakh in case of a public sector unit. Besides, the concept of company seal has also been done away with.
• With regard to acceptance of deposits by the companies, in contravention with regulations, the new law says that if a firm fails to repay the deposit or any interest due thereon within the time specified, it will be “punishable with fine which shall not be less than Rs 1 crore but which may extend to Rs 10 crore” in addition to payment of deposits.
• In case of dividend, the amended Act said that no company will declare dividend unless “carried over previous losses and depreciation not provided in previous year or years are set off against profit of the company for the current year”.
• The unclaimed dividend will not be transferred to the Investor Education and Protection Fund.
• With regard to trying fraud cases, the new norms said that all cases under the Companies Act cannot be tried by a special court and that only serious offences will go to such courts, while the others would be tried by normal magisterial court.
• The Act has set a threshold limit for auditors to report frauds to central government with rider.
• The Audit Committee can make omnibus approval for related party transactions proposed to be entered into by the company in case any loan made by a holding company to its wholly-owned subsidiary or any guarantee given by a holding company in respect of any loan made to its wholly-owned subsidiary company among others.
• Related party transactions can be passed through ordinary resolution instead of special resolution required currently. The amendments were made as there have been
complaints from the corporates about the problems ever since the companies law was enacted in 2013.

**Tripura withdraws AFSPA, says insurgency on the wane**

- The Tripura government has revoked the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) as insurgency is on the wane in the State.
- The repeal of the Act, which has been in force in the State since February 1997, came less than a month after the election to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.
- The AFSPA had been in force in the State’s 26 police station areas. In four police station limits, the Act was partially enforced.

**Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act:**

- It is an Act empowering armed forces to deal effectively in ‘Disturbed Areas’. Any area which is declared ‘Disturbed’ under the disturbed areas act enables armed forces to resort to the provisions of AFSPA.

**Who declares an area as disturbed?**

- The choice of declaring any area as ‘disturbed’ vests both with state and central government.

**Special powers provided to armed forces:**

- After an area comes under the ambit of AFSPA, any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or another person of equivalent rank can use force for a variety of reasons while still being immune to the prosecution.

**Ambit:**

- The act was passed on 11 September 1958 by the parliament of India to provide special legal security to the armed forces carrying out operations in the troubled areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura (seven sisters).
- In 1990 the act was extended to the state of Jammu and Kashmir to confront the rising insurgency in the area.
- In Manipur, despite opposition from the Central government, state government withdrew the Act in some parts in Aug, 2004.

**The government can declare AFSPA in the following conditions:**

- When the local administration fails to deal with local issues and the police proves inefficient to cope with them.
- When the scale of unrest or instability in the state is too large for the police to handle.

**Legal provisions of AFSPA:**

- In an area declared, “disturbed” an army officer is legally free to carry out following operations:
  - Fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law” against “assembly of five or more persons” or possession of deadly weapons.
  - Destroy any shelter (private or govt.) from which armed attacks are made or likely to be made or attempted to be made.
  - Arrest any person without warrant who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence.
  - Enter and search, without warrant, any premises for purpose of arrest or to recover any person, arms, explosives.
• To search and seize any vehicle suspected to be carrying an offender or any person against whom any reasonable suspicion exists that he has or is about to commit an offence.
• To provide legal immunity to the army personnel found involved in any violation or ethical breach i.e., they cannot be sued or prosecuted.
• The decision of the government to declare a particular area ‘disturbed’ cannot be challenged in a court of law.
• In 2005 the Jeevan Reddy Commission said that AFSPA should be repealed and the clauses that are required should be included in other Acts.

PM’s interaction through PRAGATI

• The Prime Minister of India recently chaired his third interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation.
• Initiating his interaction, the Prime Minister expressed satisfaction that PRAGATI was speeding up decision-making processes in vital projects and important areas of governance. He also said that the spirit of problem-solving and swift implementation, which is being generated through the PRAGATI interactions, is gradually spreading to all areas of governance.

PRAGATI:
• PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man’s grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

Unique features:
• The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
• It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
• With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.
• It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
• Prime Minister will hold a monthly programme where he will interact with the Government of India Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries through Video-conferencing enabled by data and geo-informatics visuals.
• Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, on-going Programmes and pending Projects.
• The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.
• It will also take into consideration various correspondences to PM’s office by the common people or from high dignitaries of States and/or developers of public projects.
• It is also a robust system for bringing e-transparency and e-accountability with real-time presence and exchange among the key stakeholders.
• The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

**Cancer cases on the rise but death rate is falling**

• An international consortium of researchers led by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, in its recently released data, has said that the incidence of cancer has grown over the last decade in India although the rate of mortality has fallen. The study is named “The Global Burden of Cancer 2013”.

• The team analysed 28 cancer groups in 188 countries.

**Important observations made by the Report:**

• Breast cancer is the fastest growing in terms of incidence for women and kills the most, and prostate cancer is the fastest-growing in incidence for men, while lung cancer killed the most men.

• Globally, the incidence of cancer is rising, but even as it has become the second leading cause of death, mortality is falling with better detection and treatment across countries.

• India has a lower incidence of cancer than the global average, with just half the number of new cases recorded every year per capita than the global average.

• However, the incidence has grown from over 700 new cases per million population to nearly 1,000 new cases per million people, the numbers show. Simultaneously, the death rate has declined.

• The number of new mouth cancer cases in India more than doubled between 1990 and 2013 from 55,480 to 127,168.

• In 2013, there were 14.9 million new cases and 8.2 million deaths worldwide. Among men, prostate cancer caused 1.4 million new cases and 293,000 deaths. For women, breast cancer caused 1.8 million new cases and 464,000 deaths.

**Republican Nebraska bans death penalty**

• Nebraska has become the first ‘red State’ since 1973 to abolish the death penalty after state legislators banded together to overrule a veto by Governor Pete Ricketts.

• With this decision, Nebraska becomes the 19th US state to abolish capital punishment.

• Capital Punishment is still legal in 31 states, but there are about 10 in which a moratorium on executions has been imposed.

• The abolition of capital punishment in Nebraska is especially significant given that it is the first conservative state to do so in more than 40 years and it comes at a moment in which the appropriateness of the death penalty is being increasingly questioned.

• Nebraska lies in both the Great Plains and the Midwestern United States. Its largest city is Omaha, which is on the Missouri River. The state has more underground water reserves than any other state in the continental U.S.

**Kasturirangan report to be implemented by year-end**

• Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Prakash Javadekar recently said that the recommendations made by the Kasturirangan Committee report on eco-sensitive zones in the Western Ghats would be implemented by this year-end.

• He said that the Union government had asked the State governments concerned to hold consultation with the local population and submit their comments.
While Kerala has submitted its comments, Karnataka is yet to do so. Tamil Nadu, Goa, Maharashtra, and Gujarat are expected to submit their reports shortly.

Kasturirangan Report:

- The Kasturirangan panel was set up to study the Gadgil committee report on the Western Ghats. The Gadgil panel report had faced unanimous opposition from state governments for recommending that almost three-fourth of the hills, including plantations, cultivated lands and large habitations, be turned into a restricted development zone with an overarching authority to regulate the region superseding the elected authorities’ role.

Recommendations made by the Kasturirangan panel:

- Around 60,000 sq km of Western Ghats, spread across six states, should be turned into a no-go area for commercial activities like mining, thermal power plants, polluting industries and large housing plans.
- It has suggested that 90% of the natural forests left in the Western Ghats complex — adding up to 60,000 sq km and constituting 37% of the entire hilly belt — be conserved under the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) provisions of the green law. The forest area falling within the ESA would also cover 4,156 villages across the six states. The villages falling under ESA will be involved in decision making on the future projects. All projects will require prior-informed consent and no-objection from the gram sabha (village council) of the village.
- The panel has recommended that there should be a complete ban on mining activity in this zone and current mining activities should be phased out within five years, or at the time of expiry of the mining lease.
- It has banned development of any township or construction over the size of 20,000 sq m in the ESA zone. It has not recommended a ban on hydroelectric projects in the zone, but put a regime of stricter clearances for dams and other projects.
- The report suggests doing away with the complete moratorium on industrial and mining activity in the two Maharashtra districts of Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri. It has suggested persisting with the ban only on the area of the two districts falling within the ESA and a strict regulation in the rest.
- The report has steered clear from demanding a strict ecological control over the Western Ghat complex requiring changes and regulations on agricultural practices the way Gadgil committee report had suggested.

Digital Locker – 1,00,000 Mark in 100 Days

- After Digital Locker trial version was launched in Feb, 2015 over 1,00,000 Digital Lockers have been opened by the Citizens, within 100 days of its launch.

Digital Locker:

- It is dedicated personal storage space, linked to each resident’s Aadhaar number. DigiLocker can be used to securely store e-documents as well as store Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) link of e-documents issued by various issuer departments. The e-Sign facility provided as part of DigiLocker system can be used to digitally sign e-documents.
- The initiative was launched by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology, under the Ministry of Communications and IT.
- Here, the users can store their documents such as insurance, medical reports, PAN card, passport, marriage certificate, school certificate and other documents in the digital format.
- With this, the government is trying to create an electronic version of documents, which can be easily verified and stored in printable format.
At present, the digital locker gives 10MB of free space for individuals to store documents and links of government department or agency-issued e-documents. The government is also planning to subsequently increase the storage space to 1 GB.

Benefits:
- It will minimize the use of physical documents and will provide authenticity of the e-documents.
- It will provide secure access to Govt. issued documents.
- It will also reduce administrative overhead of Govt. departments and agencies and make it easy for the residents to receive services.
- Digital Locker is one of the key initiatives under the Digital India vision, which is aimed at eliminating the usage of physical documents. Digital Locker will allow various agencies to push the documents into the Digital Locker of citizens mapped to their Aadhaar Number.

**Mega Food Park Inaugurated at Nalbari, Assam**

- A Mega Food Park was inaugurated at Nalbari, Assam recently by the Chief Minister of Assam. It Park has been set up in 50 acre of land at the cost of Rs. 76 crore. This project is having facilities of fully operational industrial sheds for SMEs, developed industrial plots for lease to food processing units, Dry Warehouse of 10000 MT, Cold Storages of 3000 MT, Common Effluent Treatment plant, Quality Control Labs etc.
- The Park also has a common administrative building for office and other uses by the entrepreneurs.
- 6 Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) are also proposed to be set up at Nagaon, Badarpur, Tinsukia, Barapani, Krishnai and Kajalgaon which will provide facilities for primary processing and storage near the farms.

**Mega Food Parks Scheme:**
- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers’ income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- **Aim** of the Scheme: The Scheme is aimed at providing modern infrastructure facilities along the value chain from farm gate to the market with strong backward and forward linkages.

**What these food parks provide?**
- They facilitate the efforts to increase the level of processing of agricultural and horticultural produce, with particular focus on perishables, in the country and thereby to check the wastage.
- The Scheme has a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model. It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- The PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.
- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.
- The scheme is demand-driven and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

**Implementation and financial assistance:**
• Mega Food Park project is implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which is a Body Corporate registered under the Companies Act. State Government/State Government entities/Cooperatives applying for setting up a project under the scheme are not required to form a separate SPV.
• The financial assistance for Mega Food Park is provided in the form of grant-in-aid at 50% of eligible project cost in general areas and at 75% of eligible project cost in NE Region and difficult areas (Hilly States and ITDP areas) subject to maximum of Rs. 50 crore per project.

Benefits:
• Reducing post harvest losses.
• Maintainance of the supply chain in sustainable manner.
• Additional income generation for the farmers.
• Shifting the farmers to more market driven and profitable farming activities.
• It will be a one stop shop where everything will be available at a single location.
• As per experts, it will directly employ 10,000 people.
• This integrated food park will help reduce supply chain costs.
• It will also reduce wastage across the food value chain in India and improve quality and hygiene to create food products in the country.

Difficulties in implementation:
• Major challenges being faced by the Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) in implementation of the Mega Food Park projects, include acquiring contiguous land of 50 acres or more in the name of SPV, obtaining term loan from the Banks, difficulties in obtaining various statutory clearances from the State Government Departments/Agencies, timely contribution of equity by the promoters, lack of cohesiveness amongst the promoters etc.

India tops world hunger list with 194 million people

• According to United Nations annual hunger report, India is home to the highest number of hungry people in the world, at 194 million, surpassing China. The Report is titled ‘The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015.’

The Report says:
• At the global level, the corresponding figure dropped to 795 million in 2014-15, from 1 billion in 1990-92, with East Asia led by China accounting for most of the reductions.
• India too saw a reduction between 1990 and 2015. In 1990-92, those who were starved of food in India numbered 210.1 million, which came down to 194.6 million in 2014-15.
• India has made great strides in reducing the proportion of food insecure persons in the overall population, but according to FAO, it still has over 194 million hungry persons. India’s numerous social programmes are expected to continue to fight hunger and poverty.
• However, China stood out as the reduction in the number of hungry people was much higher than in India, which came down to 133.8 million in 2014-15 from 289 million in 1990-92.
• A majority — 72 out of 129 — of the countries monitored by FAO have achieved the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the prevalence of undernourishment by 2015, with developing regions as a whole missing the target by a small margin.
• Talking of noticeable progress, the report made a specific mention of Latin America and the Caribbean, southeast and central Asia as well as some parts of Africa. The overall analysis suggested that inclusive economic growth, agricultural investments and social protection, along with political stability, can eradicate hunger.
GDP grows by 7.3 % but fails to overtake China

- A recently released data by the Central Statistics Office shows that India’s economy grew by 7.3% during 2014-15 failing to overtake China as the world’s fastest growing major economy.

Other Details:
- Capital formation continued to be lower at 28.7% of GDP against 29.7% during 2013-14.
- Gross fixed capital formation – a barometer for investments – slowed for the second straight year.
- The manufacturing sector grew by 7.1% against the 2013-14 growth of 5.3%.
- The prime drivers of the growth were the significantly stronger performance of ‘manufacturing’, ‘electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services’ and the ‘financial, real estate and professional services’.
- Almost all sectors of the economy picked up during the year. The exceptions were the sectors of ‘agriculture, forestry and fishing’, ‘mining and quarrying’ and ‘public administration defence and other services’ that’s linked to government spending.
- The International Monetary Fund has projected that India will outpace China during the current fiscal year.

Leak not radioactive, says AERB

- Alarm bells were sounded at the Indira Gandhi International Airport recently when a leak from a medicinal consignment that was thought to be radioactive was reported in the cargo area of the airport.
- However, after investigation, security personnel said that the reports of a radioactive leak were false.

What happened?
- A package arrived from a foreign country carrying Iodine 131 which is used in radiotherapy for thyroid. Next to these containers was another container carrying NVenal Pyrodine, which is not radioactive, that had leaked.

Iodine 131:
- Iodine-131 (131I), also called radiiodine, is an important radioisotope of iodine.
- It has a radioactive decay half life of about 8 days.
- Its uses are mostly medical and pharmaceutical. It also plays a role as a major radioactive hazard present in nuclear fission products.
- It is a major uranium fission product, comprising nearly 3% of the total products of fission.
- It is used in nuclear medicine therapeutically and can also be seen with diagnostic scanners if it has been used therapeutically.
- Major uses of 131I include the treatment of thyrotoxicosis (hyperthyroidism) and some types of thyroid cancer that absorb iodine.
- The 131I isotope is also used as a radioactive label for certain radiopharmaceuticals that can be used for therapy for imaging and treating pheochromocytoma and neuroblastoma.
- The only naturally occurring isotope of iodine is stable iodine-127.

Revamp on cards

- An expert panel set to expedite roll out of broadband in rural areas has suggested revamp of national optical fibre network (NOFN) initiative, increasing the scope of the project.
that will entail three fold increase in cost to Rs.72,778 crore from about Rs.20,000 crore approved earlier.

Other details:
- The committee has estimated the total cost of the revised project at Rs.72,778 crore, which is three fold higher than Rs.20,000 crore approved earlier.
- The report stresses on involvement of States, besides private players, for speedier implementation of the project that has fallen far behind its planned schedule.
- The report stresses on involvement of States, besides private players, for speedier implementation of the project that has fallen far behind its planned schedule.
- The Committee has also re-worked the timelines for implementation, stating that the project can be commissioned by December 2017.
- Seven States have proposed to come up with their own model to roll out broadband network under BharatNet programme.

National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN):
- The NOFN project was approved by Cabinet in 2011 and deadline to connect all panchayats was fixed by end of 2013 then deferred to September 2015 by UPA government. The Narendra Modi-led government re-examined project status and set target to complete roll out in 50,000 village panchayats by March 31, 2015, and another 1 lakh by March 2016 and the rest by end of 2016.
- It is a project to provide broadband connectivity to over two lakh (200,000) Gram panchayats of India at a cost of Rs.20,000 crore.
- The project provides internet access using existing optical fiber and extending it to the Gram panchayats. Connectivity gap between Gram Panchayats and Blocks will be filled.
- The project was intended to enable the government of India to provide e-services and e-applications nationally.
- A special purpose vehicle Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) was created as a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Companies Act of 1956 for the execution of the project.
- The project will be funded by the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) and was estimated to be completed in 2 years.
- The project envisaged signing a tripartite MoU for free Right of Way (RoW) among the Union Government, State Government and Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL).
- All the Service Providers like Telecom Service Providers (TSPs), ISPs, Cable TV operators etc. will be given non-discriminatory access to the National Optic Fibre Network and can launch various services in rural areas. Various categories of applications like e-health, e-education and e-governance etc. can also be provided by these operators.

**No date set to roll out one-rank one-pension**

- Union Defence Minister recently said that he could not fix a date for the implementation of the One-Rank One-Pension (OROP) scheme for ex-servicemen. However, he also made it clear that the government will soon put in place the Scheme.

One-rank one-pension scheme:
- 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%, posing fresh challenges to keep the Centre’s fiscal deficit within the budgetary target of 4.1% of the Gross Domestic Product.