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AWARDS AND HONOURS

Name of the Award	Award Winner	Key Points to Note
2015 Turing Award	Whitfield Diffie and Martin Hellman	They created the famous Diffie-Hellman public-key exchange protocol
Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Awards	Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport	Awarded the world's number 1 position for best airport for the second consecutive year.
FMSCI Motorsports Man of the Year Trophy	Armaan Ebrahim	The ceremony was organised by the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) in New Delhi.
Brain Prize	Tim Bliss, Graham Collingridge and Richard Morris	Brain Prize worth one million euros
Bihari Puraskar	Poet Dr Bhagwati Lal Vyas	For his anthology of Rajasthani poems 'Katha Sun Aawe Hai Sabad'.
Dadasaheb Phalke Award	Actor Manoj Kumar	47th Dadasaheb Phalke Award for the year 2015
Krutitava Smagra Samman	Padma Sachdev	Renowned Dogri poetess and writer
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)	Visitor's Awards	President's awards for excellence
Anand Mahindra	France's Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur	Mahindra & Mahindra chairman and managing director
Kerala Tourism campaign	Golden City Award	Titled "New Worlds", the multimedia campaign containing three short films
Hanan Al Hroub	\$1m global prize	The winner was announced at an awards ceremony in Dubai
Abdulqadir Rashik	United Nations #LinksSDGs Data Visualization Challenge	ENTREPRENEUR and founder of India-based Miavy Systems
Sir Andrew Wiles	Abel Prize	British professor
Carol	LGBT film of all time	Todd Haynes' atmospheric lesbian love story, Carol
Tikka Shatrujit Singh	Knight of the Legion of Honour	The great-grandson and heir of Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala
M Venkaiah Naidu	Skoch Lifetime Achievement Award	At 43 rd SKOCH summit held in New Delhi.
DataWind	Recognized for the tablet brand with maximum consumer pull	The leader in delivering Internet access to emerging MARKETS
Cairn India	FICCI Excellence Awards	Top deciles of safety performance
DLF Mall	Best Retail Project of the Year	At CNBC Awaaz Real Estate Awards held in Mumbai

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Himachal Pradesh	Krishi Karman Award	For its landmark achievement in showing highest production of food grains
Geetakshi Arora	Noor Inayat Khan Prize	Indian-origin student
M Sukumaran	CV Kunhiraman Literary Prize	Renowned Malayalam writer
Late Captain Shankar Laxman	Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award	
PR Sreejesh and Deepika	Dhruv Batra Player of the Year Award	
President Francois Hollande	Legion d'Honneur	France's highest honour
Kanika Dewan, Dhivya Suryadevara, Shaurya Veer Himatsingka and Sheetal Amte-Karajgi	Young Global Leaders Class of 2016.	Given by World Economic Forum
Priyanka Kakodkar and Raksha Kumar	Chameli Devi Jain award	Both are Journalists
Bhawan Singh	Life Time Achievement award	Award presented in National Photography Awards
Pallavi Fauzdar	Limca Book of Records	First woman solo biker to reach the tip of Mana pass in Uttarakhand.

Zee Cine Awards 2016

Bengali Film Category

- Best Actress: Churni Ganguly for Nirbashito
- Best Actor: Prosenjit
- Best Film: Belaseshe

Marathi Film Category

- Best Actress: Amrita Subhash for Killa
- Best Actor: Nana Patekar for Natsamrat
- Best Film: Natsamrat

Bollywood Category

- Editing: Masaan
- Best Product Design: Bajirao Mastani
- Best Sound Design: Bajirao Mastani
- Best Background Score: Bajirao Mastani
- Best VFX: Bajirao Mastani
- Best Action: Bajirao Mastani
- Best Choreographer: Ganesh Acharya for 'Malhari' from Bajirao Mastani
- Best Cinematography: Sudeep Chatterjee for Bajirao Mastani
- Best Story: Juhi Chaturvedi for Piku
- Best Dialogues: Juhi Chaturvedi Piku

- Lifetime Achievement Award: Veeru Devgn
- Best Lyrics: Varun Grover for 'Moh Moh ke Dhaage' from Dum Laga Ke Haisha
- Best Music: Anu Malik for 'Moh Moh ke Dhaage' from Dum Laga Ke Haisha
- International Icon Award: Anil Kapoor
- Best Playback Singer (Female): Shreya Ghoshal for 'Mohe Rang Do Lal' from Bajirao Mastani
- Best Playback Singer (Male): Arijit Singh for 'Sooraj Dooba Hai' from Royand Mohit Chauhan for 'Matargashti' from Tamasha
- Best Debutant Male: Vicky Kaushal for Masaan
- Best Debutant Female: Bhoomi Padnekar for Dum Laga Ke Haisha and Harshaali Malhotra for Bajrangi Bhaijaan
- Best Debutant Director: Neeraj Ghaywan for Masaan
- Best Actor in Comic Role: Nawazuddin Siddiqui for Bajrangi Bhaijaan
- Best Actor in Negative Role: Nawazuddin Siddiqui for Badlapur
- Best Actor in Supporting Role: Sanjay Mishra for Masaan
- Best Actress in Supporting Role: Shweta Triphati for Masaan
- Song of the Year: Prem Ratan Dhan Payo
- Best Actor: Salman Khan for Bajrangi Bhaijaan
- Best Actress: Deepika Padukone for Bajirao Mastani
- Best Film: Bajrangi Bhaijaan

Jury Awards

- Best Actress: Deepika Padukone for Piku
- Best Actor: Amitabh Bachchan for Piku and Ranveer Singh for Bajirao Mastani
- Best Director: Sanjay Leela Bansali for Bajirao Mastani
- Best Film: Bajirao Mastani

Jain Teerthankar idol enters "Guinness book of records"

A 108—feet tall idol of Lord Rishabhdeva, the first Teerthankar of Jains, carved out of a single rock, has entered the "Guinness World Records" as the world's tallest Jain statue. The impressive statue is located atop Mangi Tungi mountain near Teharabad village of Baglan tehsil in this North Maharashtra district.

PM Modi among TIME's 30 Influential People on Internet

According to the TIME Magazine's report, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is among the most influential people on the Internet. The list includes US presidential hopeful Donald Trump, reality TV star Kim Kardashian and her husband Kanye West, author J K Rowling, former Olympic athlete Caitlyn Jenner and soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo.

Arvind Kejriwal named among world's 50 greatest leaders by Fortune

Arvind Kejriwal has been named among the world's 50 greatest leaders by Fortune magazine with the Delhi Chief Minister being the sole Indian leader on the list topped by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. 47-year-old Aam Aadmi Party chief is ranked 42nd on the list and is the sole leader from India.

Tenth Asian Film Awards : Complete List of Winners

- **Best Film:** The Assassin
- **Best Director:** Hou Hsiao-Hsien for The Assassin
- **Best Actor:** Lee Byung-hun for The Inside Men
- **Best Actress:** Shu Qi for The Assassin
- **Best Newcomer:** Jessie Li for Port of Call
- **Best Supporting Actor:** Tadanobu Asano for Journey to the Shore
- **Best Supporting Actress:** Zhou Yun for The Assassin
- **Best Screenplay:** Jia Zhangke for Mountains May Depart
- **Best Cinematography:** Mark Lee Ping-bing for The Assassin
- **Best Production Design:** Hwarng Wern-ying for The Assassin
- **Best Original Music:** Lim Giong for The Assassin
- **Best Editing:** William Chang Suk-ping, Chu Ka-yat, Liao Ching-sung, Wong Hoi, Philip Yung for Port of Call
- **Best Visual Effects:** Prasad Sutar for Bajirao Mastani
- **Best Costume Design:** Lee Ji-yeon and Shim Hyun-seob for The Throne
- **Best Sound:** Chu Shih-yi, Tu Duu-chih and Wu Shu-yao for The Assassin
- **Lifetime Achievement Award:** Yuen Wo-ping and Kirin Kiki

63rd National Film Awards : Complete List of Winners

- Best Film: Baahubali
- Best Director: Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 'Bajirao Mastani'
- Best Actor: Amitabh Bachchan, Piku
- Best Actress: Kangana Ranaut, Tanu Weds Manu Returns
- Best Hindi Film: Dum Laga Ke Haisha
- Best Choreography: Remo D'Souza, Deewani Mastani song in Bajirao Mastani
- Best Malayalam Film: Pathemari, Artistically narrated saga of 2 generations of Malayali workers who migrated to gulf for livelihood
- Best Tamil Film: Visaranai
- Best Telugu Film: Kanche
- Best Sanskrit Film: Priyamanasam
- Best Kannada Film: Thithi

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- Best Konkani Film: Enemy
- Best Assamese Film: Kothanodi
- Best Haryanvi Film: Satrangi
- The Head Hunter bags Best Wanchi Film
- Best Khasi Film: Onaatah
- Best Manipuri Film: Eibusu Yaohanbiyu
- Best Mizo Film: Kima's Lode Beyond the Class

APPOINTMENTS

Name of the Persons	Post/Department
Rozle Prezlj	Chairman of the IAAF Athletes' Commission
Sunil Sabharwal	Alternate Executive Director at IMF
Mrugank Paranjape	MD & CEO of the exchange
TCS chief N Chandrasekaran	Non-official director to the board of Reserve Bank of India (RBI)
MS Dhoni	Revital H brand ambassador
Kangana Ranaut	Reebok India's brand ambassador
BS Chauhan	Law Commission Chairman
Ahmed Abul Gheit	Secretary General of Arab League
NPS Hira	Deputy Chief of Army Staff
Saini	VC of Canberra University
Ashley Judd	UN Goodwill Ambassador
Michelle Yeoh	UNDP goodwill ambassador
Amar Abrol	CEO of AirAsia India
Fazle Kabir	Governor of Bangladesh's Central Bank
Ritu Beri	Advisor for Khadi promotion
Gautam Sinha	CEO of Times of India Group's digital wing, Times Internet
Messi	Huawei global ambassador
S Sridhar	MD of Pfizer India
HL Dattu	Member of International Human Rights body
Mukund Padmanabhan	New editor of The Hindu
Justice Permod Kohli	Chairman of Central Administrative Tribunal
Bhushan Patil	Paytm's President
Surya Deva	UN Human Rights Commissioner
Nandita Bakshi	CEO of Bank of the West
S Ramadorai	Public Interest Director and chairman of BSE
Patrick Dupuis	Wipro's Board of Directors
Faustin Archange Touadera	Central African Republic's new President
Jitendra Jagota	Indian Direct Selling Association's Chairman

BANKING AND FINANCE

GOI to get Rs 17308 Crore dividend from Coal India Ltd

The Board of Directors of Coal India Ltd (CIL) has approved the payment of Interim dividend for the financial year **2015-16 @ Rs. 27.40** a share on the face value of Rs. 10.

- The payment of interim dividend would start from March 21, CIL informed stock exchanges. Earlier, CIL had fixed March 15 as the 'record date' for the purpose of payment of interim dividend. The total outgo for the CIL's interim dividend would be around Rs. 20, 830 crore including the dividend distribution tax.
- The Government of India, which holds 79.65 per cent stake in CIL, will get Rs. 17,308 crore.
- The government has been able to mobilise a little over Rs 18,300 crore from divestment this fiscal year till February against the target of Rs 69,500 crore due to volatility in stock markets.

GOI to set up panel for consolidation of Public Sector Banks

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that the government of India will soon set up an expert group to look into consolidation of public sector banks as the country needs stronger rather than a large number of banks. The GOI is considering **Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)** for PSU bank officials besides strengthening the **SARFAESI Act** and **Debt Recovery Tribunals** to deal with the problems of stressed assets that are estimated at around Rs.8 lakh crore.

SBI gets preliminary approval for Myanmar branch

The State Bank of India is among four new foreign banks given preliminary approval to open 100 per cent-owned branches in **Myanmar**. The Southeast Asian nation has made this move to woo investment to the country long ruled by the military and hit by Western sanctions. The four new banks that have been given initial approval by the Central Bank of Myanmar are **Vietnam's Bank for Investment and Development**, **Taiwan's E.SUN Commercial Bank**, **South Korea's Shinhan Bank** and the **State Bank of India**.

Capital Area Bank first to get small finance bank licence

Capital Local Area Bank, a Jalandhar-based local area bank, has emerged as the first entity to have received the **Reserve Bank of India's** licence to start operations as a **small finance bank**. **Capital**, which claims to be the largest local bank in the country, currently has 44 branches in five districts of **Punjab** and three more would be opened by March 31. During the first five years as a small finance bank, it will focus on northern region.

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SoftBank splits into two subsidiaries

Japanese investment bank **SoftBank Group Corp** has announced a major reorganisation of its businesses. The firm has said that it would separate its profitable domestic mobile business from its global business, which includes a majority stake in US mobile operator Sprint Corp. SoftBank's President **Nikesh Arora** will now head the overseas management company, whose holdings also include a 32 per cent share of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and a range of other Internet and technology firms.

ICICI Bank offers 'work-from-home' for women

ICICI Bank announced the launch of a work-from-home programme to prevent women employees from dropping out of its workforce. The company has deployed face recognition technology to facilitate women to work from home and provide access to the bank's core banking servers under. The programme **iWork@ home** will enable almost every non-customer facing task to be done from home. The platform is designed not only to recognise the employees face; it also logs her out if she leaves her seat or if another face appears within range of the camera.

CBDT sets up dedicated structure for monitoring taxpayer services

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has set up a dedicated structure for delivery and monitoring of tax payer services in the income tax department. The **Tax Administration Reforms Commission's (TARC)** Report had accorded considerable importance to redressal of grievances and a customer focussed approach in the Department through creation of a tax payer services vertical. The creation of this structure will fulfil some of the most significant recommendations of the TARC.

Fitch maintains India's growth forecast at 7.5%

Global rating agency **Fitch** has maintained its growth forecast for India at **7.5 per cent** this fiscal and sees higher growth over the next two financial years. However, 8 per cent growth will remain elusive in the short term. The forecast is largely in line with the Finance Ministry's growth estimates. **The Economic Survey** had also said achieving 8 per cent growth may not be possible in the short run.

SBI Life launches SBI Life – Smart Women Advantage

To commemorate the International Women's Day, SBI Life Insurance has launched '**SBI Life – Smart Women Advantage**' plan that provides for life cover, savings and female-specific critical illness benefits.

- It's a participating individual traditional endowment plan with health concept built into one plan, and also provides optional benefits of additional pregnancy complication, congenital anomalies and child birth related abnormalities, as also other illnesses, SBI Life said in a release.

- The plan carries tax benefits under section 80D and 80C of the Income Tax Act for premiums paid towards health benefits and life cover respectively under the policy.

RBI inks information exchange pact with Bank of Israel

The Reserve Bank has signed a pact with Bank of Israel for exchange of information pertaining to banking supervision. The Reserve Bank has entered into an MoU, **Letter for Supervisory Co-operation and Statement of Co-operation** with supervisors of a few countries to promote greater co-operation and share supervisory information.

GOI announces to withdraw tax proposal on EPF

Presenting the Union Budget for 2016-17, **Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley** had proposed to tax withdrawal of 60 per cent of accumulations in the EPF after April 1, 2016. The government has rolled back the Budget proposal to tax **Employees' Provident Fund** or EPF withdrawal after facing intense criticism from all quarters. Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that the government will be reviewing the proposal.

Yes Bank inc pact with Indo-Brazil chamber

Yes Bank has inked a pact with the India Brazil Chamber of Commerce (IBCC) for cooperation in knowledge sharing, consultancy, skill and technology, and B2B opportunities.

- The core sectors covered in the MoU will be sports, media and entertainment with special focus on **IT, infrastructure**, broadcast driven business opportunities.
- The MoU also seeks for building ground for innovative business integrations for businesses from India and Brazil.

ICICI Bank, Ferrari tie up for credit cards

ICICI Bank launched its new range of co-branded credit cards in association with the Italian luxury sports car manufacturer, Ferrari. The Ferrari Credit Cards, which will be available in two variants — **Ferrari Platinum Credit Card** and **Ferrari Signature Credit Card** — will be offered to elite customers, who are enthusiasts of the iconic luxury brand.

Kotak Mahindra Group ties up with Canada Pension Plan for Investment in Indian stressed assets

The **Kotak Mahindra BSE Group** has tied up with **Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB)** to invest in stressed assets in India to take advantage of opportunities that arise as banks clean up account books of bad assets.

- The agreement entails a total INVESTMENT of up to \$525 million, of which as much as \$450 million will come from CPPIB.

- This investment is aimed at tapping the growing opportunity arising from the current stress in the Indian banking and corporate sectors. Kotak Mahindra and its affiliate Phoenix Asset Reconstruction Co. have been dealing in the distressed and structured credit market for over a decade.
- Kotak will act as an advisor as CPPIB invests in assets that suit its long-term investment mandate.

SBI partners with Uber for instant vehicle financing

Public sector lender SBI has tied up with taxi-aggregator Uber to provide instant vehicle finance to **'driver-partners'** on the latter's platform. The scheme would encourage **skilled drivers** to overcome liquidity crunch and excess documentation requirements to become an entrepreneur.

- All loans will be covered under the government's **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana Scheme**, SBI said in a statement. SBI Managing Director Rajnish Kumar said the new facility would enable drivers to apply for loans at the UBER Partner Centre and get loans sanctioned in one day.

HDFC Bank launches banking solution for startups

HDFC Bank Ltd has launched **SmartUp**, a dedicated banking solution for startups, in association with Zone Startups India, a startup accelerator in Mumbai.

- SmartUp is tailored to meet all the requirements of a startup – **offering banking and payment solutions, along with advisory and FOREX services.**
- The move is done in a bid to create an ecosystem to nurture the spirit of innovation and enterprise in the startup space.
- SmartUp is a **complete banking solution for startups**. The key benefits of SmartUp current account include. Waiver of Average Monthly Balance for the first six months and extendable to 12 months. Salary Account for employees by waiving the minimum number of employees criterion

ICICI starts Contactless Mobile payments option

ICICI Bank has unveiled the country's **first contactless mobile payment solution** to enable its credit and debit customers make in-store contactless payments by just waving their smartphones near an NFC-enabled merchant terminal.

- The mobile payment solution available in the Bank's **'Pockets' app**, provides improved convenience of 'Touch & Pay' as customers are no longer required to carry physical card or cash to pay in stores.
- ICICI Bank is the *first financial institution in the country to leverage the Host Card Emulation (HCE) technology to bring forth this solution.*

**Good, better, best. Never let it rest. 'Til your good is better
and your better is best.**

IDBI starts India's first G-Sec facility via ATMs

IDBI Bank has launched a first-of-its kind “**G-Sec INVESTMENT facility through ATM for retail investors.**”

The facility will provide easy access to retail investors to INVEST in Government Securities, the public sector bank said in a statement. Retail customers of the bank can register, one time, for this facility and INVEST in G-Sec through ATMs.

- This facility is unique and first of its kind initiative of the Bank to provide easy access to retail investors to INVEST in **Government Securities**.
- This furthers the Bank's contribution to promote and popularize retail participation in Government Securities in line with the **Government of India** and **RBI's efforts towards broad basing** and expanding retail holding of Government Securities in the country.

5600 wilful defaulters owe banks Rs 60K Crore

According to the data from credit information bureau **CIBIL**, more than 5,600 borrowers, who owe banks close to Rs 60,000 crore, have been declared wilful defaulters by lenders as on December 31. These instances of wilful default are those where banks have filed suits.

- The country's largest lender **State Bank of India (SBI)** is owed Rs 12,091 crore, followed by another state-run lender **Punjab National Bank (PNB)** which has receivables of Rs 9,445 crore lent to 698 borrowers.
- **Kotak Mahindra Bank** has the highest amount of loans stuck with wilful defaulters among private sector banks at Rs 5,442 crore.
- Wilful defaults for private sector banks stood at Rs 10,250 crore and at Rs 463 crore for foreign banks.

RBI revises rules for resolution of stressed MSME loans

The Reserve Bank of India revised rules pertaining to **revival of advances to small businesses** and asked lenders to **form district-level committees to resolve stressed loans to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)**.

- The rules have been revised for “revival and rehabilitation of MSMEs having loan limits up to **Rs 25 crore**”.
- The notification follows a May 2015 government decision to provide a simple and fast mechanism to address stress in accounts of MSMEs and also help in the promotion of such businesses.

In order to succeed, we must first believe that we can.

RBI eases norms for power utility debt holding

The Reserve Bank has provided some relief to banks holding bonds of debt-ridden **State Electricity Boards (SEBs)** that were issued to them as part of the cleaning up exercises of these power utilities.

- Banks have been allowed to keep **Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY)** scheme bonds under the held-to-maturity (HTM) category.
- This will ease pressure on bond yields and debt **MARKET**, sources said.
- HTM refers a part of debt holdings of the banks which are not subjected to daily price movement and can be held by banks till maturity.

Hitachi to setup ATM making firm in India

Hitachi-Omron Terminal Solutions Corp (Hitachi-Omron Terminal Solutions) has established Hitachi Terminal Solutions India Pvt Ltd (Hitachi Terminal Solutions India) to be based in Bengaluru as an ATM manufacturing company.

- The new company has been set up with a capital of Rs 100 crore and is set a target to produce **1,500 units of ATMs** per month at the end of calendar year 2016.
- The new entity is expected to commence production in June 2016.
- Hitachi has deployed over 5,000 units of ATM in India by 2015 and at present, there are about two lakh ATMs and CDs (Cash Dispensing ATMs) operating in the country.

Aadhaar enabled e-KYC can save Rs 10,000 cr over next 5 yrs : Survey

Aadhaar enabled e-KYC (Know Your Customer) process could save over **Rs 10,000 crore for banks and telecom operators** over the next five years, says a survey.

- According to a recent study by **MicroSave**, a development consulting firm, using Aadhaar enabled e-KYC process for customer acquisition, could be highly beneficial for banks and telecom operators in India.
- The study further said that apart from substantial cost savings for banks and **FINANCIAL** institutions, Aadhaar enabled e-KYC is significantly more efficient compared to current paper-based KYC.

IOB becomes first bank to sell Indian GOLD coins

Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) has become the **first bank to commence the sale of Indian Gold Coin (IGC)** in the domestic **MARKET**.

- It has tied up with **MMTC** for the sale of IGC of **24 carat purity**.
- The IGC has the national emblem, **the Ashok Chakra, engraved on one side and the face of Mahatma Gandhi on the other**.
- The coin carries advanced anti-counterfeit features and comes in tamper-proof packaging.

- The current denominations available are **5, 10 and 20 gm**. IGC is the first ever national gold offering by the Centre and was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 5.

RBI eases reporting of NEFT by non-A/C holders

The Reserve Bank said it is discontinuing a two-year-old provision where banks had to submit data pertaining to NEFT transactions by walk-in customers not having an account with them.

- The Central Bank said banks should continue to maintain the relevant records, adding as and when required, the Reserve Bank can call for ad hoc reports regarding the data.
- A survey and incognito visits by RBI at bank branches had resulted in introduction of the provision in January 2014. It was slated to be in place for a year.
- “It was also observed that, in many cases, the officers/staff dealing with the NEFT desk at different branches were not aware of many of the above features of NEFT and customers were not guided properly,” the RBI had said.

GOI allows 49% automatic route FDI in Insurance

Seeking to attract more foreign investment, the government has relaxed FDI norms for insurance sector by permitting overseas companies to buy **49 per cent stake** in domestic insurers without prior approval.

- Currently, FDI up to 26 per cent is permitted through automatic approval route. For FDI up to 49 per cent, the approval of Foreign Investment Promotion Board is required.
- There are 52 insurance companies operating in India, of which 24 are in the life insurance business and 28 in the general insurance.
- During April-December 2015, FDI into the country grew by 40 per cent to USD 29.44 billion.

Government cancels recognition of Delhi Stock Exchange

The government has formally withdrawn the recognition of **Delhi STOCK Exchange**, more than a year after capital Market regulator **Sebi** derecognised the bourse citing “**serious irregularities**” in its functioning.

- DSE was among the few bourses that were given permanent recognition by the **Securities and Exchange Board of India** (Sebi), as per information available on the regulator’s website.
- In a notification dated March 16, the Finance Ministry said the recognition granted to the Delhi Stock Exchange Ltd “stands withdrawn”.
- Under certain provisions of the **Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956**, the recognition to a recognised stock exchange can be withdrawn if it “has not been corporatised and demutualised within the specified time”.

IRDA gives nod to LIC to Invest in PSBs

Insurance regulator **IRDA** is satisfied with the investments of **LIC** in public sector banks. After a scrutiny of its investments in **PSU** banks, the regulator has given a clean chit to the largest domestic institution with assets of close to Rs 18 lakh crore. IRDA along with regulators, including the RBI and the **Sebi**, is conducting regulatory scrutiny of large institutions which can pose systemic risk in the economy.

India's current account deficit narrows to 1.3% of GDP

India's **current account deficit** narrowed to **1.3% of the gross domestic product (GDP)** in the fiscal **third quarter**, from 1.5% in the year earlier as Trade deficit contracted. Data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed trade deficit during the October-December quarter narrowed to \$34 billion from \$38.6 billion during the same period in 2014-15.

- CAD mirrors the difference between domestic savings and domestic Investment, and conveys the extent of this gap that needs to be bridged by foreign savings.
- CAD narrowed to 1.4% of GDP in the nine months ended 31 December, from 1.7% in the corresponding period of 2014-15.
- India's merchandise exports have been declining continuously since December 2014 because of sluggish global demand and low Commodity prices, particularly Oil.

Core banking facility available at 25K post offices by April

The Department of Posts will offer core banking solutions (CBS) to its customers at **25,000 post offices by April**, against **20,494 CBS-enabled branches**.

- CBS-enabled post offices allow customers to access their postal savings from any of the branches where the facility is available.
- Postal department's digitisation is integral to Digital India.
- The core banking linkage of post offices is bigger than that of State Bank of India, which has 16,333 CBS-enabled branches.
- Core banking is a banking service provided by a group of networked bank branches where customers may access their bank account and perform basic transactions from any of the member branch offices.

Government hikes dearness allowance by 6%

In the eve of **Holi festival**, the government hiked **dearness allowance (DA)** by 6 per cent, benefiting over 1 crore central government employees and pensioners.

- The hike, which will cost the exchequer an additional Rs 14,724.74 crore annually, will take effect from January 1, 2016, telecom minister **Ravi Shankar Prasad** told reporters after the meeting of the Union Cabinet which took the decision.

- The burden on exchequer would be **Rs 6,795.5 crore** towards central government employees and **Rs 7,929.24 crore** towards pensioners during 2016-17, he said.
- The DA, which will benefit, 50 lakh central government employees and 58 lakh pensioners, will go up from the existing **119 per cent to 125 per cent**.

Edelweiss announces buy of JPMAM India

Edelweiss Asset Management announced on that it had agreed to acquire the onshore Fund schemes managed by **JPMorgan Asset Management India** (JPMAM), including its India-based onshore mutual Fund business and the international fund of funds. The buyout is subject to regulatory approvals.

- **JPMorgan** is the seventh global financial services firm to exit the Indian mutual fund (MF) sector in the past three years.
- Last year, **Goldman Sachs** sold its MF business to Reliance Capital for Rs 243 crore in a deal valued at 3.4 per cent of the former's Indian assets under management (AUM).

South Indian Bank gets ISO 9001:2008 certification

South Indian Bank has announced that its personnel department has achieved the **ISO 9001:2008** certification.

- The ISO 9001:2008 certification acknowledges that the policies, practices and methods adopted by the department are system oriented and in tandem with international standards.
- ISO 9001:2008 specifies the requirements for a quality management system where an organization:
 - a) Needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable regulatory requirements, and
 - b) Aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable regulatory requirements.

RBI revises liquidity measuring rules for Basel III

The Reserve Bank has revised certain rules on measuring liquidity for **Basel-III norms**, providing **exemption to branches of foreign banks from submitting statement with regard to foreign Currency**.

- In view of developments since the issue of circulars regarding Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR), Liquidity Risk Monitoring Tools and LCR Disclosure Standards, feedback received from the stakeholders and experience gained, it has been decided to amend certain provisions of these guidelines, RBI said in a notification.
- The revision also includes *asking banks to exclude certain loans backed by deposits from liquidity coverage ratio calculations*.

- As branches of foreign banks do not hold any foreign currency, they are exempted from submitting this statement with effect from the date of this circular, the revised guidelines said.
- All banks in India, including branches of foreign banks are required to report this on a monthly basis, going by the existing norms.

RuPay to launch credit cards in September

After increasing its Market share to 38 per cent in the debit card segment, RuPay, domestic card payment service provider, will be venturing into the credit card space this September.

- It plans to issue **100,000** such cards in the first year of its launch.
- It will initially focus on two variants of a credit card — **Regular and Platinum** — and gradually extend its portfolio to offer co-branded cards.
- RuPay is a brand owned and developed by NPCI (from 2012) to compete against global payment schemes of the likes of Visa and MasterCard.
- NPCI was promoted by 10 Indian banks.
- From 2017, the target is to issue 500,000 to a million such credit cards every year.

Federal Bank to open startup incubation centres

Kerala-based private sector lender **Federal Bank** is opening incubation centres for startups in **Bangalore** and **Ernakulam**. These specialised lounges in the bank's branches will offer advice on capital, regulatory support and even disburse Funds

- These lounges, named **Launchpad** – with fast internet connections, support staff from the financial world and advisory mechanisms – would be the perfect breeding ground for future entrepreneurs.
- The lounges would be manned by bank executives capable of dealing with the **FINANCIAL** requirements of startups as well as local specialists who would be able to advise on regulatory issues.
- The bank is also mirroring **HDFC Bank** and **SBI** in integrating its platform with mobile payments application '**Chillr**'.

USAID, ADB sign 'Develop Solar Parks' MoU

The **US Agency for International Development (USAID)** and the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** have signed an MoU to facilitate **USD 848 million (Rs. 5,681 crore)** in funding to develop solar parks across India. The agreement was signed by **Jonathan Addleton**, Mission Director, USAID/India and **M. Teresa Kho**, Country Director, India Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank.

LIC increases stake in IDBI Bank to 14.37%

State-owned lender **IDBI Bank** has informed stock exchanges that **Life Insurance Corp. (LIC) of India** now owns 14.37% stake in the bank. The life insurance behemoth previously owned 7.21% in the bank, which transferred 7.16% equity stake or 15.87 crore shares to LIC.

- With this transaction, IDBI Bank is now the second largest bank holding for LIC. As on 31 December, the insurance provider owned 21.22% stake in Corporation Bank, the highest equity it holds in any lender.
- Apart from these two, LIC owns 14.36% stake in **UCO Bank** and 13.75% stake in **Canara Bank**, at the end of the third quarter.
- The government directly owned an 80.16% stake in IDBI Bank as of 31 December.

100% FDI allowed in e-commerce marketplace model

The government has given the green light to **100% FDI** in the **marketplace format of e-commerce retailing** with a view to attract more foreign investments. As per the guidelines issued by the **Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)** on FDI in e-commerce, foreign direct investment (FDI) has not been allowed in inventory-based model of e-commerce.

- At present, global e-tail giants like Amazon and eBay are operating online marketplaces in India, while homegrown players like Flipkart and Snapdeal have foreign investments even as there were no clear FDI guidelines on various online retail models.
- To bring clarity, the DIPP has also come out with the definition of 'e-commerce', 'inventory-based model' and 'marketplace model'.

CBDT signed 11 unilateral Advance Pricing Agreements

The Central Board of Direct Taxes signed 11 unilateral APAs. With this signing, India has entered into 59 bilateral and/or unilateral APAs.

- The Advance Pricing Agreement (APA) programme was introduced by the Finance Act, 2012 to provide a predictable and non-adversarial tax regime and to reduce litigation in the Indian transfer pricing regime.
- 50 of these agreements have been signed in the current financial year.
- The agreements cover a range of international transactions, including corporate guarantees, royalty, software development services, IT enabled services and trading.
- The agreements pertain to different industrial sectors like telecom, media, automobiles, IT services, etc. Some of the agreements have rollback provisions and provide certainty to the taxpayers for 9 years with regard to the covered international transactions.

A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others.

Current Affairs March 2016 PDF

ADB cuts India's growth forecast to 7.4% for 2016-17

Global headwinds will pull down India's growth rate to 7.4 percent in the next fiscal from 7.6 percent this year but more reforms will help the country remain one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the Asian Development Bank said.

- The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) growth forecast of 7.4 percent for 2016-17 is substantially lower than its earlier projection of 7.8 percent.
- ADB's flagship publication Asian Development Outlook (ADO) also projected rise in consumer inflation, mainly on account of the impact of salary hike of government employees and a likely mild pick up in global oil prices.
- ADB projects India's gross domestic product (GDP) to grow 7.4 percent in FY 2016, slightly below the FY 2015 estimate of 7.6 percent.
- As per India's Finance Ministry's estimates, growth is likely to be between 7-7.75 percent next fiscal year.

RBI, Sri Lanka Central Bank Sign Currency Swap Pact

The Reserve Bank of India said it would allow its Sri Lankan counterpart to draw up to \$700 million over a maximum period of three months under a new special currency swap agreement signed by the two central banks.

- The RBI has previously provided currency swaps to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, including plans to extend a \$1.5 billion agreement by one year.
- Sri Lanka is seeking a loan of \$1.5 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to boost foreign exchange reserves and help avert a balance of payments crisis.
- The country has seen its foreign exchange reserves depleted by the central bank's defence of its rupee currency, as it struggles with heavy debt piled up under the previous government.

RBI cancelled Certificate of Registration of 22 NBFCs

Reserve Bank said it has canceled registration of 22 non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) including that of **Amazon Capital** and **Mascot Commerce**.

- The RBI said it canceled the certificate of registration of the NBFCs in exercise of the powers conferred on it under Section 45-IA (6) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
- Following the cancellation of registration certificate, these companies cannot transact the business of a non-banking financial institution.
- NBFCs whose registration have been canceled include Kundan Leasing and Finvest, Raseera Investments, Limtex Impex, Dignity Motors Finance, Akansha Consultancy Services, Bini Commercial Enterprises, Nirankar Investments, and Surin Investments.
- Earlier this month, the RBI had canceled registration of six other NBFCs.

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.

RBI tweaks rules for interest rates on loans

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has tweaked its norms on the new method of loan rate calculation by banks asking lenders to use the so-called marginal cost of funds calculation for even fixed rate loans up to three years.

- The new interest rate calculation which is set to be adopted by banks from April 1, links banks' loan rates to new deposits and is aimed at ensuring that lending rates are linked directly with RBI interest rate moves.
- The new norms were released in December and had initially provided for exempting all fixed rate loans. The new norms say only fixed rate loans above three years will be exempt.
- Banks can also use balances of deposits of up to seven days prior to the new rate setting to calculate the new interest rate a change from considering deposits only as on the previous day.

LIC increases stake in Dena Bank, Andhra Bank

Public sector lender Dena Bank has raised Rs. 65 crore by issuing over 2 crore shares to Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) on a preferential basis. Andhra Bank also said it has sold an over 4.23 per cent stake to LIC on a preferential allotment, without disclosing the amount.

- Post-acquisition of additional shares in **Dena Bank**, LIC's stake in the lender has gone up to 14.5 per cent from 11.63 per cent earlier, Dena Bank said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday.
- **Andhra Bank** said it has sold over 4.23 per cent stake equivalent to 28,853,210 shares to LIC on a preferential allotment. The price per unit at which Andhra Bank sold shares to LIC was not provided.
- After the additional stake buy in Andhra Bank, LIC holds more than 14.39 per cent in the lender, from over 10.15 per cent earlier.

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Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.

INDIAN AFFAIRS

CBI plans to set up Cyber Crime investigation Branch in Mumbai

The **Central Bureau of Investigation** is exploring the possibility of setting up a cyber crime investigation branch in **Mumbai**. With the increasing number of cyber crime, CBI is planning to set up a special branch in Mumbai. Cyber crime special branch is as of now only located and headquartered in Delhi. CBI is looking forward to support from the state government.

Govt plans to set up more nuclear power plants

In order to meet the India's growing needs, the GOI plans to set up nuclear power plants in **Bihar, Haryana and Punjab**. The GOI aims to increase nuclear power generation capacity by three times in ten years. With regard to nuclear power programme, Singh, the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, said the government is considering setting up new plants in areas not covered before. A site has been identified for a nuclear plant in Razauli in Bihar's Nawada district in the last 18-19 months of the current government.

TCS recognized as Top Global Employer

Tata Consultancy Services, a leading IT services, consulting and business solutions organization has been recognized as a Top Global Employer by the **Top Employers Institute**. This makes it one in only eight organizations worldwide to have achieved this status. In the Top Employers Institute's assessment of 1,072 companies worldwide, TCS has been ranked as an exceptional performer across nine core Human Resources (HR) areas: talent strategy, workforce planning, on-boarding, learning and development, performance management, leadership development, career and succession management, compensation and benefits and company culture.

India ranks 90 in terms of Energy Security

In terms of Energy Security, India has been ranked at the 90th place in a list of 126 countries compiled by WEF, which was topped by Switzerland. The latest **Global Energy Architecture Performance Index Report**, explored the energy architecture of 126 countries based on their ability to provide energy access across three dimensions of the "energy triangle" – affordability, environmental sustainability, security and access. The list was topped by **Switzerland** followed by **Norway** and **Sweden** in the second and third place, respectively.

46 new coal blocks identified in India

The **Geological Survey of India** has identified 46 new coal blocks in the country, out of which 12 are located in **West Bengal**. Out of the 34 new coal blocks outside Bengal, **Chattisgarh** has 12, **Madhya Pradesh** 11, **Maharashtra** 4, **Jharkhand** 1, **Telangana** 2, **North-Eastern regions** 3 and **Andhra Pradesh** 1.

Maresh Kumar Singla committee – Points to remember

The Government of India has constituted a committee to consider Scheduled **Tribes status to six Communities of Assam**. The committee will be headed by Special Secretary (Internal Security) Ministry of Home Affairs, **Maresh Kumar Singla**. The committee will recommend the modalities for granting of Scheduled Tribes status to six Communities namely Koch Rajbongshi, Moran, Matak, Tai Ahom, Chutia and Adivasi (Tea Tribes) in Assam. The Committee will submit its report by 31 May 2016.

Carriage by Air Amendment Bill gets Rajya Sabha nod

A bill that would enhance compensation for air travellers in case of death, injury, lost baggage or even inordinate delay in flights was passed by the Rajya Sabha with some changes. It was cleared by the Lok Sabha in December last year. Since the Rajya Sabha has made changes, the revised bill would again go to the Lower House. Once the legislation is implemented, Indian airlines would be required to pay compensation amount that is equivalent to the rates paid by their global counterparts.

NHAI ties up with ISB for skill development

NHAI has taken a significant step in ensuring development of management competencies of its technical and managerial manpower, with a tie up with **Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad**. With the Government's ambitious plans for infrastructure development in the country, road sector is seen as one of the thrust areas to achieve the objective and ensure sustained economic growth. The programme on "Leadership Programme in Infrastructure Management" in ISB aims at developing skills and competencies relating to multiple disciplines : Strategic Planning, Finance, Economics, Law, Social and Environmental issues, Public Policy etc. in Infrastructure Management.

PM Modi's hometown to be open defecation free

Mehsana district administration has roped in the self-help groups (SHGs) to attain total eradication of open defecation. The district administration will motivate the public to join this sanitation drive in the district. First, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's hometown **Vadnagar** in **Mehsana district** will be made open defecation-free (ODF) before March 15. Later, the district administration has planned to cover **Unjha, Visnagar, Vijapur, Jotana, Bechraji talukas**.

CBI sets up group to deal with financial frauds

The CBI has set up a working group to coordinate with various **financial institutions** to help curb financial frauds. CBI Director **Anil Sinha** said that the group will meet regularly and go into various aspects relating to early detection of frauds and defaults. He said, the working group will look into every default so that it can be declared fraud swiftly and CBI can investigate them expeditiously.

Election Commission announces 5 state assembly poll dates

Chief Election Commissioner **Nasim Zaidi** has announced the poll schedule for **West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and the Union Territory of Puducherry**. While elections will be held on different dates in the four states and one UT, all the results will be declared on May 19. The Model Code of Conduct will be enforced with immediate effect and the governments of the poll-bound states as well as the Centre would not be able to announce any new schemes or programmes that may influence the voters.

PM Narendra Modi launches Setu Bharatam Project

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has inaugurated an ambitious Rs 50,800-crore **Setu Bharatam project**, under which a total of 208 railway crossings will be replaced by rail over bridges (ROBs). As part of the project, 1,500 bridges of the British era will be overhauled at an estimated expenditure of Rs. 30,000 crore. The ministry has already launched an Indian Bridge Management System to map 1,50,000 bridges across the country.

Abolition of Interview for Group C and D Services

The Central Government has decided to dispense with the interview for all **Group C** (including Group D) and non-gazetted Group B category in Central Government by 31.12.2015. Accordingly, instructions have been issued to the Staff Selection Commission mandated with the recruitment of mainly Group B (Non-Gazetted) and Group C (Non-technical) posts in the Central Ministries/Departments to discontinue the interview in all mandated recruitments commencing from 1.1.2016.

India denies visa to members of US religious commission

US commission scheduled to visit India to discuss and report on the conditions of religious freedom in the country has been denied visa by the Indian government.

- A three-member delegation of US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) wanted to make a one-week visit to meet with government officials, religious leaders and activists in India.
- This is not the first time the USCIRF members have not been issued visas. The members, who prepare an annual report on religious freedom in countries across the globe, were denied the visas for the first time in previous UPA regime.
- USCIRF has been able to travel to many countries, including those that are among the worst offenders of religious freedom, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, China and Burma.

Climate change may kill half million people by 2050

According to new research published in the **Lancet**, Climate change could kill more than 500,000 people a year globally by 2050 by making their diets less healthy.

- The research is the strongest evidence yet that climate change could have damaging consequences for food production and health worldwide.

- Researcher Marco Springmann from the University of Oxford said that much research has looked at food security, but little has focused on the wider health effects of agricultural production.
- Changes in food availability and intake also affect dietary and weight-related risk factors such as low fruit and vegetable intake, high red meat consumption, and high bodyweight.
- These all increase the incidence of non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and cancer and death from them.

SC refuses interim relief to telcos on call drop

The Supreme Court has declined any interim relief to telecom companies against the **Delhi High Court's** order upholding **TRAI's** decision making it mandatory for them to compensate subscribers for call drops from January 1, 2016.

- The telecoms said a “**100 per cent call drop-free network**” is impossible under the Law of Physics and will cost them hundreds of crores in compensation payable to customers every month.
- **The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)**, on the other hand, maintained that its Telecom Consumers Protection (9th Amendment) Regulations, 2015 — which was upheld by the Delhi High Court last month — was framed purely in the interest of the common man.
- The petition has been filed jointly by the Cellular Operators Association of India, and telecom majors such as Bharti Airtel, Aircel, Vodafone, Idea Cellular and Telenor.

GOI to digitise all rural post offices by 2017

IT and telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told in Parliament that the government plans to digitise nearly 1.3 lakh rural post offices by March 2017. The government has approved Rs 4,909 crore for modernisation of 1.55 lakh post offices including 1.29 lakh post offices in rural areas, called Gramin Dak Sewak post offices. The modernisation process will include setting up centralised data centres and disaster recovery centres, networking of all post offices.

Paytm ties up with Delhi Metro for card recharge

Paytm has tied up with Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). As a part of the agreement, Delhi Metro travellers will be able to recharge their metro cards via Paytm and DMRC website. The announcement was made on the company's blog and the service was also launched. The move is made in a bid to make traveling by Metro a hassle free experience for over 2.3 Mn commuters that use the Metro train service on a daily basis.

President inaugurates National Conference on Women Legislation

President Pranab Mukherjee inaugurates first-ever National Conference of Women Legislators in New Delhi. President Mukherjee said the country has not been able to achieve more than 12 per cent representation for women out of the total membership of Parliament. The meeting with the theme, 'Role of Women Legislators in Nation Building', has been organised by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan.

Traditional Chapchar Kut festival celebrated across Mizoram

Chapchar Kut, the most important traditional festival of the Mizoram people was celebrated across the state and also in the Mizo-inhabited areas in the neighbouring states. Dressed in traditional attire, exuberant dancers danced to the tune of typical music and songs while popular Mizo dances including Cheraw, Sarlamkai, Chheihlam and Khuallam were performed by different cultural troupes.

Stone laid for Octomax Unit at Mathura Refinery

Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan laid the foundation stone of country's first-of-its-kind Octomax unit at the Mathura refinery that will help in the production of high-octane gasoline. Octomax, a "novel technology" developed in-house by Research and Development Centre of Indian Oil, involves conversion of cracked C4 streams to high-octane gasoline blending stock for production of Euro-IV/V equivalent gasoline. The refinery will setup a plant of 55 KTA capacity at an estimated cost of Rs 43 cr and is expected to be completed by October 2017. The unit on Octomax technology has been conceptualised and designed based on indigenous efforts.

SRESHTA: Indian Railways' new special research wing

Indian Railways is all set to set up a Special Railway Establishment for Strategic Technology and Holistic Advancement (SRESHTA), a new entity that will comprise mostly scientists and railway experts. SRESHTA will be responsible for long-term research for improving the functioning of the public sector behemoth. The new research unit will be headed by a reputed scientist, who will report directly to the Chairman, Railway Board. Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO), railways' current research arm, will focus only on day-to-day issues.

India puts a halt on scanning Japanese food imports

Indian Government has decided to discontinue the scanning of the Food products from Japan that run the risk of being contaminated by radioactive substance. Now the Food products get an easy access into the country. Even after five years of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011, reports indicate that food products from Japan carry the risk of radioactive contamination that can lead to various forms of cancer.

Thousands of dead fish washed ashore Ulsoor lake

Thousands of dead fish have washed up on the banks of a polluted lake in India's southern technology hub of Bangalore. It is suspected that sewage from many parts of the city has been flowing into the lake, depleting oxygen levels in the water. Residents living in and around the lake were in for a shock as they found the fish heaped around, raising unbearable stink in the water body. A tourism spot, Ulsoor lake had been choked with water hyacinth in recent years, with government launching clean-up efforts.

Digital marketing portal Mahila e-Haat launched for women entrepreneurs

In a bid to strengthen women entrepreneurs, the ministry of women and child development (WCD) launched **Mahila e-Haat**, an online marketing platform for women. Launched a day before the International Women's Day on 8 March, the portal has been set up with an investment of under Rs.10 lakh from the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh—an autonomous body under the WCD ministry for the socio-economic empowerment of women—and sellers can register their products on the platform without having to pay any listing fee. On the day of the launch, about 125,000 beneficiaries under 10,000 self-help groups registered themselves on the portal.

Tata Motors partners US Firm for Rs 50 K Crore project

Tata Motors has signed a strategic agreement with Bharat Forge and US-based General Dynamics Land Systems for India's Rs 50,000-crore Future Infantry Combat Vehicle (FICV) programme. Tata Motors, the country's largest commercial vehicle maker, will lead the consortium with Pune-based auto component maker Bharat Forge as the partner. General Dynamics Land Systems will bring in its expertise in the combat vehicles business. The FICV is a high-mobility armoured battle vehicle for ferrying infantry men.

Railways forms Special Purpose Vehicle for bullet train project

Gearing up to introduce trains that run at speeds of more than 300 kmph, the Indian Railways have formed a new Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to implement the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Bullet Train project. The entity has been named the National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited. The bullet train is expected to cover the 508 km between Mumbai and Ahmedabad in about two hours, running at a maximum speed of 350 kmph and operating speed of 320 kmph.

Germany to develop three smart cities in India

Germany is going to participate in the smart city programme of the Union government. The European country will help to develop Kochi, Bhubaneswar and Coimbatore as smart cities. The State Secretary in Germany's Ministry for Environment, Gunther Adler, announced this in New Delhi at the second meeting of the Indo-German working group on urban development. Under the smart city programme, the three cities will use technology to monitor the use of daily facilities such as electricity, gas, oil, transport, water and even harvest.

Govt mulls policy to promote wind energy projects

In a bid to encourage optimum use of wind energy potential in India, the Centre will soon unveil a policy to give incentives including an interest rebate of 0.25 for increasing capacity of wind mills of up to 1 MW. Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has floated a draft for Repowering of Wind Power Projects in the country for comments from stakeholders by March 14, 2016.

Reliance Defence gets final clearance for 12 industrial licences

The licensing committee of Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) has approved 12 industrial licences to the Reliance Defence. The Reliance defence is a subsidiary of Reliance Infrastructure Limited for manufacture of wide range of Defence equipment required by the Armed Forces. DIPP has approved these licences to the Strategic Business Units (SBU) under Reliance Defence Limited to address defence programmes in India and overseas.

Govt to sell 5% stake in Railways' Container Corp

The government will sell up to 5 per cent stake in state-run Container Corp as part of its asset sales programme. It is expected that a deal could fetch about \$170 million (around Rs 1,145 crore). The government, which owns 61.8 per cent of Container Corp, is selling up to 9.75 million shares at a floor price of Rs 1,195 (\$17.76) per share, according to a regulatory filing. Retail as well as Institutional investors can bid for the shares in an auction on the stock exchanges. The government last month raised about \$730 million from a share sale in power producer NTPC Ltd.

Five regional centres of National School of Drama proposed

Five regional centres of the prestigious **National School of Drama (NSD)** are to be set up across the country, besides upgrading a resource centre at Bengaluru to a regional centre. On the basis of the recommendations made by the Broad Based Committee NSD Society proposed to establish 5 regional centres one each at **Kolkata, Mumbai/Goa, J&K, and North-East**. These regional centres would be established in consultation with the concerned State Governments, who were required to provide accommodation for the purpose.

MIT Researchers turn waste gas into liquid fuel

With the help of engineered microbes, the MIT Researchers have turned the emissions of power stations, steel mills and garbage dumps into liquid fuels. The process has been successfully trialled at a pilot plant in China and a much bigger facility is now planned. Energy-dense liquids are vital to transport but are currently derived from Oil, a fossil fuel, and transport produces about a quarter of the global carbon emissions driving climate change.

Karnataka CM to Launch Scheme for Accident Victims' Free Treatment

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah launched 'Santwana Yojana' under which road accident victims will be given free treatment for the first 48 hours at any hospital. The scheme, 'Mukhyamantri Santwana Harish Yojana,' has been named after Harish Nanjappa who donated his eyes moments before his death even as he lay severely injured seeking help after a mishap in Bengaluru last month. The fear of hassles with the police and the money to be paid at the hospital were the reasons for the public not paying attention to accident victims.

Air India operates 'world's longest all-women flight'

Air India on Monday said it flew the "world's longest" all-women operated and supported flight from the national capital to San Francisco. The flight, which travelled a distance of around 14,500 kilometer in close to 17 hours, was operated as part of International Women's Day celebrations. The non-stop Delhi-San Francisco flight took off from here on March 6. This year for the first time, on the world's longest non-stop flight, entire flight operations from cockpit crew to cabin crew, check-in staff, doctor, customer care staff, ATC (air traffic control) and the entire ground-handling, were handled by women – Air India.

'Maritime India Summit 2016' to be held in Mumbai from 14th to 16th April

'Maritime India Summit 2016' to be held in Mumbai from 14th to 16th April, 'Maritime India Summit 2016' is a maiden flagship initiative of the Ministry of Shipping that will provide a unique platform for participants to explore potential business opportunities in Indian Maritime Sector. The conference will project vast investment opportunities in each of the Indian Maritime States and Union Territories, including an exclusive partner country session by Republic of Korea. This Summit will attract more than 2000 participants, including senior government officials and policy makers, CEOs of Indian and global Maritime industry, industry experts, thought leaders and distinguished speakers from across the world.

Mumbai and Bangalore among cheapest cities in world: EIU

According to a top London-based forecast group, Mumbai and Bangalore are among the cheapest cities in the world. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) ranked Singapore as the priciest ahead of Zurich, Hong Kong, Geneva and Paris. The EIU also said India and Pakistan accounted for five of the 10 least expensive cities in the world. The cheapest were Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, followed by Bangalore and Mumbai.

Uber opens Asia's first engineering hub in India

Ridesharing services provider Uber has opened its first Asian engineering centre in Bengaluru. The centre will house software engineers, product developers and others working initially on problems specific to users in India. The centre will eventually play a role in improving Uber's customer-facing

technologies worldwide. Worldwide, Uber has about a 1,000 engineers spread over nine engineering centres.

National Led Bulbs Scheme Gets a New Face in 'UJALA'

Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of State (IC) for Power, Coal and New & Renewable Energy has announced the name '**UJALA**' for the LED based Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (DELP), which is currently running successfully in over 120 cities across India. UJALA, an acronym for Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All, is being implemented by **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)**. The National LED programme was launched by the Prime Minister on January 2015 with a target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs.

Project Mausam aims to explore Multi-Faceted Indian Ocean World

Project 'Mausam' is the initiative of **Ministry of Culture**. The Project will be implemented by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** as the nodal agency with research support of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and National Museum as associate bodies. This project aims to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean 'world' – collating archaeological and historical research in order to document the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean – extending from East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian Subcontinent and Sri Lanka to the Southeast Asian archipelago.

Railways launch online "Clean My Coach" service

Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu launched an online "clean my coach" service that allows travellers to get their compartments cleaned by sending an SMS or by using an app or a designated website. As per the scheme, for any cleaning requirement in the coach, passengers have to send an SMS on a mobile number **58888**. Alternatively, passengers can use the android app or Web page www.cleanmycoach.com for logging the request. Following this, a passenger's request is immediately acknowledged via SMS on mobile phone along with a code.

Govt to computerise all ration shops by 2019

Government aims to computerise the **PDS** sector to help check pilferages and plug leakages by installing electronic **Point of Sale (ePoS) devices** at all fair price shops across the country by March 2019 (rpt 2019). Government has also started a pilot project linking the PDS with Aadhar card under Direct Benefit Transfer scheme in **Puducherry, Chandigarh and in urban areas of Dadra and Nagar Haveli** and, depending upon its success, it will be extended across the country to help remove corruption in PDS, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan told the Rajya Sabha.

Parrikar launches a portal for Kendriya Sainik Board School

The Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar launched an interactive web portal of **Kendriya Sainik Board** (KSB) Secretariat, under the Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (ESW) of Defence Ministry. The interactive portal facilitates Ex-Servicemen/dependents to submit online applications under various welfare schemes. At present, it contains website and workflow software for online submission of Prime Minister Scholarship Scheme (PMSS) for the sons and wards of Ex-Servicemen.

SEBI bars wilful defaulters from raising funds

The SEBI board has approved curbs on 'wilful defaulters', which entails ban on public issue of securities. Any entity declared wilful defaulters will also not be able to take control in any other listed entities. The SEBI board accepted most of the broad recommendations made in the discussion paper on wilful defaulters it floated last year. The move by Sebi will help other regulators, particularly the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its drive against cracking down on wilful defaulters.

Kakrapar power station shuts down after leakage

One of the two 220 MWe units at the **Kakrapar Atomic Power Station** (KAPS) in **Gujarat** had to be shut down at 9 am on Friday (March 11, 2016) after leakage of heavy water from its coolant system. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) has sent a team of experts for an independent assessment of the situation. The KAPS, located on the border of Surat and Tapi districts near Vyara town of Tapi, is run by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL).

Call drops in India above global average : Survey

A survey has found out that on average **4.73 per cent** of calls get dropped in the country, much higher than the global average of three per cent. By the RedMango Analytics report, 59.1 per cent of dropped calls were due to poor quality and 36.9 per cent of all the dropped calls were due to network faults. RedMango Analytics conducted the survey across 20 cities, including Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Jammu.

Govt sets new norms for Hydrocarbons licensing

Government of India has approved a new policy for exploration and also defined the norms for pricing of existing and new discoveries made in difficult areas. The petroleum minister said the new oil and gas exploration policy will now be based on a revenue-sharing model, as opposed to cost-and-output-based norms earlier. The difficult areas for which the new pricing norms have now been formulated are defined as those from deep-water, ultra deep-water and high pressure-high temperature areas.

Users can now complain against misleading Ads via WhatsApp

Consumers can now file complaints against misleading commercials by companies to advertising watchdog ASCI through mobile messaging app WhatsApp. Consumers can now WhatsApp the objectionable advertisement to **+91 77-100-12345**, from where the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) would lodge 'suo moto' complaints using this number. Consumers can send pictures of print ads, hoardings, packaging or screen shots of websites, links of YouTube videos etc and a ASCI team would be scrutinising these complaints and take it further if found valid.

Farakka Power Plant in WB shuts down five units

Abysmally low level of water in the **Farakka Feeder Canal** has caused the **National Thermal Power Corporation** to shut down five units of its power plant at Farakka in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The five units together have a combined generating capacity of 1600 MW and the shutdown is likely to affect Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and industry in the Eastern Region.

FSSAI to train 20K street vendors in Delhi

As part of its project to promote clean food, food safety regulator FSSAI will train about 20,000 street food vendors in the nation capital over the next four weeks. The decision to launch '**Project Clean Strategy Food**' was announced at an event to connect with corporates, media specialists and food experts to promote food safety. The event was co-organised with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication.

GOI allows women in combat roles in all CAPFs

The Union Home Ministry recently published new rules allowing women to apply as direct-entry officers in border guarding force ITBP, the only paramilitary which hitherto did not allow ladies to join in supervisory combat roles owing to its primary task of guarding the difficult Sino-India border. Among the five of these forces, called the CAPFs, the Central Reserve Police Force and the Central Industrial Security Force have been allowing women to apply as direct-entry officers through the UPSC for a long time. Two other forces – Border Security Force and Sashastra Seema Bal – were allowed to directly induct women officers in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

PM Narendra Modi inaugurates three major railway projects in Bihar

- PM dedicated a **rail-cum-road bridge at Patna**, inaugurated another at Munger and laid the foundation of additional bridge at Mokama over the River Ganga.
- Modi laid foundation stone of second Mokama double line railway bridge adjacent to existing Rajendra Pul.
- PM dedicated **Patna Ganga bridge (4.56 km)** to the nation and inaugurated the freight operation through Munger rail-cum-road bridge.

- There are three bridges over the entire 460 km length of the river Ganga in Bihar – one road bridge at Naugachia, a rail-cum-road bridge at Mokama and the third road bridge Mahatma Gandhi Setu at Patna.

Tourism Ministry launches four skill initiatives for youths

- A **SENSITIZATION PROGRAMME** FOR THE EXISTING SERVICE PROVIDERS AT **VARANASI**
- A PROGRAMME TO **GROOM YOUNG PERSONS** INTERESTED IN **HOME DELIVERY SERVICE** AS AN OCCUPATION
- A PROGRAMME OF **TRAINING** TO BRING UP **PARYATAK MITRA**
- A TRAINING PROGRAMME TO **BRING UP** TOURIST FACILITATORS IN THE **NORTH EAST**

NITI Aayog launches Women Transforming India campaign

- **Celebrating women doers, leaders** and change makers from across the country, **NITI Aayog** – Government of India's premier **think-tank** – has launched the '**Women Transforming India**' initiative' on, **March 8**, International Women's Day, in partnership with the **UN in India** and **MyGov**.
- As a **policy think tank**, **NITI Aayog seeks to engage** directly with **women leaders** from across **urban** and **rural** areas of India.
- '**Women Transforming India**' is, therefore, **our effort** at putting our ear to the ground to gather **successful stories** of change heralded by women at the grassroots level, **within communities**.
- **Winning entries** will receive a **certificate of appreciation** from NITI Aayog and the UN in India. Change makers may also have a chance to **interact directly** with **policy makers** in the **Government of India**, to enable affect **positive policy action**.
- '**Women Transforming India**' is consistent with the government's renewed commitment to advancing **gender equality**.
- This initiative is also a **step forward** in furthering the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which have Gender as a **stand-alone goal**.

ONGC plans to Invest \$5 bn on KG basin block

- The announcement comes within days of the **government** freeing up **natural gas pricing**.
- This **fresh investment** in developing the **KG DWN 98/2**, with reserves of **70 billion cubic meters (bcm)** of gas and **23 million tonnes** of Oil will be over and above the **capital expenditure** of **Rs. 30,000 crore** for **FY17**.
- **KG DWN 98/2** is next to the famous **KG D6 block**, owned by **Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Limited (RIL)**, which reportedly pumped **\$1.4 billion** worth of gas from **ONGC's** field.
- **ONGC** has taken the **decision** to develop the block itself without any **foreign partners**.

- Earlier, ONGC partnered **global Oil majors** of the likes of **Norway's StatOil, Brazil's Petrobras** and **Chevron Corp. of U.S. to develop the block** but they all **walked away** due to delays and **bureaucratic hurdles**.

India test-fires nuclear-capable Agni-I ballistic missile

- The **surface-to-surface**, single-stage missile, powered by solid **propellants**, was test-fired from a **mobile launcher** at 9.15 AM from launch pad-4 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at **Abdul Kalam Island (Wheeler Island)**, a defence official said.
- The **sophisticated missile** covered **700 km** distance within **9 minutes** and **36 seconds**.
- The **trajectory** of the trial was **tracked** by a battery of sophisticated **radars, telemetry observation stations, electro-optic instruments** and **naval ships** from its launch till the missile hit the target area with **accuracy**.
- **Agni-I missile** is equipped with **sophisticated navigation system** which ensures it reaches the target with a **high degree** of accuracy and precision.

Govt imposes anti-dumping duty on plastic-processing imports

In a move designed to protect the domestic industry, the government imposed anti-dumping duty of up to 44.7 percent on import of plastic-processing machines from **Chinese Taipei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam for five years**.

- The duty will be levied on imports of all kinds of plastic-processing or injection-moulding machines, also known as injection presses.
- The **Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC)** said the safeguard duty covers imports from the countries in question and has been imposed after the domestic industry took a beating from such dumping.
- Plastic-processing or injection-moulding machines are used for **processing or moulding plastic materials**.

Railways starts E-ticketing for journalists

Journalists now need not go to counters for booking train tickets as the Indian Railways launched e-booking for scribes on concessional passes available to them.

- During the launch, Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu said "It was promised in the budget to provide e-booking facility to journalists and today we fulfilled it". Journalists were earlier required to book ticket on concessional passes at PRS counters.
- In order to avail the benefit of the e-booking facility, **journalists have to use their registered ID card number issued by Railways to book tickets**.

400 e-tailers team up with postal department for delivery

More than 400 e-commerce companies are leveraging the extensive reach of the Department of Posts (DoP) in an effort to deliver their consignments at every nook and corner of the country.

- The Department has tied up with more than 400 e-commerce agencies, including **Flipkart, Amazon, YepMe, Snapdeal** and the like for delivering e-commerce pre-paid as well as cash-on-delivery (COD) orders. DoP has a network of some 1.55 lakh post offices, of which 1.3 lakh are in rural areas.
- Of all, Amazon is the biggest partner in terms of business with India Posts. As per the note, DoP received Rs 1,150 crore from parcels under the COD category, which is expected to cross the Rs 1,500-crore mark by the end of the current fiscal.
- DoP is delivering 40,000 e-commerce parcels per day and the average value of parcels handled by India Post is Rs 5,000 for urban areas and Rs 3,000 for rural areas.

PM Modi to inaugurate World Sufi Forum

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the **World Sufi Forum** in **New Delhi** where more than 200 Indian and international delegates, including Sufi Shuyukh, spiritual leaders, scholars, academicians and masters of Sufism, are participating.

- The four-day event is being organized by **All India Ulama and Mashaikh Board (AIUMB)**, the apex body of Sufi Dargahs in India.
- The meeting is expected to debate on how Sufi teaching can prevent global terrorism. The conclave will also debate on how to guide the **Muslim** community away from sectarian division.
- The organizers also said the debate on role of women in Islam will also be conducted in the international conference.

The Sufi Conference is expected to come out with a declaration against extremism and Wahabism in the last day of the event to be convened in the **Ramlila Maidan**.

Pawan Hans, IRCTC join to boost chopper tourism

Seeking to promote helicopter -tourism, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation and Pawan Hans have joined hands under an agreement that would allow flyers to book tickets through IRCTC website.

- The agreement envisages both sides to jointly identify areas of cooperation and draw up detailed projects to promote 'heli tourism' in the country and enable selling of online tickets for regular and chartered helicopter services and joy rides.
- The two sides will also facilitate marketing or cross-selling of products and services through both physical outlets and websites, thus improving the range of services to their own customers.
- Both will also undertake opening and managing of various catering and hospitality outlets and Budget Hotels through their joint strength, at Pawan Hans (PH) properties and non-PH locations.

PSUs to invest over Rs 10 K Crore in mining sector

Public sector units (PSUs) such as **Nalco** and **Hindustan Copper Ltd** have proposed to invest more than Rs 10,000 crore in the mining sector.

- As per data provided by Minister of State for Steel and Mines Vishnu Deo Sai in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha, aluminium maker Nalco, Hindustan Copper Ltd and Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd (MECL) have proposed an investment of Rs 10,037.50 crore in the mining sector.
- It includes Nalco's investment in Pottangi bauxite mines and Utkal D&E coal blocks in Odisha and Hindustan Copper's in copper mines in Jharkhand and Rajasthan.
- In a separate query on illegal mining, the minister informed the House that a total of 533 FIRs have been filed between 2012-13 and 2015-16 (till January) regarding illegal mining in the company.
- Besides, a total of 635 complaints have been lodged in 2012-13 and the first 10 months of the current fiscal.

India ranks 118 out of 156 on UN's World Happiness Index

According to the **United Nations' World Happiness Index 2016**, India ranks **118th out of 156 countries** on a global list of the world's happiest nations.

- India was at 111 on the happiness list in 2013 & 117 in 2015.
- Denmark takes the top spot as the happiest country in the world, displacing Switzerland, according to The World Happiness Report 2016, published by the **Sustainable Development Solutions Network** (SDSN), a global initiative for the United Nations.
- **Rwanda, Benin, Afghanistan, Togo, Syria and Burundi** were the least happy countries this year.
- The report takes into account GDP per capita, life expectancy, social support and freedom to make life choices as indicators of happiness.
- **Switzerland** was ranked second on the list, followed by **Iceland (3), Norway (4) and Finland (5)**.

The report was released ahead of **UN World Happiness Day**, which is observed on **March 20**. For the first time.

Bodh Gaya to host Buddhist Conclave from March 29

Bodh Gaya will host a **Buddhist Conclave** during March 29-31, 2016. The conclave will be organised by the **Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality** (FAITH) in collaboration with the **Ministry of Commerce** (MOC) and the **Ministry of Tourism** (MOT), and the target will be to develop the **Buddhist Circuit** in **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar** in India, and Nepal, with foreign investment in the segment.

India signed \$35 million loan agreement with WB for MP project

The **Government of India** has signed a loan agreement with the **World Bank** for **Madhya Pradesh** citizen access to responsive services project.

- The loan has been sanctioned by the World Bank's concessionary lending arm **International Development Association (IDA)**.
- The project size is 50 million dollars, of which 35 million dollar will be financed by the World Bank and the remaining amount will be funded out of State Budget.
- The objective of the project is to improve access and quality of public services in the state through implementation of the Public Service Delivery Guarantee Act, 2010.
- The duration of the project is 5 years.

Government cuts PPF interest rate from 8.7% to 8.1%

The government has slashed interest rates payable on small savings including **Public Provident Fund** and **Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP)** in a bid to align them closer to Market rates.

- The interest rate on **Public Provident Fund (PPF)** scheme will be cut to **8.1 per cent** for the period April 1 to June 30, from 8.7 per cent, at present.
- Similarly, the interest rate on KVP will be cut to **7.8 per cent** from 8.7 per cent.
- While the interest rate on post office savings has been retained at 4 per cent, the same for term deposits of one to five years has been cut.
- The popular five-year **National Savings Certificates** will earn an interest rate of **8.1 per cent** from April 1 as against 8.5 per cent, at present.
- A five-year Monthly Income Account will fetch 7.8 per cent as opposed to 8.4 per cent now.
- Girl-child saving scheme, **Sukanya Samriddhi Account** will see interest rate of **8.6 per cent** as against 9.2 per cent.
- **Senior citizen savings scheme** of five-year would earn **8.6 per cent** interest compared with 9.3 per cent.

Andhra Pradesh gets India's first state-wide broadband project

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu launched the first phase of **Fiber Grid project** to provide broadband connectivity at cheap rate.

- Andhra Pradesh government signed an MoU with Cisco as part of the inauguration of India's first statewide broadband project '**AP FiberNet**' in **Visakhapatnam**.
- Naidu said that digital transformation was the most transformative means to ignite sustainable growth and improve society.
- His government's aim was to provide Internet connection to all households in the state as part of **Digital India campaign**.

- Under the project, Internet connections would be provided at cheap rate in districts of *Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram* by April. It will cover the rest of the state by end of July this year.

Ford Foundation free from Government's watch list

The Indian government has quietly taken US non-profit **Ford Foundation** off its watch list. The move comes only days before **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** heads to the US to meet with **President Barack Obama** at the **Nuclear Security Summit** in **Washington** later this month.

- The Home Ministry has already issued orders to take the Foundation off the so-called 'prior permission' list.
- What this means is that banks will no longer have to seek permission from the Finance Ministry before processing foreign **FUND** flows from the US-based Foundation to any **Indian bank account**.
- Based on a report by the Gujarat government last year, the Ministry had put Ford Foundation on the watch list, citing "national security".

Modi will inaugurate Krishi Unnati Mela

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will tomorrow (19 March) inaugurate **three-day 'Krishi Unnati Mela'** providing **information on new farm schemes and technologies that will help farmers double their incomes within the next few years**.

- The mela, or fair, is being held at the **Pusa campus** in the national capital.
- Modi will give away '**Krishi Karman Awards**' to states and progressive farmers who have made outstanding contribution in the field of agriculture. He will also visit the theme pavilion and address farmers.
- To reach out to farmers at the block level across the country, the whole event would be telecast live at block panchayat level for the first time.

Feni is now Goa's Heritage Spirit

Goa government classified the country liquor, **Feni** as **Heritage Spirit of Goa**. Feni is the form of spirit produced exclusively in the coastal state.

- Feni is the first liquor product in the country to obtain such status and got its Geographical Indication (GI) certification in 2000.
- It used in various cultural traditions, cuisines and is well known for its medicinal value also. Hence, the Government opined not categorise it as country liquor as it is presently defined under the Goa Excise Duty Act, 1964 and proposed to bring an amendment to the Act.

SC allows photos of governor, CM, ministers in ads

The Supreme Court **allowed the publication of the photos of governor, chief minister and the ministers of the department concerned in government advertisements.**

- The apex court bench headed by **Justice Ranjan Gogoi** allowed the publication of photos of governor, chief minister and ministers of departments concerned while modifying their earlier order by which the court had permitted photos of president, prime minister and Chief Justice of India only in the government ads.
- The centre and the states of **Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka** had moved the court seeking the review of its earlier order, contending that it was contrary to the federal structure of the country.

ISRO signs MoU with Indian Railways

Aiming at effective use of space technology in **remote sensing** and **graphic information system (GIS)** based applications, **Railways** is set to join hands with **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**. An MoU will be signed between Railways and ISRO, under Department of Space, tomorrow for developing applications in the field of remote sensing and GIS.

- The MoU will enable use of space technology tools in providing passenger information for all trains, indicating next station/stoppage, real-time train-tracking, survey of new rail route alignments particularly in hilly and difficult terrains.
- It will also aid in conducting track vulnerability studies, mapping of assets, audio-visual warning to road users at unmanned level crossing gates and introduction of web-enabled rail user-centric services.
- Currently, Railways is using space technology for providing connectivity to **Passenger Reservation System (PRS)** counters and unreserved ticketing system at remote and non-rail head locations.

Surat, Beas cleanest railway stations in India: survey

Railway stations at **Surat** (Gujarat) and **Beas** (Punjab) have been adjudged the cleanest stations in a survey conducted by the Indian Railways across 407 stations.

- The survey results for A1 category are: Surat (1); Rajkot (2), Bilaspur Junction (3), Solapur (4), Mumbai Central (5), Chandigarh (6), Bhubaneswar (7), Vadodara (8), Madurai (9) and New Jalpaiguri (10).
- For A category railway stations, the rankings are: Beas (1), Gandhidham in Ahmedabad (2), Vasco-da-Gama (3), Jamnagar (4), Kumbakonam (5), Nasik Road (6), Salem Jn (7), Ankleshwar (8), Kathgodam (9), Kovilpatti (10).

Airbus to setup pilot training centre in India

Airplane maker **Airbus SAS** will set up a pilot and maintenance training centre in the **National Capital Region** at a cost of **\$40 million** for the first phase, to support India's need for new Airbus pilots.

- Srinivasan Dwarakanathan, president of Airbus division in India, said on an average one Airbus aircraft per week is expected to be delivered to Indian airlines over the next 10 years.
- Airbus said the proposed **INVESTMENT** in a training centre is a key strategic Airbus initiative in line with the country's **Skill India** programme launched in 2015 by the Indian government to develop a wide range of advanced competencies.
- This new centre will be fully owned by **Airbus Group India** with training to be delivered by Airbus's specialized training instructors.

First Gay marriage bureau set up in India

Benhur Samson, an NRI, has set up India's first **Gay marriage bureau** for homosexuals to help gay people find the right match for them.

- The general belief is that most **homosexuals** tend to identify their own partners and settle with them.
- But Benhur Samson, who used to help gays with surrogacy in India till 2013, was surprised when he received requests from them regarding prospective life partners.
- Samson started the arranged gay marriage service to cater to such persons. He has also roped in the gay prince of Rajpipla, **Manvendrasingh Gohil**, as a consultant, along with lawyers to look into the legal aspects of the marriages, including immigration if an Indian marries a person abroad.
- The bureau has so far received around 250 inquiries and around 24 people are enrolled with us, he said, adding that the process to identifying the right match for them is on.

The bureau charges **\$5,000** so that only serious candidates came forward to look for their match. If in case the person does not find the match the money charged is refundable.

'Iron fist' at Pokhran: IAF displays prowess

On March 18, Indian Air Force (IAF) put up its greatest ever show of air power. The event was witnessed by the President Pranab Mukherjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cabinet ministers and political leaders, and the entire military brass. Also present were the air attachés of various countries.

- The attachés of China and Pakistan were not invited as these countries do not invite their Indian counterparts for similar exercises.
- The event earlier called '**Vayu Shakti**' got its current name '**Iron-Fist**' when last held in 2013.
- The exercise logo shows an Iron Fist with a long arm to depict the long reach of the IAF. The Himalayan eagle perched on top with wings spread wide portrays IAF's readiness for flight.

- The event was a showcase of all facets of air power and was packaged into six themes covering IAF's transformation, net-centric operations, air-defence, combat support, night ops and soft power.
- All manned and unmanned aircraft, air-to-air and surface-to-air weapons, and Special Forces took part.

Sudhir Raheja given extra charge as AAI chairman

Member (Planning) **Sudhir Raheja** has been given the additional charge of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) Chairman after R K Srivastava's tenure was curtailed suddenly by the government.

- This is the second time Raheja has been entrusted with the task of heading the national airport company.
- In August 2014, Raheja was given the additional charge following the repatriation of the then acting Chairman Alok Sinha to his parent cadre, Uttar Pradesh.
- Raheja took over the additional charge of the post left vacant by the sudden exit of **R K Srivastava**, a 1984 batch Jharkhand-cadre IAS officer, was removed from the post by the government, nearly 15 months after he was brought at the helm for a five-year term.

Chhattisgarh disburses over Rs 1,800 crore under MUDRA Yojana

The Chhattisgarh government has disbursed **Rs 1, 821-crore** loans to several beneficiaries under the **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) Yojana** (PMMY).

- The banks disbursed Rs 1821.50 crore to the beneficiaries encouraging the young entrepreneurs to avail the benefits of the ambitious programme.
- The scheme was launched in **April 2015** and was aimed to provide funding to the non-corporate, small business sector.
- According to officials, the scheme had been receiving good response in the state as youths were taking keen interest to avail the benefits.

Paytm ties up with PVR to sell online movie tickets

Cinema exhibition chain **PVR cinemas** and mobile payments and commerce platform **Paytm** have announced a strategic relationship that will bring PVR's movie tickets to Paytm's e-commerce platform as a part of its nationwide foray in the online movie ticket segment.

- In the first year of this relationship, PVR targets to sell tickets worth **Rs 250-300 crore** on Paytm's e-commerce platforms in addition to revenues from ticket sales at box offices and other channels.
- This is another initiative to augment the box office revenues by reaching out to more consumers and achieving better penetration into microMARKETS.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Kisan Suvidha mobile app

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched **Kisan Suvidha mobile application** for farmers. It will provide information on subjects such as *weather, market prices, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and agriculture machinery*. Kisaan Suvidha is an omnibus mobile app developed to help farmers by providing relevant information to them quickly.

- To operate this app farmer should own a smart phone and should register his or her Mobile Number and enter details of the state, district and block or sub-district.
- The information will be available in Hindi and English.
- A tap on the weather button shows details of temperature, humidity, wind and rainfall for the current day and the forecast for the next five days.

Agasthyamala finds place in UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves

India's "unique" **Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve** is among 20 new sites added by the UN's top cultural body **UNESCO** to its **World Network of Biosphere Reserves**. The Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve (ABR) was established in 2001 and is spread across the two states of **Kerala** and **Tamil Nadu**.

- The International Co-ordinating Council added the new sites during a two-day meeting in **Lima**, capital of **Peru**.
- Biosphere reserves are places for learning about sustainable development aiming to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with the sustainable use of natural resources.

Government clears new Defence Procurement Policy

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar gave final approval to the new **Defence Procurement Policy (DPP) 2016**, which will come into effect from April 1, 2016. The DPP, which will have provisions to fast-track acquisition of critically-needed equipments, will be unveiled at the **Defence Expo** on March 28.

- The policy will give first priority to **Indian Designed Developed and Manufactured (IDDM)** acquisition and relax norms with respect to blacklisting. There will be strategic partnerships in case of helicopters, fighters and submarine projects.
- The government will update the **Ordnance Factory Board** and **Defence Procurement Manuals** in two months.
- Parrikar said the new blacklisting policy will also be issued separately next month and made it clear that there will be no relaxation for those who have already been blacklisted and bribe givers will be punished.
- The existing blacklisted firms will be allowed to appeal before a vigilance committee of the Defence Ministry for delisting under the new policy.
- The new DPP will also have provision for allowing the DAC to fast track the procedure by bypassing the Acceptance of Necessity (AON) process, in urgent cases like requirements of the Special Forces.

Govt launches mobile app 'Pusa Krishi'

Union Agriculture Minister **Radha Mohan Singh** launched a new mobile app '**Pusa Krishi**' for farmers in order to take the technology to farm fields.

- The mobile app was launched at the valedictory session of the three-day '**Krishi Unnati Mela**'.
- With use of this mobile app, farmers can get easy solutions to their problems.
- Farmers can get information about weather and accordingly they can take measures to save crops.
- The app will provide farmers with information related to new varieties of crops developed by Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), resource conserving cultivation practices as well as farm machinery and its implementation will help in increasing returns to farmers. The Minister also felicitated 45 progressive farmers with '**Krishi Karman**' awards.

Ola, Maharashtra government sign MoU to skill one lakh youth

Ola, India's largest taxi aggregator recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maharashtra government, to skill, develop and create opportunities for ENTREPRENEURSHIP for **1,00,000 youth in the state**.

- The MoU, which will also take into consideration the employment of women, will work towards skilling people to be independent driver-entrepreneurs over the next five years.
- The company will work closely with the Maharashtra government to expand its network of driver owned cabs across multiple categories like Micro, Mini, Prime etc.
- The government will also work with Ola towards making concerted efforts in providing the right training infrastructure and technology framework to make a meaningful difference in the current employment scenario.

GOI notified new Plastic Waste Management Rules

The government of India has notified new norms for **plastic waste management** across the country. The **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016**, which is aimed at curbing the over 6,000 tonnes of uncollected plastic waste generated daily, will target plastic manufacturers and industries that use it.

- **Environment minister Prakash Javadekar** said this will be brought about by a new principle of **Extended Producers Responsibility Act**.
- Those industries using plastic will have to pay proportionately towards collection through the same distribution system they use for retailing their products.
- Such industries will be liable to lose their certification for operations if they do not abide by the norms.
- However he could not specify the extent of fines that would be imposed on the manufacturers or how exactly the monitoring system will operate.
- The government also aims to standardise the 50 micron size plastic bags as opposed to the 40 micron ones, which was the minimum permissible limit earlier.

Centre notifies new stringent rules to manage e-waste

Waking up to the challenge of managing hazardous e-waste, the Centre notified new rules to dismantle and recycle all electrical and electronic waste in the country by expanding its ambit and introducing a clause of penalty for violators.

- The new rule — **E-waste Management Rules, 2016** — has, for the first time, brought in its ambit the management of the waste of compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) and other mercury-containing lamps.
- Under the new rules, it would be the responsibility of the producers/manufacturers to ensure collection of e-waste, as well as its disposal in an environmentally sound manner.
- At present, India generates **1.7 million tonnes of e-waste every year** but the country can scientifically recycle only **one-fourth** of it, leaving the rest of it in hazardous manners that severely pollutes land and water.

Government amends Atal Pension Yojana

The government has amended **Atal Pension Yojana (APY)** to give an option to the spouse to continue to contribute for balance period on **premature death of the subscriber**.

- It has decided to give an option to the spouse of the subscriber to continue contributing to APY account of the subscriber, for the remaining period, till the original subscriber would have attained the age of **60 years** instead of present provision of handing-over lump-sum amount to spouse on the premature death before 60 years of the subscriber.
- The changes were made based on the feedback received from various quarters which indicated that the present provision under APY of handing-over lump sum amount to spouse on premature death of the subscriber is not preferred by many subscribers.
- It has also highlighted the fact that there is growing demand to give an option to the spouse to continue contribution after the death of subscriber to enable him/her to draw pension when the deceased subscriber would have turned 60 years of age.

VAT relief for yarn in Punjab, Haryana

The Punjab Government in its pre-poll budget (Assembly elections in Punjab expected in early 2017) has provided a partial rollback of VAT (value added tax) on cotton spinning. The new rate of VAT on cotton spinning will be **3.63%** compared to the earlier **6.05%**. Punjab has 165 spinning mills with 4.25 million active spindles and consume 6.5 lakh to 7 lakh cotton bales annually.

- Imports of cheaper cotton yarn by fabric and garmenting units (concentrated in Ludhiana and Gurgaon) in Punjab and Haryana from other parts of India had rendered the local spinning units uncompetitive in their own territory due to higher manufacturing cost.

- Due to high VAT, buying yarn from spinners in these states was costlier for these units compared to importing it from neighboring states.
- Punjab, Haryana being among major cotton producing states, the relief in VAT announced in past few days by both the states will now help ailing local spinning units.

Bajaj Finance enters life care financing segment

Bajaj Finance is entering the **Rs 20,000-crore life care segment** under which it will finance expenses for stem cells storage units, cosmetics-based hair treatment, dental and eye care, IVF & maternity care, laproscopic cure for a dozen ailments, and elective medical/paramedical care for many other issues.

- The Pune-based company, which claims to be the **first to enter this segment in the country**, expects to net around Rs 1,000 crore in sales over the next five years from this business hoping to an encore of the massive demand for such segmental Funding in the Western markets where life care segment is a booming business.
- Bajaj has already financed 400 customers for their expenses towards stem cell storage, cosmetics-based hair restoration therapy and dental care such as braces, whitening etc.
- A formal launch in the six top metros is expected within a month four weeks.
- The domestic life care category business is around Rs 20,000 crore and is clipping at 20-22 per cent and is likely to cost at a higher pace going forward with financing options now being available.

Ministry of Road approved National Highway project worth Rs. 6284 crore

The Ministry of road, transport and highways has approved 11 National highways projects worth Rs. 6,284 crore.

- The total length of the road is 453 km and will be executed on EPC(Engineering, Procurement Construction), BOT (Toll) and Hybrid annuity model.
- The project was approved by the Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) meeting which was held under the chairmanship of Secretary Road, Transport and Highways, Sanjay Mitra.
- Out of the total 11 projects, one will be implemented on BOT(Toll) and Hybrid annuity each and the remaining nine projects will be on EPC mode.

Govt to plant 4 crore trees along Ganga river

Government unveiled its plan to plant over **four crore trees** in next five years as Union Water Resource Minister Uma Bharati stressed on planting of Himalayan species vegetation that will produce **Brahmadrav**, which she said, ensures clean river water.

- Releasing the **detailed project report (DPR)**, Bharati said Brahmadrav is *“not a myth or faith but fact”* as she insisted on planting of “suitable” vegetation to ensure ecological flow (e-flow) of the river is adequate.

- Suggesting that no river like Ganga can be cleaned over a short span of time, the Minister cited examples of Rhine and Thames rivers, which she said took 40 years and 27 years respectively to be cleaned.
- The DPR release ceremony was also attended by Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar.
- Water Resource Secretary Shashi Shekhar said the government will plant native species all along the river's stretch and the work is expected to get underway from monsoon this year.

Indian Coast Guard vessel **Arnvesh** commissioned

The Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV), **ICGS Arnvesh**, of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) was commissioned on 21 March 2016 in Visakhapatnam. The vessel was commissioned by the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Naval Command, Vice-Admiral **HCS Bisht**.

- The ship is primarily intended to undertake surveillance at sea, coastal patrol, anti-smuggling and anti-piracy operations.
- **Arnvesh** is equipped with the most-advanced navigational and communication sensors and equipment, including night vision capabilities, and is fitted with **40/60 Bofors gun** onboard as main armament.
- Arnvesh is the **16th vessel** among the 20 vessels in this category being constructed by Cochin Shipyard Limited.
- The ship is built by the Cochin Shipyard Ltd.
- The ship will be manned by five officers and 35 enrolled personnel.
- The **300-tonne and 50-m long vessel** is propelled by triple **Rolls Royce Kamewa water jets** and can achieve a maximum speed of 33 knots.

Union Government launches Longitudinal Ageing Study in India

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare launched the **Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI)**. The main objective is to assess the needs of its elderly people and frame policies accordingly. It will survey more than 60,000 elderly over 25 years plan. He further added that this survey will provide scientifically validated data on various issues of the elderly.

- LASI is the largest study on older population in the country.
- The **International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS)**, Mumbai in collaboration with **Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH)** and **University of Southern California (USC)**, USA is undertaking the "The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India" under the aegis of the Ministry of Union Health and Family Welfare.

Mizoram, JICA sign pact for promoting sustainable agriculture

The Mizoram government and Japanese International Cooperative Agency (JICA) signed an agreement on '**Capacity Enhancement for Sustainable Agriculture and Irrigation Development.**'

- The memorandum of understanding was signed by top officials of Agriculture, Minor Irrigation, Horticulture and Soil and Water Conservation departments in the presence of state chief secretary Lalmalsawma. JICA was represented by its team leader **Satoru Fujita** and four other officials both from Tokyo and Delhi.
- Experts of the Japanese company would, on the company's own expense, undertake technical cooperation project in four rural development blocks in **Aizawl, Kolasib, Serchhip and Champhai districts**.

Four Day National AROGYA Fair Begins in Goa

A National level **AROGYA** Fair organized by the Ministry of **AYUSH** in association with **Goa** State Government and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) began in Goa at Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium at Goa University Campus at Bambolim near Panaji. The four day fair aims to create awareness among the members of the public about the efficiency of the AYUSH systems, their cost-effectiveness and the availability of herbs and plants used for prevention and treatment of common ailments at their doorstep through various mass media channels to achieve the objective of Health for all.

Mizoram signs MoU with JICA for promoting Sustainable Agriculture

Mizoram government and **Japanese International Cooperative Agency** (JICA) have signed an MoU on 'Capacity Enhancement for Sustainable Agriculture and Irrigation Development'.

- The MoU will pave way for experts of the Japanese company to undertake technical cooperation project on the company's expense in four rural development blocks in Aizawl, Serchhip, Kolasib and Champhai districts.
- Under it training programmes would be conducted in Japan both for farmers and officials from Mizoram for three times.
- The project will be undertaken based on the development study conducted by JICA during 2013 and 2015.
- Based on this study, it had formulated a master plan covering 20 years and the technical cooperation project would commence from October 2016 till September 2021.

BHEL commissioned 600 MW Jaipur Thermal Power Plant in Telangana

Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), a Maharatna central public sector enterprise, has successfully commissioned a 600 Mw coal-based thermal power plant in **Telangana**. The company has built 600 Mw rating sets which comprise of a four cylinder turbine, designed in-house.

- With the commissioning of the unit, **Singareni Collieries Company Ltd (SCCL)** has successfully diversified into the power generation business.

- The heavy engineering major had earlier commissioned a 600 Mw thermal power plant at **Kakatiya** in the state in last December.
- The company commissioned 85 per cent of the coal-based power stations in Telangana amounting to 5,180 Mw.
- The state government has recently placed orders with the company for executing around 6,000 Mw of thermal power projects in the state on engineering procurement construction basis.

GOI starts survey to find enemy properties

With the aim of finding new enemy properties, the government has launched a survey in five States, for identification of movable and immovable assets once held by people who migrated to Pakistan. The five states are **Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Delhi**.

- In order to detect more enemy properties in the States by conducting the survey in an organised manner, the Home Ministry has appointed 65 personnel, including 50 surveyors and 15 accountancy and management personnel, for the task.
- After the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and 1971, many people migrated to that country subsequent to which the Indian government, in accordance with the Defence of India Rules, framed under the **Defence of India Act**, took over the properties and companies of such persons who had taken Pakistani nationality.
- These 'enemy properties' were vested by the Central government in the **Custodian of Enemy Property for India**.
- Among the enemy properties under the jurisdiction of custodian of Enemy Property of India in Mumbai are ₹310 crore worth fixed deposits, treasury bills and government stock, ₹177.6 crore worth bank balance and ₹37.54 lakh gold and silver jewellery, as on December 31, 2015.
- There are several thousand crores of rupees worth of 'enemy properties' spread across the country.
- The survey was ordered before the **Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2016**, which sought to amend the **Enemy Property Act, 1968**, was referred to a Rajya Sabha House Committee for detailed scrutiny last fortnight.

India and China led investments in renewable energy in 2015: UN

According to the report by UN, **India and China** led developing countries in investments made in renewable energy in 2015. For the first time commitments in solar, wind and other renewables capacity by emerging economies surpassed those by wealthy nations

- The report '**Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2016**' by the UN Environment Programme said the developing world including **China, India and Brazil** committed a total of USD 156 billion in new renewables capacity last year, up 19 per cent from 2014.
- Investments by developed countries were down eight per cent in 2015 to USD 130 billion.

- The year 2015 was the first time when investment in renewables in developing countries outweighed that in developed economies, the report said.
- A large part of the record-breaking investment in developing countries took place in China, which lifted its investment by 17 per cent to USD 102.9 billion, more than a third of global commitments.
- India was also among the top 10 investing countries in renewable energy, with its commitments rising 22 per cent to USD 10.2 billion.

President rule imposed in Uttarakhand

President's Rule has been imposed in **Uttarakhand** a day before the crucial trust vote in the state assembly for the **Harish Rawat government**. The Cabinet had recommended the imposition of Central rule in the state last night following an hour-long emergency meeting with Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**. It received the formal nod from **President Pranab Mukherjee**.

- The Government justified the imposition of President's Rule saying the **Harish Rawat** government was "**unconstitutional**" and "**immoral**" since March 18, when the "failed" Appropriation Bill was shown as passed.
- The crisis in Uttarakhand had started earlier this month, after nine lawmakers of the ruling Congress, including former chief minister Vijay Bahuguna, had rebelled against the Harish Rawat government.
- With the move coming weeks after President's Rule was imposed in Arunachal Pradesh, the furious Congress alleged that the BJP was stooping to new lows.

Gujarat to set up nation's first Organic Farming University

Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel said that the state will set up country's first **university** exclusively focussing on organic farming. The main objective is to help farmers in switching to unconventional methods of farming.

- State agriculture minister Babubhai Bokhiria said state government is committed to promote organic farming and in order to achieve it, a fund of Rs 10 crore has been earmarked towards the university in the annual 2016-17 budget, presented recently.
- The place may be chosen near to agriculture Kamdhenu University in Gandhinagar district.
- He apprised that for promoting organic farming, state government has taken steps like setting up of a cell to implement its new organic farming policy.

Tata Motors signed a contract with Indian Army

Tata Motors has signed a follow-on contract with the **Indian Army** to supply 619 units of its **6X6 HMV** (high-mobility vehicle) multi-axle truck. Built with a material handling crane, the Tata 6X6 HMV is

meant for loading-unloading and transportation of ammunition pallets, spares and other operational equipment.

- This is in conjunction to an earlier order awarded by the Army to Tata Motors for 1,239 units of the 6X6 HMT.
- This is the single largest order awarded to an Indian private original equipment manufacturer in land systems by the Indian Army under the defence ministry's defence procurement procedure.

Parrikar unveils Defence Procurement Procedure

After a delay of over an year, the much-awaited new **defence procurement policy** was unveiled by the government with an aim to ensure transparency, fast-track acquisition process and give a push to the "Make in India" initiative.

- The DPP have been loaded online on the Defence Ministry's website and would be made available in hard copy format after 15 days.
- The new policy has introduced an **Indian Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM)** category which will benefit the local units.
- Parrikar said defence export clearances are to be granted online. He said the policy will also include 'Start-up India' initiative.

Bihar passes bill to ban liquor in the state

The Bihar Assembly has unanimously passed the Bihar Excise (Amendment) Bill 2016 to enforce the ban on country made liquor from April 1. The 1915 liquor Bill was amended to incorporate stricter penal provisions, including death sentence, for manufacturers and distributors of illicit liquor in the event of a hooch tragedy.

ADB cuts India's growth forecast to 7.4% for 2016-17

Global headwinds will pull down India's growth rate to 7.4 percent in the next fiscal from 7.6 percent this year but more reforms will help the country remain one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the Asian Development Bank said.

SC approved guidelines of GOI to protect Good Samaritans

The Supreme Court has approved the Union government's guidelines to protect Good Samaritans from any kind of harassment for helping road accident victims. Also, they (good Samaritans) will be exempted from any criminal and civil liability.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Hashim Thaci elected as President of Kosovo

Hashim Thaci has been elected as Kosovo's president after 71 of the country's 120 MPs voted in favour of his nomination. Ten ballots were deemed invalid. The alternative candidate, Rafet Rama, also from the Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, received no votes. Several MPs from LDK refused to vote for Thaci as president. Thaci was elected in the third round of voting after failing to win the two-third majority backing in two votes earlier the same day.

China launches first self propelled floating dock

China's navy has launched its first self-propelled floating dock, giving it the ability to repair warships far from the coast. The dock, the Huachuan No. 1, would enable the navy to return damaged ships to fighting capability "in very rapid time" and was designed to be sent into combat zones. The use of the dock means that ships with minor damage will not have to be taken out of service, while those with severe damage will not have to return to a shipyard.

Bill Gates is richest person in the World, Mukesh Ambani at 36th – Forbes

According to Forbes' annual ranking of billionaires, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates continued his reign as the richest person in the world. Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani has retained his position as India's richest person, leading a pack of 84 Indian billionaires in 2016. Forbes' 2016 list of the World's Billionaires includes 1,810 billionaires, down from a record 1,826 a year ago.

Peru declares emergency after oil spill hits rivers

Peru has declared an emergency three weeks after a major oil pipeline burst, affecting two rivers in the country's northwest. The pipeline spilled 3,000 barrels of crude oil into the Chiriaco and Morona rivers, which are the main source of water and food for several indigenous communities. The government has told these communities not to eat fish from the polluted waters. The broken pipeline reportedly used to transport between 5,000 and 6,000 oil barrels per day.

UNSC unanimously expands sanctions on North Korea

The United Nations Security Council has unanimously adopted a resolution significantly expanding international sanctions against North Korea. The new measures amount to some of the toughest against North Korea in two decades. The vote is in response to North Korea's nuclear test last month. The sanctions will result in all cargo going to and from the country being inspected, while 16 new individuals and 12 organisations have been blacklisted.

South Korea passes first Anti-terror Bill

South Korea's parliament has passed the country's first anti-terror bill, with opposition lawmakers leaving the plenary chamber after ending the nine-day marathon speeches. Among almost 300 parliamentary seats, only 156 ruling Saenuri Party lawmakers and one minority party member participated in a vote on the country's first anti-terrorism legislation, which was passed through the National Assembly with 156 in favour. The bill, which was first brought up in South Korea in 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, had repeatedly failed to be enacted due to worries about abuse of power by the country's spy agency.

River Atoyac vanishes overnight after tremors

Thousands of **Mexicans** were astonished when they woke up to discover their local river had vanished overnight. The **Atoyac River**, the sole source of water for 10,000 in the state of Veracruz, is thought to have disappeared into a crevasse following an earthquake tremor. It is unclear how much of the river, which crosses eight municipalities in the mountainous area of central Mexico, was affected by the suspected sinkhole. The river, which flows through eight municipalities in a mountainous area of central Mexico, is thought to have vanished into a crevasse.

Philippines seizes North Korea ship after sanctions

The Philippines says it has seized a North Korean ship in line with tightened UN sanctions targeting the country's nuclear programme. The Jin Teng is one of 31 ships operated by North Korean firm Ocean Maritime Management, which is subject to an asset freeze and sanctions. New UN sanctions were imposed after North Korea's recent nuclear and ballistic missile tests. They include mandatory inspections of all cargo going to or from the DPRK. The Philippines government says it will impound the Jin Teng and eventually deport the crew.

UK Royal Navy to join NATO migrant patrols

The UK military is to join Nato forces intercepting and returning people trying to reach Europe from Turkey, as David Cameron prepares to meet European leaders to discuss the escalating migration crisis. The prime minister announced that the Royal Navy was deploying the amphibious landing ship RFA Mounts Bay as the first UK contribution to the Nato deployment in the Aegean Sea. The vessel, which carries a Wildcat helicopter, will join naval vessels from Germany, Canada, Turkey and Greece as part of Nato's first intervention in the migration crisis.

North Korea threatens nuke attacks on US, South Korea

North Korea has threatened to turn Washington and Seoul into "flames and ashes", warning of an indiscriminate "pre-emptive nuclear strike of justice" in reaction to the start of US-South Korean military drills. Such threats have been a staple of the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, since he took power

after his father's death in December 2011. But they tend to increase when Washington and Seoul stage what they describe as annual defensive springtime war games.

Freecharge partners with Mexico-based movie theatre chain Cinopolis

Digital payments platform FreeCharge has partnered with Mexico-based chain of movie theatres, Cinopolis, that aims to provide its customers an easy to use and secure way of making payments. With the partnership going live in the second week of March, customers can pay for movie tickets and Food&Beverages (F&B) across 38 Cinopolis theatres in 28 Cities using the FreeCharge wallet. As part of launch the customers will also be able to avail offers and discounts rolled off by the FreeCharge. FreeCharge is the first digital wallet partner for Cinopolis, the world's 4th largest chain of movie theatres.

North Korea claims to have miniaturised nuke warhead

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the country has miniaturized nuclear warheads to mount on ballistic missiles and ordered improvements in the power and precision of its arsenal. Kim has called for his military to be prepared to mount pre-emptive attacks against the United States and South Korea and stand ready to use nuclear weapons. U.S. and South Korean troops began large-scale military drills this week, which the North called "nuclear war moves" and threatened to respond with an all-out offensive.

UN adopts plan to curb sex abuse by peacekeepers

The UN Security Council has adopted a resolution to take strong action to confront the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeepers. The resolution, drafted by the United States, requests UN Secretary-General to replace all military and police unit of a troop or police contributing country in UN peacekeeping operations if the country has not taken appropriate actions to investigate their personnel or hold perpetrators accountable. Fourteen members of the 15-nation Council voted in favor of the resolution.

Wikipedia to develop speech engine for blind

The Wikimedia Foundation is currently developing a speech synthesis engine to its encyclopedia. In parallel with the release of its new app for iOS, the Wikimedia Foundation is currently developing a multilingual engine in partnership with the Royal Institute of Technology KTH. It will be optimized for Wikipedia but available as open source.

Snowden starts campaign against cyber censorship

Prominent activists ranging from Edward Snowden to Pussy Riot have planned to spread online protests against growing government restrictions on citizens' expression, marking an annual world day against cyber censorship. In one message, Snowden, will tell the public: "Even if you're not doing anything wrong, you're being watched and recorded."

Malaysia bans recruitment of new foreign workers

Malaysia has banned the recruitment of new foreign workers after widespread criticism of its decision to bring in 1.5 million Bangladeshis to work in the country, a move that may also affect Indian labourers. Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid said employers who wanted to hire foreign workers should recruit from among foreign employees already in the country, including those whose permits had expired. Ahmad Zahid who is the home minister, said the issue of importing 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers could be considered as closed.

South Sudan allowed soldiers to rape as wages : UN

According to a UN Report, the South Sudanese government has conducted a “scorched earth policy” against civilians caught up in the country’s civil war. The Government has allowed its soldiers and allied militias to rape women in lieu of wages, torture and murder suspected opponents and deliberately displace as many people as possible. The report laid bare the scale of the atrocities committed by both sides since the war broke out in December 2013 and warned that many of those may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Obama Chooses Merrick Garland for Supreme Court

President Obama nominated **Merrick B. Garland** to be the nation’s 113th Supreme Court justice. The Supreme Court vacancy follows the death of **Antonin Scalia** last month.

- **Judge Garland**, 63, is viewed as a moderate and has won praise from senior Republican figures.
- The appointment has to be ratified by the Senate, but its Republican majority has vowed to block a vote on any Supreme Court nominee from Mr Obama.
- **Republicans** have called on the president to leave the nomination to his successor, who will be elected in November.
- The death of Justice Scalia, a staunch conservative, left the nine-member Supreme Court evenly divided between conservatives and liberals.

President Obama said Mr Garland – chief judge of the **Washington** appeals court and a former prosecutor – enjoyed respect from **Democrats and Republicans alike**.

China to build tsunami alert centre in South China Sea

China is building a tsunami alert centre in South China Sea and the facility in the disputed region has been approved by the UN.

- It has begun operations and has already issued tsunami alerts to the international community, including neighbouring countries in the South China Sea.
- The project has received United Nations approval.
- This is the latest announcement on facilities China is constructing in the disputed South China Sea.

- China defends facilities in the South China Sea like a light house saying that **it will benefit all the countries in the region while critics say it is an attempt by Beijing to solidify its presence in disputed islands and reefs with permanent structures.**
- Officials of South China's Hainan Province also announced that the province is building piers and restoring the ecological environment on the the Paracel islands which China calls as **Xisha Islands.**

Asia most exposed to disasters, Africa most vulnerable: Study

Countries and mega-cities across Asia are highly exposed to natural hazards ranging from cyclones to earthquakes, but people in sub-Saharan Africa are more vulnerable, according to a report.

- Nearly 1.4 billion people in South Asia — **India, Bangladesh, Pakistan** — face at least one major threat from nature, **especially flooding, severe storms** boosted by rising seas, and quakes.
- In the case of Bangladesh, 100% of its population is exposed, compared to 82% for India and 70% in Pakistan.
- **China, Indonesia, Japan and the Philippines** are also among the nations with the largest numbers of people in harm's way.
- The United States, Mexico and Brazil round out the top ten.
- When it comes to vulnerability, however, **Africa** is the continent where people are most likely to suffer injury, disease and death as a result of natural disasters, according to the Natural Hazards Vulnerability Index from risk analysts Verisk Maplecroft.

US imposes new sanctions on North Korea


The **Obama** administration has tightened the **US Trade embargo** on **North Korea**, explicitly placing sanctions on the Pyongyang government, its ruling party and broad sectors of the country's economy. The US action is expected to significantly increase pressure on **China** to cut its business dealings with the nuclear-armed state.

- Chinese companies could also be targeted in the crackdown.
- China is by far the North Korean government's largest business partner and invests in many of the economic sectors.
- The U.S. said revenue, particularly from North Korea's mining industry, is invested by Pyongyang back into programs to develop weapons of mass destruction.
- The Treasury also sanctioned 17 North Korean government officials and organizations, and placed travel warnings on 20 North Korean shipping vessels.

Brazil President appoints Lula as Chief of Staff

Brazilians have protested in several cities against **President Dilma Rousseff** after she named her predecessor, **Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Chief of Staff.**

- In the capital **Brasilia**, riot police fired pepper spray at protesters outside the presidential palace.

- Lula is currently being investigated in a **major corruption scandal**.
- Brazil's leader, who is herself facing impeachment proceedings, defended the appointment. She said Lula was a "**skillful political negotiator**" and experienced leader who would help kick off economic recovery.
- **Lula** was briefly detained and questioned earlier this month over allegations of **MONEY**  laundering connected to Operation Car Wash, a massive investigation into corruption at the state oil giant, **Petrobras**.
- He denies the allegations, saying they are aimed at preventing him from running for president again in 2018.

Turkey and EU reach landmark deal on refugees

Turkey and the EU have reached a controversial deal European leaders hope will stop the flow of refugees to the continent in return for political and financial concessions for Ankara.

- Turkish Prime Minister **Ahmet Davutoglu** and EU President **Donald Tusk** confirmed the agreement, which will come into force on Sunday, at a press conference in Brussels after three rounds of talks.
- The accord aims to close the main route by which a million people poured across the Aegean Sea to Greece in the last year before marching north to Germany and Sweden.

General Lori Robinson nominated as first US female combatant Chief

General Lori Robinson has been officially named as the next nominee to lead **US Northern Command (NORTHCOM)**, setting her up to be the **first woman** to lead a combatant command in **Pentagon** history.

- The announcement, made by **Secretary of Defense Ash Carter**, was largely expected, with Defense News, among others, reporting in January that Robinson was the likely pick.
- She is currently commander for the Pacific Air Forces and enrolled in the Air Force in 1982.
- If confirmed by the Senate, she would replace **Adm. Bill Gortney**, who held the position since December 2014.
- The US Northern Command oversees all of **North America**.

Russia gets its own Rating Firm – ACRA

Vladimir Putin's homegrown credit-ratings firm is up and running and foreign competitors are already feeling the heat. Moody's last week announced it would shutter its joint venture in Moscow of 12 years and Fitch said it will probably stop issuing local ratings on Russian companies, the same day **ACRA**, which stands for **Analytical Credit Rating Agency**, applied for a license to operate in Russia.

- In the past three weeks, Moody's Investors Service Inc. and Fitch Ratings Ltd. have said they plan to stop issuing local ratings rather than agree to having their Moscow branches regulated by the Russian government at the cost of breaking international sanctions.

- Russia is squeezing the business of foreign-ratings assessors since downgrades it condemned as politically motivated last year pushed the sovereign below INVESTMENT grade for the first time in more than a decade.

New Golden Frog species discovered in Colombia

A team of scientists including a **Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI)** research associate announced the discovery of a new species of pale Gold colored frog from the cloud forests of the high Andes in Colombia. Its name, commemorates both its color (dorado means 'golden' in Spanish) and El Dorado, a mythical city of gold eagerly sought for centuries by Spanish conquistadores in South America.

Hinduja brothers top UK's Asian Rich List

The Hinduja brothers have emerged as the richest **Asian-origin** entrepreneurs in **Britain** for the fourth consecutive year with an estimated personal fortune of 16.5 billion pounds.

- The India-born brothers **GP Hinduja and SP Hinduja** topped the 'Asian Rich List 2016' released and the annual rankings showed that they had added one billion pounds to their personal fortune in a year to be worth an estimated 16.5 billion pounds.
- The 'Asian Rich List' assesses the total wealth of Britain's top 101 richest Asians and is compiled by UK-based publishing house Asian Media and market.
- **Steel tycoon Lakshmi N Mittal** was ranked second in the list, released by the Indian High Commissioner to the UK Navtej Sarna. The fortune of Mittal, however, has plummeted by 3.3 billion pounds to finish with 6.4 billion pounds.
- **Sri Prakash Lohia**, chairman of the Indorama Corporation, is listed 3rd richest with fortune worth 3 billion pounds.

IKEA donates Rs 92 crore for safe water projects in India, Indonesia

Swedish furniture retailing giant IKEA will contribute **12.4 million euro (Rs 92.84 crore)** to provide safe water and sanitation to one million people in India and Indonesia through **Water.Org**.

- IKEA Foundation has announced a new grant of 12.4 million euro to Water.Org on the occasion of **the World Water Day (March 22)**.
- IKEA Foundation is the philanthropic arm of **INGKA Foundation**, the owner of the IKEA Group of companies.
- The World Bank estimates that 2% of communicable diseases in India are linked to unsafe water and the lack of hygiene practices, and 50% of India's population continues to practice open defecation, the statement said.

Nepal and China sign many agreements

Stung by the bitter lessons from Madhesi blockade of India Trade points that caused acute fuel shortage, **Nepal signed a transit and transportation treaty with China for its third-country commerce — a move that is likely to end New Delhi's monopoly over the landlocked Himalayan nation's Trade through Haldia port in Kolkata.**

- The two countries signed the agreement along with nine other treaties in Beijing, a day after Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli began a week-long trip to China. Oli's maiden visit as the Nepal prime minister comes at the invitation of his **Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang.**
- The visit is significant in the light of Nepal's efforts to reduce its decades old dependence on India after Madhesi protestors in southern plains, agitated over the the new Constitution, blocked supply trucks coming in from the southern neighbour.
- The five-month long blockade caused huge crises as fuel and medicine supplies dried up.
- The transit agreement with China gives Nepal an option to use the next nearest **Tianjin port** in China that is **3,000 km from Nepal border.**
- **India's Haldia port is 1,000 km away.**
- Other important agreements signed during Oli's visit on Monday include **an accord on the construction of a bridge in Hilsa, far west Nepal, that will connect the republic with Tibet.** Hilsa was a traditional Trade route to Nepal.
- China has also pledged **\$216-million soft loan to Nepal** for construction of a regional airport in the second largest city of Pokhara, some 200 km

Ali Mohamed Shein is a new President of Zanzibar

The electoral authority of Tanzania's semi-autonomous archipelago of Zanzibar, the ZEC, announced incumbent President **Ali Mohamed Shein** had won his re-election bid, after polls boycotted by the main opposition party.

- Shein from the ruling **CCM** party easily won after the main opposition party, the Civic United Front or CUF, boycotted the election, protesting the ZEC's decision to nullify the results of last October's general election in which the opposition apparently won both the presidency and the house of representatives.
- International observers, including the European Union and other international bodies, made clear their stand by condemning not only the election re-run, but also the nullification of the October election results.

Nepal became Dialogue Partner of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Nepal has become a dialogue partner of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**, a Beijing-based regional security grouping.

- Nepal was officially made a dialogue partner after a memorandum was signed by SCO secretary-general Rashid Olimov and visiting Nepalese Foreign Secretary Shanker Das Bairagi.
- Nepalese **Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli** attended the signing ceremony.
- The SCO was established in 2001 to promote cooperation on security-related issues and strengthen mutual trust, friendliness and neighborliness among the member states.
- As a dialogue partner, Nepal is able to participate in the multi-field cooperation of the SCO, which has an increasing presence in international affairs.
- As Nepal joins the SCO, it will create new opportunities for the SCO's mutually beneficial cooperation and benefit people living in the extensive region that the SCO covers.
- Recently, Azerbaijan officially became a SCO dialogue partner upon the signing of a similar memorandum.

Nepal and Azerbaijan became Dialogue Partner of SCO

Nepal on 22 March 2016 became a dialogue partner of the Beijing-based regional security grouping, **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.

- Nepal was officially made a dialogue partner after a memorandum was signed during the Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli visit to China.
- As a dialogue partner, ***Nepal will be able to participate in the multi-field cooperation of the Organisation.***
- Beside Nepal, **Azerbaijan** also officially became a SCO dialogue partner on 21 March 2016 upon the signing of a similar memorandum.

RTI bill presented in Sri Lankan Parliament

Sri Lanka's much-awaited **Right to Information (RTI)** Bill was tabled in Parliament fulfilling an election promise of the Sirisena government.

- The bill's presentation had been delayed as the Northern Provincial Council had failed to pass the proposed draft in the Council on time.
- The RTI was a key election pledge made by the Opposition coalition now in power when they challenged the former president Mahinda Rajapaksa in the presidential election held in January 2015.
- Rajapaksa was defeated by Maithripala Sirisena in general elections last year.
- The Cabinet had approved it in December and thereafter was referred to the nine provincial councils for approval.

Pakistan and Iran aim to boost trade to \$5 billion

Pakistan and **Iran** aim to increase annual trade volumes between the two countries to **\$5 billion** by 2021. Trade between Pakistan and Iran fell to \$432 million in 2010-11 from \$1.32 billion in 2008-09, according to the **Trade Development Authority of Pakistan**, after western powers imposed sanctions on Tehran aimed at halting a nuclear program they suspected was aimed at developing a nuclear bomb.

- **Sharif** spoke at a business conference with **Iranian President Hassan Rouhani**, who arrived in **Islamabad** for two-day talks focused on increasing Pakistan's electricity imports from Iran, boosting trade relations and reviving plans for a gas pipeline between the two countries.
- Most of the sanctions were lifted in January in return for Iran complying with a deal to curb its nuclear ambitions.
- Iran currently exports around 100 megawatts (MW) of electricity to the areas of Pakistan that border Iran. Pakistan is in the final stages of negotiating a deal that will increase that to 1,000 MW, the ministry of water and power has said previously.

UNSC extends mandate of UN Assistance Mission in Somalia

The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** on 24 March 2016 extended the **UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)** till 31 March 2017. A resolution in this regard was unanimously approved by all the 15 members of the Council in order to support an inclusive, free, fair and transparent electoral process in 2016 and universal elections by 2020.

- Somalia is a semiarid land in the Horn of Africa.
- The Somalis are one of the most homogeneous peoples in Africa, but unity is thwarted by clan-based rivalries.
- The independence of Somaliland, while widely acknowledged, is not officially recognized by the international community—as efforts continue to reunify Somalia.
- It was established in May 2013 by the UNSC to create and galvanize the political and strategic environment of Somalia in which stabilisation and peace-building can proceed.

Syrian Govt forces retake all of Palmyra from ISIS

Syrian government forces have recaptured **Palmyra**, inflicting a significant defeat on the **Islamic State** group which seized the city last year and dynamited its ancient temples. The army and its militia allies took complete control of the city and were clearing mines and bombs laid by the militants.

- **The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights** said there was still gunfire in the eastern part of the city on Sunday morning but the bulk of the IS force had pulled out and retreated east, leaving Palmyra under **President Bashar al-Assad's** control.
- For government forces, the recapture of Palmyra opens up much of Syria's eastern desert stretching to the Iraqi border to the south and IS heartland of Deir al-Zor and Raqqa to the east.

- It follows a three-week campaign by the army and its allies on the ground, backed by intensive Russian air strikes, aimed at driving IS back.
- Russia's intervention in September turned the tide of Syria's five-year-old conflict in Assad's favour.

Myanmar gets its first public listing

After a delay of more than 20 years, Myanmar's stock exchange opened for its first day of business, with the trading of a single company.

- The move comes as the country's development accelerates with a democratic government being formed after an election victory in November, part of a political and economic transformation that's bringing an end to more than five decades of isolation.
- The listing debut was attended by First Myanmar's Pun and officials including Maung Maung Thein, the country's deputy finance minister and chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, who called it "a historic day in the development of the capital markets."
- First Myanmar, Myanmar Citizens Bank and Myanmar Thilawa SEZ are among the initial batch of six companies approved for listing.
- Myanmar's equity-market journey began in the early 1990s, when executives from **Daiwa Institute** of Research Holdings, a unit of Japan's second-largest brokerage, met with the nation's military rulers in Yangon.

World Bank approved \$100 million loan to Jordan

Jordan will get a cheap \$100 million loan from **World Bank** to help create 100,000 jobs for Syrian refugees and its own citizen. The **World Bank's Board** extended the highly unusual financing offer because of the extraordinarily difficult situation facing both the refugees and their Jordanian hosts.

- The long-term loan, almost interest free, is part of an attempt by the international community to improve conditions for refugees in overburdened regional host countries, including Jordan and Lebanon.
- More than 4.8 million Syrians have fled their country since the start of the Syria conflict in 2011. **Jordan** hosts about 640,000 registered Syrian refugees and Lebanon more than 1 million.
- Cheap loans by the World Bank and other donors are among the new tools meant to help finance education and job creation for refugees in the region. Such support is also meant to slow the migration of refugees to Europe.

Myanmar's Htun Kyaw sworn in as president

Htun Kyaw has been sworn in as Myanmar's new president after more than five decades of military rule in the country. Myanmar has been under military or military-dominated rule since a coup in 1962, and

the elections in November which brought the new government to power were the first openly contested polls since 1990. Htin Kyaw takes over from former general Thein Sein, who has led the country since 2011.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Military Exercise Force Eighteen begins in Pune

Eighteen nations from 'Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)' Plus including United States, China and Russia will participate in the largest 'Multinational Field Training Exercise' being conducted at Pune from March 2. This will be the maiden multinational exercise ever conducted by the ground on Indian soil, which will see participation of 18 ASEAN Plus nations including United States, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea among others. It is conducted by India as part of its ambitious Look (Act) East policy and it is one of the largest multi-national military exercises conducted in the country.

MoUs with Japan and Russia in the various fields of Railways

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi was apprised of the following Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs). The MoC signed between Ministry of Railways (MoR) and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), Japan on technological cooperation in Rail Sector on 11th December 2015. The MoU signed between Ministry of Railways and Joint Stock Company "Russian Railways" on technical cooperation in railway sector on 24th December 2015.

Raisina Dialogue, started in New Delhi

Raisina Dialogue, a joint initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs and a leading think tank, Observer Research Foundation. The three-day Dialogue, organised on the lines of the famous Shangrila Dialogue held in Singapore, will see participation of more than 100 speakers from over 35 countries. It is focusing on Asia's physical, economic, human and digital connectivity, attempting to discover opportunities and challenges for the region to manage its common spaces, as well as the global partnerships needed to develop common pathways in this century.

Indo-Indonesia Joint Training Exercise Garuda shakti IV

Indo-Indonesia Joint Training Exercise **GARUDA SHAKTI** is conducted as part of military diplomacy between Indian and Indonesian Army alternatively in India and Indonesia respectively. The exercise is conducted on a reciprocal basis and its first edition was conducted in the year 2012 in India. The second edition was conducted in Indonesia in 2013 and third in India in 2014. The exercise is aimed at building and promoting positive relations between the two Armies of India and Indonesia.

India offers highest overseas credit to Bangladesh

India signed a landmark agreement with Bangladesh extending **\$2 billion** to the country in its biggest ever overseas credit line, five years after it inked a credit agreement worth \$1 billion with its neighbour. Chairman and Managing Director of Exim Bank Yaduvendra Mathur signed the deal with senior secretary in Bangladesh's economic relations division Mohammad Mesbahuddin. The agreement was inked in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement during his visit here in June, 2015.

MoU signed between India and UAE on Cyber Space

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its ex-post approval for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Technical Cooperation in Cyber Space and Combating Cyber-Crime signed last month. This agreement would provide help in handling of the issues related to the cyber-crime between the two countries. Both the countries shall cooperate in cyber space and combating cyber-crime in all forms, particularly through coordination and exchange of information in relation with cyber crime, cooperation and training in cyber-crime investigation, etc. between India and UAE.

MoU b/w India & IMF for setting up of SARTTAC

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its approval for entering into the MoU between India and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for setting up of South Asia Regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (SARTTAC). The center will be set up in India by the IMF. The cabinet also authorised the Finance Minister to approve related decisions in respect of India's contribution for setting up of the centre. The SARTTAC will be a collaborative venture between the IMF, the member countries that is Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Additional member countries could join SARTTAC at a later stage. SARTTAC will also selectively cater to the capacity building needs at the State level, especially in India.

MoU between India and Bahrain on Cooperation for Prevention of Human Trafficking

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its approval for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Bahrain on cooperation for prevention of human trafficking especially trafficking in women and children; rescue, recovery, repatriation and re-integration of victims of trafficking. This MoU will strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries and increase the bilateral cooperation on the issues of prevention, rescue, recovery and repatriation related to human trafficking especially women and children expeditiously.

India, US launch Fulbright-Kalam Climate Fellowship

India and the US have launched the Fulbright-Kalam Climate Fellowship, in a new initiative to advance bilateral cooperation on climate change, that will enable Indian research scholars to work with American

institutions in the field. The first call for applicants was announced on Friday for the fellowship jointly funded by both the governments and will enable up to 6 Indian PhD students and post-doctoral researchers to work with US host institutions for a period of 6-12 months, according to a press release.

India to supply 18 Meter Gauge Diesel Electric Locomotives to Myanmar

India will supply 18 Meter Gauge 1350 HP Diesel Electric Locomotives to Myanmar to augment locomotive fleet of Myanmar Railways to meet increasing demand for passenger and freight traffic. The supply contract of locomotives is a vital project being funded under an existing line of credit extended to Myanmar by Government of India. These locomotives will be manufactured by Diesel Locomotive Works, Varanasi with several modern features like microprocessor controls, fuel-efficient engine and ergonomic cab design etc.

46 countries to participate in 9th Defence Expo in Goa

- **Defexpo India 2016**, the ninth in the series of biennial **Land, Naval and Internal Homeland Security Systems Exhibition**, will be held at **Naqueri Quitol** in Quepem taluka of **South Goa** from **March 28-31, 2016**.
- Defexpo India is **clearly** steering the path of **steady growth** and has been receiving overwhelming and **unprecedented international response** with **each edition**.
- This is for the **first time** that the Expo will **travel** to **Goa** from **Delhi**.
- For this **edition**, countries like **USA, Russia, Sweden, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates** and **Portugal** amongst others have **confirmed** their participation.
- An impressive **232 foreign companies** from **32 countries** participated in the show in **2014** along with **15 country pavilions** with a growth of **12.64 per cent** in terms of **space booking**.

India and China exchange tariff cut offers

Plans to liberalise Trade between India and China, the world's two fastest-growing large economies, have gathered momentum with both sides exchanging offers on removal of a chunk of tariff lines on goods imports.

- Against India's offer to remove 42.5% of tariff lines under the 16-country Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), China has expressed its willingness to abolish equivalent amount of tariff lines for India.
- Cotton fibre and yarn, copper and some organic chemicals are the major items that India has exported to China this fiscal, while its imports from China include electronic items, mechanical appliances, organic chemicals, fertiliser and iron and steel. Earlier, India used to export huge quantities of iron ore to China before curbs were placed on their mining.

Indian Oil firms sign \$4.2 Billion deals with Rosneft

Russian energy giant **Rosneft OJSC** has agreed to sell substantial stakes in two **Siberian oil and gas fields** to state-run **Indian oil companies**, advancing India's efforts to safeguard its energy security through the acquisition of overseas assets. The deals, signed during a visit to India by Rosneft's president and chairman **Igor Ivanovich Sechin**, are together worth an estimated **\$4.2 billion**.

- **Indian Oil Corp. Ltd, Oil India Ltd and a unit of Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd** signed an agreement to purchase a 29.9% stake in Tass-Yuryakh oilfield from Rosneft.
- The Indian consortium also signed an agreement with Rosneft for buying a 23.9% stake in the Vankor oilfield, worth just over \$2 billion.
- **ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL)**, the overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), signed a separate agreement to buy an additional 11% stake in the **Vankor field**.
- OVL will pay \$925 million for the additional stake, taking its holding in the asset to 26%. In September, OVL acquired 15% of Vankor for \$1.26 billion.
- A fourth deal signed will allow **Oil India, Indian Oil and Bharat PetroResources Ltd**, the Bharat Petroleum subsidiary, to make more acquisitions in the **Vankor cluster**.

AYUSH Ministry to enter agreement with WHO

To popularise **AYUSH** system of medicine across the world, the ministry will enter into an agreement with **WHO** and a partnership with **United States** for research in AYUSH medicines for treatment of cancer.

- AYUSH is a very important sector and it should be propagated worldwide.
- To popularise AYUSH system of medicine across the world, the AYUSH Ministry is entering into an agreement with the WHO.
- MoUs have already been signed with several countries for bilateral cooperation in the field of traditional medicine.
- Central Research Councils and National Institute in the AYUSH Systems of Medicine along with the National Medicinal Plant Board (NMPB), Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporations Limited (IMPCL) amongst others are showcasing their strengths in research, education and development of such products.

India to host 8th BRICS Summit in Goa

India will host the **eighth annual Summit of BRICS** from October 15-16 in **Goa** in its capacity as chair of the influential bloc comprising five countries with 42 per cent of the world population and combined GDP of over \$16 trillion.

- India assumed chairmanship of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India- China-South Africa) from Russia on February 15 and it will last till December 31.
- The logo for the Summit is a **lotus** having colours from all the five member countries and a traditional '**namaste**' in the centre.

India deployed P-8I to Seychelles for EEZ Surveillance

The Indian Navy has deployed a **P 8I maritime** reconnaissance aircraft to **Seychelles** since 20 Mar 16, for surveillance in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Seychelles, in accordance with the MoU between the Governments of India and Seychelles.

- The Indian Navy has, in the past, undertaken surveillance missions in the Seychelles EEZ twice a year, by deploying IN ships.
- The last such deployment was undertaken by ships of the 1st Training Squadron of the Indian Navy, in Oct 15.
- This is the first time that the P8I aircraft has been deployed to Seychelles.

India and Bangladesh PMs launch two bilateral projects

Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh commissioned international gateway of internet service in Agartala and supply of 100 MW power to Bangladesh from **Tripura**. **Chief Minister Manik Sarkar** also graced the cross border occasion connected through video conference.

- Both Prime Ministers were accompanied by their external affairs ministers, power and telecommunication ministers in their PMOs when two bilateral projects launched at around 10.30 AM.
- Agartala has become third station connected to submarine cable for internet bandwidth after Chennai and Mumbai while the state also landed in international power map by starting supply of electricity from **Suryamaninagar** grid to the grid in **Comilla** of southeast Bangladesh.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, **Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina** and **Chief Minister Manik Sarkar** in their speeches termed the commissioning of 10 GBPS bandwidth import and 100 MW electricity from south Tripura's 726 MW Palatana gas based project a historic one and a day to celebrate friendly relations between two neighbours.

Cabinet gives nod for MOU between India and UAE to mobilise long-term investment

The Union Cabinet chaired by the **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** gave its ex-post facto approval for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between **India** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** signed on 11th February, 2016 to mobilise long term investment into the **National investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)**.

- The objective of NIIF is to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects, both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects; NIIF would solicit equity participation from strategic anchor partners.
- The MoU will help establish a transparent and high-level framework and collaboration platform under which both countries intend to explore ways to facilitate and expand the participation of UAE's investment institutions in appropriate infrastructure projects and institutions in India

including NIIF, in a manner consistent with the established investment criteria and standards in a mutually agreed manner.

India and France sign MoU for construction of six nuclear reactors at Jaitapur

India and France have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for construction of six nuclear reactors at **Jaitapur** in **Maharashtra**, two months after the two countries decided to conclude the techno-commercial negotiations for the project by the year end.

- The pact was inked at the end of the two-day visit of a high-level delegation of Electricite de France (EDF) — French public utility — to Mumbai for holding discussions with the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) on the construction of the plants.
- The Jaitapur nuclear power project, proposing a nuclear power plant of 9900 MW, consists of 6 European Pressurised Reactors (EPR) of 1650 MW each.

India sends first ever direct vessel to Bangladesh

In a historic moment, an Indian container vessel left from **Krishnapatnam port** for **Bangladesh**, on a direct route for the first time, as a part of coastal shipping agreement between both the countries. The voyage aims at developing and facilitating coastal trade between India and Bangladesh after the Narendra Modi government revived the trade agreements signed by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1974.

- Earlier the shipments from Indian ports being transported to Bangladesh were routed either via Colombo or Singapore.
- With the launch of the direct service, time taken for such shipments would come down from 2-5 days.
- Last November, the two countries had signed a standard operating procedure for commercial cargo movement aiming at easier bilateral trade conditions.
- Various provisions were added including that the vessels from both the countries will be treated as domestic vessels upon entry.

Modi reaches Brussels for India-EU Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Brussels on the first leg of his three-nation tour to Belgium, the US and Saudi Arabia. During the course of the visit Modi will attend the India-EU summit and the global nuclear security summit in the US. On his daylong visit to Brussels, Modi will hold a bilateral summit with Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel and then attend the 13th India-European Union (EU) Summit.

Jaitley launches 'Make in India' conference in Sydney

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley launched 'Make in India' conference in Sydney and asked Australian businesses to be the part of India's growth story. The Minister pinpointed that with People in agri sector

moving out, there was a need to achieve the target of manufacturing sector to occupy the 25 per cent of India's GDP. India has to invest in its infrastructure in a bid to prepare a base for an economy of this huge size, he said.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

- Zee Media Corp Ltd acquired 80% stake in 2 India Today firms
- UltraTech acquired cement units of Jaiprakash Associates
- InnerChef acquires EatonGO, Flavour Labs
- Magicbricks acquires Bengaluru-based Properji
- Wings Travel acquired taxi service Bookmycab

CABINET APPROVALS AND BILLS PASSED

Bill to amend Enemy Property Act introduced

In a major move to prevent transfer of enemy property and allows state appointed custodian to sell it off, the government has introduced a Bill to amend retrospectively several provisions of the Enemy Property Act of 1968. Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijju moved the Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill in Lok Sabha to replace an Ordinance that was promulgated on January 2016. The Ordinance seeks to amend the Enemy Property Act, 1968 and the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971.

Parliament passes Bureau of Indian Standards Bill, 2015

Parliament has passed the Bureau of Indian Standards Bill 2015 with the approval from the Rajya Sabha, the upper house. The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha in last session. Replying to debate on the Bill, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said it is in national interest. He said the government is trying to bring a Bill for Consumer Protection to protect their interests. On June 17, 2015, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave its approval to introduce a new Bureau of Indian Standards Bill [of 2015].

Parliament passes National Waterways Bill, 2015

Parliament has passed the National Waterways Bill, which provides for declaring certain inland waterways as national waterways with the Rajya Sabha giving its nod to the legislation. The bill, passed by Lok Sabha in December 2015, also repeals the five acts on the existing national waterways, which will not be covered under this bill. Under it, 106 additional inland waterways will be added to the list of national waterways, taking the number to 111. While inland waterways are recognised as a fuel

efficient, cost effective and environment friendly mode of transport, it has received lesser investment as compared to roads and railways. Since inland waterways are lagging behind other modes of transport, the central government has evolved a policy for integrated development of inland waterways.

Cabinet approves Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, a scheme for providing free LPG connections to women from BPL households. Under the scheme, Rs. 8000 crore has been earmarked for providing five crore LPG connections to BPL households. The scheme provides a financial support of Rs. 1600 for each LPG connection to the BPL households. The identification of eligible BPL families will be made in consultation with the state governments and the Union Territories. This scheme would be implemented over three years, namely, the FY 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Real Estate Bill passed in Rajya Sabha

The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Bill, 2015, which intends to protect home buyers, bring in transparency and plug the flow of unaccounted money into the sector, was passed by Rajya Sabha. The Bill provides that 70 per cent of sale proceeds will have to be kept aside by the developer in an escrow account and it can be utilised for land cost and construction of the related project. An escrow is a financial instrument held by a third party on behalf of the other two parties in a transaction. It, therefore, provides greater certainty to buyers that the money they pay to the developer will be utilised for development of the project where they have bought houses.

Cabinet approves ratification of BIMSTEC Convention

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its approval for signing and ratification of the Bay of Bengal Initiative on Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. The Ministry of Home Affairs has been designated as the Central Authority under Article 15 of the Convention. The BIMSTEC comprises of seven countries viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The establishment of regional arrangements for mutual assistance in criminal matters will greatly contribute to more effective cooperation in the control of criminal activities.

Government clears proposal to amend NMDR Act

Government of India has cleared a proposal to amend the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act, 1957) to allow transfer of captive mining leases not granted through auction. The move is aimed at allowing mergers and acquisitions of companies and facilitating banks and financial institutions to liquidate stressed assets where a company or its captive mining lease is mortgaged. The amendment will allow transfer of captive mining leases not granted through

auction. The transfer provisions will facilitate banks and financial institutions to liquidate stressed assets where a company or its captive mining lease is mortgaged.

LS passes Aadhaar (Target Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Bill, 2016

The Lok Sabha has passed the Aadhaar Bill, providing statutory backing to the unique identification number for transferring government subsidies and benefits, as a money bill after government overruled opposition objections. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said thousands of crores of rupees would be saved by plugging leakages and diversions as he rejected opposition demand for referring the Bill to a standing committee and their concerns of privacy as well as Aadhaar potentially being used for “mass surveillance” and “ethnic cleansing”. Overruling Congress’ objections that the legislation has been turned into a money bill to avoid voting in the Rajya Sabha where the government does not have a majority, he said Aadhaar was a money bill in true definition.

LS passes Bill to include more communities in Schedule Caste

The bill to include certain communities in the list of Scheduled Castes (SC) in **Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Kerala and West Bengal** was passed by the Lok Sabha.

- The state governments of Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Kerala, Odisha and West Bengal have proposed certain modifications in the list of Scheduled Castes, “by way of inclusion of certain communities modification and removal of area restriction in respect of certain communities and exclusion of certain communities in case of Odisha”.
- The ministry said that in accordance with the provisions of **article 341** of the Constitution, six Presidential Orders have been issued specifying SCs in respect of various States and union territories and these orders have been amended from time to time.
- Some members said if more castes are being added to the list of SC, then the reservation quota should also be increased from the present level.

Real Estate bill passed in Lok Sabha

The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha, five days after its passage by Rajya Sabha. The Bill seeks to **protect the interest of the home buyers by enhancing transparency and fixing the accountability of developers, BROKERS and consumers.**

- It would also ensure that customers are treated fairly by ensuring no arbitrary changes in project plans, full disclosure on apartment size and fairer penalty provisions.
- The bill defines carpet area as net usable area of an apartment which means now people will be charged only for the carpet area. This comes as a big relief to home buyers as developers today quote on super built up area also known as sellable area which takes into 30-40% area more than flat’s usable area.

- The Bill ensures the completion and delivery of flats as strict regulations are imposed on developers for any violations of the Appellate Tribunals or monetary penalties or both.

Rajya Sabha passes Sikh Gurdwaras Bill

A bill was introduced in Rajya Sabha which envisages to amend **91-year-old Sikh Gurdwaras Act** to exclude Sahajdhari Sikhs from voting in the elections to Sikh religious bodies.

- The bill was introduced in Rajya Sabha which envisages to amend 91-year-old Sikh Gurdwaras Act to exclude Sahajdhari Sikhs from voting in elections to Sikh religious bodies.
- **The Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925** was a piece of legislation in British India, which legally defined Sikh identity and brought Sikh gurdwaras (houses of worship) under the control of an elected body of orthodox Sikhs.
- The Bill was introduced in the House by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh. The Bill proposes to remove the exception given to Sahajdhari Sikhs in 1944 to vote in the elections to select the members of the Board and the Committees constituted under the Act.

Cabinet approves Udaan scheme till 2019-20

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, has given its approval for extension of time period of the “**Special Industry Initiative for J&K**” (SII J&K) Udaan scheme till 2019-20. Initially, the time period of Udaan was up to 2015-16.

- **Udaan** provides exposure to the youth of **Jammu and Kashmir** to the best of corporate India and corporate India to the rich talent pool available in the State.
- So far, 67 leading corporates have partnered with **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** under Udaan with a commitment to train youth from the state covering *Organized Retail, Banking, FINANCIAL Services, IT, ITES, Infrastructure, Hospitality etc.*
- More than 19,000 candidates have been selected, more than 15,000 have joined training, out of them, 8700 candidates have completed training and 6,838 have been offered jobs.
- It is expected that the target of the scheme, to train and enhance employability of 40,000 graduates, post graduates and three year engineering diploma holders, will be achieved by 2019-20.

To accelerate the pace of implementation, mega selection drives have been introduced, in which around 8-10 corporates participate in a drive. It has significantly improved the number of selections. 67 mega selection drives have been held so far covering all districts of the state.

Punjab passes Bills to settle farm dues and protect cows

In a landmark move, the Punjab government passed a Bill with a framework to **regulate and settle agriculture debts**.

- The House also passed the **Punjab Gau Sewa Commission Bill** to protect cows. Neighbouring Haryana had passed a cow protection Bill earlier, after the BJP government had come to power.

- According to a Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) study of 2013, rural indebtedness in Punjab was around **Rs 35,000 crore**. This was the main reason for the death of more than 5,000 farmers in the past 10 years.
- According to the Bill, the interest payable on the debt shall be calculated at such rate as may be notified by the government.
- The interest payable on the debt shall be simple interest calculated on a yearly basis.
- The government would establish a **District Agriculture Debt Settlement Forum** at every district of the state to implement the Act.
- The chairman of the forum would be a retired district and sessions judge or a retired additional district and sessions judge.

Cabinet approves National Capital Goods Policy

The **Union Cabinet** has approved the **national capital goods policy**. The government believes implementation of the capital goods policy is critical and needed to give a boost to the sector and the 'Make in India' initiative.

- The government had unveiled the National Capital Goods Policy in February. This is the first time such a policy has been framed for the sector.
- The Cabinet has also green flagged the doubling of two rail lines in **Bihar** and **Jharkhand** and approved incentives for rural housing.
- In particular, the policy will make sure the country utilizes the capital goods that already exist and cut down on imports, he says.
- To give a rough idea, the capacity utilization for the industry as a whole, he says, would be between 45 percent and 70 percent, adding, **Thermax** operated at a capacity level of 50 percent-60 percent.
- Indian companies will find themselves exporting capital goods into countries where there is a Trade deficit.
- Long-term loans will be made available to these companies through the likes of **EXIM bank**.
- One can see India offering sops to Indian companies wanting to export more in the manner of countries like China and Japan, says Unnikrishnan.

Union Cabinet approved rupees 9000 crore for SBM

The Union Cabinet approved a **\$1.5 billion (about Rs 9,000 crore)** offer of World Bank support for the **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** in rural areas.

- The approval provides for a mechanism of incentivisation through World Bank credit. States' performance will be gauged through performance indicators.

Fertiliser subsidy

- The government has also fixed the **subsidy rates of phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers** for 2016-17, with an estimated outgo of Rs 21,274 crore, at the same estimated level of consumption as in 2015-16, at about 31 million tonnes.
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved *Rs 15.8 per kg for nitrogen, Rs 13.2 per kg for phosphorus, Rs 15.4 per kg potash and Rs 2.04 per kg for sulphur.*
- Under the policy since April 2010, the subsidy on P&K fertilisers is announced annually for each of these four nutrients on a per kg basis, then converted into subsidy per tonne. The rates are determined by taking into account the international and domestic prices of P&K fertiliser, exchange rate and inventory levels.

Bhutan hydro project

- The Cabinet approved a revised cost of **Rs 4,021 crore for the 720 Mw Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project in Bhutan, under implementation.**
- The project will provide surplus power to India and the bilateral agreement was signed in April 2010, at an estimated Rs 2,896 crore (March 2008 prices).
- The Government of India is Funding it, with 30 per cent being a grant and 70 per cent a loan, at 10 per cent annual interest, to be paid back in 30 equal six-month instalments.

Cabinet approves construction of one crore houses

Government has decided to construct **2.95 crore houses** in rural areas under its ambitious **Housing for All by 2022 scheme.**

- The Union Cabinet, in a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave its nod for the implementation of the rural component of the scheme.
- The government will have to spend nearly Rs 81,975 crore over construction of the one crore houses in the first three years of the **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin** under which it will provide FINANCIAL assistance of Rs 1.20 lakh to those living in plain areas and Rs 1.30 lakh to those in “hilly and difficult” areas.
- The scheme would be implemented in rural areas throughout the country except **Delhi and Chandigarh.** The cost of houses would be shared between the Centre and the states.
- The Union Cabinet had in June last year approved the launch of the ‘**Housing for All by 2022**’ programme for the rehabilitation of slum-dwellers and promotion of affordable housing for the urban poor, targeting to provide nearly 20 million houses over seven years.

SNIPPETS FROM THE STATE

Chennai gets India's first self-cleaning smart toilets

A total of 180 self-cleaning public eToilets have been installed in Chennai. These Toilets are free for public use. Each toilet automatically cleans itself before entry and after use and sensors enable consumption of less water and power with each use. Around 40 toilets come equipped with a sanitary napkin generator. Notably, these toilets can be located through an Android app called eToilet. Spread over 35 square feet, each automatic unmanned toilet cleans itself before entry and after use. They come equipped with sensors for exhaust fan and light to ensure that they consume less water and power than conventional toilets.

Gujarat tops the list of states with most investment potential

Gujarat has topped the list of 21 states with most investment potential that has been drawn up by New Delhi-based think-tank National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). Gujarat is followed by Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The ranking of 20 states and one union territory of Delhi was based on five pillars — labour, infrastructure, economic climate, governance and political stability, perceptions — and 51 sub-indicators. The NCAER survey puts Jharkhand at the bottom of the list, just above Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. While Gujarat topped in governance and political stability, and perceptions, Delhi ranked one in infrastructure and economic climate. Kerala topped the chart in labour issues.

Maharashtra and Telangana sign historic pacts on water sharing

Maharashtra and Telangana sign historic pacts on water sharing. Both states agree to construct five barrages to share water for irrigation. Telangana and Maharashtra government's have signed an MoU for the construction of five barrages on Penganga and Godavari rivers. Out of these, three barrages will be constructed by the Telangana State and two barrages by Maharashtra government. This is a historic agreement on water sharing that will script a new history in the country. The agreement will pave the way for the two States to work out mutually-agreeable specifications on the construction of Medigadda barrage.

Haryana New Secretariat Building gets first earthquake warning system in country

Haryana's new secretariat in **Chandigarh** has become the only building in the country to have an early earthquake warning and security system (onsite).

- The system is already being used in **26 countries** around the world and can provide crucial seconds for evacuation in event of an earthquake.
- Installed and demonstrated by a team from **Terra Techcom Private Limited, New Delhi, and Secretary Electronics GmbH, Germany**, who have collaborated with India for the project, the

system uses a master and a submaster device which prevents false alarms and a six-horn siren at the terrace with a 6-km range.

- The system works on the principle of primary and secondary waves of an earthquake.

Punjab notifies swine flu under Epidemic Disease Act

The Punjab government notified **swine flu (H1N1)** under the **Epidemic Disease Act**. The notification issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department said all hospitals (government as well as private) will have to inform the Department of Health about a case of ILI (Influenza like Illness) having chronic diseases.

- All hospitals will have to keep a suspected as well as confirmed case of swine flu in isolation in order to contain the spread of the disease. All hospitals will have to inform the Health department in case a suspected or confirmed case of swine flu is reported, Health and Family Welfare department.
- The treatment of swine flu is provided **free of cost** to all the patients as recommended by the Government.
- All private and Government hospitals will have to abide to this notification.
- The committee observed that patients of swine flu who were having other chronic diseases had high mortality rate as compared to patients not having chronic diseases.

Punjab Govt approves life term for 'sacrilege' of Guru Granth Sahib

Punjab assembly has passed a bill which states that whoever causes injury, damage or sacrilege to **Guru Granth Sahib** with an intention to hurt the religious feelings of the people will be punished with **imprisonment** for life.

- The **Bill – Code of Criminal Procedure** (Punjab Amendment – was moved by Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal.
- The Bill seeks life imprisonment for sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib, by adding section 295 AA in IPC and enhancement of punishment under **section 295 of IPC**, injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class from two to 10 years.

Himachal Pradesh to have electric buses under FAME scheme

The department of heavy industry has granted in-principle approval to **Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC)** and **Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA)** to introduce zero-emission retrofitted electric buses under its flagship scheme FAME India (faster adoption and manufacturing of hybrid & electric vehicles in India).

- HRTC and MMRDA will roll out 25 electric buses each.
- Under FAME India, the department will **FUND** up to 75 per cent cost of the buses.
- Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadr Singh, who also holds the finance portfolio, had mentioned in his Budget speech that Himachal Pradesh would be the **first state in India** to introduce zero-emission electric buses.

Andhra Pradesh Government inaugurates country's first lift irrigation project

Andhra Pradesh government is all set to inaugurate **Pattiseema** lift irrigation project. The project is described as the first river linking project in country. The project deals with connecting **Godavari** with **Krishna**.

- The first pump of this Rs 1,300-crore project was installed and switched on in September, 2015, about six months after the project contract was awarded to Hyderabad-based **Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited** (MEIL) on condition to complete the entire project in one year.
- The project was designed to lift 80 tmc (trillion metric cubic feet) of flood water in a span of 110 days during the flooding season between July and October from Godavari as was permitted by the Godavari Water Dispute Tribunal (GWDT) from the ongoing Polavaram Multi-purpose Irrigation Project.

Haryana becomes 1st to launch injectable contraceptive

Haryana becomes 1st to launch injectable contraceptive. The '**Project Salamati**' which is being implemented by state health department with the assistance of **Pathfinder International**, is initially being implemented in nine health blocks of four districts of the state.

- These included four health blocks in district Palwal, three in district Mewat, Kurali block in district Faridabad and Khor block in district Rewari. These districts have been chosen as a pilot project, as mother and infant mortality rate in these districts are more as compared to other districts.
- After the success of this project in these districts, it would be implemented throughout the state.
- This facility would be available **at all primary health centres, community health centres, sub-divisional and district hospitals for free of cost.**
- An outlay of **Rs 3,916.94 crore** has been earmarked for health and family welfare in the year 2016-17 as compared to Rs 2,857.28 crore in the year 2015-16, thus showing an increase of 37.1 per cent.

Madhya Pradesh to join National Agri Market platform

The state government through its Mandi Board had recently sent a proposal to launch the platform from Karond mandi (10 km away from Bhopal).

- The central government has agreed to release **Rs 15 crore for all 50 mandis to equip them with online support system, software, hardware, and grading of farm yield.**
- The Mandi Board will also chip in with further funds if required to upgrade mandis to enable them to sync with the NAM (National Agriculture Market) platform.
- The NAM platform requires a regulator, a warehousing agency, a grading agency, aggregators and third-party payment system to complete the process of e-auction.

World Bank approved \$250 million loan to Reforms in Rajasthan

The World Bank Board approved a 250 million US dollar Development Policy Loan (DPL) for Rajasthan. The loan was granted to support the government of Rajasthan in improving the performance of its electricity distribution sector under the State's 24x7 Power for All program. The First Programmatic Electricity Distribution Reform Development Policy Loan for Rajasthan will be the first in a series of two operations for a comprehensive turnaround of Rajasthan's electricity distribution sector.

Haryana launches scheme for the differently-abled

The Haryana government launched a new scheme under which **six months' pension would be given in advance to persons with disabilities** for adapting their homes as per their requirement.

- Social Justice and Empowerment Minister **Kavita Jain** said this amount would be recovered over a period of 42 months under the '**Adapting homes for the differently-abled**' scheme.
- Apart from this, Haryana has been selected by the Centre as a **pilot State for universal ID for persons with disability**, for which work has already been started.
- Gurgaon and Faridabad districts have been selected for the '**Accessible India**' campaign for persons with disabilities.
- Besides, a home for abandoned and mentally-challenged persons has been established at a village in the State in collaboration with an NGO Earth Saviours.

Haryana cabinet approves Jat reservation bill

The Haryana Cabinet approved the Jat reservation bill to provide reservation to Jats and four other castes in government jobs and educational institutions. *However, a formal announcement in this connection will be made by chief minister Manohar Lal in the state assembly.*

- The cabinet meeting was chaired by the chief minister.
- Sources of a newspaper claimed that the cabinet has decided to give reservation to Jats under a newly created category for **backward classes (BC-3)**.
- There are already **27% reservation** in government jobs for backward classes in two categories; **BC-1 and BC-2**.
- The BJP-led state government had said it will bring the bill to give reservation to Jats and four other castes — **Jat Sikhs, Bishnois, Tyagis and Rors** in the ongoing Budget Session which is scheduled to end on March 31.
- The community has been demanding reservation in the existing backward classes (BC) category.
- The Backward Classes quota is bifurcated in two categories — BC-A and BC-B having 16 and 11% reservation

Gujarat and Maharashtra contribute 46% to India's exports

According to an **ASSOCHAM** study on 'Export Performance of States', the analyzed data between 2007-08 and 2014-15 reports that **Gujarat** and **Maharashtra** account for more than 46 percent of the merchandise consignments from the country. The top five states claim over 69 per cent of India's entire export earnings.

- While Gujarat and Maharashtra have been vying for the top spot, the latter became the best performing states shipping goods worth USD 72.83 billion in 2014-15.
- Gujarat had export shipments of USD 59.58 billion in the same period while Tamil Nadu emerged as the third largest sourcing state with USD 27.47 billion of the consignments.
- Though Gujarat and Maharashtra have traditionally been dominating the export business because of their locational advantage in terms of coastline, their growth rate has not been as good as those of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, which are doing a lot of catching up despite being land-locked.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NASA to build supersonic passenger jet

The US space agency has finally given green signal for preliminary design of a "low-boom" supersonic passenger jet that will take people places with an unimaginable speed. This is the first in a series of "X-planes" in NASA's New Aviation Horizons initiative, introduced in the agency's fiscal year 2017 budget. NASA has awarded a \$20 million contract to Lockheed Martin to develop a preliminary design for a quiet demonstration passenger aircraft designed to fly faster than the speed of sound. The piloted test aircraft would use so-called Quiet Supersonic Technology, or QueSST, to create a supersonic "heartbeat," a kind of soft thump instead of the annoying sonic booms usually associated with supersonic planes.

World's most expensive train station opened in NY at 9/11 site

The world's most expensive train station is opened in New York. The station has been designed by Santiago Calatrava, a Spanish-Swiss architect. The World Trade Center Transportation Hub, which is expected eventually to serve more than 200,000 commuters daily, is built next to the site of the Twin Towers, which were destroyed in the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. The building has become a major source of controversy — for its daring aesthetic, for spiraling drastically off budget and for closing seven years behind schedule. Initially budgeted at US\$2 billion, it ended up costing US\$3.85 billion. That would make it the most expensive station in the world.

New breast cancer drug that slows tumour growth

A new treatment for breast cancer has been hailed a "game changer" after it was found to slow the progression of aggressive breast cancer by nine months. By combining an established hormone drug

called fulvestrant with a new treatment called palbociclib, doctors found they could slow the cancer growth in around two thirds of women with advanced forms of the most common type of breast cancer, thereby delaying the need for chemotherapy.

Scientists find how Zika virus attacks foetus

Scientists have announced they believe they understand how the Zika virus causes a rare birth defect in which babies are born without abnormally large heads and underdeveloped brains. Working with lab-grown human stem cells, scientists found that the virus selectively infected cells forming the brain's cortex, the thin outer layer of folded gray matter. Its attack made those cells more likely to die and less likely to divide normally and make new brain cells. Since the outbreak that has swept through the Americas first emerged, scientists in Brazil have raised concerns over a possible link between Zika and the birth abnormality, known as microcephaly.

China plans to land probe on Mars in 2021

China plans to land a probe on Mars in 2021 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of founding of the ruling-Communist Party of China and a decade after its first failed mission in 2011, after which India, US, Russia and EU stole the march. The probe is expected to reach Mars in 2021 after a flight of seven to ten months. The Communist Party, the sole governing party of China, was founded in 1921. China is likely to launch a Mars probe in 2020. After months of flying, the probe is expected to land in Mars at the 100th anniversary of the CPC.

Scientists create first biological supercomputer

Scientists have created the world's first biological supercomputer which is energy efficient and it hardly heats up at all. It uses proteins instead of electrons to relay information around a circuit. The proteins are powered by adenosine triphosphate (ATP), the energy provider to all the cells in a human body. The substance that provides energy to all the cells in our bodies, Adenosine triphosphate (ATP), may also be able to power the next generation of supercomputers. That is what an international team of researchers led by Prof. Nicolau, the Chair of the Department of Bioengineering at McGill, believe.

Five healthcare ATMs launched in Four states

A total of five healthcare ATMs have come up in four states — Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh — under a Health Ministry pilot that combines telemedicine with a rudimentary free drugs programme. The ministry is hoping these would tide over the massive shortage of doctors in the country and also the risks of pilferage that free drugs programmes are fraught with. The MPHWS will explain the dosage to the patient. And in case urgent referral is required, the 108 ambulance service will be made available at the sub-centre. India currently has 0.51 doctors per 1,000

population, half the 1:1,000 ratio recommended by World Health Organization. Rural India's ratio is 0.63 per 10,000.

Indian scientists have developed Herbal drug to treat dengue

Indian scientists have developed a herbal medicine against dengue, which accounts for 50 per cent of the global population estimated to be at risk from the disease. Experts are now gearing for the next step, which is to hold clinical trials and toxicity studies before seeking permission from the Ministry of Ayush and the Drug Controller of India (DCI) for commercial production. The project was undertaken jointly by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Ministry of Science and Technology, the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology and Ranbaxy Research Laboratory, and employed ayurveda in devising the drug. Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne tropical disease caused by the dengue virus.

ISRO to launch IRNSS-1F satellite on March 10

ISRO scientists will place the sixth navigational satellite IRNSS-1F in orbit on March 10. The Mission Readiness Review Committee (MRRC) has decided to begin the count-down activities of the PSLV-C32 mission that would carry the satellite to the space. This would be the second launch for ISRO in the new year. With 33 successive successful missions, the PSLV-C32, after a flight duration of about 20 minutes, will place IRNSS-1F, the sixth satellite of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), in the sub Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (sub GTO), with a perigee of 284 km (nearest point to earth) and an apogee of 20,657 km (farthest point to earth) with an inclination of 17.86 deg to the equatorial plane.

ISRO launches sixth navigation satellite IRNSS-1F successfully

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched the country's sixth navigation satellite IRNSS-1F from the spaceport at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh. The navigation satellite is put into the intended orbit in a successful launch. Now India is just one step away from having its own regional navigation satellite system that will be on par with the US-based Global Positioning System. Till date, India has launched five regional navigational satellites (IRNSS-1A, 1B, 1C, 1D and 1E) as part of a constellation of seven satellites to provide accurate position information service to users across the country and the region, extending up to an area of 1,500 km.

NASA delays its next Mars mission to 2018

NASA announced that it has moved back its next unmanned mission to Mars to 2018, after a component of the Mars spacecraft was found to have a leak in its key science instrument. The InSight mission — which stands for Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport — is scheduling a new expected launch window beginning May 5, 2018, with a Mars landing scheduled for Nov. 26, 2018, according to NASA. The goal of the mission is to analyze the deep interior

of Mars to determine how “rocky planets planets — including Earth — formed and evolved.” The InSight mission aims to send a lander to Mars to study the planet’s interior and learn more about how the rocky world formed.

Blue Origin may test Human Space Flights by 2017

Private space travel company Blue Origin expects its first test flights with people in 2017. The announcement was made by Company founder Jeff Bezos, the man who founded Amazon.com. He is spending some of the billions earned from the Seattle-based online retailer on high tech equipment and about 600 employees working in a former Boeing airplane parts facility. Bezos said he’s convinced the company—a vision of his childhood dreams_will eventually be profitable. The company isn’t taking deposits yet, so it’s unclear whether thousands of interested space travelers will translate into sales. Blue Origin, founded in 2000, has launched a ship twice, and it landed safely. The company plans to keep testing until its usefulness is done then switch to other ships being built to test human flight.

India to launch 25 Foreign satellites this year

India will launch 25 foreign satellites belonging to seven countries, with the USA topping the list in 2016-17. In written response to a question, Jitendra Singh, minister of state in Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) which looks after the department of space, said till date 57 foreign satellites from 21 countries have been launched using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).

He said Antrix – the commercial arm of ISRO – has signed agreements with Algeria and Canada for launching three satellites each, four for Germany, one each for Japan and Malaysia and 12 for the USA in 2016-17.

Scientists find Plastic eating bacteria

Scientists in Japan have discovered a form of bacteria that can digest the plastic in disposable plastic water bottles, raising hopes it could be used to dispose of some of the 311 million tons of plastic produced annually worldwide. Plastic bottles contain polyethylene terephthalate, or PET, a plastic ingredient which is also found in lots of other products, like polyester clothing, soda bottles, and tennis balls. PET is great for products but terrible for the environment, because until now it was believed to be unable to be broken down by microbes, which means it couldn’t be biodegradable. Much of the pollution in the ocean is made of PET.

BSNL plans to install ‘zero base’ mobile towers

To demonstrate that communication can be delivered with good aesthetics, state-run BSNL plans to install 50 ‘zero base’ mobile towers, which are better looking and multi-functional. The concept of a ‘zero site’ is that it can be used as a wi-fi hotspot, street light and camera and the radio units can be

hidden inside the pole or underneath. BSNL Chairman and Managing Director Anupam Shrivastava said during his recent visit to Mobile World Congress, he witnessed solutions provided by equipment makers Nokia, Ericsson, Huawei and ZTE regarding the zero base towers. “We will ask for quotes from all these players for zero base towers.

ExoMars 2016 spacecraft successfully launched by ESA-Roscosmos

- The Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO) and Schiaparelli will travel to Mars together before separating on 16 October at distance of 900 000 km from the planet. Then, on 19 October, Schiaparelli will enter the martian atmosphere, descending to the surface in just under six minutes.
- TGO will image features on the martian surface that may be related to trace-gas sources such as volcanoes. In addition, it will be able to detect buried water-ice deposits, which, along with locations identified as sources of the trace gases, could influence the choice of landing sites of future missions.
- The spacecraft was launched on a Proton-M rocket operated by Russia’s Roscosmos from Baikonur, Kazakhstan. ExoMars 2016 is the first of a two-phase of ExoMars (Exobiology on Mars) program. The ExoMars programme is a joint endeavour between ESA and the Russian space agency, Roscosmos.
- The primary goal of the ExoMars programme is to address the question of whether life has ever existed on Mars. This relates to its name, with the ‘exo’ referring to the study of exobiology – the possible existence of life beyond Earth (sometimes also referred to as astrobiology).


Tomato waste may prove fuel of the future

A team of scientists from Washington has found that rotten or damaged tomatoes could soon be rescued from the bin and used to generate electricity. The team’s pilot project involves a biological-based fuel cell that uses tomato waste left over from harvests in Florida.

Researcher Namita Shrestha from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology said, “We have found that spoiled and damaged tomatoes left over from harvest can be a particularly powerful source of energy when used in a biological or microbial electrochemical cell. The process also helps purify the tomato-contaminated solid waste and associated waste water.”

Anti-Diabetic Drug ‘Ayush-82’ to be commercialised

The National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) of the Department of Scientific & Industrial Research, Ministry of Science & Technology signed a License Agreement with Kudos Laboratories India for commercialization of **Ayush-82**, an ayurvedic formulation for prevention and management of Diabetes.

- It has been developed by Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS), New Delhi, an apex organization for research in Ayurveda under the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy).
- Now Kudos Laboratories India could commercialize this product under their TRADE  name with due acknowledgement to CCRAS, Ministry of **AYUSH**, Government of India.

Aston Martin and Red Bull team up to build supercar

Formula One outfit **Red Bull** and British luxury carmaker **Aston Martin** have announced a technology partnership to build an **Aston Martin-branded supercar**.

- Red Bull's chief designer Adrian Newey will work with Aston Martin's design boss Marek Reichman on the car, dubbed Project AM-RB-001.
- As part of the tie-up, Red Bull's RB12 cars will carry the Aston Martin wings logo throughout the 2016 Formula One season starting at the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne.
- Officially, Aston Martin's CEO Andy Palmer says the car, now code named **Project AM-RB 001** (a mashup of the company names), will be "about spectacular beauty, aerodynamic efficiency, advanced technology and getting around a race track in a fast but elegant way."

Three astronauts launched to the International Space Station

One American and two Russians blasted off for their six-month stay on the **International Space Station** from **Kazakhstan**. The Russian Soyuz spacecraft lifted off with 9,000 pounds of thrust carrying the three astronauts from the Baikonur Cosmodrome.

- The Expedition 47 and 48 crew include veteran NASA astronaut **Jeff Williams** and Roscosmos cosmonauts **Oleg Skripochka** and **Alexey Ovchinin**.
- Soyuz was successfully captured and docked at the Space Station with the trio on time.
- Williams will set several records during his stay on the Space Station, he will become the new American record holder for cumulative days in space, at 534, beating Scott Kelly's one-year mission.
- Williams will take command of the station starting on June 4 beginning Expedition 48 and marking his third Space Station expedition, also a record.
- Russian cosmonaut **Gennady Padalka** holds the world record at 878 days.
- This will be Ovchinin's first flight to the space station.
- The three new arrivals will bring the space station crew up to six join Expedition 47 Commander Tim Kopra, of NASA, ESA astronaut Tim Peake and cosmonaut **Yuri Malenchenko**.

British Astronomers Find Nine 'Monster' Stars

Nine "monster" stars which are 30 million times brighter than the Sun have been spotted by British astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope.

- The cluster of stars around 170,000 light years from Earth is the largest group of very massive stars ever identified.
- They were discovered by an international team led by astronomers from **Sheffield University**.
- The Hubble Space Telescope was launched into orbit in 1990 and is nearing the end of its life, but is still proving useful.
- The cluster is called **R136**, and measures a few light years across.
- It sits in the **Tarantula Nebula** inside the Large Magellanic Cloud, which is a satellite galaxy of the Milky Way. It is extremely large, hot and bright stars whose energy is radiated mainly in the ultra violet.

'Man-made' sun produces longest pulse at 50 million degrees

In a breakthrough, a '**man-made' sun experiment in China** has successfully produced long pulse plasma discharge at a temperature of more than 50 million degrees — the longest discharge at such a high temperature.

- The **Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST)**, an artificial sun experiment developed by **Hefei Institute of Physical Science of the Chinese Academy of Science**, realised a ultra-high temperature (UHT) long pulse plasma discharge for 102 seconds as of January.
- An artificial sun can provide limitless clean energy through controlled thermonuclear fusion.
- The light and heat of the Sun come from two of hydrogen's radioactive isotopes —**deuterium and tritium**.
- These release a huge amount of energy during the **process of fusion** into a helium atom.
- The artificial sun imitates this fusion process.

USFDA nod for Aurobindo Pharma osteoporosis drug

Aurobindo Pharma Ltd has received final approval from the **US Food & Drug Administration (USFDA)** to manufacture and MARKET **Naproxen Sodium Tablets USP, 220 mg (OTC)**. This product is expected to be launched in Q1 of FINANCIAL year 2016-17.

- The approved ANDA is bioequivalent and therapeutically equivalent to the reference listed drug product (RLD) Aleve Tablets of Bayer Healthcare LLC (Bayer).
- Naproxen Sodium Tablets is used in the treatment and prevention of **osteoporosis** in postmenopausal women. The approved product has an estimated MARKET size of \$96 million for the 12 months ending January 2016.
- This is the 66th ANDA (including 14 tentative approvals) to be approved out of Unit VII formulation facility in Hyderabad for manufacturing oral non-antibiotic products.
- Aurobindo now has 245 ANDA approvals (210 final approvals, including 10 from Aurolife Pharma LLC and 35 tentative approvals) from USFDA.

Nadda launches CBNAAT machines for quick diagnosis of TB

Union Health Minister JP Nadda launched **Cartridge Based Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (CBNAAT)** machines for the quick diagnosis of Tuberculosis within two hours.

- The CBNAAT is a revolutionary rapid molecular test which detects *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and **rifampicin drug resistance**, simultaneously. This test is fully automated and provides results within two hours.
- At present 121 CBNAAT machine are functioning and five hundred more such machines were launched by the Minister.
- Nadda also launched a new anti-TB drug **Bedaquiline**, which is a new anti-TB drug for treatment of Multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis.

Cisco to setup IoT solutions & prototyping center in AP

Cisco has signed an MoU with the **Andhra Pradesh** government to set up an **Internet of Everything (IoE) Innovation center in Visakhapatnam**. The center will enable the company's partners and startups to build IoT solutions and carry out rapid prototyping of products.

- Other than this, Cisco will also invest in developing a Technology center of Excellence and a research lab in the Institute of Digital Technology at **Tirupati**, which will focus on smart cities, digital security and manufacturing solutions.
- Cisco will also collaborate with **Andhra University in Vizag** for a 12 month research program that will identify and help develop and customize various technological solutions for rural Andhra Pradesh.

Researchers have developed a new Gravity Map of Mars

Researchers have developed a new map of Mars' gravity with three NASA spacecraft that is the most detailed to date, providing a revealing glimpse into the hidden interior of the Red Planet.

- The new gravity map will be helpful for future Mars exploration, because better knowledge of the planet's gravity anomalies helps mission controllers insert spacecraft more precisely into orbit about Mars.
- It will help to understand the still-mysterious formation of specific regions of the planet.
- The improved resolution of the new gravity map suggests a new explanation for how some features formed across the boundary that divides the relatively smooth northern lowlands from heavily cratered southern highlands.

India among five nations creating Zika vaccine : WHO

India is among five countries where projects are underway to develop vaccines to fight the deadly **Zika virus** affecting newborns in 38 countries.

- At present, WHO says more than 30 companies are working on, or have developed, potential new diagnostic tests.
- For vaccines, 23 projects are being worked on by 14 vaccine developers in the *US, France, Brazil, India and Austria*, WHO said.
- Zika virus is posing severe public health implications and is linked to neonatal malformations and neurological disorders affecting newborns.
- The WHO had in February declared the Zika virus outbreak as an **“international public health emergency”**.

ISRO established GIRI Radar System at Tirupati

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on 21 March 2016 established the **Gadanki Ionospheric Radar Interferometer (GIRI)** near **Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh**. It was set up at the National Atmospheric Research Laboratory (NARL) which is an autonomous research institute of the Department of Space.

Microsoft shuts Artificial Intelligence Robot – Tay

Humans will be humans and the latest victim is Microsoft, which launched artificial intelligence (AI)-powered bot on Twitter for a playful chat with people, only to silence it within 24 hours as users started sharing racist and offensive comments with the bot.

- Launched on Twitter as an experiment in **“conversational understanding”** and to engage people through **“casual and playful conversation”**, **Tay** was soon bombarded with racial comments and the innocent bot repeated those comments back with her commentary to users.
- Some of the tweets had **Tay** referring to Adolf Hitler, denying the Holocaust, supporting Donald Trump’s immigration plans, among others.
- The AI chatbot **Tay** is a machine learning project, designed for human engagement.
- Tay — an AI project built by the Microsoft Technology and Research and Bing teams — was coded with information which can tell users jokes or offer up a comment on a picture you send her.
- The bot is also designed to personalise her interactions with users.
- Microsoft has since deleted some of the most damaging tweets from nearly the 96,000 that Tay tweeted.

South Korea tops Global Average Internet speed

Content delivery network services provider **Akamai Technologies** released its Fourth Quarter, 2015 State of the Internet report. Based on data gathered from the **Akamai Intelligent Platform**, the report provides insight into key global statistics such as connection speeds, broadband adoption metrics, notable Internet disruptions, **IPv4 exhaustion and IPv6 implementation**.

- The report revealed that global average connection speed increased 8.6% to 5.6 Mbps from the third quarter, a 23% increase year-over-year.
- **South Korea** had the top average connection speed at **26.7 Mbps**, while **India** was the slowest in the Asia Pacific region with average speeds of **2 Mbps**.

J & J has received patent in India for multifocal contact lens designs

Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc has received patent in India for **multifocal contact lens designs**, for contact lens for the aged especially patients with presbyopia.

- As an individual ages, their eye is less able to accommodate or bend the natural lens to focus on objects relatively nearer to the observer. This condition is known as **presbyopia**.
- Johnson and Johnson has its multifocal lenses sold under its contact lenses brand **Acuvue**, to address the issue of presbyopia.
- According to the specification the company filed with the patent office, the invention provides contact lenses that provide correction for presbyopia using multifocal designs that are scaled to an individual, or group of individuals, based on both pupil size and the Stiles-Crawf 3rd effect.
- It says that the pupil size of the individuals *vary with age, luminance and distance from the eye to the object being viewed and as the luminance increases, the size of pupil has to be decreased*. However, in aged

ISRO set to launch record 22 satellites in single mission

India is all set to script history by launching a record number of 22 satellites, including a number of micro and nano ones from foreign countries, in a single mission in May this year. Apart from the Indian remote sensing satellite, **Cartosat 2C**, which constitutes the primary payload, the **PSLV C34** rocket will carry on board four micro-satellites weighing 85 to 130 kg each and 17 nano-satellites weighing 4 to 30 kg.


- As many as 18 satellites are being launched for foreign agencies including those from the U.S., Canada, Germany, and Indonesia.
- Two of the nano-satellites have been developed by the Pune Engineering College and Sathyabhama University.
- The micro-satellites include the **M3MSAT** of Comdev, Canada, to be used for collection and study of automatic identification system signals from low earth orbit.
- The Indonesian satellite **LAPAN A3** for earth surveillance and magnetic field monitoring.

USFDA approves Aurobindo Pharma's Dementia Drug

Drug firm Aurobindo Pharma has received final approval from **USFDA** to manufacture and market **Rivastigmine Tartrate Capsules USP**, used for the treatment of **dementia** disease, in the American market.

- The approved product is bioequivalent and therapeutically equivalent to **Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation's** Exelon Capsules.
- The approved product has an estimated market size of USD 26.7 million for the twelve months ending January 2016.
- Exelon is used in the treatment of mild moderate dementia of the Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

SPORTS NEWS

Winner	Title	Sport/Venue
Rahul Sachdev	All India Open Snooker Title	Former National 6Reds runner-up
Mumbai	Col CK Nayudu Trophy	Cottari Kanakaiya Nayudu, also known as 'CK', was the first captain of the Indian cricket team in Test matches.
Jitu Rai	Gold medal in 50m pistol	ISSF (International Shooting Sport Federation) World Cup in Bangkok
Patna Pirates	Pro Kabaddi title	They defeated U Mumba team.
India	Asia Cup	At the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium
Indian paddlers	Gold at World Table Tennis Championship	In less than 24 hours
Tarun Kona and Alwin Francis	Peru International doubles title	Badminton
Lin Dan	All England Badminton Championships Title	Professional badminton player from China.
Services	Santosh Trophy	Fifth triumph for Services
Nico Rosberg	Australian Grand Prix	Rosberg's 15th career victory
SSP Chawrasia	Hero Indian Open title	He defeated Anirban Lahiri
HS Prannoy	Swiss Open 2016	His second Grand Prix GOLD  badminton tournament title
Gurmeet Singh	Asian Race Walk Championship GOLD	First Indian athlete to clinch a gold medal
Sreejish and Deepika	Hockey Player of the year	
Sergey Karjakin	World Chess Candidates Tournament	Crimean-born Russian grandmaster
Novak Djokovic	BNP Baripasa Open	Defeated Milos Raonic
Victoria Azarenka	BNP Baripasa Open	Defeated Serena Williams

Important Sports Related NEWS

- Within months after withdrawing as the title sponsor for the Indian Premier League (IPL), soft drinks major PepsiCo has re-entered into a collaboration with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) as one of its three new associate sponsors.

- Hockey India national-level umpire Napoleon Singh has been promoted to the International Outdoor Umpire by the International Hockey Federation (FIH).
- Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova announced at a news conference that she failed a drug test at the Australian Open. The drug is called meldonium, though Sharapova said she had been using it under the name of mildronate and was unaware of both the different name and the fact it is on the World Anti-Doping Agency's banned list until she received a letter notifying her of the positive test 10 days ago.
- Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) has entered into a four-year partnership with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) as an associate sponsor for all international matches at home.
- FIFA is seeking to claim "tens of millions of dollars" in bribe Money seized by U.S. federal prosecutors. FIFA submitted a 22-page claim to the U.S. Attorney's Office in New York that seeks a big share in restitution from more than \$190 million already forfeited by soccer and marketing officials who pleaded guilty in the sprawling corruption case.
- Defending champions Sania Mirza and Martina Hingis crashed out of the Indian Wells Masters after suffering a shock straight sets defeat in the women's doubles event at Indian Wells.
- Australia all-rounder **Shane Watson** will retire from all international cricket after the World Twenty20 in India.
- The UN has suspended Maria Sharapova as a goodwill ambassador following the Russian tennis star's admission that she tested positive for the banned substance meldonium at the Australian Open in January.
- Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), India's leading IT services provider, announced a **three year partnership** with the **VirginMONEY London Marathon** to enhance the digital experience delivered to marathon participants.
- India wrestling star **Yogeshwar Dutt** has qualified for the **2016 Rio Olympics** in the 65 kg weight category in freestyle category.
- Bangladesh pace sensation **Taskin Ahmed** and left-arm spinner **Arafat Sunny** were suspended for bowling with an illegal action by the ICC, dealing a massive blow to the team's campaign in the ongoing World Twenty20.
- Indian wrestler **Hardeep** sprang a surprise by booking an **Olympic quota** place for India in **Greco-Roman wrestling**, which is not the country's forte, after finishing with a silver medal in the 98kg category on the last day of the Asian Olympic Qualification championship.
- A 19-member Indian team left for **Bordeaux** in France to compete in the **9th International Abilympics**, an event for persons with disabilities, from March 23 to 27.
- The Union Cabinet chaired by the **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** has given its approval for holding of **Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Under-17 World Cup** to be held in India in **2017**. It is likely to be held in the month of September -October 2017.

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- **California Chrome** justified his status as joint favorite by landing the **Dubai World Cup** with a perfectly timed run under jockey **Victor Espinosa**. Chrome won the \$10-million Dubai World Cup at Meydan Racecourse in the **United Arab Emirates**.

OBITUARY

Name of the Person	Associated Field
George Kennedy	Oscar winning actor
Kumarimuthu	Tamil Comedy Actor
Martin Crowe	Former New Zealand Captain
PA Sangma	Former Lok Sabha Speaker
Ashok Ghosh	All-India Forward Bloc leader
PK Nair	Veteran film archivist
Pat Conroy	Author of Prince of Tides
Kalabhavan Mani	Malayalam Actor
Ray Tomlinson	Email inventor and selector of @ symbol
George Henry Martin	Record producer
Nana Vasconcelos	Brazil musician
Ernestine Anderson	Jazz vocalist
Lloyd S. Shapley	Nobel Laureate and a Father of Game Theory
Anita Brookner	Art historian and Booker prize winner
Ustad Ali Ahmad Hussain Khan	Eminent Shehnai exponent
Frank Sinatra Jr.	Son of legendary singer Frank Sinatra
Meir Dagan	Former Mossad Director
Paul Daniels	Famous magician
Anker Jorgensen	Former Danish PM
Andy Grove	Legendary former Intel CEO
Johan Cryuff	Football legend
Garry Shandling	comedian and actor
VD Rajappan and Jishnu Raghavan	Malayalam actors
Jishnu Raghavan	Malayalam actor
Peter Brown	Actor
Anand Gajapathi Raju	Former minister
Jim Harrison	'Legends of the Fall' author

OBSERVED DAYS IN MARCH 2016

Date	Day Observed
March 1	Zero Discrimination Day
March 3	World Wildlife Day
March 8	International Women's Day
March 10	World Kidney Day
March 14	Pi Day
March 15	World Consumer Rights Day

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March 18	World Sleep Day
March 20	International Day of Happiness
March 20	World Sparrow Day
March 21	World Puppetry Day
March 21	International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
March 21	International Day of Forests
March 22	World Water Day
March 23	World Meteorological Day (WMD)
March 24	World Tuberculosis Day
March 25	International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave TRADE
March 27	World Theatre Day (WTD)

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