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National News

Coastal security is a challenge says R.K. Dhowan

- The Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral R.K. Dhowan, said that “coastal security is a big challenge” and patrolling has been stepped in coastal areas in the past few months.
- “In the last few months, we are on high state of alert and have deployed Navy units, ships, aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles in the coastal areas,” he said.
- Speaking on the sidelines of the second Admiral R.L. Pereira Memorial Lecture function, Admiral Dhowan said dealing with non-state actors was always a difficult situation.
- Asked about the boat allegedly carrying explosives for a possible terror attack near the Gujarat coast recently, he said: “Coastal security is a big challenge and we have a huge coastline of 7,516 km and extensive economic zone of over two million sq km.
- There are nearly 5,000 merchant ships operating and over 2.4 lakh fishing boats in the area.” To maintain surveillance, the Navy had put in place the National Command and Control Communication System and Intelligence System, Admiral Dhowan said.
- “Threat perception in the Indian Ocean region is wide and varied. There is threat of asymmetric warfare and other maritime threats that could emanate from the region for the country. India is fully concerned and is ready to defend its seas,” he said.

NFIR opposes FDI in Railways

- The National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) has vehemently opposed the Centre’s proposal for FDI in Railways and threatened to go on indefinite strike in June this year.
- According to NFIR General Secretary M. Raghaviah, there is no need for FDI in Railways. “Government’s move to slowly hand over the Railways to foreign hands is like the entry of East India Company, which ruled the country later,” he said.
- NFIR has offered the Railway Ministry to take loan from the Provident Fund of the Railway employees and repay them in due course for funding certain viable projects.
- “NFIR is strongly against FDI in Railways and will oppose it tooth and nail,” Mr. Raghaviah told reporters on the sidelines of Zonal Conference of its affiliated unit Central Railway Mazdoor Sangh (CRMS).
- He said if the government wants to raise money for certain new projects, it would be appropriate on their part to decide the priority and viability of the project and utilise the PF to certain extent.
- Mr. Raghaviah further said that a small amount can be taken from their salaries as loan for similar purpose. NFIR had discussed the issue of their opposition of FDI with Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu and had apprised him of the lurking danger in FDI, he said.
- NFIR, which represents a majority union, has accused the government of ignoring safety aspects in the Railways, and not filling vacant posts in the operating and allied departments.
- Listing measures to augment revenue of the Railways, Mr. Raghaviah said passenger fare should be hiked and more facilities should be provided to them.

- People are willing to pay extra provided you extend good facilities including catering, he said. Railways should discontinue paying Rs. 9,000 crore dividend to the Government, he said and questioned the facility of senior citizen concession.

World Ramayana Conference in Bengaluru

- The Ramayana Research Foundation in Bengaluru has organised a three-day World Ramayana conference from January 23 to 25 at the National College Grounds.
- Fifty scholars from across India will present papers on varied subjects. Sanskrit scholar Satya Vrat Shastri, politician Subramanian Swamy, scholar Bannanje Govindacharya and Mani Dravid will participate in a national debate on January 24.
- 'Valmiki Sanman' will be conferred on Sanskrit scholars Satya Vrat Shastri and K.S. Narayanacharya on January 25. Shobana will present dance ballets on January 23, and Nirupama Rajendra will do so on January 25.

NGOs oppose panel report on environmental laws

- Environmental NGOs voiced opposition to the report of the high-level committee (HLC) on environmental laws during a hearing of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests.
- The Standing Committee earlier invited responses on the HLC after it was submitted last year and seemed determined to hear as many representations as it could on the report. Committee chairperson Ashwani Kumar said there was a lot of disquiet in the media over the report and one criticism was that it was done in a hurry.
- A number of NGOs made representations before the Committee. The representatives included the former Environment Secretary Dr. Prodipto Ghosh, Sunita Narain from the Centre for Science and Environment; Belinda Wright from the Wildlife Protection Society of India; Dr. K. Ullas Karanth, Centre for Wildlife Studies; Dr. Asad Rahmani, Bombay Natural History Society; and Ritwick Dutta, Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment.
- While the report of the HLC chaired by former Cabinet Secretary T.S.R. Subramanian was not tabled in Parliament, Mr. Kumar said there were a number of requests for hearing opinions on the report and there was a feeling that it would weaken environmental laws.
- He declined to express his own view on the report and clarified that he didn't think a review of the report was outside the scope of the Standing Committee.
- He said this issue was very much in the public domain and the report had gone to the government and there were apprehensions about some of the recommendations.
- The Standing Committee discussed various issues of national importance and since there was so much disquiet among environmentalists, it was only fair that MPs were apprised of the report, he said.
- However, he said there was no time frame to come up with a review after hearing all the stakeholders concerned and since the environmental laws had to be considered, it could not be done in haste.
- Union Minister of State for Environment Prakash Javadekar had said amendments to environmental laws would be brought about in the budget session based on the recommendations of the HLC.

Where is the need for law on defacement of properties: Delhi High Court

- The Delhi High Court has posed a question to the government authorities on the need for a legislation on defacement of properties in the Capital when a policy on outdoor advertisements was already in existence.
- The question pertained to the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property (DPDP) Act adopted in 2009. A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice G. Rohini and Justice R.S. Endlaw asked the Delhi Government earlier this week to clarify its stand on the issue by January 12.
- The Court was hearing a writ petition moved by the Aam Aadmi Party and a city resident, Anil Bhatia, challenging the action for removal of posters from the houses of people.
- The petitioners said the move amounted to denial of right to freedom of speech of the citizens who had willingly put up the posters on their property.
- The petition contended that the DPDP Act should not be invoked when the posters or banners were put up on the houses and other buildings with the consent of their owners.
- The petition was filed after the Delhi Police removed posters from private properties of AAP supporters and threatened them with action under the Act.

U.S Secretary calls for greater Indo-US economic ties

- U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry pushed for expansion of India-US commercial ties and praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to the area of wind energy.
- "The world's oldest democracy and the largest democracy can help to forge an era of shared prosperity and security. Trade between India and the U.S. has increased five-fold since 2001.
- We can do more together. I want our economic relationship to grow stronger in every aspect. We must do more together and we must do it faster. We share PM Modi's goal of increasing our country's annual trade fivefold.
- We want to expand our commercial ties with India and our bilateral trade to increase five-fold," Mr. Kerry said in his address at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2015. He expressed awe at the "entrepreneurial passion" he saw in the entrepreneurs of Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore on his several visits to India.
- "Our founding documents begin with the exact same words 'We the people' and our innovators and entrepreneurs are constantly pushing the curve of discovery," he said.
- In the wake of the huge numbers of people in extreme poverty, Mr. Kerry pointed to "endless possibilities" in terms of setting up schools, hospitals, roads, energy grid and developing tourism.
- However, the threat of climate change was "an enormous cloud" hanging over the world. "Global climate change is violently affecting communities and disrupting commerce, development and economic growth around the world.
- It is costing farmers crops. It is costing insurance companies unbelievable payouts. If we continue down the current trendline, we will see climate refugees fighting for food and water."

- In the light of this situation, Mr. Kerry expressed hope that the Indo-US could ensure sustainable development and opportunities for economic growth and prosperity.

India can lead smart growth says Ban Ki Moon

- Raising concerns over the impact of climate change, world leaders laid thrust on renewable energy and sustainable development at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged investors to “shape and agree on the post-2015 development agenda with a set of sustainable development goals.”
- He set 2030 as the target to provide universal access to energy to all seven billion people in the world, double energy efficiency and double the use of renewable energy.
- Praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s smart city initiative for encouraging the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency, Mr. Ban urged the Indian business community “to lead the transformation we need to achieve sustainable development and inclusive growth.”
- “India is in a unique position to lead the move towards sustainability,” the U.N. Secretary-General said. The Summit saw participation by 8,500 delegates, including 2500 foreign delegates from around 120 countries and about 30 world leaders from the field of politics and business.
- Large conglomerates from India and abroad announced huge investment and job creation plans. While Reliance Industries chief Mukesh Ambani said his group would invest Rs. 1 lakh crore in 12-18 months across businesses, Kumar Mangalam Birla of Aditya Birla Group announced investment plans for Rs. 20,000 crore in the State.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi cited the Centre’s recent decisions to invite foreign investment in Railways, Defence and Insurance. Projecting India as a 3D investment destination, Mr. Modi said the country had “democracy, demography and demand.”

FM expects GST to take effect in 2016

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said he expected the government to implement the common Goods and Services Tax (GST) across the country in the course of next year.
- Mr. Jaitley presented the GST Bill in parliament last year. It needs the support of two-thirds of its members as well as ratification by State legislatures.
- The Bill, which was returned, authorises payment and appropriation of certain additional sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for 2014-15. It was passed by Lok Sabha on December 10.
- Describing the GST reform as a “win-win situation” for both the Centre and the States, the Finance Minister had said the Bill would not have “fear of the unknown” unlike Value Added Tax (VAT).
- Investors and manufacturers have long coveted the GST as a game-changer that would simplify taxes while broadening the tax base, adding as much as 2 percentage points to the size of Asia’s third-largest economy.

CJI’s remarks on PM inappropriate says Fali S. Nariman

- Senior advocate Fali S. Nariman, one of the most respected legal voices in the country, described Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu’s personal remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi as “inappropriate and ill-advised.”
- But primarily, he said, the media should not have, in the first place, publicised Mr.

Dattu's "personal remarks", reportedly made during an "informal interaction." Mr. Nariman was responding to remarks reportedly made by Mr. Dattu to reporters about Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- The interaction was variously described in newspaper reports as "informal" and "rare." National dailies and channels reported the CJI as saying, "I had met the Prime Minister four times and I would rate him as a good leader, a good human being, a man with foresight who would strive for good governance."
- After asking, whether it was proper for a sitting Chief Justice to make such comments (published widely) on a serving Prime Minister. And even if his views are personal, should he have expressed them in public during an interaction with the media. What is the protocol for serving judges in this regard and have there been such incidents in the past?
- Mr. Nariman said: "My initial response to the reported comments of the CJI in the press is that what was said at an "informal interaction" [as you call it] is not to be publicised. But since the remarks have now been reported, I would describe them as "inappropriate and ill-advised": because they send the wrong signals – especially to people looking for wrong signals!"
- "But what has not made the headlines in any newspaper is that the CJI also reportedly said during his "informal chat" with journalists that there must always exist tension between the Executive and the Judiciary Correctly said."

'Janata Parivar' merger to be formalised soon

- A day after Janata Dal (United) president Sharad Yadav said the JD(U) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) would merge first in Bihar, he made a U-turn saying the merger would be formalised with all the six parties coming together in Delhi.
- "The grand merger will be formalised with all six parties joining it in Delhi," said RJD chief Lalu Yadav, participating in a social gathering organised by the State party chief on Makar Sankranti.
- Mr. Prasad, who made arrangements for a feast at his residence, however, declared that the grand merger of all six parties would be officially announced by Mr. Mulayam Singh soon in Delhi.
- "The announcement has already been done, and Mulayam Singh will officially announce it soon. Should everybody keep on announcing it?" asked the RJD chief.
- The JD(U) Rajya Sabha member and party spokesperson K C Tyagi said "next week some good news regarding the grand merger may come." "Merger of all old Janata Parivar parties will soon be a reality," reiterated INLD leader Ajay Chautala, who attended the Makar Sankranti feast.
- Several party leaders of the Janata Parivar attended feasts organised by State JD(U) president Basistha Narayan Singh and Mr. Prasad. However, senior JD(U) leader and former Chief Minister Nitish Kumar did not participate as he was indisposed, while Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi joined the banquets.
- Reacting to State BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi's statement that the merger was cold-shouldered by Mr. Mulayam Singh, Mr. Prasad shot back, "Has Sushil Kumar Modi left the BJP and become the spokesperson of Samajwadi Party?" making it clear that they [all the six socialist parties] were together.
- Taking a dig at the Prime Minister's Swacch Bharat Abhiyan, Mr. Prasad said the

cleaning department was with the BJP and the people of India had given it the responsibility.

SC asks government for update on 'Ganga clean-up projects'

- The Supreme Court asked the NDA government if there was any chance of cleaning up the Ganga river during its current term in power. Solicitor-General Ranjit Kumar submitted that a consortium of IITs was preparing a road map for cleaning the river.
- He said the government was proposing a total of 80 sewage treatment plants (STPs) which would process, in a day, 368 million litres of water flowing into the river in the five river basin States.
- The court directed the government to present the status of 31 ongoing projects of STPs and 15 others which were in the bidding stage.
- The hearing primarily focused on the domestic sewage flowing into the river. In October 2014, the Bench had referred to the National Green Tribunal the responsibility of monitoring and inspecting industrial units along the river and even cut off their water and power connections if they were found to be polluting.
- The Supreme Court has been hearing this petition since the early 1980s. Numerous orders have been passed by it, directing the authorities to protect the river. The petition was filed by lawyer M.C. Mehta highlighting the alarming state of the river and its depletion owing to pollution.

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Government allows direct sale of bio-diesel by manufacturers

- In a bid to augment supply of environment friendly fuel, the government allowed private manufacturers of bio-diesel to sell it directly to consumers like Indian Railways.

- Till now, only state-owned oil firms and only those private firms investing Rs 2,000 crore in oil infrastructure were allowed to retail petrol and diesel. Bio-diesel, which is to be doped in diesel before being used to fire automobiles, too was clubbed under this rule.
- “The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave its approval for amending the Motor Spirit (petrol) and High Speed Diesel (diesel) control order for Regulation of Supply, Distribution and Prevention of Malpractices dated December 19, 2005,” said an official statement.
- “The amendment will allow private bio-diesel manufacturers, their authorised dealers and joint ventures of oil marketing companies (OMCs) authorised by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG) as dealers and give marketing /distribution functions to them for the limited purpose of supply of bio-diesel to consumers,” it said.
- Also, the Rs 2,000 crore investment “will also be relaxed and a new clause added to give marketing rights for bio-diesel to the private bio-diesel manufacturers, their authorised dealers and JVs of OMCs authorised by the MoP&NG for direct sales to consumers”, it said.
- The amendment was made because users faced problems in sourcing bio-diesel. State-owned firms had their financial consideration because cost of bio-diesel was more than the refinery-gate price of diesel.
- With the relaxation, bulk users like Railways can buy bio-diesel directly from manufacturers and dope in diesel for running locomotives. “This decision will encourage the production and use of bio-diesel in the country,” the statement said.

Sri Lanka’s new govt. to start ties with India ‘on a clean slate’

- Sri Lanka’s new government will start its relationship with India on a “clean slate,” Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera told ahead of his departure to New Delhi.
- Coinciding with his trip, the Sri Lankan government released 15 Indian fishermen in its custody, and officials said the Sri Lankan fishermen, currently in Indian prisons, were also being released.
- Mr. Samaraweera said the visit was intended to put the two countries’ relationship back on track after it was “at times strained” when President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s government was in power.
- In addition to holding bilateral discussions with his counterpart Sushma Swaraj, Minister Samaraweera will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Congress President Sonia Gandhi over the next couple of days.
- Following Sri Lanka’s January 8 elections in which President Rajapaksa was defeated by his former Cabinet member, New Delhi wasted no time in reaching out to the new leadership.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first international leader to congratulate President Maithripala Sirisena, just as clear signs of his victory began emerging on the morning of January 9.
- Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj called Mr. Samaraweera soon after he assumed charge as Foreign Minister and invited him to New Delhi. The two leaders are long

time friends, and have interacted closely when they held the telecommunications portfolio on either side of the Palk Strait in the 1990s.

- “The fact that as Foreign Minister I have undertaken my first overseas visit to India signifies the importance that President Sirisena’s government places on strengthening and improving bilateral ties with India,” Mr. Samaraweera said.

Union Cabinet clears FM radio channels auctions

- The Union Cabinet cleared the third phase of auction of FM radio channels, expected to fetch Rs. 550 crore to the government.
- A Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the auction, while also clearing migration [renewal] of 135 private FM radio licences from the second to the third phase in 69 cities. Several more private channels will hence start operations in those cities.
- By the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, migration requires payment of a fee. As many as 243 private FM channels operate in 86 cities in 26 States and three Union Territories.
- “The auction process will add an estimated revenue of over Rs. 550 crore to the national exchequer on successful auctions of all proposed channels.
- Besides, it will beget the amount realised through the migration process which is dependent on the TRAI-recommended formula, where migration fee is linked to the discovery of market prices through the FM Radio Phase III auction,” the Cabinet statement said.

GAIL pipeline Catches fire in Delhi

- Four cars were completely charred and a man was injured after an Indraprastha gas pipeline caught fire in South Delhi’s Moti Bagh. The pipeline was reportedly perforated by civic construction contractors working at a site nearby.
- The fire at the high-pressure pipeline occurred around 9-30 a.m. near Venkateshwara College in Satyaniketan. It carries gas to consumers like Maruti Udyog in Gurgaon.
- A police officer said: “The incident took place when some PWD workers carrying out digging work in the place accidentally punctured the pipeline. They were testing the soil in the area for construction of an elevated flyover and happened to hit the pipeline.”
- Construction for the elevated corridor was being carried out by PWD appointed Hindustan Construction Company. Workers of HCC’s local contractors allegedly perforated the underground pipeline while using a drill machine.
- While the workers fled after the incident, the gas leaked from the pipeline and spread in a small area. It soon caught fire.
- “An auto-rickshaw driver who was passing by at the time of the incident suffered superficial injuries on his face and stomach. The injured driver was identified as Ramprakash (40). He was discharged after first aid.
- Four cars parked nearby the spot were completely gutted in the incident. With the help of army personnel, the remaining cars were removed from the area and locals were evacuated. We have registered an FIR in this connection,” the officer added.
- The incident which took place in the middle of the residential area and shopping

complex was contained through swift action by army officials, fire services, policemen and GAIL.

- The supply of gas at both ends of the pipeline was shut immediately. This helped in bringing the situation under control, the fire official said.

IITs, IIMs to roll out free online courses

- Union Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani announced the launch of free online courses by premier institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institutes Management (IIMs) from the current year.
- Ms. Irani said that as part of the digital initiatives and education reforms launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, consultations on the New Education Policy would begin on January 26.
- A nominal fee would be charged for certification of various online courses. It would be free for people with special abilities and those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Literature Festival to showcase Rajasthan's heritage

- The rich heritage of Rajasthan is set to come alive as the annual ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival showcases the vibrant culture of the State to the over 2 lakh visitors expected for the event.
- Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje will inaugurate the event. Rajasthani musicians Nathoo Solanki, Chugge Khan and the Jaisalmer Boys will open the world's largest free literary festival with the sounds of their traditional music which has become synonymous with the first day of the festival.
- Also on the opening day, musicologist John Napier and Shanti Raman will speak of the tradition and challenges in archiving the oral history of the Nath Jogis. They will be joined by jogi performer Kishori Nath who will recite and perform from an ancient bardic repertoire.

Pahlaj Nihalani is Censor board chief

- The government put in place an entirely new censor board with producer Pahlaj Nihalani as its chairperson. Mr. Nihalani, known for the 1990s blockbusters Shola aur Shabnam and Aankhen , produced "Har Ghar Modi-The Power House of India," a fan-song for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, last year.
- The new board also features Dr. Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, best known for his epic TV serial Chanakya and the critically acclaimed, national award winning Partition film Pinjar , based on Amrita Pritam's novel of the same name.
- Other board members include Gujarat Central University Vice-Chancellor Syed Abdul Bari, besides film and theatre personalities who are either BJP members or have had close association with the party.
- BJP national secretary Vani Tripathy Tikoo, who has acted in films like Chalte Chalte and Dushman , and Bengali actor George Baker, who joined the BJP last year, were appointed members of the board.
- Mr. Baker contested from the Howrah parliamentary constituency in last year's general elections but lost to Prasun Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress.
- Ashoke Pandit, Kashmiri activist and filmmaker, known for films like And the World

Remained Silent and Sheen also found a place on the revamped censor board. Another new appointee, Ramesh Patange, is a Dalit RSS activist and author of Me, Manu anee Sangh (I, Manu, and Sangh).

- Tamil actor and former AIADMK MLA S.Ve. Shekher and Telugu actor Jeevitha were also appointed members of the board for three years.
- Ms Jeevitha is fighting a cheque bounce case in which she was sentenced to two years in prison and fined Rs. 25 lakh, which she paid.

Rajni Kothari was the first to foresee caste factor

- Rajni Kothari, preeminent political theorist and activist, who in the 1960s developed the idea of the 'Congress system' to explain the party's umbrella character that accommodated multiple interests within its fold, is no more. He was in his mid-80s and ailing for several years.
- Numerous books and commentaries that combined empirical research and theoretical originality make Mr. Kothari possibly the most influential thinker on the development of the Indian political system.
- Being an academic did not restrain him from donning an activist cap, and Mr. Kothari was an active participant in politics, most remarkably through his association with the People's Union for Civil Liberties.
- He had an enduring influence on the study of Indian politics with his many books, especially, his magnum opus, 'Politics in India', and also 'Caste in Indian Politics, and Rethinking Development: In Search of Humane Alternatives'.
- Mr. Kothari founded the Centre for the Study of Developing Society in 1963 in Delhi, which grew as a premier institute, where a galaxy of India's social scientists was based. He was also chairman of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, and in various capacities, mentored several generations of Indian social scientists.

Haryana's decision to reduce retirement age to 58 upheld

- The retirement age of Haryana government employees now stands reduced to 58 years from 60 years as the Punjab and Haryana High Court has upheld the decision of the Manohar Lal Khattar government to the effect.
- The decision is likely to impact nearly 5,000 of the 3 lakh employees on an immediate basis.
- Government sources had earlier claimed that while the reduction in retirement age would result in an additional burden of Rs. 200 crore on the exchequer on immediate basis it would prove beneficial in the long run as it would lead to more job opportunities at the entry level.
- It was on November 25 that Mr. Khattar had announced the reduction in retirement age of employees.

1-crore award for villages attaining balanced sex ratio

- Union Minister for Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi announced a Rs. 1-crore award for any innovative village attaining a balanced sex ratio.
- At the inaugural session of a national thematic workshop on woman and child

development in Panipat, Ms. Gandhi urged the State governments and the district commissioners and other officials to work together for the success of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save daughter, educate daughter) programme to be launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi .

- Ms. Gandhi said the Prime Minister chose Haryana to launch the campaign as it was one of the States with a low female sex ratio. One hundred districts with a low female sex ratio were selected nationwide for the campaign, and 12 of them, including Panipat, were in Haryana.

Periyar Tiger Reserve wins NTCA award

- The Periyar Tiger Reserve, spread over 925 sq.km. in Kerala, bagged the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) biennial award for encouraging local public participation in managing the reserve.
- There are 75 communities living around the reserve, including tribal people who are dependent on eco-development programmes.
- The community-based eco-tourism activities helped visitors and there were night scouting programmes with the help of expert trackers as well. Tourism was supplemented by pepper growing and marketing which was a value addition. Now, self-help groups were involved in honey processing and other income-generating activities.

e-auction of 46 coal blocks to begin

- The government has begun re-allocating cancelled coal blocks. E-auction, in two phases, of 46 coal mines would begin on February 14. While 23 Schedule II mines (those that are producing already) would be auctioned between February 14 and March 5, another 23 blocks, falling under Schedule III (ready to produce), would be put on offer between February 25 and March 5.
- Started with 42 mines in Schedule II and 32 mines in Schedule III. Subsequently, 27 mines were transferred from Schedule I (all 204 mines) to Schedule III, and this took thereby taking the number to 101. However, with three mines falling in the 'no go' areas, the effective number of mines would be 98.

Cabinet panel plans strategy to legislate ordinances

- The Budget session of Parliament, as is customary, will be held in two parts: the recess will start on March 20 and Parliament will reconvene on April 20.
- The session will end on May 8. The Railway budget will be presented on February 26 and the Economic Survey the next day.
- The debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address has been fixed for February 24 and 25.

New Chief Justice for J&K High Court

- Justice N. Paul Vasanthakumar, judge of the Madras High Court, has been elevated as the Chief Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court.
- Justice Vasanthakumar, who is from Marthandam in Kanyakumari district on Tamil Nadu, had been a lawyer for 25 years. He was made an Additional Judge of the Madras High Court on December 10, 2005, and appointed permanent judge on April

20, 2007.

- He disposed of 92,000 petitions as a judge of the Madras High Court and delivered several landmark judgments.

Jhumpa Lahiri wins DSC Prize for 2015

- Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri won the \$50,000 DSC Prize for Literature, one of South Asia's top literary awards for her book, *The Lowland* .
- The Prize celebrates writing on the South Asian region from writers across the globe and is given to the best novel or translations into English of a work on or about the region.
- "This is an enormous honour for *The Lowland* and for me personally. I wish I was there in person to receive the award," Ms. Lahiri said through a phone conversation from Rome. Publisher Caroline Newbury accepted the award on her behalf.

Irom Sharmila arrested again

- A day after being released from jail, rights activist Irom Chanu Sharmila was arrested once again under the same charge of attempt to commit suicide by continuing her indefinite fast.
- Imphal West Superintendent of Police Jhaljit told PTI that Ms. Sharmila was arrested under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. She has been arrested for the same crime, but it is a different case .
- Imphal East district chief judicial magistrate rejected charges of attempt to suicide against the 42-year-old, who is on an indefinite fast for 14 years demanding the repeal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). She is in a government hospital under police custody, where she is force-fed through the nose.

A simple Device to curb female foeticide

- A simple set top box is helping to prevent sex determination and female foeticide.
- Taking its cue from Jhajjar, which had the worst sex ratio among the districts of Haryana before staging a remarkable recovery in the past three years, the Jind administration has made it mandatory for all ultrasound labs to install active tracking devices with their machines so as to make available the details of the tests online to the Chief Medical Officer (CMO).
- Though Jind is not among the 12 districts identified for concerted action under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi , the district administration has introduced the scheme to track ultrasound machines to curb their misuse for sex determination tests and to improve the sex ratio.
- Deputy Commissioner Ajit Balaji Joshi, who had been instrumental in the introduction of the scheme in Jhajjar in 2011, said all the recordings of the ultrasound tests would be sent online to the CMO. This would help the administration monitor how the equipment was being used and what tests were being done.
- Mr. Joshi said the plan would cover all the ultrasound machines in Jind. "A set top box is put along with every ultrasound machine, and the power supply to the ultrasound machine is routed through it. So, both would have to be switched on together. The set top box contains a GPRS-based SIM card which sends a message to the CMO and the Deputy Commissioner the moment it is switched on. It records the

entire functioning of the ultrasound machine and sends a video in encrypted form to the CMO every day.”

Crocodile project at Sunderbans gets a boost with expert assistance

- A crocodile project in Sunderbans, aimed at increasing the number of salt water crocodiles in the delta, has got a fresh start with the help of renowned experts in herpetology who introduced global best practices in crocodile conservation.
- The Bhagabatpur Crocodile Project started in the mid 1970's, was aimed at increasing the number of salt-water crocodiles, a Schedule-I species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- A few years later, the eggs to hatchling ratio declined, and of the 100 eggs collected on an average — less than 40 would hatch, posing questions over the fate of the project.

In a break with protocol, PM receives Obama at airport

- U.S. President Barack Obama being received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Palam Air Force Station in New Delhi. Obama received 21 gun salute at Rashtrapati Bhavan; Guard of Honour led by woman officer Puja Thakur.
- U.S. President Barack Obama, who arrived in the Capital on a three-day visit on Sunday, was accorded a grand welcome with Prime Minister Narendra Modi making a departure from protocol to receive him and First Lady Michelle Obama at the Palam Air Force base.
- He inspected the tri-service Guard of Honour, which for the first time was led by a woman officer, Wing Commander Pooja Thakur. The gesture reflected the theme of this year's Republic Day parade — “Nari Shakti” (women power). The U.S. President will be the Chief Guest at the parade on Monday morning.
- After the ceremonial reception, Mr. Obama visited Raj Ghat and paid a floral tribute at the samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi. Mr. Obama has often spoken about how he has been inspired by the Mahatma and has borrowed from his ideals and teachings.
- Accompanied by Union Power Minister Piyush Goyal, who is the Minister-in-company for the visiting dignitary, Mr. Obama observed a moment of silence at the Mahatma's samadhi . He planted a Peepal sapling and received a charkha (spinning wheel) as a memento.

No changes to civil liability law, says Sujatha Singh

- Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh and other External Affairs Ministry officials have said that no changes to the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damages (CLND) Act, 2010, have been made, and no assurances given to the U.S. on its contentious Section 46 that opens suppliers to tort liability, either.
- But given the lack of clarity on just how the government was able to convince U.S. officials who have held out against the law since 2010, many are sceptical about how viable the breakthrough will be if there is legal or political opposition to the deal in India.
- Former Atomic Energy Regulatory Board Chairman A. Gopalakrishnan was doubtful that the deal would benefit Indian consumers or taxpayers, given the cost of setting

up the insurance pool of \$244 million. “If so, the financial burden of this will eventually be on the Indian tax-payers. It is the foreign reactor manufacturer, who escapes payment and the public who suffer from the damaging consequences end up also paying for all rectification,” he said demanding more clarity from the government.

R K Laxman Passes Away

- The messy business of the democracy that was India was unforgettably captured in the iconic creation, labelled simply The Common Man , of R.K. Laxman, died .
- Mr. Laxman, who was awarded the Padma Vibhushan and the Magsaysay Award, was a complex man, who defined his métier with an ingenious lightness of touch as evinced in his autobiography, Tunnel of Time.
- His astonishing career was a paradox in the Chestertonian sense — often interviewed in public, he fiercely guarded his private life. “There was an unmatched brilliance and warmth in his wit. He was inimitable. He could be many things to many people at the same time,” reminisced friend and fellow cartoonist Mangesh Tendulkar.
- Balding, clad in a tattered jacket and donning an eternally bemused expression through his spectacles, the Common Man was the first sight of millions of newspaper readers in Mr. Laxman’s pocket cartoon, You Said it, since 1951 in The Times of India.
- Be it Gattu, the tousled boy mascot of Asian Paints, or the masterly Malgudi illustrations, Mr. Laxman’s dab hand portrayed the tokenism of politicians and the existential angst of the Indian commoner with a devastating effectiveness.

Chandigarh launches Smart City app

- In the first major step towards making Chandigarh a “Smart City,” the city administration launched its “official mobile app” to create awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities and provide all types of citizen-centric and public utility services and information to the residents.
- Launching the scheme, Vijay Dev, Adviser to the Administrator of Chandigarh, said various departments would be directed to route all information and updates through the app and appoint a link officer for the work.
- The app would become an important platform for redressing grievances.
- Speaking at the launch of an app of the Food and Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department, Mr. Dev described it as a single “e-window” to all information related to the department and various citizen-centric services.
- The app is now available free at Google Play store for Android phone users. Its iOS and Windows Phone versions would be released soon.
- Important addresses, contacts, helpline numbers and e-mail ids of the consumer forum and various departments of the Chandigarh Administration are available on the app.

Two Harappan sites being excavated

- Excavations have begun at the two Harappan sites of Binjor in Rajasthan, close to the India-Pakistan border, and Rakhigarhi in Haryana.
- While the Archaeological Survey of India’s Excavation Branch at Purana Quila, New Delhi, is excavating Binjor, the Deccan College Post-Graduate & Research Institute,

Pune, and the Haryana Department of Archaeology is excavating the Rakhigarhi site, 25 km from Jind. About 350 km separate Binjor from Rakhigarhi. As the crow flies, Binjor is situated seven km from the border, in Anupgarh tehsil of Sri Ganganganar district.

- There are about 2,000 Harappan sites in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, with 500 in India and 1,500 in Pakistan.
- At its glory, the Harappan civilisation flourished over two million square km, from Sutkajendor on the Makran coast of Balochistan to Alamgirpur in Uttar Pradesh, and from Manda in Jammu to Daimabad in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra.
- Sanjay Manjul, Director, Institute of Archaeology, New Delhi, who is director of the excavation at Binjor, said the excavation was being jointly done by the ASI's Excavation Branch at Purana Quila and the Institute of Archaeology.
- Vasant Shinde, Vice-Chancellor, Deccan College, is the director of the excavation at Rakhigarhi. Professor Shinde said that with the discovery of two more mounds last year at Rakhigarhi, the site had staked claim to be the largest Harappan site. One of the two newly discovered mounds would be dug this season.

Murthy and kin donate £200,000 for Gandhi statue

- The plans for erecting a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Parliament Square have received a boost with a donation of £200,000 from N.R. Narayana Murthy, co-founder of Infosys, and his family.
- The donation goes a long way in meeting the target of £750,000 set by the Gandhi Statue Memorial Trust, a charity that was set up by the economist Lord Meghnad Desai for the purpose of commissioning and installing the statue.
- Earlier this month, the Gandhi Statue Memorial Trust announced it had raised over £500,000 in donations and pledges.
- Mr. Murthy's donation will close the target gap. The installation and unveiling of the statue is likely to take place soon.

Right to shelter

- The Congress will push for the right to shelter for the poor, on the lines of the right to information and employment legislation.

Jaishankar's appointment comes in a twist

- With the Centre appointing S. Jaishankar the new Foreign Secretary, it is unclear if the sudden move will upset other officers in the External Affairs Ministry the way the surprise appointment of Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon did in 2006, with several officers resigning in protest.
- Dr. Jaishankar's replacement of Sujatha Singh is an interesting twist, given they were both in the running for the Foreign Secretary's post when Ms. Singh won the post in 2013. Officials in the then Prime Minister's Office said that while Mr. Jaishankar was the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's choice, he was overruled at the time, primarily because of Ms. Singh's seniority.

Debates show why Preamble's original text left out the two words

- Even as the omission of the words ‘secular’ and ‘socialist’ from the Preamble text in a government advertisement has stoked a controversy, the Constituent Assembly debates clearly show why the words were omitted in the original text.
- The debates saw Dr. B.R. Ambedkar reason that there was no need to include the term ‘secular’ as the entire Constitution embodied the concept of secular state, which meant non-discrimination on grounds of religion and equal rights and status to all citizens.
- On the inclusion of the term ‘socialist,’ he said it is against the very grain of democracy to decide in the Constitution what kind of society the people of India should live in.
- However, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi re-introduced the two words for political reasons in the 42nd Constitution Amendment of 1976. Constitutional expert Subhash Kashyap said: “The word ‘socialist’ was added to send a message politically that she stood for the poor. The word ‘secular’ was obviously meant for the minorities in the context of the birth control programmes of the emergency period. It was not as if the Constitution was not secular or socialist before the words were added. India has been secular before the 42nd Amendment and continues to be secular after it.” “It was merely playing politics,” Mr. Kashyap said.

Remove ads on pre-natal sex selection: SC

- In an interim order, a Supreme Court bench of Justices Dipak Misra and Prafulla C. Pant ordered the three search engines – Google, Yahoo and Microsoft — to “forthwith” withdraw online advertisements, currently being hosted or published, on pre-natal sex determination facilities, clinics or centres in violation of Section 22 of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) or PC-PNDT Act, 1994.
- Referring to an affidavit filed by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Solicitor-General Ranjit Kumar said the government would be able to “stop the presentation of any kind of thing that relates to sex selection and eventual abortion” if the search engines part with the URLs of such content. Alternatively, he said the search engines can also “effectively or regularly” block key words and advertisement links as they have the “relevant technology and deep-domain knowledge”
- The hearing is based on a PIL filed by Dr. Sabu Mathew George in 2008 highlighting the use of Internet and popular search engines to promote sex determination technologies in violation of the 1994 Act.

Shekhar Sen is Sangeet Natak Akademi chairman

- Eminent singer and theatre director Shekhar Sen has been appointed the new chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the country’s premier institution for performing arts.
- Mr. Sen was awarded the Padma Shri on Republic Day.
- According to an order issued by the Culture Ministry , Mr. Sen has been appointed for a five-year term with immediate effect.
- The Akademi has been without a head after earlier chairperson Leela Samson, who was appointed by the UPA government, quit on September 30 last year.

Gorkhaland movement leader Subhash Ghisingh dead

- Subhash Ghisingh, the founder-leader of the movement for a separate homeland for the Gorkhas in northern Bengal, passed away at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in New Delhi. He was 80 and is survived by two sons and a daughter.
- Mr. Ghisingh was born in a tea estate in Darjeeling and later joined the Army's Gorkha Rifles. "When he first started talking about a separate State, no one in the Darjeeling Hills was with him," recalled Abhijit Majumdar, a Central Committee member of the CPI-ML in Siliguri. "But he was a genuine leader who slowly mobilised people, selling them the idea of a separate identity and self-rule."
- Mr. Ghisingh's politics was based largely on the alleged discrimination that Darjeeling Hills suffered at the hands of a government that ruled from Kolkata, nearly 600 kilometres south. The movement slowly drew in hundreds of thousands of people belonging to various ethnic groups, predominantly the Gorkhas, residing in the hills. He became their undisputed leader.
- For almost 20 years — from 1988 to 2007 — Mr. Ghisingh headed the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). However, in 2007, his political disciples led by Bimal Gurung formed a separate outfit, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM). Eventually, it became difficult for the legendary Gorkha leader to operate from the hills and he was forced to shift to Siliguri in the plains of north Bengal.

Human rights group slams India's record

- A top global human rights group has criticised the Indian government for its treatment of minorities, lack of protection for women's and children's rights, restrictions on free speech and insufficient support extended for human rights via New Delhi's foreign policy engagements.
- In its 25th annual World Report on human rights, New York-headquartered Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that there was a "spike" in incidents of violence against religious minorities in 2013 in the run-up to the national elections where 133 people were killed and 2,269 injured in 823 incidents.
- Even one year after the communal violence in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts of Uttar Pradesh where over 60 people, mostly Muslims, were killed and tens of thousands displaced, "both the Central and the State governments had not provided proper relief or justice," the report said.
- Citing numerous other incidents of violence against minorities, including recent cases of discrimination against Dalits in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, the HRW report focused attention on the plight of those involved in "manual scavenging," the cleaning by hand of human waste.
- In terms of women's rights, in early 2014, the government introduced guidelines for the medical treatment and examination of women and children who report rape, but failed to allocate resources necessary for their implementation. At the time of writing only two States had adopted the guidelines.

Govt. effects major reshuffle of Secretaries

- The Narendra Modi government effected a major reshuffle of Secretaries of Union Ministries days after the tenure of Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh was curtailed.
- Shankar Agarwal, secretary of the Urban Development Ministry and Anita Agnihotri, secretary Housing and Poverty Alleviation (HUPA) Ministry were both moved out, ahead of the launch of the government's flagship schemes—the smart city project

and housing for all by 2020.

- According to sources, the Prime Minister's Office had held several rounds of meetings with both these ministries and there was "dissatisfaction" over the slow pace of work. The Prime Minister's Office had recently asked the UD Ministry to fast track the smart city project, while the HUPA ministry was asked to submit the blueprint for how housing shortage, particularly for the weaker sections will be met.
- While Mr. Agarwal has been shifted as Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment in place of Gauri Kumar, Ms. Agnihotri will take over as Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment in place of Sudhir Bhargava.
- Madhusudhan Prasad, Special Secretary in the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry will take over as Secretary, UD and Nandita Chatterjee, Member Secretary, National Commission for Women, Ministry of Women and Child Development will take over as secretary HUPA.
- Gauri Kumar has been moved to (Co-ordination & Public Grievances), Cabinet Secretariat in place of S.B. Agnihotri.
- Lov Verma, Secretary Health and Family Welfare Ministry has also been moved out at a time, when the government is gearing to roll out the Universal Health Assurance Mission. He has been shifted as Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in place of Stuti Narayan Kacker, on her superannuation. Bhanu Pratap Sharma, Establishment Officer and Special Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, will take over as the new Health and Family Welfare Secretary.

Law Commission moots special commercial courts

- The Law Commission recommended that the government to set up special commercial courts for the speedy disposal of "high value commercial suits" and suggested "substantial" changes in the Civil Procedure Code.
- In its 253rd Report, the Law Commission of India headed by chairperson Justice A.P. Shah, recommended to Union Law Minister V. Sadananda Gowda that separate commercial courts, and commercial divisions and appellate commercial divisions in High Courts would all ensure that cases are disposed of expeditiously, fairly and at reasonable cost to the litigant.
- The Commission has also included a draft Bill, "the Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts and Commercial Courts Bill, 2015" and suggestions for substantive procedural changes in the form of amendments to the Civil Procedure Code, 1908.

Dilip Kumar gets lifetime achievement award

- Veteran actor Dilip Kumar was conferred 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for his contribution to Indian cinema.
- Actor Anumpam Kher received the award on his behalf at the Jaipur International Film Festival (JIFF) here.
- In her video message, Dilip Kumar's wife Saira Bano said, "Dilip sahib will be very happy and feel to be honoured by with this award. Due to doctors' advice, he could not come to Gulabi Nagari [Jaipur] to receive it.

Make Moral Science must in schools: plea

- The Supreme Court issued notice to the government and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on a plea to make 'Moral Science' compulsory from Class 1 to 12.
- A Bench comprising Chief Justice H.L. Dattu and Justice A.K. Siki sought responses of the Human Resource Development Ministry and the CBSE on a PIL petition filed by advocate Santosh Singh, contending that Moral Science should be made compulsory to "include moral values and nurture national character in the national interest."

Russia, China back India's inclusion in expanded APEC

- Russia and China have endorsed India's efforts to formalise an iron-clad rejection of international terrorism, amid a call by the three countries to end the era of a unipolar world and rid the globe of the threat of "regime change."
- At the end of their day-long deliberations in the Chinese capital, the foreign ministers of the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping issued a comprehensive joint communiqué that called for an ambitious reform of an international system that was respectful of the diversity of home-grown political systems.

21-nation grouping

- The communiqué recommended India's inclusion in an expanded Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a 21-nation grouping of Pacific Rim countries.
- The Ministers endorsed India's impending membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) after elevating the grouping, which is pillared by Russia, China and most of the Central Asian States as "one of the key instruments in promoting multilateral political, security, economic and humanitarian interaction in the region."

In SCO

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which India is joining soon, has been holding major counter-terrorism exercises, in anticipation of the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan. Recognising the threat to stability posed during Afghanistan's upcoming transitional phase, the three Ministers called for supporting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in tune with the withdrawal of the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

Joint statement

- Without specifying the "Pivot to Asia" doctrine of the U.S., which involves concentration of forces on China's periphery, a joint statement by the RIC grouping called for advancing talks in the East Asia summit framework on rule-based security architecture in the Asia-Pacific, driven by the United Nations.

Home Secretary sacked

- Union Home Secretary Anil Goswami was given his marching orders for allegedly trying to stall the arrest of Saradha scam accused and former Minister Matang Sinh.
- The final decision was taken after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Rajnath Singh met and discussed the issue.

- Rural Development Secretary L.C. Goyal was appointed in his place, the order from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet said.
- Despite high maternal mortality, India records drop in fertility
- India, which is unlikely to achieve the fifth Millennium Development Goals (MDG-5) of reducing maternal mortality to 109 per 1,00,000 live births by 2015, is however, confident of meeting the target for lowering the total fertility rate (TFR) by the end of the 12th Plan.

Right to religion not above public morality: SC

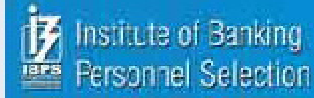
- Confirming the sacking of a government servant for bigamy, the Supreme Court ruled that the fundamental right to religion did not include practices which ran counter to public order, health and morality.
- The judgment by a Bench of Justices T.S. Thakur and A.K. Goel was on a petition filed by Khursheed Ahmad Khan against the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to remove him from service as Irrigation Supervisor for contracting a second marriage when his first marriage was still in existence.
- His ouster was based on Rule 29 (1) of the Uttar Pradesh Government Servant Conduct Rules, 1956.
- Mr. Khan challenged the constitutionality of the provision in the 1956 Rules, arguing that it violated his right to freely practice his religion.
- But the Bench dismissed his contention. Justice Goel, who wrote the verdict, quoted the apex court's 2003 judgment in Javed versus State of Haryana that "a practice did not acquire sanction of religion simply because it was permitted."
- "What was protected under Article 25 was the religious faith and not a practice which may run counter to public order, health or morality. Polygamy was not integral part of religion and monogamy was a reform within the power of the State under Article 25," Justice Goel wrote.
- The court further noted that no material was shown on record to prove that Mr. Khan had divorced his first wife, and moreover, his service record still showed his first wife's name.
- "Sharp distinction must be drawn between religious faith and belief and religious practices. What the State protects is religious faith and belief. If religious practices run counter to public order, morality or health or a policy of social welfare upon which the State has embarked, then the religious practices must give way before the good of the people of the State as a whole," the judgment reproduced the 1952 judicial precedent in the Narasu Appa Mali case.

Punjab Colleges to be tobacco-free

- All private and government universities of Punjab will soon become "tobacco-free". Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, Vini Mahajan has written to Vice-Chancellors and the principals of the affiliated colleges to implement the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 (COTPA) on their campuses.
- In the communication, Ms. Mahajan said Punjab was the first State in India to ban the sale of loose cigarettes (as single sticks) to dissuade consumers and the Tobacco Control Cell of the State had been aggressively pursuing the agenda to bring down

tobacco consumption in Punjab and banning of loose cigarettes was a step in that direction.

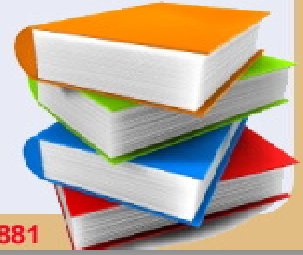
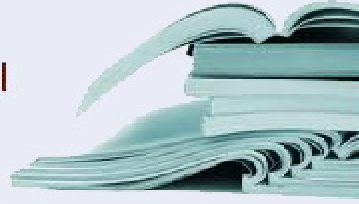
- Universities and colleges have been urged to keep a check on the shops and kiosks near their premises as well as small markets within to enforce complete ban on sale of tobacco products.
- The official reminded that under Section 4 of COTPA, smoking in public places is prohibited & under Section 6 of COTPA, tobacco selling is not allowed within 100 yards of any educational institution. She said this measure would go a long way in reducing prevalence of tobacco in Punjab as it would end up reducing the age of initiation.



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International News

John Kerry heads for India to attend 'Vibrant Gujarat Summit'

- US Secretary of State John Kerry headed for India to attend the Vibrant Gujarat Summit during which he will address investors to boost economic ties and meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss a broad range of bilateral and global issues, including climate change.
- “The Secretary would be emphasising the importance and future potential of our economic partnership with India, State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki told.
- “Obviously the discussion would be on everything from continuing to do more economically and technologically, given that United States and India, we believe, can reach greater level of prosperity together than we would achieve alone,” she said.
- The three-day Vibrant Gujarat Summit will begin tomorrow in Ahmedabad. “He would also be reiterating throughout the trip, our shared commitment to address the challenge of climate change, promoting clean energy in the future. Prime Minister Modi has a strong track record in this regard,” she said, adding that the Obama administration sees this trip as a pivotal point in India-US relationship.
- After a brief stopover in Munich to meet the Sultan of Oman, Kerry leading a high-level US delegation is scheduled to arrive in Ahmedabad. Soon after his arrival, he is expected to visit the Gandhi Ashram, meet members of the civil society and visit the Ford plant, which is expected to open shortly. He would address the Vibrant Gujarat Summit and hold a round table with top Indian CEOs.
- Kerry is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Modi and hold another round-table with American CEOs participating in the summit.
- Referring to the multi-fold increase in bilateral trade in the last 10 years, which stands now at about USD 100 billion, Psaki said the summit is an opportunity to further the goal that US President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Modi have talked about in terms of increasing trade five-fold to USD 500 billion.

Sri Lanka's new government to probe Rajapaksa's 'coup' bid

- Sri Lanka's new government accused former President Mahinda Rajapaksa of having tried to stage a military coup to remain in power following presidential polls, which saw his chief rival and former minister Maithripala Sirisena elected president.
- Mangala Samaraweera, a top aide of President Sirisena, told reporters that the coup was averted because the army chief “did not want to do anything against democracy at that decisive time.”
- This, he said, was despite orders from Mr. Rajapaksa and his brother Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, then the defence secretary to deploy troops to centres where the votes were being counted late on January 8.
- The new cabinet, to be sworn in soon, would initiate an investigation into the pre-dawn “conspiracy” as one of its first tasks, he added. The allegations come just days

after sections hailed Mr. Rajapaksa for “stepping down gracefully” and ensuring a smooth transition of power .

- “The truth is it was not a smooth transition of power,” said Mr. Samaraweera, who earlier served as Foreign Minister and is tipped to be a key member of President Sirisena’s cabinet.
- When contacted, Army commander Lieutenant General Daya Ratnayake told: “I have not seen those allegations yet, so I cannot respond.” Referring to earlier concerns over the army being deployed in the north and east to allegedly disrupt elections, he said: “You saw that there was no such incident. The transition was very smooth,” he said.
- On whether Mr. Rajapaksa or his brother gave him orders to stage a coup, General Ratnayake said: “I can’t comment on that, it is very sensitive. You have to check with the politicians.” However, should the government initiate an enquiry, the army would cooperate in the process, he said.

Taiwan confirmed the H5N8 strain of bird flu

- Taiwan’s agriculture authority confirmed that the strain of bird flu found in a goose breeding facility in the Chiayi County was the H5N8, which is not considered to be highly pathogenic.
- This follows the discovery of the highly pathogenic H5N2 strain of the bird flu virus at a chicken farm in the southern Taiwanese county of Pingtung.
- Agriculture council chief, Chen Bao-ji, said that this was the first time that the H5N8 strain has been detected in Taiwan, adding that it was suspected to have been spread by migratory birds, according to a Xinhua report.
- The Chiayi County government began culling more than 1,500 geese at the farm on Sunday and a ban on the movement of poultry in Pingtung, Tainan and Yunlin counties was imposed.
- The culling of 120,000 chickens on a farm in Pingtung was completed after poultry was found to be infected with the H5N2 strain. Avian influenza, known informally as avian flu or bird flu, refers to influenza caused by viruses adapted to birds.
- It has caused a global concern because of its possible transmission to humans and the threat of a pandemic if it mutates to a form that can be easily passed from birds to humans and then, from human to human.

Emerging economies must help combat climate change: U.N. Chief

- U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that while respecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, emerging economies such as India, China, South Africa and Brazil should take necessary action to combat climate change.
- Interacting with presspersons after visiting a canal-top solar power project, he said the developed countries had caused much more impact on climate than the developing nations and they had different capacities to tackle impacts.
- India was taking necessary action by projects such as the canal-top power project, a creative and impressive one which all developing countries should emulate.
- To questions, he said climate finance was the most important aspect to make

combating climate change a success. India could play a vital role as one of the fastest growing economies.

- He was catalysing funds into the Green Climate Fund, which had topped \$10 billion last year. He was optimistic about arriving at a new, robust climate treaty in Paris.

India-U.S. to Jointly fight cancer & Ebola

- India and the United States are expected to sign memoranda of understanding on cancer research and Ebola control when U.S. President Barack Obama arrives later this month.
- Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare J.P. Nadda said the two countries had agreed to jointly fight Ebola. Under the agreement, Indian health care personnel will be trained in Ebola control and treatment procedures.
- “The Indian Council of Medical Research is already working on producing a vaccine for Ebola. But this MoU will focus on capacity building in areas of Ebola control,” a senior official of the Ministry said.
- Though India has had no reported cases of Ebola, the disease has so far claimed over 7,000 lives in the affected countries. A 26 year-old, who had travelled from Liberia to India and was found carrying the virus in his semen, remains in isolation.
- Another MoU is to be signed between the National Cancer Institute, U.S., and the upcoming National Cancer Institute in Jhajjar, for sharing of treatment plans, expertise and research.
- The NCI in the United States coordinates the National Cancer Programme, which conducts and supports research, training, health information dissemination, and other programmes with respect to the cause, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of cancer, rehabilitation and the continuing care of cancer patients and their families.
- At the institute in Jhajjar being developed by the AIIMS, cancer research will be the area of focus apart from patient care and management. India reports 11 lakh new cases of cancer every year, with a mortality rate of 5.5 lakh per year.
- Cancer treatment facilities in India are inadequate, compared to WHO standards, which requires one radiotherapy machine per million population. India at present has 0.41 machine per million population.

Leading U.K. papers reproduce “survivors’ issue” cover

- Newsrooms in publications across the United Kingdom saw fierce debates over whether to reproduce the cover of the latest issue of Charlie Hebdo — the “survivors’ issue” as it has been called — which went into a record 5 million print run on January 14.
- The latest issue of the satirical magazine carries a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad on its cover that is a tearful and forgiving depiction of the founder of Islam.
- While some publications have opted to publish the page in their regular reportage on developments around the weekly magazine — that lost six of its editorial leadership and three others to terrorist bullets last week — others have declined to do so.
- The Guardian; Times; Independent; Financial Times and the BBC have published the cartoon, as have major websites like Huffington Post, BuzzFeed and the news sites of Yahoo and Google.

- The magazine — sold out in France, and selling at astronomical prices on ebay — will be available in Britain at select outlets. Bookshops and magazine distributors are cagey about the number of copies that they are likely to receive.
- The Muslim Council of Britain has responded to the publication with restraint. A statement signed by 53 imams of mosques from across Britain, said that although most Muslims will be “hurt, offended and upset” by the re-publication of the cartoon, the “best and immediate” response is to emulate the “enduring patience, tolerance, gentleness and mercy as was the character of our beloved Prophet.”

Japan approves its largest defence budget

- Japan approved its largest-ever defence budget for the next fiscal year, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe looks to strengthen surveillance of territorial waters in the face of a continuing spat with China.
- For the year to March 2016, Tokyo will spend 4.98 trillion yen (\$41.97 billion), the government said, rising for the third straight year.
- “This is the largest budget ever,” said a defence ministry official, adding the highest allocation previously was 4.96 trillion yen earmarked in 2002.
- The trend reflects Mr. Abe’s wish to build a more active military, with an eye on a possible escalation of tensions with China.

Global economy to expand by 3% in 2015

- Noting that the global economy is still struggling to gain momentum while many developing economies are less dynamic than they were in the past, the World Bank has projected that it would expand by three per cent this year.
- The global economy grew by an estimated 2.6 per cent in 2014, and is projected to expand by 3.3 per cent in 2016 and 3.2 per cent in 2017, the bank said in a report.
- Developing countries grew by 4.4 per cent in 2014 and are expected to edge up to 4.8 per cent in 2015, strengthening to 5.3 and 5.4 per cent in 2016 and 2017, respectively, it said.
- Following another disappointing year in 2014, developing countries should see an uptick in growth this year, boosted in part by soft oil prices, a stronger US economy, continued low global interest rates, and receding domestic headwinds in several large emerging markets, it added.
- “In this uncertain economic environment, developing countries need to judiciously deploy their resources to support social programmes with a laser-like focus on the poor, and undertake structural reforms that invest in people,” said World Bank President Jim Yong Kim.
- “It’s also critical for countries to remove any unnecessary roadblocks for private sector investment. The private sector is by far the greatest source of jobs and it can lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty,” he added.
- Underneath the fragile global recovery lie increasingly divergent trends with significant implications for global growth, the World Bank report said.
- Activity in the United States and the United Kingdom is gathering momentum as labour markets heal and monetary policy remains extremely accommodative. But recovery has been sputtering in the Euro area and Japan as legacies of the financial crisis linger.

- The oil price collapse will result in winners and losers. “Worryingly, the stalled recovery in some high-income economies and even some middle-income countries may be a symptom of deeper structural malaise,” said Kaushik Basu, World Bank Chief Economist and Senior Vice President.
- “As population growth has slowed in many countries, the pool of younger workers is smaller, putting strains on productivity. But there are some silver linings behind the clouds.
- The lower oil price, which is expected to persist through 2015, is lowering inflation worldwide and is likely to delay interest rate hikes in rich countries,” he said.
- “This creates a window of opportunity for oil-importing countries, such as China and India. What is critical is for nations to use this window to usher in fiscal and structural reforms, which can boost long-run growth and inclusive development,” Mr. Basu said.

U.S. think tank flags readiness of Pak nuclear weapons

- Evidence has emerged this week suggesting that Pakistan may have accelerated its covert nuclear weapons development programme and rendered operational a nuclear reactor structure located near a heavy water reactor, in a complex that is likely geared toward the production of plutonium.
- High-resolution satellite imagery dated January 15, 2015, shows that external construction of the Khushab complex’s fourth reactor is complete and it has “become operational.”
- If, as the evidence suggests, Pakistan is accelerating its nuclear weapons programme, it may heighten tensions with New Delhi, where the subject is likely to come up when Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets U.S.
- President Barack Obama during Republic Day celebrations next week.
- In a report that included the satellite photographs by Digital Globe, Washington think-tank Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) said that the assessment of reactor completeness and operation was “based on the presence of a very specific signature: steam is venting from the reactor’s cooling system.”
- The Khushab reactor complex was originally constructed and became operational in the 1990s, at that time comprising primarily of a heavy water production plant and an estimated 50 megawatt-thermal (MWth) heavy water reactor.
- Following the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan in 1998, Islamabad initiated the construction of a second heavy water reactor between the year 2000 and 2002, ISIS notes, a third one in 2006, and a fourth one in 2011.
- ISIS, which has closely tracked the progress on the construction of the reactor complex, noted that a January 2011 image showed the building, similar in layout to the second and third reactors at the same site, early in its construction but by April 2011, the frame of the reactor building and the main reactor hall were visible.

Ordinance makes ‘gender-neutral’ restrooms compulsory

- West Hollywood has joined the vanguard of places that are taking steps to make transgender people feel more welcome. Last week, an ordinance took effect that abolished the traditional designation of “men” or “women” on single-stall public

restrooms, a bow to the requests of the sizable community of transgender people, who do not believe they fall into either category.

- Restaurants and other places with public restrooms will not have to make any changes if the bathrooms have multiple stalls, but all single-stall public restrooms have to be labelled “gender neutral”; businesses have 60 days to comply, but can do so by simply placing a gender-neutral sign on any single-stall restroom.
- This sweep of legislation reflects the growing prominence and visibility of transgender people. Amazon Studios’ streaming show Transparent has received widespread critical acclaim, and the lead actor, Jeffrey Tambor, won a Golden Globe last Sunday for his performance as a man who identifies as a woman.

Cuba, U.S. open historic talks

- The United States and Cuba opened two days of historic talks in Havana to end decades of Cold War-era animosity and re-establish diplomatic relations.
- The meetings in Havana follow the historic decision by U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban leader Raul Castro in December to seek normal diplomatic relations.
- U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Alex Lee and Cuban Foreign Ministry official Josefina Vidal sat down for the first day of closed-door talks.
- Their opening remarks were not broadcast.
- The reopening of mutual embassies, closed since relations broke in 1961, will be at the centre of Thursday’s talks, which will be led on the U.S. side by Roberta Jacobson, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

Kerry issued summons in rights group move against RSS

- A U.S. court has issued summons to Secretary of State John Kerry calling for his response within 60 days to a lawsuit demanding that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) be designated a “foreign terrorist organisation.”
- Judge Laura Swain of the District Court of the Southern District of New York said in her summons that Mr. Kerry was required to answer the “declaratory lawsuit” filed by Sikhs for Justice, a human rights group that had earlier filed a case against Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging culpability for his role in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, which occurred when Mr. Modi was the Chief Minister.
- This week’s lawsuit, which acquires significance in the context of U.S. President Barack Obama’s visit to India over the weekend to join its Republic Day celebrations, called for the Foreign Terrorist Organisation tag for the RSS “for believing in and practicing a fascist ideology and for running a passionate, vicious and violent campaign to turn India into a ‘Hindu’ nation with a homogeneous religious and cultural identity.”
- In its 26-page complaint, SFJ alleged that the “crimes of the RSS” included the targeting of religious minorities of India, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, citing incidents of violence against these groups in Gujarat, Punjab and Orissa, respectively.

Salman is new Ruler of Saudi Arabia

- Saudi Arabia’s elderly King Abdullah died and was replaced by his half-brother Salman as the absolute ruler of the world’s top oil exporter and the spiritual home of Islam.

- Global leaders paid tribute to the late monarch, a cautious reformer who led his kingdom through a turbulent decade in a region shaken by the Arab Spring uprisings and Islamic extremism.
- Another of the late monarch's half-brothers, Moqren, was named the new crown prince.
- In his first public statement as the new ruler, the 79-year-old King Salman vowed to maintain a steady course for the conservative kingdom.

Thai ex-Premier Yingluck impeached

- Thailand's junta-stacked Parliament voted to impeach the former Premier, Yingluck Shinawatra, hours after prosecutors announced plans to indict her for corruption in a double blow that risks reigniting the country's bitter divisions.
- The successful impeachment of Ms. Yingluck, the kingdom's first woman Premier and the sister of former leader Thaksin Shinawatra, carries an automatic five-year ban from politics while the criminal charges could eventually see her jailed for up to a decade.
- Experts say the impeachment and criminal charges are the latest attempt by the country's royalist elite, and its army backers, to nullify the political influence of the Shinawatras, whose parties have won every election since 2001.
- But the junta's pursuit of the family could also disturb the uneasy calm that has descended on Thailand since the military took over.

Consensus on implementing 13th amendment: Ranil

- Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe said political parties have agreed to implement the thirteenth amendment as a solution to end the country's over three-decade-old ethnic conflict involving the Tamil minority..

Power to Councils

- He further said that all Provincial Councils will have equal powers now that the Tamil National Alliance has said that they are for a solution within an undivided Sri Lanka.
- Provincial Councils became part of the Sri Lankan statute as a direct result of the landmark 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka accord, popularly known as the Rajiv-Jayawardane Accord, after its architects — Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene.
- Mr. Wickramasinghe also blamed the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa for failing to resolve the thorny issues concerning the Tamil minority despite having ended the two-and-a-half decade-old civil war with the LTTE in 2009.
- On the U.N.'s human rights investigation on Sri Lanka, Mr. Wickramasinghe said it was the result of Mr. Rajapaksa's mishandling of the issue.

Church of England: First woman Bishop consecrated

- The Church of England ended centuries of male-only leadership as Reverend Libby Lane became its first woman bishop in a ceremony briefly disrupted by a traditionalist priest's protest.
- Around 100 bishops gathered around the 48-year-old to perform the traditional

“laying on of hands” at the ceremony’s climax in the Gothic splendour of York Minster, northern England.

- The congregation of some 2,000 people broke into applause and cheers and some shed tears. Highlighting the divisions which dog the Church despite a painstaking reconciliation process, a lone conservative opposed to women as bishops had earlier disrupted the ceremony.

WikiLeaks accuses Google of handing over e-mails to U.S.

- Whistleblower site WikiLeaks accused Google of handing over the e-mails and electronic data of its senior staff to the U.S. authorities without providing notification until almost three years later.
- Google was apparently acting in response to warrants issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, which is investigating WikiLeaks for publishing hundreds of thousands of classified military and diplomatic files.
- WikiLeaks said that Google could and should have resisted complying with the warrants, as well as immediately informing those whose data it handed over.
- The information was handed over to the U.S. authorities on April 5, 2012, but Google did not inform the WikiLeaks staff until December 23, 2014, according to documents obtained by AFP.

Impeached Sri Lankan Chief Justice reinstated

- Sri Lanka’s new President restored the country’s former Chief Justice after she was controversially impeached by the previous administration led by Mahinda Rajapaksa.
- Lawyers welcomed Shirani Bandaranayake with bouquets of flowers at the Supreme Court in Colombo, although the decision to reinstate her will likely be largely ceremonial as she is expected to step down on Thursday.
- A government official who asked not to be named said President Maithripala Sirisena had written to Ms. Bandaranayake to say her 2013 impeachment was unconstitutional and she should return to work.

Annual Abortion rate doubles in Pak.

- Pakistan recorded 2.25 million abortion cases in 2012, with the rate of annual abortions doubling in 10 years due to minimal use of contraception in its conservative society, according to a report.
- The report titled ‘Induced Abortions and Unintended Pregnancies in Pakistan’ was carried out by Population Council in collaboration with Guttmacher Institute in U.S.

New China-Myanmar oil pipeline bypasses Malacca trap

- China has taken a firm step to beef up its energy security by inaugurating a pipeline that will bring crude oil from a deep water port in Myanmar, along a transit route that will bypass the strategic Malacca Straits.
- The first tanker that will offload 300,000 tons of oil is expected to arrive on Friday at Maday Island – a deep water port developed by China in the Bay of Bengal. From there, oil, mostly brought from West Asia and Africa, will be pumped into a 2402 km long pipeline that will stretch for 771 km in Myanmar and another 1631 km in China.

- A gas pipeline, next to the Madaya Island terminal, already runs from Myanmar's port of Kyaukpyu. China also finalised plans to establish a rail corridor from Kyaukpyu to its Yunnan province.
- The strategic oil pipeline will service China's two major growth centres — Kunming and Chongqing, an industrial hub along the Yangtze River delta. Both cities are pivotal in the development of China's Silk Road Economic Belt, the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. Kunming is one of the starting points of the Maritime Silk Road, because it connects with three countries belonging to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) — Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos. Landlocked Laos in turn becomes the gateway to ports in Thailand, and a wider transportation network covering Malaysia and Singapore as well.
- Significantly, the new oil pipeline bypasses the Malacca Straits — a narrow channel that connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific. The Chinese are concerned that their access to the Malacca Straits — the main channel of their trade and energy supplies — can become compromised on account of Beijing's growing rivalry with the United States, and maritime disputes with neighbours in the South China Sea.
- As oil begins to flow, the Chinese are also building a refinery in Kunming that can process 10 million tons of crude annually.
- Part of the shipments received will also be delivered to Myanmar, says the country's Vice-President U Nyan Tun. China and Myanmar have jointly funded the project, including the construction of the Madaya oil unloading terminal.
- Analysts say that apart from enhancing energy security, the construction of an oil and gas pipeline from Myanmar is driven by environmental considerations, as China works to limit carbon emissions resulting from its over-dependence on coal.

Italy: Sicilian judge elected President

- Sergio Mattarella, a constitutional court judge from Sicily is seen as a symbol of Italy's battle against organised crime, was elected Italy's new President.
- The 73-year-old Sicilian, who was backed by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's centre-left Democratic Party (PD), succeeds the hugely popular Giorgio Napolitano.
- Mr. Mattarella is little known to the public but is widely respected after a 25-year parliamentary career and several stints as Minister in governments of the left and right.

Nepal committee passes Guidelines for Constitution

- The Proposal Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly (CA) passed its working guidelines, declaring that principles like democracy, federalism, republicanism, secularism, and inclusiveness would be an integral part of the new Constitution.
- In its second meeting, the Proposal Drafting Committee (PDC), which has been tasked to study the report submitted by the Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee on agreements and disputes over the new Constitution, said no questions would be prepared on it for voting.
- The new committee has been tasked to prepare a questionnaire with 'Yes' and 'No' voting option to decide the disputes.
- Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)-Nepal boycotted the PDC meeting for not

entertaining questions on republicanism, secularism and federalism.

U.N. agency says 2014 was warmest year on record

- The U.N. weather agency says 2014 was the warmest year on record, though the temperature difference with 2010 and 2005 is so small that it's impossible to say for sure which of the three years was the hottest.
- The World Meteorological Organization's analysis on Monday mirrored findings two weeks ago by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and also included data from the Met Office in Britain.
- The Geneva-based WMO said surface temperatures were 0.57 degrees Celsius above average last year.
- That's slightly warmer than 2010 and 2005, but the difference was within the uncertainty margin of 0.10 degrees Celsius.
- With 14 of the 15 hottest years recorded this century, WMO chief Michel Jarraud said warming is expected to continue as atmospheric levels of heat-trapping CO2 rise.

Jordan executes two Jihadists after Islamic State murders pilot

- Jordan executed two Iraqi jihadists, including a woman would-be suicide bomber, in response to the burning alive of one of its fighter pilots by the Islamic State group.
- The gruesome murder of airman Maaz al-Kassasbeh triggered condemnation from governments across the Middle East.
- Jordan said it hanged Sajida al-Rishawi and Al-Qaeda member Ziad al-Karboli — who were both on death row — before dawn at a prison south of the capital.
- Amman had promised to begin executing Islamic extremists in response to the murder of Kassasbeh, who was captured by IS when his plane went down in Syria in December.
- Jordan's King Abdullah II described Kassasbeh as a hero and vowed to take the battle to IS after a video emerged purporting to show the caged 26-year-old F-16 fighter pilot engulfed in flames.



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India and The World

India is world's second most trusting nation: Survey

- Moving up the ranks, India has emerged as the second most trusted country in the world in terms of faith reposed on its institutions even as globally trust levels have fallen, says a survey.
- As the world's rich and powerful gather in the Swiss resort of Davos, a study by public relations firm Edelman has found that general level of trust in institutions among college-educated people around the globe are at levels not seen since 2009 in many of the markets it surveyed.
- Trust in institutions in India has improved sharply in 2015 with the country moving up three notches to the second place among 27 nations.
- While the number of "truster" countries are at an all-time low of six in 2015 including UAE, India, China and Netherlands, the number of "distruster" countries has grown significantly to 13 including Japan, Russia, Hong Kong, South Africa and Italy.
- Brazil, Malaysia, France and the US are among the 8 "neutral" nations as per the trust index, the survey said.
- India, which last year saw the BJP-led NDA government storming to power at the Centre, stands tall.
- According to the report, an "alarming evaporation of trust" has happened across all institutions, reaching the lows of the Great Recession in 2009.
- Trust in government, business, media and NGOs in the general population is below 50 per cent in two-thirds of countries, including the U.S., U.K. and Germany, it said.
- From fifth most trusted in 2014, India has now become the second-most trusted in 2015 with a score of 79 per cent in the barometer. The study has put India Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image on the first page.

Vision statement on Asia-Pacific, Indian Ocean

- After meeting for close to five hours, including an extended lunch, tea on the Hyderabad House lawns, and delegation level talks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Barack Obama issued three separate documents: a declaration of friendship with a commitment to regular summits, a joint statement called "Shared Effort, Progress for all", and a joint strategic vision statement for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian ocean region.
- The last document could raise eyebrows in China, when External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj visits Beijing next week, as it elaborates on the clauses in their previous joint statement for the disputed maritime region, and says, "We affirm the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea."
- Conspicuous by its absence was mention of "cross-border" terrorism or India's issues with Pakistan, although the two sides repeated their September commitment to "disrupt" terror groups including Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, D Company and the Haqqani Network.

Germany eager to join 'Make in India' initiative

- German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble expressed interest in working with India in the manufacturing sector, especially in the auto and solar energy industries, at a meeting with business lobby Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). The German minister is scheduled to hold talks with Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- Dr. Schäuble's positive note on German manufacturing industry's readiness to participate in the 'Make in India' policy comes close on the heels of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's voicing of the Obama administration's worries over the initiative.
- Mr. Modi is scheduled to jointly inaugurate the Hannover trade fair along with German Chancellor Angela Merkel during his visit to Germany in April 2015.

Obama, Modi at India US CEO Forum

- The India-US CEO Forum began with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama present along with top business honchos of both countries.

India Inc is led by Tata Group chairman Cyrus Mistry.

- The other CEOs who are expected to be present are Mukesh Ambani, chairman and managing director (CMD), Reliance Industries Ltd; Gautam Adani, chairman, Adani Group; Sunil Bhari Mittal, chairman and group CEO, Bharti Enterprises; Sashi Ruia, chairman, Essar Group; Hari S Bhartia, co-chairman and MD, Jubilant Life Sciences; and Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, CMD, Biocon.
- Among others are Anand Mahindra, CMD, Mahindra and Mahindra; Deepak Parekh, chairman, HDFC; Chanda Kochar, CEO and MD, ICICI Bank; Arundhati Bhattacharya, chairman, State Bank of India; Vishal Sikka, CEO & MD, Infosys; B Prasada Rao, CMD, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited; Sudhir Mehta, chairman emeritus, Torrent Pharmaceuticals; Preetha Reddy, executive chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Enterprises; Anurag Kumar, director, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore; and D.K. Saraff, CMD, ONGC. Honeywell International Chairman and CEO Dave Cote was likely to lead the US CEOs team, which was to have Indra Nooyi, chairperson and CEO, PepsiCo, and Ajay Banga, CEO, Mastercard, among others. US-India Business Council (USIBC) acting president Diane Farrell told IANS: "The Forum will be focusing on two-way trade. Ease of doing business is something that will be focused. That will attract more US business to India. "Market access issue of both the countries will be discussed. US companies recognise the importance of both these programmes of Digital India and Make in India. The US companies will look at the consistency and predictability of Indian market."

PIA closure will snap vital link between India, Pakistan

- Official Pakistani sources said they were worried that the Enforcement Directorate notice to the Pakistan International Airlines on its offices in Delhi, had political overtones.
- The move, they feared, would "cut off a vital link between both countries." PIA runs the only flights between India and Pakistan, with two flights a week on the Delhi-Lahore sector and once a week on the Mumbai-Karachi sector.
- Pakistani officials insisted that the PIA service to India which started in 1976, would not be cancelled, despite all the problems. However, one official said there were apprehensions that the action came after Foreign Secretary talks were cancelled last July, and indicated other actions could follow "causing a further rift in ties."

Business and Economy

SC allowed Sahara group to raise “junior loan”

- The Supreme Court allowed the Sahara group to raise a “junior loan” of \$650 million from a foreign lender to pay Rs.5,000 crore and bank guarantee of same amount for the release of Subrata Roy and two directors on bail.
- A three-judge bench led by Justice T.S. Thakur said the amount, raised as loan against its three overseas hotels located in London and New York, would be parked in Aamby Valley (Mauritius) Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Sahara group’s India-based Aamby Valley Limited.
- However, the court said Sahara Group should also clear up with the Reserve Bank of India if there were any impediments under the Foreign Exchange Management Act in case of transfer of the loan amount from its Mauritius subsidiary.

Renault is set to launch sub-Rs.4 lakh car in 2015

- Renault is set to launch an all-new hatchback in the sub-Rs.4 lakh segment this year as the French car maker intensifies its efforts to transform into a volume player in the Indian passenger vehicle (PV) market.
- The proposed small car will compete in the Maruti Alto segment. And, it will be the first product out of Renault-Nissan’s new vehicle platform CMF-A, a global platform meant to design and develop low-budget cars for customers in India and other markets.
- “It is a very wide platform in terms of diversity, and this will be a global car. It will be sold in other countries also,” Sumit Sawhney, Country CEO and Managing Director, Renault India.
- He said the company had not finalised the launch dates. But the first new launch of 2015 would be its 7-seater MPV (multi-purpose vehicle) Lodgy, and the new hatch would come after that. Presently, Renault India sells only Pulse in the small car segment.
- The chairman and CEO of Nissan and Renault combine Carlos Ghosn had said that CMF-A would be India-based platform. It would be designed Indian engineers, he had said, and indicated that the first product out of this platform would hit the market by 2015.
- But, Mr. Sawhney declined to elaborate on the new hatchback. However, he said the segment accounted for 30-40 per cent of car market and company was keen to have a strong presence.

‘Vibrant Gujarat’ now India’s principle economic summit

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors Summit has become the country’s “principle economic summit” and welcomed other states organising similar events.
- “The more the states organise it, the more their idiom and their attitude in support of investment change.... it’s a welcome phenomenon,” he told reporters on the sidelines of the summit in Gandhinagar.

- The Finance Minister said the recent trend, wherein states like Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have held such summits while Maharashtra is also mulling one such show, is very heartening and he is glad that such aggressive activities are being undertaken.
- The Uttar Pradesh government has also adopted an aggressive posture in attracting investors, with a strong media campaign wooing investors. "I think this has become the principle economic summit as far as India is concerned.
- Now I think this is where economic activity is happening," Mr. Jaitley said. Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also lauded the efforts by states and promised all help from the Centre in the efforts.
- "Today, many other states have adopted this approach. Government of India is committed to supporting any such initiative of any state government," he said in his speech.
- Mr. Modi stressed a lot on the growth potential of the country and outlined his approach on the way forward in fastening the economic growth.
- Speaking at the session on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Mr. Jaitley said there is a huge amount of inequality in the society which is visible in things like lack of access to clean drinking water, absence of toilets etc, even though there is a widespread notion that the country is growing.

Aditya Birla Group will invest Rs 20,000 cr in Gujarat

- Making public his "personal bias" for investing in Gujarat, Kumarmangalam Birla said the diversified Aditya Birla Group will invest Rs. 20,000 crore over a period of time in the state to ramp up capacities across various existing facilities.
- "We will be continuing to grow our businesses. On the anvil are brownfield expansions at our cement plant in Sevagram, the VSF plants in Vilayat and Bharuch, and along with that, expansion in metal plants (among others)
- "Our investments will be close to Rs 20,000 crore, as we see it," he said at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in Gandhinagar. He further said that for his company, Gujarat is the most preferred investment destination in India.
- "We're greatly impressed by proactive approach of government of Gujarat...I have a personal bias for it," he added. Mr. Birla said it was not tax sops but delivery of high quality infrastructure which has got the group latched on to the state.
- At present, the Aditya Birla Group's investments in the state exceed Rs 25,000 crore and it generates revenues in excess of Rs 30,000 crore a year. The company, he said, employs 10,000 employees directly and 20,000 indirectly.
- Speaking on the occasion, MasterCard President and Global Chief Executive Ajay Banga said investors are hoping for a similar show from Modi (as he had shown as Gujarat Chief Minister) at national level.
- Mr. Banga, who is also Chairman of USIBC, said the NDA government has "gotten off to a very, very good start" but pointed out some concerns among investors. "They are waiting for clarity, they want transparency in policy decisions, consistency and predictability," he said.
- He said progress on key issues like land reforms, labour reforms, property ownership reforms, GST rollout and Government moves on retrospective taxation will be keenly followed now on.

WB projects 6.4% economic growth in India this year

- Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.4 per cent in 2015 and accelerate further in the next year on the back of steps being taken by the Narendra Modi-led NDA government, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim said.
- Speaking at the Vibrant Gujarat summit, he said the World Bank was committed to catalysing a vibrant India and there is much reason for optimism.
- “We project that India will be a bright spot in an otherwise medium global economic outlook. (The) economy according to our projections is expected to grow 6.4 per cent this year and even faster in 2016,” he said.
- After slowing to sub-five per cent growth in the previous two financial years, the economy has started showing signs of pick-up as it expanded by 5.7 per cent and 5.3 per cent in the second and third quarter of 2015.
- The World Bank President said Mr. Modi and his government have been quickly putting in place the building blocks for even more rapid growth, streamlining national regulatory structure and promoting social inclusion.
- Mr. Jim said, he was “very encouraged” by the recent proposal of a Constitution amendment bill for Goods and Services Tax. The proposed new indirect tax regime, he said, offers an opportunity to make it substantially easier to do business in India.
- “GST will create one common market and substantial saving for companies on logistics, especially if the structure of the GST is uniform,” he added. He was also encouraged to see that the Prime Minister has focused on programmes to promote the broad sharing of the benefits of growths.

Deal for mega solar project

- SunEdison Inc, the U.S.-headquartered solar energy services firm, and India’s Adani Group have come together to invest \$4 billion or Rs. 25,000 crore in setting up one of the world’s largest solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing facility in Gujarat.
- The project is expected to create not only thousands of jobs, but also provide a much-needed impetus to the country’s electrification programmes through solar energy.
- The proposed solar PV production unit will come up at Mundra in about three years. And, it will vertically integrate all aspects of solar panel production on site, including poly silicon refining, and ingot, cell, and module production.

‘Jan Dhan Yojana’ a game changer: RBI

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Deputy Governor Urjit Patel said that ‘Jan Dhan Yojana’ scheme implemented by public sector banks, whereby 100 million bank accounts have been opened for those who were un-banked, is unequivocally a “game-changer.”
- “It provides an unprecedented scaffolding and a spring board for meaningful financial inclusion and, concomitantly, substantial financial deepening of our economy,” said Dr. Patel at an award function. The award was presented to Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research, Mumbai.
- Citing the discussion at the ‘Gyan Sangam’, gathering of bankers and top-level policy makers in Pune, recently, Dr. Patel said: “We should redefine the metric for effective lending and prioritise loans to enterprises, which will generate more employment.”

- In other words, he said “bankable labour-intensive enterprises should benefit as we go forward in this direction.”
- According to him this would benefit, a much larger number of small business loans. He said that the hard earned macroeconomic stability provides an important backdrop for optimal decisions by all stakeholders.
- “e have to preserve this. The dramatic fall in oil prices is a boon for us. It saves, on an annualised basis, around \$50 billion roughly, one-third of our annual gross POL imports of about \$160 billion. Of course, there will be leakages and other set-offs,” he added.

Ranjan hails Decision to free banks

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan said that the decision of the Government to give freedom to public sector banks (PSBs) to function independently is a “land mark decision”. He was speaking at the convocation ceremony of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR).
- The Finance Ministry had issued a direction to banks recently asking them to take decisions without fear or favour and to ignore extraneous considerations in commercial decisions, in the aftermath of the ‘Gyan Sangam’, which was attended by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Mr. Modi said at the Gyan Sangam, the two-day bankers’ meet arranged to discuss banking reforms, that the Government will not interfere in the functioning of public sector banks. He also called for ending “lazy banking” and said that banks must prioritise lending to employment-generating sectors.
- Dr. Rajan said that institution plays an important role in the intellectual development of students. While asking students to pay back to the society, Dr. Rajan remembered, institution builders like Dr. Varghese Kurien, who built up a brand like Amul, T. N. Seshan, former Election Commissioner and Vinod Rai, former CAG.
- Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who was the Chief Guest at the convocation, congratulated the institute for the gender “reverse disparity” in favour of the women. Over 70 per cent of the students who passed out today were women.
- Mr. Jaitley also said that the election results recently proved that castes and dynasties will no more attract voters as they are interested only in governance and economic growth.
- Meanwhile visiting the LIC corporate Office, Mr. Jaitley said that one-third of the country would soon be insured by LIC by partnering with Prime Minister’s Jan Dhan Yojana.
- He said that LIC was a role model of how a public sector institution should function and appreciated claims performance of LIC, which was much better than the private sector.
- The Finance Minister also said that millions had built their houses with LIC’s support and people’s savings were channelised and invested in infrastructure. LIC also generated employment directly through employees and agents and indirectly by investing in the economy.

Digital India programme will help to boost GDP growth: Ravi Shankar

- Interlinking India's growth to the government's Digital India programme, IT and Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said increased computer literacy and growing use of mobile internet will help push India's Internet economy to USD 200 billion by 2020.
- The minister was speaking at the release of a report by IAMAI and The Boston Consulting Group. According to the report 'India@Digital.Bharat', India is heading towards an internet economy worth USD 200 billion by 2020, that will contribute 5 per cent of the GDP.
- In 2013 alone, it contributed USD 60 billion or 2.7 per cent of India's GDP. "For this, we need to move at a fast pace towards computer literacy.
- The other key area which will help the internet economy to grow is mobile internet," Mr. Prasad said, adding the government is committed to digitisation and is looking extensive PPP for successful implementation.
- The minister said there is a need to create hubs in rural India that will help grow e-commerce.
- "Unless connectivity reaches every village of India, the dynamics of growth will remain unchanged... It took 30 years to cover 10 lakh km of optic fibre laying, and in just next 3 years 7 lakh km will be added, making rural connectivity a reality," he said.

'Ringo' app makes international calls cheaper

- Ringo, an international calling app which provides low cost calling without the use of the Internet, has commenced operations in India offering international calls at 70 per cent cheaper than most mobile telephone service providers and 20 per cent cheaper than calls made on Skype and Viber through the Internet for most destinations.
- This service is already available in 16 countries including the US, UK, Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore. The company said it would offer high quality international calls at a fraction of existing cost of calls in India to companies conducting global business and families trying to keep in touch with friends and relatives staying abroad.
- The Internet-free Ringo calls traverse over regular phone networks and it uses a unique call flow to convert international calls into local calls, thus making the call rates very cheap.
- When a Ringo user from India contacts someone based in one of the 16 countries in which its service is available, Ringo will automatically dial out a local call to the Indian user and another local call to the desired number located in the foreign destination and connect the two over reliable carrier circuits.
- All this happens instantly and calls using Ringo are identical to making call on one's carrier, Ringo officials said. "We believe our app will change the way India communicates with the world. In this country, reliable internet connectivity that can support VOIP calling is still far away.
- Ringo provides the perfect solution for Indians who want to stay in touch with people staying abroad reliably and at a low cost," said Bhavin Turakhia, Chief Executive Officer, Ringo.
- "We believe that communication should be easy and inexpensive so that the market would grow phenomenally," said Mr Turakhia.

RBI decided to cut repo rates by 25 basis points

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- Encouraged by softening inflation, the RBI decided to cut the benchmark interest rate by 0.25 per cent to 7.75 per cent with a view to boost growth. The decision to reduce repo rate comes a fortnight ahead of the scheduled date of monetary policy announcement on February 3.
- “It has been decided to reduce the policy repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) by 25 basis points from 8.0 per cent to 7.75 per cent with immediate effect,” Reserve Bank said in a statement.
- The RBI has been keeping the benchmark interest rate at elevated level at 8 per cent since January 2014. The RBI, however, has decided to keep the cash reserve ratio (CRR), the portion of deposits which the banks are required to have in cash with the central bank, unchanged at 4.0 per cent.
- Following reduction in the repo rate, the reverse repo rate has been adjusted to 6.75 per cent and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and Bank Rate to 8.75 per cent.
- The RBI said that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has been easing since July 2014 and was below the expected trajectory and the government has reiterated its commitment to adhering to its fiscal deficit target.

Infosys announces \$250 million ‘Innovate in India Fund’

- In a move to help the Indian start-up ecosystem, India’s second largest IT company Infosys, announced the creation of a \$250 million (Rs. 1,550 crore) ‘Innovate in India Fund’ from its recently expanded innovation fund.
- Earlier, Infosys had said that it will expand its innovation fund to \$500 million to accelerate the creation of its worldwide ecosystem of innovation.
- The Innovate in India Fund, announced by Dr. Vishal Sikka, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director in a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will be dedicated for investments in promising new Indian companies that will be inducted into the global ecosystem of strategic partners that Infosys is building.
- The Fund will be used to invest in young companies innovating in next-generation solutions and technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, pervasive connectedness as well as collaboration and design technologies, the company said in a statement.
- Speaking on the fund, Dr. Sikka said, “Start-ups represent the vision, the hope and the persevering entrepreneurial spirit taking root in India. With the ‘Innovate in India Fund’, Infosys will invest in great Indian start-ups, help amplify their engineering and operations, as well as help bring their innovations to market at scale.
- Next-generation solutions built on emerging computing technologies, in innovative new ways, can dramatically reshape and improve the world around us.
- That’s why, we look forward to working with innovative companies to strengthen our collective potential and also accelerate the success of the Prime Minister’s ‘Digital India’ mission aimed at helping people gain benefits from the latest in information technology.”

Government likely to sell 10% stake in IOC this fiscal

- The Department of Disinvestment (DoD) has circulated a draft note for the consideration of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) for sale of 10

per cent out of government's 68.57 per cent stake in Indian Oil Corporation, sources privy to the development said.

- It sought comments on the proposal from Petroleum Ministry as well as Departments of Expenditure, Public Enterprises and Economic Affairs.
- Sources said the plan to sell 24.27 crore equity shares in IOC was mooted after big-ticket disinvestment in Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) got stuck in subsidy woes.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had discussed possible disinvestment candidates in oil sector, other than ONGC, with Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on January 8. Government was to sell 5 per cent of its stake in the country's biggest oil and gas producer ONGC to raise Rs 17,000-18,000 crore.
- However, the double impact of tumbling global oil prices and the rising subsidy burden has left the ONGC stock battered. It has slipped from Rs. 472 in June last year to Rs. 343.85 (at close of market). At current price, the government will get no more than Rs. 15,000 crore.
- In 2014-15, the government has sold 5 per cent stake in steel major SAIL to garner Rs. 1,700 crore. It is racing against time to meet its disinvestment target of Rs. 43,425 crore for this fiscal. Blue-chip companies like ONGC, NHPC and Coal India had been lined up for disinvestment.

Coca-Cola to cut jobs in India

- Beverages giant Coca-Cola will cut jobs in India as part of its "redesigning operating model" globally to accelerate business growth across markets.
- "As part of the Coca-Cola Company's recently announced, multi-year productivity initiatives, we are now redesigning our operating model to streamline and simplify our structure and accelerate the growth of our global business," a Coca-Cola India spokesperson said.
- "As we have acknowledged previously, this redesign work will result in impacts to jobs across our global operations including in India," he said. With the company still working on the redesign process, the impact of the process is yet to be known, he said.
- Coca-Cola India employs around 250 people in India. Up to 15,000 people are employed by the company's bottling partners. The Atlanta-based company had already announced it would cut between 1,600 and 1,800 jobs worldwide in coming months to trim costs.
- In October last year, the company had said it would cut costs by \$3 billion by 2019 by bringing in enhanced efficiencies in its global operations.

Jaitley hailed decision of RBI to cut interest rate

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley hailed the decision of RBI to cut the interest rate, saying it is positive for the Indian economy and will certainly help in reviving the investment cycle the government is trying to restore.
- "The RBI decision to cut the interest rate will lead to more money in the hands of the consumer for greater spending," Mr. Jaitley said.
- "It is positive for the Indian economy and it will certainly help in reviving the investment cycle the government is trying to restore," said Mr. Jaitley who has been nudging the central bank to ease the interest rate to lower the cost of capital.

- Earlier in the day, the RBI cut interest rate by 0.25 per cent to 7.75 per cent.

WPI inflation almost flat at 0.11% in Dec.

- Wholesale inflation inched up to 0.11 per cent in December from 0 per cent in November on the back of a surge in food prices, raising hopes of a rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India in its next Monetary Policy Review, scheduled to be held on February 3.
- Wholesale inflation in food, according to official data released on Wednesday, shot up to 5.2 per cent, a five-month high. It was 0.63 per cent in November. Inflation in pulses, vegetables and fruits was higher in December over the previous month.
- The rise in food prices is attributed to the increase in prices in vegetables, fruits, pulses, onion and potatoes. Inflation as measured by the wholesale price index (WPI) has been on the decline since June.
- The sub-1 per cent WPI inflation figure soon comes after the latest retail inflation data, released, at 5 per cent, too showed a marginal increase, and yet remained below expectations. With global crude now below \$50 a barrel, fuel inflation continued to fall.
- Wholesale inflation for fuel fell to minus 7.82 per cent in December against minus 4.91 per cent in November. Commenting on the WPI inflation, Confederation of Indian Industry Director-General Chandrajit Banerjee said that the December figure was much more favourable than anticipated.
- The CII hopes that the conducive inflationary situation would spur the RBI to move away from its inflation-centric approach to policy making and focus on rejuvenating growth in the economy and industry, in its forthcoming monetary policy, he said in a statement.

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Decision by RBI to cut rate to help revive realty market sentiment

- The decision by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to cut the benchmark interest rate by 0.25 per cent to 7.75 per cent, although small, will boost the overall sentiment in the real estate market, the industry felt.
- The liquidity-starved industry has seen increasing non-performing assets (NPAs) and banks have been wary of increasing their exposure to it.
- The rate cut is also an indicator that inflation is now under control and that the government is keen on initiating steps to boost economic growth, felt experts.
- "It is a small step but reflects positive intent and sends the right signals," Lalit Kumar Jain, President, Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) said, adding, "currently the effective rate is around 10.25 per cent as banks are not passing on the rates fully."
- The industry cannot sustain business at a rate above 8 per cent and we are sure the rate will be brought down further." The move is expected to instill hope and confidence in the real estate industry.
- "However, the impact of this move on the real estate sector will be manifested only when commercial banks lower their lending rates. Leading banks may actually lead

the obvious reduction,” said Sanjay Dutt, executive MD – South Asia, Cushman & Wakefield, a real estate consultancy. He expected demand from end-users to take a bit longer to actually transform into active buying.

- Mr. Jain said a reduction of 200 basis points within a short span is needed. “RBI should look at the housing sector favorably given its linkages. It needs a policy for project funding to developers and has to take into consideration the market’s cyclical nature.”

SC seeks RIL response to the final CAG report

- The Supreme Court directed Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) to respond to the final CAG report alleging irregularities, including in payments made to the contractors on drilling of D6 wells at the Krishna-Godavari basin.
- Granting RIL six weeks to respond, a Bench led by Justice T.S. Thakur posted the case for March 20.
- On that date, the Bench said would examine RIL’s reply in connection with the audit body’s report that sought disallowance of \$357.16 million (about Rs 2,179 crore) expenditure RIL incurred on drilling of wells and payments to contractors in KG-D6.
- Solicitor-General Ranjit Kumar said the Centre would wait to comment on the CAG findings until the Parliament’s Public Account Committee, which is examining it, gives a final word.
- The order was passed during a brief hearing of petitions filed in 2013 by senior CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta and NGO Common Cause. The petition challenged the then UPA government decision to double the price of natural gas from \$4.2 to \$ 8.4 per mmbtu and seeking cancellation of RIL’s contract for exploration of oil and gas from the KG basin.
- The court further permitted Mr. Dasgupta and the other petitioners to file their responses to the NDA government’s fresh guidelines which would “supersede” the earlier UPA dispensation’s policy on price fixation for natural gas, including that from KG basin.

Japanese companies want to invest in India

- The government said Japanese companies have ranked India as the top most preferred destinations for further investments.
- According to the Commerce and Industry Ministry, the business sentiments of Japanese companies were revealed in a survey conducted by Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) in July 2014.
- The survey of 1,000 Japanese manufacturing companies ranked India as the No.1 destination for future investments followed by Indonesia and China.
- “Some Japanese companies are seriously contemplating their future investment plans in India amounting to about Rs.75,000 crore (\$12 billion) in next 2-3 years,” the survey said.
- During the period from June to September 2014, foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow from Japan amounted to \$618 million against \$273 million for the corresponding period in 2013.
- The ministry said FDI inflow of \$103.14 million took place in October 2014. The

ministry further said that the government has set up a special management team called Japan Plus to facilitate Japanese investors.

- “The team is actively interacting with Japanese companies and handholding them through various approval processes, as and when required,” the ministry said.

Govt. to corporatise Ordnance factories

- Days after terminating the contract of DRDO chief Avinash Chander, the government is planning to corporatise some of the ordnance factories. The plan is to initially corporatise about 10 ordnance factories and turn them into Public Sector Undertakings to make them more accountable and increase their capabilities.
- Those under consideration are the cloth-making and equipment factories in the Kanpur belt. A note on this matter has already been circulated in the highest echelons of the government and the proposal is likely to get the government nod by April, the sources added.
- These factories are into manufacturing personnel clothing, parachute material, small arms, metallurgical equipment, shells and other such equipment.
- The move comes close on the heels of Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar promising a major overhaul of the DRDO and defence production units. This is not for the first time though that corporatisation of ordnance factories is being considered.
- In the UPA I regime too, the government mooted such a proposal in accordance with the recommendations of the Vijay Kelkar committee.

Obama proposes higher tax on wealthy Americans

- President Barack Obama’s State of the Union address will propose closing multibillion-dollar tax loopholes used by the wealthiest Americans, imposing a fee on big financial firms and then using the revenue to benefit the middle class, senior administration officials said .
- Mr. Obama’s annual address to a joint session of Congress will continue his theme of income equality, and the administration is optimistic it will find some bipartisan support in the Republican-dominated House of Representatives and Senate.
- Mr. Obama’s proposals call for reforming tax rules on trust funds, which the administration called “the single largest capital gains tax loophole” because it allows assets to be passed down untaxed to heirs of the richest Americans.
- They also would raise the capital gains and dividends rates to 28 per cent, the level during the 1980s Republican presidency of Ronald Reagan.
- As a way of managing financial risk that could threaten the U.S. economy, Mr. Obama also wants to impose a fee of seven basis points on the liabilities of U.S. financial firms with assets of more than \$50 billion, making it more costly for them to borrow heavily.

Amazon gets into movie production

- Amazon Studios announced that it will significantly expand into movie production by acquiring films for theatrical release and early-window streaming through its subscription service, Amazon Prime Instant Video.
- A key part of the new venture is to shrink what’s historically been a three-month window reserved for theatres, instead getting movies to its website four to eight

weeks after theatrical release.

- Roy Price, vice president of Amazon Studios, said the company's goal is to produce 12 movies a year, with production beginning later this year.

India to beat China in growth in 2016: IMF

- "India will grow at 6.3% in 2015, up from 5.8% in 2014"
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected India to grow at 6.5 per cent in 2016, overtaking China whose growth was forecast to slow down to 6.3 per cent.
- In its World Economic Outlook report released , the IMF forecast that India would grow at 6.3 per cent in 2015, up from 5.8 per cent in 2014. China's 2014 growth rate was 7.4 per cent.
- In another forecast released , the United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects (U.N. WESP) report predicted a smart recovery for India in 2015.
- It pegged its 2015 India growth forecast lower than the IMF's — at 5.9 per cent. At 6.3 per cent, the UN WESP's 2016 India growth forecast is, however, closer to that of the IMF.

Bajaj group to release book

- The Bajaj group will release a book, commemorating the birth centenary of Kamalnayan Bajaj.
- Titled 'Kamalnayan Bajaj — Architect of the Bajaj Group' and written by noted business historian Gita Piramal, the book traces the struggles, tribulations and emergence of one of the largest business houses in India and captures the spirit of the country in challenging times while profiling one of the giants of Indian industry.
- From a trading group whose reins he took over from his father Jamnalal Bajaj, the group founding, till his passing in 1972, Kamalnayan (Kakaji) Bajaj transformed the group to being among the top 20 industrial houses in the country.

Centre to release new series of Consumer Price Index next month

- For presenting a more accurate and realistic price situation, the government will release next month a new series of Consumer Price Index (CPI) with 2012 as base year for computing the retail inflation rate.
- The first series (revised) would be compiled for January, which will be released on February 12.
- From January, 2016, onwards, inflation rates would be compiled using the actual CPI of the revised series, according to an official release "Now the CSO is in the process of revising the Base Year from 2010=100 to 2012=100," it said adding that with this (base) revision, the gap between Price Reference Year (Base Year) and the Weight Reference Year has been minimised. Apart from base revision, a number of methodological improvements have been introduced in the revised series.

TVS Srichakra to Launch radial tyres

- TVS Srichakra Ltd., a well-known maker of two-wheeler, three-wheeler and off-road tyres, will be launching radial tyres for motorcycles soon. Unveiling the

company's new identity and logo — TVS TYRES — here, P. Vijayaraghavan, Director of the company, said the new logo conveyed strength, speed and dynamism.

- Talking to reporters, he said there was a rapid increase in tubeless tyres in the country with manufacturers incorporating it in the new vehicles. The concept was catching up fast, and they were also significantly increasing the production of tubeless tyres for the motorcycles and scooters segments.

Saradha scam: accused say bribes paid to SEBI official

- Some of the accused in the multi-crore Saradha chit fund scam, in their disclosures to the Enforcement Directorate, have levelled bribery allegations against an official of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- The ED has been told by the accused that the official, then holding a senior position, was paid bribes regularly to ensure smooth conduct of operations of the Saradha Group companies that were allegedly involved in the scam.
- Following Supreme Court observations last year, the Central Bureau of Investigation has also initiated investigations into the matter. "Investigation conducted so far puts a question mark on the role of SEBI, Registrar of Companies and officials of the RBI within whose respective jurisdictions and areas of operation the scam not only took birth but flourished unhindered," said a Supreme Court Bench.
- The CBI has also questioned several SEBI officials in view of allegations that the regulating body initiated action against Saradha Realty swiftly after receipt of complaints regarding the company's alleged illegal activities.
- A few days ago, the agency also sought clarifications from a SEBI member in connection with the probe conducted into the complaints and action taken by the body.
- The probing agencies have found that the Saradha Group of companies collected funds of Rs.2,459 crore from lakhs of investors spread across 14 States, including West Bengal, Assam and Odisha, between 2008 and 2013.
- Of the collected funds, Rs.1,983 crore — apart from the interest earned — remained outstanding and has, therefore, been marked as proceeds of crime committed by the accused persons for attachment of their properties under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. The ED has already attached properties worth about Rs.500 crore.

Ashok Leyland gets ready for electric play

- Ashok Leyland (AL) has indicated that the company is actively focused on developing electric and ethanol-powered vehicles in preparation for the emerging opportunities in the alternative transport solution segment.
- The Hinduja flagship, showcased full-fledged working prototypes of three electric zero emission vehicles (that include the all-electric light commercial vehicle Dost, 10-tonne electric truck and midi bus) and an ethanol-driven Dost.
- AL expects first major opportunity for plug-in electric vehicles to come in the bus segment. Its upcoming electric bus is being developed in-house with some parts sourced from Ashok Leyland's UK subsidiary Optare, which is a pioneer in bus making.
- Though the commercial launch of electric vehicles and alternate fuel-powered vehicles may take some more years, AL is seeing some green shoots in terms of subvention

schemes under the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020.

- The transportation sector accounts for a third of total crude oil consumption in the country and road transportation accounts for over 80 per cent of total consumption.

Kenstar ties up with Amazon

- Consumer electronics and appliances manufacturer Kenstar has made a foray into the air conditioner segment, and launched its range of split ACs. In a first, Kenstar has tied up with e-commerce player Amazon.in to distribute the ACs exclusively.
- A statement from the company said it aims to revolutionise the AC segment and plans to capture 5 per cent of the total market share by the close of 2014-15.

Xiaomi to set up first R&D base in India

- Handset maker Xiaomi will set up a research and development unit in Bengaluru, its first such facility outside of China, as it looks to beef up presence in the booming Indian smartphone market.
- The company, which expects the centre to be operational in the next few months, will focus on localising its products and features for the Indian market through the unit.
- Work on the facility is expected to commence by the end of March and in the next few months, it will be operational, Xiaomi India Head Manu Jain told .

Banks free to decide NPA norms, says Supreme Court

- Dealing a blow to borrowers, especially in the industrial sector, the Supreme Court upheld a 2004 amendment enabling banks to follow different guidelines for declaring bad loans as “non-performing assets.”
- Noting that quick recovery of bad loans was essential to keep the financial health of the country intact, a Bench of Justices J. Chelameswar and S.A. Bobde upheld an amendment to Section 2, which defines non-performing assets (NPA) under the Securitisation and Re-constitution of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interests (SARFAESI) Act, 2002.
- The Act allowed a secured creditor bank to determine a bad debt as NPA and proceed to seize and sell the assets to recover the amount due to it as loan.
- The 2004 amendment classified borrowers into two categories. One, those who got secured loans from institutions which followed RBI guidelines framed on the declaration of NPAs. Two, those who borrowed from institutions governed by guidelines set by their own regulators.
- The court was deciding a batch of petitions filed by borrowers, contending that the amendment discriminated against between two classes of borrowers. Especially, when RBI guidelines gave only 60 days before a bad debt can be declared an NPA, while individual regulators were allowed up to 180 days to lapse before the secured loan is declared an NPA.

Base year change pushes GDP growth to 6.9% in 2013-14

- The base year was last revised in January, 2010 The Modi Government, sharply revised India's 2013-14 GDP growth estimate to 6.9 per cent from 4.7 per cent. The 2012-13

growth estimate was revised to 5.1 per cent from 4.5 per cent.

- Former Finance Minister and Congress leader P. Chidambaram said that the data released showed that the 10 years of the UPA government recorded the highest decadal growth since Independence.
- GDP data for a fiscal undergoes three rounds of revisions; the process takes three years. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) releases the second Revised Estimate for a financial year ending in March on the subsequent January 30.
- The estimates released on Friday also follow a change in the base year for calculating national accounts to 2011-12 from 2004-05 in addition to the routine annual revision — where changes are made only on the basis of updated data becoming available.
- The base year was last revised in January, 2010.
- In case of base year revisions, apart from a shift in the reference year for measuring the real growth, conceptual changes, as recommended by the international guidelines, are incorporated, the official release said.
- The changes have reduced the gap between the way India calculates GDP and the methodology used by the International Monetary Fund.
- The jobs-creating manufacturing sector's growth estimate for 2013-14 was revised to 6.2 per cent from minus 0.7 per cent and for 2012-13 was revised to 5.3 per cent from 1.1 per cent.

Cash transfers can plug PDS leakages: study

- A new study has estimated that 46.7 per cent or 25.9 million metric tonnes (MMTs) of the grains (rice and wheat), released through the PDS, did not reach the intended beneficiaries in 2011-12.
- In the study, based on the latest NSSO data, by Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER and former Chairman, Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACAP), Ashok Gulati and Shweta Saini, Chhattisgarh was the best performing State with 0 per cent diversion. Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were among the better performers with 11.1 per cent and 12.2 per cent leakages respectively.
- The worst-performing State was Manipur where 97.8 per cent of the grains failed to reach beneficiaries, followed by Daman and Diu where leakages were 95.8 per cent. In Delhi, 82.6 per cent of the grains were diverted.
- During the period under study, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister in Gujarat, the pilferage was 72.2 per cent. Poor States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal delivered greater proportion of off-taken grains to the poor than Gujarat.
- The PDS operates through a network of roughly 5,00,000 fair price shops (FPS) across the country and is likely the largest public network of its type in the world, currently distributing roughly 50-55 MMT of grains annually.
- The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 also relies on this vehicle to deliver food security to 67 per cent of population (75 per cent rural and 50 per cent urban) with an estimated distribution of about 61.4 MMT of grains.

Centre proposes major changes to Tea Act

- The Centre has proposed major amendments to the 1953 Tea Act to give more teeth to the regulator — Tea Board of India.

- The move aims at plugging loopholes in relevant sections of the Tea Act to enable takeover of the management or control of tea gardens, which have been closed for over 90 days.
- The amendments also propose new additions in the Act, like including in its ambit terms like small tea growers while defining tea estates. Special attention is also to be paid to protection of IPR of teas and monitoring of tea gardens. The Government feels that there is need to delete certain archaic provisions of the Indian Tea Act as they have become irrelevant. There is also a need to reinforce the powers and functions of the Tea Board so as to enable the body to regulate, develop and promote tea industry and trade while helping production and exports besides improving quality.
- Surprisingly, the existing Act does not clearly define the powers of the Tea Board although it is widely known as the industry regulator. The amendments plan to lay out clear definitions in this respect while setting out the powers of the Tea Board chairman.
- The Tea Board has sought powers to monitor the working of tea gardens, making its approach more direct and proactive than the present reactive attitude. It has been suggested that the Board shall constantly monitor the gardens and try to pre-empt closures.
- It is felt that the Section 16 of the Tea Act, which provides for handing over management of sick gardens, has many limitations.

Obama proposes \$3.99 trillion budget

- President Barack Obama proposed a \$3.99-trillion budget for fiscal year 2016 that sets up a battle with Republicans over programs to boost the middle-class that are funded by higher taxes on corporations and wealthy Americans.
- The budget foresees a \$474-billion deficit, which is 2.5 per cent of U.S. gross domestic product. It projects deficits stabilising at that rate over a 10-year period, senior administration officials said.
- Mr. Obama's budget fleshes out proposals from his State of the Union address and helps highlight Democratic priorities for the last quarter of his presidency and the beginning of the 2016 presidential campaign.
- But it is as much a political document as a fiscal road map and would require approval from the Republican-controlled Congress to go into effect.

JK group Chairman Gaur Hari Singh passes away

- JK group Chairman Gaur Hari Singhania passed away following a heart attack.
- Singhania (80) was also the President of J. K. Organisation and a Promoter Director of JK Cement Ltd. since its inception in 1994.
- A sports lover, he was also the chief patron of Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association's (UPCA). He is survived by a son, Yadupati Singhania.
- He was cremated this afternoon at Bhagwat Das Ghat in the city.

Rajan for raising tax exemption limit on financial investments

- Days ahead of the Budget, Reserve Bank of India Governor Raghuram Rajan, pitched

for increasing the tax exemption limit on financial investments by individuals from Rs.1.50 lakh a year.

- Acknowledging that there was a Rs.50,000 increase in the limit in the last budget to Rs.1.50 lakh a year, he said benefits of this instrument had been lost over time as the limit was anchored at Rs.1 lakh for a long time.
- Cracking its whip on entities using stock markets for evading taxes and laundering black money, watchdog SEBI has decided to suspend trading in listed companies that are found to be used by such manipulators.
- The capital markets regulator has identified three parameters for taking action against such companies and the trading would be suspended in the shares of those entities that satisfy more than one of the criteria.
- In its probe into various such cases, SEBI found huge share price rally in shares of the companies that existed only on paper and did not even exist on the addresses mentioned in their regulatory filings, while preferential allotment has emerged as a major route for laundering of illicit funds.
- The modus operandi typically involves stock market dealings aimed at evading capital gains tax and showing the source of income as legitimate from stock markets. SEBI found a typical pattern in trading of shares of these companies. First, the shares would be allotted on preferential basis to certain connected entities, price would be pushed higher without any fundamental move, followed by an exit being given to these investors and the shares would be sold back to the company or related entities raking in huge profits.
- Such huge profits were made in stocks where fundamentals or financials of the companies did not justify the price.
- A large number of small NBFCs and brokers are already under SEBI's scanner for having facilitated illicit transactions worth thousands of crores of rupees over the past two-three years, sources said.

Naveen Chopra is new Vodafone India COO

- Vodafone India, announced the appointment of Naveen Chopra as Chief Operating Officer (COO) with effect from April 1.
- Mr. Chopra, now Director (Vodafone Business Services), will succeed Sunil Sood, who will be the Managing Director and CEO of the company effective April 1.

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Science and Technology

Country's highest zoo attempts to save high altitude herbivores

- The initiative taken by Darjeeling's Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZP) in conserving high altitude herbivores that have been on the path of extinction, has served to stem the rapid decline in their numbers.
- Some of the animals that have been included in the conservation programme of PNHZP, the country's highest altitude zoo located at over 7,000 ft, are the Blue Sheep, the Himalayan Tahr, the Himalayan Goral and the Markhor.
- All the four herbivores have been placed in the Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which denotes that the species are 'threatened'. The conservation of these animals is also crucial for the Himalayan ecosystem.
- "All the four herbivores are the main prey of the much endangered Snow leopard. A decrease in their numbers will naturally affect the existence of the elusive mountain cat," Upashna Rai, the biologist in the PNHZP told.
- Conserving these herbivores serves the dual purpose of protecting the snow leopard as well. The PNHZP is also involved in the global conservation and breeding programme of the snow leopard.
- The Darjeeling Zoo has taken the initiative of breeding these high altitude herbivores and is also involving the other high altitude zoos in breeding and conservation of the species.
- It has provided to each of the main zoos of Sikkim and Nainital one pair of the Blue Sheep and the Himalayan Goral as a part of an exchange programme.

4th navigation satellite launch in March 2015

- The fourth navigation satellite of the country is getting ready for launch in March, and it will be another step forward for India in evolving its own navigation satellite system and not depend on the Geographical Positioning System (GPS) service of the U.S.
- Cryogenic propulsion systems on board PSLV-C27 rocket that will launch the satellite are being developed by scientists of the ISRO Propulsion Complex at Mahendragiri in Tirunelveli district.
- S. Ingersol, group director of the complex, told, "Totally, seven satellites are required to be launched to complete the configuration under the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) and already three had been launched.
- Dr. Ingersol said launch of the remaining four satellites would be completed in one year and after that India's dependency on the U.S. for GPS service would be significantly reduced. "This will trigger the much-needed development in geographic information systems."
- The Mahendragiri complex was developing the second and fourth liquid stages needed for the launch vehicle. "Advance research by ISRO scientists has made India go for launching heavier satellites of three to four tonnes from our own soil," he said.

TB rate going down, but not fast enough to meet WHO target

- India is unlikely to reach the WHO target of elimination of tuberculosis (TB) by 2050 going by the rate at which incidence of the disease is declining in the country.
- “Incidence of TB in India is declining at the rate of about 2 per cent per year. However, in order to reach the TB elimination target by 2050, the rate should be 19 to 20 per cent per year,” WHO Representative to India Nata Menabde told.
- She, however, said that on using available strategies and technologies effectively, along with universal health coverage and social protection, the country could achieve a reduction of TB incidence rate of 10 per cent per year by 2025.
- “To hasten the decline of TB incidence beyond that would require new tools such as new effective vaccines, new points of care, effective diagnostics and new effective shortened treatment regimens,” she suggested.
- Additionally, social determinants of TB such as under-nutrition, overcrowding and poor ventilation in slums and clinical risk factors such as diabetes mellitus, smoking etc should be addressed simultaneously, she added.
- Citing the WHO Global TB Report 2014, Ms. Menabde said that India has already met the Million Development Goals (MDG) target of 50 per cent reduction in the prevalence of TB by 2015 compared to 1990. “India is also well on track for reducing TB death by 50 per cent by 2015,” she stated.
- Ms. Menabde, however, said there was a need to improve the quality of care provided to TB patients at private clinics and hospitals as most approached such facilities for treatment, especially in urban areas.
- “At least one-half of the TB patients in India, especially in urban areas, approach private sector for TB care. But the quality of care in the private sector in most situations is not satisfactory.
- “There is a need for wider dissemination of ‘standards for TB care’ to the private sector, targeted approaches to engagement with them and more stringent implementation of mandatory notification of TB cases.

Deficient southwest monsoon hits Rabi sowing

- A delayed and deficient southwest monsoon has shrunk rabi sowing from last year’s level. If sowing was taken up on 597.15 lakh hectares of land last year, the figure this time was 566.18 lakh hectares.
- What is worrisome is the gap of 30.97 lakh hectares between the areas sown in the previous week and its corresponding week last year, higher than the deficit of 26.82 lakh hectares when making such a comparison for the week earlier.
- The southwest monsoon was 12 per cent lower than the long period average in the country and 21 per cent in northwest India, hitting kharif crop production by 2-3 per cent. The rain deficit is affecting rabi sowing now.
- A meeting in the Agriculture Ministry to review the crop and weather situation noted that wheat has been sown in 4.92 lakh hectares less this year because of lower moisture in the soil. Although the area under wheat will be made up in the next few weeks, the harvest will depend on the weather conditions.

- Of particular concern is the lower acreage of pulses. The area under gram is lower this year by 14.8 lakh hectares from last year's because of the lower minimum support price. Farmers have turned away from sowing gram as the price is low, sources said.
- The area under coarse cereals is lower by 4.57 lakh hectares mainly because of reduced sowing of maize and jowar in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

Almonds could Reduce belly fat, Study Found

- Snacking on almonds instead of carbs could reduce belly fat and lower the risk of heart disease, a new study has claimed.
- The study found that a daily snack of 1.5 ounces of almonds instead of a high-carbohydrate muffin, eaten as part of an overall healthy diet, improved a number of heart disease risk factors in study participants.
- In addition to significantly improving LDL and total cholesterol, snacking on almonds instead of muffins also reduced central adiposity (belly fat), a well-established heart disease risk factor.
- Reducing abdominal fat is particularly beneficial given its connection to metabolic syndrome and increased risk for heart disease. The twelve-week, randomised, controlled clinical study, led by researchers at Penn State University, was conducted in 52 overweight, middle-aged adults who had high total and LDL cholesterol but were otherwise healthy.
- Participants ate cholesterol-lowering diets that were identical except that one group was given a daily snack of 1.5 ounces (42g) of whole natural almonds, while the other group was given a banana muffin that provided the same number of calories.
- Participants were provided all meals and snacks in amounts based on their calorie needs to maintain body weight, and followed each diet for six weeks. The diet containing the almond snack, compared to the muffin snack, decreased total cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol non-HDL-cholesterol and remnant lipoproteins.
- In addition, the diet with the muffin snack reduced HDL (good) cholesterol more than the almond diet. Despite no differences in body weight or total fat mass, the almond diet significantly reduced abdominal fat mass, waist circumference and leg fat mass compared to the diet with the muffin snack.

Common factors in divergent habitats of migratory birds, Studies found

- To understand the diverse habitats of migratory birds and make comparison studies, the bird watchers' team of Nature Society of Tirupur, that has been studying the arrival-departure patterns of such species in western region, travelled across the State where migratory birds flock in large numbers.
- The assessment helped find the common factors that prompt certain bird species to visit areas such as Nanjarayan tank in Tirupur and the coastal lines of the State, though outwardly it looks as a divergent environment.
- Disclosing the patterns of migrations and common factors that make respective species to seek abodes in different parts of the State, K. Ravindran, secretary of the Society, told that many of the species that flock the Nanjarayan irrigation tank area in Tirupur and its hinterland were also seen in coastal areas of the State, especially in Nagapattinam district.

- The team found species like the Sandpipers, which come from Western Europe, the Northern Pintails, that migrates from Northern Europe and North America, and the Black-tailed Godwits, a bird species coming from Iceland area in Europe, among few others, which comes to western region of the State during winter season, in coastal areas too with some of them even noticed in smaller numbers around irrigation tanks in sanctuaries like Koonthankulam near Tirunelveli.

Indian vaccine Meningitis will protect infants

- A meningitis A vaccine (MenAfriVac) manufactured by Serum Institute of India, Pune was approved by WHO a few days ago for use in infants in sub-Saharan African populations. The vaccine will be introduced as part of the routine immunisation programme.
- “In the four years since its introduction in Africa, MenAfriVac has had an immediate and dramatic impact in breaking the cycle of meningitis A epidemics,” a WHO release said. The vaccine has already been used in those aged 1-29 years.
- But with the WHO’s approval, the vaccine can be given to infants thereby “protecting million more children at risk of the deadly disease.” About 200,000 people suffer from meningitis every year in the region.
- The disease kills 20,000 to 25,000 people in the region every year. “Like in the case of measles, not many meningitis cases are seen in children younger than one year,” said Dr. Suresh Jadhav, Executive Director of Serum Institute.
- “A mother, who has had meningitis, transmits the meningitis antibodies to newborns and these antibodies protect them for one year.”
- Every individual living in the meningitis belt (which stretches from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east) gets infected with meningitis before the age of 29 years and hence mothers invariably carry antibodies against the disease.
- The WHO has approved the use of a 5 microgram dose of the vaccine for children, which will be administered when they are nine months old.
- Immunisation at nine months will help achieve sustainable disease control following mass campaigns that target people belonging to the 1-29 age group.
- Explaining the rationale for choosing to immunise at ninth month, Dr. Jadhav said: “It’s one opportunity to treat both measles and meningitis,” he said. Measles vaccination is also given to children at nine months of age.
- A booster dose will be given when the child is 12-18 months old. According to Dr. Jadhav, the first meningitis dose will protect a child for five years and a booster dose will confer lifelong protection.
- Though a single campaign has been carried out to cover a large population in 15 countries, those born after the campaign have not received the MenAfriVac vaccine and are hence vulnerable to meningitis infection. But with the introduction of the vaccine as part of the immunisation schedule, these children will also be protected.

New dolphin-like creature identified near Scotland: scientists

- A new dolphin-like species that lived around 170 million years ago has been identified from fossils found on the Isle of Skye off Scotland.

- The 14-foot long marine creature has been named *Dearcmhara shawcrossi* in honour of an amateur enthusiast, Brian Shawcross, who recovered the creature's fossils from the island's Berreraig Bay in 1959.
- It is a member of a group called ichthyosaurs that were among the dominant marine reptiles when dinosaurs ruled the land. "The dolphin-like creatures were as long as 14 feet from snout to tail, and inhabited warm, shallow seas around Scotland during the Jurassic Period," Scientist reported.
- *Dearcmhara*, a moderate-sized ichthyosaur, swam in warm, shallow seas during the Jurassic Period, preyed on fish and other reptiles.

Playing music benefits the brain: research

- More than a decade ago, there was great buzz in the press and media on something that was tantalizingly referred to as "The Mozart Effect". Some researchers claimed that school students performed better in tests as they were listening to music by the great European classical music composer Mozart.
- Compared to them, another set of students (control group, same age, same background and so forth) who took the same tests, but with no Mozart in the background, did less well.
- This news spread like wildfire and parents began playing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to their children with the hope of elevating their performance, and hopefully IQ values as well.
- Several questions were raised about this Mozart effect, both in the professional and popular press. Is it reproducible (not always, low sample size)? Does listening to music only calm the mind and focus it to the task on hand? Why Mozart, why not Beethoven, Bach or Beatles? Why only western music, and not Carnatic, Hindustani, Japanese or even soothing chants? Is the effect temporary or long-lasting? Do lullabies make infants smarter, besides sleep-inducing?
- Many of these questions were attempted to be answered by a variety of experiments — amateur and professional — and the overall consensus appears to be that music is good for you, but as far as the Mozart Effect goes, the jury is still out.
- A more scientifically challenging question here is whether music makes noticeable change in your cognitive abilities, and affect and alter the brain in perceptible ways.
- Is listening to music as a passive recipient sufficient, or should one actively engage in music — singing solo or in groups, playing an instrument, and improvising more effectively? Note that in the latter case, you are actually exerting and exercising your brain. In other words, listening to Mozart, or to play Mozart — which would be a better or true "Mozart Effect"?

Researchers identified Mutations causing abnormal heart muscle protein

- An international team of researchers have sought to identify genetic mutations that produce abnormal forms of a key heart muscle protein. As a result of the mutations, the heart muscles weaken and produce a condition known as 'dilated cardiomyopathy.'
- The increased strain that is then put on the heart can lead to heart failure where the organ is unable to pump the requisite quantities of blood.

- Changes to titin, a protein that is part of the mechanism muscles use to contract and relax, have been implicated as a cause for dilated cardiomyopathy.
- Titin is the largest human protein and is produced by a gene whose genetic information exists as 364 separate segments, known as exons. Variations in how the genetic data from these exons are assembled mean that the protein can exist in a variety of forms.
- A 2012 study carried out in severe and familial cases of dilated cardiomyopathy found that disruptive mutations in the gene, resulting in truncated titin variants being produced, were the commonest genetic cause for the ailment.
- Researchers who carried out that study have gone on to examine titin gene sequences from over 5,200 individuals, with and without the condition, as well as scrutinising 150 heart tissue samples collected from patients who underwent heart surgery.

Polar bear clusters migrate to Northwest Passages for longer lasting ice

- Some polar bear clusters have slowly moved to islands situated in north of Canada's mainland that are retaining the Arctic ice for longer says a new scientific study. According to the study the migration is linked to climate change and would continue.
- The study published earlier this month in the journal PLOS ONE was based on DNA taken from nearly 2,800 polar bears in countries where the animals live - the United States, Russia, Canada, Greenland and Norway.
- Bear clusters from Canada's eastern Arctic area and a marine area off eastern Greenland and Siberia are journeying to the Canadian Archipelago, also known as the Arctic Archipelago, where ice is more abundant, the study found.
- The channels through the islands, known as the Northwest Passages, have come to be seen as a potentially valuable shipping route as Arctic ice melts.
- The region that has attracted a larger number of polar bears sits north of the Canadian mainland, close to Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. It is comprised of more than 36,000 islands and covers more than 550,000 square miles (1.4 million square km).
- The migration has occurred during the last one to three generations of the predators, or between 15 and 45 years, U.S. Geological Survey researcher Elizabeth Peacock, the study's lead author, said in a statement.
- The bears choose this area because that is "where the sea is more resilient to summer melt due to circulation patterns, complex geography and cooler northern latitudes," Peacock said.
- The Canadian Archipelago could serve as a future refuge for polar bears, who rely on Arctic ice to cross between land masses, to forage and to mate, according to the researchers.

India's 'Mars Orbiter' team wins award

- India's Mars Orbiter programme team has won the 2015 Space Pioneer Award in the science and engineering category from the US based National Space Society (NSS), the society said.
- In a statement issued in Washington, the NSS said its 2015 Space Pioneer Award in the science and engineering category has been won by the Indian Space Research

Organisation (ISRO) Mars Orbiter Programme team.

- “This award will be presented to an ISRO representative during the National Space Society’s 2015 International Space Development Conference, the 34th ISDC, to be held in Toronto, Canada,” the statement said.
- The conference will run from May 20-24. According to the NSS, India’s Mars Orbiter launched on Nov 5, 2013 that went into Mars orbit on Sep 24, 2014 achieved two significant mission firsts in terms of an Indian spacecraft that has gone into orbit around Mars on the very first try and that no other country has ever done this.
- Secondly, the spacecraft is in an elliptical orbit with a high apoapsis, and has a high resolution camera which is taking full-disk colour imagery of Mars.
- Very few full disk images have ever been taken in the past, mostly on approach to the planet, as most imaging is done looking straight down in mapping mode.
- These images will aid planetary scientists. The Mars Orbiter programme team located in Bangalore is headed by Mylswamy Annadurai, the statement said.

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Britain’s “Beagle 2” spacecraft found on Mars

- Britain’s infamous “Beagle 2” spacecraft, once dubbed “a heroic failure” by the nation’s Astronomer Royal, has been found on Mars — 11 years after it went missing

searching for extraterrestrial life.

- Beagle 2, part of the European Space Agency's Mars Express mission, had been due to land on Mars on Christmas Day 2003, but went missing on December 19, 2003. Until now, nothing had been heard from it since then.
- But in an announcement made to a packed news conference at London's Royal Society scientific institution, space experts said the tiny Mars lander has been found on the surface of the red planet.
- "Beagle 2 is no longer lost," said David Parker, chief executive of the UK Space Agency. He said scientists now had "good evidence" that the spacecraft successfully landed on Mars on the date it was due — December 25, 2003 — but had only partially deployed.
- "This find shows that the entry, descent and landing sequence for Beagle 2 worked and the lander did successfully touch down on Mars on Christmas Day 2003," the UK space agency said in a statement.
- Beagle 2 — which measures less than 2 metres across — was named after the ship Charles Darwin sailed when he formulated his theory of evolution. It was built by British scientists for about 50 million pounds (\$85 million)
- The plan was for it to report back from the Mars' surface using instruments designed to help search for signs of life, but nothing was heard after it was dropped off to make its landing.

2014 Earth's hottest year on record: scientists

- 2014 was Earth's hottest on record in new evidence that people are disrupting the climate by burning fossil fuels that release greenhouse gases into the air, two U.S. government agencies said.
- The White House said the studies, by the U.S. space agency NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), showed climate change was happening now and that action was needed to cut rising world greenhouse gas emissions.
- The 10 warmest years since records began in the 19th century have all been since 1997, the data showed. Last year was the warmest, ahead of 2010, undermining claims by some skeptics that global warming has stopped in recent years.
- Record temperatures in 2014 were spread around the globe, including most of Europe stretching into northern Africa, the western United States, far eastern Russia into western Alaska, parts of interior South America, parts of eastern and western coastal Australia and elsewhere, NASA and NOAA said.
- "While the ranking of individual years can be affected by chaotic weather patterns, the long-term trends are attributable to drivers of climate change that right now are dominated by human emissions of greenhouse gases," said Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies in New York.
- "The data shows quite clearly that it's the greenhouse gas trends that are responsible for the majority of the trends," he told reporters. Emissions were still rising "so we may anticipate further record highs in the years to come."
- U.N. studies show there already are more extremes of heat and rainfall and project ever more disruptions to food and water supplies. Sea levels are rising, threatening millions of people living near coasts, as ice melts from Greenland to Antarctica.

Parrikar hands over LCA SP-1 to Air Force

- Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar handed over the first series-production version of the Light Combat Aircraft to the Indian Air Force.
- Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha, received its technical documents from the Minister in the presence of R.K.Tyagi, Chairman of its manufacturer, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd.
- At Bharat Electronics Ltd, the Minister laid the foundation stone for a training academy. He rolled out the 750{+t}{+h}metro car made by BEML Ltd for Delhi Metro, the defence companies said.
- The IAF looks set to get the final battle-ready version of the Light Combat Aircraft only around December this year, according to top officials involved in its development.
- That means a further six-month delay in the 25-year-old aircraft project, which was expected to be achieved in June this year.

Agni-V missile to be test-fired on January 31

- India's strategic missile, Agni-V, will test-fired from the Wheeler Island, off the Odisha coast, on January 31.
- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which has developed the missile, will launch it from a canister mounted on a road-mobile launcher, which is a TATRA truck.
- A gas generator at the bottom of the canister will push the 17-metre long, 50-tonne Agni-V out of the canister.
- The missile, which can take out targets situated more than 5,000 km away, can carry a nuclear warhead weighing 1.1 tonnes. In the launch on January 31, 2015, it will carry a dummy payload.
- The missile was earlier scheduled to be test-fired in the second week of January but was postponed to the last week of January or the first week of February due to "non-technical" reasons.

Changing face of tech spending and Indian IT

- Last week, India's big three IT firms — TCS, Infosys and Wipro — exuded optimism on the demand environment and IT spending even as research firm Gartner cut its global tech spending forecast for calendar year 2015.
- Gartner pegs 2015 spending to grow 2.4 per cent to \$3.8 trillion (tempered from its previous forecast of 3.9 per cent). Within the overall pie, IT services are expected to rise by 2.5 per cent to \$981 billion, which is lower than 4.1 per cent projection the firm made in the last quarter.
- The firm expects a subdued demand for software support services through 2018 in the backdrop of lower growth rate for enterprise software.
- A slowdown in enterprise software means that the over \$100 billion Indian IT services industry, which has thrived from traditional bread-and-butter business like application development and maintenance and infrastructure management, will now have to look at newer avenues for growth as clients move towards digital technologies to cut cost.

GPS tracking devices to monitor Obama convoy

- Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking devices and satellite images would be used by intelligence and security agencies to keep a constant watch on the movements of U.S. President Barack Obama's convoy during his visit.
- It is learnt that a dedicated joint control room consisting of senior Indian and U.S. security officials has been set up to monitor the security arrangements for Mr. Obama. A part of ITC Maurya, where the U.S. President will stay, has been converted into a control room.
- As a precautionary measure, agencies may block public access to online GPS maps of about a dozen places in Delhi, which Mr. Obama is scheduled to visit. GPS maps of all venues have been designed to keep track of his movement. However, no drones will be deployed for aerial surveillance.
- U.S. sleuths have brought along anti-sabotage scanners to sanitise the venues in coordination with their Indian counterparts.
- Cyber security experts have been engaged for surveillance of suspicious online activity. Mr. Obama will use his own vehicle 'The Beast.' "His will be a larger cavalcade with over two dozen vehicles," .
- Following several rounds of meetings, it has been decided that on Republic Day, Mr. Obama will not accompany President Pranab Mukherjee to the parade venue, but will arrive in his 18-foot long Presidential car with Mr. Mukherjee's cavalcade.
- "In 2007, as the chief guest at the Republic Day parade, the then Russian President Vladimir Putin had also used his own vehicle," said the official. The entire city will be turned into a no-fly zone, allowing only the flypast of Indian Air Force aircraft.
- 'The Beast' is an explosion-proof heavily armoured vehicle fitted with a night vision system. It is a virtual shield capable of withstanding biochemical attacks and has its own oxygen supply mechanism. The seven-seater vehicle functions as a control room for the U.S. President to remain in touch with the Pentagon and senior U.S. government functionaries through video-conferencing or encrypted satellite phone communications. It is fitted with emergency medical equipment and has a bank of his blood type. The vehicle's fuel tank, with a special foam coating, is armour-plated and its doors have eight-inch-thick armour plating. The car's five-inch-thick windows are bulletproof. Its driver undergoes special week-long training at a secret service academy.

Major cause of blindness identified

- Microscopic spheres of calcium phosphate have been linked to the development of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a major cause of blindness. AMD affects 1 in 5 people over 75, causing their vision to slowly deteriorate.

Valmik Thapar moots PPP route to save tigers

- Author Valmik Thapar feels experts, scientists, and non-governmental organisations should be involved in tiger conservation.
- Though the recent tiger census, which has shown a 30 per cent increase in the number of tigers, is a remarkable achievement, the country should be able to sustain it, environmentalist and wildlife expert Valmik Thapar said . Mr Thapar made a strong pitch for public-private partnership in tiger conservation programmes in the country.

- The latest Tiger Census in the country puts the number at 2,226, indicating a 30 per cent jump from the previous census. India now accounts for 70 per cent of the world's wild tigers.
- Speaking at a session on "Tigers in Red Weather" at the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival here, Mr. Thapar warned that the tiger population could go up as sharply as it could come down.

TRAI issues draft rules for full mobile number portability

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has issued draft regulations to facilitate full mobile number portability, which is set to start from May 3.
- The full or nationwide mobile number portability (MNP) will allow consumers to change the service provider in any part of the country while retaining their existing number.
- At present, mobile number portability allows consumers to change their service provider within a telecom circle, which, in most cases, is limited to a State.
- "In view of implementation of full MNP, some changes will be required in the MNP Regulations, 2009 (as amended).
- Accordingly, a draft amendment to the Telecommunication Mobile Number Portability Regulation, 2009, has been prepared," TRAI said in a statement.
- The Department of Telecom on November 3, 2014, issued amendment to the MNP Licence Agreement, and asked telecom operators to implement full MNP within six months from the date of amendment to the licences.
- In the new amendment, TRAI wants to introduce a clause to safeguard the interest of post-paid mobile service users who face disconnection in new network even after clearing all their dues of their old service provider.
- The regulator has fixed timeline on the old or donor service provider and new or recipient service provider for clear communication about dues cleared by the subscriber to ensure continuity of service.
- TRAI has sought public comments on the subject by February 6.

India, U.S. to extend Defence cooperation pact

- Aiming for a transformative defence partnership, India and the U.S. agreed to extend the Defence Cooperation Agreement and identified four projects under the Defence Technology Trade Initiative (DTTI) for joint production and development and exploring cooperation for jet engines and aircraft carrier systems.
- Mr. Modi said this would help upgrade the country's domestic defence industry and expand the manufacturing sector in India.
- Mr. Obama said the agreement would guide the bilateral defence cooperation for the next 10 years.
- In another significant step, the two countries agreed to set up a working group to explore aircraft carrier technology and design and develop jet engine technology in India.
- The projects identified under the DTTI include next-generation Raven mini-unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), roll-on, roll-off intelligence kits for C-130 transport aircraft and mobile electric hybrid power source.

- Indian Ambassador to the U.S. S. Jaishankar said these four projects were “pathfinder” schemes as they would determine how to go forward in defence co-development. Of these, two projects were with U.S. companies, while two were with the U.S. government.

HIV treatment to be linked to Aadhaar

- Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) Treatment for HIV/AIDS infection will now be linked to Aadhaar. Even those coming for HIV infection testing will have to produce their Aadhaar cards. This is to avoid duplication of patients going to several ART Centres for testing.
- The National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) has created a special software which will identify a patient who goes for testing at different centres and gets registered at all the centres.

Agni-V to be test-fired from canister today

- Agni-V, India’s most powerful strategic missile, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will lift off from a canister mounted on a TATRA truck stationed on the Wheeler Island off Odisha.
- This is the third launch, but the first from a canister, a method that will allow the missile to be fired even from roads. Avinash Chander, Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister and DRDO Director-General, has called Agni-V “a game changer.” Mr. Chander, the architect of the Agni series, will be present at the launch scheduled for 8 a.m. Agni-V can carry a 1.1-tonne nuclear warhead over 5,000 km.

Swine flu Deaths preventable: Centre

- 2,038 cases reported this year across the country, 191 dead
- In the wake of a H1N1 (swine flu) outbreak, which has claimed 191 lives this year, the Centre said mortality on account of the flu can be contained with immediate medical intervention.
- There have been 2,038 cases of H1N1 reported across the country in 2015, with Telangana reporting the highest number of cases at 629 and 34 deaths, followed by Delhi with 488 cases and 5 deaths, Gujarat with 309 cases and 38 deaths and Rajasthan with 205 cases and 49 deaths.
- Health Ministry officials said Delhi’s low mortality is attributable to the high awareness about the flu, followed by early detection and timely treatment.
- The Centre is closely monitoring the surge in cases and Central teams have been dispatched to Telangana and Rajasthan.

Smart phone dongle to diagnose HIV, syphilis

- A palm-sized dongle connected to a smartphone will soon be able to diagnose HIV and syphilis with good accuracy.
- The device, which was recently field-tested on 96 patients in Rwanda, had high sensitivity and specificity for both HIV and syphilis.
- The results are published today (February 5) in the journal Science Translational Medicine.
- Sensitivity and specificity for both the infections are comparable to the lab-based

ELISA.

- **In the case of HIV, the sensitivity was 100 per cent and specificity was 87 per cent. For syphilis, the sensitivity was 92-100 per cent and specificity was 79-92 per cent.**

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Sports

Poland wins Hopman Cup

- Poland has won its first ever Hopman Cup title, beating the USA 2-1 in the final. Agnieszka Radwanska showed why she should be considered among the favourites for the Australian Open later this month by beating the world No. 1 Serena Williams in the final.
- The world No. 5 Radwanska teamed up with Hopman debutant Jerzy Janowicz to beat the US pairing of Serena Williams and John Isner 2-1.

Avinash emerges champion in National junior snooker

- Avinash Kumar continued his giant-killing spree to win his maiden National junior snooker title at the BRC. The 20-year-old Delhi cueist won all his round-robin semifinal league games, losing just three frames.
- “He played spectacular snooker. His extraordinary show has caught the attention of everyone in this National meet,” said former World billiards champion Manoj Kothari.
- “We will try and get him scholarship from one of the oil companies,” he informed. Avinash, whose parents migrated to Delhi from Patna, did not drop a single frame.
- Playing his second league game against Hritik Jain from Madhya Pradesh, Avinash was thrashed 1-63 in the opening frame. “I came to the venue late and hardly had time to warm-up,” he said.
- “Though I won the second frame I was still not be able to focus well. I got my rhythm back in the fourth and there was no stopping me.” Avinash lost the first frame to S. Shrikrishna of Tamil Nadu 11-72 in the final league game only to take the next four in a row.

India have slipped to 7th place in Test rankings

- India have slipped a place to be seventh in the latest ICC Test rankings after losing the four-match away series against Australia 0-2. India’s slide in the rankings come after the two fighting draws which were not enough to prevent another series loss overseas.
- India captain Virat Kohli however has gained three places to be 12th in the batsmen standings after amassing 692 runs in the eight innings Down Under. His Australian counterpart Steven Smith has reached a career-high fourth after piling up 769 runs in the series at a staggering average of 128.16.
- Amongst the bowlers, pacer Mohammed Shami has risen seven places to a career-high 31st place after taking match figures of six for 145 runs in Sydney, while Australia’s Mitchell Starc has moved up nine places to 33rd after returning five wickets for 142 runs.
- Amongst the other bowlers from the Sydney Test are Australia duo Shane Watson and Josh Hazlewood, up to 38th and a career-high 46th respectively.

Railways’ teams win in contrasting styles

- It was double delight for Railways at the 63rd senior national volleyball championship

as it clinched the men's and women's titles beating Tamil Nadu and Kerala respectively.

- While the women's final was a cakewalk, the men's title-round will probably go down in the history of Indian volleyball as one of the greatest comebacks in the finals of the national championship.
- Railways was down two sets and staring down the barrel before it saved three match points in the fourth set and went on to turn it around and win the match 19-25, 18-25, 25-23, 26-24, 15-9.
- Defending champion TN had no one to blame but itself for the result — letting its crown slip when it had one hand on it with some poor defence work and unforced errors in the final three sets.
- For Railways, attacker S. Prabakaran was the star performer of the day. He, along with all-rounder Manu Joseph, kept the visitors in the game with some attacking play.

Women's hockey camp begins

- The Indian women's hockey team began its preparatory camp for a Test series against Spain at the National Stadium.
- Goalkeepers: Yogita Bali, Savita, Rajni Etimarpu.

Brett Lee announced retirement from all forms of cricket

- Former Australia fast bowler Brett Lee announced his pending retirement from all forms of cricket after a 20-year career.
- The 38-year-old pacer quit international cricket in July 2012, but had been a Twenty20 regular, both in the Indian Premier League and the domestic competition in Australia.
- Lee, who made the announcement at the Sydney Cricket Ground, remains the equal leading wicket-taker for Australia in ODIs with Glenn McGrath, with 380 in 221 appearances. Lee also took 310 wickets in 76 Tests for Australia.

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Advani to meet Sitwala in National billiards final

- Six-time champion, Pankaj Advani, will take on PSPB teammate Dhruv Sitwala in the 82nd National billiards championship final at the BRC.
- Advani overcame Siddharth Parikh of Railways 4-2 and Sitwala, looking to win his maiden crown, registered a thrilling 4-3 victory over B. Bhaskar of Karnataka for the third entry into the title round.
- Advani took three hours to tame Parikh. An unfinished break of 148 gave Advani

- the first frame at 150-37 and two small breaks of 50 and 66 ensured 2-0 lead (150-87).
- Parikh compiled an unfinished 107 to neutralise Advani's lead of 114 to take the frame at 114-150. The 12-time world champion hit back with vengeance in the fourth.
 - A lead of 52 disappeared as Advani showed his cueing prowess with a terrific unfinished 154 to make it 3-1. It was a close fifth frame when Pankaj missed a fairly easy canon at 140-138 and Parikh ensured 2-3 in his favour.
 - The master of green baize, however, proved his class with two good breaks of 70 and 53 to take the frame at 150-45. "I am glad that even on a day when I was not at my best I managed to pull it off," Advani said.
 - "Full credit to Siddharth who has come into top four after ten years. I am happy that I am through to the final," a relieved Advani said.

IPL media rights: BCCI invites tenders

- The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has invited bids for media rights relating to the future editions of the Indian Premier League (IPL).
- The upcoming Pepsi IPL will be broadcast across the world through every technological medium available, thus reaching out to an even larger audience, BCCI secretary Sanjay Patel said in a statement.
- Bids should be submitted by February 3, at a meeting of the BCCI Marketing Committee, at which time it is intended that the bids will be opened, evaluated and the tender awarded in the presence of bidders.

Sania wins first title of the season in Sydney Open doubles

- India's Sania Mirza won her first title of the season and 23rd of her career when she and Bethanie Mattek-Sands shocked top-seeded Americans Abigail Spears and Raquel Kops-Jones in the summit clash of the Apia International.
- The unseeded Indo-American combine humbled the top seeds 6-3, 6-3 in just 69 minutes.

Panel to decide penalty

- The Supreme Court formed a three-member committee to decide on the punishment against Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) betting scandal involving co-owners of the two teams.
- Former Chief Justice India R. M. Lodha will head the committee that includes former Supreme Court judges Ashok Bhan and R. V. Raveendran.
- The committee has been given six months for to further investigate and come to a decision regarding the allegations against Mr. Kundra and Mr. Meiyappan. The two teams face the possibility of being scratched from the high profile domestic T20 tournament.
- The Board will have to elect its new president in six months' time and N. Srinivasan can contest only if he lets go of his commercial interest in CSK. It is East Zone's turn to have a president. However, BCCI rules allow a candidate from outside the zone to contest if there is a proposer and seconder a from that zone.
- It is compulsory for the candidate to have attended two Annual General Meetings of

the Board apart from being a principal office-bearer.

IPTL will help in expanding the frontiers of tennis

- Former English tennis star Tim Henman feels the newly launched International Premier Tennis League (IPTL) is the best thing to happen in Asia, where the sport is yet to pick up.
- Henman, who was in the city to conduct tennis clinics for trainees adopted by the 'HSBC Road to Wimbledon' junior development programme, said the tournament conceived by Indian star Mahesh Bhupathi will surely help in expanding the boundaries of the sport.

Undertaking a must to contest BCCI elections

- Following the Supreme Court's ruling that BCCI members with commercial interest in BCCI-organised events — including the IPL — are not eligible to contest the BCCI elections, the candidates will have to give an undertaking to that effect to the BCCI.
- Elections are to be held for the post of principal office-bearers (president, secretary, jt. secretary and treasurer) and five vice-presidents.
- Apart from the IPL, the BCCI organises tournaments in the senior, junior and women's categories and also organises the annual awards and the M.A.K. Pataudi Memorial lecture. Many other committees are also nominated by each zone. Generally BCCI office-bearers obtain unanimity for selection committees, but there have been occasions when selectors have been elected.
- The BCCI by-laws also specify eligibility rules for members wanting to contest elections. Past or present office-bearers or vice-presidents, except the president or a member who has represented his association at two AGMs, can contest for the post of office-bearer (secretary, jt. Secretary and vice-president).
- The president must be a past or present office-bearer or vice-president of the Board nominated by at least two full members from the zone, whose turn it is as per the principle of rotation.
- He must have attended two AGMs representing a full member.
- The BCCI's rules also say that such candidate or candidates (for the post of president) need not be from the same zone that is exercising its right of nomination by rotation.
- According to the by-laws of the BCCI, the office-bearers and vice-presidents who get elected at the next AGM will have a tenure of three years.
- But the question now though is, will the BCCI be forced to conduct another election in September 2015, should the Supreme Court's three-member panel recommend amendments to the eligibility rules for elections.
- The Supreme Court has said that the three-member committee's deliberations will not affect the BCCI AGM and elections to be held within six weeks.

India set for Tri-series with one Eye on World Cup

- All set to defend its cricket World Cup crown in less than a month, India will get its preparations underway with the aim to find the right combination for the marquee event when it takes on Australia in the ongoing ODI tri-series.
- While this tri-series provides the perfect setting for experimentation, the need of the

hour is to get a settled combination going ahead to instil confidence in the side.

- Skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni will return to international cricket after a little over two weeks since his Test retirement at the same venue, and he will have some decisions to make. The first order of business will be to make a firm choice about the opening combination.
- Ahead of Sunday's game, the team management has failed to specify whether it will be Ajinkya Rahane or Rohit Sharma pairing up with Shikhar Dhawan at the top of the order, or indeed whether a third possibly surprising combination might be thrown up.
- Unlike the team's preparations ahead of any Test match, its net sessions for an ODI do not throw up any suggestive patterns and it was the same on Saturday as well. In no particular order then, all batsmen enjoyed a decent hit in the nets including Ambati Rayudu and Stuart Binny.
- Among the bowlers, playing two spinners is definitely par for the course for India, with R. Ashwin and Axar Patel slated to take up those spots.

Starc sets up Australia's win

- Paceman Mitchell Starc took six for 43 to help Australia to a four-wicket victory over India, despite a brilliant century by Rohit Sharma.
- Rohit's 138 at the MCG enabled India post a competitive 267 for eight after electing to bat.
- However, Australian opener Aaron Finch countered Rohit's century with a match-winning knock of his own, making 96 as Australia reached 269 with four wickets in hand and six balls to spare.
- He received great support from Steve Smith (47) as the pair put on 101 for the third wicket.

Advani bags his seventh National title, Ameer is women's champ

- Pankaj Advani won his seventh senior National snooker title beating Varun Madan by six frames to three in a well-fought final of the BRC Gloster National billiards and snooker championship at the BRC .
- The victory also gave Advani a fourth double, having won the billiards and snooker crowns in 2007, 08 and 2009 also.
- MP's Ameer Kamani won her maiden senior snooker title defeating defending champion Vidya Pillay of Karnataka .

New Zealand wins series

- New Zealand wrapped up its one-day series against Sri Lanka with a game to spare when Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor orchestrated a 120-run win in game six.
- Williamson (97) and Taylor (96) provided the backbone of New Zealand's 315 for eight in 50 overs and Sri Lanka was all out for 195 in the 41st over.
- The win puts New Zealand 4-1 up in the seven-match series with one game washed out.

- Only Kumar Sangakkara looked at ease in Sri Lanka's run chase with 81 off 66 deliveries, but none of the other recognised batsmen were able to get past 30 as New Zealand all-rounder Corey Anderson stamped his mark on the game.
- Anderson smacked 40 from 28 balls to support Williamson and Taylor during New Zealand's innings and then took four for 52 with the ball as the Sri Lankan batsmen again showed a lack of fight.

Gilchrist and Ryder to be inducted into Australian Cricket Hall of Fame

- Celebrated wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist and late former captain and selector Jack Ryder will be inducted into Australian Cricket Hall of Fame at the annual Allan Border Medal ceremony .
- ACHoF chairman David Crow today announced that Gilchrist and Ryder were the selection committee's choice for induction this year.
- The ACHoF recently expanded its criteria to include a player's impact off the field following his playing career.
- Gilchrist said he was humbled by his nomination alongside many of the greatest players to represent Australia.
- Ryder was Don Bradman's first Test captain but it is their association off the field for more than two decades as selectors which had a far greater impact on the game.
- A tall and aggressive batsman and lively medium pace bowler, Ryder played 20 Tests for Australia and 20 years for Victoria.

Delhi Open tennis from Feb. 16

- The cream of Indian tennis, spearheaded by defending champion Somdev Devvarman, is scheduled to compete in the Delhi Open \$100,000 Challenger tennis tournament to be played at the R.K. Khanna Stadium here from February 16 to 22.
- In a release issued , the organisers have stated that Yuki Bhambri, Saketh Myneni and Ramkumar Ramanathan would also be seen in action, apart from top players like James Duckworth of Australia and Yuichi Sugita of Japan, ranked 120 and 136 respectively.
- Vishnu Vardhan will get a wild card into the main draw by virtue of having won the Fenesta National championship, while the runner-up Sidharth Rawat will get a wild card for the qualifying event, along with the national junior champion Vidit Vaghela.
- In the concurrently hosted \$25,000 ITF women's tournament, Perna Bhambri will gain entry as a wild card as the national champion.
- Karman Kaur Thandi who had finished runner-up will get a wild card for the qualifying event. Incidentally, she had also won the junior title in the national championship.

Boxing India to introduce new league, ranking system

- In order to work in line with International Boxing Association (AIBA)'s ambitious leagues such as AIBA Open Boxing (AOB), AIBA Pro Boxing (APB) and World Series of Boxing (WSB), Boxing India (BI) has decided to launch the Indian Series of Boxing (ISB) and a national ranking system in the second half of the year.

- The apex body has been making an effort for the synergy of amateur and professional boxing by allowing pugilists from professional leagues to qualify for the Olympics. BI's new step will help the Indian boxers be part of the reforms "that will bring fresh value to boxers and boxing in India".

Debashis Das holds Topalov

- Grandmaster Debashis Das came up with his best performance ever to hold former world champion Veselin Topalov of Bulgaria to a creditable draw in the second round of the Masters' section of Tradewise Gibraltar Chess festival.
- On a day of upsets, Indian Grandmaster Vishnu Prasanna defeated Grandmaster Emil Sutovsky of Israel while former world junior girls' champion Soumya Swaminathan beat American Kayden Troff to maintain a clean slate after two games. Also ending on a high was Indian GM M.R. Venkatesh who scored a fine victory over Simen Agdestein of Norway.
- With eight rounds still to come, it was business as usual for some of the higher-ranked players.
- But highest rated Indian P. Harikrishna had to show his endgame-magic before he could secure his second victory in the tournament.

'Revive defunct IBPWA'

- Olympian and former National badminton champion U. Vimal Kumar, said that shuttlers should revive the defunct Indian Badminton Players Welfare Association (IBPWA) and approach the Badminton Association of India (BAI) instead of floating a new body.
- He also expressed anguish over the players' attitude as many thought of floating an association only when they were left out of the Indian team. "This way, they can never be united. Players should have a clear agenda and not be there for selfish reasons," he remarked.
- Vimal said active players and recently-retired ones should take the responsibility of running the association.
- Vimal explained how players revolted against BAI in the mid-90s when All England champion Prakash Padukone had formed the Indian Badminton Confederation.
- He said BAI permitted players to send entries directly for National-ranking tournaments, and also for international events through BAI for forwarding it to the respective organisers. "The State associations, players and BAI functioned with better understanding," he pointed out.

Gold for Bindra

- Former World and Olympic champion Abhinav Bindra shot gold with a spectacular finish in air rifle in the IWK Hockbrueck shooting championship in Munich .
- The 32-year-old Bindra beat Vitali Bubnovich of Belarus by 0.4 points with a total of 208.0. Bindra shot a perfect 10.9 on the penultimate shot after having led by 0.1 points, before the last two shots of the 20-shot final series.
- While Bindra ended with a 10.3, the Belarussian finished with 10.4 and 10.5, that saw him fall short of gold.

Aussies break Korean hearts in final

- Host Australia won the Asian Cup football after beating South Korea 2-1 in extra time of an electrifying final, substitute James Troisi smashing home a dramatic winner.
- Troisi broke Korean hearts with the last kick in the first period of extra time after Son Heung-Min had snatched a dramatic injury-time equaliser at the end of normal time.
- Australia's triumph gave the Socceroos a first title since defecting from Oceania nine years ago, while South Korea's anguish continued after failing to break a hoodoo in the tournament stretching back to 1960.

Maxwell leads Australia to a crushing win

- A career-best performance by all-rounder Glenn Maxwell inspired Australia to a crushing 112-run win over England in the ODI tri-series final at the WACA .
- Maxwell scored 95 to help Australia recover from a poor start and make 278 for eight.
- He then took four wickets and a fine catch as England crumbled in the run chase to be dismissed for just 166 in 39.1 overs.
- England, which will face Australia in the World Cup opener later this month, was never in the hunt after paceman Mitchell Johnson claimed three quick wickets (three 27) to have it struggling at 46 for four.
- He removed Moeen Ali for 26 and then had England skipper Eoin Morgan bowled without offering a shot, off successive balls.
- Maxwell (four for 46) also found himself on a hat-trick after removing Jos Buttler (17) and the hapless Chris Woakes, who had a match to forget, with successive deliveries.

Indian Badminton League likely after June

- The Indian Badminton League (IBL), a franchise league, commercially managed by Badminton Association of India (BAI), will be held after June as the organisers are not finding a clear 20 days for the staging of the event for the second time, according to T.P.S. Puri, vice president (administration), BAI.
- He said that the earlier plans to hold the league in April appeared not possible as players would be busy preparing for the prestigious Sudirman Cup after taking part in two back-to-back fixtures — the All England championship and the Swiss Open in March.
- “Though players and franchises are keen to play, we are looking for a window. Most probably we may stage the event after June,” he pointed out.
- He said the IBL Governing Council should take into consideration the availability of players' world over before finalising the schedule.
- He said the league will see new players entering the fray and a good many players may play for the existing franchisees as they were contracted for two years.
- “The format would remain the same. Depending on the wishes of the sponsor and the franchisees we will initiate the changes.”
- Reacting to Andhra Pradesh Badminton Association's (APBA) decision to take legal action against shuttlers, who skipped the 79th senior National championship at

Vijayawada, he said he would pursue APBA not to proceed.

- “Even though APBA wished to move the court, it has to go through BAI. We should emphasise to the players as they need to train hard to maintain their peak form.”
- He said a good number of Indian shuttlers were occupying top slots in the world ranking lists and that was possible as they play around 15 to 16 tournaments in a year.
- “They need to train hard to sustain the challenge. I think BAI should have a liberal view by permitting the elite players to train,” he said.

A win for Anand

- Five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand got some consolation after scoring a regulation victory over David Baramidze of Germany in the sixth and penultimate round of the Grenke Chess Classic here.
- Coming after two straight losses against nemesis Magnus Carlsen of Norway and Levon Aronian of Armenia, the victory served as a breather for Anand as this was also the first win of the year for the Indian ace.
- With just one round to go Carlsen and Naiditsch remain on top of the table with four points each while Caruana remains half a point behind them.
- The trio of Aronian, Bacrot and Adams are not far behind on three points each while Anand remained seventh in the eight-player round robin.

In The News

H.S. Brahma

- H.S. Brahma, the seniormost Election Commissioner, will succeed V.S. Sampath as the next Chief Election Commissioner of India. Mr. Sampath will demit office after turning 65.
- Mr. Sampath paid a farewell visit to President Pranab Mukherjee. In just under six years in the Election Commission, first as EC then as CEC, he helped conduct two Lok Sabha elections and at least one round of Assembly elections in every State.
- A 1973-batch IAS officer from the Andhra Pradesh cadre, he held several important positions in the Union government, including as Secretary, Rural Development and Power, before being appointed an Election Commissioner in March 2009.
- Mr. Brahma, who hails from Assam, is also an IAS officer from the 1975 batch of the Andhra Pradesh cadre. Like Mr. Sampath, he too held the post of Power Secretary before being appointed Election Commissioner in August 2010.
- He will hold office for only a very short period, until he turns 65 on April 19 this year. Mr. Brahma has also held posts such as Joint Secretary (Border Management) in the Union Home Ministry. He also worked as Special Secretary & Additional Secretary in the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Anupam Shrivastava

- Anupam Shrivastava has been appointed the chairman and managing director (CMD) of state-run BSNL from January 15, a company statement said.
- Mr. Shrivastava has been appointed CMD of BSNL for a period of five years or till the time of superannuation at the age of 60 years, it said.
- "Government is focusing on connecting unconnected people with telecom services including high-speed broadband. As BSNL CMD, it will be my top propriety to work with government in connecting people at affordable cost, expeditiously and at turning around BSNL into a profitable venture," Mr. Shrivastava said after assuming the office.
- "I will take up important pending project of NOFN (National Optical Fibre Network), mobile service in Maoist-hit areas," he added.
- Prior to this posting, Mr. Shrivastava has served as director (consumer mobility) BSNL. He has also worked as senior general manager at Jodhpur, Ajmer and Jaipur in Rajasthan Telecom Circle.

Kiran Vadodaria

- Kiran B. Vadodaria of Sambhaav Metro was elected president of Indian Newspaper Society (INS) for 2014-15 at its 75th annual general meeting.
- P.V. Chandran (Grihalakshmi) will be the deputy president, Somesh Sharma (Rashtradoot Saptahik) the vice-president, Mohit Jain (Economic Times) the honorary treasurer and V. Shankaran the secretary-general of INS.

V. Gowarikar

- Vasant Ranchhod Gowarikar, a stalwart who played a key role in India's space programme, passed away in Pune after catching dengue. He was 81.
- A chemical engineer with a doctorate from Birmingham University, Dr. Gowarikar joined the Indian Space Research Organisation in 1967, settling down in Thiruvananthapuram.
- Dr. Gowarikar was director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, the lead agency for the rocket programme, before leaving ISRO in 1986 to become Secretary for the Department of Science & Technology. He is survived by his wife, three daughters and two grandchildren.

Atul Khare

- United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced the appointment of Atul Khare of India as Under-Secretary-General, Department of Field Support (DFS). He succeeds Ameerah Haq of Bangladesh.
- Dr. Khare, a former Indian Foreign Service officer and AIIMS graduate, brings to the position strategic management and innovative reform expertise in both headquarters and field perspective, a U.N. statement said.
- Currently providing charitable medical advice in India, Dr. Khare has a long senior career with the U.N., most recently as Assistant Secretary-General leading the Change Management Team (2011-2012) and Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and Deputy Head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York (2010-2011).
- He was previously Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Timor-Leste and Head of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) at the level of Under-Secretary-General (2006-2009).

A.S.Kiran Kumar

- A.S. Kiran Kumar is the new Secretary of the Department of Space as also Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Space Commission.
- Currently Director of the Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad, Mr. Kiran Kumar will head the organisation for three years from the date he assumes charge, according to the order issued by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, Department of Personnel & Training under the Ministry of Personnel & Public Grievances.

R K Laxman

- The messy business of the democracy that was India was unforgettably captured in the iconic creation, labelled simply The Common Man, of R.K. Laxman, died.
- Mr. Laxman, who was awarded the Padma Vibhushan and the Magsaysay Award, was a complex man, who defined his métier with an ingenious lightness of touch as evinced in his autobiography, Tunnel of Time.

Shekhar Sen

- Eminent singer and theatre director Shekhar Sen has been appointed the new chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the country's premier institution for performing arts.
- Mr. Sen was awarded the Padma Shri on Republic Day.

- According to an order issued by the Culture Ministry , Mr. Sen has been appointed for a five-year term with immediate effect.
- The Akademi has been without a head after earlier chairperson Leela Samson, who was appointed by the UPA government, quit on September 30 last year.

Subhash Ghisingh

- Subhash Ghisingh, the founder-leader of the movement for a separate homeland for the Gorkhas in northern Bengal, passed away at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in New Delhi. He was 80 and is survived by two sons and a daughter.
- For almost 20 years — from 1988 to 2007 — Mr. Ghisingh headed the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). However, in 2007, his political disciples led by Bimal Gurung formed a separate outfit, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM). Eventually, it became difficult for the legendary Gorkha leader to operate from the hills and he was forced to shift to Siliguri in the plains of north Bengal.

Paulina

- Colombia's Paulina Vega was crowned Miss Universe , beating out contenders from the United States, Ukraine, Jamaica and the Netherlands among the top-five at the world's top beauty pageant in Florida.
- The 22-year-old model and business student triumphed over 87 other women from around the world, becoming only the second beauty queen from her nation to take home the prize.
- The last time Colombia won the crown was in 1958, when Luz Marina Zuluaga took the title.
- A beaming and tearful Vega, wearing a long silver-sequined gown, accepted her sash and crown from the reigning Miss Universe, Gabriela Isler, from Venezuela.
- She hugged first runner-up, Nia Sanchez, from the United States as the win was announced.
- London-born Vega dedicated her title to Colombia and to all her supporters.

Awards & Prizes

Sarabhai award for SHAR director M.Y.S. Prasad

- M.Y.S. Prasad, director of Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota Range (SHAR), has been selected for the Vikram Sarabhai memorial award to be presented by the Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) at a function to be held soon.
- Dr. Prasad is selected for his outstanding contribution to R&D in the field of space science in his long and chequered career at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Prior to Dr. Prasad, those who received this award were former ISRO chairmen Dr. Satish Dhawan, Dr. K. Kasturi Rangan, Dr. G. Madhavan Nair and Dr. K. Radhakrishnan.
- The ISCA, which is a premier scientific organization of the country established in 1914 in Kolkata, has been giving this award in alternate years.

Jhumpa Lahiri wins DSC Prize for 2015

- Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri won the \$50,000 DSC Prize for Literature, one of South Asia's top literary awards for her book, *The Lowland*.
- The Prize celebrates writing on the South Asian region from writers across the globe and is given to the best novel or translations into English of a work on or about the region.
- "This is an enormous honour for *The Lowland* and for me personally. I wish I was there in person to receive the award," Ms. Lahiri said through a phone conversation from Rome. Publisher Caroline Newbury accepted the award on her behalf.

List of Padma Awardees

- Following is the list of 104 persons conferred Padma Awards. They include nine Padma Vibhushan and 20 Padma Bhushan awardees.

Padma Bhushan

- Jahnu Barua (Art), Assam; Vijay Bhatkar (Science and Engineering), Maharashtra; Swapan Dasgupta (Literature and Education), Delhi; Swami Satyamitranand Giri (Others), Uttar Pradesh; N. Gopalaswami (Civil Service), Tamil Nadu; Subhash C. Kashyap (Public Affairs), Delhi; Gokulotsavji Maharaj (Art), Madhya Pradesh; Ambrish Mithal (Medicine), Delhi; Sudha Ragunathan (Art), Tamil Nadu; Harish Salve (Public Affairs), Delhi; Ashok Seth (Medicine), Delhi; Rajat Sharma (Literature and Education), Delhi; Satpal (Sports), Delhi; Shivakumara Swami (Others), Karnataka; Kharag Singh Valdiya (Science and Engg), Karnataka; Manjul Bhargava (Science and Engg), USA; David Frawley (Others), USA; Bill Gates (Social Work), USA; Melinda Gates (Social Work), USA; and Saichiro Misumi (Others), Japan.

Padma Vibhushan

- Name (discipline), State/country: L.K. Advani (Public Affairs), Gujarat; Amitabh Bachchan (Art), Maharashtra; Prakash Singh Badal (Public Affairs), Punjab; D. Veerendra Heggade (Social Work), Karnataka; Dilip Kumar (Art), Maharashtra; Jagadguru Rambhadracharya (Others), Uttar Pradesh; Malur Ramaswamy Srinivasan

(Science and Engg), Tamil Nadu; Kottayan K. Venugopal (Public Affairs), Delhi; and Karim Al Hussaini Aga Khan (Trade and Industry) France/U.K.

Padma Shri

- Manjula Anagani (Medicine), Telangana; S. Arunan (Science and Engg), Karnataka; Kanyakumari Avasarala (Art), Tamil Nadu; Bettina Sharada Baumer (Literature and Education), J&K; Naresh Bedi (Art), Delhi; Ashok Bhagat (Social Work), Jharkhand; Sanjay Leela Bhansali (Art), Maharashtra; Lakshmi Nandan Bora (Literature and Education), Assam; Gyan Chaturvedi (Literature and Education), Madhya Pradesh; Yogesh Kumar Chawla (Medicine), Chandigarh; Jayakumari Chikkala (Medicine), Delhi; Bibek Debroy (Literature and Education), Delhi; Sarungbam Bimola Kumari Devi (Medicine), Manipur; Ashok Gulati (Public Affairs), Delhi; Randeep Guleria (Medicine), Delhi; K.P. Haridas (Medicine), Kerala; Rahul Jain (Art), Delhi; Ravindra Jain (Art), Maharashtra; Sunil Jogi (Literature and Education), Delhi; Prasoon Joshi (Art), Maharashtra; Prafulla Kar (Art), Odisha; Saba Anjum (Sports), Chhattisgarh; Ushakiran Khan (Literature and Education), Bihar; Rajesh Kotecha (Medicine), Rajasthan; Alka Kriplani (Medicine), Delhi; Harsh Kumar (Medicine), Delhi; Narayana Purushothama Mallaya (Literature & Education), Kerala; Lambert Mascarenhas (Literature and Education), Goa; Janak Palta McGilligan (Social Work), Madhya Pradesh; Veerendra Raj Mehta (Social Work), Delhi; Tarak Mehta (Art), Gujarat; Neil Herbert Nongkynrih (Art), Meghalaya; Chewang Norphel (Others), Jammu and Kashmir; T.V. Mohandas Pai (Trade and Industry), Karnataka; Tejas Patel (Medicine), Gujarat; Jadav Molai Peyang (Others), Assam; Bimla Poddar (Others), Uttar Pradesh; N. Prabhakar (Science and Engg), Delhi; Prahalada (Science and Engg), Maharashtra; Narendra Prasad (Medicine), Bihar; Ram Bahadur Rai (Literature and Education), Delhi; Mithali Raj (Sports), Telangana; P.V. Rajaraman (Civil Service), Tamil Nadu; J.S. Rajput (Literature and Education), Uttar Pradesh; Kota Srinivasa Rao (Art), Andhra Pradesh; Bimal Roy (Literature and Education), West Bengal; Shekhar Sen (Art), Maharashtra; Gunvant Shah (Literature and Education), Gujarat; Brahmdev Sharma (Literature and Education), Delhi; Manu Sharma (Literature and Education), Uttar Pradesh; Yog Raj Sharma (Medicine), Delhi; Vasant Shastri (Science and Engg), Karnataka; S.K. Shivkumar (Science and Engg), Karnataka; P.V. Sindhu (Sports), Telangana; Sardara Singh (Sports), Haryana; Arunima Sinha (Sports), Uttar Pradesh; Mahesh Raj Soni (Art), Rajasthan; Nikhil Tandon (Medicine), Delhi; H Thegtse Rinpoche (Social Work), Arunachal Pradesh; Hargovind Laxmishanker Trivedi (Medicine), Gujarat; Huang Baosheng (Others), China; Jacques Blamont (Science and Engg), France; Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin (Others), Maharashtra (Posthumous); Jean-Claude Carriere (Literature and Education), France; Nandrajan 'Raj' Chetty (Literature and Education), France; George L Hart (Others), USA; Jagat Guru Amrta Suryananda Maha Raja (Others), Portugal; Meetha Lal Mehta (Social Work), Rajasthan (Posthumous); Tripti Mukherjee (Art), USA; Dattatreya Nori (Medicine), USA; Raghu Rama Pillarisetti (Medicine), USA; Saumitra Rawat (Medicine), UK; Annette Schmiedchen (Literature and Education), Germany; Pran Kumar Sharma alias Pran (Art), Delhi (Posthumous); and R. Vasudevan (Civil Service), Tamil Nadu (Posthumous) .

Raghuram Rajan wins 'Governor of the Year' award

- RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan has been named 'Governor of the Year' by Central Banking Publications. In a statement, the publication said that the award recognises, "Raghuram Rajan's disciplined and focussed approach leading the Reserve Bank of

India during his first year as Governor was remarkably impressive.

- Accepting the award, Raghuram Rajan said: “Of course, no central bank works alone. The important role played by the government in maintaining fiscal discipline, in initiating growth-friendly structural reforms and in launching ambitious new financial sector programmes, such as rolling out bank accounts for all, has been critical to any success the economy has had, and is likely to have.
- “Moreover, all our collective efforts should be seen as work-in-progress — inflation has to be fully tamed, growth has to be brought back to potential and the banking system cleaned of distressed assets, even while we build the platform for the financial sector to support strong and sustainable growth.

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