

# **SRIRAM'S IAS**



**2014**

## **GENERAL STUDIES CURRENT AFFAIRS November to MARCH**

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**1. India ranked 78<sup>th</sup> on Human Capital Index**

- Human Capital Index is developed and published by World Economic Forum.
- Investment in human capital is vital to economic growth internationally as it drives national and global economies. As a leader in the analysis and improvement of human capital disparities worldwide, the WEF considers factors and indicators of individuals as well as long-term trends that shape a nation's workforce and talent pool.
- The four pillars of the Index are:
  - The Education pillar contains indicators relating to quantitative and qualitative aspects of education across primary, secondary and tertiary levels and contains information on both the present workforce as well as the future workforce.
  - The Health and Wellness pillar contains indicators relating to a population's physical and mental well-being, from childhood to adulthood.
  - The Workforce and Employment pillar is designed to quantify the experience, talent, knowledge and training in a country's working-age population.
  - The Enabling Environment pillar captures the legal framework, infrastructure and other factors that enable returns on human capital.
- The Index contains 51 indicators in total, spread across the four pillars, with 12 indicators in the Education pillar, 14 in the Health and Wellness pillar, 16 in the Workforce and Employment pillar and nine in the Enabling Environment pillar.
- India ranked 78<sup>th</sup> in the 2013 Human Capital Index out of total 122 countries covered. Switzerland topped the index.

**2. China and ECB sign \$57bn currency swap deal**

- China and the European Central Bank have signed a currency swap agreement worth 350bn yuan (\$57bn; £36bn). Such agreements mean the central banks can exchange currencies and firms can settle trade in local currencies rather than in US dollars.
- The deal is one of the largest for China as it looks to build a more international role for the yuan. It will last for three years and can be extended if both parties agree.
- Foreign exchange swaps such as these mean two countries agree to swap, or borrow, each other's currency at an agreed rate. In doing so, the parties involved avoid swings in exchange rates. They can also be less reliant on the US dollar for bilateral trade and some business deals.
- China's central bank has now signed currency swap deals amounting to some 2.2 trillion yuan with 22 countries and regions, according to Xinhua.

**3. SEBI eases norms for overseas investors**

- Ushering in a new regime for overseas investments in Indian capital markets, SEBI has announced new Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) regulations to put in place easier registration process and operating framework for such entities.
- The new class of investors, FPIs, would encompass all FIIs (Foreign Institutional Investors), their sub-accounts and Qualified Foreign Investors (QFIIs), and would be divided in three categories as per their risk profile.
- The KYC (Know Your Client) requirements and other registration procedures would be much simpler for FPIs compared to current practices. The SEBI has also decided to grant them a permanent registration, as against the current practice of granting approvals for one year or five years to the overseas entities seeking to invest in Indian markets.
- Under the new norms, all existing FIIs, Sub Accounts and QFIIs will be eventually merged into this new investor class to be known as FPIs.

- SEBI also approved setting up 'Designated Depository Participants (DDPs)', which would register FPIs on behalf of the market regulator subject to compliance with KYC norms.

#### **4. India ranks 134<sup>th</sup> in the Ease of Doing Business Report of World Bank**

- Singapore and Hong Kong top the Doing Business list of the 10 most business-friendly places in the world. India ranked 134 out of total 189 countries in the Ease of Doing Business Index.
- Rwanda, Russian Federation, and Philippines are among the most improved in the annual survey of 189 economies.
- The gap between the best and worst performers in the survey is narrowing as countries foster entrepreneurship and trade.
- While Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) high-income economies continue to perform the best across most areas measured by Doing Business, Eastern Europe and Central Asia is narrowing that gap. In 3 of the 10 areas, Europe and Central Asia is at the same level or ahead, and falls close behind in another two.
- Doing Business sheds light on how easy or difficult it is for a local entrepreneur to open and run a small to medium-size business when complying with relevant regulations. It measures and tracks changes in regulations affecting 11 areas in the life cycle of a business: starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, resolving insolvency and employing workers.

#### **5. India tops global chart of remittances**

- A remittance is a transfer of money by a foreign worker to an individual in his or her home country. Money sent home by migrants competes with international aid as some of the largest financial inflows to developing countries. Remittances are playing an increasingly large role in the economies of many countries, contributing to economic growth and to the livelihoods of less prosperous people.
- India would continue to attract the largest amount of remittances among developing economies in 2013, more than China and the Philippines, according to a World Bank report released in October last year.
- The report predicts India will receive an estimated \$71 billion (around Rs.4.4 trillion) in remittances in 2013 (up from \$69 billion in 2012) and much higher than China's \$60 billion.
- "India and China will represent nearly a third of total remittances to the developing world this year. Remittances to developing countries as a whole are projected to continue to grow strongly over the medium term averaging an annual growth rate of 9% to reach \$540 billion in 2016," the World Bank said.

#### **6. Global Hunger Index 2013**

- The 2013 Global Hunger Index (GHI), released on 14 October 2013 by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Welthungerhilfe, and Concern Worldwide -- revealed that 842 million people were chronically under nourished across the world. The 2013 GHI is calculated for 120 countries, its scores are based on three equally weighted indicators.
- The GHI combines three equally weighted indicators into one score:
  1. The proportion of people who are undernourished.
  2. The proportion of children under five who are underweight.
  3. The mortality rate of children younger than age five.
- An increase in a country's GHI score indicates that the hunger situation is worsening, while a decrease in the score indicates improvement in the country's hunger situation.

- The 2013 Index indicates that global hunger is decreasing; the 2013 world GHI score has fallen by 34 percent from the 1990 GHI score. Yet world hunger still remains “serious,” with 19 countries suffering from levels of hunger that are either “alarming” or “extremely alarming.”
- South Asia has the highest regional GHI score, followed by Africa south of the Sahara while Burundi, Eritrea and Comoros have the highest levels of hunger.
- India has moved from 65 to 63 in the Global Hunger Index, making a marginal improvement since 2012, but continues to suffer far behind other emerging economies.
- The score for India has improved slightly from 22.9 in 2012 to 21.3 in 2013. Within SAARC countries also, India continued to trail behind Pakistan and Bangladesh on the index.
- The level of hunger in India remained at ‘alarming levels’ and the report also noted that it is one of the three countries outside Sub-Saharan Africa to fall in this category. The other two are Haiti and Timor-Leste.
- India continued to record one of the highest prevalence of children under five who are underweight, at more than 40 per cent.
  1. Undernourished population 2010-12: 17.5 Per cent
  2. Underweight children <5years 2008-12: 40.2 Per cent
  3. Under-5 Mortality 2011: 6.1 Per cent

#### **7. INS Sunayana**

- The Indian Navy on 15 October 2013 inducted into service its largest offshore patrol vessel (OPV), INS Sunayna, at the Southern Naval Command. The ship was designed and built by the public sector Goa Shipyard. The ship is equipped with the most advanced communication, navigation and electronic warfare equipment besides a 76-mm SRGM (Super Rapid Gun Mount), and close-in weapon system (CIWS). INS Sunayna will strengthen the Indian Navy capability to safeguard the maritime interests.
- The vessel is expected to fill the vital gap in the Southern Naval Command’s patrol capability. The vessel also has the ability to embark an advanced light helicopter (ALH) or a Chetak search and rescue helicopter. Two more vessels of this class will be delivered to the Navy between this year-end and mid-2014.

#### **8. INS Vikramaditya**

- INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier was inducted into the Indian Navy on 16 November 2013 giving a boost to the India’s maritime warfare capabilities. The INS Vikramaditya (44500 tonne carrier Admiral Gorshkov) was commissioned by the Union Defence Minister, AK Antony and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin in a ceremony at the sub-zero temperature in the wind-swept Sevmash Shipyard in the city of Severodvinsk port in the northern Arctic region of Russia.
- The commissioning of the INS Vikramaditya will enhance the reach and capability of Indian Navy and its induction with its integral MiG 29K fighters and Kamov-31 helicopters will add a new dimension to the operational capabilities of the Navy.
- The ship has the ability to carry over 30 aircraft comprising an assortment of MiG 29K/Sea Harrier, Kamov 31, Kamov 28, Sea King, ALH-Dhruv and Chetak helicopters. The MiG 29K swing role fighter is the main offensive platform and provides a quantum jump for the Indian Navy’s maritime strike capability. These fourth generation air superiority fighters provide a significant fillip for the Indian Navy with a range of over 700 nm and an array of weapons including anti-ship missiles, Beyond Visual Range air-to-air missiles, guided bombs and rockets.

## **9. Zojila Tunnel Project**

- The Union Cabinet cleared the proposal for construction of a 14-km tunnel at Zojila pass in Ladakh region. The project envisages construction of an all-weather road involving 9000 crore Rupees investment to ensure undisrupted round-the-year connectivity between Ladakh and Srinagar.
- The Zojila pass is situated at an altitude of 11578 ft on the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National Highway (NH-1), which remains closed during the winter season on account of heavy snowfall and inclement weather.
- The proposed tunnel project passing through Zojila is one of the highest mountain passes in India. Located at an altitude of about 12000 feet on National Highway-1 the Zojila tunnel along with another 6.5 km long tunnel at Z-Morh in Sonmarg will provide road connectivity to Ladakh and Srinagar areas round the year.
- Construction of the tunnel will take seven years, and the contract for collecting toll will be for 15 years.

## **10. Pragati missile**

- India developed a new tactical surface-to-surface missile Pragati which has a range between 60-170 km. The missile is on offer to India's friendly countries. The Pragati missile is based on the Prahaar missile and it has been developed by the DRDO for the Army. It was put on display at a defence exhibition at the Seoul International Aerospace and Defence Exhibition (ADEX 2013).

## **11. India's first Synthetic Rubber Plant**

- Union Petroleum Minister Veerappa Moily on 29 November 2013 inaugurated the first "Synthetic Rubber Plant" of the country at Panipat in Haryana.
- The country's first e-SBR (styrene butadiene rubber) unit was set up by Indian Synthetic Rubber Ltd (ISRL), a joint venture promoted by Indian Oil, TSRC Corporation, Taiwan, and Marubeni Corporation, Japan.
- The plant will produce 120 kilo tonnes synthetic rubber annually, which would be used in industrial units for manufacturing automobile and daily need products. It is planned to increase the capacity of the plant to 220 KT in next two years.

## **12. Iran and P5+1 Group of Nations clinched Nuclear Deal**

- Iran and P5+1 group of Nations reached a breakthrough deal to curb Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for limited sanctions relief. An agreement to this effect was signed at UN Headquarters in Geneva on 24 November 2013 between the Chief negotiator for the six nations, Catherine Marie Ashton and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Jawad Zarif.
- The interim deal for six months is intended to give time and space to the international community to work towards a comprehensive agreement. After four days of negotiations, representatives of P5+1 group of nations - the US, the UK, Russia, China, France and Germany - reached an agreement with Iran.
- The deal is intended as the first step in a six-month process aimed at a permanent resolution to the decade-old global impasse over Iran's nuclear programme, and heading off the threat of a new war in West Asia.
- In return, Iran undertakes to restrict its nuclear activities. Over the next six months Iran has agreed to:
  1. Stop enriching uranium above 5 per cent, reactor-grade, and dilute its stock of 20 per cent-enriched uranium or convert it to oxide, which makes it harder to enrich further.
  2. Not to increase its stockpile of low-enrichment uranium.
  3. Freeze its enrichment capacity by not installing any more centrifuges, leaving more than half of its existing 16000 centrifuges inoperable.

4. Not to fuel or to commission the heavy-water reactor it is building in Arak or build a reprocessing plant that could produce plutonium from the spent fuel.
  5. Iran will give greater access to inspectors including daily access at the Natanz and Fordo nuclear sites.
- In return, there will be no new nuclear-related sanctions for six months if Iran sticks by the accord.

### **13. Kirit Parikh committee**

- Kirit Parikh committee on Pricing Methodology for Diesel, Domestic LPG and PDS Kerosene has recommended a price increase of Rs 5 / litre in diesel, Rs 4/ litre in kerosene, and Rs 250 in LPG cylinder with immediate effect.
- The Panel recommended:
  - Number of subsidised LPG cylinders should be decreased from the present 9 to 6 cylinders per annum to each household.
  - Subsidy on diesel sales should be capped at Rs 6/litre.
  - Do away with the subsidy on diesel within one year, which could save the exchequer Rs 72000 crore in fuel subsidy.
  - Government should take measures to pass on the impact of rise in price of diesel to consumers, and move speedily towards making the price of diesel market-determined.
  - Continuation of existing pricing principles for controlled petroleum products.
- Kirit Parikh panel was set up by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in June 2013 assigning it with the task to advice on Pricing Methodology for Diesel, Domestic LPG and PDS Kerosene. The panel was chaired by Planning Commission member Dr. Kirit S. Parikh.

### **14. Supreme Court directs Centre and State Governments to pass order within 3 months to fix tenure of civil servants**

- In a ruling that would affect the functioning of bureaucracy in the country, the apex court held that bureaucrats must be given an assured minimum tenure in posting. The SC bench observed that fixed tenure of bureaucrats would promote professionalism, efficiency and good governance and that much of the deterioration in the functioning of bureaucracy is due to political interference. In this regard, the court directed the Centre and state governments to pass an order within 3 months on giving fixed tenure to civil servants.
- The ruling also empowered top bureaucrats to record in writing the oral instruction of political bosses on files so as not to be troubled later on for a particular decision. As per apex court, such recording of political instructions by bureaucrats will also help in promoting transparency and will allow general public to access correct information.
- The court passed the judgment on a PIL filed by 83 retired bureaucrats including former cabinet secretary T S R Subramanian seeking its directions for insulating bureaucracy from political interference. The verdict has come in the backdrop of controversies involving bureaucrats including Ashok Khemka, IAS officer of Haryana cadre over DLF-Robert Vadra land deal, and Durga Sakthi Nagpal, UP cadre IAS officer, who was targeted by the state government for alleged misconduct.
- The PIL had alleged that at present, the system of transfers, postings, promotions, disciplinary action and other personnel matters pertaining to the members of civil services are ad-hoc and non-transparent. It said that transfers are often used as instruments of reward and punishment, with officials being frequently transferred on the whims and caprices as well as the personal needs of local politicians and other vested interests. Officers, especially those in the All India Services serving in state governments, have no stability or security of tenure.

- It sought that the civil servants at all levels should be given a minimum 3-year fixed tenure on each post to foster functional freedom and independence. It said that there should be an independent, high-powered and statutory 'civil services board' in each state which should process proposals of postings and transfers.

**15. Kannur (in Kerala) declared as the first Zero-Landless district of India**

- Under the Zero Landless (Citizens) Kerala Project, Kannur (Kerala) has been declared as the first zero-landless district in India.
- It is a project which seeks to provide 3 cents of land each to 2.44 lakh landless in the State of Kerala by 2015. On October 1, 2013 Ms Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the first phase of the distribution of title deeds to the landless under this Project. About 1 lakh titles are being distributed in the first phase.

**16. Robocoin: World's first Bitcoin ATM unveiled in Vancouver, Canada**

- The world's first Bitcoin ATM machine which can transact digital currency – Bitcoins – for any official currency has been unveiled in Vancouver, Canada.
- The ATM named Robocoin allows users to buy or sell the digital currency known as bitcoins. The ATM in Vancouver is operated by Las Vegas-based Robocoin and Vancouver-based Bitcoiniacs.
- **Bitcoin** is a virtual currency that is unregulated by any central bank or government, but still works for purchasing goods and services from retailers willing to accept it. It can also be traded on an open market that fluctuates much like a stock market. Bitcoin is a distributed peer-to-peer digital currency that functions without the inter-mediation of any central authority. Bitcoin is also called a "cryptocurrency" since it is decentralized and uses cryptography to prevent double-spending, a significant challenge inherent to digital currencies.

**17. "Hand in hand" – Joint military exercises between Indian and China**

- Armies of India and China held their 3rd joint military exercise in China. 150-member Indian contingent went to Chengdu city (China) to take part in anti-terrorism drills. The 10-day exercise had been code named "hand in hand" and was inaugurated on November 6, 2013.
- Indian and Chinese armies held their 3rd joint military exercises after a gap of 5 years. The yearly exercises began in 2007, with the first such exercise held in China's Kunming city followed by the second round at Belgaum in Karnataka in 2008. The next round was called off by India following the denial of visa to a top General heading troops in Jammu and Kashmir on the grounds that the region formed part of disputed territory.

**18. Integrated Processing Development Scheme (IPDS) gets nod from CCEA**

- The new Integrated Processing Development Scheme (IPDS) aimed at addressing the environmental concerns faced by textiles units has been given approval by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).
- **Integrated Processing Development Scheme (IPDS)** is a government sponsored scheme to be implemented during the 12th Five Year Plan at a total cost of Rs 500 crore. Under this scheme, four to six brown field projects and three to five green field projects would be established to address the environmental issues faced by textile processing units.
- The IPDS will help the textiles industry to become competitive on the global scale by adopting environmentally friendly processing standards and technology and by setting up new processing parks. It will support the upgradation of existing processing clusters/centres specifically in the field of water and waste water management and also promote research and development work in the textiles-processing sector.

**19. "Malabar": India-US naval field training exercise**

- India and the US held their "Malabar" naval war-games in the Bay of Bengal from November 5, 2013 till November 11, 2013.
- "Malabar" is on a regular basis planned bilateral naval field training exercise between Indian and US Navy. The exercise has grown in both scope and complexity over the years and it has featured both ashore and at-sea training.

**20. Bangladesh allows commercial cultivation of Bt Brinjal**

- The Government of Bangladesh has given nod to the commercial cultivation of transgenic Bt brinjal, making it the first South Asian country to cultivate the genetically modified food crop.
- As per Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), the government has approved four Bt brinjal varieties (Bt begun-1, 2, 3 and 4) for limited scale cultivation with some caveats. These varieties had been developed by BARI using Indian firm Mahyco's proprietary gene construct technology. Mahyco had transferred its Bt brinjal technology to BARI in 2005-06 through a USAID-funded and Cornell University-managed 'Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project'.
- Bt brinjal is a genetically modified transgenic variety of brinjal. It contains a foreign 'Cry1Ac' gene derived from a soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). This gene synthesises a protein toxic to the fruit and shoot borer (FSB), a damaging pest. The gene endows the crop a "built-in" resistance to FSB, reducing dependence on spraying pesticides.
- There are apprehensions among the environmentalists in India who fear that, given the porosity of Indo-Bangladesh border, the transgenic crop could leak into India's environment. They have requested the Government to take all measures to safeguard food and seed supply, apart from bio-diversity. Requests have also been sent to Environment Ministry to take all steps to prohibit any illegal or unintentional transfer of Bt brinjal or seeds through the border with Bangladesh. Environmentalists have written to the Ministry urging THE Indian government to explore all options under the Cartagena Protocol to ensure that Bangladesh takes all measures to ensure that our diversity here is safeguarded from any trans-boundary movement of this GM food crop.

**21. RBI permits foreign banks' subsidiary to acquire private banks**

- As per the guidelines released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Wholly-Owned Subsidiary (WOS) of foreign banks are allowed to acquire domestic private sector banks as well as open branches anywhere in the country. In addition, as per the guidelines:
  - Foreign bank subsidiary are permitted to be listed on local stock exchanges.
  - As a condition, foreign bank subsidiary will not be permitted to acquire more than 74%, the sectoral limit for overall foreign investment, in the private banks they may acquire.
  - WOSs will be given near national treatment which will facilitate them to open branches anywhere in the country at par with Indian banks (except in certain sensitive areas where the Reserve Bank's prior approval would be required).
  - The initial minimum paid-up voting equity capital or net worth for a WOS would be Rs 500 crore.
  - As a measure of prevention against the possibility of the Indian banking system being dominated by foreign banks, there are certain measures to contain their expansion if the share of foreign banks exceeds a critical size.
- RBI will prohibit further entry of new WOSs of foreign banks or capital infusion, when the capital and reserves of all foreign banks in India exceed 20% of the capital and reserves of the entire banking system.

**22. Haiyan, most power typhoon ever, batters Philippines**

- The central islands of Philippines were slammed by category-five typhoon Haiyan. The typhoon has been recorded as the strongest recorded typhoon to make landfall. It forced millions of people to flee to safer places or take refuge in storm shelters.
- The category-five super typhoon with 275 kph (170 mph) wind gusts and 5-6 metre (15-19 ft) waves smashed the islands of Leyte and Samar.
- According to experts, super typhoons and cyclones with winds around 300 kph are so powerful they can blow apart storm-proof shelters due to the huge pressures they create, which can suck walls out and blow roofs off buildings.
- Philippines are frequently hit by typhoons. An average of 20 typhoons slam into the island nation every year. In 2011, typhoon Washi took lives of 1,200 people, displaced 300,000 and destroyed more than 10,000 homes. Typhoon Bopha last year shattered three coastal towns on the southern island of Mindanao, killing 1,100 people and inflicting damages estimated at \$1.04 billion.

**23. Female participation in voting improved over last 50 years**

- As per an analysis of 50 years of Election Commission data for the Assembly elections held between 1962 and 2012 in 16 major States, there has been a significant improvement in the sex ratio of the electorate as compared to early years. The analysis was done by Mudit Kapoor and Shamika Ravi, Assistant Professors at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.
- The analysis points that:
  - Between 1962 and 2012 in 16 major States the sex ratio of voters — the number of women voters for every 1,000 men voters — increased from 715 in the 1960s to 883 in the 2000s.
  - Important to note that this improvement did not come about because more women registered to vote than men but because more women actively voted.
  - The sex ratio of electors, all those on the roll, did not improve over time; in fact, it worsened in some States. But female voter turnouts enhanced faster than male, leading to an improvement in the overall sex ratio of voters.
  - Kerala remains the State with the most equitable gender ratio among voters, throughout the last 50 years.
  - Madhya Pradesh and Odisha are the most improved backward States, going from 558 and 572 women voters for every 1,000 male voters in the 1960s to 804 and 866 in the 2000s.

**24. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban trans fat**

- The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has decided to ban the heart-clogging trans fats. As per FDA, although manufacturers already have eliminated many trans fats, the average American still eats around a gram of trans fat a day eliminating which could prevent 20,000 heart attacks and 7,000 deaths each year. Keeping this in mind, the FDA would determine a phase-out timetable in a few months.
- Trans-isomer fatty acids, or trans fats, are a type of unsaturated fat, which is uncommon in nature but can be easily created artificially. These trans-isomer (E-isomer) fatty acids are sometimes mono-unsaturated or polyunsaturated due to the presence of a double carbon-carbon bond, but they are never saturated. Trans fats are formed during the processing of polyunsaturated fatty acids in food manufacturing. The fats are created when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil to make it more solid, which is why they are often called partially

hydrogenated oils. In plants and animals, fatty acids generally have cis (as opposed to trans) unsaturations.

- Trans fats are used both in processed food and in restaurants, often to improve the texture, shelf life or flavour. The fats are found in some baked goods such as pie crusts and biscuits and in ready-to-eat frostings.
- In humans, consumption of trans fats increases the risk of coronary heart disease by raising levels of the lipoprotein LDL ("bad cholesterol") and lowering levels of the lipoprotein HDL ("good cholesterol").

## **25. India's economy likely to become 3rd largest by 2030**

- As per a report by Standard Chartered, Indian economy is likely to become the third largest economy by 2030 behind China and the USA. The report says that the world is in the midst of an economic "super-cycle".
- A super-cycle is a period of historically high global growth, which remains for a generation or more, driven by opening up of new markets, rising trade, high rates of investment, urbanization and technological innovation.
- As per Standard Chartered's Super-Cycle report:
  - By 2030, India is likely to be the 3rd largest economy with a GDP size of \$15 trillion.
  - China with a GDP of \$53.8 trillion is predicted as the biggest economy.
  - The US has been forecasted to be at 2nd place with GDP size of \$38.5 trillion.
  - Though some major emerging economies are going through slowdown, a mild set of reforms could set out growth resumption in several large rising economies, including China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Brazil.

## **26. U.S. to emerge as world's top oil producer in 2015: IEA**

- According to International Energy Agency (IEA), the United States will leave behind Saudi Arabia and Russia to become the world's top oil producer in 2015. This development will enable the US to become almost self-sufficient reducing its dependency on OPEC supply. However, the IEA forecasts that by 2020, the oilfields of Texas and North Dakota will be past their peak output and the Middle East will resume its dominance – especially as a supplier to Asia.
- As per International Energy Agency:
  - surge in shale oil production in the United States has reversed a reduction in its oil output and the IEA, adviser to industrialised nations, predicted in its 2012 World Energy Outlook the U.S. would surpass Riyadh as top producer in 2017.
  - The surge in the oil output from Brazil, the dependence on Middle East oil in the next few years will be reduced.
  - Oil prices would continue to increase prompting development of unconventional resources such as the light, tight oil that has fueled the U.S. oil boom, oil sands in Canada, deepwater production in Brazil and natural gas liquids.
  - By the mid-2020s, non-OPEC production will decline and nations in the Middle East mainly Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will provide most of the increase in global supply.
  - The Middle East will continue to be of central importance to fulfill the needs of the global oil industry mainly in Asia for many years to come.
  - Currently, increasing U.S. tight oil production is helping to meet growing demand which is estimated to touch 101 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2035, up from 86.7 million bpd in 2011 and up slightly from 99.7 million bpd expected last year.
  - Supply of Middle East oil will be crucial to the demands from China and India.

- China is expected to overtake the US as the largest oil-consuming country and Middle East oil consumption is likely to surpass that of the European Union, both around 2030.
- India is projected to become the largest single source of global oil demand growth after 2020.

**27. Union Cabinet gives nod to B.Sc. Community Health course**

- The Union Cabinet approved a 3-year Bachelor of Science (Community Health) course in State Universities. The course will start from the academic year 2014-15.
- The government plans to set up a specialized cadre of Community Health Officers who will be posted at sub-centres in rural areas, functioning under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, where they can provide basic health care. As proposed, persons belonging to rural areas will study a three-year course on basic anatomy, and diagnosis and treatment of basic ailments.
- The focus of training will be on conducting normal deliveries, pre-and anti-natal care, handling diarrhea, pneumonia, vaccination, providing tuberculosis treatment and treatment of fevers and skin infections. The Health Ministry believes that these professionals will eventually be absorbed by the State Health Departments and will subsequently be posted to higher levels of health care facilities.

**28. Bharat Ratna for scientist Prof. C.N.R.Rao**

- C.N.R. Rao conferred with the prestigious Bharat Ratna Award, India's highest civilian award.
- About C.N.R. Rao (Chintamani Nagesa Ramachandra Rao)
  - An Indian scientist
  - Worked mainly in solid-state and structural chemistry.
  - One of the world's foremost solid state and materials chemists.
  - Rao's work on transition metal oxides led to basic understanding of novel phenomena and the relationship between materials properties and the structural chemistry of metal oxides.
  - At present, he is the Head of the Scientific Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India.
  - Author of around 1500 research papers.
  - Authored and edited 45 books.
  - First Indian scientist to reach the h-index of 100.
  - One of the earliest to synthesize two-dimensional oxide materials such as La<sub>2</sub>CuO<sub>4</sub>.
  - Rao's findings have resulted into a systematic study of compositionally controlled metal-insulator transitions. Such findings have immensely helps in fields such as colossal magneto resistance and high temperature superconductivity. Oxide semiconductors have uncommon promise.
  - Made good contribution to nano materials, apart from his work on hybrid materials.

**29. Indian Navy gets another P-8I Maritime Patrol Aircraft from Boeing**

- The US aircraft manufacturer Boeing has delivered the second P-8I aircraft to Indian Navy. With the help of this aircraft Indian Navy's long-range maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare capabilities is likely to get a boost. Boeing, which is manufacturing eight P-8I aircrafts for India, delivered the first one in May 2013.
- P-8I Aircraft:
  - It's a variant of the P-8A Poseidon possessed by the US Navy
  - Manufactured by US based company Boeing
  - Long-range, multimission maritime patrol aircraft

- To replace the ageing fleet of Tupolev Tu-142 aircraft in the Indian Navy.
- Designed to protect the vast coastline and territorial waters of India.
- Can conduct Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Anti-Surface Warfare (AsuW), intelligence, maritime patrol, surveillance and reconnaissance missions.

### **30. Abdulla Yameen becomes President of Maldives**

- Abdulla Yameen has been elected as the new President of the Maldives after a run-off poll. The event ended nearly two years of political tumult that blighted the incipient democracy and raised international concerns over the country's future.
- Yameen, the half-brother of former autocratic ruler Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was sworn in as the 6th president of the Maldives by Chief Justice Ahmad Faiz.
- Yameen, 54, a candidate of Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), bagged an unexpected win in the presidential run-off by securing 51.39% of the votes over opposition leader and former president Mohamed Nasheed belonging to Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) who received 48.61% of the votes.

### **31. World Bank Study: 53% of Indian households defecate in the open**

- As per a recent paper/ report titled 'Effects of Early-Life Exposure to Sanitation on Childhood Cognitive Skills' released by the World Bank on the eve of the first ever UN World Toilet Day: Owing to absence of toilet or latrine facilities which are important contributors to malnutrition, 53% of Indian households defecate in the open.
- At present, nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide lack access to toilets, around 1 billion practice open defecation and more than 600 million in India openly defecate.
- The study suggests that:
  - Low-cost rural sanitation strategies viz India's Total Sanitation Campaign can support children's cognitive development
  - Open defecation (i.e. going outside without using a toilet or latrine) is an important threat to the human capital of developing countries
- Children exposed to more fecal germs don't grow as tall compared to children with less exposure.
- Physical height is an important economic variable reflecting health and human capital.
- Inadequate sanitation a crucial contributor to malnutrition, especially in India
- Children in India are shorter (around 0.7 cm on average) than children in counterpart in Sub-Saharan Africa who are poorer, on average, a paradox called "the Asian enigma".

### **32. 22<sup>nd</sup> CHOGM 2013 Sri Lanka**

- The 22nd Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, CHOGM began in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 15 November 2013. The Summit was inaugurated by Prince Charles of England, who is representing Queen Elizabeth at the Commonwealth Summit.
- The theme for CHOGM 2013 is Growth with Equity; Inclusive Development.
- External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid is represented the India in the 22nd Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). This year, CHOGM in Sri Lanka, the first time an Asian country is hosting the summit in 24 years. The last CHOGM Summit (in 2011) was held at Perth, Australia.
- The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is held every two years to enable leaders of Commonwealth countries to come together to discuss global and Commonwealth issues, and to decide on collective policies and initiatives.
- Every CHOGM is jointly organized by the host country and the Commonwealth Secretariat. These biennial meetings serve as the principal policy and decision-making forum to guide the strategic direction of the association.

- Commonwealth leaders have been coming together for discussions since 1949, but the title Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting was adopted during a session in Singapore in 1971. This specific classification was used to depict the gathering of both presidents and prime ministers in the event.
- One unique aspect of the meeting is that the formal opening ceremony and the formal Executive Session are followed by a where leaders meet privately for discussions. With an informal atmosphere, this session allows heads of state to freely and frankly exchange their views on important issues and come to a consensus.

### **33. CHOGM 2015 to be held in Malta as Mauritius pulls out.**

- The next CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) 2015 will be held in Malta. The south European nation invited the Commonwealth to hold the summit after Mauritius pulled out in protest against the decision to hold this year's gathering in Sri Lanka despite an international protests over alleged rights violations and war crimes.
- Earlier, Mauritius was to host the biennial meet in 2015 but Prime Minister Navin Chandra Ramgoolam said just ahead of the Colombo summit that it no longer wanted to stage the event, citing Sri Lanka's human rights record.
- The international pressure on Sri Lanka is aggravating over alleged human rights abuses committed by the army against Tamils during the final phase of nearly three-decade long war against the LTTE that ended in 2009.
- The Prime Ministers of India and Canada also didn't attend this year's summit over the same issue.

### **34. NASA launches MAVEN to explore Mars**

- In a bid to dismantle the ancient mystery of Mar's radical climate change, US space agency NASA launched robotic explorer MAVEN rocketed toward the red planet. The unmanned spacecraft was launched aboard a United Launch Alliance Atlas V 401 rocket from Cape Canaveral in Florida, US. This is NASA's 21st mission to Mars since the 1960s. But it's the first one dedicated to studying the Martian upper atmosphere.
- Scientists are eager to know why the climate of Mars changed from warm and wet during its first billion year to cold and dry today. The early Martian atmosphere was thick enough to hold water and possibly support microbial life. But much of that atmosphere may have been lost to space, eroded by the sun.
- About MAVEN:
  - MAVEN: Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution
  - Aim: To study the Martian upper atmosphere and conduct its experiments from orbit around Mars.
  - Launched by NASA on November 20, 2013 from Cape Canaveral on Atlas V rocket.
  - It is the first spacecraft devoted to exploring and understanding the Martian upper atmosphere.
  - Reach Mars on September 22, 2014 after travelling over 440 million miles (700 million kilometres).
  - Carries 8 instruments: Neutral Gas and Ion Mass Spectrometer, Imaging Ultraviolet Spectrograph, Magnetometer, Solar Wind Electron Analyzer, SupraThermal And Thermal Ion Composition, Langmuir Probe and Waves antenna, Solar Energetic Particles and Solar Wind Ion Analyzer.

### **35. India, Vietnam sign eight agreements**

- India and Vietnam signed eight agreements, including one for oil and gas exploration in the seas off Vietnam that includes the South China Sea as visiting Vietnamese Communist Party

general secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held talks in New Delhi.

- The eight agreements as well as a \$100-million line of credit to Vietnam for defence purchases consolidate India's "Look East Policy".
- Key Agreements:
  - Air services agreement to introduce direct flights between the two countries and also promote an international aviation system based on competition.
  - Agreement for establishing a high-tech crime lab in Hanoi (Vietnam's capital).
  - India will provide a financial grant for buying technical equipment and teaching aids for the Indira Gandhi Hightech Crime Lab (IGHCL) and also designate experts to Vietnam.
  - MoU between Vietnam Oil and Gas Group and ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) provides for joint exploration, development and production of petroleum resources between the two countries for new investments by OVL in oil and gas blocks in Vietnam for oil and gas exploration and production.
  - MoU between Tata Power Ltd. and Vietnam's industry and trade ministry for development of the Long Phu 2 coal-fired 1,200 MW power plant project in Soc Trang, Vietnam. Tata Power Ltd won the contract for building the thermal power plant in the Mekong delta region for a bid of \$1.8-billion.
  - Agreement on setting up a Vietnam-India English and IT Training Centre at the National Defence Academy of Vietnam in Hanoi.

### **36. Provide loans to women SHGs at 7%: RBI to banks**

- The RBI has directed Public Sector Banks (PSBs) to give loans to women Self Help Groups (SHGs) at a rate of 7% per annum so as to provide them the benefit of interest rate subvention scheme under the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana-Aajeevika (SGSY) scheme.
- As per a notification by the central bank, PSBs will be subvented to the extent of difference between the Weighted Average Interest charged and 7% subject to the maximum limit of 5.5%, for the FY-2014. This subvention will be available to all the PSBs on the condition that they make SHG (self help group) credit available at 7% in the 150 districts.
- Similarly, the Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) will be subvented to the extent of difference between the lending rates and 7% for the FY-2014 on the condition they make SHG credit available at 7%.
- Furthermore, SHGs will be provided an additional 3% per cent subvention on immediate repayment of loan. Banks have been directed to charge an interest rate of 7% per cent for all loans up to Rs 3 lakh, approved to women SHGs on or after December 1, 2013. However, for loans extended between April 1, 2013 and November 30, 2013, banks should convert the rate of interest to 7% for all the existing loan accounts of the SHGs with effect from April 1, 2013.
- About Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana-Aajeevika (SGSY) scheme
  - Government of India launched Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) on April 1, 1999 to provide sustainable income to poor people living in rural areas of the country. The scheme comes under the Ministry of Rural Development.
  - Aim: Providing self-employment to villagers through the establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Activity clusters are established based on the aptitude and skill of the people which are nurtured to their maximum potential. Funds are provided by NGOs, banks and financial institutions.

**37. Justice A.P.Shah appointed Chairman of 20<sup>th</sup> Law Commission of India**

- Justice Ajit Prakash Shah has been appointed as the new Chairman of the 20th Law Commission of India . He has taken charge of the position vacated by the resignation of Justice D K Jain, who was appointed as the head of National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission. The 20th Law Commission was constituted with effect from September 1, 2012 with a 3-year term, ending on August 31, 2015.

**38. Magnus Carlsen – New King of Chess**

- Norway's Magnus Carlsen ended 5 times title-holder Viswanathan Anand's reign as the world champion. Magnus Carlsen took the crown after a hard-fought draw in the 10th game of the World Chess Championship match. This was the first time in 8 world championship matches starting from 1995 that Anand has been unable to win even a single game. Carlsen made 6.5 points out of a possible 10 by winning 3 games and drawing 7 games. Anand had won the world championship title five times – 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012.

**39. India declines WTO Peace Clause proposal**

- India has decided not to agree to the 'Peace Clause' for agriculture subsidies that the World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Roberto Azevedo has proposed for Bali talks. India will not agree to any deal until it is clear that the proposed interim solution will be available till a permanent solution to the issue of India's Minimum Support Prices (MSP) transgressing the WTO norms has been found and agreed to.
- 'Peace Clause' of WTO: India wants to implement its Food Security Scheme by providing food entitlements at subsidized rates to 2/3rd of its population. To realize this, the government will have to procure a huge quantity of grains from farmers. The government procures grains at certain MSPs. However, WTO norms under the Agreement on Agriculture may hamper the plan as the rules set a subsidy cap of 10% of the value of production for developing countries. India is already inching closer to that limit. If India breaches that limit it would create dispute and may be dragged to the WTO Disputes Settlement Body. The 'Peace Clause' proposed by the WTO general-secretary offers an interim solution by allowing the developing countries to offer subsidies to farmers that are currently prohibited under WTO norms. The clause will restrict other WTO members from seeking penalties and facilitating the government to procure grains at MSPs and sell them at subsidized rates through Public Distribution System (PDS).
- There is catch in this 'peace Clause'. While developing countries can provide WTO-prohibited subsidies to farmers without inviting any dispute under the Agreement on Agriculture, developed countries will have the right to drag these countries to the WTO Disputes Settlement Body, under the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. This would render the peace clause null-and-void. There is also lack of clarity on when the proposed Peace Clause will expire and in case there arrives no solution or agreement at the eleventh Ministerial conference, the protection from the Peace Clause will end and its extension will have to be renegotiated — a contingency India doesn't want.
- The Minimum Support Price (MSP) Scheme is a scheme of the Government of India (GOI) to safeguard the interests of the farmers. Under this Scheme the GOI declares the minimum support Prices of various agricultural produces and assures the farmers that their agricultural produce will be purchased at the MSP, thereby preventing its distress sale. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) acts as the Nodal Agency of the GOI.
- India decided not to agree to the 'Peace Clause' for agriculture subsidies that the World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Roberto Azevedo has proposed for Bali Ministerial of the World Trade Organisation 2013.

- Here, India stands to seek safeguards for subsidies given to the farmers for food security purposes by poor countries. Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma said that for India, food security is non-negotiable, it is an integral part of the millennium development goals and the need for public stockholding of food grains to ensure food security must be respected, and for this WTO rules must be updated.
- For this valuable cause, India got support from many WTO members like South Africa, Nepal, Egypt, Uganda, Namibia, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Ecuador, Venezuela, Mauritius and Nicaragua, etc.
- Developed countries were pressurizing India to accept a peace clause, which offers four years of immunity against penalties imposed for breaching the farm subsidy cap of 10 per cent under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).
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- Because of India's concern of Food security, 9<sup>th</sup> WTO's Bali Ministerial Conference revised draft decisions on a package of issues designed to streamline trade, allow developing countries more options for providing food security, boost least developed countries' trade and help development more generally.

#### **40. COP-19 Warsaw**

- At the UN Climate Change Conference in Warsaw (COP19), governments took further essential decisions to stay on track towards securing a universal climate change agreement in 2015.
- Governments agreed to communicate their respective contributions towards the universal agreement well in advance of the meeting in Paris in 2015. Further, the required monitoring, reporting and verification arrangements for domestic action have been finalized for implementation, thereby providing a solid foundation for the 2015 agreement.
- Importantly, further progress was also made in helping countries, especially the poorest, adapt to the impacts of climate change and build their own sustainable, clean energy futures.
- In a breakthrough outcome, the rulebook for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation was agreed, together with measures to bolster forest preservation and a results-based payment system to promote forest protection.
- The Green Climate Fund, planned to be a major channel of financing for developing world action, will be ready for capitalization in the second half of 2014.
- Additionally, governments agreed on a mechanism to address loss and damage caused by long-term climate change impacts.
- The most recent climate science shows that human-generated climate change is beyond doubt, but we have a limited time to keep warming to a maximum of under two degrees. However, global greenhouse gas emissions need to peak this decade, and get to zero net emissions by the second half of this century. To achieve this, it is critical that action is taken and coordinated swiftly at all levels: international, domestic, business and finance.
- Decisions towards a universal agreement in December 2015, which will enter into force in 2020: Governments will elaborate the elements of the new climate agreement as of their first meeting in March 2014, table an initial draft text by December 2014, and submit the formal draft text by May 2015, all with a view to enabling the negotiations to successfully conclude in December 2015.
- It was also decided that nationally determined contributions would be put forward in a clear and transparent manner. Developed country governments were urged to provide support to developing countries for this important domestic process.

- Governments agreed to identify the precise information that countries will provide when putting forward their nationally determined contributions by the beginning of the UN Climate Change Conference in Lima at the end of 2014.
- Governments established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. The mechanism will address losses and damages associated with long-term climate change impacts in developing countries that are especially vulnerable to such impacts.
- Strengthening efforts to mobilize USD 100 billion by 2020: In view of developed countries' commitment to mobilize USD 100 billion annually by 2020 to support developing countries in their climate change actions, developed countries agreed to make their efforts in this regard publicly known on a biennial basis from 2014 to 2020.
- Cutting emissions from deforestation – “the Warsaw Framework for REDD+”: Governments agreed on a set of decisions on ways to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The decisions are the culmination of 7 years of work, and their agreement comes as a clear breakthrough for action on climate change. Global deforestation accounts for some 20 percent of the world's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The set of decisions bolsters forest preservation and sustainable use of forests with direct benefits for people who live in and around forests. The package provides a foundation for the transparency and integrity of actions and clarifies the coordination of support. It establishes the means for results-based payments if developing countries can demonstrate the protection of forests. For this purpose, the package is backed by initial pledges of USD 280 million.
- All 48 Least Developed Countries under the UNFCCC umbrella finalized a comprehensive set of plans to deal with climate change impacts. These plans serve to better assess the immediate impacts of climate change and enable countries to determine the support and actions they require to become more resilient.

**41. National Lok Adalat settles around 35 lakh cases in India: NALSA**

- The National Lok Adalat held all over the country effectively settled a record 35 lakh cases pending in various courts.
- The National Lok Adalats were organised by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee. They were organized in the apex court, all 24 high courts and all the district and sub-district courts of the country. This was the first time that cases were taken up at the same time all over the country for settlement.
- The National Lok Adalat, organized simultaneously in the Supreme Court and courts all over the country, resolved over 35 lakh cases related to accident claims, matrimonial disputes, dud cheques and traffic fines, among others, in a single day.
- The gigantic exercise was held to settle 39 lakh pending cases relating to motor accident claims, matrimonial disputes, labour disputes, dud cheques, bank recovery cases, civil suits and traffic tickets.
- As per Chief Justice P Sathasivam who inaugurated National Lok Adalat, the main object of the adalat was to expedite justice to litigants and make sure that there were no further appeals. He viewed the settlement of disputes through the Lok Adalat as cost-effective, and also providing easy access to justice.

**42. RBI to launch CPI-indexed IIBs**

- The Reserve Bank of India will launch CPI-indexed Inflation Indexed Bonds (IIBs) aimed at protecting the savings of retail investors from the impact of inflation.
- According to RBI Deputy Governor H R Khan the amount of this year's IIBs would be between Rs 10,000-15,000 crore (wholesale price and consumer price indexed bonds) but exact amount is yet to be decided.

- In October, 2013, the RBI said in its policy statement that inflation-indexed securities for retail investors of 10-year tenor would be linked to the new (combined) Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Inflation-Indexed Bonds or IIBs are bonds where both the principal and the interest are indexed to inflation. In this way it is different from the Capital Indexed Bonds (CIBs) issued in 1997 which provided inflation protection only to principal and not to interest payment. These are thus designed to cut out the inflation risk of an investment. These bonds will be linked to the inflation index of the country and serve as a better investment option as compared to physical assets like real estate and gold. Higher the inflation, the higher would be the returns.
- While the first series of IIBs which was open to all categories of investors was indexed to Wholesale Price Index (WPI), the second series which will be launched by December end this year will exclusively for retail investors and it will be indexed to the new (combined) Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- The step is being taken to de-motivate investments in gold as bulging imports of the yellow metal has been adversely affecting the country's Current Account Deficit (CAD), which had surged to a historic high of 6.7% in the third quarter of 2012-13. In May 2013, imports of gold and silver soared by 138% on an annual basis to \$ 7.5 billion.
- As per RBI, IIBs would help in:
  - Boosting domestic savings and reversing the declining savings-to-GDP ratio.
  - Providing households and other investors a competitive option against gold and real estate. In the wake of rising inflation last year, there was considerable flow of investments from financial savings to safe-haven assets like gold that resulted into higher imports of the metal. This led to current account deficit or CAD widening to 4.9% of GDP at the end of September 2012.
  - Giving investors choice to use IIBs as good hedging instruments against inflation.

#### **43. 'Operation Oliver' to conserve vulnerable turtles**

- The Coast Guard in Odisha has launched 'Operation Oliver' as part of its annual mission to ensure the safe mid-sea visit of breeding Olive Ridley sea turtles in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary area of the State.
- The operation is being conducted in collaboration with the forest department in order to keep watch and vigil on illegal fishing along the turtle concentration zone.
- The authorities have also deployed a state-of-the-art CG ship and a dornier aircraft for the exercise
- Olive Ridley Turtles, also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle are found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. They are considered vulnerable because of their few remaining nesting sites in the world.
- Largest breeding ground for these turtles: The Gahirmatha Beach in Kendrapara district of Odisha (India), now a part of the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Bhitarkanika Mangroves designated a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in 2002. It is the world's largest known rookery of Olive Ridley sea turtles. Two other mass nesting beaches on the mouth of rivers Rushikulya and Devi.
- Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is located in Orissa and is only marine wildlife sanctuary of Orissa. This sanctuary boasts of possessing the world's largest known rookery of Olive Ridley sea turtle.
- Olive Ridley is classified as Vulnerable according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature And Natural Resources (IUCN), and is listed in Appendix I of

CITES. These turtles are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in mass numbers, termed arribadas.

- The winter season is the mating and breeding season of these turtles. So accordingly, the fishing activities inside the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary and 20 kms off the shore are banned for 7 months starting from November 1 to May 31 every year. The ban is enforced under the Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1982 and Orissa Marine Fishing Rules, 1983 to protect the endangered Olive Ridley Sea turtles.

**44. Cyber Coalition 2013: NATO's largest-ever cyber-security exercise held in Estonia**

- NATO held Cyber Coalition 2013, the largest-ever cyber-exercises to practise averting large-scale, simultaneous cyber attacks on member states and their allies. The drill was hosted by National Defence College training center in Tartu, Estonia.
- Objective: Cyber Coalition an exercise with technical components to give its participants a good learning about NATO's Cyber Defence capabilities, identify areas for improvement within the NATO-wide Cyber Defence community. It also aims to better the capability, cooperation and information sharing between NATO and NATO nations and partners in cyber defence via mode of education, research and development, lessons learnt.
- Representatives of 27 nations and NATO partners from Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Ireland and Finland participated in the drill. New Zealand and the European Union took part as observers. A total of 400 people participated, including government, legal and IT experts. Participants put their skills to the test to show how they would respond to a cyber attack.

**45. Medium enterprises to be included under priority sector: RBI**

- As per the Reserve Bank of India, the incremental bank loans to medium service enterprises (as defined in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006) provided after November 13, 2013, up to the credit limit of Rs. 10 crore, would qualify as priority sector advances. This dispensation would remain in force up to March 31, 2013.
- The medium-sized units across various sectors are feeling the heat of ongoing slowdown, as payments from large companies are not being made timely. These enterprises have limited bargaining power and can't endure dues for long. With lending to medium-sized units set to be treated as priority sector lending, banks would look to give loans to viable units which will in turn help banks in meeting priority sector lending targets.
- As per a recent report by RBI, priority sector credit had increased in 2012-13, against a decline in overall growth. However, growth in priority sector credit was lower than the growth in overall credit. In 2012-13, credit to priority sectors by public and private sector banks was at 36.3% and 37.5% respectively, against the overall target of 40%.
- For micro and small industries, dues were at Rs 2.84 lakh crore, as of March 2013, growth of 20.3% compared to 2012.

**46. No capital gains tax or stamp duty on foreign banks converting to WoS**

- As per a notification by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the conversion of existing foreign bank branches into Wholly-owned Subsidiaries (WoS) in India will not be liable to capital gains tax or stamp duty.
- The central bank clarified that Government of India has inserted, by the Finance Act, 2012, a new Chapter XII-BB titled 'Special Provisions relating to Conversion of Indian Branch of a foreign bank into a subsidiary company' in Income Tax Act, 1961, inter alia, exempting capital gains arising from such conversion from capital gains tax, with effect from April 1, 2013.
- It further added that a new section '8E' had been inserted in Indian Stamp Act, 1899 vide Banking Laws (Amendment) Act, 2012, exempting from stamp duty on any conversion of a

branch of a foreign bank into wholly-owned subsidiary or transfer of shareholding of a bank to a holding company in terms of the scheme or guidelines of RBI.

- As per RBI, foreign banks with complex structures and which did not provide adequate disclosures would have to operate in India only through WoS in order to regulate and avoid 2008-type crisis.
- Although RBI has allowed foreign banks to list their subsidiaries in the local stock exchanges, it has also prescribed that the minimum paid-up equity capital or net worth for a WoS would be Rs. 500 crore. However, foreign banks functioning in India before August 2010 have been given the option to continue their operations in branch model.
- State-run banks in the country control about 2/3rd of the aggregate assets of the Indian banking system, whereas, foreign banks manage around 4.3% of total deposits.
- Citibank is the largest foreign bank operating in India in terms of asset base. Other key foreign banks are StanChart, which has 100 branches, HSBC 50, Deutsche Bank 17 and DBS 12 branches.
- As of March 2013, there were 43 foreign banks in India with 333 branches.

#### **47. Mars Orbiter Mission 'Mangalyan'**

- India's premier space agency, ISRO, on 5 November 2013 successfully launched its historic mission to Mars from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, about 100km from Chennai. It was India's first mission to the red planet. The mission follows India's successful 2008-2009 Chandrayaan-1 moon probe, which discovered water molecules in the lunar soil. The total cost of the Mars mission is 73 million US dollars.
- The main features of the Mars mission are as following:
  - Launched onboard PSLV C25.
  - The main objective of the mission is to develop the technologies required for design, planning, management and operations of an interplanetary mission.
  - The other objectives of the mission are to explore Mars surface features, morphology, mineralogy and search for methane in the Martian atmosphere using indigenous scientific instruments.
  - The satellite carries instruments such as Lyman Alpha Photometer, a methane sensor, a composition analyser, a camera and an imaging spectrometer for studying the atmosphere, particle environment and surface imaging.
  - The satellite is scheduled to reach the Mars orbit in September 2014 and is designed to circle the Red Planet in an elliptical orbit of 366 km X 80000 km.
- The Mars Orbiter Mission's (MOM) spacecraft's was propelled into the Mars Transfer Trajectory on 1 December 2013, freeing it from the influence of Earth's gravity. ISRO successfully conducted the Trans Mars Injection (TMI) operations to put MOM on course to the Red Planet with the help of spacecraft's 440 Newton liquid engine which was fired for about 22 minutes providing a velocity increment of 648 metres/second to the spacecraft. With this, the Earth orbiting phase of the spacecraft ended and is now on path to Mars.
- The spacecraft is being continuously monitored from the Spacecraft Control Centre at ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) in Bangalore with support from Indian Deep Space Network (IDSN) antennae at Byalalu.

#### **48. India declared itself free from Bird Flu**

- The government on 12 November, 2013 declared the country free from bird flu and has notified the same to OIE-world organisation for animal health.
- The country had notified the outbreak of bird flu on 5 August at College of Veterinary Sciences and Animal Husbandry in Anjora and Durg and Government Poultry Farm, at Jagdalpur, both in Chhattisgarh.

- “India has declared itself free from Notifiable Avian Influenza (H5N1), commonly called bird flu, and notified the same to World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE),” an official statement.
- After the outbreak, authorities have stamped out the entire poultry population including destruction of eggs, feed, litters and other infected materials in the radius of one km around the outbreak location. Besides it, there were restriction on movement of poultry, disinfection and cleaning up of infected premises.
- Even though India is free from bird flu, regular surveillance to be continued throughout the country, especially in vulnerable areas bordering infected countries and in areas visited by migratory birds, the statement added

**49. Govt launches web portal on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**

- Union Minister of Minority Affairs K Rahman Khan on 11 November 2013 launched a National Portal on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. The portal was inaugurated to mark 125th birth anniversary of the great national leader- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, (11 November 1888 – 22 February 1958) was a scholar and a great Indian freedom fighter, an eminent educationist and the first Education Minister of India. He was one of the greatest national leaders of his time in the cause of Hindu Muslim unity as well as secularism and socialism.
- This portal is an initiative to digitise the heritage of the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and make his life and legacy available online. Along with a biographical account on Maulana Azad, the portal contains titles and information on over 20 books written by Maulana Azad, in Urdu and English, as well as information on over 45 books written on Maulana Azad in Urdu, Hindi and English.
- Portal also contains over 60 photographs – some of which are with contemporaries like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, C Rajagopalachari amongst others. The portal also has excerpts of rare writings by Maulana Azad – his address on the Mahatma’s Birthday on All India Radio, his message on the day that marked the anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, his insights on the history of philosophy – to name a few. Additionally, the portal enlists the institutions, scholarships and other initiatives named after the leader.
- The portal is a collaborative effort by the Union ministry of minority affairs, the Office of Advisor to the Prime Minister, the National Commission for Minorities, the Ministry of Culture). The national portal [www.maulanaazadheritage.org](http://www.maulanaazadheritage.org) a one stop point collating all knowledge and resources available on Maulana Azad, is now available to the public.

**50. Use of VVPAT in Mizoram polls**

- The performance of the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system used in the recently held Mizoram assembly election was not satisfactory, as 10 per cent of the machines malfunctioned, state Chief Electoral Officer Ashwani Kumar said.
- The VVPAT is a machine attached to EVMs which allows voters to check if their votes are cast the way they wished. For the first time in the country in Assembly polls, VVPAT was used in Mizoram on November 25 when 21 VVPATs out of 217 used in the polling were found defective.
- EVMs with VVPAT system were used in 10 assembly constituencies within Aizawl city limits where 217 VVPATs were used in the polls. Altogether 300 sets had been sent to the state. Officials from the ECIL and trained personnel were present in the polling stations where VVPATs were used.
- VVPAT was first experimented in an assembly by-poll in Nagaland in September 2013.

**51. 13th Council of Ministers Meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association**

- Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) held its 13th Council of Ministers meeting in Perth, Australia on 1 November 2013. On the occasion, India handed over the chair of the IORA to Australia. India chaired the IORA, since 2011.
- The Perth reviewed the process made by IORA since 2012 meeting in Gurgaon, India. The future directions and initiatives to advance were considered then for the interests of the IORA and its members.
- The thirteenth Council of Ministers' Meeting was visited by the member states Foreign Ministers namely Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- Perth Principles
  - Reiterating that IORA is the apex pan-regional organisation for the Indian Ocean.
  - Recalling the six priority areas of cooperation agreed at the eleventh COMM (Council of Ministers' Meeting) in Bengaluru, namely: Maritime Safety and Security; Trade and Investment Facilitation; Fisheries Management; Disaster Risk Management; Academic and Science and Technology Cooperation; and Tourism and Cultural Exchanges.
  - Committed to promoting cooperation and collaboration between IORA and other Indian Ocean regional stakeholders including Dialogue Partner States and other regional and international forums.
- The IOR-ARC was formally launched at the first Ministerial Meeting in Mauritius on 6 – 7 March 1997. This meeting adopted the IOR-ARC Charter, and determined a number of administrative and procedural matters.
- The apex body of the IOR-ARC is the Council of (Foreign) Ministers (COM). The meeting of the COM is preceded by the meetings of the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG), Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF), Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI), and the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO). The Coordinating Secretariat of IOR-ARC is located at Ebène, Mauritius. Apart from a Secretary-General, its present staff strength at the executive level includes two Directors and eight local staff.
- IORA was formerly known as IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation).
- Members of IORA (IOR-ARC): 20 Member States namely Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- Whereas the China, Egypt, France, Japan, United Kingdom and the United States of America are Dialogue Partners of the IOR-ARC. The Indian Ocean Tourism Organisation (IOTO) and Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG) have been granted Observer Status.

**52. U.N. court rules on Cambodia-Thailand row**

- The U.N.'s top court ruled that the area around a flashpoint ancient temple on the Thai border belongs to Cambodia—and that any Thai security forces should leave. The International Court of Justice interpreted a 1962 ruling saying that "Cambodia had sovereignty over the whole territory of the promontory of Preah Vihear,"
- At least 28 people have been killed in outbreaks of violence since 2011 over the ownership of the patch of land next to the 900-year-old Preah Vihear temple.
- Last year, the ICJ ruled that both countries should withdraw forces from around the ancient Khmer temple, which is perched on a clifftop in Cambodia but is more easily accessed from

the Thai side. Thailand does not dispute Cambodia's ownership of the temple, a Unesco World Heritage site, but both sides laid claim to an adjacent 4.6-square-km piece of land.

**53. OPCW and Syrian chemical weapons destruction**

- Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the UN Chemical weapons watchdog on 15 November 2013 started its work on the final roadmap for the destruction of chemical arsenals of Syria. In the plan, Syrian chemical weapons will be transported for destruction outside its territory to ensure their destruction in the safest and soonest manner, and no later than 30 June 2014.
- The deadline of OPCW to agree on the destruction milestones of more than 1000 tonnes of dangerous chemicals in Syria expired on 15 November 2013. The plan was adopted during the meeting of its 41-member Executive Council in The Hague.
- The UN Security Council gave its mandate to the agency to destroy the weapons of mass destruction by mid-2014. As per the reports, OPCW will send the resource for packaging and handling the chemical materials to 12 chemical storage sites by December 2013, under a tentative plan. Subsequently, the chemicals would be taken to Syria's Latakia port from where they would be shipped out by 5 February 2013.
- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) that entered into force in 1997. As of today the OPCW has 190 Member States, who are working together to achieve a world free from chemical weapons. They share the collective goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security. It was later awarded Nobel Peace Award for 2013.

**54. Bharatiya Mahila Bank starts with 7 branches**

- Bharatiya Mahila Bank, the country's first all-women commercial bank, commenced its operations on 20 November, 2013 with seven branches. However, doubts remain if the bank will succeed in achieving its objective of economic empowerment of women in remote villages.
- "The setting up of the Bharatiya Mahila Bank is a small step towards the economic empowerment of women. It is also a reflection of our commitment to this cause. I am sure that the bank will fulfil the objective with which it is being established, namely financial inclusion of women and providing them equal and easy access of financial services," said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh while inaugurating the bank's first branch in Mumbai's Nariman Point.
- Analysts believe the bank will find it tough to differentiate itself from rivals and will face stiff competition from state-run and private-sector lenders, and microfinance companies, which already have an established presence in rural India.
- Bharatiya Mahila Bank has been set up with an initial paid-up capital of Rs 1,000 crore. Led by Usha Ananthasubramanian, all the eight on the board of directors of the bank are women. The bank aims to increase its branch count to 25 by March 2014.
- Currently, all the seven branches of the bank are in urban centres — Kolkata, Mumbai, Lucknow, Guwahati, Chennai, Bangalore and Ahmedabad. This could also prove to be a hindrance, at least in the short-term, in reaching out to rural women.
- According to the bank's business plan, the bank envisages a business mix (deposits plus advances) of Rs 60,000 crore with 771 branches by 2020.
- The bank has sought regulatory forbearance for one year in opening branches in rural areas.

**55. Biosimilar Trastuzumab got Approval of DCGI**

- Indian Biotech Company Biocon on 26 November 2013 announced that it had received market authorisation from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for its Breast cancer Drug- biosimilar Trastuzumab.
- The biosimilar trastuzumab will be marketed in India under the brand name of CANMAB by the company, and is expected to be available to Indian patients in the fourth quarter of FY14. The drug is jointly developed by Biocon along with US-based pharma company Mylan.
- Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in India, with over 100000 new patients being diagnosed with this disease every year. The cost of biologics in cancer treatment is high, which makes access unaffordable to a large number of patients.
- Biosimilar Trastuzumab will offer an alternative affordable option thereby enhancing access to treatment for cancer patients in India and the world over.
- Biosimilar Trastuzumab drug is used for the treatment of Her 2+ metastatic breast cancer. The Biosimilar Trastuzumab marketed in the brand name of CANMab. CANMab is the first biological equivalent of Herceptin, a breast cancer drug manufactured by Swiss company, Roche.

**56. Angela Merkel, German Chancellor selected for Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace 2013**

- Dr. Angela Merkel, German Chancellor on 19 November 2013 selected for Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2013.
- The International Jury for the Prize was chaired by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, which made this announcement on 19 November 2013 on the birth anniversary of Indira Gandhi.
- Dr. Angela Merkel is nominated for her exemplary leadership in Europe and the world during the financial crises, her commitment to universal peace and disarmament and her leadership role in strengthening productive and mutually beneficial relations with India and other developing countries.
- Angela Dorothea Kasner, better known as Angela Merkel, was born in Hamburg, West Germany, on 17 July 1954. Trained as a physicist, Merkel entered politics after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. Rising to the position of Chairwoman of the Christian Democratic Union party, Merkel became Germany's first female chancellor, and one of the leading figures of the European Union, following the 2005 national elections.
- The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development was instituted (in 1986) in the name of former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. It celebrates the values that she stood and fought for in the service of our nation and its people.
- The award is conferred upon the person or an organisation irrespective of race, religion, nationality or other aspects. It consists of award worth 2.5 million Rupees as well as trophy along with citation.
- The Indira Gandhi Award is constituted by Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust.
- Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Liberian President was conferred with the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2012.

**57. India and Malaysia Signed MoU to boost co-operation in Public Administration**

- India and Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 25 November 2013 to strengthen co-operation in public administration and governance as part of the efforts to enhance their strategic partnership.

- The MoU covers eight areas of co-operation including human resource management, e-governance, public delivery system, accountability and transparency, skills and capacity building and quality results.
- The MoU was signed by Malaysia's Public Service Department Director-General Mohamad Zabidi Zainal and the Secretary of India's Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances of Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Sanjay Kothari.
- The MoU envisages cooperation via tours, workshops and conferences, sharing of public administration and governance information and expertise, common project implementation mechanisms and exchange of publications, state.

**58. Heads of Competition authorities of BRICS Nations signed the Delhi Accord**

- The Heads of the Competition Authorities of BRICS Nations signed a Joint Accord namely Delhi Accord on 22 November 2013 at 3rd BRICS International Competition Conference (ICC) at New Delhi.
- The Delhi Accord was signed to ensure effective enforcement of competition rules, among the BRICS nations and to strengthen the co-operation among their fair trade regulators by exchanging views and boosting communication.
- BRICS Competition Authorities also considered the need of establishing good communication between the BRICS Competition Authorities on competition law and policy to further improving and strengthening the relationship between the BRICS Competition Authorities.

**59. Malala receives EU's Sakharov human rights prize**

- Pakistani teenage activist Malala Yousafzai, who survived a Taliban assassination attempt last year, received the EU's Sakharov human rights prize at a ceremony in Strasbourg. The European Parliament President, Martin Schulz, presented the award to the 16-year-old. Malala dedicated the award to "the unsung heroes of Pakistan" and to human rights campaigners worldwide.
- Malala was shot in the head a year ago for campaigning for better rights for girls in Swat Valley of northwest Pakistan, an erstwhile Taliban stronghold.
- The Sakharov Prize for free speech is awarded by the European Parliament annually in memory of Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov.
- The 50,000—euro (USD 65,000) prize is considered Europe's top human rights award. Malala joins a distinguished list of winners of the prize that includes South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar.
- Malala rose to prominence in 2009 for anonymously writing a blog for BBC Urdu about life under Taliban rule and the lack of education for girls in the mountainous Swat Valley. She became internationally known after the Pakistan Army pushed the Taliban out of the area in 2009. A Taliban shot her as she was riding in a bus with school friends. She was brought for treatment to Birmingham, where she now lives with her family.

**60. 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting held at New Delhi**

- The 11th ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Foreign Ministers Meeting took place in New Delhi from 11 to 12 November 2013. This is the first time that India has hosted the biennial ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting since India joined the group in 2007.
- The theme of the meeting was "ASEM: Bridge to Partnership for Growth and Development."
- The meeting was attended by 34 Foreign Ministers from Asia and Europe, including the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton and the Secretary General of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Le Luong Minh. 11 countries were

represented by Deputy Foreign Ministers. The meeting was chaired by the External Affairs Minister of India, Salman Khurshid.

- The issues which were discussed during the meet include economic and financial issues, sustainable development, non-traditional security challenges and regional and global issues. Delegates also assessed the achievements of ASEM in the past 17 years and its future orientation.
- In this meet Foreign Ministers agreed to intensify efforts to bring about greater synergy between Asian and European partners of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) across the three pillars of political dialogue, economic cooperation and socio-cultural exchanges.
- Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was set up in 1996. ASEM represents over half of the global population and accounts for more than half of the global GDP. It is a forum of 46 Asian and European countries. 27 countries are from the EU and 19 countries are from Asia. India has been participating in ASEM meetings since 2007.
- ASEM also comprises two international organisations, i.e. the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union, for expanding political and security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation.
- In the key achievements of ASEM, the Trans-Eurasia Information Network (TEIN) a ground-breaking research and education network connecting researchers in both continents are included.

## **DECEMBER 2013**

### **1. JIMEX**

- The Indian Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) conducted the second bilateral Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX) off Chennai between December 19 and 22.
- Both the countries agreed upon the conduct of bilateral naval exercises during Defence Minister AK Antony's visit to Japan in November 2011 and the maiden JIMEX was conducted in June 2012 off Japan.
- The focus of exercises during JIMEX is primarily in the sphere of maritime security cooperation.
- The Indian Navy will be represented by the indigenously built stealth frigate INS Satpura, guided missile destroyer INS Ranvijay and missile corvette INS Kuthar and JMSDF will be represented by two guided missile destroyers JS Ariake and JS Setogiri.

### **2. RBI makes punching PIN mandatory for debit card transactions done every time**

- With an aim to minimize frauds, RBI has made it mandatory for debit card holders to punch in their PIN numbers every time they use the card. In June 2013, the central bank had extended the deadline for implementation of mandatory PIN punching at Point-of-Sales (PoS) and merchant outlets till November 30, 2013 following representation of banks.
- The PIN functions as another layer of security for the debit card which reduces the chances of fraud. While using it at PoS, merchants will first swipe the cards at a PIN enabled PoS terminal and punch in the transaction amount. That will be followed by customers punching their PINs to complete the transaction.

### **3. Chang'e-3: China's lunar probe carrying 'Jade Rabbit' moon buggy lifts off**

- In an attempt to carry out its first ever 'soft landing' on moon, China launched its lunar mission-Chang'e-3 which is carrying country's first moon rover marking a major milestone for China's space programme.

- A landing by a spacecraft on the moon or a planet at a sufficiently low velocity for the equipment or occupants to remain unharmed is called as soft landing.
- Chang'e-3 is China's first lunar rover mission aimed at exploring the Moon's surface and looking for natural resources such as rare metals.
- Key Payload on the mission was the Six-wheeled robotic rover called Yutu (or Jade Rabbit) and a landing module.
- China's Chang'e-3 lunar spacecraft which is carrying its first moon rover Yutu or Jade Rabbit rover made a "soft landing" on the moon since 1976. With this accomplishment China has joined the elite club of the US and Russia to achieve this feat. The probe touched down on an ancient 400-kilometre (250-mile) wide plain known in Latin as Sinus Iridum, or The Bay of Rainbows.

#### **4. Another Tiger Reserve to come up in Maharashtra**

- Maharashtra will have its fifth tiger reserve in Nagzira as the National Tiger Conservation Authority has given nod to the development of the conservation zone. The tiger reserve will be set up between Bhandara and Gondia districts.
- The Nagzira-Navegaon tiger reserve will be established to conserve tigers wandering outside the Tadoba reserve territory. The Nagzira sanctuary, which was of 150 square kilometer and the Navegaon National Park, was of 130 square kilometer, which has been increased to 700 square kilometer to form a new tiger reserve.
- The other four tiger reserves in Maharashtra are in:
  - Melghat
  - Tadoba
  - Pench
  - Sahyadri
- The Centrally Sponsored Scheme "Project Tiger" was launched in April, 1973 with the objective "to ensure maintenance of a viable population of Tigers in India for scientific, economic, aesthetic, cultural and ecological values, and to preserve for all times, areas of biological importance as a national heritage for the benefit, education and enjoyment of the people."
- The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 was amended keeping in view the needs of the Project Tiger for providing enabling provisions for constitution of the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Tiger and Other Endangered Species Crime Control Bureau. So, the National Tiger Conservation Authority was constituted from September 4, 2006 to strengthen tiger conservation. The functions are as follows:
  - Ensuring normative standards in tiger reserve management
  - Preparation of reserve specific tiger conservation plan
  - Lay down annual/ audit report before Parliament
  - Instituting State level Steering Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister and establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation.
  - According approval for declaring new Tiger Reserves.
  - The NTCA has constituted a multidisciplinary Tiger and Other Endangered Species Crime Control Bureau (Wildlife Crime Control Bureau) with effect from 6.6.2007. The WCCB comprises the officers from Police, Forest, Customs and other enforcement agencies to effectively control illegal trade in wildlife.

#### **5. India at 94th spot on Corruption Perception Index: Transparency International**

- According to a survey by corruption watchdog Transparency International, India is positioned at 94th place on corruption index which ranked 177 countries. Afghanistan,

North Korea and Somalia are viewed as the world's most corrupt countries while Denmark and New Zealand have scored the best.

- As per Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2013:
  - India, with a score of 36 out of 100, ranked 94 on the index, above Pakistan at rank 127 but below China which stood at the 80th position.
  - Globally, almost 70% of countries are found to have a "serious problem" with public servants on the take, and none of the 177 countries surveyed this year achieved a perfect score.
  - Bhutan ranked 31st, Sri Lanka 91, Nepal 116, Pakistan 127 and Bangladesh 136.
  - Among BRICS group, India is behind China (80th), South Africa and Brazil (both 72nd). It is, however, better than Russia (127th).

#### **6. India to be hub of oil demand growth after 2020: IEA**

- As per Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA), India will become the largest single source of global oil demand growth after 2020.
- Key predictions of IEA published in its World Energy Outlook:
  - The global oil demand is projected to touch 101 million barrels per day (mbpd) by year 2035 from today's around 87 mbpd.
  - The centre of energy demand is shifting decisively in favour of emerging economies, particularly China, India and the Middle East, which drive global energy use 33% higher.
  - India's oil consumption will exceed 8 mbpd by 2035, which is more than current consumption of Japan, Korea and Australia put together.
  - Currently, within Asia, China dominates the region, before India replaces it from 2020 as the principal engine of oil demand growth.
  - India's energy demand are estimated to double by 2035 on back of economic growth and population increase.
  - By 2035, India is likely to be the largest importer of coal and will be second largest importer of oil next to China and will be number four in importing gas after European Union, China and Japan.
  - Although the energy demand will be two-fold, the consumption per capita in India will still be 1/4th of the OECD average.
  - China is predicted to become the largest oil-importing country by replacing US and India will become the largest importer of coal by the early 2020s.
  - India's coal imports will surge primarily because India uses the fossil fuel for generation of electricity and 68% of electricity in India is generated from coal.
- The International Energy Agency was established by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a response to the oil shock of 1973-74. IEA advises its 24 member countries on issues related to energy security.

#### **7. Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013**

- Employing or engaging a person has become an offence now as Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 comes into force across India except J&K. The law forbids the employment of manual scavengers, the manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment and the construction of insanitary latrines.
- The law also has provisions for rehabilitation of manual scavengers and providing them alternative employment. With the enactment of this law, the construction and maintenance of the insanitary latrines has become an offence.

- Key points of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013:
  - 1.) Prohibition of Insanitary and Employment or engagement as Manual Scavengers
    - It will be an offence to:
      1. Construct or maintain an insanitary latrine
      2. Engage or employ a person to work as the Manual Scavenger
    - Penalty against offenders:
    - First contravention is punishable with imprisonment up to 1 year or with the fine up to Rs 50,000 or both.
    - Any subsequent contravention is punishable with imprisonment up to 2 years or with the fine up to Rs 5 lakh or both.
  - 2.) Prohibition of person from engagement or employment for hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank
    - First contravention is punishable with imprisonment up to two years or with a fine up to two lakh rupees or with both
    - Any subsequent contravention is punishable with imprisonment up to five years or with fine up to five lakh rupees or with both
  - 3.) Under this Act, offences are cognizable and non-bailable
  - 4.) Time bound survey of Manual Scavengers in Urban and rural areas
  - 5.) Comprehensive Rehabilitation of the Manual Scavengers within a time bound framework
    - Manual Scavengers will be issued Photo Identity card
    - Government will provide initial cash aid
    - Children of the Manual Scavengers will be provided scholarship
    - Residential plot with financial aid will be allocated for the construction of the house or a ready built house
    - Imparting Manual Scavengers livelihood skill
    - Providing concessional loan with subsidy for assuming alternative occupation
    - Extending any other legal or programmatic help
  - 6.) Vigilance/ Monitoring Mechanism
    - The implementation of the Act will be under the following Vigilance/Monitoring panels at various levels of State and Centre.
    - Vigilance Committees
      1. District level committees will be headed by District Magistrate
      2. Sub-Division level committees will be headed by Sub Divisional Magistrate
    - Monitoring Committees
      1. State level committees will be headed by Chief Minister
      2. Centre level committees will be headed by Minister of Social Justice and Employment

#### **8. All unfilled chemical munitions of Syria destroyed: OPCW**

- As per Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), all of Syria's unfilled munitions have been destroyed.
- The United Nations and OPCW teams are working in tandem in Syria with an aim to remove the most toxic chemicals from Syria by the end of the year for destruction at sea and destroy the entire program by mid-2014. The OPCW, which won the Nobel Peace Prize 2013, has been instructed by the United Nations to supervise the destruction of the Syrian government's chemical weapons stockpile.

- The Syrian government under Bashar-al Assad was accused by the US and its Western allies of using Chemical weapons (mainly Sarin gas) to crush the rebellion in the country. Syria rejected the allegations and blamed the rebels for its use. The matter went to the extent that the US started contemplating military action against the country which was opposed by Russia. Later, on Russia's intervention, Syria joined Chemical Weapons Convention which requires all parties to declare and destroy all of the chemical weapons they possess. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has the job is to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria joined the OPCW and agreed to dismantle its chemical arsenal to avoid possible U.S. military strikes.

#### **9. "LOB" Clause agreed between India and Mauritius**

- Mauritius and India agreed on the principle of including a Limitation Of Benefit (LOB) or anti-treaty shopping law clause in the revised tax treaty to ring-fence its jurisdiction from any attempts of round-tripping and money laundering activities.
- The LOB clause limits treaty benefits to those who meet certain conditions including those related to business, residency and investment commitments of the entity seeking benefit of a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).
- It is aimed at preventing 'treaty shopping' or inappropriate use of tax pacts by third-country investors and to limit the ability of third country residents to obtain benefits under the said treaty.
- The practice of structuring a multinational business in order to take advantage of more favorable tax treaties available in certain jurisdictions is called treaty shopping. A business that resides in a home country and not having a tax treaty with the source country (from which it receives income), can establish an operation in a second source country having a favorable tax treaty, in order to minimize its tax liability with the home country.

#### **10. India permits unlisted companies to directly raise capital abroad**

- As per the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), India's FDI policy has been modified to allow unlisted firms to directly list on stock exchanges abroad to raise capital for acquisitions or retiring overseas debts. This step may help India in controlling high Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Unlisted companies are heretofore not allowed to directly list in overseas markets without prior or subsequent listing in Indian markets. But following the changes made in the 'Consolidated FDI Policy' in this regard, they would be allowed to do so.

#### **11. Supreme Court restricts the use of red beacon light on vehicles**

- The Supreme Court has banned the use of red beacon light with flashers on all vehicles except those used by high dignitaries holding constitutional post; also banned pressure horns, multiple sound emitting horns and musical horns in vehicles.
- The court passed the order on a PIL filed by Uttar Pradesh resident Abhay Singh on misuse of red beacon.
- The apex court stated that the red lights represent power and create an errant difference among those who are allowed to use it and the ones who are not. But a large number of those using vehicles with red lights have neither respect for the laws of the country, nor they treat the ordinary citizens with respect. Even criminals were getting away using red lights because the police were too "scared" to stop a car with a beacon. So, to avoid such practices, the court decided to restrict them.
- VIPs who can use Red beacons while on duty:
  - LIST A: (With Flasher): President; Vice President; Prime Minister; ex-Presidents; ex-PMs; deputy PM; CJI and SC Judges; LS Speaker; Union Cabinet Ministers; plan panel deputy chairperson; leaders of opposition in LS and RS.

- LIST B: (Without Flasher): CEC; CAG; Union Mos & dy ministers; LS deputy speaker; RS dy chairman; plan panel members; AG; Cabinet secy; services chiefs & officiating chiefs of staff; heads of CAT, UPSC, minorities commission, SC & ST commission.

## **12. NGT banned burning of plastic, rubber across the country**

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned “unregulated open burning” of plastic, rubber or such other articles across the country. NGT directed all the municipal authorities to ‘set up, operationalise and coordinate the waste management systems within their limits
- All the plastic waste/scrap dealers and/or recyclers including the members of the PVC and Plastic Waste Dealers Association, respondent herein, shall be bounded from carrying on their business of separation of plastic waste and its eventual transfer to recyclers or disposal contrary to and without registration under the Plastic Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011.
- The NGT's judgment came on a plea alleging illegal burning of plastic, rubber and related waste in various villages in North and North West Delhi.
- National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 (NGT) is a federal legislation enacted by the Parliament of India, under India's constitutional provision of Article 21, which assures the citizens of India the right to a healthy environment. The tribunal itself is a special fast-track court to handle the expeditious disposal of the cases pertaining to environmental issues.

## **13. India's Deputy Consul General Devyani Khobragade held in US on visa fraud charges**

- India's Deputy Consul General Devyani Khobragade arrested in New York for an alleged case of visa fraud and making false statements in connection with the visa application for an Indian national employee who was domestic helper in her home. Later on, she released on a \$250000 bond after she pleaded not guilty in a court.
- The U.S. State Department clarified that Indian diplomat does not enjoy immunity from US laws. It is firm about its policies in support of the domestic workers. Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations(VCCR), the Indian Deputy Consul General enjoys immunity from the jurisdiction of US courts only with respect to acts performed in the exercise of consular functions.
- Ms. Devyani is currently employed as the Deputy Consul General for Political, Economic, Commercial and Women's Affairs at the Consulate General of India in New York.
- Indian diplomat Ms. Devyani was accused of paying her domestic assistant just a few dollars an hour and lying on a visa application. The minimum wage paid to the employee in USA is \$4,500 a month, but she was paying only \$530 a month.
- The Indian embassy pointed to Article 41 (section 3) of VCCR (Personal Inviolability of Consular Officers) which clearly says that proceedings against a consular officer “shall be conducted with the respect due to him by reason of his official position”. The Indian Government has taken this issue forcefully with the US saying that the action by law authorities was in complete violation of this Article and least expected from a friendly country.
- **Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963:** The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963 is an international treaty that defines a framework for consular relations between independent countries. A consul normally operates out of an embassy in another country, and performs two functions:
  - protecting in the host country the interests of their countrymen, and
  - furthering the commercial and economic relations between the two countries.

- While a consul is not a diplomat, they work out of the same premises, and under this treaty they are afforded most of the same privileges, including a variation of diplomatic immunity called consular immunity. The treaty has been ratified by 176 countries.
- The Ministry of External Affairs later transferred diplomat Ms Devyani Khobragade to India's Permanent Mission in the United Nations, giving her full diplomatic immunity.

#### **14. Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill passed**

- The parliament passed the historic Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, paving the way for establishment of an ombudsman to fight against corruption in public offices and ensure accountability on the part of public officials, including the Prime Minister, but with some safeguards. Welcoming the Bill's passage, 76-year-old social activist Anna Hazare broke his fast, into its ninth day, in Ralegaon Siddhi, Maharashtra.
- The Lokpal Bill, 2011, also referred to as The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, 2011, is an anti-corruption law in India which "seeks to provide for the establishment of the institution of Lokpal to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for matters connecting them. The bill was introduced in parliament following massive public protests led by anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare and his associates.
- Highlights of Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill 2011
  - The bill provides for the setting up of a Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayuktas at the States.
  - The Lokpal consists of a Chairperson and a maximum of eight members of which 50% shall be judicial members. The Chairperson may be either a serving or retired Chief Justice of India, or a Judge of the Supreme Court or an eminent person. Fifty per cent of the total members shall be from the higher judiciary.
  - The Chairperson and the members of the Lokpal shall be appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Selection Committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court judge nominated by him. One eminent person recommended by the Selection committee and nominated by the President will be its fifth member.
  - Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by Lokpal.
  - A high powered Committee chaired by the Prime Minister will recommend selection of the Director, CBI. Directorate of Prosecution headed by a Director of Prosecution under the overall control of Director.
  - The appointment of the Director of Prosecution, CBI will be made on the recommendation of the Central Vigilance Commission.
  - Transfer of officers of CBI investigating cases referred by Lokpal with the approval of Lokpal.
  - The Bill also mandates setting up of Lokayuktas through enactment of a law by the State Legislature within 365 days from the date of commencement of the Act.

#### **15. Indian scientists discovered insulin pills for diabetics**

- The Indian Scientists at National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) developed insulin pill for diabetics in third week of December 2013. They have discovered a pill form of insulin treatment, so now diabetes patients would be spared from the pain of jabbing themselves with a needle every day.
- The process to transform delivery of this therapy from a shot to a pill was a challenge because body's digestive enzymes that are so good at breaking down food also break down

insulin before it can get to work. Besides, insulin doesn't get easily absorbed through the intestine into the bloodstream.

- To overcome these hurdles, scientists combined two approaches to shield insulin from the digestive enzymes and then get it into the blood. They packaged insulin in tiny sacs made of lipids, or fats, called liposomes, which are already used in some treatments. Then, they wrapped the liposomes in layers of protective molecules called polyelectrolytes.
- To help these "layersomes" get absorbed into the bloodstream, they attached folic acid, a kind of vitamin B that has been shown to help transport liposomes across the intestinal wall into the blood.
- Diabetes suppresses the production or use of insulin, which is a hormone that helps blood glucose or blood sugar become absorbed into cells and gives them energy.
- Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body doesn't make enough insulin, and type 2 diabetes occurs when the body doesn't make or use insulin very well, causing glucose to remain in the blood, which can lead to serious problems.

**16. Kirobo: World's first robot astronaut**

- Kirobo, the world's first robot astronaut talks about Christmas in its first chat with the Japanese commander of the International Space Station.
- Kirobo is Japan's first humanoid robot astronaut, developed by Tomotaka Takahashi, to accompany Koichi Wakata, the first Japanese commander of the International Space Station.
- A pint-sized android equipped with artificial intelligence and capable of learning how to respond appropriately to humans.
- Created jointly by advertising firm Dentsu, the University of Tokyo, robot developer Robo Garage and Toyota.
- The robot's capabilities include voice and speech recognition, natural language processing, speech synthesis and telecommunications, as well as facial recognition and video recording. Kirobo is specially designed to navigate zero-gravity environments and will assist Commander Wakata in various experiments.

**17. RBI: Inflation linked bonds for sale from December 23, 2013**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will issue Inflation Indexed National Savings Securities Cumulative (IINSS-C) bonds (or inflation linked bonds) for retail investors by opening the subscription on December 23, 2013 and close it on December 31, 2013.
- The IINSS-C bonds will offer investors a return i.e. 1.5% more than inflation based on the consumer price index. Interest will be compounded half yearly, enhancing effective yield on investments.
- **Inflation linked bonds**
  - The limit for investment per applicant per annum: Rs 5,000 – Rs 5 lakh.
  - Eligibility for subscription: Individuals, Hindu Undivided Family, charitable institutions and universities.
  - The interest rate on these bonds would be linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
  - The interest rate would comprise two parts — a fixed rate of 1.5% per annum and inflation rate based on CPI with a lag of three months. It would be compounded on the principal on half-yearly basis and paid at the time of maturity.
  - For senior citizens (65 years and above of age), early repurchase will be allowed after one year from date of issue and other investors can redeem them after three years but with penalty of 50 per cent of the last coupon paid.
  - RBI will act as a central depository, as these securities will be issued in the form of Bonds Ledger Account (BLA) and held with RBI.

- Distribution or sale of bonds would be through banks: SBI, nationalized banks and three private banks HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank and Stock Holding Corporation of India.

**18. First Ministerial Level Talk held for BCIM Trade Corridor**

- India, China, Bangladesh and Myanmar held the first ever official-level discussions on the ambitious BCIM economic corridor to link India and China with Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- The economic advantages of the BCIM trade corridor are:
  - Reach to numerous markets in Southeast Asia,
  - Improvement of transportation infrastructure and
  - Creation of industrial zones
- Currently, the four nations raised an ambitious proposal that included developing multi-modal transport, such as road, rail, waterways and airways, joint power projects, telecommunication networks, etc. As a first step, they will identify realistic and achievable infrastructure projects to boost physical connectivity.
- Over the next six months, each country will come up with a joint study report proposing concrete projects and financing modalities, before the next meeting of the four nations in June 2014, hosted by Bangladesh.
- The linking of all four countries by road has strengthened the belief that this corridor would subsequently open up the whole of the northeastern region of India to Southeast Asia and China and turn it into a significant channel of trade.
- BCIM Trade Corridor: The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor is a test case for cooperation between India and China in regional development as well as addressing common challenges. It aims to connect Kolkata with China's Kunming city with a highway running through Bangladesh and Myanmar.

**19. Cabinet approved FTA in trade and services with ASEAN**

- The Cabinet approved a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in trade and services with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- The objective is to promote the movement of Indian professionals in the 10-nation ASEAN. The Agreement on Investment would protect, promote and increase foreign investment flows into the country and also removes and barriers.
- The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (CECA) between India and ASEAN was signed in 2003. The Cabinet approved the Agreement on Trade Goods under the CECA with the ASEAN in July 2009.

**20. e-Pramaan would make SMSs a valid documentary proof**

- Soon, SMSs will be acceptable as "documentary proof" for a variety of citizen-services ranging from making payments to registrations.
- The Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY), a part of the ministry of Communication and Information Technology, is all set to flag off a new online authentication project.
- The Central Government launched a platform with about 241 applications for the public after completing pilot project of mobile governance with about 100 departments and testing proof of concepts. SMS authentication is part of the e-Pramaan project which has an overall outlay of Rs 23 crore; it will become reality by June 2014.
- The online authentication project of the Union government would enable SMSs to be used as documentary proof for various registrations and payments. The applications relate to services will cover areas viz. Right to Information (RTI), health, Aadhaar, education, directory services, etc.

**21. e-Inclusion: IT Training for Rural Sc/St/Women Beneficiaries' Project Launched**

- The Government of India launched e-inclusion project to make people e-literate. On this occasion, Minister of Communication & IT, Mr. Kabil Sibal released the handbook titled 'e-Literacy: Towards Empowering Rural India' bearing profiles of 50 beneficiaries who have successfully undertaken the basic IT training programme under the E-Inclusion project.
- The e-Inclusion project is the initiative under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) for creating a transparent and accountable governance model for enabling service delivery at the doorstep of citizens. Initially around 45 thousand people will be trained under the program.
- Beneath the project, economically weaker sections of the society including rural SC, ST and women will receive IT training. It will make at least one individual in every household e-literate.
- The project will improve the quality of life of people, especially those living in rural India and will allow them to actively participate in knowledge based activities and also access financial, social and government services by using Internet.

**22. Government sanctioned Quadricycle as a new vehicle**

- The road transport and highways ministry sanctioned "Quadricycle" as a new category of vehicle on Indian roads. These vehicles are safer than three-wheelers as they have four wheels with fully enclosed body structure with hard top and doors. After integrating suggestions and objections, transport minister Oscar Fernandes approved the proposal that under this category, battery-powered or electric four-wheelers will also be considered.
- Quadricycle Vehicle is a four-wheel vehicle with a small engine to be positioned between a three-wheeler and a passenger car which does not meet the same safety and emission norms of regular passenger cars and have their own set of regulations.

**23. 59.4% of Indian rural households have no latrines: NSSO survey**

- As per a survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), 59.4% of rural Indian households lack latrine facility. The survey throws light on key indicators of living conditions like drinking water, sanitation, hygiene and housing condition in India.
- The survey was done from July 2012 to December 2012 by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

**Key finding of the NSSO Survey:**

- Access to Drinking Water:
  - Around 88.5% rural households and 95.3% urban households improved source of drinking water.
  - Condition in Kerala is poor where 29.5% of rural households have access to safe drinking water whereas in Tamil Nadu it was 94%.
  - Access to safe drinking water in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are above national average.
  - In Bihar, 97.6% (rural) and 99.7% (urban) households improved source of drinking water and in Uttar Pradesh with 96.6% and 99.2% of rural and urban households respectively.
  - 85.8% of rural households and 89.6% of urban households had adequate drinking water.
  - In Nagaland only 16% rural households have sufficient drinking water throughout year.
- Sanitation & Housing Condition:
  - Around 62.3% of rural household and 16.7% of urban households lacked bathroom facility.

- 59.4% and 8.8% households in rural India and urban India respectively lacked latrine facilities.
- Only 31.9% and 63.9% households in rural India and urban India respectively had access to latrine facility for its exclusive use.
- 38.8% and 89.6% households in rural and urban India respectively were found to have access to improved type of latrine.
- 80% of rural households and 97.9 percent of urban households had electricity for domestic use.
- 65.8% of rural households and 93.6% of urban households lived in a house with pucca structure whereas 24.6% of rural households and 5% of urban households lived in a house with semi-pucca structure during 2012.
- Only 26.3% and 47.1% households in rural India and urban India respectively had good ventilation in their houses.
- 31.7% and 82.5% of rural and urban household respectively had improved drainage facility in the environment of their dwelling units.
- Around 32% of rural households and 75.8% of urban household's areas had some garbage disposal arrangement
- Only 10.8% of urban dwelling units were situated in slum.

**24. China offers its Beidou Navigation System free of cost to neighbours**

- In a strategic move, China is ready to offer its neighbouring nations use of its indigenously developed Beidou Satellite Navigation System (BDS) free of charge. The offer has generated interest from a number of nations including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Thailand.
- As per the Chinese government, the country wants to expand the use of the BDS, which already has 16 satellites operating for the Asia-Pacific and is being promoted as an alternative to the US' Global Positioning System (GPS). China intends to offer BDS to nations in the Asia-Pacific region, and particularly in South and Southeast Asia, where the satellites can provide the highest accuracy.
- China has already reached agreement with Pakistan and Thailand on use of the Beidou network. It is in talks with Sri Lanka, for which it has already launched a satellite, and Bangladesh, over cooperation on satellite use. In early 2014, Thailand will become the first country to set up a satellite station based on Beidou, with both nations signing a \$ 319 million deal.
- Beidou Satellite Navigation System (BDS) is a Chinese satellite navigation system. It consists of two separate satellite constellations:
  - Beidou-1: A limited test system that has been operating since 2000
  - Beidou-2 : A full-scale global navigation system which is also known as COMPASS and is currently under construction as of January 2013 . Beidou-2 will have 35 satellites in its network.
- Initially, when the BDS was launched in 2011, it was serving only the government and military. However, over the past year the navigation system is being widely used for civilian purposes domestically. In China, around 80% of passenger buses and trucks use the BDS. Now China intends to expand its satellite navigation services to Asia-Pacific and to South and South-East Asia regions.

**25. India, US sign \$1 billion contract for six "Super Hercules" aircrafts**

- India and the US have signed another mega defence deal worth \$1.01 billion in which the US will supply six additional C-130J "Super Hercules" aircraft. The "letter of offer and

acceptance" for the six new four-engine C-130Js, which will be delivered within 3 years, was inked under the US government's "Foreign Military Sales" (FMS) programme.

- The Indian Air Force already has six C-130Js tactical airlift aircraft, which are based at the Hindon airbase on the outskirts of Delhi. The upcoming six new C-130Js will be stationed at Panagarh in West Bengal.
- India's new mountain strike corps which has been named XVII Corps will also have its headquarters in Panagarh. The XVII Corps with a total of over 80,000 soldiers, is being brought up by the Army in a project worth around Rs 90,000 crore. This new corps will fill operational voids along the 4,057-km Line of Actual Control (LAC) as well as add to the Indian Army's ground offensive capabilities against China for the first time.

**26. RBI extends deadline to issue inflation-indexed bonds**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) extended the time for issuance of Inflation Indexed National Savings Securities Cumulative (IINSS-C) bonds (or inflation linked bonds) by three months to March 31, 2014, from December 31, 2013. The issuance can be closed earlier than March 31, 2014 with a prior notice.
- The reason for extending the deadline is that the operational guidelines (internal to banks) for selling these certificates at the branch level are still in the works. Further, it will take time to create awareness among customers in relation to inflation linked bonds.

**27. Latvia becomes the 18th state to join the Eurozone**

- The Baltic nation, Latvia joined the Euro Zone, with the expectation that the euro will lower its borrowing costs and encourage investors by eliminating currency risk. It became the 18th member of the European Union, which uses the Euro as its currency and the fourth smallest economy in the euro zone after Malta, Estonia and Cyprus.
- The Eurozone is an economic and monetary union (EMU) of 18 European Union (EU) member states that have adopted the euro (€) as their common currency and sole legal tender.
- Member states: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.
- Latvia joined the Eurozone on January 1, 2014.

**28. 8<sup>th</sup> Financial Stability Report released by RBI**

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its 8th Financial Stability Report (FSR) on 30 December 2013. The FSR was released against the backdrop of a mild positive market reaction to the announcement of tapering in the US Federal Reserve bond purchase plan from January 2014.
- Major Highlights of the report are:
  - India's external sector has improved with reduction in Current Account Deficit (CAD). CAD is expected to be less than 3 per cent of the GDP during the current financial year 2013-14.
  - Report revealed that the banking system is facing rising tide of bad loans. The gross non-performing assets (NPAs) in the system will rise to 4.6 per cent by September 2014 from 4.2 per cent in September 2013.
  - The amount of recast loans touched an all-time high of 10.2 per cent of the overall advances as of September 2013.
  - The state-run banks will be the worst-affected, the report said, pegging the gross NPAs for public sector banks at 4.9 per cent by March 2015. It projected the gross NPAs for private banks at 2.7 per cent in the same period.

- Asset quality continues to be a major concern for Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs). The Gross Non-performing Assets ratio of SCBs as well as their restructured standard advances ratio has increased.
- Five sectors — infrastructure, iron & steel, textiles, aviation and mining — have a high level of stressed advances. At system level, these five sectors together account for around 24 per cent of total advances of commercial banks and around 51 per cent of their total stressed advances.
- Due to the interconnectedness with banks, liquidity pressure is felt by the money market mutual funds (MMMFs) whenever redemption requirements of banks are large and simultaneous. Regulatory measures are taken to reduce the degree of interconnectedness seem to have been successful in reducing the liquidity risk in the system.
- However, macro-economic adjustment is far from complete, with persistence of high inflation amidst growth slowdown. Fall in domestic savings and high fiscal deficit are other major concerns for India.
- Macro stress tests on credit risk suggest that if the adverse macroeconomic conditions persist, the credit quality of commercial banks could deteriorate further. However, under improved conditions, the present trend in credit quality may reverse during the second half of 2014.

**29. CII's Business Confidence Index revealed signs of economic turnaround**

- Business Confidence Index (BCI) was released by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) for the period October-December 2013-14 on 29 December 2013. The Index indicated pick-up in the economic activity in the Quarter 4 of 2013-14.
- BCI rose sharply to 54.9 during the Q4 of 2013 -14 from 45.7 in the Q3 of 2013-14 indicating that there are signs of economic turnaround in the fiscal year 2013-14.
- This improvement in BCI happened because of improvement in export performance, said the CII Director-General Chandrajit Banerjee.
- The growth in BCI for the Q4 came as a major relief for the Indian economy which has braved the onslaught of the slowdown for the last several quarters and been awaiting the return of growth.
- However, the BCI also revealed downside risks to the economy. These include: domestic economic and political instability, slackening consumer demand, high level of corruption, persistent high inflation and risk from exchange rate volatility.

**HSBC Business Confidence Index**

- HSBC Bank Middle East Limited has teamed up with Middle East Economic Digest and YouGov to create a unique index of business sentiment in the Middle East.
- The first edition of the HSBC - MEED Middle East Business Confidence Index was published in the Middle East Economic Digest magazine on 18 June.
- HSBC Trade Confidence Index for India stood at the highest -- 142 points, followed by UAE (132 points) and Indonesia (127 points).

**30. Cabinet approved the Constitutional Status to Judicial Appointments Commission**

- The Union Cabinet on 26 December 2013 approved the constitutional status to a proposed Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) for appointment and transfer of judges to the higher judiciary.
- The status would ensure that composition of the commission cannot be altered through an ordinary legislation. A Parliamentary standing committee which examined the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, 2013 had also made a similar recommendation.

- There were demands that the composition as well as the functions of the proposed JAC should be mentioned in the Constitution as a safeguard against future changes.
- As per the proposal, Article 124 A of the Constitution of India will define the composition of JAC and Article 124 B will define its functions. At present the composition of the panel is defined in the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2013. It was introduced with a separate constitutional amendment bill in Rajya Sabha in August 2013.
- The decision to make Judicial Appointments Commission was taken to do away the Collegium System of Appointment of Judges that allows Judges to make their own appointments. As per the proposed Bill inclusion of two eminent persons in the six-member Judicial Appointments Commission is to happen instead of the two jurists. The decision was made to create a balance and avoid the extra weightage to judiciary in the body.
- As per the new proposal the six members Judicial Appointments Commission would comprise of the Chief Justice of India, two Supreme Court judges, Union Law Minister and two eminent persons, instead of two jurists. To appoint the two eminent persons for the appointments commission would be done by the collegium that will include the Prime Minister of India, the Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India. The secretary of the Law Ministry will act as the convenor of the Judicial Appointment Commissions but not the member of the commission.
- **Main Points of the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) Bill 2013 are**
  - The JAC on creation will do away the collegium system of appointments to the High Courts and Supreme Courts
  - The Article 124 (2) of the Constitution of India will be amended to give power to the President of India to appoint the Judges on the recommendation of the JAC
  - The JAC will be determined by an ordinary law as per the Constitution (120th Amendment) Bill 2013 introduced in the Parliament by UPA government
  - Constitutional Amendment in the JAC's term will require two-third majority for modification in the Parliament. The ordinary law requires a simple majority
- **Article 124(2) of the Constitution of India:** In appointing the Judges of the Supreme Court, the President shall consult the Chief Justice of India and such other Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Court's as he may deem necessary.  
Union Cabinet cleared a Proposal to scrap the Collegium System of Appointing Judges  
UPA Government proposed inclusion of two Non-Jurists in Judges Selection Panel

### **31. China formally eased one-child policy and abolished labour camps**

- The top legislature of China on 28 December 2013 adopted a resolution that eases the one child policy of the country. The resolution was passed by the standing committee of the National People's Congress (NPC).
- The resolution has allowed the couples of China to have two children if either parent is an only child. Earlier, a couple generally had a second child only if both parents were only children. It also approved proposal that abolishes re-education through labour camps. The policy had an exception, which included the ethnic minorities and couples who both lacked siblings.
- The policy changes were announced following a meeting of top Communist Party officials in November 2013. These reforms came at the end of the six day meet of the congress after this was tested in parts of the country. To be put into effect, it just needed a approval by the legislature.
- The one-child policy was introduced in 1979 in China. The decision was taken to curb the rapid population growth. The policy restricted the couples in urban areas to only one child,

whereas in rural areas families were allowed to have two children only in case the first one was a girl.

- As per the policy about one-third of the total population of 1.3 billion citizens of China couldn't have a second child without incurring a fine. This led to a gender imbalance occurred in China because of the preference for a boy child.
- The policy has become increasingly unpopular and leaders fear the country's ageing population will both reduce the labour pool and exacerbate elderly care issues. By 2050, more than a quarter of the population will be over 65.

**32. Egypt declared Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group**

- Egypt's ruling Government declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group. The decision came on 25 December 2013. The decision came after government officials blamed the Brotherhood for a suicide bombing at a police headquarters in north of Cairo that killed 16 people.
- Egypt's leaders were in conflict with the movement since July 2013, when the military deposed Mohamed Morsi as a President. Mohammed Morsi was a former head of Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's first democratically elected President.
- Government has vowed to treat anyone as a terrorist who belongs to Muslim Brotherhood or even take part in its activities. 23 Muslim Brotherhood supporters were arrested on charges of belonging to a terrorist organization.
- A Cairo Court has already banned activities by the Muslim Brotherhood and has issued orders for dissolving it and frozen its assets.
- Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna in March 1928, the group spread to other Muslim countries but has its largest, or one of its largest, organizations in Egypt. It is a Sunni Islamist religious, political and social movement.
- The party won almost half the seats in the 2011–12 parliamentary elections, and its candidate, Mohamed Morsi won the June 2012 presidential election. 2012 election was country's first democratically held elections. After the military coup of the former President Mohamed Morsi, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court of Ireland, Adli Mansour sworn in as the interim President on 4 July 2013 to oversee early Presidential elections of the country.

**33. Public Sector Banks directed by the Union Finance Ministry to act as Insurance Brokers**

- The Union Finance Ministry on 23 December 2013 directed public sector banks (PSBs) to act as insurance brokers from 15 January 2014.
- In the Budget speech 2013-14, the Finance Ministry remarked that banks will be permitted to act as insurance brokers to increase insurance penetration and mis-selling of insurance products.
- The Guidelines are as follows:
  - At present the banks are allowed to sell products of one life, one nonlife and one health insurance Company.
  - There is an arbitrage available for private sector banks since it is not made mandatory for them to sell multiple companies products.
- Recently Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the guidelines for banks to become brokers with stringent capital requirements
- Banks with large bad loans, low capital and losses may not qualify to start insurance broking firms.
- The Insurance Regulator and Development Authority (IRDA) on August 2013 released the final guidelines of bancassurance that the companies must not have more than a 50% exposure to any one client.

- For the life insurance sector, the bancassurance (corporate agency-bank) channel accounts for 30% of total new business premium collection.
- Bancassurance:
  - Bancassurance is the bank insurance model (BIM).
  - Banacassurance is the partnership between a bank and an insurance company.

**34. Direct transfer of Cash subsidy on kerosene to be launched soon**

- The government of India puts a way ahead to launched Cash subsidy on kerosene after the successful implementation of cash subsidy on LPG for BPL (below poverty line) families.
- The scheme would be known as DTCK (direct transfer of cash subsidy on PDS kerosene). This would be on the lines of DBTL (direct benefit transfer of subsidy on LPG (cooking gas)).
- The mode of implementation would be covered under two phases, In the first phase seven districts of three states would be covered under the subsidy.
- In Maharashtra, the scheme would be lunched in Nandurbar , Wardha and Amravati . while in Rajasthan , Alwar , Ajmer and Udaipur would be covered. Similarly, the initiative would be covered in north Goa.
- So far, Centre had granted a subsidy of around 1700 crore rupees for DBTL, but now the exchequer would be expected to face a subsidy bill of 30000 crore rupees for providing fuel to BPL families.
- A pilot DTCK scheme has been running in Kotkasim tehsil of Rajasthan's Alwar district since December 2011. The results have been encouraging.
- Direct transfer of cash subsidy :
  - The price of the commodity remain same as that of the market price , government itself decide the subsidized price and pay the difference between market price and subsidized price directly to the family of the BPL in their account.
  - Instead of paying subsidy to the manufacturer , government directly pay cash to the poor people.
- The change in the subsidy policy able to tackle the following shortcomings of the system :
  - Dual – pricing
  - Black Marketing
  - Unresponsiveness to customer needs
  - Poor targeting of BPL population
  - Diversion and leakages
  - Under recoveries for Oil Manufacturing companies (OMCs)
- The new system is expected to reduce this cost and subsidy bill through better targeting. In the Union Budget 2012-13, target is to keep 2012-13 subsidies under 2 percent of GDP and under 1.75 percent of GDP in the next 3 years.

**35. First human artificial heart implanted in France**

- The first human artificial heart implantation performed in Georges Pompidou Hospital, Paris in December 2013 was successful. The artificial heart designed by the French biomedical firm Carmat and developed by the Dutch based European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS).
- The artificial heart can give patients up to five years of extra life, which replaces the real heart. The previous heart assistance devices are created mainly for temporary use.
- The artificial heart uses biomaterials including bovine tissue and an array of sensors to mimic the contractions of the heart. The patient has to wear a belt of lithium batteries to power the heart. Inside the heart, surfaces that come into contact with human blood are made partly from bovine tissue instead of synthetic materials which can cause blood clots.

- The artificial heart weighs as little as less than a kilogram (900grams), almost three times heavier than an average healthy human heart.

**36. 5 percent growth in Indirect tax collections during April-November period**

- Indirect tax collections have grown by 5 percent in the April-November period of the current fiscal. Total collection of indirect taxes including excise, customs and service tax stood at about 3 lakh 7 thousand 568 crore rupees during the first eight months in the current fiscal.

**37. Net Direct Tax Collection increased by 13.7% till 20 December of FY 2013-14**

- The net direct tax collection increased by 13.7% to reach 4.12 lakh crore rupees till December 20, 2013 of the current fiscal year 2013-14. During the same period in 2012-13, the net direct tax collections had totalled 3.63 lakh crore rupee.
- The increase in net direct tax collection has come despite a slowdown in the economy, according to data released by Ministry of Finance on 21 December 2013.
- The government in Union Budget 2013-14 had fixed a target of over 6.68 lakh crore rupees for the current fiscal as against 5.65 lakh crore rupees in 2012-13. That is the government envisaged a growth of 19 per cent in direct tax collection in the fiscal year 2013-14. Out of above net collection, contribution by way of advance tax increased by 8.8% to 202626 crore rupees.
- The collection of corporate taxes increased 10.2% to 260752 crore rupee against 236580 crore rupee in the same period last year. Advance tax collection from corporates rose by 8.4 per cent to 176935 crore rupee as compared to the same period last year.
- Personal income tax collection was up by 20.5 per cent to 147987 crore rupee from 122818 crore rupee in the corresponding period last year.
- Securities Transaction Tax (STT) mop-up stood at 3427 crore rupee. STT is levied on every purchase or sale of securities that are listed on the Indian stock exchanges.
- Wealth tax collection up to stood at 752 crore rupee.

**38. United Nations felicitated Odisha Government for effectively handling Cyclone Phailin**

- Odisha Government on 20 December 2013 was felicitated by United Nations for effectively handling the Cyclone Phailin in October 2013. Margaret Wahlstrom, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction presented a citation to the Naveen Patnaik, the Chief Minister of Odisha in Bhubaneswar.
- Odisha Government was felicitated for its efforts to keep human casualties to a minimum at the time of cyclone. After the citation, Wahlstrom invited Naveen Patnaik to participate in the global conference on disaster management that will be organised in 2015 by United Nations.
- With this felicitation, Odisha became the first South East Asian state to be felicitated for disaster management.

**39. Ministry of Environment issued fresh order on Kasturirangan recommendation**

- The Environment Ministry issued a fresh order, following the in principle acceptance of the Kasturirangan committee report on 20 December 2013 and withdrawn 16 November 2013 notification.
- The Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) order clarified that the recommendations made by the Kasturirangan led High-Level Working Group (HLWG) has not put any fresh restrictions on land use in the ESA. And the order does not impact the continued occupation of land in possession of the local people or affect their day to day activities or normal livelihood.
- The HLWG report however maintains the bans on the following

- Mining, quarrying, sand mining, thermal power plants
- Building construction projects on areas that are 20000 sq m or more, township and area development projects with an area of 50ha and above and red category of industries in ESA.
- The HLWG defines 37 percent of the Western Ghats landscape as ecologically sensitive.
- Ministry said that a high-level committee of the Environment Ministry will be set up to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the HLWG in a time-bound manner.
- The Ministry accepted all the other major recommendations made by the HLWG like financial arrangements to incentivise green growth in Western Ghats, participation of and involvement of local communities in decision making, data monitoring systems especially the establishment of Decision support and Monitoring Centre for Western Ghats are accepted.
- The Ministry of Environment's order dated December 20, issued to Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

#### **40. CCEA allowed RIL to sell gas at higher price with bank guarantee**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) resolved the issue of Reliance Industries (RIL) to sell KG-D6 block gas at a higher price with effect from April 2014.
- RIL has been asked to provide bank guarantees that would be in force till an international court of arbitration gives its final ruling on whether RIL has willfully violated contractual obligations on 80 per cent of committed gas output or resorted to hoarding.
- The government said that details of the bank guarantee including its periodicity would be worked out by January 2014, taking into account the law ministry's views. According to the government, the short-supply of gas at KG-D6 so far has been around 1 trillion cubic feet.
- The new pricing is based on the Rangarajan committee formula. The new formula will be valid for five years and applies only to new contracts or renewals when existing ones expire. It does not apply to contracts which contain a specific formula for natural gas price indexation or fixing.
- As per the Rangarajan formula, beginning 1 April 2014, all domestic gas will be priced at an average of international hub prices and the cost of LNG imported into India. The increased domestically produced gas price in the country would hover around 7-8/mmBtu dollar at the current rate. This would be almost double that of the current rate. This would also result in higher subsidy outgo, as the input costs for fertiliser and gas-based power plants will go up.
- Benchmarks: There are two broad elements which are used for an average which will be used as an unbiased arm's length price. These are
  1. A price obtained by taking the cost of liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports into India under long-term contracts and removing charges such as transportation to obtain a theoretical price at the point of production in exporting countries. This is known as the netback price. The government decided not to include spot import costs. It will be a weighted average.
  2. The weighted average of prices at three major gas trading points - the hub price at Henry Hub in the United States, the price at the National Balancing Point of the UK and the netback price at sources of supply for Japan.
- The main departure from the Rangarajan proposals was to review prices quarterly, rather than monthly, in an attempt to smooth volatility and allow better planning of investments.
- For both pricing elements, the formula will take the average prices for the four quarters preceding the quarter before the review. So for the quarter starting 1 April 2014, the formula will be based on the four quarters ending 31 December 2012.

**41. CCEA allowed CIL to pump gas from CBM mines**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) allowed state-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) to pump methane gas trapped in coal seams of its existing mines. The decision by the CCEA would open a new revenue stream for the world's largest coal miner CIL. Further it would help unlock several mines that have remained out of bounds because of the presence of the explosive gas that make mining unsafe.
- Currently, rules and regulations prohibit mining firms from extracting CBM during mining as the policy does not allow for simultaneous extraction of methane (CBM) and coal. CBM extracted by CIL will be priced and marketed as per the government's gas pricing and utilization policy.
- At present, only those companies that successfully bid for mines with CBM are allowed to explore and produce such gas. The government has auctioned 33 CBM blocks since 2001. CIL holds at least 20% of the estimated 60 billion tonnes of coal resources in India. It has several coal mines in eight States, which are estimated to have CBM reserves of 3.5-4 trillion cubic feet.
- Coal bed methane (CBM), coalbed gas, or coal mine methane (CMM) is a form of natural gas extracted from coal beds. It is an unconventional source of energy because methane gas is contained in the coal and does not migrate to other rock strata. In recent decades it has become an important source of energy in United States, Canada, and other countries. Australia has rich deposits where it is known as coal seam gas.
- **Coal Bed Methane Policy in India:** CBM Policy was the Government of India on 19 July 1997 with an aim to offer the block for the exploration of CBM through open competitive bidding system. It provides infrastructure status to the exploration and exploitation of CBM. It asks the contractor to pay royalty at a flat rate of 10% ad valorem as is applicable to natural gas. These amounts will accrue to the State Governments concerned. The duration of the CBM contract will be for 38 years for blocks located in a normal area and 40 years for blocks in a frontier area. Government will not have any participating interest. Foreign/Indian companies could have 100% participating interest.

**42. Cabinet Panel formed to demarcate eco-sensitive zones around national parks and sanctuaries**

- A Cabinet subcommittee has been set up to demarcate eco-sensitive zones around the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka. B Ramanath Rai, the Minister of Forest of Karnataka will head the Cabinet subcommittee set. The state cabinet decided to constitute the panel as per the direction of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).
- In its direction the Supreme Court has ordered the centre and states to demarcate 10 kilometer zone in parks as the buffer zone. 2 kilometers of the zone around the Bandipur Tiger Reserve has been demarcated by the authorities. This demarcation has led to a total ban on quarrying within the zone and other activities.
- The states have five national parks and 27 wildlife sanctuaries and the subcommittee will study and prepare a report on demarcating the eco-sensitive zones around other national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. As per the Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T.B. Jayachandra, the report of the study would be sent to the Centre for demarcation of the boundaries.
- He also said that as per the guidelines of centre, commercial mining, setting up of the industries that causes pollution, establishment of hydroelectric projects, and commercial use of firewood, tourism and others are prohibited in the eco-sensitive zones.

**43. RBI and Bank of Japan agreed to triple the currency swap agreement to 50 billion dollar**

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Japan's Central bank, Bank of Japan, decided on 18 December 2013 to enhance the bilateral currency swap arrangement from 15 billion dollars to 50 billion dollars. The agreement would help bring stability in the financial markets in both the countries.
- The deal is basically aimed at lifting sentiments and allaying any fears that India has insufficient cushion to finance its current account deficit (CAD) if the situation worsens drastically.
- The arrangement implies that, the Bank of Japan will accept rupees and give dollars to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Similarly, India's central bank will take yen and send dollars to the Bank of Japan.
- The arrangement will help stabilise the currencies of the two nations in time of contingencies. It can be put into operation whenever there is depletion of foreign exchange reserves or speculators hammer the currencies.
- Further, this will help reduce the demand for dollars in the short-term and boost exports and could be effective hedge against the volatility in the foreign exchange market. India should only enter into such agreements with countries with which it does not have a big trade imbalance.
- The currency swap arrangement was first signed in 2008 and was limited to 3 billion dollars. In 2011, the deal was renewed and the size was increased to 15 billion dollars.
- A currency swap is defined as the exchange of principal and interest in one currency for the same in another currency. It is considered to be a foreign exchange transaction and is not required by law to be shown on a company's balance sheet. For example, suppose a U.S.-based company needs to acquire Swiss francs and a Swiss-based company needs to acquire U.S. dollars. These two companies could arrange to swap currencies by establishing an interest rate, an agreed upon amount and a common maturity date for the exchange. Currency swap maturities are negotiable for at least 10 years, making them a very flexible method of foreign exchange.

**44. Sahitya Akademi Awards announced for the year 2013**

- The Sahitya Akademi Awards 2013 was announced on 18 December 2013 by Sahitya Akademi. Poetry writers have dominated the awards announced in 2013. Eight books of poetry, four of essays, three of novels, two each of short stories and travelogues, one each of autobiography, memoirs and play have won the Sahitya Akademi Award 2013.
- The awards were recommended by jury members, who represent 22 Indian languages and approved by the Executive Board of the Sahitya Akademi that met under the Chairmanship of Dr. Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari, President of the Sahitya Akademi. Assamese and Gujarati language awards will be declared later on.
- The books were selected on the basis of recommendations made by a Jury of three members in the concerned languages in accordance with the procedure laid down for the purpose. According to the procedure, the Executive Board declared the Awards on the basis of unanimous selections made by the Jurors or selection made on the basis of majority vote. The Awards relate to books first published during the three years immediately preceding the year of Award (i.e., between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2011).
- The Award in the form of a casket containing an engraved copper-plaque, a shawl and a cheque of 100000 rupees will be presented to the authors of these books at a special function to be held on 11 March 2014 at New Delhi during the Festival of Letters organized by Sahitya Akademi.

- Winning poets of these awards were:
  - Javed Akhtar for poetry Lava in Urdu language
  - Namdev Tarachandani in Sindhi language for poetry Mansh-Nagari
  - Arjun Charan Hembram for poetry Chanda Bonga in Santali language
  - Radhakant Thakur for poetry Chaladuravani in Sanskrit
  - Ambika Dutt for poetry Aanthyoi Nahi Din Hal in Rajasthani
  - Sitaram Sapolia for poetry Doha Satsai in Dogri
  - Anil Boro for poetry Delphini Onthal Mwdai Arg Gubun Gubun Khonthai in Bodo
  - Subodh Sarkar for poetry Dwaipayan Hrader Dhare in Bengali
- The Sahitya Akademi was formally inaugurated by the Government of India on 12 March 1954. As a national organization it is responsible to work for the development of Indian letters and to set the literary standards in all the Indian languages. It functions as an autonomous organization. It was registered as a society on 7 January 1956, under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.

#### **45. Union Ministry of Finance Approved Three Proposals to utilise Nirbhaya Fund**

- The Union Ministry of Finance on 16 December 2013 approved the three proposals of different Ministries to utilise the Resources in the Nirbhaya Fund to Enhance the Safety and Security of Women in the country.
- In the Union Budget speech on 28 February 2013, the Union Finance Minister P.Chidambaram had announced that the Government will set-up a Fund called the Nirbhaya Fund and contribute 1000 crore rupees to the Fund.
- Three Proposals are:
  - I. Proposal of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs designed in consultation with Ministry of Information Technology: Integration of the police administration with the mobile phone network to trace and respond to distress calls with minimum response time.
  - II. Proposal of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways: A scheme for 'security of women in road transport in the country' covering 32 towns each with a population of over one million to be implemented over a period of two years. The scheme would have following features:
  - III. Proposal of Ministry of Railways: A pilot scheme of setting up an SOS alert system in trains in select zones.
- Besides the above three schemes, Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) have reported that they are formulating a scheme for vulnerability mapping, opening of response centres and creating awareness for enhancement of safety and security of women in the selected 32 towns.

#### **46. Union Cabinet approved the Prevention of Communal Violence Bill 2013**

- The Union Cabinet on 16 December 2013 approved the Prevention of Communal Violence Bill 2013. The bill aimed to prevent and tackle the communal violence in the country and punish the perpetrators of the violence.
- The Bill has been named as The Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2013.
- The Bill has the provision of creating an institutional arrangement for speedy investigation, disposal of cases and for providing relief and rehabilitation to victims of communal violence. It also seeks imposition of enhanced punishment on persons involved in communal violence.

- **The highlights of the Bill**
  - The Bill defines communal violence to include any act or series of acts, whether spontaneous or planned, resulting in injury or harm to the person or property knowingly directed against any person by virtue of his or her religious or linguistic identity.
  - The Bill has proposed to punish organized communal violence with life imprisonment. Hate propaganda will be punished with up to three years imprisonment or fine or both. Funding of communal violence will be punished with up to three years or fine or both.
  - Dereliction of duty will invite a punishment with imprisonment ranging from two years to five years and breach of command with imprisonment of up to 10 years.
  - Earlier the power of intervention of the Centre in event of riots was unilateral, that is, central could send paramilitary forces without consulting the state governments. This has been amended and now the State governments will have discretion in deciding whether the assistance of the Centre is needed or not.
  - The new bill makes bureaucrats and public servants accountable for any acts of commission and omission while handling communal violence. However bureaucrats who refuse to obey unlawful orders of their superiors during communal situations cannot be held responsible for willful neglect of duty.
  - The Bill provides compensation of 7 lakh rupees to the next kin of those killed in communal violence, 5 lakh rupees for rape, 3 lakh rupees to 5 lakh rupees for disability and 2 lakh rupees for grievous injury.

#### **47. Cabinet approved the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2011**

- The Union Cabinet on 12 December 2013 approved the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2011. The Bill is a comprehensive measure that covers a whole spectrum of problems from physical disabilities to mental illness and multiple disabilities. It will replace the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995.
  - The Bill is based on the recommendations of Sudha Kaul Committee appointed in 2010 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
  - **The highlights of the Bill**
    - Provides for 5% reservation in public sector jobs and makes the private sector more accountable for creating a disabled-friendly environment. It provides incentives for the private sector to take such measures.
    - To ensure political participation, the Bill says that every person with disability who fulfills eligibility requirements is entitled to be registered as a voter. He/she should not be disqualified from exercising the voting right on the grounds of disability, irrespective of any stipulation to the contrary in any law for the time being in force.
    - Further, it says that any person who is unable to vote in person due to disability or because of admission to hospital for treatment is entitled to opt for postal ballot. It requires the Election Commission to ensure that all polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities.
    - It allows mentally unsound women the right to fertility and prescribes punishment for forced abortion or hysterectomy on them.
    - The Bill is based on the premise of all rights for all disabled. The Bill has been described as historic by the social activists as it has provided the definition of disability in very expansive terms to cover all kinds of disability whether physical or mental.
- The Bill, to conclude, recognizes the equality of persons with disabilities and prohibits direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of disability. The Bill also makes provision

for the practical implementation of all the civil political rights included in the Disability Convention. Many of these rights are also affirmed by the Constitution of India.

**48. Maharashtra Legislative Assembly passed the much awaited Anti-Superstition Bill**

- The Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra on 13 December 2013 passed the much-awaited Anti-Superstition Bill: The Bill seeks to curb black magic and other inhuman practices arising out of superstition.
- It came after four months of the murder of the noted rationalist Dr. Narendra Dabholkar on 20 August 2013 in Pune, who fought for such a law for more than for one and a half decade. Earlier, the State Government of Maharashtra on 21 August 2013 adopted an Anti-Black Magic and Superstition Ordinance.
- The Lower House adopted the Bill by a voice vote with certain amendments. The Bill was introduced in the Lower House on 10 December 2013 by the Social Justice Minister Shivajirao Moghe. Resentment and dismay was expressed by the opposition members, over the passage of the Bill in undue haste even after development of consensus on the Bill.
- Now the Bill will be taken to the Legislative Council for consideration and passage, after which it will be enforced as a law. The state Government had promulgated an ordinance in this regard after the assassination of the Anti-Superstition campaigner Dr. Dabholkar and introduced the revised Bill to get it converted into the law.

**49. The Rangarajan Panel recommended the guidelines for Highway sector**

- The C Rangarajan panel recommended the guidelines prescribing bailout packages for developers of highway projects and the task of implementation lie with the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI).
- The panel recommended that 75% of the premium amount payable to the government will be restricted in the first three years of the contract. Further it recommended that the road developers should submit the entire premium amount three years before the completion of full contract. At present companies pay some amount of premium to the government in the first year of the project which keeps increasing in the subsequent years.
- The panel's recommendations, if accepted, will lead to huge reduction in the premium payment in the first years. As a result, it will provide relief to the developers like GMR Infrastructure Ltd and GVK Power and Infrastructure Ltd and 23 other road developers.
- The panel was appointed by the Government in October 2013 to fine-tune and decide all terms and conditions of the bailout policy for the road developer who were pulling out of road projects due to the premium burdens.
- The six-member panel is headed by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council Chairman C Rangarajan. The other members of the panel include Secretary Planning Commission Sindhushree Khullar, Expenditure Secretary R.S. Gujral, Secretary, Economic Advisory Council Alok Sheel, Roads Secretary Vijay Chhibber, Joint Secretary Road Transport and Highways Rohit Kumar Singh and Chairman National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) R.P. Singh.
- Earlier in October 2013, the Cabinet note, which included suggestions of the finance ministry, planning commission and law ministry, had suggested that developers pay a discount rate of 12% on the premium payment and also pay a penalty of up to 0.5% of the total project cost in case default was on their part.
- The proposal says if toll revenues turn out to be more than projected, the money left after servicing debt and other necessary costs would go to NHAI as advance payment. Further the concessionaire cannot claim return to equity till premium equals or exceeds what was originally quoted for that particular year. The highways sector has seen a drastic reversal of

fortune since 2012-13 with developers and financiers steering clear of the sector even while multiple projects have failed to take-off.

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) managed to award only 479-km till now as against target of 3000 kms by September 2013. In the previous financial year, only 1,116-km was awarded against the target of 9,500-km.

#### **50. CCEA approved Panchayati Raj Ministry proposal on BRGF**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on 12 December 2013 approved the proposal of the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj to continue district component of Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF) in the current financial year (2013-14).
- The district component of BRGF covers 272 backward districts in 27 states and the entitlement of each district is one crore rupees. The amount is used primarily to build capacity for elected representatives and functionaries of Panchayati Raj institutions.
- The BRGF will have budgetary estimate of 6500 rupees during 2013-14. The fund will contribute towards poverty alleviation in backward districts and promote accountable and responsible panchayats and municipalities.
- The Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF), launched by the Prime Minister at Barpeta in Assam on 19th February 2007, signifies a new approach to addressing persistent regional imbalances in development. The programme subsumes the Rashtriya Sama Vikas Yojana (RSVY), a scheme earlier being administered by the Planning Commission.
- **Objectives of BRGF:** The Backward Regions Grant Fund is designed to redress regional imbalances in development by way of providing financial resources for supplementing and converging existing developmental inflows into the identified backward districts, so as to:
  - Bridge critical gaps in local infrastructure and other development requirements that are not being adequately met through existing inflows,
  - Strengthen, to this end, Panchayat and Municipality level governance with more appropriate capacity building, to facilitate participatory planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring, to reflect local felt needs,
  - Provide professional support to local bodies for planning, implementation and monitoring their plans,
  - Improve the performance and delivery of critical functions assigned to Panchayats, and counter possible efficiency and equity losses on account of inadequate local capacity.

#### **51. India and UAE signed Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement**

- India and United Arab Emirates on 12 December 2013 signed a Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) that would accelerate fresh capital investments of UAE in India.
- The BIPPA agreement was signed by Obaid Humaid Al Tayer, the Minister of State for Financial Affairs of UAE and Namo Narain Meena, the Minister of State for Finance of India. At present the Foreign Minister of UAE, Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan is on a visit to India.
- The BIPPA has been worked on as an exception to the norm of India to freeze all BIPPA agreements until a new template is in place. UAE wants to explore major infrastructure projects in India but was waiting till the signature of the BIPPA.
- India and UAE are the largest trading partners of each other with the total bilateral trade of 75 billion dollars. At present, the UAE invests in India about 3 billion dollar. UAE controls the second largest Sovereign Wealth Fund in the world under the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

- At present, Abu Dhabi National Energy Company (TAQA) wants to invest 700 million dollars in Himachal Pradesh in the electricity sector, whereas the DP World Operations is aimed at expansion of their footprint in the port sector in India.
- In February 2013, India-UAE High Level Task Force on Investments that was set up to speed up investment opportunities met but before proceeding UAE wanted to conclude the BIPPA. This signing of the agreement has opened the possibilities of High Level Task Force meetings in January 2014 to explore investment opportunities.
- With the signing of the India-UAE BIPPA, India now has such agreements with all GCC countries, which also opened the possibilities of pursuing India-GCC Free Trade Agreement, which has been on the backburner so far.

## **52. Justice Sodhi Committee on Insider Trading Regulations submitted report to SEBI**

- The High Level Committee to Review the SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 1992 constituted under the Chairmanship of Justice N.K. Sodhi on 7 December 2013 submitted its report to SEBI Chairman, UK Sinha at Chandigarh. Justice N.K. Sodhi has been the former chief justice of Karnataka and Kerala High Courts and has been the former presiding officer of the Securities Appellate Tribunal.
- The Committee has made many recommendations to the legal framework for prohibition of insider trading in India. It has also focused on making this area of regulation more predictable, precise and clear by suggesting a combination of principles-based regulations and rules that are backed by principles. The Committee has also suggested that each regulatory provision may be backed by a note on legislative intent.
- **Main features of the proposed regulations are:**
  - While enlarging the definition of "insider", the term "connected person" has been defined more clearly and immediate relatives are presumed to be connected persons, with a right to rebut the presumption. The term "immediate relative" would cover close relatives, who are either financially dependent or consult an insider in connection with trading in securities.
  - Insiders would be prohibited from communicating, providing or allowing access to UPSI unless required for discharge of duties or for compliance with law.
  - The regulations would bring greater clarity on what constitutes unpublished price sensitive information (UPSI) by defining what constitutes generally available information (essentially, information to which non-discriminatory public access would be available). A list of types of information that may ordinarily be regarded as price sensitive information has also been provided.
  - Trading in listed securities when in possession of UPSI would be prohibited except in certain situations provided in the regulations.
  - Insiders who are liable to possess UPSI all round the year would have the option to formulate pre-scheduled trading plans. In such cases, the new UPSI that may come into their possession without having been with them when formulating the plan would not impede their ability to trade. Trading plans would, however, be required to be disclosed to the stock exchanges and have to be strictly adhered to.
  - Conducting due diligence on listed companies would be permissible for purposes of transactions entailing an obligation to make an open offer under the Takeover Regulations. In all other cases, due diligence would be permissible subject to making the diligence findings that constitute UPSI generally available prior to the proposed trading. In all cases, the board of directors would need to opine that permitting the conduct of due diligence is in the best interests of the company, and would also have to ensure execution of non-disclosure and non-dealing agreements.

- Trades by promoters, employees, directors and their immediate relatives would need to be disclosed internally to the company. Trades within a calendar quarter of a value beyond 10 lakh rupees or such other amount as SEBI may specify, would be required to be disclosed to the stock exchanges.
- Every entity that has issued securities, which are listed on a stock exchange or which are intended to be so listed would be required to formulate and publish a Code of Fair Disclosure governing disclosure of events and circumstances that would impact price discovery of its securities.
- Every listed company and market intermediary is required to formulate a Code of Conduct to regulate, monitor and report trading in securities by its employees and other connected persons. All other persons such as auditors, law firms, accountancy firms, analysts, consultants etc, who handle UPSI in the course of business operations may formulate a code of conduct and the existence of such a code would evidence the seriousness with which the organization treats compliance requirements.
- Companies would be entitled to require third-party connected persons who are not employees to disclose their trading and holdings in securities of the company.

**53. Israel, Jordan, Palestinians signed Red Sea-to-Dead Sea Water sharing Deal**

- Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians 9 December 2013 signed a historic water-sharing initiative at the World Bank in Washington that could protect the Dead Sea from rising demand for water in the region.
- The agreement was signed by Israeli Energy Minister Silvan Shalom, Shaddad Attili, head of the Palestinian water authority, and Hazim el-Naser, head of the Jordanian water ministry.
- According to the agreement- a pipeline will be built on the Jordanian side of the Aqaba Gulf to carry brine (sea water) from a desalination plant at the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, while providing drinking water to the region. The project is expected to cost 250m-400m Dollars.
- The Dead Sea water Depleting Issue: The Dead Sea is dropping by as much as 1m (3.3ft) a year as the River Jordan is depleted for use in irrigation. The Dead Sea is so rich in salt and other minerals that humans float naturally on the surface. The area around the sea has an established tourism and health industry because of the water's unique properties. But the Dead Sea is losing water rapidly, with some fearing the Dead Sea could dry up entirely by 2050.
- The scheme will pipe water from the Gulf of Aqaba off the Red Sea through a desalination plant in Jordan, sending brine to the southern-most edge of the Dead Sea. The sea water will be used to test the impact of Red Sea water being transported to the Dead Sea.
- It will involve the construction of a desalination plant in Jordan, projected to yield 80 million-100 million cu m of water annually. A water transfer deal will also see Israel supply water to Jordan and the Palestinian territories. The project also expected to yield hydroelectric power for use in the desalination process.

**54. Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 377**

- The Supreme Court of India on 11 December 2013 upheld the constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code making gay sex an offence punishable with upto life imprisonment.
- A bench of justices G S Singhvi and S J Mukhopadhyaya set aside the Delhi High Court's verdict which had in 2009 decriminalised gay sex among consenting adults in private.
- The Supreme Court bench allowed the appeals filed by various social and religious organisations challenging the Delhi high court verdict on the ground that gay sex is against the cultural and religious values of the country.

- The Supreme Court ruled that there is no constitutional infirmity in section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, IPC which makes gay sex an offence punishable with upto life imprisonment. With the apex court verdict, the operation of penal provision against gay sex has come into force. The bench stated Parliament is authorised to delete section 377 of IPC but till the time this penal provision is there, the court cannot legalise this kind of sexual relationship. The court passed the order on a batch of petitions of anti-gay right activists and social and religious organisations against the Delhi High Court's verdict decriminalising gay sex.
- The Delhi High Court had on 2 July 2009 decriminalised gay sex as provided in Section 377 of the IPC and had ruled that sex between two consenting adults in private would not be an offence.
- Section 377 in the Indian Penal Code, 1860: Unnatural offences; Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

**55. Scientists discovered a new greenhouse gas 7000 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>**

- Scientists at University of Toronto discovered a long-lived manmade greenhouse gas (GHG) called Perfluorotributylamine (PFTBA) that is 7100 times more potent than carbon dioxide at warming the Earth over a 100-year time span.
- The new discovered gas PFTBA which does not occur naturally has been in use in the electrical industry such as transistors and capacitors since the mid-20th century. It belongs to an entire class of chemicals used for industrial applications whose effects on the atmosphere remain unknown.
- Concentrations of PFTBA in the atmosphere are low – 0.18 parts per trillion in the Toronto area – compared to 400 parts per million for carbon dioxide. So PFTBA does not in any way displace the burning of fossil fuels such as oil and coal as the main drivers of climate change.
- From a climate change perspective, individually, PFTBA's atmospheric concentration does not significantly alert the phenomenon of climate change, still the biggest culprit is CO<sub>2</sub> from fossil fuel emissions. Further, it has the highest radiative efficiency of any molecule detected in the atmosphere to date.
- But PFTBA is long-lived. The Toronto researchers estimated that PFTBA remains in the atmosphere for about 500 years. Unlike carbon dioxide which is taken up by forests and oceans, there are no known natural "sinks" on Earth to absorb it.
- The discovery of PFTBA and its warming potential raises questions about the climate impacts of other chemicals used in industrial processes.

**56. UP emerged as the biggest exporter of Buffalo meat**

- Uttar Pradesh (UP) with a share of 67% has emerged as the biggest exporter of buffalo meat from the country followed by Punjab and Maharashtra, said a recent FICCI report. The report also noted that apart from having the country's largest buffalo population, UP also has the highest number of abattoirs-cum-meat processing export units.
- Buffalo meat production in the state has been increasing gradually since 2007-08 but since 2010 it increased by 40%. UP ranks third in meat production and the state has a large livestock population, representing 10% of the cattle and over 25% of the buffalos in India.

**57. Oxford Scientists Developed Malaria Vaccine**

- Oxford scientists recently developed a novel new Malaria Vaccine which can protect against the deadly mosquito-borne disease. The vaccine has shown promising results in the first clinical trial to test whether it can protect people against the disease.

- The trial was carried out by researchers led by Professor Adrian Hill of the Jenner Institute at Oxford University, along with researchers from the biotechnology company Okairos. It's the first time that a vaccine has been shown to have a protective effect through a sufficiently high immune response involving cells called CD8 T cells. It is CD8 immune cells that are seen to mount a protective response against malaria in similar studies in mice.
- Every existing vaccine in use - bar one - generates antibodies. But there are two arms to the body's immune system for fighting infection: antibodies and T cells. This new vaccine aims to stimulate an immune response involving T cells. CD8 T cells are important because they are the primary killer cells in the immune system.
- They can attack nearly all types of infected cells in this case liver cells infected with the malaria parasite. But this first demonstration of a large CD8 response from a vaccine could be relevant for tackling other diseases too.
- Malaria is caused by a parasite called Plasmodium, which is transmitted via the bites of infected mosquitoes. In the human body, the parasites multiply in the liver, and then infect red blood cells.
- Symptoms of malaria include fever, headache, and vomiting, and usually appear between 10 and 15 days after the mosquito bite. If not treated, malaria can quickly become life-threatening by disrupting the blood supply to vital organs. In many parts of the world, the parasites have developed resistance to a number of malaria medicines.

#### **58. Department of Posts launched 'Express Parcel' and 'Business Parcel' Services**

- Department of Posts, Under Union Ministry of Communications & IT, on 2 December 2013, launched an Express Parcel service and Business Parcel Services for speedy delivery of parcels across the country.
- Express Parcel is a premium parcel service for retail as well as bulk customers. It offered time bound, safe and secure home delivery of parcels. To have minimal transit time these parcels will be given airlift wherever needed.
- Bulk customers would also have an economical option of surface transported 'Business Parcel'.
- These two new parcel services aim to promote the e-commerce market in India by offering reliable and cost efficient delivery solutions. Whereas 'Express Parcel' is an air mail service providing guaranteed time bound delivery of parcels, 'Business Parcel' will provide fast, secure and cost efficient transmission of parcels through surface. These services will have 'Cash on Delivery' facility which has become a pre-requisite today for e-commerce parcels.
- Though 'Business Parcels' will have a nationwide coverage, the 'Express Parcel' service will initially be available between 20 identified cities: Agra, Bangalore, Bhubaneshwar, Chennai, Delhi (NCR), Patna, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Indoor, Jaipur, Jammu, Kolkata, Lucknow, Ludhiana, Mumbai, Pune, Parwanoo, Shillong, Surat and Thiruvananthapuram. This service will be expanded nationwide in phased manner.

#### **59. Tripura Introduced PVC-Electoral Photo Identity Cards First Time in the Country**

- Tripura on 30 November 2013 introduced for the first time in the country PVC Electoral Photo Identity Card (PVC EPIC) as mandated by the Election Commission of India.
- The new PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride- or Plastic) EPIC has many scientific security features to prevent duplication, forging and tampering. Unlike the present paper voter's card, the PVC-EPIC has inserted coded information of the elector. The information and government logos of the new EPIC would be visible only in ultraviolet light.
- Tripura is the first state in India to introduce the newly designed EPIC.

- The new card will be issued through the Common Service Centre of the central government's Information Technology department. The card was simultaneously introduced in 23 sub-divisions of all the eight districts of the State.
- PVC: Plastics are also called synthetic resins and are broadly classified into two categories: thermosetting resins and thermoplastic resins. The thermosetting resins include phenolic resin and melamine resin, which are thermally hardened and never become soft again. Thermoplastic resins include Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC), polyethylene (PE), polystyrene (PS) and polypropylene (PP), which can be re-softened by heating.

#### **60. Europe launched Gaia satellite from French Guiana**

- Europe on 19 December 2013 launched the Gaia satellite – one of the most ambitious space missions in the history. Gaia lifted on a Soyuz rocket from Europe's Spaceport from the Kourou in French Guiana at 6:12 local time. It will map the precise positions and distances to more than a billion stars.
- This will give the first realistic picture of how the Milky Galaxy has been constructed and will also detect thousands of unseen objects like asteroids and new planets. The satellite is carrying two telescopes that will throw light on to a huge, one billion-pixel camera detector connected to a trio of instruments. It has been developed to sample the ultra-stable and supersensitive optical equipment to pinpoint.
- Gaia's journey will take about a month as it will travel about one and half kilometers to the observatory station from the earth.
- **Gaia**
  - Gaia has been developed in more than 20 years. It is on a five-year science mission
  - Gaia is now en route towards an orbit around a gravitationally-stable virtual point in space called L2, some 1.5 million kilometers beyond Earth as seen from the Sun
  - Gaia will observe each of the billion stars an average of 70 times each over the five years and will measure the position and key physical properties of each star, like its brightness, temperature and chemical composition
  - It has a sunshield that will block heat and light from the Sun and Earth and this blocking will provide the stable environment that is needed by its sophisticated instruments to make an extraordinarily sensitive and precise census of the Milky Way's stars

### **JANUARY 2014**

#### **1. FAA downgraded safety ratings of Indian aviation**

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the US downgraded the safety ratings of Indian aviation on 31 January 2014. The safety ratings have been downgraded from top to the second category. The downgrading would affect expansion of flights by Indian carriers to the United States.
- The downgrade from Category I to II means that Indian aviation regulator does not meet the safety standards set by the UN agency, International Civil Aviation Organisation.
- The downgrading of Indian aviation was taken after Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) failed to address all the 33 concerns raised by the FAA in its safety audit conducted in September 2013 and December 2013.
- Among the concerns raised by the FAA over 33 issues were filling up of several senior positions including those of full-time Flight Operations Inspectors (FOIs), beefing up of aviation safety training programmes and preparing manuals and documentation on certain safety issues.

- The FAA downgrade of India's safety rankings would effectively bar Air India and Jet Airways from increasing flights to the US from what they currently operate or have any new code-share relationships with any US airline.
- However, it does not mean that these airlines are unsafe but show that the DGCA's safety oversight may not be enough to properly monitor safety performance of Indian carriers.

**2. By June 2014 India to have 243 million Internet users: IAMAI**

- The internet user base in India was projected to touch 243 million by June 2014. This was according to the data released by the Internet And Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) on 29 January 2014.
- With more and more people accessing the Web through mobile phones, the IAMAI projected a growth of 28 percent in internet user base from June 2013 to June 2014. The Internet user base in the country stood at 190 million at the end of June 2013.

**3. Cabinet approved Amendments to the Mental Health Care Bill**

- The Union Cabinet on 30 January 2014 approved the amendments in the Mental Health Care Bill with an aim to empower people suffering from mental illness and to protect their rights.
- The Mental Health Care Bill 2013 was introduced in Rajya Sabha in August 2013 and was sent to Parliamentary Standing Committee, which recommended some amendments.
- The new bill seeks to decriminalise suicide and make access to affordable mental health care a right for all. This is the first time in India, that a bill that seeks to decriminalise acts of suicide by linking it to the state of mental health of the person attempting the act has been presented in the Rajya Sabha and approved by the Cabinet.
- As per the Bill People suffering from mental health attempting suicide would be treated as mentally ill and therefore the act will be exempted from the provisions of Section 309 of Indian Penal Code. This bill has fulfilled the gap in the mental health law in the country after India Ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that requires harmonisation in its laws with those prevalent worldwide. The convention was signed by India on 1 October 2007 and it came into force from 3 May 2008.

**4. India and Fiji signed Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement**

- Government of India and the government of Fiji on 30 January 2014 signed a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) for avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.
- The negotiation on the DTAA was reached in 2011 and this agreement will provide tax stability to the residents of India and Fiji. It will also facilitate in mutual economic cooperation as well as stimulate the flow of investment, technology and services between the two countries. It also incorporates provisions for an effective exchange of information and assistance in collection of taxes between tax authorities of the two countries including exchange of banking information.
- The maximum rate of tax that should be charged in the country of source will not exceed the prescribed limit for such dividends, royalties, interest and fees for technical services. The capital gains that are earned by the sale of shares will be taxable in the country of source. The anti-abuse provisions have been incorporated in the agreement to ensure that the benefits of Agreement are availed of only by the residents of the two countries and to prevent any abuse of treaty.
- The agreement will also help the two countries in
  - As per the DTAA the business profit will be taxable in the source state if the activities of an enterprise constitute a permanent establishment in the source country

- Profits derived by an enterprise from the operation of aircraft in international traffic shall be taxable in the country of place of effective management of the enterprise
- Dividends, interest, royalty income and fees for technical or professional services will be taxed both in the country of residence and in the country of source
- Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAA) means as an essential bilateral agreements that has been reached between the countries like this case the agreement on DTAA between India and Fiji. This is basically signed with an objective to avoid taxation of income in both the countries and to promote economic trade and investment between the two countries.
- The Double Tax Avoidance Agreements (DTAA) is essentially bilateral agreements entered into between two countries, in our case, between India and another foreign state. The basic objective is to avoid, taxation of income in both the countries (i.e. Double taxation of same income) and to promote and foster economic trade and investment between the two countries.
- Important advantages of DTAA are
  - Lower Withholding Taxes (Tax Deduction at Source)
  - Complete Exemption of Income from Taxes
  - Underlying Tax Credits
  - Tax Sparing Credits
- The provisions mentioned under DTAA provide the facility of overriding the general provisions mentioned under the taxes of a particular country. In case of India Section 90(2) has been inserted in the Indian Income Tax Act helps the countries under DTAA to override the domestic tax norms. Insertion of this code in the Act provides the assessee a chance to choose among the provisions of Income Tax Act or of DTAA, whichever seems as more beneficial.

#### **5. Six PSUs signed MoU to set up World's largest Solar Power Project**

- Six Public Sector Units (PSUs) namely BHEL, SECI (Solar Energy Corporation of India), SSL (Sambhar Salt Ltd), Power Grid, SJVNL (Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam) and REIL (Rajasthan Electronics & Instruments Ltd) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 29 January 2014 to set up the World's largest 4000 MW ultra solar power project in Rajasthan.
- The project will be the largest single location solar plant spread across 19000 acres at Sambhar in Rajasthan. The project will be developed in two phases in 7 to 8 years.
- The solar photo-voltaic power plant will use PV modules based on crystalline silicon technology.
- The plant life is estimated to be 25 years and is expected to supply 6400 million units of energy per year. The plant will help to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by over 4 million tonnes per year.

#### **6. NIT Odisha developed technology to turn Plastic into fuel**

- National Institute of Technology, Odisha, developed a commercially viable technology for efficiently rendering common polymer, low-density polyethylene (LDPE) into a liquid fuel. This discovery may lead to re-using discarded plastic bags and other products to address growing demands for fuel globally. Study was published in International Journal of Environment and Waste Management.
- LDPE is used to make container, medical and laboratory equipment, computer components and plastic bags.
- The team heat up the plastic waste to between 400 and 500 degrees celsius over a kaolin catalyst (a clay mineral containing aluminum and silicon). This caused the plastic's long

chain polymer chains to break apart in a process known as thermo-catalytic degradation. The process released large quantities of much smaller, carbon-rich molecules.

- An analytical method called Gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) was used to characterise these product molecules and found the components of their liquid fuel to be mainly paraffins and olefins 10 to 16 carbon atoms long. This makes the liquid fuel very similar chemically to conventional petrochemical fuels.
- Kaolin acts as a catalyst by providing a large reactive surface on which the polymer molecules can sit and so be exposed to high temperature inside the batch reactor, which breaks them apart.
- Recycling initiatives are in place across the world but much of the polyethylene waste ends up in landfill, dispersed in the environment or in the sea. The process, if implemented on a large scale, can reduce pressures on landfill as well as ameliorating the effects of dwindling oil supplies in a world with increasing demands on petrochemicals for fuel.

#### **7. India ranked lowest in International Intellectual Property Index**

- US Chamber of Commerce released the International Intellectual Property (IP) Index on 28 January 2014. In the IP Index, India has scored a low seven point out of maximum 30 points. India continues to have the weakest IP environment of all countries included in the GIPC Index for the second consecutive year.
- The continued use of compulsory licenses, patent revocations, and weak legislative and enforcement mechanisms raise serious concerns about India's commitment to promote innovation and protect creators.
- Other highlights of the IP Index
  - The United States received the highest (28.5 percent) overall score, but came in third after the United Kingdom and France in the enforcement category.
  - China IIP environment continued to see challenges (trade secret protection and enforcement) and it shows improvements in certain aspects of its patent regime.
  - Canada's treatment of pharmaceutical patents, copyright laws, and unwillingness to ratify international IP treaties resulted in significantly lower scores than other upper-income economies.
- International IP Index is prepared by the Global Intellectual Property Center (GIPC) of the US Chamber of Commerce which maps the IP environment of 25 countries from around the world utilising 30 factors, which are indicative of an IP environments that fosters growth and development.

#### **8. National Waqf Development Corporation Limited inaugurated by Prime Minister**

- Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India on 29 January 2014 inaugurated National Waqf Development Corporation Limited (NAWADCO) that is a new Central Public Sector Enterprise in New Delhi. It will remain under the Ministry of Minority Affairs. National Waqf Development Corporation (NAWADCO) has been established with an authorized share capital of Rs.500 Crore.
- An official release said that the Waqf Corporation is an important institution that will work for development of Waqf properties for the community welfare. It will also facilitate and mobilize financial resources for the development of Waqf properties for community development purposes in a joint venture with the state and Union Territory Waqf Boards and the Mutawallis.
- The corporation has been established as a follow-up of the recommendation of Sachar Committee. In India more than 4.9 lakh registered Waqf properties are present and it fetches about 163 crore rupees annually. The recommendation of Sachar Committee says that if the

properties of Waqf board are developed properly than it will bring an annual income of about 12000 crore.

**9. UNESCO released 11<sup>th</sup> EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013-14**

- UNESCO released the 11th Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013 – 14 on 28 January 2014. The theme of the report was Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all.
- The report warns that despite advances made in education, not a single goal laid down in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 will be achieved globally by 2015.
- The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013-14 vividly underlines the fact that people in the most marginalized groups have continued to be denied opportunities for education over the decade. The Report has advocated to put in place a robust global post-2015 education framework to tackle unfinished business while addressing new challenges.
- It further said that post-2015 education goals will only be achieved if they are accompanied by clear, measurable targets with indicators tracking that no one is left behind, and if specific education financing targets for governments and aid donors are set.
- **Global Monitoring Report and India:** According to the Report, in India there are two issues i.e. access and quality. While the Right to Education (Act) has almost taken care of the access part, the government next target is to now focus on improving quality. The main highlights of the Report in context of India are:
  - In India, education accounts for 10.5% of the total government expenditure which is 3.3% of the GNP (gross national product).
  - The expenditure on education was below the target of 6%. In fact the spending on education has declined over the period 1999 – 2011. The decline was witnessed in both terms, that is, as a percentage of budgeted expenditure and as a percentage of GNP. In 1999, the spending on education was 13% of the total budgeted expenditure and 4.4% of the GNP.
  - India has the highest population of illiterate adults, 287 million which is 37% of the total population of such people across the world.
  - In India, even after completing four years of school, 90% of children from poorer household remain illiterate.
  - The UN body has advised countries including India to improve their tax regimes so as to provide more funds to the education sector.
  - In India, rich young women have already achieved universal literacy but the poorest will only do so around 2080.
  - Allocation for education in India varies widely across states. The expenditure of Kerala on education per pupil was about 685 dollar per year while in Himachal Pradesh it was 542 dollar. In contrast, in West Bengal it was 127 dollar and in Bihar 100 dollar.
- The Education for All Global Monitoring Report was established in 2000 at Dakar in Senegal. The main objective of the Report is to inform, influence and sustain commitment to achieving the Education for All goals by 2015.
- At the UNESCO Summit in April 2000, 1100 participants from 164 countries adopted the Dakar Framework for Action; Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments. These participants agreed upon six wide-ranging education goals to be met by 2015.

**10. India Post to install 3000 ATM & 1.35 lakh micro-ATM by September 2015**

- India Post announced to install as many as 3000 Automated Teller Machine (ATM) and 1.35 lakh micro-ATMs by September 2015 on 27 January 2014. The facility will be available for savings account holders of post offices across the country.

- Initially, three ATMs were to be installed in New Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore by 5 February 2014. After six months of launch of the service, India Post might get interoperability permission from Reserve Bank of India (RBI). After that India Post will join the National Financial Switch, which will benefit India Post account holders to transact at the banks' ATMs and vice versa.
- The ATMs can be used only by 26 crore savings account-holders who save with the postal department. India Post is working with software major Infosys on this project.
- The micro ATMs will be handheld devices to be operated at the post office level while the ATM will be similar to the one operated by any commercial bank.
- Postal savings are worth around 6.05 trillion rupees, which is half the savings in the largest lender SBI and more than double that of the largest private sector lender ICICI Bank.
- The postal department, which has 1.55 lakh post offices over 90% of which are in villages, offers the savings account to people across the country and pays an interest of 4% per annum for such deposits. The account offers cheque facility at present.

#### **11. Ministry of Women and Child Development launched Multi Sectoral Nutrition Programme**

- The child sex ratio in the 0-6 year age group declined steeply from 927 in 2001 to 919 in 2011. The child marriages are still prevalent in the country as 47 % of women in the age 20-24 were married before the age 18.
- The problems like gender discrimination, early marriage, undernourishment lead to a cycle of multiple deprivations for girl. To overcome the undernourishment and develop girl child as a national resource government launched MSNP.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development launched the Multi Sectoral Nutrition Programme (MSNP) and Nutrition Resource Platform (NRP) on 24 January 2014.

#### **Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Programme**

- Multi -Sectoral Nutrition Programme (MSNP) aims to bring inter-sectoral convergence and coherence in policy, planning and action.
- It focuses on both direct interventions and indirect interventions for maternal and child under-nutrition which will provide a continuum of care and follow a life cycle approach.
- The programme will be implemented as a special intervention in 200 high burden districts spread over 19 States. In the current financial year it will be launched in 100 districts.

#### **Nutrition Resource Platform**

- NRP aims to collect, collate and make available resources and material on nutrition and child development to various stake holders.
- NRP is an interactive knowledge resource base which facilitates real quick time interaction, exchange of ideas, discussions between Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and other stakeholders.
- NRP is functional at National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD). It is a virtual repository with the support of Food and Nutrition Board and NIC.
- The NRP is an e-platform and is a valuable source of information.

#### **12. India ranked 155th in global Environment Performance Index**

- The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2014 was released on 25 January 2014. As per the Index, India was ranked 155 out of 178 countries with an index score of 31.23 points in its efforts to address environmental challenges.
- India was ranked behind neighbouring countries China at 118, Pakistan at 148 and Nepal at 139 respectively.
- Among the BRICS countries, South Africa was placed at 72nd position, followed by Russia (73), Brazil (77) and China (118).

- EPI ranks how well countries perform on high-priority environmental issues mainly in the areas of protection of human health from environmental harm and protection of ecosystems.

#### **Other highlights of the EPI**

- The two objectives that provide the overarching structure of the 2014 EPI are Environmental Health and Ecosystem Vitality.
- The 178 nations in the index represent 99 per cent of the global population, 98 per cent of the world's total land area, and 97 per cent of the global GDP.
- The country with the highest EPI is Switzerland which is followed by Luxembourg, Australia, Singapore, and Czech Republic.
- The bottom five performers in the EPI are Somalia, Mali, Haiti, Lesotho, and Afghanistan. All the low performers are grappling with civil unrest, significant economic development pressures, and political turmoil.
- Urbanisation without sufficient investment in environmental safeguards is the key reason for emerging economies' poor showing when it comes to air quality, biodiversity and habitat protection.
- The EPI is prepared by Yale and Columbia Universities in collaboration with the World Economic Forum (WEF) as well as with support from the Samuel Family Foundation and the McCall MacBain Foundation.
- The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is constructed through the calculation and aggregation of 20 indicators reflecting national-level environmental data. These indicators are combined into nine issue categories, each of which fit under one of two overarching objectives.

#### **13. India became third largest crude oil importer in the World**

- India overtook Japan to become the third largest crude oil importer in the World. As per the data released by Reuters on 30 January 2014, India imported 3.86 million barrels-per-day of crude oil in the year 2013.
- India's crude oil imports were nearly 6 percent higher than Japan's customs-cleared imports of 3648372 barrels-per-day (211716710 kilolitres). Recently, China had overtaken USA to become the world's largest importer of crude oil.
- World's Top Five Oil-Importing Countries
  - China imports 6.30 million barrels per day
  - USA imports 6.24 million barrels per day
  - India imports 3.86 million barrels per day
  - Japan imports 3.64 million barrels per day
  - Germany imports 2.67 million barrels per day

#### **14. Dhruva-3 indigenous High Performance Computing System inaugurated**

- Dhruva-3 was inaugurated by Avinash Chander, DG DRDO and Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister at Advanced Numerical Research and Analysis Group (ANURAG) in Hyderabad on 25 January 2014.
- Dhruva-3 an indigenous High Performance Computing System was designed to solve critical Defence Research and Development applications by Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Dhruva-3 is a high end facility and very useful for the design of aircraft, particularly Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) and other such aircraft where we require analysis of aerodynamics at high speed and under different conditions. It is one of the fastest computing facilities in India which will play a vital role in cyber security and information processing.

**15. Pitroda Committee submits report to Information and Broadcasting Ministry**

- Expert Committee constituted by Information and Broadcasting Ministry to review the institutional framework of Prasar Bharti has submitted its report on 25 January 2014. The committee was headed by the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure, Sam Pitroda. The committee was set up on 29 January 2013.
- Committee has recommended amending the Act of 1990 to give effective freedom to the Prasar Bharti with administrative and financial powers.
- Committee has following recommendations:
  - To develop a funding mechanism for Prasar Bharati to address the need for autonomy with financial accountability.
  - The organisation should have the power to frame rules and regulations for its employees without requiring government approval.
  - There should be an reorganisation of the Prasar Bharati board to make it a professionally managed body effective in guiding the organisation.
  - Complete transfer of ownership and management of assets and human resource to Prasar Bharati to make the organisation administratively and financially autonomous of government.
  - Significantly, it recommended setting up of a regulatory body to ensure public accountability of the organisation with respect to all content broadcast on its television and radio network. It should be a sub-committee of the Prasar Bharati board.
  - Prasar Bharati should create a world-class broadcasting service benchmarked with the best in the world.
  - The committee encouraged outsourcing of content creation to external producers to attract high quality and diverse programme and creation of a distinct brand identities for different TV and radio channels, defining the content strategy for each.
  - The committee also strongly batted for the use of social media by Prasar Bharati which can be implemented immediately and defining a social media strategy for the organisation.
  - It also called for setting up of a Prasar Bharati connect as a third arm of the public service broadcaster independent of DD and AIR and mandate it to manage the various social media initiatives of the organisation.
  - The committee sought expansion of satellite and digital cable TV operations to meet the obligations of public service broadcasting.
  - It also pressed for digitalisation of the present AM radio system to a new radio transmission system after due evaluation, subject to cost and technical availabilities.
  - The committee further suggested greater involvement of the private sector to expand broadcasting market with a view to effectively utilise infrastructure being created by Prasar Bharati.
  - There should be a creation of a dedicated, multi-platform channels for dissemination of Prasar Bharati's archival products.

**16. Union Government launched National Waterway-4 project in Tamil Nadu**

- Union Government launched the project for the development of the stretch of 37 Kilometer of the National Waterway-four (NW-4) between Sholinganallur to Kalpakkam in South Buckingham Canal in Tamil Nadu. The project was launched on 24 January 2014.
- NW-4 covers a total length of 1078 Km consisting of Kakinada-Puducherry canal systems integrated with Godavari and Krishna Rivers. Main components of the project include dredging and excavation to develop navigational channel, construction of three terminals

and navigational locks, replacement of one existing bridge at Kelambakkam, and installation of navigational aids.

- The project is expected to be completed in two years with 123 crore rupees. The project will ease out the transportation problems in Chennai suburbs to a great extent besides promoting tourist movement to important tourist spots at Mahabalipuram and Puducherry.
- Other stretches of the National Waterway-4, which covers the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, would also be taken up for development subsequently.

#### **National Waterways**

- National Waterway 1: will starts from Allahabad to Haldia with a distance of 1620 km. The NW 1 runs through the Ganges, Bhagirathi and Hooghly river system. It will be the longest National Waterway in India.
- National Waterway 2: a stretch on Brahmaputra River from Sadiya to Dhubri in Assam state.
- National Waterway 3: run from Kollam to Kottapuram. The 205 km long West Coast Canal is India's first waterway with all time navigation facility.
- National Waterway 4: connect Kakinada to Pondicherry through Canals, Tank and River Godavari along with Krishna River.
- National Waterway 5: connects Orissa to West Bengal using the stretch on Brahmani River, East Coast Canal, Matai River and Mahanadi River Delta.
- National Waterway 6: It is the proposed waterway in Assam state and will connect Lakhipur to Bhanga in river Barak.

#### **17. India and Japan inked MoUs to strengthen cooperation in tourism and power generation**

- India and Japan inked several pacts during the official visit of the Prime Minister of Japan to India from 25 to 27 January 2014. Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan was the Chief Guest of India on the occasion of the Republic Day parade on 26 January 2014.
- The sides signed memorandum for strengthening cooperation in the field of tourism, enhancing energy efficiency in telecom towers and power generation in the country. During this tour of Shinzo Abe, the two countries inked several pacts and they includes

S.No.	Name of the Document	Details
1	Memorandum between Japan Tourism Agency, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Government of Japan and the Ministry of Tourism, Republic of India in the field of Tourism	MOU aims at promoting tourism between the two countries
2	Implementing Arrangement between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan and the Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology of India	Agreement will help implement bilateral Sand exchanges
3	Memorandum of Cooperation between the Bureau of Indian Standards and Japanese Industrial Standards Committee	Memorandum aims at harmonizing standards between the two countries
4	MoU among New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organisation (NEDO) Japan and Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India on a	MoU aims at enhancing energy efficiency in telecom towers

	Model Project for Energy Management Systems in Telecommunication Towers in India	
5	Exchange of Notes on ODA loan for Uttarakhand Forest Resource Management Project	Project is financed by Japanese Official Development Assistance
6	Exchange of Notes for the Project for Improvement of the Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children, Chennai	Grant aid under Japanese ODA
7	Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) Buyers Credit for NTPC's Kudgi Power Plant	Japanese soft loan for power generation in India
8	Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) loan for NTPC's Auraiya Power Plant	Japanese loan for power generation in India

**18. 2013 is fourth warmest year on record for the planet**

- Two top American scientific agencies NOAA and NASA in their separate releases have confirmed the trend of global warming is continuing. The releases were made on 22 January 2014.
- Annual climate report of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) shows that above-average annual temperature was experienced in most of the planet in 2013. As per the release, 2003 was the fourth warmest year, since record keeping began in 1880. The temperature of 2013 tied with the temperature experienced by the world in 2003.
- As per the report of the combined global land and ocean surface temperature was recorded 0.62 degrees Celsius (1.12 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 20th century, which is average 13.9 Celsius (57 degree Fahrenheit).
- A second analysis by the NASA scientists came forward with a different result that says that the global temperature of the year 2013 tied with the temperature recorded in 2006 and 2009. It says that the recorded temperature is the seventh warmest year, which is in record.
- Process of detecting the global temperature used by the two agencies is slightly different but they agree on the trend of calculation.
- As per the data of past 134 years, global warming due to the building-up of the greenhouse gases has been attributed as the reason for the rise in temperature. It has been attributed by the climate scientists depending on the nature of carbon dioxide released in the atmosphere of the planet, which is released from the emissions caused from transport vehicles, industries and power. As per NASA, CO<sub>2</sub> is at its highest level in the atmosphere in the 8 lakh year long atmosphere. It has recorded the rise of the gas to 400 parts per million in 2013 as compared from 285 parts per million in 1880.

**19. RBI issued new guidelines for loan restructuring in NBFCs**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued guidelines for loans restructured by non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) on 23 January 2014. The new guidelines are intended to create a level-playing field between NBFCs and other commercial banks.
- The guidelines issued on loan restructuring for NBFCs were based upon the recommendations of Mahapatra Committee. Mahapatra Committee headed by B Mahapatra, Executive Director at RBI, was appointed by the RBI in October 2013.
- The new guidelines issued are
  - NBFCs to have more flexibility to deal with stressed loans but it is mandatory for them to set aside a substantial amount of provisions to cover restructured loans.

- NBFCs, like commercial banks, are required to set aside a 5% provision against restructured loans. For existing stock, the provisions will go up to 5% in a phased manner by March 2017.
- At present, a majority of the NBFCs are not allowed to accept public deposits and most of their funding needs are met by borrowing from commercial banks.
- An infrastructure loan given by an NBFC will become a non-performing asset (NPA) if the project fails to take off commercially within two years from the original date of commencement of commercial operations (DCCO), unless it is restructured and becomes eligible for classification as a standard asset.
- If the loan is given to a non-infra project, it will become an NPA if the borrower fails to commence commercial operations within one year from the original DCCO, even if it is regular as per record of recovery, unless the loan is restructured.
- NBFCs will have to make a provisioning of 0.25% of the loan amount for such loans.
- For commercial real estate loans, an extension of DCCO will not be considered as restructuring if the revised DCCO falls within a period of one year from the original date of commercial commencement. Hence, such loans will be treated as standard assets without attracting higher provisioning.
- A special classification benefit will be provided to corporate debt restructuring cases, including small and medium enterprises. The benefit will, however, be withdrawn with effect from 1 April 2014.
- Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) are company registered under the Companies Act, 1956 engaged in the business of loans and advances. The Reserve Bank of India is entrusted with the responsibility of regulating and supervising the NBFCs by virtue of powers vested in Chapter III B of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934. They are different from the commercial banks in the sense that they cannot accept demand deposits and do not form a part of any payment settlement. Also, deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

#### **20. Union Cabinet approved to set up Rail Tariff Authority**

- The Union Cabinet approved to set up Rail Tariff Authority on 20 January 2014. Rail Tariff Authority will be an advisory body which will advise the Railway Ministry on fares. RTA will comprise of a chairperson and four members at the apex level.
- At present railway fare and freight rates are set by the Railway Board in accordance with the Railway Act, 1989.
- The Rail Tariff Authority functions include
  - It will recommend fare revision from time to time taking into account input cost and market condition.
  - It will aim to develop an integrated, transparent and dynamic pricing mechanism for the passenger and freight segments of the Indian Railway's business.
  - It will help the government to generate requisite surpluses for growth in the future.
- RTA will be the first external pricing regulatory body for the country's rail sector. The RTA will be given mandatory powers only after the amendment of the Railway Act, 1989 by the Parliament.
- The RTA will make recommendations to the Railway Ministry which usually will have to accept it. If in case Railway Ministry disagrees, the ministry will send the recommendations back to the RTA to review its decision.

**21. RBI expert panel suggested adoption of new CPI for Anchoring Monetary Policy**

- Expert Committee to revise and strengthen the monetary policy framework submitted its report to the Governor of RBI on 21 January 2013. The committee was headed by Dr. Urjit R Patel, the Deputy Governor of RBI and was constituted on 12 September 2013 by the Governor Dr. Raghuram G Rajan. It has been done to make it transparent and predictable.
- The committee in its suggestion has recommended that a new Consumer Price Index (CPI) should be adopted by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to anchor the monetary policy has been recommended on 21 January 2014 by an expert panel set by the central bank. The committee has also set an inflation target at 4 percent with a band of plus/minus 2 percent around it.
- The panel in its recommendation has also suggested that the monetary policy decision should be vested in the hands of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) that will be headed by the Governor. These suggestions as recommendation is intended to better ground inflation expectations by making it clear that inflation is the RBI's primary objective. It also expects to be held accountable for its performance in this regard.
- As per the suggestions the government also needs to ensure the fiscal deficit as a ratio of GDP should be brought down to 3 percent by 2016-17 which should be consistent with the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (Amendment) Rules 2013. In its suggestion it has suggested two schemes namely Market Stabilisation Scheme (MSS) and Cash Management Bills (CMBs) may be phased out and the government debt and cash management should be taken over by the Debt Management Office of the government. It has also suggested that all fixed income financial products should be treated on par with the bank deposits for the purposes of taxation and TDS.
- The committee has suggested detachment of Open Market Operations (OMOs) from the fiscal operations and instead linked solely to the liquidity management. OMOs should not be used for managing yields on government or government securities.
- In recent years, inflation in India has been amongst the highest within the G-20. Household Inflation expectations have risen sharply and have remained at elevated levels, unhinged from the low inflation experience of 2000-07 as also from the global inflation record. Professional forecasters' surveys show that the long-term inflation expectations have risen by about 150 basis points during this period.

**22. Union Cabinet granted minority status to Jain community across India**

- Jain community has been granted the minority status by Union Cabinet on 20 January 2014. This nod has enabled the community to avail the benefits in government schemes and programmes. With this nod of the Union Community, Jain community became the sixth community to attain minority status. Other five communities that has been granted the status of minority are
  - Muslims
  - Christians
  - Sikhs
  - Buddhists
  - Parsis
- This nod came ahead of the Lok Sabha elections 2014. It is also followed by the meet of vice-president of Congress, Rahul Gandhi's meet with Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. Before this cabinet nod of minority status to Jain community was in existence in some states namely, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. This nod has extended the status of the community across India.
- The community will get a share in the central fund that is regulated under the welfare programmes and also as scholarships for the minority after the decision is notified under Section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992. With this notification, the community will be allowed to administer and manage their own educational institutions.

**23. Union Government approved Capacity Building Scheme and Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Climate Change**

- Union Government of India approved to set up Capacity Building scheme and Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Climate Change on 21 January 2014.
- The Capacity Building Scheme will attempt to build capacity at both centre and state levels to assess impact of climate change and associated risks. The Scheme will be worth 290 crore rupees. Besides, it will undertake and augment various activities in consonance with the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and State Action Plan on Climate change.
- On the other hand, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Climate Change Studies and Action will be an autonomous body which will have four key functional areas. The areas are related to
  - Environmental- scientific assessments and modeling
  - Economic and legal analysis
  - Monitoring and policy making
  - Training, capacity building and advocacy and database, documentation and inventory management.

A committee of secretaries (CoS) will soon take a call on structure of institute and the time period for its completion. The Committee of Secretaries will comprise of secretaries in the ministries of environment and forest, finance, renewable energy, agriculture, water resources and earth science.

- About National Action plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)
- The National Action plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was launched in 2008 by the Union Government. It is comprised of eight government missions projecting India's contribution towards combating climate change.
- NAPCC includes action plan on solar energy, enhanced energy efficiency, sustainable habitat, conserving water, sustaining the Himalayan ecosystem, a Green India mission, sustainable agriculture and strategic knowledge platform for Climate Change.
- The State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC) should be in line with the objectives of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and ensure its implementation at the State level.

**24. Finance Ministry nod for 1000 rupees minimum monthly pension plan**

- Union Finance Ministry on 23 January 2014 approved a proposal to provide minimum monthly pension of 1000 rupees to workers of organised sector, under the Employees Pension Scheme 1995 (EPS-95). The proposal will be in effect from 1 April 2014 and will benefit around 27 lakh pensioners. The government will provide an additional contribution of over 1200 crore rupees to ensure minimum monthly pension.
- Now it depends on the decision of Union Labour Minister, Oscar Fernandes to take it to the Cabinet for approval. At present the subscribers get 500 rupees per month despite working for 30 years.
- Apart from this the Finance Ministry has also approved a proposal seeking raise of the basic wage ceiling under the Employees Provident Fund Scheme from the existing 6500 rupees to 15000 per month. Employees who get the basic wages more than 6500 rupees per month (including basic pay and dearness allowance) are not covered under the social security scheme run by EPFO. The Employee Pension Scheme is run by Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).

**25. SC laid down guidelines for dealing with mercy pleas**

- Supreme Court laid down 12 guidelines for authorities in dealing with death-row prisoners on 22 January 2014. Supreme Court said that the solitary confinement of prisoners is unconstitutional.
- Three judges bench headed by Chief Justice P.Sathasivam formulated the guidelines for the conduct on how death row inmates should be treated. As currently there is no symmetry between the manuals of state and central jail authorities.
- Guidelines are as follows:
  - The procedure should be followed while placing the mercy plea before the President. All the required documents and records should be sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in one stroke instead of piece-meal basis.
  - Once MHA received all the details, it should convey its recommendations to the President within a reasonable and rational time.
  - MHA should send periodical reminders if there is no response from the office of the President.
  - If there is a rejection of mercy plea by the President or the Governor, the same should be communicated in writing to the prisoners and to their family.
  - The death convicts are entitled "to receive a copy of the rejection of the mercy petition by the President and the Governor.
  - There must be a gap of 14 days between receipt of communication of rejection of mercy petition and execution date. This would allow the death convict to prepare himself mentally for the execution.
  - Without sufficient notice of the scheduled date of execution, the right of prisoners to avail of judicial remedies will be thwarted.
  - There should be a provision of final meeting between condemned prisoners and their family as such a procedure is intrinsic to humanity and justice, and should be followed by all prison authorities.
  - There should be regular mental health evaluation of all death row convicts and appropriate medical care should be given to those in need.
  - After the issuance of execution warrant, the prison superintendent should satisfy himself on the basis of medical reports by government doctors and psychiatrists that the prisoner is in a fit physical and mental condition to be executed.
  - It is necessary that copies of relevant documents should be furnished to the prisoner within a week by prison authorities to assist in making mercy petition.
  - The apex court also made post-mortem of death convicts after their hanging obligatory.

**Mercy Petition**

- As per the constitution of India, There is a provision under Article- 72, which states that president of India has a power to grant pardon to any person convicted of any offence.
- The President is guided and advised by the home minister and the council of ministers in his decision. There is no timeframe in which the President has to make the decision which is subject to judicial review.

**26. Garuda Vasudha Advanced Light Helicopter of Geological Survey of India launched**

- Minister of Mines, Dinesh Patel launched the Advanced Light Helicopter named Garuda Vasudha of Geological Survey of India from the Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), Bangalore on 23 January 2014. The Garuda Vasudha a Dhruv category built by HAL dedicated to the nation.

- The Ministry also laid the foundation stone of a Centre of Excellence Laboratory building of GSI at Bangalore, worth of 42 crore. Garuda Vasudha of GSI is equipped with Heliborne Geophysical Survey System (HGSS) comprised of four aerogeophysical sensors namely
  - Time Domain Electromagnetic
  - Magnetic
  - Spectrometric
  - Gravimetric along with Data Acquisition Systems
- Garuda Vasudha is used for extensive surveys by the GSI for locating hidden mineral health.
- Heliborne Geophysical Survey System (HGSS) will bolster the probing prowess of aerogeophysical surveys for locating concealed and deep seated mineral deposits of the country.
- Remote Sensing and Aerial Survey Wing of Geological Survey of India will be using both the aerial and heliborne survey together to locate mineral resources which will fulfill the rising demands.

**27: India and UAE agreed to Promote Cooperation in Renewable Energy**

- India and UAE on 18 January 2014 agreed to promote cooperation in renewable energy, especially in areas of solar energy and wind power. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to this effect in Abu Dhabi by Farooq Abdulla, the Minister of New and Renewable Energy of India and Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, the Minister of State of UAE.
- The signed MoU allows the two countries to form a Joint Working Group for better coordination through joint research on subjects of mutual interest like
  - Exchange and training of scientific and technical personnel
  - Exchange of available scientific and technologies information and data
  - Organization of workshops, seminars and working groups,
  - Transfer of know-how, technology and equipment on non-commercial basis
- Earlier, India has launched in National Solar Mission (launched in 2010) under the National Action Plan on Climate Change. India has been making efforts in promoting energy in remote and un-electrified areas of the country. Indian Minister, Farooq Abdulla also congratulated UAE for the hospitality extended by them during the 4th Assembly session of IRENA.
- The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) is mandated as the global hub for renewable energy cooperation and information exchange by 124 Members (123 States and the European Union). Over 40 additional countries are in the accession process and actively engaged. Formally established in 2011, IRENA is the first global intergovernmental organisation to be headquartered in the Middle East.
- IRENA supports countries in their transition to a sustainable energy future, and serves as the principal platform for international cooperation, a centre of excellence, and a repository of policy, technology, resource and financial knowledge on renewable energy. IRENA promotes the widespread adoption and sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy, including bioenergy, geothermal, hydropower, ocean, solar and wind energy in the pursuit of sustainable development, energy access, energy security and low-carbon economic growth and prosperity.

**28. India and Pakistan reached agreement on Non Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA)**

- India and Pakistan reached an agreement on providing Non Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA) in place of Most Favoured Nation status. The agreement on NDMA will help normalize bilateral trade between the two nations.

- This was stated in a Joint Statement released by the Commerce Ministers of two nations at the end of 5th SAARC Business Leaders Conclave held in New Delhi on 18 January 2014. The Pakistan Trade Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan on this occasion extended the invitation to Union Commerce and Industry Ministry Anand Sharma to visit Pakistan in February 2014.
- **Highlights of Joint statement**
  - Both the countries agreed to provide Non Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA) on reciprocal basis to establish normal trading relations. This includes issuing bank licences to allow banks to function in each other's country.
  - Under agreed NDMA, India needs to open up to 614 items to Pakistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, needs to open up to India two lists comprising 936 and 1209 items
  - To intensify and accelerate the process of trade normalization, liberalization and facilitation and to implement the agreed measures before the end of February 2014
  - To make operational the Wagah – Attari Land Customs Station on all seven days of each week to provide the movement of containers, all tradable items by land route
  - To liberalize business visa regime for the business community of both the nations along the Wagah – Attari border
  - To convene the meetings of the technical working groups on Customs, Railways, Banking, Standards Organizations and Energy
  - To hold India Show in collaboration with FICCI in Lahore with the objective of enhancing bilateral trade in February 2014.
  - Along with India Show, a joint Vintage Car Rally between Amritsar and Lahore will be held to promote greater people to people contact
- The Third meeting of Joint Business Forum of Chief Executive Officers is scheduled in Pakistan for mid-February of 2014. The Joint Business Forum will help enhance trade cooperation in diverse sector such as textiles, tourism light engineering, pharmaceuticals and others.

## **29. National Urban Health Mission launched**

- National Urban Health Mission was launched by the Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad on 20 January 2014 in Bangalore.
- NUHM aims to
  - Improve the health care status of the urban population particularly the poor and other disadvantaged sections.
  - Strengthen public health care system.
  - Involve the community and urban local bodies in healthcare delivery.
  - Supplement the National Rural Health Under a unified National Health Mission.
  - Special Focus on
  - Urban Poor Population living in listed and unlisted slums.
  - All other vulnerable populations such as homeless, rag-pickers, street children, rickshaw pullers, construction site workers, sex workers and any other temporary migrants.
- **Highlights of NUHM**
  - 30- 100 bedded Urban Community Health Centres for cities above 5 lakh population.
  - Urban Primary Health Centres for every 50000 population located within or near slums like settlements.
  - Strengthening existing First Referral Units (FRUs), Urban Health Centres & Dispensaries in terms of human resources, equipment, medicines & consumables.

- Special outreach sessions for the most vulnerable sections of the urban population.
- One ANM is for every 10000-12000 population.
- One ASHA is for every 200-500 slums & urban poor households.
- Empowerment of communities through Mahila Arogya Samiti for every 50-100 slums & urban poor households.

**Coverage**

- State Capital, District Headquarters and all cities, towns with population above 50000.
- Estimated 22.13 crore urban populations, including around 7.75 crore poor and vulnerable population.
- National Urban Health Mission Formulated as a Sub-Mission under National Health Mission (NHM)

**30. India and South Korea inked pacts in different areas including trade and commerce**

- India and South Korea have signed many pacts in different areas on 16 January 2014 to deepen economic cooperation and bolster defence engagements in New Delhi. The agreements were signed after delegation level talks between Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India and Park Geun-hye, the President of South Korea in New Delhi.

List of Documents signed during the state visit of President of Republic of Korea to India (15-18 January 2014)

S.No.	Title	Details
1.	Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Government of the Republic of India on the Protection of Classified Military Information	To cooperate in the field of defence and to ensure the protection of classified military information exchanged under this Agreement
2.	Implementing agreement between Indian Space Research Organisation And Korea Aerospace Research Institute For Cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space	To promote the peaceful uses of outer space in the interests of international cooperation at regional and global level
3.	Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning of the Republic of Korea and the Ministry of Science and Technology of The Republic of India on a Joint Applied Research And Development Programme in Science and Technology	To develop further cooperation in the field of prospective technologies for the common benefit of the two countries by involving industry-academia-institute partnerships for translational research leading to the practical application of research and development (R&D) findings, and to cooperate in a joint applied research and development program
4.	Cultural Exchange Programme between the Government of The Republic of India And the Government of The Republic of Korea for the years 2014-2017	To enhance cooperative activities under the Cultural Agreement concluded between the Governments of the two countries on 12 August 1974
5.	Memorandum of Understanding on the	To cooperate in reviving Nalanda

	Establishment of Nalanda University	University as an international institution that will advance the concept of an Asian community by bringing together future generations in a common objective of making new discoveries of old relationships to realize a unity of minds
6.	Agreement on Cooperation between Doordarshan and Korea International Broadcasting Foundation (Arirang Tv)	To develop and strengthen mutual friendly relations in the field of Broadcasting with the aim of leading to greater understanding between the two countries
7.	Joint Declaration of Intent Between the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of The Republic of India and the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning of the Republic of Korea on Cooperation in the Field of Information and Communications Technology	To promote, facilitate and support joint ventures, joint initiatives and markets in the ICT sector
8.	Memorandum of Understanding between Controller of Certifying Authorities (Cca) of the Republic of India of Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA) of the Republic of Korea on Cooperation and Information Exchange for Development of an Arrangement for Mutual Recognition of Certifying Authorities	To develop cooperation between the parties for facilitating development of an arrangement which will provide such Mutual Recognition of the certifying Authorities of the two countries
9.	Memorandum Of Understanding between Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In) of Department of Electronics & Information Technology of Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of the Republic of India And Korea Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Center (Krcert/Cc) Of Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA) of the Republic of Korea on Cooperation in the Field of Cyber Security	to develop cooperation between the Parties in the area of Information Security to deter cyber threats and to further improve computer security readiness and raise awareness around the importance of keeping systems secure, and security practices and procedures current and up to date

- This visit of the South Korean President will help in strengthening the strategic partnerships between the two countries. For stronger India-Korea relations, sustained trade growth with the expansion of the economic exchanges is necessary. At present India and South Korea have robust economic relationships. In 2012, the bilateral trade between the two countries was over 18 billion dollars.
- Park Geu-hye President of South Korea is on a visit of India which started on 15 January and ends on 18 January 2014. She was accorded ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhawan on 16 January 2014. The South Korean President is accompanied by a delegation which includes the Foreign Minister, the Minister for Science and the Minister for Trade and Industry. Her India-visit started after a week of clearance of the POSCO Steel Company project in India.

**31. India registered an increase of five years in life expectancy rate**

- India registered an increase of five years in the average life expectancy rate. The average life expectancy rate increased from 63.9 years in 2004 to 69.6 years in 2014. The increase in the life expectancy was the result of consistent investments in public health sector by the government.
- Life expectancy is defined as the average number of years a person born in a given country would live if mortality rates at each age were to remain constant in the future.
- As per the census of 2011, the life expectancy in India was 65.48 years as compared to the global average life expectancy of 67.88 years. Japan, Switzerland, San Marino are the countries with highest average life expectancy of 83 years. On the other hand, poor countries of Africa like Somalia, Lesotho have an average life expectancy of 50 years with Sierra Leone having the least life expectancy at 47 years.
- Although India has improved its performance but it still has a life expectancy rate which is relatively very low in South Asia. For instance, Bhutan has the life expectancy of 65.79 years while Pakistan has managed to improve its overall Life expectancy to 67 years. China's life expectancy rate is 72.90 years, Bangladesh has life expectancy of 70 years and Sri Lanka has life expectancy of 75 years.
- Among the BRICS countries also India fares badly. For instance, Brazil's life expectancy rate stands at 74 years, Russia's life expectancy is 69 years and South Africa has a poor life expectancy of 58 years.

**32. Karnataka first State to provide Universal Health Coverage**

- Karnataka became the first State in India to provide Universal Health Coverage to its population. It achieved the distinction with the launch of Rajiv Arogya Yojana on 9 January 2014.
- The Scheme entails the beneficiary to pay only 10 percent of the cost of treatment or procedures. It aims at providing subsidized healthcare to virtually every citizen in the State with Above Poverty Line (APL) card. The BPL families are already covered under health scheme through Vajpayee Arogya Sree programme.
- Under the scheme, APL family members are entitled for health check up to 1.5 lakh rupees per annum. In special cases, if the expenditure exceeds 1.5 lakh rupees, the government grants another 50000 rupees.
- The scheme covers 447 procedures and 50 follow-up packages. The beneficiaries can avail treatment in 160 hospitals, including 14 hospitals outside the State.
- The scheme will cover cardiovascular diseases, cancer treatment (surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy), neurological diseases, renal diseases, burns, poly-trauma cases not covered by motor vehicle insurance and neo-natal cases.
- The cost of Universal Health Coverage is estimated to be 120 crore rupees annually.

**33. Indigenous Glucose Monitoring Device launched by Union Government**

- The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched two indigenous Glucose Monitoring Device, Suchek and QuickcheQ, on 13 January 2014. The launching of two kinds of glucometers and testing strips will make mass screening and detection feasible.
- Suchek is designed and developed by Nanobios Lab, Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai. Suchek is very useful for health camps as it has a mobile application, which helps save, trend and analyse blood glucose levels at an individual level.
- QuickcheQ is designed and developed by the Birla Institute of Technology, Hyderabad with funding from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). These will be manufactured by Biosense Technologies and will be available in the open market in the next six months.

- Among the non-communicable diseases, diabetes is rapidly rising all over the world. Globally, it is estimated that 382 million people living with diabetes. India alone is reported to have more than 65 million cases of diabetes, the second largest number after China.
- Under the national programme on prevention and control of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and stroke, more than 53 million people have been screened for diabetes and more than 50 million for hypertension.
- Diabetes or diabetes mellitus, describes a group of metabolic diseases in which the person has high blood glucose (blood sugar), either because insulin production is inadequate, or because the body's cells do not respond properly to insulin, or both.
- Patients with high blood sugar will typically experience polyuria (frequent urination), they will become increasingly polydipsia(frequent thirst) and polyphagia( frequent hunger).
- There are three types of diabetes:

**1) Type 1 Diabetes**

- The body does not produce insulin. People usually develop type 1 diabetes before their 40th year, often in early adulthood or teenage years.
- Patients with type 1 diabetes will need to take insulin injections for the rest of their life. They must also ensure proper blood-glucose levels by carrying out regular blood tests and following a special diet. Approximately 10% of all diabetes cases are type 1.

**2) Type 2 Diabetes**

- The body does not produce enough insulin for proper function, or the cells in the body do not react to insulin (insulin resistance).
- Some people may be able to control their type 2 diabetes symptoms by losing weight, following a healthy diet, doing plenty of exercise, and monitoring their blood glucose levels. Approximately 90% of all cases of diabetes worldwide are of this type.

**3) Gestational Diabetes**

- This type affects females during pregnancy. Some women have very high levels of glucose in their blood, and their bodies are unable to produce enough insulin to transport all of the glucose into their cells, resulting in progressively rising levels of glucose.

**34. Government notified new natural Gas Pricing Formula**

- The Government of India on 10 January 2014 notified the new natural gas pricing formulae, which will be in effect from 1 April 2014. As per the newly issued notification, the rate of all domestically produced fuel will be almost doubled to 8.2 to 8.4 dollar per unit.
- The notification of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry said that the prices of the gas will be the average price of liquid gas imports into India and benchmark global gas rates. This formula will be in applicable for the next five years from the date of its being into effect.
- The rates will be changed every quarter on the basis of the 12 month average of global rates and LNG import price. This formula will be applied to all gas produced by both the public sector firms like ONGC and the private companies.
- These guidelines will be applicable on D1 and D3 gas discoveries of the block depending upon the submission of bank guarantees, which will be notified separately. The same rates also will be uniformly applicable to all the fields of India except the fields where the prices has been fixed following the contract and also in the marginal small fields, which requires special dispensation.
- The formula was announced during the Petrotech Conference, where the government interacts with the industry leaders and markets the next round of the New Exploration Licensing Policy for the potential investors. Might be possible that the development of the

formula will help in development of the new fields, which were missed out by the companies that doesn't know about the revenue can be generated from the gas fields.

- The notification of the formula for price hiking was awaited by the gas and oil industry since 27 June 2013, the date when the new pricing system got the first nod of the Cabinet following the recommendations of the Rangrajan Committee. The notification on the formula was delayed because of the legal fight between the Union Oil Ministry and Reliance Industries after the concerns was raised by the Union Finance Ministry. Reliance has been penalized for the fall in output.
- Higher prices against bank guarantees that could be encashed in the case that the output of gas from D1 and D3 fields of KG-D6 block was hoarded by the company, which was approved by The Cabinet in December 2014.
- Effects of the formula on prices of other materials: This formula will lead to raise the subsidy on fertilizer and will enormously raise the costs of the power plants fired with gas. The fertilizer and power firms lobbying exercise failed to be in effect with the raise of the domestic gas prices.

### **35. India completed three years without any polio case**

- India completes three years without reporting any case of polio on 13 January 2014. It is only the second time in the history that a disease is being eliminated in India through immunisation after small pox in May 1980.
- Officially the World Health Organisation (WHO) will certify India as polio-free on 11 February 2014. The WHO on 24 February 2012 removed India from the list of countries with active endemic wild polio transmission.
- Once India is declared polio-free, the entire WHO region would also become polio free.
- India's being declared polio-free is particularly important because it was the only country in the South East Asian region with polio cases. The number of polio cases came down from 741 in 2009 to 42 in 2010 and just one in 2011 reported from West Bengal.
- India won the war against polio through intense Pulse Polio Immunisation under the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). The Pulse Polio Immunisation programme was launched in 1988 by Rotary International in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO). Under the Polio Immunisation programme, over 17 crore children were vaccinated in each round of vaccination with the help of 24 lakh vaccinators.
- Poliomyelitis often called polio or infantile paralysis is an acute, viral, infectious disease spread from person to person, primarily via the fecal-oral route. Poliomyelitis was first recognized as a distinct condition by Jakob Heine in 1840. Its causative agent, poliovirus, was identified in 1908 by Karl Landsteiner.
- Poliomyelitis is caused by infection with a member of the genus Enterovirus known as poliovirus (PV). This group of RNA viruses colonize the gastrointestinal tract - specifically the oropharynx and the intestine. The incubation time (to the first signs and symptoms) ranges from three to 35 days, with a more common span of six to 20 days.
- Three serotypes of poliovirus have been identified—poliovirus type 1 (PV1), type 2 (PV2), and type 3 (PV3)—each with a slightly different capsid protein. PV1 is the most commonly encountered form, and the one most closely associated with paralysis.
- Albert Sabin developed oral polio vaccine (OPV). It was produced by the repeated passage of the virus through non-human cells at sub-physiological temperatures. It was licensed by the US National Institutes of Health in 1962.

**36. Union Cabinet approved the National Youth Policy, 2014**

- The Union Cabinet approved the introduction of the National Youth Policy, 2014 (NYP, 2014) on 9 January 2014. The NYP, 2014 will replace National Youth Policy, 2003 which is currently in force.
- The vision of NYP, 2014 is to empower youth to achieve their full potential, and through them enable India to find its rightful place in the community of nations.
- The Policy is basically aimed at development of an educated and healthy young population, who are not only economically productive, but are also socially responsible citizens contributing to the task of nation-building.
- For achieving the vision of NYP, 2014; five well-defined objectives and 11 priority areas have been identified. The priority areas are: education, skill development and employment, entrepreneurship, health and healthy lifestyle, sports, promotion of social values, community engagement, participation in politics and governance, youth engagement, inclusion and social justice.
- The Youth Policy, 2014 will cover the entire country. It will cater to the needs of all youth in the age-group of 15-29 years. According to the Census 2011, the youth in the age group of 15-29 years constitute 27.5 per cent of the population, that is about 33 crore persons.
- The Policy has proposed broad policy interventions for the youth which are consistent with the 12th Plan priorities. It has not proposed any specific programme/scheme, having financial implications. Rather all concerned Ministries/Department has been mandated to bring focus on youth issues within the framework of their plans/programmes/schemes.

**37. Ministry of Environment and Forest approved Tawang II hydroelectric project**

- Ministry of Environment and Forest cleared the Tawang-II hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh on 9 January 2014.
- The Tawang – II hydroelectric of 800MW project in Arunachal Pradesh will be executed by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC). The Project is to be set up on the Tawangchu River, downstream of Forebridge near Jang in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The expected cost of the project is 6112.30 crore rupees. The Project will benefit all the States of Northeast and may generate 3622 million units annually. The Tawng project will require diversion of 116 hectares forest land including 19.6 hectares for underground use.
- The project approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forest on certain conditions. These conditions are:
  - NHPC would transfer the cost of compensatory forest to the state forest department;
  - NHPC will have to set up at its own cost a four feet high reinforced cement concrete pillars to demarcate the boundary of the diverted forest land; and
  - NHPC will have to maintain the flora and fauna in the vicinity of the project.

**38. Reserve Bank of India relaxed Foreign Direct Investment rules**

- The Reserve Bank of India relaxed the rules of Foreign Direct Investment on 9 January 2014. The decision is aimed at providing exit option to the foreign investors. The investors can exit their investments by selling their holding of equity or debt.
- The relaxation was expected to facilitate higher foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into India. India saw a drop of 15 percent in FDI inflows from April 2013 to October 2013.
- The exit option given to the foreign investors is subject to the condition that any FDI will have a minimum lock-in period without any assured return. The lock-in period for defence and construction sector has been kept at three years and for all other sectors it will be at least a year.

- For a listed company the non-resident investor can exit at the market price prevailing at the stock exchanges. In case of unlisted company an investor can exit from equity shares at a price not exceeding the price arrived at on the basis of return on equity.

**39. Nirbheek, India's first gun for women, launched**

- India's first gun for women, Nirbheek was launched on 9 January 2014. It is a tribute to the gang rape victim of December 2012, Nirbhaya.
- Gun has been manufactured by the Indian Ordnance Factory, Kanpur.
- It is a 0.32 bore light weight revolver which has been developed to give more power to women to defend themselves. It only weighs 500 grams and is made of titanium alloy. Besides, being the lightest revolver, Nirbheek is also the smallest revolver made in India.
- For its simple mechanism and light frame it has been described by arms experts as an Indian hybrid of a Webley & Scott and Smith & Wesson.

**40. Record low temperatures in the United States caused due to Polar vortex**

- All the fifty states of US recorded sub-freezing temperatures in January 2014. Bitter cold created logjam across all the transportation services. The shivering cold also caused power shortage and adversely impacted daily routine. These low temperatures were not experienced in the region, since the last 20 years. Experts explained that Polar Vortex could be the main culprit behind this brutal cold.
- Polar Vortex
  - Polar Vortex is a low pressure, upper level (primarily in stratosphere) wind system rotating in anticlockwise direction.
  - Wind Velocity of this system is more than 100 miles per hour.
  - Generally, this vortex remains confined to the Arctic region. When the Polar Vortex weakens or splits, these cold winds move out of the Arctic and move towards South. The weakening of the Polar Vortex is attributed to the change in the intensity of the upper level winds that build Polar Vortex.
  - Polar Vortex can occur anywhere in the Northern hemisphere.
  - The vortex is strongest in winter, due to more temperature contrast between the Polar Regions and the mid-latitudes.
  - Often, Polar vortex is misunderstood as hurricanes or tornadoes. But, these are different phenomena. The areas covered under the influence of the polar vortex are much wider than hurricanes or tornadoes. Polar Vortex lasts for more days than hurricanes or tornado.

**41. Kelkar panel submitted report to Union Oil Ministry**

- The Kelkar Committee submitted the first part of its report on 8 January 2014. The committee recommended continuing with the present production-sharing regime in contracts for blocks and allows companies to recover exploration and production costs.
- A Committee was set up under Vijay Kelkar on 13 May 2013 to suggest ways of raising domestic oil and gas output. The panel was entrusted with the task of drafting a plan to reduce India's dependence on overseas energy by 2030 and submit a report within six months.
- Key recommendations of the committee:
  - It suggested administering Production-Sharing Contracts (PSC) without any changes and strengthening the Directorate-General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) for better administration.
  - Shifting to an open acreage regime, where companies can pick exploration areas through the year rather than wait for periodic auctions that offer areas identified by the government.

- The panel has called for setting up a National Data Repository (NDR) that will preserve and promote the country's natural resources data.
- The second part of the report would cover pricing and taxation issues and is likely to be submitted in February 2014.
- Under the present regime, oil companies can recover all costs of successful and unsuccessful wells from sales of oil and gas before sharing profit with the government.
- The suggestions in the first part of the Kelkar Committee report are contrary to the royalty-sharing regime suggested by C. Rangarajan Committee, which has been accepted by the government. Under royalty -sharing regime companies are required to state upfront the quantum of oil or gas they would share with the government from the first day of production.
- Rangarajan Committee had suggested for royalty sharing regime without cost recovery to check gold plating of investments by companies. Royalty sharing regime is prevalent in developed countries.
- However, Kelkar Committee has opined that royalty sharing regime is not workable in Indian conditions wherein the exploration of oil & gas blocks are still under-developed. Thus, the Kelkar panel favoured the revenue sharing model for shallow and on-land blocks that are less cost-intensive than deep sea exploration.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had criticised the PSC regime on grounds that it encouraged companies to increase capital expenditure and delay the government's share.

**42. Government gave nod to Guidelines for transparent TV ratings**

- Union Cabinet on 9 January 2014 approved a comprehensive regulatory framework in the form of guidelines for Television Rating Agencies in India. The guidelines have been launched with an aim to make television ratings transparent, credible and accountable.
- This was a long-awaited proposal for bringing out a comprehensive regulatory framework which has been done to streamline the way TV channels are rated in the country. The framework will cover a detailed procedure for registration of rating agencies, eligibility norms, terms and conditions of registration, methodology for audience measurement, cross-holdings, complaint redressal mechanism, audit, disclosure, sale and use of ratings, reporting requirements and action on non-compliance of guidelines.
- With a reasonable notice, the TRAI and I and B can conduct inspections of the rating company as per the issued guidelines. The proposal has been designed following the recommendations of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). This will help in streamlining the process of rating viewership of TV channels.

**43. RBI panel recommended setting up of specialized banks to cater to low income households**

- A panel of Reserve Bank of India led by **Nachiket Mor** has suggested to set-up specialized banks to cater to the low income households. These banks will ensure that every citizen have a bank account by 2016. The panel has also suggested that facility for withdrawal, payment and deposit to be set up within a 15 minute walking-distance across the country.
- The panel was set up by Governor of India, Raghuram Rajan on the same day when he took the charge as the Governor of RBI. He constituted the panel to suggest steps for promoting financial inclusion..
- The panel has advocated setting up the Payments Banks to provide payment services and deposit products to low income households and small businesses. It has limited the maximum balance for an individual customer to 50000 rupees. In its suggestion it has mentioned that these banks can be set up with minimum capital requirement of 50 crore rupees, which is one-tenth of 500 crore rupees that is required for a full-service bank. It has also suggested that an Aadhaar card should be used automatically to open a bank account.

These recommendations have made a provision of sweeping changes in the Banking structure.

- The panel that was headed by ex-ICICI Bank Executive Director Nachiket Mor in its recommendation for financial inclusion has said that the bank for small businesses that is called as the payments banks will focus primarily to provide services to people.

**44. SC directed Centre to appoint a National Regulator to oversee implementation of Forest Policy**

- The Supreme Court of India on 6 January 2014 directed the Government of India to appoint a national regulator to oversee the implementation of forest policy. The court rejected the contention that there is no need for such a body.
- The Supreme Court Bench of three judges, which was headed by A K Patnaik and comprised justices SS Nijjar and FMI Kalifulla, while hearing a PIL, also ordered the Centre to file an affidavit on compliance of its order by 31 March 2014. The bench also observed that directing the implementation of the national regulator is must as the present system under the central government was deficient.
- The bench of the Court in its order said to the Union of India to appoint a regulator with its offices in as many states as possible. The judgment was passed after rejecting the plea of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) that there is no need to appoint such a regulator to oversee the implementation of forest policy.
- In its order the Court made it clear that the regulator will see the implementation of the Forest Policy of 1988, while the clearances will be made under the Forest Act by the MoEF only. The national regulator will deal directly the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of 2006 for every project.
- The Court's order came on an MoEF plea that was seeking the modification of the 2011 decision in which it directed the centre to appoint a national regulator for appraising projects enforcing environmental conditions for approvals and to impose penalties on polluters.
- There was no need to set up a green regulator to oversee matters related to environment clearances and pleaded for modification of its order to set a body was said by the centre in 2013.

**45. Union Ministry of Human Resource Development announced Maulana Azad Taleem-e-Baligan scheme**

- Union Ministry of Human Resource Development announced Maulana Azad Taleem-e-Baligan scheme along with two other new initiatives on 5 January 2014. It was announced at the annual meeting of the National Monitoring Committee for Minorities Education.
- Maulana Azad Taleem-e-Baligan aims to achieve higher literacy for the minority Muslim community. The scheme will be launched in 61 Muslim-concentrated Sakshar Bharat districts, the Centre's adult literacy programme running in eleven states.
- The scheme will impart literacy to one crore population in the age group of 15 years and above and the basic education to 2.5 lakh adults and skill development programmes. Additional 1000 Adult Education Centers will be set up exclusively for women exceeding 5000 muslim population.
- The other new scheme is for establishing educational hubs by co-locating KGBV, Girls/Women Hostels, Degree colleges, Polytechnics in few selected towns/Districts which are educationally backward and have substantial Muslim concentration.
- Besides, a new scheme on the lines of HUNAR for skill development among Minority girls has been announced. The scheme will cover 9.20 lakhs minority girls at the proposed outlay of Rs.978 crores.

**46. IRDA formed Suresh Mathur panel to suggest ways to improving FDI**

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) formed a new committee headed by Suresh Mathur to suggest ways to enhance Foreign Domestic Investment (FDI) in insurance intermediaries (other than insurance companies) and Third party administrators (TPA). The Committee would consist of ten members.
- The Terms of Reference of the Committee are:
  - To explore the options of further increasing FDI limit for insurance intermediaries.
  - To analyse possible impact of such increase on the industry and other related sectors.
  - To review the related international practices.
  - To examine to what extent, if possible, the FDI limit can be increased in intermediaries and study the international practices in this regard.
- Presently, a foreign company cannot hold more than 26% shares in an insurance company. But, in case of insurance intermediaries there is no such restriction.
- There was also a consistent demand for increasing the foreign shareholding in insurance brokers from the existing limit of 26% to 100%. The aforesaid proposed change would not require any modification in the Insurance Act. But, In case of increasing foreign shareholding in an insurance intermediary or TPA, the insurance act would get modified.
- There is a long pending Insurance bill in Rajya Sabha since 2008. This bill seeks to raise the FDI limit in insurance sector from existing 26% to the 49 %.

**47. US Senate confirmed Janet Yellen as next Chairperson of Federal Reserve**

- The US Senate on 6 January 2014 confirmed the name of Janet Yellen as the first woman to lead the US Federal Reserve. With this confirmation, the Senate has elevated an advocate to fight unemployment and a backer of the Central Bank's efforts to spur the economy with low interest rates and massive bond purchases.
- She succeeds the Chairman Ben Bernanke as the next head of America's central bank. Ben Bernanke is stepping down after serving as the Chairman of Federal Bank for eight years, which was dominated by the Great Recession and the efforts of the bank to combat it. Her term in the office will begin on 1 February 2014. Her appointment marks an important shift in the direction of the efforts of the bank's policies as the monetary policy of past 5 years have resulted in fed pouring about 3.8 trillion dollars into the US economy leading to the financial crisis.
- Yellen aged 67 was voted by the senators with a margin of 56-26 on her name and numerous of absences, which was caused due to delays in the flights due to arctic temperatures around America.
- 45 Democrats and 11 Republicans voted for the name of Yellen, who has been the Vice-chair of the Bank, since 2010. The 26 votes, which were casted against her name was done by Republicans. Her term as the leader of the Century old bank will be four years from the date of her joining.
- The Federal Bank under Bernanke has driven short term interest rates down to near zero and flushed money into the economy with huge bond purchases. It's expected that Yellen, the strong ally of Bernanke who has supported these policies will continue until some concrete signs does not emerge to sustain improvement of the economy as well the job market.
- Earlier in December 2013, Federal Bank announced that it will gradually reduce its 85 billion dollar in monthly bond purchase by trimming them back to initially 75 billion dollar in the month and will take further measured steps as the economic conditions improve. The bank's holdings reached to 4 trillion dollar, which was four times to the level of before US was hit by the financial crisis in 2008. The Great Recession ended in June 2009 by modest

growth in the economy of the country, which has seen signs of encouragement in past few months.

- Apart from it, the unemployment of US has fallen to 7 percent in December 2013 from its recent peak level of 10 percent in October 2009. US has seen an average 200000 jobs monthly Since August and its economy has grown at an annual rate of 4.1 percent from July 2013 through September 2013.

#### **48. GSLV-D5 carrying communication satellite GSAT-14 successfully launched**

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on 5 January 2014 launched its heavy-duty rocket GSLV-D5 for placing communication satellite GSAT-14 into the orbit. The rocket GSLV-D5 lifted off from Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota at 4:18 IST. It was powered by an indigenously developed cryogenic engine.
- The capacity of the INSAT/GSAT system will be augmented further by the 12 communication transponders onboard GSAT-14. It will help the country in providing many satellite-based communication services, which includes tele-education and tele-medicine.
- This successful launch has helped India to join the groups of nations namely US, Russia, France, China and Japan in mastering the complex cryogenic technology. This is a major achievement for the GSLV programme, said by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, the Chairman of ISRO.
- **ISRO's indigenous cryogenic engine GSLV-D5 rocket**
  - Powered by an indigenous cryogenic engine, injected into orbit a telecommunication satellite, GSAT-14.
  - It is the first successful flight of the indigenous cryogenic engine.
  - The GSLV is a three-stage engine rocket. The first stage is fired with solid fuel, the second with liquid fuel and the third is the cryogenic engine.
  - A cryogenic engine is more efficient as it provides more thrust for every kilogram of propellant burnt. Cryogenic fuels are extremely clean as they give out only water while burning.
  - A cryogenic engine uses liquid oxygen at -253oC and liquid hydrogen at -183 oC and can develop the thrust needed in the final state of the rocket to put satellites, weighing two tonnes or more, into a geosynchronous orbit.
  - It is essential to master this technology for any space power as launching heavier satellites requires cryogenic engines even in the lower stages of the rocket.
  - After this launch, India joined the "Cryo Club" and became the sixth spacefarer after US, Russia, the European Space Agency, China and Japan to develop a cryogenic engine — a necessity for interplanetary probes and manned space missions.

#### **49. India and Maldives signed three Memorandum of Understandings**

- India and Maldives signed few Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) on 2 January 2014.
- President Abdulla Yameen made his first visit to India after the election in Maldives and appreciated India's equidistant approach during the Maldives presidential election.
- The following MoUs were signed:
  - Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Health
  - Exchange of Letters on extending the Memorandum of Understanding on Manpower requirements of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital
  - Memorandum of Agreement for allotment of plot to the High Commission of MaldivesBesides, both the countries agreed
  - To handover land on reciprocal basis in Male and New Delhi for construction of the new Chancery buildings for the respective High Commissions in each other's country

- To establish the Joint consultative Commission as per the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development signed between India and Maldives in 2011
- India reiterated financial support to Maldives for developmental projects like setting up of the Maldives Police Academy, the renovation of Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Male and construction of the Composite Training Centre for the Maldives National Defence Force.
- India also extended a standby credit facility of 25 million dollars to the Maldives for imports from India and agreed to meet the requirement of petroleum products in the Maldives.
- India has agreed to allow visa-free entry for the people from Maldives for medical purposes and removal of the restriction on re-entry within two months.
- Both the sides also agreed to resolve the GMR's contract to run Male International Airport.
- India and the Maldives are looking forward to boost security and maritime cooperation, people-to-people contacts and air connectivity.

**50. Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved amendments to Mega Power Policy 2009**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved amendments in the Mega Power Policy 2009 on 2 January 2014.
- The amendments will clear the road blocks in the realization of provisional Mega Power projects.
- The objective is to increase power availability to boost overall growth of the country and also ensure that consumers are reasonably charged for electricity supplied.
- The major amendments to the Mega Power Policy 2009 are:
  - The developer must tie up at least 65 percent of installed capacity through competitive bidding..
  - Remaining 35 percent of installed capacity will be allocated under regulated tariff as per the respective State government policies.
  - The thermal power projects of 1000 MW and above, capacity and hydro power projects of 500 MW and above are allowed duty-free equipment imports.
  - To avail the a benefits, project developers must submit status certificate of the provisional mega power projects along with fixed deposit receipt from any scheduled bank as a security for a term of 36 months.
  - Extend the maximum time period to 60 months instead of 36 months from the date of import for provisional mega projects for furnishing final mega certificates to tax authorities.
  - The dispensation will be one time and limited to 15 projects which are located in the States having mandatory host State power tie up policy of PPAs under regulated tariff.

**51. PARAM Yuva II: India's no.1 and 44th among most power efficient supercomputer in the world**

- Supercomputer PARAM Yuva-II was rated 1st in India, 9th in the Asia Pacific Region and 44th in the world among the most power efficient computer systems as per the Green500 List. It was announced at the Super computer Conference (SC 2013) in Denver, Colorado, US.
- PARAM Yuva-II was developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).
- C-DAC is the second organization worldwide to have carried out the Level 3 measurement of Power versus Performance for the Green500 List.
- PARAM Yuva – II uses hybrid technology, processor, co-processor and hardware accelerators. PARAM uses hybrid technology to provide the peak compute power of 520.4 Teraflop/s using 210 kilowatt power.

**52. Chief of Army Staff Bikram Singh took Charge as Chiefs of Staff Committee Chairman**

- Army chief General Bikram Singh took over as the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) on 30 December 2013. He received the baton of Chairman, COSC from outgoing Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal N.K.Browne.
- General Singh will have a brief tenure of around seven months as the CoSC, as he is expected to retire in July 2014. Browne was a member of the COSC, since 1 August 2011 and its Chairman from 1 September 2012.
- The COSC is the senior-most officer of the three Services and is in-charge for looking after the joint issues related to them. The senior-most of the three Services chiefs takes over the post.
- General Singh was also shortlisted for appointed as the Permanent Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee -- a post which has been recommended by the Naresh Chandra Committee for reforms in the higher defence management.

**53. India's power network integrated into one grid with joining of Southern region**

- India's power network has been integrated into one grid as South India has been linked with the national electricity grid. This completes the consolidation of the entire country into one network for distributing electricity to consumers. The integration was attained through the commissioning of the Raichur-Solapur 765 kilovolt (kV) single-circuit transmission line by state-owned Power Grid Corp. of India Ltd. With this, the Indian power system has become one of the largest operating synchronous grids in the world with about 232 GW (gigawatts) of installed power generation capacity. India has achieved its 'ONE NATION'-'ONE GRID'-'ONE FREQUENCY' objective.
- There is a problem of power shortage in the southern states of India. Power-starved states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were waiting for the line to be interconnected to enable them to transmit power purchased from surplus states in the north and eastern regions. As per the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), India's highest power sector planning body, Puducherry, Karnataka and Kerala had a peak power shortage of 8.1%, 5.8% and 5.5% respectively in August 2013. However, with the linking of this region with the national grid this problem can be tackled more efficiently as the surplus power from East and West grids could be diverted to power-deficient south. Besides, it will also improve transmission and facilitate better management of demand, ensuring the stability of the electricity grid.
- There are five regional grids in the country:

1. Northern	4. North-eastern
2. Southern	5. Western
3. Eastern	
- **"One Nation-One Grid-One Frequency"**: The Indian Power system for planning and operational purposes is divided into above mentioned 5 regional grids. The integration of regional grids, and thereby establishment of National Grid, was ideated in early 90s. The integration of regional grids which started with asynchronous HVDC back-to-back inter-regional links facilitating limited exchange of regulated power was subsequently advanced to high capacity synchronous links between the regions.
- The early inter-regional links were planned for exchange of operational surpluses amongst the regions. However, later on when the planning philosophy had graduated from Regional self-sufficiency to National basis, the Inter-regional links were planned associated with the generation projects that had beneficiaries across the regional boundaries.
- By the end of XI plan the country has total inter-regional transmission capacity of about 28,000 MW which is likely to boost to about 65000 MW at the end of XII plan.

**54. "Know India Programme" for NRI and PIO youth by GOI**

- Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs programme named "Know India Programme (KIP)" for young Overseas Indians, with a view to provide them an exposure to the country of their origin (i.e. India) so that they can understand India better and more closely.
- Know India Programme of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is a 3-week orientation programme for diaspora youth conducted with a view to promote awareness on different facets of life in India and the progress made by the country in various fields e.g. economic, industrial, education, Science & Technology, Communication & Information Technology, culture.
- Under the Programme, 20 young persons of Indian origin in the age group of 18 to 24 from different countries visit India every year, which will provide them an opportunity to have a deeper understanding into Indian people and society.
- The content of the programme broadly includes the following:
  - Presentations on the country, political process, developments in various sectors,
  - Interaction with faculty and students at a prestigious University/College/Institute,
  - Presentation on the industrial development and visits to some Industries,
  - Visit to a village to better understand the typical village life,
  - Exposure to Indian media,
  - Interaction with NGOs and organizations dealing with women affairs,
  - Visit to places of historical importance/Monuments,
  - Taking part in Cultural programmes,
  - Exposure to yoga,
  - Call on high dignitaries, which may include President of India, Chief Election Commissioner of India, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, and Ministers in-charge of Overseas Indian Affairs, Youth Affairs and Sports.
- So far MOIA has organized 24 Know India Programmes in which 729 Overseas Diaspora Youth have participated in these programmes.

**55. Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram: India's first adolescent health programme launched**

- The Government of India has started the country's first comprehensive adolescent health programme- Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, which will also focus on adolescents' reproductive health.
- Focus: Health needs of 24.3 crore adolescents which makes 21% of India's population in India.
- A holistic and participative programme instead of a 'doctor-driven' effort.
- Strategy: RMNCH+A stands for (Reproductive, Maternal, New born, Child Health + Adolescent).
- New dimensions: Mental health, nutrition, substance misuse, gender based violence and non-communicable diseases.
- Community based interventions through peer educators, and is supported by collaborations with other Ministries and State governments, knowledge partners and research.
- Strives to make adolescents aware even before the occurrence of any disease or problem, so that they could make informed decisions and choices.
- Using new technologies and social media platforms to reach the adolescents in their own spaces, with strategic partnerships with communities and peers.
- Emphasis on 6 'Cs':
  - Coverage
  - Content
  - Communication
  - Counseling
  - Clinics
  - Convergence

- As per RKS programme, a person within 10-19 years of age is an adolescent. It includes people in this age bracket in urban and rural areas and includes both girls and boys, married and unmarried, poor and affluent, whether they are in school or out of school.

#### **56. Pratham Survey: Education standards declining in India despite funding**

- The annual survey done by the Indian education research group Pratham disclosed that the standards of education in rural India have declined every year since 2009 in spite of huge government funding in the field. The survey was conducted in 16,000 villages across the country and covered around 6,00,000 students in government and private schools in rural areas.
- Pratham survey highlights:
  - The Right to Education (RTE) Act passed in 2009 guarantees state schooling for children from 6-14 years of age. However, the enrollment levels reached 96% in this age category in 2013, a marginal difference from 2012.
  - In 2009, 52.8% of children in standard five across government and private schools were able to read a text from standard two, this fell to 47% in 2013.
  - The enrollment of children in private schools increased slightly in 2013 to 29 %. This number was just 18.7 % in 2006.
  - The guarantee of education is meaningless without satisfactory learning. There are serious implications for India's equity and growth if basic learning outcomes do not improve soon.

#### **57. Bimal Jalan panel on new bank licences**

- The Bimal Jalan panel which is scrutinizing applications for new bank licences will hold a meeting in February.
- Initially, 26 entities expressed interest in entering the banking field. But, Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata group, withdrew its application in November 2013 leaving 25 players.
- Public sector units: India Post and IFCI, Private sector: Anil Ambani group, Aditya Birla, Bajaj Finance, Muthoot Finance, Religare Enterprises, etc have applied for the licences.
- The last two entities to get banking licences from RBI in 2003-04: Kotak Mahindra Bank and Yes Bank.
- At present, India has 27 public sector banks, 22 private sector banks and 56 regional rural banks.
- RBI's Guidelines for New Bank Licenses:
  - The RBI issued guidelines for licensing of new banks on February 22, 2013 and issued clarifications in June 2013.
  - The business model of the applicant would be an important criterion for processing the application and the model should provide for financial inclusion.
  - Bank should have 49% caps on foreign holding in new banks.
  - New banks are required to establish at least 25% of their branches in places with less than 10,000 populations.
  - Existing NBFCs, if considered eligible, may be permitted to promote new banks or convert themselves into banks.
  - Private corporate and public sector entities must have 10 years experience to be eligible to apply for new license. The initial paid-up capital for new banks has been set at Rs 500 crore.

#### **58. RBI: Currency notes issued before 2005 to be withdrawn from circulation**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to withdraw all currency notes issued prior to 2005, including Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denominations. As per the RBI, pre-2005 notes can be

identified easily as these notes do not have the year of printing mentioned on them. The year of printing in a small font is visible at the middle of the bottom row in notes issued after 2005.

- After March 31, 2014, RBI will completely withdraw all bank notes from circulation issued prior to 2005. From April 1, 2014, the public will be required to approach banks for exchanging these notes. The facility will be open in all banks till further notice.
- As per the apex bank, from July 1, the non-customers who want to exchange more than 10 pieces of Rs.500 and Rs.1,000 notes will have to provide proof of identity and residence to the bank branch in which she/he wants to exchange the notes.
- However, there is no need to panic as the central bank has assured that these notes will continue to be legal tender even after March 2014, though people are advised to initiate the process of exchanging notes at bank branches as per their convenience.

**Reasons for withdrawing pre-2005 notes from circulation:**

- Security - pre-2005 notes have fewer security features as compared to 2005 and post-2005 notes. Thus, lesser will be the chances of its counterfeiting newer currency notes. Most fake currency notes being pumped in Indian economy were copies of pre-2005 notes.
- Flushing out black money - The spillover effect of the RBI's decision will be to flush out black money. Money has value only as long as it is a medium of exchange and store of value. It loses its value when it ceases to be a medium of exchange.
- A disincentive for cash hoarders - With the RBI's announcement, currency hoarders will be left with no option but to liquidate their unaccounted holdings by spending or exchanging them. Thus, this is a well thought out exercise by the RBI to capture the "money flows" into the system and also help flush out counterfeit notes.
- International standard practice - It is an international standard practice to remove old series notes.

**59. NALSA launched free legal service clinics across the country**

- National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) launched the 2648 village legal service clinics across the country. The Chief Justice of India, P.Sathasivam inaugurated the free legal clinics in New Delhi.
- As per the regulation, NALSA will set up village legal services clinics in one village in each Taluk of the country. These village legal services clinics will dole out legal advices to people with the help of para-legal volunteers and empanelled lawyers, besides assisting them in getting BPL card, Election ID, Aadhaar Card, gas connection and other government welfare schemes.
- Motto: No person in the country should starve from hunger of justice.
- Benefit: These centres will help villagers overcome the problems they face due to ignorance of the law and illiteracy and function as single- window facilities to give all types of services to the common man.

**60. Chinese scientists invented 'Water-jet' printer**

- Scientists of the Jilin University, China have invented a printer that uses water to print, instead of ink. After about 22 hours, the paper fades back to a plain sheet of white paper, allowing it to be re-used.
- The "water-jet" technology is capable of reprinting numerous times, spares people their money and saves trees. As per the statistics, many papers (40% of office Prints) are throwing into the dustbin after the single reading.
- In the water-jet printer, the technology work is the paper, which is treated with an invisible dye that colours upon exposure to water and later disappears. It uses a dye compound called oxazolidine that gives a clear, blue print in less than one second upon application of water.

- Within a day, the used paper fades back to white which makes it reusable.
- At temperature lesser than 35 degree Celsius, the print would fade away in 22 hours, while at higher temperature, it would fade faster. The technology is ideal for documents that are printed to be read once and then discarded.
- At 70 degree Celsius, the colour disappears within about 30 seconds.
- At present, there are four water-printed colours - blue, magenta, gold and purple. Though, they can only print in one hue at a time.
- The technology does not require changing a printer but only replacing the ink in the cartridge with water, using a syringe.
- The scientists are also working on a machine that will heat pre-printed sheets of paper as they are fed into the machine, fading the pages instantaneously for re-printing. Their next step is to improve both the resolution and the duration of the print.

## **FEBRUARY 2014**

### **1. Uniform tax rate for foreign portfolio investors**

- The Union Government stated that Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) will attract uniform tax rate in all categories. The Central Board of Direct Taxes notified that the new class of investors, FPIs, would be treated as FIIs under the Income Tax Act, 1961. As per their risk profiles, FPIs are divided into three categories.
- These are as follows:-
  - Category I - the lowest risk entities comprises foreign government and government-related foreign investors.
  - Category II – regulated entities such as university funds, university-related endowments and pension funds, etc.
  - Category III – other entities viz. Qualified Foreign Investors (QFIs), etc.
- FPIs brought together all the three investment categories — Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs), their sub-accounts and Qualified Foreign Investors (QFIs). The tax rate for FPIs would be the same as that extended to FIIs. The new system would be especially beneficial for QFIs, who were subjected to higher tax rate earlier.
- As per the new norms:
  - FPIs have been divided into three categories as per their risk profile and the KYC (Know Your Client) requirements, and other registration procedures would be much simpler for FPIs compared to the current practices.
  - The new class would be given a permanent registration, as against the current practice of granting approvals for one year or five years to the overseas entities seeking to invest in Indian markets.
  - Such registration would be permanent unless suspended or cancelled by SEBI or surrendered by the FPI.
  - In the new tax regime, there would be no deduction of tax at source on income earned by way of capital gains by FPIs (including erstwhile QFIs) but a discharge of tax by QFIs themselves only post which remittances outside India would be permitted.

### **2. Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE)**

- The Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) programme declared that it has plans to release up to 25 birds into a 30,000-sq-km drug-free "safe zone". A project hopes to start releasing captive-bred birds into the wild by 2016, after experiencing the devastation wrought by a drug on Asian vulture populations.

- In order to ensure that the species affected do not disappear completely from the wild, SAVE identified a number of priorities viz.
  - To establish a number of vast “safe zones” for the captive-bred birds to be released within. The areas have a radius of 100km and the consortium has identified six such areas – some of which cross national borders into Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
  - Establishment of a captive-breeding programme that would provide the birds to be released back into the wider environment, once it was safe to do so.
- Reason for declining vulture population
  - Diclofenac, a painkilling drug administered to cattle, is the main cause of mass extinction of vultures.
  - Vultures, which have a digestive system robust enough to even digest disease-causing pathogens found in rotting meat of dead, do not have a critical enzyme that breaks down diclofenac and die of renal failure after eating carcasses of cattle administered the drug.
  - Vultures feeding on cattle either die from acute kidney failure within a few days or lose their ability to reproduce.
  - In 2006, India banned the use of veterinary drug “Diclofenac”, which is toxic to any vulture that feeds on the carcass of recently treated cattle, but SAVE in its study, stated that the drug continues to be sold and used illegally today.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has put vultures on its list of ‘critically endangered’ species.

### **3. After Delhi, Rajasthan became 2nd state to withdraw approval for FDI in multi-brand retail**

- Rajasthan scrapped the approval given by the previous Congress government for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in multi-brand retailing. After Delhi, Rajasthan became the second state, to withdraw approval for FDI in multi-brand retail following a change of government after the assembly elections held in November-December.
- Recently, the Aam Admi Party Government in Delhi had repealed the decision to allow FDI in retail and told the Centre that it would not allow foreign supermarkets in the Capital as they would destroy the local markets and close down neighbourhood shops and kirana stores.
- The states that allow global retailers to open supermarket chains (mostly Congress-led) viz. Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana, Rajasthan, Manipur, Karnataka, etc.

### **4. India's first monorail inaugurated in Mumbai**

- India's first monorail service started in Mumbai. The monorail service that would link the city to major stations began its first phase of 8.93 km between Wadala and Chembur in the eastern fringes of the Commercial Capital.
- The first phase of the monorail covered seven stations: Wadala depot, Mysore Colony, Bhakti Park, Bharat Petroleum, V.N. Purav Marg, Fertiliser Colony, and Chembur.
- Second phase – connecting Wadala with Sant Gadge Maharaj Chowk in South Mumbai will be completed by mid-2015.
- The project executed by a consortium of engineering major Larsen and Toubro Ltd (L&T) and Malaysian firm Scomi Engineering and owned and operated by Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).
- The overall monorail project covers a 19.17 km stretch in the Chembur-Wadala-Jacob Circle corridor, which will be the second longest corridor with 17 stations. (The longest one is Japan's Osaka Monorail).

- A monorail is a rail-based transportation system based on a single rail, which acts as its sole support and its guideway. The term is also used variously to describe the beam of the system, or the vehicles travelling on such a beam or track. The beam in a monorail system is narrower than the vehicle.
- After the launch of Mumbai monorail, India joined the elite group of countries viz. the U.S., Germany, China, Japan, Australia and Malaysia that run monorails.

## **5. FATF released report on Money Laundering & Terrorist Financing**

- The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) released an international report on money laundering and terrorist financing.
- It identifies the Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (ML/TF) vulnerabilities and risks of the “diamond pipeline” that covers all sectors in the diamond trade: production, rough diamond sales, cutting and polishing, jewelry manufacturing and jewelry retailers.

### **Excerpts of the Paris-based FATF report**

- China and India are major markets where diamond trade is done on a large scale.
- India, Israel, Belgium, Canada and the USA has reported instances where diamond prices were overvalued for purposes of laundering and suspected financing. In these countries trade accounts of diamond business are being used to launder illegal funds to the tune of millions of dollars.
- The closed and opaque nature of the diamond markets and the high value of diamonds combined with a lack of expertise in this area on the part of the authorities have left this industry susceptible to abuse by criminals.
- In cases of suspicious money laundering instances of diamond trade, the funds transfer occurred from India, Israel and Switzerland to the UAE.
- India reported a relatively large number of sanitized cases (12) in which suspicious transaction reports were received (in connection with diamond trade). In these specific cases, Hong Kong, China is a destination for illicit cash flows related to the diamond trade.
- Diamond trade, as an international phenomenon, needed a complete and global analysis to understand and determine money laundering and terrorist financing threats and vulnerabilities related to this unique trade.

## **6. National Mission on Libraries(NML) – an initiative of the Ministry of Culture, launched**

- President Pranab Mukherjee launched the National Mission on Libraries (NML) at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. He formally inaugurated the NML's guidelines, logo and website.
- Mission: Launched by the Ministry of Culture to modernize and digitally link public libraries across the country.
- Benefit: designed for the entire spectrum of population – students, researchers, scientists, professionals, children, artists and differently abled persons.
- Objective of National Mission on Libraries (NML): To create a world class library system, foster reading habits, facilitate research work and provide information to people in a timely and convenient manner which is also universal and equitable.
- Set up in pursuance of a report of the National Knowledge Commission, which recommended a total revamp of the Library and Information Service sector to serve the changing needs and expectations of the users and give a fillip to the library movement in the country.
- Factors of NML: up-gradation of infrastructure, digitization and modernization, census of libraries and their development as knowledge centres and transformation of libraries into empowering and inclusive institutions.

- Core areas of Mission: Creation of a National Virtual Library of India, Setting up of National Mission on Libraries Model Libraries, Quantitative & Qualitative Survey of Libraries and CapacityBuilding for revamping the Public Library System & Services.
- Main component: To initiate need-based training programmes to develop managerial skills and IT competencies of their personnel in tune with demands of the Internet era.
- Implementation of NML: Six libraries under the Culture Ministry, 35 Central Libraries in states and 35 District Libraries will be developed as model libraries.
- For setting up of the model libraries, existing libraries would be identified in consultation with the state governments to improve infrastructure and upgrade technology used by them.
- Emphasis will on developing these libraries in economically backward districts.
- Future planning: 629 district libraries across the states would be provided network connectivity.
- Nodal agency for the implementation of NML: Kolkata-based Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), a 10-member body headed by Prof. Deepak Pental, former Vice Chancellor of Delhi University.
- NML also planned to create a National Virtual Library of India (NVLI) to facilitate a comprehensive database on digital resources, carry out a census on the resources available in the libraries and conduct a study on the reading habits in different regions of the country.
- The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in its Report to the Nation (2006-2009) made ten major recommendations on libraries. In pursuance of this, a High Level Committee to be called as National Mission on Libraries (NML) has been set up by the Government of India. Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture will be the central agency for the National Mission on Libraries for administrative, logistics, planning and budgeting purposes.

#### **7. 101st Indian Science Congress**

- Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh inaugurated the 101st Indian Science Congress at Jammu University, Jammu. The five-day (Feb 3-7, 2014) event will see deliberations and presentation of papers by the scientific fraternity from across the globe.
- Dr. Singh stated that the country must increase its' annual expenditure on science and technology to at least 2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the private sector must join hands with the government for an inclusive progress in science and technology.
- Excerpts of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's speech
  - India will partner with the international scientific community in establishment of the world's major R&D projects.
  - In the Gravitational Wave Experiment, India intends to host the third detector. A Neutrino-based Observatory is proposed to be established in Tamil Nadu at a cost of about Rs. 1450 crore.
  - India would soon join, as an associate member, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, CERN, where international projects such as the research on 'God Particle' was going on.
  - Favored genetically modified crops.
  - Supported the scientists to engage more with society and explain socially productive applications of biotechnology and other alternatives.
  - Announced the names of five eminent scientists, who have been selected for the recently instituted Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowships.
  - The Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship is open to scientists who are either Nobel Laureates or Fellows of the Royal Society, or members of the United States or French academies of science. The selected scientists are entitled to a fellowship of

\$1,00,000 and a research grant of Rs. 55 lakh. They will have to do research in an institution here for 12 months, which can be spent in installments over 3 years. The host institution would also get a grant of Rs. 10 lakh for providing laboratory and other facilities for the research.

**8. Justice Ashok Kumar Mathur Committee: 7th Pay Central Commission constituted**

- The Central Government constituted the 7th Central Pay Commission under the chairmanship of Mr. Ashok Kumar Mathur, a retired Supreme Court judge and retired chairman of Armed Forces Tribunal.
- Its work will be to revise the salary structure of Union government employees from both civil and military services. The panel will submit its report in two years and the recommendations would be implemented from Jan 1, 2016.
- The Central Government constitutes Pay Commission almost every ten years to revise the pay scales of its employees and often these are adopted by states after some modification.
- The 6th Central Pay Commission under the Chairmanship of B.N.Srikrishna was approved in July 2006. The 5th Pay Commission was implemented with effect from January 1, 1996 and fourth from January 1, 1986. The 1st pay commission was constituted under the Chairmanship of Srinivasa Varadachariar in May 1946 and its report was submitted by 1947.
- The first commission was based upon the idea of living wages to the employees, which was taken by the Islington Commission.

**9. Govt. launched 'National Cloud' Under 'MeghRaj'**

- Govt. launched the National Cloud under 'MeghRaj' initiative. National Information Centre (NIC) is providing Cloud services under the umbrella of 'MeghRaj'.
- In order to utilize and harness the benefits of Cloud Computing, the Central Government has embarked upon an ambitious initiative – 'GI Cloud' which has been named as 'MeghRaj'.
- Focus: To accelerate delivery of e-services in the country while optimizing ICT spending of the Government. This will ensure optimum utilization of the infrastructure and speed up the development and deployment of eGov applications.
- Architectural vision of GI Cloud: As per the set of common protocols, guidelines and standards issued by the Government of India, GI cloud will cover a set of discrete cloud computing environments spread across multiple locations, built on existing or new (augmented) infrastructure.
- Benefit of GI Cloud: Helpful for the departments to procure ICT services on demand in the OPEX model rather than investing upfront on the CAPEX.
- Characteristics of National Cloud: Self service portal, Multiple Cloud solutions, Secured VPN access and Multi location Cloud.
- Existing Cloud services: Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS), Software as a Service (SaaS) and Storage as a Service (STaaS).
- Cloud computing is the delivery of computing and storage capacity. In cloud computing, end users are not required to buy software or Devices as they are provided by service providers on a rental basis. It's an Internet based technology which enables its user to share technological resources, software and digital information from anywhere using a browser.
- The Department of Electronics & Information Technology (DeitY) prepared the two Policy reports viz., 'GI Cloud Strategic Direction Paper' and 'GI Cloud Adoption and Implementation Roadmap'.

**10. K.V. Thomas Committee**

- The Central Consumer Protection Council (CCPC) under the chairmanship of minister K V Thomas set up a sub-committee to draft guidelines to safeguard consumer interest from false advertisements in the country.
- Objective: To issue guidelines to monitor the advertisements. At present, there is no any legal protection cover available for consumers against false advertisements.
- It is constituted to see how to regulate false statements made in the advertisements in the name of scientific claims. (Maximum false claims are made in health-related fields). It will have the powers to (take) corrective actions and (impose) compensation.
- Proposal: To hold everyone engaged in the production of advertisement responsible for its contents. This will include the manufacturer, advertising agency, artists, actors and the media platform, be it print or electronic.
- The committee will submit its recommendations by the end of February 2014.
- For instance, if the claims made by whitening creams proved unphenomenal as advertised, Consumer should have right to claim compensation not only from the advertisers but also from the celebrities endorsing the product.
- The immediate push for regulation has come from the Madhya Pradesh High Court. The court ordered the consumer affairs ministry to set up an ad-monitoring panel as recommended by the Vibha Bhargava Commission. The commission had submitted its report in 2005 and it underlined the urgent need to regulate false claims by advertisers of different products.

**11. Govt. allows FIIs, NRIs to invest in insurance sector**

- The Union Government has allowed 26% foreign investment in insurance sector in activities related to insurance viz. broking, Third Party Administrators (TPAs) and surveyors and permitted Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to also invest in insurers within the stipulated cap.
- The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) stated that in case of insurance, the 26% cap will include FDI and investments from FIIs and NRIs. (Earlier, only FDI under the automatic route was allowed in insurance companies.)
- Apart from insurance companies, the relaxation would apply to insurance brokers, third-party administrators (TPAs), surveyors and loss assessors. All of this investment can be made under the automatic route.
- Insurance brokers are entities which for remuneration arrange insurance contracts with insurers or reinsurers on behalf of their clients. The TPAs help in facilitating health insurance on behalf of insurers. Surveyors and loss assessors provide technical services to the insurance companies. All these entities are required to obtain a licence from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) for undertaking specific activities.
- The Arvind Mayaram Committee on definition of FII and FDI, in its draft report, recommended composite caps whereby FDI, FII and NRI investments would form part of the total cap on foreign investments.
- The Insurance Act, 1938 does not stipulate any FDI limits for insurance intermediaries or TPAs, but sector regulator IRDA has restricted it to 26%.

**12. India and Germany inked pacts on financial and tech co-operation**

- India and Germany signed two umbrella agreements for financial and technical co-operation, under Indo German bilateral Development Cooperation framework. The Umbrella Agreements were signed by Finance Minister P Chidambaram and German

Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Gerd Mueller during their bilateral meeting.

- The pacts were signed during an official six-day visit of German President Joachim Gauck.
- The Umbrella Agreement on Financial Cooperation refers to concessional loans from Germany for nine projects viz.
  - Himalaya Hydropower Programme (HPPCL).
  - Green Energy Corridors.
  - Promotional Programme for Energy Efficient New Residential Housing-II (NHB).
  - Energy Efficiency in Thermal Power Plants (WBDCL).
  - Affordable Housing Programme (NHB).
  - New Approaches in Microfinance and Microenterprise Finance (SIDBI)
  - Missing Middle Programme (SIDBI).
  - Madhya Pradesh Urban Sanitation and Environment Programme.
  - Himachal Pradesh Forest Ecosystems Climate Proofing Project.
- The Umbrella Agreement for technical cooperation refers to 13 projects in Energy, Environment and Sustainable economic development sectors, which are a priority sectors under the bilateral development cooperation between the two nations.

### **13. Indian CEOs leading major companies in the world**

- Microsoft has become the biggest company to be headed by an Indian. Indian-born Mr. Satya Nadella appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and member of the Board of Directors of the Internet giant Microsoft. The appointment of Mr. Nadella is a significant achievement as he joined a circle of India-origin executives manning top global companies.
- Some global corporations led by Indian CEOs:
  - Mr. Lakshmi Mittal – Chairman and CEO of Arcelor-Mittal, world's largest steel making company. The Indian Steel mogul is one of the most influential and powerful figures globally.
  - Ms. Indra Nooyi – Chairperson & CEO of PepsiCo, one of the largest food and beverage business in the world.
  - Rakesh Kapoor – CEO of Reckitt Benckiser, the consumer goods giant is listed on London Stock Exchange and is a constituent of the FTSE 100 Index.
  - Anshu Jain: Co-CEO, Deutsche Bank.
  - Ajay Banga: President & CEO, MasterCard, an American financial services corporation that process payments between the banks of merchants when purchases are made through the brand card. Mr. Banga appointed CEO in July 2010.
  - Sanjay Jha: Appointed as chief executive officer of GLOBALFOUNDRIES in January 2014. GLOBALFOUNDRIES is the world's first full-service semiconductor foundry with a truly global manufacturing and technology footprint.
  - Shantanu Narayen – President and CEO of Adobe Systems, one of the world's largest and most diversified software companies.
  - Dinesh Paliwala: CEO of Harman International, a leading provider of premium audio and infotainment systems for the automotive, consumer and professional markets. He has served as the CEO since July 2007.
  - Rajeev Vasudeva: Egon Zehnder.
  - Ivan Menezes: CEO of alcoholic beverages firm Diageo PLC since July 1, 2013.
  - Ajit Jain: Berkshire Hathaway Group.
  - Piyush Gupta: DBS Group Holdings.
  - Sanjay Mehrotra: CEO of SanDisk since January 1, 2011.

- As per human resource experts, professionals in India have become global professionals. The technical skills and the behavioural patterns of Indians executives make them very much adaptable to any kind of situation they come across. Indians focus on good education and ability to work in difficult situations is aiding to this rising trend and more and more Indians could rise to top positions at global companies in the near future.

**14. Bezbaruah Committee: To address concerns of Northeastern people**

- The Union Government set up a Bezbaruah panel to propose remedial measures to address concerns of people from the Northeast following outrage over the death in Delhi of a 19-year-old student from Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Bezbaruah Committee:
  - A six-member panel led by Former IAS officer M P Bezbaruah, who is also a member of North-Eastern Council.
  - Members: Retired IAS officers H W T Syeim, Allen Temshi Jamir, Tape Bagra and P Bharat Singh and the Deputy Secretary in Ministry of Home Affairs S Saha as Member Secretary.
  - The Chairman of the committee shall co-opt members, one each from the other Northeastern states like Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim.
  - Four new members drafted in the committee: Ms. Marina Nido (Mother of the Student Nido Tania who died after being allegedly beaten by some shopkeepers in south Delhi's Lajpat Nagar), former IPS officer S T Sangliana and student's leaders J Mavio and J T Tagam from Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Objective: The Panel will examine the causes behind attacks/violence and discrimination against people from the Northeast, suggest measures to be taken by the government to address these concerns besides suggesting legal remedies for the same. It will deliberate and find ways to stop such attacks on the people from Northeast.
- The panel will submit a report within two months after examining the causes behind the attacks of discrimination against the people from Northeast.
- The Union Government expanded Bezbaruah panel to look into the various kinds of concerns of the persons hailing from the North Eastern States, who are living in different parts of the country, especially the Metropolitan areas, and to suggest suitable remedial measures which could be taken by the Government.
- Terms of Reference of the Bezbaruah Committee:**
  - To examine the various kinds of concerns, including the concerns regarding security, of the persons hailing from the North Eastern States.
  - To examine the causes behind the attacks/violence and discrimination against the people from the North-Eastern States.
  - To suggest measures to be taken by the Government to address these concerns.
  - To suggest legal remedies to address all the concerns.
  - The Bezbaruah panel will interact with the students/professionals, NGOs, students' organizations and other persons from the North Eastern States living in Delhi to seek their suggestions.

**15. DRDO developing UAVs to track down Maoists**

- The Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) is developing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to track down maoists in naxal hit states viz. Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, etc. And would demonstrate the operational capability of the first such vehicle; Nishant in Jagdalpur.
- The UAVs being developed for CRPF would be able to help the forces trace and track down the ultra Left operatives in even thick forests.

- The Nishant, a multi-mission UAV developed by India's Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), a branch of DRDO, had already been inducted by the army. (Nishant consists of an air vehicle supported by ground control station equipment mounted on Tatra vehicles and it can be moved to any location for launching whenever required making it very versatile).
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are aerial vehicles which operate without a human pilot. They are commonly used in both the military and police forces in situations where the risk of sending a human piloted aircraft is unacceptable, or the situation makes using a manned aircraft impractical.
- Uses: To get aerial video of a remote location, especially where there would be unacceptable risk to the pilot of a manned aircraft and can be equipped with high resolution still, video, and even infrared cameras. The information obtained by the UAV can be streamed back to the control centre in real time. They can be used to carry and deliver a variety of payloads. Helicopter type UAVs are well suited to this purpose, because payloads can be suspended from the bottom of the airframe, with little aerodynamic penalty.

#### **16. Chip-and-PIN cards**

- With an aim to minimize frauds, RBI has mandated that Banks must adopt Aadhaar as additional authentication or move to EMV (Euro pay Master Card Visa) chip and pin technology to ensure security in card-based payment transactions.
- The apex bank made it mandatory for debit card holders to punch in their PIN numbers every time they use the card. The PIN functions as another layer of security for the debit card which reduces the chances of fraud. While using it at PoS, merchants will first swipe the cards at a PIN enabled PoS terminal and punch in the transaction amount. That will be followed by customers punching their PINs to complete the transaction.
- A chip-and-PIN card is a plastic card of standard size. It has two chips (a) An embedded chip (b) A traditional magnetic strip. In order to accomplish a transaction, a customer has to punch in his/her PIN number. In case the card gets stolen or lost, it is very difficult to copy the card due to presence of the embedded microchip.
- The overall system of the card designed in order to make it more difficult for criminals to cash in on credit card fraud. Information is stored on the embedded chip, which is needed for authentication purpose during a transaction. This information on the embedded chip is of the same nature as stored in today's magnetic stripe. The chip is safe as there is no personal information about customer's a/c stored on the embedded chip.

#### **17. Sitaram Yechury Committee Report**

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture has rejected the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Bill in the present form. The committee stated that the proposal for setting up a new aviation regulator lacks teeth in empowering the authority.
- The panel, headed by Sitaram Yechury suggested the Civil Aviation Ministry to come out with a comprehensive Bill after revisiting the Aircraft Act, 1934 because it felt that the Act is too old to tackle the emerging problems in the aviation sector.

#### **Excerpts of the Sitaram Yechury committee report on Transport, Tourism and Culture**

- The Chairperson of Civil Aviation Authority of India should be part-time only as there exists possibility of deadlock between a full time Chairperson and the Director General would be imminent.
- Increase the number of experts in the selection committee for the appointment of Chairperson, DG and full-time members of the Authority.

- Found fault with the qualifications needed to become the chairman of the CAA in the Bill, saying it would seem that only a former civil aviation secretary would fulfill the requirements to head the CAA.
- Allow professionals and heads of public sector undertakings viz. Airports Authority of India, who have the relevant experience and knowledge but were lower in rank than secretary, to head CAA.
- CAA members' term of office should be reduced to three years from the proposed five years as it would block those persons having latest training and knowledge from becoming members, particularly when the sector was growing and changing fast.

**18. Sushil Koirala: Nepal's new PM**

- Veteran Nepali Congress President, Mr. Sushil Koirala (75) elected as Prime Minister of Nepal, after he secured more than two-thirds of the votes in the Parliament of Nepal. He would be the sixth head of government since the country became a Republic in 2008, following a peace deal with Maoist rebels in 2006.
- Mr. Sushil Koirala received 405 votes while 148 votes were cast against him out of the present 583 legislators that took part in the voting in the Parliament in the Kathmandu a short while ago.
- He became the fourth prime minister from his family, after Matrika Prasad Koirala, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala and Girija Prasad Koirala.
- He took over the charge from Mr. Khil Raj Regmi, who was working as acting Prime Minister of Nepal from March 14, 2013.

**19. Mr. Vishwanath Tripathi honored with the Vyas Samman 2013**

- The famous Hindi writer, Mr. Vishwanath Tripathi (82) honored by the prestigious Vyas Samman 2013. He has been chosen for his memoir 'Vyomkesh Darvesh' that is a biography of the noted Hindi scholar Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi. Mr. Tripathi has around 20 publications by his name that includes memoirs, novel and poetry collection.
- The Vyas Samman 2012 was given to Hindi litterateur Narendra Kohli for his historical novel "Na Bhoot Na Bhavishyati" based on Swami Vivekananda.
- The Vyas Samman award instituted in 1991 by the K.K. Birla Foundation and the award carries a prize of Rs. 2.5 lakh. It is one the most prestigious award of India that is given every year to the poet or writer for their outstanding contribution in the Hindi language.

**20. All public transport vehicles must have GPS**

- The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways set a deadline for public transport vehicles running in major cities with a population of over 10 lakh to install GPS devices by February 20, 2014. The Union government has directed all state governments to follow the guidelines.
- All the owners of public service vehicles are required to get Global Positioning System (GPS) installed in their vehicles by February 20. Those who fail to install, then the necessary action shall be taken against the defaulters.
- Under the Nirbhaya Fund for women safety, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved Rs 1,405-crore project to track and monitor public transport and provide alarm buttons for alerting authorities.
- The project involves setting up of closed circuit television (CCTVs) and using GPS to ensure safety and security of women and girls in distress. It will be implemented within two years after allocation of funds to set up a National Level Vehicle Security and Tracking System and City Command and Control Centre with installation of GPS, CCTV in public road transport.

**21. Sikkim: India's first state to achieve 100% sanitation coverage**

- As per the report released by the Union Ministry of Drinking water and Sanitation, Sikkim became the only state in India to achieve 100% sanitation in rural and urban households, schools, sanitary complexes and Aanganwadi centres.
- Under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan scheme, the Himalayan state, Sikkim has constructed 98,043 individual household latrines against the target of 87,014 till January, and achieved 112.67% of its target. The scheme was implemented by the Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- The state has also sensitized people to adopt a holistic approach to improve sanitation and hygiene in a clean environment while accelerating its overall development.
- Sikkim chief minister Pawan Chamling launched a community-led total sanitation campaign in 1999 for achieving full sanitation in the 7,096 sq km area of the state. And, to encourage sanitation activities, the state government has instituted a "Nirmal Gram Puraskar" (Clean Village Award).
- Sikkim also topped the list among all states of the country in net performance indicators.
- Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) is a community-led total sanitation program initiated by Government of India in 1999. Its mission is to eradicate the practice of open defecation by 2017. It aims to accelerate sanitation coverage in rural areas to achieve the vision of Nirmal Bharat by 2022 with all gram Panchayats in the country attaining Nirmal status. It aims to motivate communities and Panchayati Raj Institutions promoting sustainable sanitation facilities through awareness creation and health education. It encourages cost effective and appropriate technologies for ecologically safe and sustainable sanitation.
- Govt. of India launched Nirmal Gram Puraskar (NGP) to encourage the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to take up rural sanitation promotion and attain 100% open defecation free Panchayats.
- Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) is being implemented in association with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at all levels, through social mobilization for construction of toilets and also maintain clean environment by way of safe disposal of wastes.

**22. Solar mission: US again challenged India's solar export restrictions in WTO**

- On the second phase of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM), the Government of India stated that it hadn't violated global trading norms under the World Trade Organization (WTO), even as the US filed a second case against India in WTO.
- The United States of America (USA) challenged the domestic content requirement in Phase II of India's National Solar Mission (NSM), which requires solar power developers to use Indian-made equipment. It alleged that the requirement was discriminatory and against international norms, including World Trade Organization (WTO) laws, and affects US solar panel manufacturers.
- In February 2013, the US had filed a similar case related to the first phase of the mission. Though, it didn't pursue that case.
- The Government of India dismissed the allegations and stated that its national solar mission programme is WTO-compliant and it would defend its stand in the Geneva-based multilateral body.
- India argued that its solar policies are legal under WTO government procurement rules that permit countries to exempt projects from non-discrimination obligations.
- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) pointed out that many US companies have won contracts in-phase II of India's National Solar Mission. Thus, there should not be such issue of discrimination against them. In the Phase II of the solar mission, the Ministry

of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has freed half the projects from local sourcing conditions.

- Phase I of policy implementation: MNRE involved developers of solar photovoltaic ("PV") projects employing crystalline silicon technology to use solar modules manufactured in India.
- Phase II of policy implementation: MNRE expanded this domestic sourcing requirement to crystalline silicon solar cells and thin film technologies as well.
- At present, solar thin film consists of the majority of US solar product exports to India and these domestic content requirements will probably cause even greater harm to US-producers than under Phase I. That's why, there is a bone of contention between USA and India.

### **23. Mukul Mudgal Committee report on IPL spot fixing scandal**

- The Justice Mukul Mudgal Committee submitted its report to the Supreme Court after investigating allegations of spot-fixing and betting in the Indian Premier League (IPL).
- As per the Mukul Mudgal Committee report
  - The allegations of betting and passing of information against Mr. Gurunath Meiyappan (the Son-in-Law of BCCI president N Srinivasan) stand proved.
  - More investigation is needed against Rajasthan Royals owner Mr. Raj Kundra, who is facing charges of betting and fixing the match.
  - The allegations of spot-fixing and match fixing against five players – Sreesanth, Ankeet Chavan, Ajit Chandila, Amit Singh and Siddharth Trivedi – on the basis of evidence provided by Delhi Police were facing criminal trial and adequate punishment has been imposed upon them by the BCCI.
  - Constitution of IPL Governing Council, the two teams Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals may be suspended.
  - As per the Clause 11.3 of the IPL franchise agreement in any case, if the team, official, team owner or anyone else associated with the team tries to bring bad on the league, then the team can be suspended immediately.
- **Recommendations of Mukul Mudgal panel**
  - Senior players should make ensure that younger players are aware about the spot-fixing and other things that tarnish the sport as well as the player or team.
  - The game should be made more clear and transparent.
  - Information should be shared with other agencies by BCCI.
  - BCCI should make a proactive approach against players and bookies instead of wait for the media probe.
  - In its recommendation, it has also suggested getting registered agents of the players by BCCI and those agents should not be allowed to travel with the players.
- Mukul Mudgal Committee was formed by Supreme Court in October 2013 to investigate spot-fixing in IPL matches.

### **24. Union Government launched HIV Salvage Therapy**

- The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched third-line drug therapy for people living with HIV/AIDS and extended free Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) to more of them by revising the eligibility norm.
- The third-line therapy also known as salvage or rescue therapy is prescribed for people who have limited drug options left.
- At the launch of the National AIDS Control Programme Phase IV (2012-2017), Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad stated that:

- For receiving free ART, the minimum CD4-count limit reduced from 500 to 350. The count is a measure of the viral load.
- The highly expensive therapy (Third-Line Therapy) would enhance longevity and improve the quality of life of patients and will also be provided free of charge to patients.
- The Union Government has also tabled the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Bill, 2014, in the Rajya Sabha to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to protect the human rights of people living with it.
- The Bill seeks to prohibit any kind of discrimination against the infected person — for instance, denial or termination of employment or occupation, unfair treatment, denial of access to any sector and forcible HIV testing. Currently, India is estimated to have 2.39 million people living with HIV/AIDS.
- ART consists of the combination of at least three Anti-Retro Viral (ARV) drugs to maximally suppress the HIV virus and stop the progression of HIV disease.

**25. OECD issued new standard to combat black money; India to follow new standard for tracking black money**

- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) revealed a new “game-changing” mechanism to combat the menace of offshore tax evasion. Till now, 42 countries including India adopted a new global standard for automatic exchange of information on offshore tax evasion and committed to share tax details.
- The plan is to develop a mechanism for automatic exchange of information on bank accounts holding more than \$250,000 as a “real game changer” that would deter evasion and help tax authorities identify citizens hiding money offshore.
- Its objective is to smooth the automatic exchange procedures those are used to crack cases of offshore tax evasion and illegal stashing of money.
- **Highlights of the new tax standards set by the Global economic body OECD**
  - Governments would automatically share information on taxpayers' offshore bank and brokerage accounts with foreign tax authorities.
  - Banks, brokers and some insurers and investment funds would have to report residents' account balances as well as interest, dividends and other investment income to their government. The government would then make that information available automatically to any other government that had signed the information-exchanging agreement.
  - Financial companies would also be required to identify the ultimate beneficiaries of shell companies, trusts and similar legal arrangements that now can be used to evade taxes.
  - OECD will formally present the standard for the endorsement of G20 finance ministers during a February 22-23, 2014 meeting in Sydney, Australia.
  - In other words, this new standard on automatic exchange of information will build up international tax co-operation and place governments back on a more even footing as they seek to protect the integrity of their tax systems and fight tax evasion.

**26. “India-China Year of Friendly Exchanges” launched by Vice President of India**

- The Vice President of India Mr. Mohammad Hamid Ansari launched the ‘India-China Year of Friendly Exchanges’ in New Delhi (2014). Initiatives taken by India to form closer and stronger relationship with China:
  - To promote Chinese companies to establish production and supply chains which will link our economies. This will also ensure a more balanced trade between our two

sides. One of the ideas, which is being looked at carefully is of a dedicated Chinese Industrial Park in India.

- To introduce Chinese language in the middle schools in India. Recently, 22 Chinese teachers have come to teach at selected C.B.S.E. schools across the length and breadth of our country.
- To highlight Indian culture in China through a programme entitled 'Glimpses of India'.

#### **27. CSO: India's Economy to grow by 4.9% in 2013-14**

- As per the advanced estimates released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) during 2013-14 is estimated at 4.9% as compared to the growth rate of 4.5% in 2012-13.
- The advance estimates of national income at constant (2004-05) and current prices, for the financial year 2013-14
- Based on expected level of agricultural production from the Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture & Cooperation(DAC), Index of Industrial Production (IIP), monthly accounts of Union Government Expenditure maintained by Controller General of Accounts (CGA) and of State Government expenditure maintained by Comptroller and Auditor general of India (CAG).
- Per capita income in real terms (at 2004-05 prices) during 2013-14 is probably to attain a level of Rs 39,961 as compared to the first revised estimate for the year 2012-13 of Rs 38,856. The growth rate in per capita income is estimated at 2.8% as against the previous year's estimate of 2.1%.
- Per capita income at current prices during 2013-14 is estimated to Rs 74,920 as compared to Rs 67,839 during 2012-13, shows a rise of 10.4%.
- The rates of Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) at current and constant (2004-05) prices during 2013-14 are estimated at 28.5% and 32.5%. (GFCF is an indicator of investment)
- The rate of expenditure on valuables at current prices has gone down from 2.6% in 2012-13 to 2.1% in 2013-14.
- Key sectors that have taken into account while estimating the of national income at constant (2004-05) and current prices, for the financial year 2013-14 are:
  - Agriculture, forestry and fishing: Will probably show a growth of 4.6% in its GDP during 2013-14, as against the previous year's growth rate of 1.4%.
  - Manufacturing: Expected to contract 0.2% in this financial year compared with growth of 1.1% in the previous year.
  - Services sector (finance, insurance, real estate and business services sectors): Expected to grow 11.2% this year compared with 10.9% in 2012-13.
  - Mining and quarrying: Probably to contract 1.9% as compared to 2.2% decline in production 2012-13.
  - Construction: Will probably improve to 1.7% from 1.1% in 2012-13.
  - Trade, hotels, transport and communication: Probably improve to 3.5% in this financial year.
  - Electricity, gas and water production: The growth in these sectors is likely to improve to 6% in 2013-14 from 2.3 per cent in 2012-13.
  - Community social and personal services growth would be better at 7.4% as compared to 5.3% previously.
- The Chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, Mr. C. Rangarajan described the latest estimate of 4.9% for 2013-14 as an encouraging indication that economic slowdown is over.

**28. India and ADB signed loan agreement to improve rural roads in 5 States**

- The Government of India (GOI) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a \$275 million loan agreement to continue improving rural roads in the states of Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal. The loan represents the second tranche of \$800 million financing facility under the Rural Connectivity Investment Program (RCIP).
- Joint secretary of Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Mr. Nilaya Mitash and Country Director of ADB, Ms. M. Teresa Kho signed the pact.
- Executing agency of the project: Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) at the central level, while the state governments of Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal are charged with overall implementation at the state level for a period of 43 months.
- The loan will construct 3,693 km of all-weather rural roads in the states which will benefit nearly 1,800 rural habitations.
- Second phase of project is expected to be completed in June, 2017.
- The central government will provide counterpart funds of \$81.56 million for a total second tranche project investment cost of \$356.56 million.
- Rural Connectivity Investment Programme (RCIP): A multi-tranche financing facility (MTFF) started by Asian Development Bank (ADB). RCIP will construct or upgrade the 9000 km of rural roads to an all-weather standard connecting around 4800 habitations in the States of Assam, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.
- The second tranche from the ordinary capital resources of ADB has a 25-year term including a grace period of 5 years, commitment charge of 0.15% per year, and interest rate to be determined in accordance with ADB's LIBOR-based lending facility.

**29. India hosted third World Congress on Agro-forestry 2014**

- The third World Congress on Agro-forestry 2014 (WCA14) held in New Delhi, India and was inaugurated by President Mr. Pranab Mukherjee. This was the First ever World Agro-forestry Congress in Asia Pacific Region.
- Theme: "Trees for Life: Accelerating the Impact of Agro-forestry".
- Co-host: the World Agro-forestry Centre, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the Indian Society of Agro-forestry and Global Initiatives.
- Objective: To boost awareness, engagement and investments in agro-forestry,
- Benefit: Would shape the next steps in the field of integrative science, transformative change in landscapes, tree improvement, innovative tree-based value chains, and debates on global and local sustainability, reform of land and tree tenure and holistic education.
- The third edition of World Agroforestry Congress organized to-
  - Expand global awareness and understanding of agro-forestry.
  - Share the current status of knowledge and practice of agro-forestry and consolidate its research base.
  - Build support for agro-forestry within governments, companies, academia, NGOs and the media.
  - Increase the engagement of the private sector.
- First two World Congresses on Agro-forestry held in: Florida, USA (2004) and Nairobi, Kenya (2009).

**30. Chinese scientists developed flexible fire resistant paper**

- Chinese scientists invented a new kind of fire resistant paper. The paper is first of its own kind and can be used for long time purpose to save the important documents. The research was published in Chemistry—A European Journal.
- Fire resistant paper
  - Will not catch fire even at 1000 degrees Celsius
  - Formed by calcium phosphate compound.
  - This inorganic paper is flexible and incombustible, but still feels like ordinary paper. It can be torn, folded, and destroyed by strong acid.
  - Useful for important documents to preserve for long periods of time.

**31. SEBI approved the new Corporate Governance norms**

- The Market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) approved the new corporate governance norms that restrict the number of independent directors on a company board, spell out whistleblower policies and institute checks on salaries of key managerial persons, among other things.
- Beside new corporate governance norms, SEBI board also:
  - Approved new KRA (KYC Registration Agency) Regulations that would make it easier for the investors to comply with Know Your Client (KYC) requirements across various segments of the capital markets.
  - Also approved the long-term policy for mutual funds in India where the minimum capital requirement for asset management companies (AMC) has been raised from Rs 10 crore to Rs 50 crore.
  - Proposed the government to allow the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) to invest up to 15% of their corpus in equities and mutual funds.
  - Also proposed to allow an income tax exemption under 80C of Rs 2 lakh for investments in select mutual funds but the move would require government approval and an amendment of the Income Tax Act.
- Excerpts of new corporate governance norms
  - Restricted independent directors to serve as directors on a maximum of 7 listed companies and limited their total tenure to two terms of 5 years each..
  - In case a person is a whole time director in a listed company, then he can only be on three boards.
  - If somebody has already been independent director for more than five years, then he can get only one extra term of 5 years.
  - The companies would also need to adopt a whistle-blower policy for employees, while the number of directorship a person can hold on company boards would be capped, among various other measures to safeguard the interest of minority shareholders.
  - At least one woman director on the Board of the company.
  - Now, Companies will have to disclose remuneration policies of CEOs and executive directors, related-party transactions and appointment and resignations of independent directors.
- The new corporate governance norms will be effective from October 1, 2014 for all listed companies and are based on recommendations made by the industrialist Adi Godrej committee.

**32. Mount Kelud Volcano Erupts in Indonesia**

- Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared a state of emergency on the main island of Java because of a major volcanic eruption. Mount Kelud in the east Java

erupted and sends a cloud of ash 30 km into the sky and blanketed villages up to 500 km away.

- Ashfall occurred in large portion of Java Island, from Malang to the east, as well as Central Java and Yogyakarta. Around 200,000 people have been affected and there is widespread disruption to flights as several airports have been closed due to poor visibility.
- The 1,731-meter Mount Kelud is home to more than a half of Indonesia's 240 million people. Kelud is among about 130 active volcanoes in Indonesia. Kelud's last major eruption was in 1990, when it spewed out searing fumes and lava that killed more than 30 people and injured hundreds.
- Indonesia lies across a series of geological fault-lines and is prone to frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. There are about 130 active volcanoes in Indonesia.

**33. Dr. VV Dongre and Prof. Guocheng Zhang bagged International Gandhi Award 2013**

- The President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee presented the International Gandhi Award for the year 2013 to Dr. Vijaykumar Vinayak Dongre and Prof. Guocheng Zhang for making outstanding contributions in the field of leprosy to eradicate the disease through treatment, training and research at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi.
- International Gandhi Award
  - Instituted by the Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation (GMLF) that was established in 1950 to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's service and scientific approach towards leprosy.
  - GMLF introduced the International Gandhi Award in 1986.
  - Recognizes the commendable contributions of individuals and institutions in ameliorating the quality of life of people afflicted with leprosy.
  - The award is given every alternate year to individuals/institutions for making outstanding contribution in the field of leprosy.

**34. Dua's layer: Dr. Harminder Singh Dua, Indian origin UK doctor discovered new layer of cornea**

- To cure blindness of eye due to glaucoma, Professor Harminder Singh Dua from the Nottingham University discovered an ultra-thin layer hidden deep in the human cornea that can help treat glaucoma. Glaucoma is a devastating disease caused by defective drainage of fluid from the eye and is the world's second leading cause of blindness.
- Dr. Dua is an Indian origin UK doctor.
- Dua's layer
  - This 15 microns thick new layer also known as Dua's layer.
  - Located at the back of the cornea between the corneal stroma and Descemet's membrane.
  - Plays a vital role in the structure of the tissue that controls the flow of fluid from the eye.
  - Makes an important contribution to the sieve-like trabecular meshwork called the Trabecular Meshwork (TM) in the periphery of the cornea.
  - Benefit of this discovery: It will offer new clues on why the drainage system malfunctions in the eyes of some people, leading to high pressure.
- The study was published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology.
- Previously, Scientists believed that the cornea consists of five layers- from front to back—the corneal epithelium, Bowman's layer, the corneal stroma, Descemet's membrane and the corneal endothelium.
- Pressure within the eye is maintained by the balance of aqueous fluid production by eye tissue called the ciliary body and drainage principally through the TM to the canal of Schlemm, a circular channel in the angle of the eye.

- Defective drainage through the TM is an important cause of glaucoma, a condition that leads to raised pressure in the eye that can permanently affect sight.

**35. Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill-2014**

- Parliament passed “Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) bill-2014” to regulate street vending activities and protect the rights of urban street vendors besides ensuring steps against harassment by police and civic authorities. The Rajya Sabha adopted the bill by a voice vote and without discussion. (the bill was already passed by Lok Sabha).
- Excerpts of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) bill-2014
  - Objective: To protect the rights of urban street vendors and regulating street vending activities and to create conducive atmosphere where street vendors will be eligible to carry out their business in a fair and transparent manner, without fear of eviction and harassment.
  - Legalizes street vending activities to ensure urban street vendors' safety from police harassment.
  - Propose: To set up Town Vending Committees (TVC), which will be responsible for deciding vending zones and the number of vendors that each zone should have.
  - Provides protection of livelihoods rights, social security of street vendors, regulation of urban street vending in the country and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
  - Provides time-bound release of seized goods, for both perishable and non-perishable goods
  - There is a provision for establishment of an independent dispute redressal mechanism under the chairmanship of retired judicial officers to maintain impartiality towards grievance redressal of street vendors.
  - In order to avoid uncertainty of authorities, the Bill provides for a survey of all existing street vendors, and subsequent survey at-least once in every five years, and issue of certificate of vending to all the street vendors identified in the survey, with preference to SC, ST, OBC, women, persons with disabilities, minorities etc.
  - As per Section 29 of the Bill street vendors will be protected from harassment by police and other authorities and there is a prime clause to ensure they carry on their business without the fear of harassment by the authorities under any other law.
  - To prevent delay in implementation, the bill provides that the Rules under the Bill have to be notified within one year of its commencement, and Scheme has to be notified within six months of its commencement.

**36. India and Bahrain signed three pacts to boost bilateral ties, during the State Visit of King of Kingdom of Bahrain to India**

- India and oil-rich Gulf nation Bahrain signed three pacts to boost bilateral ties. The pacts were signed in the presence of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and Bahrain King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in New Delhi.
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Bahrain:
  - In the fields of youth and sports: To strengthen bilateral cooperation through institutional exchanges particularly through exchange of youth and sports teams in various disciplines.
  - On the establishment of a “High-level joint commission” for bilateral cooperation to replace the Joint Committee for Technical and Economic Cooperation established in

1981. The 'High Joint Commission', to be chaired by the Foreign Ministers, will serve as an umbrella framework for all cooperation between the two countries.

- Another MoU signed between the Foreign Service Institute and the Diplomatic Institute of Bahrain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote cooperation between the two organizations.

### **37. "Odia"- 6th Indian classical language**

- The Union Cabinet gave its nod for classifying Odia as a classical language to give impetus to scholarships in the language. It is the sixth Indian language to get such prestigious tag after Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.
- There has been a long-standing demand that Odia, which is one of the oldest languages and has no resemblance to Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali, Telugu, etc, be declared as a classical language.
- A classical language is a language with a literature (art of written work) that is classical. U.C.Berkeley linguist George L. Hart defined Classical Language as follows: "It should be ancient, it should be an independent tradition that arose mostly on its own, not as an offshoot of another tradition, and it must have a large and extremely rich body of ancient literature."
- Classical languages are those which are ancient, of an independent nature and not a derivative of any other tradition. And based on above, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tamil, Hebrew, Greek and Latin are considered as the Classical Languages of the World. Of these only Chinese and Tamil are used by masses now.
- In India, Tamil was the first to gain the Classical Language status, followed by Sanskrit in 2005. These two languages (Tamil and Sanskrit) are undoubtedly parental sources for many languages belonging to the Indo-European family and the Dravidian family of linguistic groups.
- In 2006, the Union Minister for Tourism and Culture announced in the Rajya Sabha the creation of a new category of languages as classical languages based on 4 norms:
  - i. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years;
  - ii. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers;
  - iii. The literary tradition should be original and not borrowed from another speech community;
  - iv. The classical language and literature being distinct from the modern, there may also be discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or offshoots.
- A committee of linguistic experts followed it up, and based on its recommendation classical status was conferred on Telugu and Kannada in 2008. Thus, the definition of classical languages has undergone several changes over the years and the latest criterion too is susceptible to changes.
- Benefits of declaring Odia as classical language
  - Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in Odia language.
  - A 'Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages' can be set up.
  - The University Grants Commission can be requested to create, to start with at least in Central Universities, a certain number of professional chairs for classical languages, for scholars of eminence in Odia language.
- Languages thus far declared to be Classical are:
 

○ Tamil (2004)	○ Telugu (2008)
○ Sanskrit (2005)	○ Malayalam (2013)
○ Kannada (2008)	○ Odia (2014)

**38. "Patna" – World's Longest Free Wi-Fi Zone in India**

- The Chief Minister of Bihar, Mr. Nitish Kumar unveiled the world's longest free Wi-Fi zone at the e-Bihar summit in Patna. The free Wi-Fi zone stretched nearly 20 km between the National Institute of Technology (NIT) at the eastern end of the Ashok Rajpath and Danapur at the western end of the state capital, Patna.
- This new free Wi-Fi zone beats the current world's longest zone of 3.5 km in China.
- In a bid to make Patna crime-free, Mr. Kumar also inaugurated the 'city surveillance and dial 100' project, wherein 100s' of CCTV cameras would be installed all over the city for better safety and security.
- A state data centre has also been opened for storing of the 'data' collected by these cameras.
- This project will enable CCTVs to capture vehicle numbers and person's identity instantly, which would be shared all over the network to nab any criminal. Every vehicle entering or exiting the city would be monitored this way.
- Positive Outcome of Free Wi-Fi zone: Still, internet connectivity in India is poor and Wi-Fi hubs are rare. Also, free WiFi zones are next to negligible in the country. Such a step has put not just India on the global map but even made Bihar an example to follow for other states.

**39. "SOMAH Solution- to preserve donated organs"; developed by Indian origin doctor Dr. Hemant Thatte**

- An Indian origin doctor, Dr. Hemant Thatte developed a 21-chemical solution known as SOMAH Solution that could preserve a donated organ for up to a week before a transplant.
- Dr. Hemant Thatte is a senior cardiovascular surgeon at Harvard University.
- SOMAH Solution in Sanskrit means elixir of immortality. The new preservative that is a mixture of 21 chemicals, has the potential to store the heart (and other organs) for up to 7 days.
- A research paper published in the medical journal Circulation in October 2009 showed cells of organs preserved in SOMAH had a lower rate of death than in another preservation solution.
- The biggest advantage of SOMAH is that it can be used at room temperatures. Presently, hearts and lungs need to be transplanted within 4-6 hours of being recovered from a brain-dead donor, the liver within 8 hours and kidneys within a bit more than 24 hours. In addition, the available organs cannot be transported long-distance for transplant and have to be made available locally.

**40. Sochi 2014: Russia topped medal table as Winter Olympics came to an end**

- The 2014 Winter Olympics, officially known as the XXII Olympic Winter Games, held in Sochi, Russia. Host nation Russia finished on top of the medal table by winning 33 medals in the tournament.

**41. Whistleblowers Protection Bill 2014: Passed by Parliament to encourage those disclosing information on corrupt public servants**

- The Parliament of India approved the Whistleblowers Protection Bill 2014 to set up a mechanism to encourage persons for disclosure of information on corruption or willful misuse of power by public servants. The bill also seeks to provide punishment for false or frivolous complaints. Recently, the Rajya Sabha gave its nod to the bill without any amendment after keeping it pending for more than two years. The Lok Sabha had passed the bill in 2011.
- Objective of the Bill: To provide and protect mechanism, methodologies to encourage the person for reporting any such corruption activities or any misuse of power by a bureaucrats or government officer.

- Will provide an adequate protection to persons reporting corruption or wilful misuse of discretion which causes demonstrable loss to the government or commission of a criminal offence by a public servant.
- Sets the procedure to inquire into the disclosures and provides adequate safeguards against victimisation of the whistleblower. It will also seek to provide punishment for false or frivolous complaints.

**42. "Indira Paryavaran Bhawan" inaugurated by Dr. Manmohan Singh**

- Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh inaugurated Indira Paryavaran Bhawan in New Delhi, which will house the Ministry of Environment and Forests and has a provision to accommodate its 600 officials.
- Indira Paryavaran Bhawan is India's first on site Net Zero green building built by the adoption of Solar Passive design and energy efficient building material. The building is targeted to achieve LEED India Platinum Rating and GRIHA 5 star rating.
- It cost 209 crore, include the cost of land, solar photo voltaic power generation and its evacuation system, three level mechanized basement parking system, air-conditioning system supported by geo-thermal cooling, IT services, audio and video system in auditoriums and committee rooms, furniture, provision for horticulture and other services including reuse of water by recycling the waste water and also to make the building friendly to physically challenged.

**43. India and Canada inked 3 pacts to enhance business and cultural ties**

- India and Canada signed 3 pacts for cooperation in health sector, audio-visual co-production and skill development. Currently, the Governor General of Canada, Mr. David Johnston is on a 9 day visit to India.
- MoUs signed between India and Canada:
  - The Grand Challenges Canada and Department of Biotechnology will work together to address the global health challenges especially for women and child healthcare.
  - The secretary of information and broadcasting, Mr. Bimal Julka and Mr. Stewart Beck (High Commissioner of Canada to India) signed an agreement on the audio visual cooperation. This MoU will enable Indian and Canadian film producers to utilize a platform for collaboration on various facets of film making. The agreement is expected to deepen the engagement between the critical sectors of the film industries of both countries thereby, providing a new chapter of collaboration.
  - National Skill Development Corporation from India and Association of Canadian Community College from Canada will work in skill development segment and to cooperate and share the information and learning on this aspect.

**44. Indian-American Scientist Sangeeta Bhatia developed cheap paper diagnostic for cancer**

- The Indian-American scientist, Ms. Sangeeta Bhatia developed a simple, cheap, paper test that could improve cancer diagnosis rates and help people to get treated earlier. Ms. Bhatia is professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Howard Hughes Medical Institute.
- The diagnostic, which works much like a pregnancy test, could reveal within minutes, based on a urine sample, whether a person has cancer. The synthetic biomarker technology relies on nano-particles that interact with tumour proteins called proteases, each of which can trigger release of hundreds of biomarkers that are then easily detectable in a patient's urine.
- To amplify signals from tumor proteins (that would be hard to detect on their own) by injecting special nanoparticles into the body. These proteins are known as Matrix Metallo Proteinase (MMP) that help cancer cells to escape from their original locations by cutting through proteins of the extra cellular matrix, which normally holds cells in place.

- These nanoparticles, coated with peptides (short protein fragments), can interact with tumour proteins called proteases. In a patient's body, these particles congregate at tumour sites, where cancer proteases cleave the peptides, which then accumulate in the kidneys and are excreted in the patient's urine.
- These biomarkers are easily detectable using an approach known as a lateral flow assay, the same technology used in pregnancy tests. In tests in mice, the researchers were able to accurately identify colon tumours, as well as blood clots.
- As per the current version of the technology, patients would first receive an injection of the nanoparticles, and then urinate onto the paper test strip. To make the process more convenient, the researchers are now working on a nanoparticle formulation that could be implanted under the skin for longer-term monitoring.

**45. Union Ministry of Environment & Forest approved field trials for GM crops**

- Union Ministry of Environment & Forest approved field trials for Genetically Modified (GM) crops rice, wheat, cotton and maize on 26 February 2014. Ministry of Environment & Forest cleared Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee's (GEAC) decision to allow gene modification field trials for food crops.
- Field trials are pilot projects that are conducted to test efficacy of the seeds. Earlier, field trial of the crops was stalled by GEAC (country's apex bio-safety regulatory authority) till a verdict was given by Supreme Court of India on a Public Interest Litigation filed by activist Aruna Rodrigues opposing GM field trials.
- Technical Expert committee recommended an indefinite temporary prohibition on trials until certain shortcomings in the process were addressed by the government. Later the court asked the government to submit an affidavit on its position and the government is expected to submit it soon.
- In November 2013, the Maharashtra government became the first state to permit field trials of GM food crops. The companies like Bioscience, Mahyco, and BASF India would go ahead with trials for genetically modified crops.
- The Genetically modified (GM) crops that are derived from organisms whose genetic material (DNA) has been modified in a way that does not occur naturally. The genetic modification could be aimed at altering the nutrient content of food, reducing its allergenic potential or improving the efficiency of food production systems.

**46. Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs notified New CSR rules**

- Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs notified new Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rules for companies on 27 February 2014. The new CSR rules will become effective from 1 April 2014.
- The new rules give effect to Section 135 and Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013, which relate to CSR related spending by companies.
- The new rules mandates that Companies having huge profits would have to spend at least 2 % of profits on the CSR activities which in turn would be used for the benefits of the society.
- Companies having minimum of 500 crore rupees net worth or 5 crore rupees as net profit or 1000 crore rupees turnover are mandated to spend 2% on CSR activities. However, while undertaking net profit criteria, profits from overseas branches and dividends received from other companies in India will be excluded.
- Provisions
  - Companies falling under ambit are required to spend 2 % of their 3 year average annual net profit on CSR activities in each financial year, beginning from the next fiscal year 2014-15.

- Company has to declare its CSR policy. This policy should mention plans/ activities /programmes or projects. These works should not be a part of routine business activities.
- Companies can undertake CSR activities as per the approval of the company's board and decision of its CSR Committee in accordance with its CSR policy.
- Rules also define the manner in which CSR committee should formulate and monitor CSR policy, role of board of directors.
- A Company is permitted to collaborate with other companies in pursuing their CSR activities but they need to show their CSR reports separately.
- Companies are permitted to spend only 5% of the total CSR expenditure for manpower required for CSR activities in a single financial year. The manpower would include company's own personnel and those of the implementing agencies.
- Company can also carry out CSR activities with a Society or a registered trust.
- Surplus from CSR activities cannot become a part of the profit of the company.
- Any type of contributions to any political party will not be treated as CSR activities.
- Spending for the benefit of the company's own employees also cannot be a part of CSR activity.
- All CSR activities will have to be within India.
- The new rules will be applicable to the foreign companies registered in India.

#### **47. India and Saudi Arabia signed MoU on defence cooperation**

- India and Saudi Arabia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defence cooperation pact to take their strategic partnership further in areas of security on 26 February 2014.
- The pact was signed between India and Saudi during the visit of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to India (from 26 to 28 February 2014) to discuss bilateral, regional and other issues of mutual interest.
- The defence cooperation pact will allow exchange of defence-related information, military training and education as well as cooperation in areas varying from hydrography and security to logistics.
- A new era of Indo-Saudi ties started in 2006, when King Abduallah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud visited India, which was highest level political visit from Saudi Arabia to India. It is also called as Delhi Declaration.
- In 2010 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Riyadh and decided to elevate the bilateral engagement to strategic partnership covering security, economic, defence and political areas called as Riyadh Declaration.
- Saudi Arabia is India's fourth largest trade partner and also the largest crude oil supplier has recorded bilateral trade at 43 billion US dollar in 2012-13.

#### **48. Government constituted an expert committee to study demand for Bodoland state**

- Government of India (Union Home Ministry) on 27 February 2014 constituted one-man expert committee to study and examine the demand of a separate Bodoland state, which will be carved out from Assam. The one-man committee will be headed by former Union Home Secretary G K Pillai and will submit its report in nine months after consulting all sections of the society on the viability of a separate state.
- Government for the first time had formed such a committee to examine the demand of Bodoland in Assam. The demand for a separate Bodoland has intensified following the decision of the government to form a new Telangana State. At present major Bodo outfits have intensified their agitation with the demand of a separate state for the Bodo tribals. Bodo tribals mostly live in a few districts of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River in Assam.

- Earlier in 2003, the government constituted an autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) by signing an accord after years of violent agitation that claimed hundreds of lives. In 2012 the BTC area has witnessed ethnic clashes between the Bodo tribals and immigrant Muslims.

**49. Largest Solar Power Plant of India launched in Madhya Pradesh**

- The largest 130-MW Solar Power Plant of India Welspun Solar MP Project was launched at Bhagwanpur in Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh on 26 February 2014. It is also the Asia's Largest Solar Power Plant.
- The Welspun Solar MP project was constructed at a cost of 1100 crore rupees on 305 hectares of land. It will supply power at 8.05 rupees a kWh. This Project will raise Indian solar capacity by 7 percent.
- The Union Government launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM) in 2010. India currently has a grid-connected solar-power capacity of 2208 MW. The JNNSM aimed for India to reach an installed capacity of 20000 MW (or 20 gigawatts) of solar power by 2022.
- The production cost of solar power in India has fallen by more than half in recent years, from 17 rupees per kilowatt-hour (kWh) three years ago to 7.50 rupees per kWh now. But these costs are still high compared to coal (2.50 rupees per kWh), nuclear (3 rupees per kWh) or natural gas (5.5 rupees per kWh).

**50. Mission document on National Mission for sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem approved**

- Union Cabinet of India on 28 February 2014 approved the Mission document on the National Mission for sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE). This mission has been launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the budget for implementation of the mission will be 550 crore rupees during 12th Five Year Plan period.
- The Mission has been developed with its primary objective to develop a sustainable national capacity to continuously access the health status of the Himalayan Ecosystem and enable policy bodies in their policy-formulation functions. The mission will also assist states in the India n Himalayan Region with implementation of actions selected for sustainable development.
- The NMSHE will address a variety of important issues like
  - Himalayan glaciers and associated hydrological consequences
  - Prediction and management of natural hazards
  - Biodiversity conservation and protection
  - Wild life conservation and protection
  - Traditional knowledge societies and their livelihood
  - Capacity in regulation of science and critical peer evaluation to help governance issues related to sustenance of the Himalayan Ecosystem
  - Assist in restoration and rehabilitation process of Uttrakhand
- This mission would also assess the vulnerability of the Himalayan region to climate change scientifically in dimensions like physical, biological and socio-cultural aspects. This scientific assess would lead to formulation of appropriate policy measures and time bound action programme to sustain its ecological resilience and ensure the continued provisions of key ecosystem services.
- Other important aims of the Mission
  - To build and support capacities at central and state levels to assess climate change and formulation of response measures to challenges in the Himalayan region

- Safeguard the communities in the Himalayas from the impacts of climate change through evidence based policy formulation and enhanced research and capacity (major beneficiaries marginalized and vulnerable communities)
- The 12 Himalayan States of India in the Indian Himalayan region (IHR) has been covered under the Mission of which 10 are hill states and two are partial hill States.
- The Government of India's, Department of Science and Technology has been given the responsibility to coordinate the implementation of the Mission (NMSHE) and a Mission cell (NMSHE Cell) will be created at the Climate Change Programme Division of the Department of Science and Technology. This cell will be headed by a Mission Director.
- NAPCC was launched in June 2008 by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change to fulfill India's vision in context to climate change. In recent times, climate change has evolved as an important area of concern and has laid ahead a challenge for environmental and development planning.
- NAPCC comprises of eight national Missions and these are
  - National Solar Mission
  - National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency
  - National Mission on Sustainable Habitat
  - National Water Mission
  - National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Eco-system
  - National Mission for a Green India
  - National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture
  - National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change

**51. Bimal Jalan Committee on New Bank Licences submitted its report to RBI**

- Bimal Jalan Committee on New Bank Licenses submitted its report to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on 25 February 2014. The report contains names of entities eligible for bank licences.
- The committee was constituted by RBI under the chairmanship of Bimal Jalan in October 2013. RBI had constituted the committee to examine the criteria, business plans and corporate governance practices of applicants applying for new bank Licenses.
- Other members of the committee are former RBI Deputy Governor Usha Thorat, former Securities and Exchange Board of India Chairman C B Bhave and Nachiket M Mor, Director of the Central Board of Directors of the RBI.
- The central bank issued guidelines for licensing of new banks on 22 February 2013.
- There are around 25 players in the group to get bank license, among them primarily are Public sector units, India Post and IFCI and private sector Anil Ambani group and Aditya Birla group. Bajaj Finance, Muthoot Finance, Religare Enterprises and Shriram Capital have also applied.
- In the past 20 years, the RBI has licensed 12 banks in the private sector in two phases. Ten banks were licensed on the basis of guidelines issued in January 1993.
- Kotak Mahindra Bank and Yes Bank were the last two entities to get banking licenses from the RBI in 2003—04.
- India has 27 public sector banks, 22 private sector banks and 56 regional rural banks.

**52. Union Government inaugurated the National Centre for Good Governance**

- Union Government inaugurated the National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) on 24 February 2014. NCGG is an apex think tank of the country in guiding and implementing good Governance reforms.
- National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) has been set up by upgrading the National Institute of Administrative Research (NIAR), Mussoorie.

- The focus of the NCGG will be action oriented research in good Governance. The Centre will function as a national repository on information on best practices, initiatives and methodologies that promote good Governance, e-Governance initiatives, change management and capacity building within the Government.
- The NCGG would work towards resolution of key issues in Governance, analyse policy and programme implementation; develop action plans, support governance reforms and help in developing synergy across various sectors and Ministries or Departments.
- The expected outcome of the NCGG will be in the form of research papers, best practices on Governance reforms, policy analysis and options will provide the necessary direction, guidance and capacity building inputs on Governance and management issues to the Central and State Government organisations, Central Training Institutes and State Administrative Training Institutes.
- A Governing Body with Cabinet Secretary as the Chairman has been constituted for NCGG. The affairs of the Society shall be managed under the overall superintendence, direction and control of the Governing Body. NCGG will also have 12 members Management Committee and Secretary of Department of Personal and Training (DOPT) as the Chairperson.
- NCGG will have a 3 tier structure. The first tier will consist of the internal Faculty and Staff, the second of outside domestic experts and the third of international consultants.

### **53. UNSC adopted resolution to boost humanitarian aid access in Syria**

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted a resolution on 22 February 2014 to boost humanitarian aid access in Syria to ease some civilian suffering.
- In the 15-member UNSC, the resolution was co-authored by Australia and Luxembourg calling for an immediate end to all forms of violence in the country and strongly condemned the rise of Al Qaida-affiliated terror.
- **Highlights of Resolution**
  - The Resolution demanded that all parties (in particular the Syrian authorities) will promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders.
  - It strongly condemned the widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the Syrian authorities. And also urged all parties involved in the conflict to lift sieges of populated areas including in Aleppo, Damascus and Rural Damascus, and Homs.
  - It also stressed the importance of medical neutrality and demanded the demilitarization of medical facilities, schools and other civilian facilities.
  - The general secretary will submit a report to the members every 30 days from the adaption of resolution specifying progress made towards the resolution's implementation.
  - The resolution emphasized that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution and expressed support for the UN-sponsored direct talks between Government and opposition representatives.
- The Security Council is one of the six main organs established under the UN Charter, headquarters at New York, US. The United Nations gives primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security to the Security Council.
- The Security Council shall consist of fifteen Members of the United Nations. The Republic of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America shall be permanent members of the Security Council.

- The General Assembly will elect ten other members of the United Nations to be non-permanent members of the Security Council. The non-permanent members of the Security Council shall be elected for a term of two years.

**54. Indian origin boy Shubham Banerjee developed low cost Braille Printer**

- A 12 year old boy of Indian Origin Shubham Banerjee developed a low cost Braille Printer on 23 February 2014. By using a 350 dollar LEGO MINDSTORMS EV3 set, he had developed a Braille Printer to help blinds.
- The invention was named as Braigo, a mash-up of Braille and LEGO. Users can type in letters, and the Braigo's needle will hammer out the translated message in raised dots on paper.
- LEGO Mindstorms EV3 is a remarkably powerful and functional robotics kit people of any age can use to build some impressive and complicated projects.
- Braille printers receive data from computer devices and emboss that information in Braille onto paper through the use of solenoids that control embossing pins. Braille printers typically print on heavyweight paper and use up more pages for the same amount of information than pages printed on a regular printer.
- They are also slower and noisier. Inter-point printers are Braille printers that emboss Braille on both sides of a page. The price of a Braille printer is directly related to the volume of Braille it produces.

**55. India and Canada signed three MoUs**

- India and Canada on 24 February 2014 signed three MoUs for cooperation in health sector, audio-visual co-production and skill development. At present David Johnston, the Governor General of Canada is on a nine day visit (22 February 2014 to 2 March 2014) to India and this visit is the first by a Canadian Governor General since 1998.
- These MoUs were signed after talks between Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India and David Johnston in New Delhi.
- Features of the three MoUs
  - The MoU between the Department of Biotechnology and Grand Challenges Canada would address the global health challenges especially women and child healthcare
  - The audio-visual cooperation MoU is aimed at co-production in the field of film and Television. This MoU will enable Indian and Canadian film producers to utilize a platform for collaboration on various facets of film making. The agreement is expected to deepen the engagement between the critical sectors of the film industries of both countries there by, providing a new chapter of collaboration. This agreement was signed by the Secretary Information and Broadcasting, Bimal Julka and Stewart Beck, High Commissioner of Canada to India.
  - Under the MoU on skill development, the two organisations namely National Skill Development Corporation and Association of Canadian Community College for Skill Development will facilitate exchange and learning

**56. Oleksandr Turchynov appointed as interim President of Ukraine**

- Oleksandr Turchynov, the Speaker of Ukraine was named as the interim President of the country on 23 February 2014. Earlier, the Parliament on 22 February 2014 impeached (dismissed) the President Viktor Yanukovych and he was toppled after he rejected an EU-Ukraine trade pact.
- This rejection of the trade-pact with EU triggered protests against him and Independence Square acted as the epicenter of the 3-months-long anti-government protests. During the protests about 80 lives were lost in the clashes between the police and the protesters since 18 February 2014.

- This appointment of Turchynov as the interim President has also paved a way to form a new unity government as the Parliament took a decision to form an-inter-party commission, which will try to form a new national unity government. The interim President said that now Ukraine will re-open talks with the European Union about closer links.

**57. Union Cabinet approved Coal Regulatory Authority**

- The Union Cabinet approved the setting up of Coal Regulatory Authority (CRA) on 20 February 2014. The proposal for setting up CRA was made by the Union Coal Ministry.
- The regulator is a non-statutory entity. Its orders will be advisory and not mandatory in nature. It will be empowered to specify the principles and methodology to determine the price of raw and washed coal and any other by-product generated during washing.
- The regulator will not have the power to decide the price in the domestic market, and Coal India will continue to enjoy its freedom to set the rates. The regulator will also have no say in the allocation of coal acreages.
- It will not have the power and functions that are vested with the Coal Controller under the present law. Powers, such as the settlement of disputes over quality, will be transferred to the regulator once the bill is passed.
- However, it will regulate testing methods to declare grades or quality, specify the procedure for automatic sampling and adjudicate upon disputes. It will also monitor the closure of mines and the approval of mining plans.
- The regulatory authority will go a long way in cleaning up the muck that has accumulated in this sector. This will make the sector competitive and increase private participation.

**58. Union Cabinet approved the setting up Equal Opportunities Commission**

- Union Cabinet approved the setting up of an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on 20 February 2014. The proposal for EOC was made by the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs on the recommendations of the Justice Sachar Committee on Social, Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Community in India.
- The Equal Opportunities Commission will address the grievances of people from the minority communities when minorities are discriminated against by government agencies. Its role is advisory in nature and will have no jurisdiction over private agencies.
- EOC is a three-member body and will be headed by a retired judge of the High Court. It will not have any powers to impose penalties.
- Sanchar Committee
  - Justice Sachar Committee on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India was formed in March 2005.
  - The Committee in its report submitted in 2006 noted that though Muslims constituted 18.5 percent of the population and their representation in bureaucracy was just about 2.5 percent.
  - The Sachar Committee held that mechanisms like the National Commission for Minorities and the National Human Rights Commission cannot look into day-to-day complaints against non-state agencies. So Sachar Committee recommended for an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC).
  - Sachar Committee recommended EOC for all people.

**59. CCEA approved National Mission for Green India**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a National Mission for a Green India on 20 February 2014. The Green India Mission (GIM) aims to improve and increase India's diminishing forest cover.
- The GIM scheme envisages a total cost of 46000 crore rupees over the next 10 years. The GIM is one of eight missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

- The mission has following objectives:
  - To increase forest cover on 5 million hectares (ha) of forest/non-forest land.
  - To improve the quality of forest cover on another 5 million hectare.
  - To enhance annual CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration.
  - To improve the livelihoods of about 3 million households living in and around forest areas.
  - To respond to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures.
  - To improve entire ecosystem and increase forest-based livelihood income for 30 lakh forest dependent households.
- The GIM will be converged with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), and National Afforestation Programme.
- Funding for the GIM will come from the Plan outlay. The Union government will provide 90 percent of the funds for implementing the scheme in the north-eastern states, and 75 percent of the funds for other states. State governments will meet the balance requirement.
- The mission will involve grassroots-level organizations including gram sabhas (village councils) and joint forest management committees (JFMCs). A governing council chaired by the environment minister and a national executive council chaired by the environment secretary at the national level will facilitate implementation of the mission.

**60. India and Netherlands signed MoU on Renewable energy**

- India and Netherlands signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for intensifying cooperation on renewable energy on 11 February 2014. The MoU was signed between the Dutch Ambassador Alphonsus Stoelinga and the Secretary of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Dr. Satish Balram Agnihotri.
- The MoU will encourage cooperation not only at the official and governmental levels but also between leading Indian and Dutch private companies and research institutions.
- Under MoU an Indo Dutch Joint Working Group will be setup and the exchange of technical and institutional knowledge on clean energy will be facilitated.
- India plans to add over 30 GW of renewable energy to its energy mix in the next 5 years. India and Netherlands had great potential for enhancing cooperation in promoting renewable energy and offered to provide all possible assistance for the purpose.

**61. Union Government made it mandatory to install GPS devices in public transport**

- The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways made it mandatory for public transport vehicles running in major cities to install GPS. The announcement was made on 9 February 2014.
- As per the directions of Union Ministry, All the owners of public transport are required to install Global Positioning System (GPS) by 20 February 2014.
- The project is a part of Nirbhaya Fund. The project involves setting up of closed circuit television (CCTV) and using global positioning system (GPS) to ensure safety and security of women and girls in distress. In the first phase, the vehicles running in cities which had a population of more than 10 Lakh should install GPS facility.
- The road ministry had earlier asked passenger vehicle owners to install these devices by September 30, 2013.

**62. N Ramachandran elected President of IOA**

- N Ramachandran was elected President of Indian Olympic Association (IOA) on 9 February 2014.
- Presently, he is the chief of World Squash Federation. He was elected unopposed for the presidential post. He will remain in the office till 2016.

- Kho-Kho Federation of India President Rajeev Mehta were also elected unopposed as Secretary General.
- All India Tennis Association (AITA) chief Anil Khanna were also elected unopposed as Treasurer.
- The poll was conducted by a three-member election commission of the IOA. It was preceded by a Special GBM which made an amendment in the constitution under the diktat of International Olympic Committee (IOC).
- Under the new constitution, any member against whom charges have been framed by a court of law for an offence that carries imprisonment of more than two years will not be allowed to contest elections and the case will be referred to the IOA Ethics Commission.
- Indian Boxing Federation, Taekwondo Federation of India and Fencing Association of India were barred by the IOC from casting votes on the ground that these three was suspended by their international federations.
- Earlier, Abhay Singh Chautala, was the president of IOA.

**63. Death sentence of 3 convicts in Rajiv Gandhi assassination case commuted to life imprisonment**

- The Supreme Court of India on 18 February 2014 commuted the death sentence of three convicts in Rajiv Gandhi assassination case to life imprisonment. The decision was made by the apex court following the delay of 11 years in deciding their mercy plea by the central government.
- The decision was made by the three-judge bench of Supreme Court that was headed by the Chief Justice of India, P Sathasivam and included Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice SK Singh. The court rejected the submission of the central government that said that there was no unreasonable delay in deciding their mercy plea and it also condemned prisoners by saying that they did not went through an agonizing experience as they were enjoying their life behind the bars. The Court in its decision held that the prolonged execution of capital sentence was a dehumanizing effect on the prisoners as they have been waiting for execution of the sentence because their mercy pleas were not confirmed or replied in any other form.
- The bench of the Court in its decision said that it was unable to accept the view of the centre and that's why it has commuted the death sentence of convicts namely Santhan, Murugan and Perarivalan to imprisonment for life subject to remission by the government.
- The Court in its decision also suggested the government to handle the cases of mercy petitions in a more systematized manner as the mercy pleas can be decided at mush faster speed than it is being done at present. It also asked the Centre to give timely advice to the President so that mercy petitions can be decided without unreasonable delay.
- Rajiv Gandhi was killed on 21 May 1991 and his assassins were convicted by a TADA Court in January 1998. He died in the suicide bombing in Sriperumbudur near Chennai in Tamil Nadu. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist organization from Sri Lanka was blamed for the attack. The death of Rajiv Gandhi came a few days after India ended its involvement in Sri Lanka through an Indian Peace Keeping Force in the Sri Lankan Civil War.
- In the judgment, the TADA Court pronounced a death sentence and the same was confirmed by the Supreme Court on 11 May 1999.

**64. Researchers at IIT Kharagpur developed ready-to-eat food paste for malnourished children**

- Researchers at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur developed ready-to-eat food paste for malnourished children on 16 February 2014.

- A four-member team led by Professor Dr H N Mishra of IIT Kharagpur prepared the formulation in their food chemistry and technology lab. This formulation could be used as part of medical nutrition therapy for management of severe acute malnutrition children.
- The researchers prepared five food formulations based on peanut, potato and Bengal gram (chana) to suit different tastes and nutrient needs of malnourished children. It is also easily digestible. It has all the vitamins, minerals, nutrients and protein which a malnourished child needs.
- Since the product targeted the underprivileged section of the society, the cost of production was low and could be sold by the industry profitably at 50 – 60 Rupees a kilogram.
- **Malnourishment in India**
  - According to UNICEF estimates, one in every three malnourished children in the world lives in India.
  - Malnutrition in early childhood has serious, long-term consequences because it puts them at greater risk of disease and early death.
  - The World Health Organisation has issued guidelines stating that ready-to-use therapeutic foods could be used to manage severe acute malnutrition in community settings.
  - With an estimated 8.1 million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition in the country, it was regarded as an important cause of morbidity and mortality in children below five years of age in India.

#### **65. Srinivasan elected as the new Chairman of ICC from July 2014 onwards**

- Narayanswamy Srinivasan, the President of BCCI on 8 February 2014 was elected as the new Chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC). His tenure of the office will begin in July 2014 for a period of 2 years. This decision was taken by the ICC Board during their meet in Singapore. He will succeed Alan Raymond Isaac.
- Apart from the approval on his name, the new model of Governance, finance and competition was also approved by the voice-vote. The new proposal was voted by eight member countries of ten member nations. Sri Lanka and Pakistan abstained from voting saying that more time was needed by them to consult with their boards on the amended resolution.
- With this appointment, the ICCs Board will be headed by Srinivasan. ICC Board is the apex decision making body of the world cricket. Srinivasan will be assisted by a new Executive Committee that will be chaired by Wally Edwards from Australia. The Finance and Commercial Affairs Committee chaired by Giles Clarke from the English cricket Board.
- The newly elected team will oversee the affairs of the international cricket during its two year transition period till 2016. Later on, the full members of the ICC will elect a new Chairman while BCCI, CA and ECB - will be represented on both sub-committees, along with two representatives of the other Full Members who will be elected by the Board.
- The newly voted structure of ICC will bring changes to the twisted revenue-distribution model, which says that the sharing of ICC revenue will be determined by the contributions made by each full member from now onwards. Now the new executive committee will have five members of which India, England and Australia will have permanent seats. This committee will recommend to the ICC board, the decision-making body. The full members of ICC will get a larger share of revenues, which will be based upon their contribution towards the game, particularly in terms of finance, ICCs history and their on-field performances in the three formats of the games.
- The World Test Championship will be replaced with an ICC Champions Trophy in 2017 and 2021. A Test Cricket Fund will be set up to promote test cricket. The fund will be

available to all Test playing nations except India, England and Australia. All full members will enter into contractually binding bilateral agreements to ensure that Future Tours Program schedule is maintained till 2023.

- The newly issued guidelines also says that the winner of the next ICC Intercontinental Cup will be entitled to take part in play-off against the bottom-ranked Member and, if successful can obtain Test status. The Associate and Affiliate members stakes would also be protected.

**66. CCEA approved implementation of National Mission Agricultural Extension and Technology**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved on 4 February 2014 the implementation of the National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology (NMAET) during the 12th Plan period.
- The extension of NMAET and its components will be expanded and up-scaled appropriately and implemented in a more coordinated and convergent manner.
- NMAET consists of 4 Sub Missions
  - Sub Mission on Agricultural Extension (SMAE)
  - Sub-Mission on Seed and Planting Material (SMSP)
  - Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)
  - Sub Mission on Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine (SMPP)
- The NMAET has been envisaged as the next step towards this objective through the amalgamation of these schemes.
- The Mission Document has been prepared in keeping with the recommendations of the Working Group of the Planning Commission and suggestions and inputs received from extensive consultation with stakeholders, particularly farmers.
- The common threads running across all 4 Sub-Missions in NMAET are Extension and Technology. Therefore, while 4 separate Sub-Missions are being proposed for administrative convenience, these are inextricably linked to each other at the field level and most components thereof have to be disseminated among farmers and other stakeholders through a strong extension network.
- The aim of the Mission is to restructure and strengthen agricultural extension to enable delivery of appropriate technology and improved agronomic practices to farmers. This is envisaged to be achieved by a judicious mix of extensive physical outreach and interactive methods of information dissemination, use of ICT, popularisation of modern and appropriate technologies, capacity building and institution strengthening to promote mechanisation, availability of quality seeds, plant protection etc. and encourage aggregation of Farmers into Interest Groups (FIGs) to form Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs).

**67. High Level Committee on Status of Women released preliminary report**

- The High Level Committee released the Preliminary Report on Status of Women in India on 3 February 2014. The Committee headed by Pam Rajput was appointed by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in February 2012 to understand the status of women since 1989.
- Report revealed that Violence against Women, Declining Sex Ratio and Economic Disempowerment of Women are three key burning issues which will require immediate attention and action by the government.
- Recommendations for the immediate action by the government are as follows
  - Legislation for 50 percent reservation for women in all decision-making bodies should be enacted
  - The constitutional promise of a right-based approach needs to be promoted for positive outcomes to enhance the status of women

- There is an urgent need to formulate National Policy and Action Plan for ending violence against women impacting the life cycle of female population at every stage of her life
- Institutional mechanisms should be strengthened and well resourced. The Minister for Women and Child Development should be of cabinet rank, thus reflecting the Government's concern with women issues
- Currently large amount of resources continue to be directed towards child development under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Increased resources would enable prioritization of gender concerns as well
- The MWCD should engage with, participate in and draw from international debates. It is also not out of place to point out that the Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee should be revisited and acted upon by Government of India as part of our international commitments to uphold women's rights
- The parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women must examine the gender implications of all proposed legislations. There is also a need for the Committee to meet more often, and its meetings should be open to civil society groups as observers
- The role of the National Commission for Women must go beyond reactive interventions to fulfill the proactive mandate of studying, recommending and influencing policies, laws, programmes and budgets to ensure full benefits to the stakeholders.
- The National Commission for Women is as an apex body is responsible for and answerable to 50 percent of the Indian population. The selection and composition of the members must be made through an institutionalized and transparent process. A selection committee comprising of experts must be given the task of searching, identifying and selecting the members who must be professionals of proven expertise. Appointments must be made keeping professional capability in mind and not political affiliations.
- Gender Responsive Budgeting coupled with gender audits should be taken more seriously to reflect purposive gender planning
- The development paradigm must have a major thrust on decentralization which would result in larger numbers of women participating in the developmental process
- Assessment of the status of women in India should be a regular feature. There should be a regular mechanism for continuous examination and assessment of status of women and reporting back publically to the nation and women of India on a bi-annual basis

#### **68. Mother and Child Tracking Facilitation Centre Inaugurated**

- Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare inaugurated the Mother and Child Tracking Facilitation Centre at the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare in New Delhi on 31 January 2014. Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) initiative was launched under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in December 2009.
- Characteristic Features of MCTS
  - MCTS is a name based web based service that captures the details of pregnant women and children up to 5 years and tracks delivery of due services to them
  - MCTS aims to ensure that every pregnant woman gets complete and quality ante and post natal care and every child receives a full range of immunisation services
  - Besides monitoring delivery of mother and child health (MCH) services, MCTS system makes use of opportunity to directly communicate with the ANMs, ASHAs and pregnant women and parents of young children on their mobiles
  - It will also gather the data from the states on the health schemes and facilities reaching the beneficiaries and to evaluate them

- It will also generate awareness about their entitlements under various government programs and schemes
- The Facilitation Centre has 80 Helpdesk Agents (HAs) and will be operational from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The feature of free inbound calls will be added in the Facilitation Centre to seek guidance on health care related queries to both beneficiaries and health workers
- This facility will also be used for
  - Sending appropriate health promotion messages in voice and text to beneficiaries that are relevant according to the month of pregnancy or age of the child
  - Transfer of Janani Suraksha Yojana benefits to pregnant women
  - Transfer of ASHA payment directly into their account which will ensure that ASHAs receive full range of incentives payment timely and regularly
  - Training of ASHAs through an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System as per need and requirement

**69. Nepal and India amended bilateral transit treaty**

- India and Nepal amended a bilateral transit treaty on 2 February 2014. The amendment to the export procedure in the Memorandum to the Protocol to the Treaty of Transit of 1999 will facilitate the transit of goods of third country origin exported from Nepal.
- This amendment in the provisions of the Treaty of Transit brought into effect a significant decision which was reached between the two sides during the Nepal-India Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) meeting on Trade, Transit and Cooperation to Control Unauthorised Trade held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 21 – 22 December 2013
- The amendments in the transit treaty will
  - Facilitate the re-export of goods imported to Nepal for fairs and exhibitions.
  - Facilitate re-export of third country origin capital goods from Nepal for repair and return as well as re-export of rejected goods from Nepal.
  - Facilitate Nepalese businesses as it will lead to re-export of goods imported from third countries after value addition, for which a legal provision was made in Finance Act of 2009.
  - Allow the movement of diplomatic cargo exported from Nepal and transiting through India.
- During the IGC held in Kathmandu, Nepal in December 2013, the two sides also discussed other important trade facilitation measures. These were allowing the movement of imported vehicles on their own power from Kolkata to Nepal and facilitating the import of bulk cargo to Nepal by operationalising the multi-modal transport link from Kolkata port through Jogbani – Biratnagar and Sunauli – Bhairahawa land routes.
- Nepal and India have a history of age-old relations in trade and commerce. India is the largest trade partner of Nepal and source of foreign investment.
- Total bilateral trade has reached US 3.21 billion dollar during Nepalese fiscal year 2009-10. During that year, Nepal's imports from India amounted US 2.71 billion dollar and exports to India remained about US 0.50 billion dollar.

**1. Dr. Madan Babu won the Protein Science Young Investigator Award for 2014**

- An Indian-born scientist, Dr. M Madan Babu won the Protein Science Young Investigator Award for 2014 at Cambridge, UK. He got the award for his effort in the field of biological system and to understand intrinsically disordered proteins and gene regulation clearly. MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge UK.
- He became the first scientist from MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology to win this award. At present, Dr. Babu heads the group on Regulatory Genomics and Systems Biology at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge, UK.
- Protein Science Young Investigator Award recognizes an important contribution to the study of proteins by a scientist still in the early stages of an independent career. It is given by the Protein Society. The Society represents a global community of researchers dedicated to the understanding of proteins.

**2. Zero AIDS Discrimination Day launched on March 1**

- For the first time, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) launched its Zero Discrimination Day on March 1 in Beijing, China, to support those who are infected by HIV/AIDS.
- Its motto is to call the people everywhere to promote equal rights for AIDS victims and celebrate everyone's right to live a full life with dignity no matter what they look like, where they come from or whom they love.
- Its Transformative Symbol is Butterfly. It envisioned zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.
- It offers an unprecedented opportunity for raising awareness; for speaking up to support people who have been discriminated against; for promoting diversity; and for becoming champions of tolerance, compassion and peace.
- Discrimination against HIV/AIDS victims is a serious barrier preventing the provision of equal services. Discrimination is not only a violation of human rights, it is illegal, immoral, hurtful and dehumanizing. Discrimination can happen anywhere: at work, at school, at home, at the health facility and in the community. Discrimination doesn't just hurt individuals or groups of people, it hurts everyone.

**3. Chennai's Ennore Port officially renamed as Kamarajar Port**

- The Ennore Port Limited of Chennai officially renamed as Kamarajar Port Ltd. after the veteran Congress leader and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Mr. Kumarasami Kamarajar. Mr. Kamarajar was known for his pioneering efforts including introducing the free noon-meal scheme for children in schools besides heralding the state's industrialization.

**4. Freedom fighter "Maulana Hasrat Mohani's postage stamp released by Vice President of India**

- The Vice President of India, Mr. M. Hamid Ansari released the commemorative postage stamp of Freedom fighter "Maulana Hasrat Mohani" in New Delhi.
- Freedom fighter Maulana Hasrat Mohani was born on January 1, 1875 in Mohan, United Province, British India. He died on May 13, 1951 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.
- He was an eminent poet who used to Ghazal poetry – a purely genre of love poetry – for political subjects and gave it a new turn. He was a great freedom fighter and never accepted British rule over India.
- In 1908, he was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment by British government for publishing an article in Urdu-e-Mu-alla against British policies in Egypt. He was released in 1910 and re-started Urdu-e-Mu-alla.

- Second person in Indian History who demanded 'Complete Independence' (Azadi-e-Kaamil) in 1921 as he presided over an annual session of All India Muslim League. (First person was Swatantryaveer Savarkar, who demanded 'Complete Independence' in 1900).
- In 1919, Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar and his brother Maulana Shaukat Ali along with some other Muslim leaders viz. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari, Raees-ul-Muhajireen Barrister Jan Muhammad Junejo, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Dr. Hakim Ajmal Khan formed an All India Khilafat Committee at Lucknow.

## 5. Indian-origin men win Heinz Awards in US

- Indian-origin men, Professor Abraham Verghese and Mr. Sanjeev Arora are among the five recipients who won the 19th Heinz awards 2013 and will be honored in Pittsburgh on April 3, 2014. Each winner will receive a cash award of \$250,000 each as well as a medallion inscribed with an of late US senator John Heinz.
- 19th Heinz Awards – 2013: Category and its' recipients
  - Arts and humanities – Professor Abraham Verghese, a doctor and author based at Stanford University Medical School, USA was given the award in recognition of his best-selling authorship. In his first book, 'My Own Country', he wrote extensively about AIDS in rural areas of Tennessee. He belongs to Kerala.
  - Public policy – Dr. Sanjeev Arora, professor of medicine at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, was recognized for revolutionizing community healthcare using video conferencing technology. He belongs to Kota, Rajasthan.
  - Environment – Professor Jonathan Foley, director of the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota where he has conducted research on the global environment and how to improve the efficiency of food production.
  - Human condition – Mr. Salman Khan, founder of online Khan Academy in Mountain View, Calif., an educational nonprofit that offers free tutorials and exercises to students around the world.
  - Technology, the economy and employment – Leila Janah (an entrepreneur based in San Francisco, USA) was honored for founding the nonprofits Samasource and SamaUSA that uses an Internet to train and employ people in impoverished communities around the world.
- Heinz Awards was established in 1993 by Ms. Teresa Heinz, the chairwoman of the Heinz Family Foundation in honor of her late husband, Senator H. John Heinz III, the Pennsylvania Republican.
- It is headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (separate from the international food company) and annually awarded by the Heinz Family Foundation. The Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of greatest importance to Senator John Heinz, who died in a midair aircraft collision in 1991.
- Awards recognize outstanding individuals for their contributions in five areas: Arts and Humanities, Environment, Human Condition, Public Policy, and Technology, the Economy and Employment.

## 6. "Braigo"- a low-cost Braille printer invented by Indian-origin boy Shubham Banerjee

- The Indian-origin, Master Shubham Banerjee (12) invented Braigo, a low-cost Braille printer by using toy construction Lego pieces in USA. It will cost \$350.
- It is to be designed from the Lego Mindstorms EV3 set. Shubham Banerjee modified a robot model to make a functional printer at a fraction of the cost of other machines in the market. (Basic model Braille printers retail for about \$2,000 online). It is programmed to produce the letters A to Z in Braille. It takes about seven seconds to print each letter.

- Braille printers, also known as embossers, are used to make copies of electronic documents on paper in a format that is readable by blind people. It receives data from computer devices and embosses that information in Braille onto paper through the use of solenoids that control embossing pins. Typically print on heavyweight paper and use up more pages for the same amount of information than pages printed on a regular printer.

## **7. Reorganisation Committee constituted in Andhra to ensure smooth bifurcation of the state**

- PK Mohanty, the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh on 28 February 2014 constituted a Reorganisation Committee at the state secretariat in Hyderabad. The state administration has constituted six major and 15 sub-committees to ensure smooth bifurcation of the state.
- The committee comprises three senior IAS officers namely K Ramakrishna Rao, B Venkatesam and Jayesh Ranjan. The Reorganisation committee will coordinate the work among 15 sub-committees who are required to submit their reports in three copies to archives, section and to the concerned secretary.
- The sent information of the 15 sub-committees would reach to the AP Reorganisation Cells three officers and then to Apex Committee. Further the report will be sent to the chief secretary by apex committee that will include eight members. The chief secretary will send the report to the advisors of the governor to start the division process.
- Apart from the formation of Reorganisation Committee, the Union Cabinet on 28 February 2014 decided to impose President's Rule in the State. The decision came as the state is without a Chief Minister, since Nallari Kiran Kumar Reddy resigned from the post and Congress party to protest against the passage of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill, 2013.

## **8. President's rule imposed in Andhra Pradesh**

- President Mr. Pranab Mukherjee approved the Telengana Bill and on the recommendation of the Union Cabinet imposed President's Rule in Andhra Pradesh.
- The President Rule was imposed due to the resignation of Mr. N. Kiran Kumar Reddy from the CM post of Andhra (to protest against the passage of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill to create a separate State of Telangana), the President's rule imposed in Andhra Pradesh, as the State was without a Chief Minister and no party came forward to form the government.
- President Mr. Pranab Mukherjee gave his nod to place under suspended animation the Andhra Pradesh assembly whose term is slated to end on June 2, 2014. After President's assent to the Telangana bill, appointed day yet to be published in the Gazette of India.
- **Excerpts of the Telangana Bill:**
  - Telangana will have 10 districts and the rest of Andhra Pradesh 13 districts.
  - Hyderabad will remain the joint capital of Telangana and residuary Andhra Pradesh for ten years.
  - The Bhadrachalam division will continue to be with Khammam district which will be part of Telangana.
  - NTPC will construct a 4,000 MW power project in Telangana to solve the electricity problem in the region.
  - A petroleum university will be constructed in Seemandhra region while seats for Semmandhra students in educational institutes in Telangana will be reserved for ten years.
  - Article 371 D will continue for the both states to ensure equitable opportunities for education and public employment.
  - Telangana comprises 10 districts: Hyderabad, Adilabad, Khammam, Karimnagar, Mahbubnagar, Medak, Nalgonda, Nizamabad, Rangareddy and Warangal.
- Till now, India consists of 28 states and 7 union territories. Soon, Telangana will become the 29th state of India, as it got approval from President of India.

**9. K.T. Thomas refused to head Lokpal Committee Search Panel**

- Retired Supreme Court judge K.T. Thomas refused to head the Lokpal Committee Search panel on 3 March 2014. He was unanimously chosen to head the Search Panel by the Lokpal Selection Committee on 21 February 2014.
- Thomas refused on the ground that Lokpal Search panel will not be able to conduct an independent eminent Lawyer Fali Nariman had also refused to become the part of the Lokpal Search Panel.
- Lokpal Search panel was constituted by the Lokpal Selection Committee chaired by Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh. The Search panel was constituted in accordance with the provisions of the Lokpal & Lokayuktas Act, 2013.
- The Search panel was mandated to scrutinize and recommend names to the Selection Committee for the post of Lokpal Chairperson and 8 other members. The Search Committee as constituted comprised of 8 members. The members of the Search panel were Justice K T Thomas, Fali Nariman (senior advocate) S.Y. Qureshi (former Chief Election Commissioner), Meenakshi Gopinath (Principal, LSR College), Mrinal Miri (Educationist), Kaki Madhava Rao (ex-AP Chief Secretary), H.K. Dua (Rajya Sabha MP), are the members of the Lokpal Search Panel.
- **Selection Procedure of the Lokpal:** Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 lays down a two-layered Lokpal selection process.
  - Firstly, Lokpal Selection Committee must set up a Search Committee to shortlist possible candidates for the 9-member Lokpal body including Chairperson. The Selection Committee will comprise of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Lok Sabha Speaker, Chief Justice of India or any other Supreme Court judge he may appoint and an eminent jurist nominated by the President or any member.
  - Currently the Selection Committee comprises of the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj, Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar, Supreme Court Justice H L Dattu (representative of the Chief Justice of India), and jurist P P Rao (the fifth member).
  - Secondly, Search Committee will finalise and recommend the names to the Selection Committee. The Selection Committee may or may not consider the names for the Lokpal.
  - Lastly, the Lokpal Selection Committee will forward the shortlisted names for the constitution of Lokpal body to the President of India. Upon receiving the names, President of India will appoint the Chairperson and other members of the Lokpal.

**10. India and Israel inked pacts on bilateral security relations**

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (Government of India) and Israel signed three pacts to strengthen the efforts in the war against terror and beef up bilateral security relations.
- The pacts are Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters, Agreement on Protection of Classified Material and Agreement on Cooperation in Homeland and Public Security.
- The agreements are based on the shared determination to protect their citizens, their assets and their interests.

**11. India – Saudi Arabia signed defense cooperation deal**

- India and Saudi Arabia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defense cooperation for greater exchange of information and training in New Delhi. The agreement was signed by Saudi Arabia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Nizar Bin Obaid Madani and India's Minister of State for Defence Jitendra Singh.
- The two sides also agreed to strengthen cooperation in the area of radio and television, as also in fields of media coverage and training, besides agreeing to activate the agreement signed between Saudi Press Agency (SPA) and the Press Trust of India (PTI).

- The pacts were signed in the presence of Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mr. Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who was on a three-day visit to India. (Mr. Al Saud is also Saudi Arabia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister).
- Saudi Arabia is India's fourth largest partner with bilateral trade of over \$43 billion in 2012-13. Saudi Arabia is also India's largest crude oil supplier accounting for about 20% of total imports in 2012-13.
- Saudi Arabia is the 6th largest market in the world for Indian exports and is destination of more than 4.08 percent of India's global exports.

#### **12. Mr. Ibrahim Mahlab: New Prime Minister of Egypt**

- Mr. Ibrahim Mahlab sworn-in as new Prime Minister of Egypt. He is a former member of Hosni Mubarak's political party. Mr. Mahlab replaced Mr. Hazem el-Beblawi, who was interim Prime Minister of Egypt since 2013. Previously, he was the housing minister in the previous administration. Mr. Mahlab would head Egypt's sixth government since the 2011 uprising that toppled the autocratic President Hosni Mubarak. He is expected to lead an interim government at least until the election of a new president.

#### **13. India's Largest Solar Power Plant launched in Madhya Pradesh**

- Welspun Solar MP project, the largest Solar Power Plant of India launched at Bhagwanpur in Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh.
- It is a 151-megawatt photovoltaic plant. It is the world's 2nd largest & Asia's Largest solar project (Single Plant). It is being set up at a cost of Rs. 1100 crore on 305 hectares of land. This Project will raise Indian solar capacity by 7%.

#### **14. NASA announces discovery of 715 new planets**

- The NASA's Kepler mission announced the discovery of 715 new planets. These newly-verified planets orbit 305 stars, revealed multiple-planet systems much like our own solar system. This discovery marks a significant increase in the number of known small-sized planets more akin to Earth than previously identified exoplanets, which are planets outside our solar system.
- The technique used by scientists was the verification by multiplicity that relies in part on the logic of probability. It used the planet-hunting Kepler telescope. It observed 150,000 stars and has found a few thousand of those to have planet candidates.
- Nearly 95% of these planets are smaller than Neptune that is almost four times the size of Earth. Four of the new planets are less than 2.5 times the radius of Earth, and they orbit their host suns in the "habitable zone" – the region around a star where water can keep a liquid state. In other words, it is defined as the range of distance from a star where the surface temperature of an orbiting planet may be suitable for life-giving liquid water.
- One of these new habitable zone planets known as Kepler-296f - orbits a star half the size and 5% as bright as our sun. Kepler-296f is twice the size of Earth, but scientists do not know whether the planet is a gaseous world, with a thick hydrogen-helium envelope, or it is a water world surrounded by a deep ocean.
- This latest discovery brings the confirmed count of planets outside our solar system to nearly 1700.
- **Kepler space telescope mission**
  - Launched in 2009, with the sole purpose of finding new stars and planets. In other words, the Kepler space telescope sought to find Earth-like worlds orbiting distant stars in the Constellation Lyra.
  - Orbits around the Sun, 40 million miles from Earth.
  - Named after 17th Century astronomer Mr. Johannes Kepler.

- Outcome of the discovery: The study indicates that the planets in these multi-systems are small and their orbits are flat and circular, resembles pancakes, not our classical view of an atom.

**15. New Corporate Social Responsibility rules for companies notified by Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs**

- The Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs notified new Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rules for companies. They will apply to companies with at least Rs 5 crore net profit, or Rs.1,000 crore turnover or Rs.500 crore net worth. As part of the new Companies Act, these new CSR rules would come into effect from April 1, 2014.
- Its objective is to expand the scope to include more activities but at the same time clarifying that contribution to state government funds and funding of political parties will not be considered CSR activities.
- The actions that are considered as CSR activities:
  - Livelihood enhancement and rural development projects, promoting preventive health care and sanitation as well as making safe drinking water available, working towards protection of national heritage, art and culture including restoration of buildings and sites of historical importance and works of art, setting up public libraries and promotion and development of traditional arts and handicrafts.
  - To reduce inequalities faced by socially and economically backward groups.
  - Measures for the benefit of armed forces veterans, war widows and their dependents, setting up homes and hostels for women and orphans, setting up of old age homes, day care centres and such other facilities for senior citizens.
  - Control ecological balance, protection of flora and fauna, animal welfare, agro-forestry, conservation of natural resources and maintaining quality of soil, air and water.
  - Training to promote rural sports, nationally recognized sports, Paralympics sports and Olympic sports, contributions or funds provided to technology incubators located within academic institutions which are approved by the central government.

**16. Sourav Kothari won the National Billiard Championship title**

- Mr. Sourav Kothari won the National Billiard Championships held in Lucknow by beating Alok Kumar by 5-3. It is the first maiden title for Sourav Kothari since he turned professional in 2007.
- Sourav Kothari and Alok Kumar both play for Petroleum Sports Promotion Board (PSPB). Third position was secured by B. Bhaskar by beating Dhruv Sitwala.

**17. Mr. Chandi Prasad Bhatt: Eminent Gandhian and environmentalist selected for Gandhi Peace Prize 2013**

- The noted Gandhian and environmentalist, Mr. Chandi Prasad Bhatt selected for the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2013.
- He is the founder of the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh in Gopeshwar, which later became the mother organization to the Chipko Movement. He is known for his work on subaltern social ecology, and considered one of India's first modern environmentalist and was one of the pioneers of the Chipko movement for which he was awarded the Raman Magsaysay Award in 1982.
- He has been previously awarded with Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, Green legend-Greenies Eco Award-2010, Raman Magsaysay Award, etc.
- Gandhi Peace Prize is an award that is bestowed to individuals and organizations for their contributions towards social, economic and political transformation through peace and other Gandhian methods.

**18. Workdays for tribals under MGNREGA raised from 100 to 150**

- The Union Cabinet raised the number of workdays under its flagship rural employment guarantee programme MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005) from 100 days to 150 days for tribals. The decision will come into effect from April, 2014.
- As per the rural job scheme, those tribals who have received land rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 will be eligible for additional 50 days of wage employment
- The beneficiaries would be those who have completed 100 workdays in that particular financial year. To distinguish this category from regular MGNREGA workers, they will be given a job card of a different color. This hike in the workdays will benefit approx 14 lakh families in India.

**19. Forbes's 2014 billionaires list: Bill Gates reclaims title as world's richest person**

- Microsoft Co-founder, Mr. Bill Gates regained the title of the world's richest person in the Forbes 2014 billionaire list. Mr. Gates has topped the list for 15 of the last 20 years, with a net worth of \$76 billion and Mexico's telecommunications mogul Mr. Carlos Slim Helu is at second place.
- The US leads the list of billionaires in the world with 492 billionaires, followed by China (152) and Russia (111). The list has new billionaires from Algeria, Lithuania, Tanzania and Uganda.
- Total number of billionaires in the world: 1,645 with combined net worth of \$6.4 trillion.
- Top 5 billionaires: Mr. Bill Gates, Mr. Carlos Slim Helu, Mr. Amancio Ortega, Mr. Warren Buffett, and Mr. Larry Ellison (Oracle Corp chief).
- Highest ranked women on the list: Christy Walton (9), with a net worth of \$36.7 billion and Liliane Bettencourt (11) has worth \$34.5 billion.
- World's youngest billionaire: Ms. Perenna Kei from Hong Kong.
- Business Tycoon, Mr. Mukesh Ambani: India's richest person for the 7th year in a row. Mr. Ambani is ranked 40th globally with net worth of \$18.6 billion. India has 56 billionaires in all with a collective net worth of \$191.5 billion.
- The Forbes list of billionaires is an annual ranking of the world's wealthiest people, compiled and published by the American business magazine Forbes. The list only represents each person's valuation on a single day, due to daily fluctuations among exchange rates and stock valuations.

**20. "Maulana Azad Sehat Scheme and Nalanda Project" launched by Union Ministry of Minority Affairs**

- The Union Ministry of Minority Affairs launched two new initiatives for the welfare of Minorities. These are Maulana Azad Sehat Scheme and Nalanda Project, a Faculty Development Program for Minorities' Higher Educational Institutions.
- **Maulana Azad Sehat scheme**
  - "Sehat Card" would be issued to every student of the Institution financially aided by MAEF.
  - Preventive Health Check-up Camps would be organized by the Institute twice in a year, through Government/Private Hospitals/Nursing Homes.
  - All findings of the Preventive Health Checkups will be entered in the Sehat Card of the student by the Doctors.
  - In exceptional and deserving cases for serious ailments, the poor students belonging to notified minorities would be provided financial assistance for treatment in Government/Recognized Hospitals.
  - Serious ailments viz. Kidney, Heart, Liver, Cancer, Brain, Knee surgery and Spinal surgery or any other life threatening diseases would be covered.

- Dispensary/Health Care Centre is to be set up in the educational institutions (School) to provide daily medical facilities to the students studying in the educational institutions funded/aided by MAEF.
- **Nalanda Project**
  - A Faculty Development Program for Minorities' Higher Educational Institutions.
  - Objective: To help faculty learn new ways to achieve excellence and to grow as faculty members.
  - Supported by Aligarh Muslim University, a premier Minority University of world fame.
  - Faculty development includes education, collaboration, resources and support.
  - Faculty development is an essential element of institutional effectiveness in higher education. It has become a priority at many academic institutions as a way to improve the quality of academic programs and to respond to emerging faculty, student, program and industry needs.
  - Faculty who engage in professional development experiences benefit also in terms of increased vitality, informed pedagogy, teaching innovations and scholarly teaching.
  - Benefit: Through educational programs and workshops, faculty can learn the skills necessary to reach excellence in a changing academic environment.

## **21. Hockey India (HI) accorded status of National Sports Federation (NSF) status**

- Hockey India (HI) has accorded with the status of a National Sports Federation (NSF) for governing the sport of hockey (both men and women) in India. It will represent India in International events.
- The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports declared Hockey India as the sole body responsible and accountable for the overall management, direction, control, regulation, promotion and development of the sports discipline in India.
- Hockey India will have to follow the guidelines of the Government and National Sports Development Code to get assistance and continued recognition.
- To be recognized as a National Sports Federation, any institution or body needs to be recognized by its international body. Hockey India's recognition was mandatory by International Hockey Federation (FIH), as well as the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).
- Since 2009, HI has fulfilled both the criteria as the FIH, Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) and IOA have considered it as the sole body responsible for the governance of the game in India.
- Since 2012, HI and FIH have jointly organized major tournaments viz. the FIH Olympic Qualifiers, FIH World League Round 2, FIH Junior Men World Cup and FIH World League Round Final in India. HI has also been conducting nationals in all the categories since 2011. Earlier, the Sports Ministry had derecognized it for not adhering to government guidelines.

## **22. 2014 Ukraine crisis: Crimean MPs' vote to join Russian Federation sparks outrage**

- The Parliament of Crimea asked Moscow to allow the region to accede to Russia and move forwards the date of a referendum on the region's status from March 30 to March 16, 2014. In other words, Crimean Parliament requested to Moscow to make Crimea the part of Russia.
- The authorities in Crimea voted to accelerate secession from Ukraine, unanimously backing a law that declared the territory to be part of the Russian Federation.
- Voters in Crimea had to choose between two options: Stay in Ukraine or join Russia. (Previously, the Parliament planned to seek greater autonomy for Crimea within Ukraine).
- Ukraine's interim prime minister opposed the referendum of Crimean parliament to join Russia. (The current Crimean constitution came into effect in 1999 and Article 135 of the Ukrainian constitution provides that the Crimean Constitution must be approved by the Ukrainian parliament).
- Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin stated that Russia had no plans to annex Crimea.

- Crimea is an autonomous republic in the south-eastern region of Ukraine and has its own constitution. Crimea's people are 58 % ethnic Russians, 24% Ukrainians, and 12 % Tatars, descendants of the Turkic people that ruled the peninsula until the Russian Tsars annexed it in 1783. (Capital: Simferopol).
- The immediate cause of anti-government protests started over President Mr. Viktor Yanukovych's decision to abandon a deal with the European Union in favour of aid and natural gas agreements with Russia.
- Causes of protest: Opposition to the Euromaidan movement, Opposition to the Yatsenyuk Government and the Verkhovna Rada's vote to repeal language law that protected minority languages.
- Effect of Protest: The anti-government protests led to the downfall of the government of President Viktor Yanukovych and set the new government.
- In brief, the 2014 Ukrainian revolution was anti-Yanukovych who is pro-Russia. Those who protested wanted close Ukraine-EU relations and not Ukraine-Russia partnership.
- USA's move on Ukraine crisis:- The U.S. has suspended military engagement with Russia and opined to expel Russia from G-8 but Germany didn't favour the expulsion. Western leaders have shown consensus on suspending the G8 summit to be held at Sochi this year, if Russia doesn't stop its interference.
- In order to resolve the political crisis in Ukraine, Ukraine Prime Minister Mr. Mykola Azarov resigned and the deputy Prime Minister Mr. Serhiy Arbuzov became the acting Prime minister of Ukraine.
- To ease the two month long protest, the parliament repealed a set of anti-protest laws and a mass amnesty was granted to all the demonstrators in the streets, even the ones who have seized government buildings by force.
- In the crisis talks between the President and opposition leaders, it was agreed that Parliament would hold a vote of no-confidence in the government, and to work towards potentially reinstating a constitution that boosted parliamentary powers and curtailed those of the President.
- After its independence in 1991 from the former Soviet Union, Ukraine has swung between its desire for integration into the European Union and keeping friendly ties with Russia that continues to be its largest single trading partner that it depends on for cheap energy resources.
- In 1997, Russia and Ukraine signed an agreement on the division of the Black Sea Fleet, with 81 % going to Russia along with Sevastopol and other military installations in the Crimea. In return, Moscow compensated Kiev with a large sum of money as well as writing off a large amount of Ukrainian debt. Russia also pays Ukraine an annual fee.
- The ongoing political crisis in Ukraine will effect India due to following reasons:
  - Immediate impact on India: The military stand-off situation of India would go worsen because Ukrainian military facility provides engines for military helicopters of Russian origin (that account for a quarter of the world's medium, medium-heavy and heavy lift helicopters) and India has contracts with many sourcing naval engines, from where India gets its entire fleet of medium military transport aircraft modernized.
  - Business and economic factors: The conflict between Russia and Ukraine would weaken rupee against dollars that will be negative for stocks and for the Indian economy. International oil and gas prices would go up that will adversely effect India, as India will have to spend more dollars to buy Brent as it is dependent on imports for its energy needs. This will pressure the rupee and may lead to a rise in the current account deficit. The FDI inflow into India may be affected adversely.
  - Strategic reasons: If the military situation in Ukraine go worse than the relations between the US and Russia would be deteriorate, then at that situation India will be under

pressure to take a clear position, as China has taken a clear position and supported Russia. Russia is a key friend of India and has helped repeatedly at the crucial time viz. Because of Russia's pro-active help, India won the 1971 war against Pakistan and liberated Bangladesh, etc.

**23. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed treaty to make Crimea part of Russia**

- Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin and the leaders of Crimea signed a treaty in Moscow to make Crimea part of Russia again. Though, Mr. Putin stated that he has no plan to seize any other regions of Ukraine.
- As per the resolution approved by the new republic's legislature, Crimea has also decided to switch to Russian time by moving the clock forward two hours by March 30, 2014.
- Though, peninsula will keep the existing Ukrainian budget and tax codes until Crimea formulates its own related regulations.
- Elections to the government bodies of Crimea and Sevastopol shall be conducted on September, 2015. Till then, current Parliament of Crimea and the Council of Ministers of Crimea along with the Legislative Assembly of the city of Sevastopol will continue their work.
- Ukrainian citizens and non-citizens permanently living in Crimea and Sevastopol will automatically be recognized as Russian unless they express their wish to maintain their current citizenship within a month. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Crimea stayed with Ukraine in 1991 as the Republic of Crimea before Ukraine later changed its name as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

**24. Russia suspended from G-8 Countries over its incursion into Crimea**

- The Group of Eight countries have suspended Russia from elite club of world powers amid heightened tensions over Ukraine and Russia's incursion into Crimea.
- Despite this suspension of Russia from G8 Nations list, the US and European Union also announced new sanctions against Moscow over its actions in the Crimean Peninsula.
- The Group of Seven nations (world's leading industrial democracies) suspended preparations for a G-8 summit that Russia is scheduled to host in June in Sochi.
- Despite strong international objections, Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a draft bill for the annexation of Crimea, one of a flurry of steps to formally take over the Black Sea peninsula.

**25. European Commission announced loan worth 11 billion euro to Ukraine**

- The European Commission announced 11 billion euro package of loans and grants for Ukraine on 12 March 2014. The assistance is aimed at putting the shattered economy of Ukraine back on its feet.
- The assistance will be discussed by European Union leaders at a summit in Brussels on 13 March 2014, and requires widespread reforms by the new Ukrainian government and the signing of a deal between Ukraine and the International Monetary Fund.
- The assistance includes 1.6 billion euros in direct loans and 1.4 billion euros in grants, of which 600 million euros can be disbursed over the next two years.
- After two years, 3 billion euros will be released from the European Investment Bank between 2014-2016 and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development totaling 5 billion euros.
- Other money will be raised by leveraging funds available from the EU's Neighbourhood Investment Facility, a fund set up to invest in projects in the EU's neighboring states.
- The EU will offer trade breaks worth 500 million euro (15.12 billion US dollar) for a year as an immediate symbol of support. EU leaders were ready to sign the political agreement and to bring forward some parts of trade deal especially tariff cuts.

- Earlier, on 11 March 2014, the United States also announced worth of 1 billion US dollar as loan to Ukraine and offered technical assistance in some areas.

**26. Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with EU**

- Ukraine signed the long-awaited Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) in Brussels on 21 March 2014. The Agreement was signed between Ukrainian Interim Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk, EU President Herman Van Rompuy on the sidelines of an EU summit in Brussels.
- The Association Agreement tries to establish closer political and economic cooperation between the EU and Ukraine.
- Also, the European Commission agreed to extend nearly 500 million euros worth of trade benefits to Ukraine, removing customs duties on a wide range of agricultural goods, textiles and other imports.
- However, agreement concerning free trade will only be signed once presidential elections are over and a new government is formed. Ukraine will be holding the presidential elections on 25 May 2014.
- The signing of the agreement coincided with the Russian President Vladimir Putin signing the Accession Agreement with Crimea after the Russian Parliament passed it on 21 March 2014.
- The Association Agreement was proposed by the EU to Ukraine in November 2013. However, it was rejected by the then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. The rejection resulted into mass protests in Ukraine leading to Yanukovich taking exile in Russia and Russia annexing Crimea in March 2014. The occupation drew criticisms and sanctions on Russia from the EU and US.
- Although the Association Agreement has far more potential to strengthen the shattered economy of Ukraine. However, it poses certain challenges that need to be tackled by Ukraine. These include among others
  - Risk of inviting retaliatory steps from Russia: Russia already has imposed stricter customs checks on trade with Ukraine.
  - Changes to the rule of law and justice.
  - Adopting business and environmental standards.
- To meet these challenges Ukraine will have to put in hard work and long-term investment.

**27. UN General Assembly rejected Russian annexation of Crimea**

- The United Nations (UN) General Assembly refused to recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and passed a non-binding Resolution 68/262 that declared invalid Crimea's referendum. In the 193-nation assembly, the resolution
- It was supported by 100 United Nations member states that declared invalid Crimea's Moscow-backed referendum. Eleven nations voted against the resolution viz. Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, North Korea, Russia, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.
- NATO and Western powers voted overwhelmingly in favor.
- 58 Abstention countries: Afghanistan, China, India and Pakistan, many South American nations, etc. More than 20 nations didn't vote viz. Israel, Iran, etc.
- The UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 is a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in response to the 2014 Crimean crisis and entitled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine".
- The resolution was introduced by Canada, Costa Rica, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

**28. 3rd BIMSTEC summit 2014 held in Myanmar**

- The 3rd BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Summit held at Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.
- Its theme is “Partnership for Harmony and Prosperity”. It was attended by Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal and chaired by Myanmar.
- Its objective was to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development through identification and implementation of specific cooperation projects and the sectors of trade and investment, technology, energy, transport and communication, tourism, fisheries, agriculture, cultural cooperation, environment and disaster management, public health, people-to-people contact, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism and transnational crime and climate change.
- Next Summit will be chaired by Kathmandu, Nepal. (The Bimstec summit takes place every four years).
- Resolutions taken by BIMSTEC members to
  - Enhance cooperation in environmental protection and sustainable development.
  - Enhance cooperation in the field of agriculture, including crops, livestock and horticulture besides fisheries.
  - Finalize an agreement on trade in goods by 2014 with intent to promote regional commerce
  - Conclude the Agreement on Services and Investments
  - Work on agreements on dispute settlement and cooperation in customs matters under the Free Trade Area framework.
  - Devise a framework for establishment of the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility.
  - Increase cooperation in expanding the skill and technology base of member countries.
- BIMSTEC is an international organization comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal as member countries.

**29. “Ex-Surya Kiran Drills VI”- Joint military exercise of India and Nepal**

- The armies of India and Nepal jointly conducted the military exercise, known as Ex-Surya Kiran Drills VI, at Saljhandi in Rupandehi district, Nepal.
- In the two-week long exercise, both the armies worked to upgrade their practical and principle aspects of jungle warfare, anti-insurgency operations and rescue operations.
- Its objective was to train troops in counter terrorism operations and to enhance defense cooperation and military relations between the two nations. The exercise also includes a detailed training in organization and conduct of disaster response, management and rescue operation. The two sides will also share experiences on counter-terrorist operations.
- The last Indo-Nepal Joint Military “Surya Kiran-V” was conducted at Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand in 2013.

**30. Mr. Vince Chhabria to be first Indian-American judge in California**

- Indian-American attorney, Mr. Vince Chhabria (44) will become California's first federal judge of South Asian descent. At present, Mr. Chhabria serves as the Deputy City Attorney at the San Francisco City Attorney's Office. He has represented San Francisco in defense of its health insurance law, adoption rights of same-sex couples and other major cases, has won Senate confirmation for a federal judgeship.

**31. 12th Meeting of the FSDC Sub-Committee at New Delhi**

- At the 12th sub-committee meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), headed by RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, held at New Delhi, it was decided to set up a High Powered Inter Regulatory Committee to explore ways of enabling banks to meet Basel 3 requirements.
- Its objective is to find ways for the banking sector to comply with Basel-III capital norms.

- Discussions during the 12th Meeting of the FSDC Sub-Committee:
  - The implementation of non-legislative recommendations of FSLRC and setting up of a repository for investors with a single view of all financial asset classes.
  - The ways for setting up an effective resolution regime for the financial sector. Issues of greater harmonisation of regulations across sectors for similar activities were also taken up.
  - The report of the working group on 'Resolution Regimes' in India, chaired by RBI Deputy Governor Anand Sinha and Economic Affairs Secretary Arvind Mayaram.
- Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is the apex-level body constituted by government of India. The objective(s) of Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) are:
  - Financial Stability
  - Financial Sector Development
  - Inter-Regulatory Coordination
  - Financial Literacy
  - Financial Inclusion
  - Macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates
  - Coordinating India's international interface with financial sector bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Financial Stability Board (FSB) and any such body as may be decided by the Finance Minister from time to time.
- Composition of Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC):
  - Chairperson: The Union Finance Minister of India
  - Other Members:
    1. Governor Reserve Bank of India (RBI),
    2. Finance Secretary and/ or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA),
    3. Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS),
    4. Chief Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance,
    5. Chairman, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI),
    6. Chairman, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA),
    7. Chairman Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA),
    8. Joint Secretary (Capital Markets), DEA, will be the Secretary of the Council,
  - The Chairperson may invite any person whose presence is deemed necessary for any of its meeting(s).

## 32. Stree Shakti Puraskar 2013

- The President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee awarded Stree Shakti Puraskar to six illustrious women on International Women's Day for their distinguished services for the upliftment of women. The Government of India has instituted six national awards known as Stree Shakti Puraskar.
- These awards are in the name of the following eminent women personalities in the Indian history who are famous for their personal courage and integrity:- Rani Lakshmibai, Rani Rudramma Devi, Kannagi, Rani Gaidinliu Zeliang, Rani Ahilyabai Holkar and Mata Jijabai.
- The awardees are:
  - Rani Gaidinliu Zeliang Award: Dr. Vartika Nanda (Delhi) for creating awareness on women's issues through media.
  - Rani Lakshmibai Award: Ms. Manasi Pradhan (Odisha) for her work in the field of women's empowerment.

- Rani Rudramma Devi Award: Dr. M Venkaiah (Andhra Pradesh) for her contribution in the field of women's health.
- Mata Jijabai Award: Ms. Bina Sheth Lashkari (Maharashtra) honored for her achievement in the field of education and training
- Kannagi Award: T Radha K Prashanti (Andhra Pradesh) for her achievement in the field of providing support to orphans, visually impaired, handicapped and destitute women.
- Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Award: Dr. Seema Sakhare (Maharashtra) for her contribution in the field of women's rights, gender issues, legal counseling and institutional support to women and girls.
- The objective of Stree Shakti Puraskar is to recognize recognizes the spirit of courage of a women in difficult circumstances, who has established this spirit of courage in her personal or professional life. It was instituted in 1991.
- It is conferred by the President of India on occasion of International Women's Day i.e. 8th March every year at New Delhi. It consists of a cash award of Rs. 300,000. It also recognizes pioneering contribution of an individual in empowering women and raising women's issues.

### **33. "Phantom"- World's first 3D model of human fingerprint developed by Indian-American scientist Mr. Anil Jain**

- An Indian-American scientist, Mr. Anil Jain from Michigan State University built the world's first three-dimensional (3D) model of a human fingerprint known as Phantom.
- A method that takes a two-dimensional of a fingerprint and maps it to a 3-D finger surface. In health care, a 3D heart or a kidney may be created because of known dimensions and they can be put in a scanner and the imaging system may be calibrated.
- Objective: To have a precise fingerprint model with known properties and features that can be used to calibrate existing technology used to match fingerprints.
- Would help to improve the overall accuracy of fingerprint-matching systems that leads to better security in applications ranging from law enforcement to mobile phone unlock.
- Developed to boost the accuracy of fingerprint-matching systems and to improve security technology.
- Indian-American scientist Mr. Anil Jain has a B.Tech degree from IIT Kanpur and MS and PhD degrees from Ohio State University. He has six US patents on fingerprint matching and has written a number of books on biometrics and fingerprint/facial recognition. He also received a number of prestigious awards for contributions to pattern recognition and biometrics.

### **34. Indian Revenue Department tightened baggage rules to curb illegal Gold Import**

- Union Government of India (Indian Revenue Department) on 6 March 2014 tightened baggage rules for inbound Indian passengers. According to the step, the passengers will have to provide details of source of funds for importing the metal as well as the air tickets. The baggage rule has been tightened to check gold smuggling in the country and to prevent misuse of gold import facility.
- Circulation issued by the Revenue Department circular says that
  - The baggage receipt that is issued by the customs will include engraved serial number on gold bars
  - The Central Board of Excise & Customs directive has said that the passengers bringing gold in any form, which includes ornaments, will have to declare item-wise inventory that is being imported with baggage receipt
- These norms have been revised and tightened following sudden increase-(spurt) in import of gold by eligible passengers via airports in the country.
- This rule has been hardened as the eligible passengers (Persons of Indian Origin or an Indian returning to India after a period of six months of stay abroad) are allowed to import gold up to 1

kilogram by paying 10 percent customs duty in foreign currency. The passenger should be a passenger who holds a valid passport issued under the Passport Act, 1967.

- In recent past, the Reserve Bank of India and the Union government have expressed concerns over the sudden increase of import of gold in the country. These increases were also felt even after measures taken by them to curb import of gold to reduce the widened Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Steps taken to curb excessive import of gold to the country were
  - Import duty of 10 percent in 2013
  - Linking the imports to exports under the 20:80 scheme
- Tightening of baggage rules have been done even after imposition of 10 percent amount on gold import may be because this step would have triggered gold smuggling in recent past. The eligible passengers have been targeted by the government as smugglers hires eligible passengers or NRIs to import gold in the country.

### **35. Indus Valley Civilisation collapsed due to Climate change**

- A study of Scientists led by the University of Cambridge and Banaras Hindu University has suggested that Climate change contributed in the fall of the Bronze Age Indus Valley Civilisation (also known as the Harappan Civilisation), which spanned across present India and Pakistan. The study has revealed that the Bronze Age megacities declined during the 21st and 20th centuries BC and never recovered back following a series of droughts that lasted for about 200 years in the zone of Indus valley.
- To study on the concept of the collapse the team of British Scientists studied snail shells that were preserved in the sediments of an ancient lake bed Kotla Dhar in Haryana. They analysed oxygen isotopes of the shell and calculated the amount of rain that happened in the lake thousands of years ago.
- The results of the project shed a light on the mystery for sudden disappearance of the major cities of the Indus Valley Civilisation. The study has also linked the decline with the documented global scale climate event and its impact on other civilisation of Old Kingdom in Egypt, the early Bronze Age civilizations of Greece and Crete as well as the Akkadian Empire in Mesopotamia.
- Scientists confirmed that climate change as the reason for collapse of the civilization by studying the evidences from Arabian Sea, Oman and Meghalaya and say that unexpected weakening of the summer monsoon affected northwest India 4100 years ago.
- The study also involved researchers from Imperial College London, the University of Oxford, the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur and the Uttar Pradesh State Archaeology Department.
- The study was funded by the British Council UK-India Education and Research Initiative to investigate the archeology river systems and climate of north-west India using a combination of archaeology and geo-science. The study was published in the journal Geology.
- Ancient Indus Valley Civilization city also known as the Mohenjo Daro or Mound of the Dead flourished between 2600 and 1900 BC. It was one of the first world and ancient Indian cities. The site was discovered in the 1920s and lies in Pakistan's Sindh province. The civilisation is considered almost as old as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

### **36. Mizoram clinched 68th Santosh Trophy 2013-14**

- Mizoram clinched the 68th Santosh Trophy for Football by defeating Railways by 3-0 at Siliguri, West Bengal and won Rs.5 lakh prize money, while the runners up Railways received Rs.3 lakh. This is the maiden Santosh Trophy for Mizoram and this was also the first appearance for them in the final match...

### **37. Annual Health Survey: Some states showed improvement**

- As per the second update of the Annual Health Survey (AHS), all major health indicators in the country's worst-performing States are showing a gradual improvement over the years but inter-State variations persist.
- The 2nd update of Annual Health Survey's (AHS) objective was to monitor the performance and outcome of various health interventions of the Government including those under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) at closer intervals through benchmark indicators.
- In 284 districts of nine states survey was conducted: Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Assam. These states account for about 48 % of the total population in the country.
- **Highlights of the Annual Health Survey (AHS)**

(a) Crude Birth Rate (CBR) and Crude Death Rate (CDR):-

1. Minimum CBR: Bageshwar (14.7) in Uttarakhand.
2. Maximum CBR: Shrawasti (40.9) in Uttar Pradesh.
3. CBR in rural areas of districts is higher than that in urban areas.
4. Minimum CDR: Dhemaji (4.5) in Assam.
5. Low female death rates have also been observed as compared to male death rates.

(b) Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):-

1. Minimum IMR: Rudraprayag (19) in Uttarkhand.
2. Maximum IMR: Shrawasti (103) in Uttar Pradesh.
3. Districts achieved the MDG -4 National target of 28 by 2015: Purbi Singhbhum & Dhanbad (Jharkhand) and Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Pithoragarh & Almora (Uttarakhand).
4. Four districts viz. Bokaro & Ranchi (Jharkhand) and Bageshwar & Nainital (Uttarakhand) are in closer vicinity to achieve the MDG-4 National target.
5. IMR in rural areas of districts is significantly higher than that in urban areas.

(c) Neo-Natal Mortality Rate (NNMR):-

1. Minimum NNMR: Rudraprayag (11), Uttarkhand.
2. Maximum NNMR: Balangir (75) in Odisha.
3. Rural NNMR in districts is significantly higher than the urban.

(d) Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR):-

1. Minimum U5MR: Pithoragarh district (24), Uttarakhand.
2. Maximum U5MR: Kandhamal district (145), Odisha.
3. Districts achieved the MDG -4 National target of 42 by 2015: Pithoragarh, Almora, Rudraprayag, Chamoli, Nainital & Bagheswar (Uttarakhand) and Purbi Singhbhum (Jharkhand).
4. 10 districts viz. Dhanbad, Bokaro, Kodarma, Hazaribagh & Giridih (Jharkhand) and Kota (Rajasthan) and Champawat, Udhampur, Dehradun & Uttarkashi (Uttarakhand) are in closer vicinity to achieve the MDG-4 National target.
5. Rural U5MR in districts is significantly higher than the urban.

(e) Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):-

1. Minimum MMR: Kumaon HQ (183) in Uttarakhand.
2. Maximum MMR: Faizabad Mandal (451) in UP.

(f) Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB)

1. Minimum SRB: Pithoragarh district (764), Uttarakhand.
2. Maximum SRB: Moradabad district (1034), Uttar Pradesh.

- **Terms:**

- Crude Birth Rate (CBR) denotes live births per 1000 population and Crude Death Rate (CDR) denotes number of deaths per 1000 population.
- Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) denotes the number of infant deaths (age below one year) per 1000 live births.
- Neo-Natal Mortality Rate (NNMR) measures the number of infant deaths (age below 28 days) per 1,000 live births.
- Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) denotes the number of children who died before reaching their fifth birthday per 1,000 live births.
- Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) measures the proportion of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births.
- Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) defined as the number of female live births per 1,000 male live births.
- Outcome of the survey: These indicators would provide requisite inputs for better planning of health programmes and pave the way for evidence based intervention strategies.

**38. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species: 15 bird species from India are in critically endangered list**

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Birds 2013 marked 15 species of birds from India as critically endangered (CR).
- Critically Endangered (CR): The highest risk category of the IUCN Red List of threatened species, comprising those that are facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.
- Bird species falling under the Critically Endangered category in India:-
  - Migratory wetland species: Baer's Pochard, Siberian Crane and Spoon-billed Sandpiper.
  - Non-migratory wetland species: White-bellied Heron.
  - Grassland species: Bengal Florican, Great Indian Bustard, Jerdon's Courser and Sociable Lapwing.
  - Forest species: Forest Owl.
  - Scavengers: Indian Vulture, Red-headed Vulture, White-backed Vulture and Slender-billed Vulture.
  - Himalayan Quail and Pink-headed Duck are now considered Extinct for all practical purposes.
  - Uplisted (facing greater danger) species in 2013 IUCN list from
- Least Concern to Near Threatened: River Lapwing and River Tern.
- Least Concern to Vulnerable: Long-tailed Duck.
- Major reasons of decline of bird species in India
  - Drastic modification, fragmentation, degradation and loss of habitat, environmental pollution (both industrial and due to increased pesticide usage), poaching and land use changes, etc.
  - Changes in cropping pattern due to various reasons, including implementation of irrigation schemes, increased - pesticide usage, livestock-grazing, high levels of disturbance and developmental activities viz. mining and hydel projects resulted in marginal fall in their population.
  - Drastic loss of grassland habitat over the past decades has severely threatened species viz. Great Indian Bustard, Bengal Florican and Jerdon's Courser.
  - Destruction of deciduous forests in central India has lead to the decline in Forest Owl numbers.
  - Destruction of forests in the fragile Western Ghats and Himalaya continue to endanger the existence of many other species.
  - Use of chemical components as in the case of diclofenac's effect of vulture species.

**39. Mysterious four new man-made Ozone-Killing gases discovered**

- The scientists from the University of East Anglia, UK discovered traces of four new man-made gases in the atmosphere that are capable of destroying the ozone layer and intensifying global warming. Scientists stated that the new gases are manmade because they were not seen in the atmosphere until the 1960s.
- Three of the gases are Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and one is a Hydro- Chlorofluorocarbon (HCFC), which can also damage ozone.
- The four new gases have been identified as CFC-112, CFC112a, CFC-113a, HCFC-133a.
- CFC-113a: An agrochemical intermediate for the manufacture of pyrethroids. (a type of insecticide once widely used in agriculture).
- CFC-113a and HCFC-133a: Intermediaries in the production of widely used refrigerants.
- CFC-112 and 112a may have been used in the production of solvents and used to clean electrical components.
- Of the four species identified, CFC-113 seems to be most worrying, as it is an insecticide coming from a very small but growing emissions source somewhere as yet unidentified.
- CFC and HCFC gases have been found to damage the ozone layer, which is essential to filter ultraviolet rays that can cause cancer in humans.
- As per estimate, about 74,000 tonnes of these gases have been released into the atmosphere. The study was published in the journal Nature Geoscience.
- The ozone layer protect the planet from damaging ultraviolet rays that can cause skin cancer and eye cataracts.

**40. SC to Lower Courts: Complete trial in criminal cases involving law makers within one year**

- In a bid to expedite proceedings against sitting MPs and MLAs in criminal cases, the Supreme Court sets a deadline for lower courts to complete trial in cases involving lawmakers within a year of framing of charges.
- The apex court stated that all such proceedings involving lawmakers must be conducted on a day-to-day basis in order to expedite the trial. As the trial is kept pending for years, lawmakers continue to enjoy membership of the legislative body despite being charged in a heinous offence.
- Justice R M Lodha bench stated that the trial courts will have to give explanation to the Chief Justice of the respective high court if the trial is not completed within a year. Though, the period can be extended by the Chief Justice of the high court, if he is satisfied with the reason given by trial judge for not completing the trial within this period.
- The court passed the ruling on a PIL filed by an NGO Public Interest Foundation, seeking its direction for expeditious trial in cases involving lawmakers.

**41. "Oxadiazoles" – New class of Antibiotics discovered**

- The scientists from the University Of Notre Dame, discovered a new class of antibiotics, "Oxadiazoles", to fight deadly bacteria viz. Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) and other drug-resistant bacteria that threaten public health.
- Over 1.2 million compounds screened and founded oxadiazole for drug-resistant bacteria MRSA. The new class of antibiotic, Oxadiazole, works by inhibiting PBP2a which is a protein that binds penicillin. It also interferes with the biosynthesis of the cell wall which allows MRSA to resist the drugs.
- The oxadiazoles are also effective when taken orally. At present, there are only three drugs available that are effective against MRSA, and only one of them may be taken orally. only one marketed antibiotic for MRSA that can be taken orally.
- In other words, Oxadiazoles can treat antibiotic resistant infections viz. Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA), etc.

- The research was published in the Journal of the American Chemical Society.
- MRSA is a bacterium that developed resistance to penicillin and certain other groups of antibiotics. It mostly appears as a skin infection which can produce boils, abscesses, stys, carbuncles, blisters, impetigo, and rashes. The infection becomes more problematic when it spreads to other organs. When the antibiotic resistant bacteria spread to internal organs, the results can be life-threatening.

**42. EC sets up multi-agency grid to curb use of black money in polls**

- The Election Commission set up a multi-agency grid of revenue and security intelligence agencies to curb the use of black money in Lok Sabha and assembly polls.
- The intelligence agencies include the officials from income tax intelligence and investigations, Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, Narcotics Control Bureau and the security forces of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Border Security Force (BSF), CISF and the Railway Protection Force.
- The officials-in-charge of intelligence in these respective departments will meet twice a week at the EC headquarters (Nirvachan Sadan) to update it about suspected financial movements.
- These agencies will compile their respective information in a standard format so that the poll panel is updated about the use of illegal money and other inducements in the polls.
- After these meetings, a comprehensive report would be prepared shared with the respective Chief Electoral Offices of various states and Union Territories.
- Additionally, the intelligence wing of the BSF will track the movement of cash, fake currency and drugs from the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders while the same would be done by the SSB along the Nepal and Bhutan borders.

**43. SC to Law Commission: Regulate provocative speeches**

- The Supreme Court (SC) directed the Law Commission to look into the issue of hate speeches being made by leaders of political, social and religious outfits and consider framing guidelines to regulate such provocative statements.
- The justice BS Chauhan bench directed the Law commission to draft guidelines regarding hate speeches by politicians before elections and give its recommendation to the Union Government.
- The apex court passed an order on a PIL filed by an NGO, Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan, alleging that there is a need for guidelines as hate speeches destroy the fabric of democracy and violate the provisions of the Constitution.
- The PIL had named Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh as respondents as the two states witnessed incidents of alleged hate speeches. It had referred to the alleged hate speeches made by Maharashtra Navnirman Sena Chief Raj Thackeray and claimed that no FIR was registered against them in the state.
- The PIL stated that in Andhra Pradesh, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen leader Akbaruddin Owaisi had allegedly made hate speeches and was arrested for them. Though, after being released on bail, he had again made similar speeches in Nanded, Maharashtra, it alleged.

**44. Assam and Nagaland became first States to get Plastic Photo Identity Card**

- Nagaland and Assam will be the first two states to be issued plastic Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The new plastic EPICs have many scientific features viz. a hologram with coded details of the voter to prevent duplication, forging and tampering.
- Plastic Photo Identity Card will be issued through common service center of Union Government's Information Technology department.
- The Election Commission (EC) declared the most expenditure sensitive states in the country: Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Tamil Nadu and also set-

up flying squad, static surveillance team and election expenditure monitoring committees to curb the use of money power during elections.

- Currently, voters using laminated Photo Identity Card for voting purpose which was not secure as well. It could be easily cloned and tampered but PVC is quite difficult to tamper and cloned, even it is very handy.

**45. Indian firm VNL's solar-powered 'WorldGSM' mobile tower architecture launched in Ghana to deliver affordable services in villages**

- The Indian telecom equipment-maker, Vihaan Networks Ltd (VNL) launched its' solar-powered 'WorldGSM' mobile tower architecture, an environment-friendly and cost-effective mobile system, to deliver affordable services in villages.
- It is being done to promote access to electronic services viz. broadcasting, the Internet, multimedia service and basic telephony in unserved areas of rural Ghana.
- This innovative green mobile tower solution is very useful in Africa, particularly in villages and remote locations.
- WorldGSM runs exclusively on solar power and requires no diesel generator backup. It is also designed for simple delivery and deployment by local, untrained workers – all resulting in zero OPEX, dramatically lower CAPEX, and near zero maintenance.

**46. Former SC judge Mr. BN Srikrishna appointed as chairman of Financial Planning Standards Board India (FPSB)**

- Retired Supreme Court judge, Mr. BN Srikrishna appointed as the Chairman of Financial Planning Standards Board India (FPSB). He succeeded Mr. Dhirendra Swarup.
- FPSB India is a public-private enterprise and a professional standards setting body that proactively guides development and promotion of standards for financial planning professionals to benefit and protect the public. (Founded: 2005 & Headquarters: Mumbai, Maharashtra).

**47. Sahitya Akademi Award 2013**

- The President of Sahitya Akademi, Dr. Viswanath Prasad Tiwari presented prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award 2013 at the annual "Festival of Letters" in New Delhi.
- Sahitya Akademi Awards 2013 are awarded to
  - Famous poets: Rabindra Sarkar (Assamese), Subodh Sarkar (Bengali), Anil Boro (Bodo), Sitaram Sapolia (Dogri), Chinu Modi (Gujarati), Ambika Dutt (Rajasthani), Radhakant Thakur (Sanskrit), Arjun Charan Hembram (Santali), Namdev Tarachandani (Sindhi) and Javed Akhtar (Urdu).
  - Novelists: Mridula Garg (Hindi), Manmohan (Punjabi) and R.N. Joe D' Cruz (Tamil).
  - Renowned film maker Dr. Makhonmani Mongsaba.
  - Books of essays: C.N. Ramachandran (Kannada), Tukaram Rama Shet (Konkani), Satish Kalasekar (Marathi), and Katayani Vidmahe (Telugu).
  - Books of short stories: Temsula Ao (English) and Mohi-ud-Din Reshi (Kashmiri).
  - Travelogues: Makhonmani Mongsaba (Manipuri) and Man Bahadur Pradhan (Nepali).
  - M.N. Paloor (Malayalam) for his autobiography, Sureshwar Jha (Maithili) for his memoirs and Bijoy Misra (Odia) for his play.
- Sahitya Akademi Award is a literary honor in India to recognize and promote excellence in Indian writing and also acknowledge new trends.

**48. Union Government mulls to build 200 low cost airports**

- The Government of India (GoI) announced to build 200 low cost airports in the next 20 years to expand connectivity to Tier-II and Tier-III cities. The development of low-frills airports will significantly reduce the cost of operations.

- The plan of Aviation ministry is to build 15 Greenfield airports, besides constructing low-cost airports. The Airports Authority of India has plans to invest Rs.1,500 crore for developing non-metro airports.
- At present, the non-metro airports accounts for just around 30 % of the country's total air traffic, but the percentage is expected to jump to 45 % within the next few years.
- The Union Government also planned to invest over \$120 billion in the development of airport infrastructure, improvement in connecting infrastructure, development of world class air navigation services infrastructure and other related activities to improve the air connectivity.

**49. "HR 5171 A"- the largest ever yellow hypergiant star discovered**

- The astronomers of Oliver Chesneau of the Cote d'Azur Observatory (Nice, France) discovered the largest Yellow star "HR 5171 A" in our Milky way Galaxy.
- The technique used by astronomers is called interferometry that helps to combine the light collected from multiple individual telescopes, effectively creates a giant telescope up to 140 metres in size.
- HR 5171 A is about 12,000 light-years away from Earth and can be visible to the naked eye in the nighttime sky. It is 1,300 times wider and 1,000,000 times brighter than Sun. Also it is 50 times bigger than red supergiant Betelgeuse in the Orion constellation.
- The star is in a binary system by studying the data contributed by several observatories and determined the system as an eclipsing binary star system with the smaller companion star orbiting the larger V766 Centauri once every 1300 days.
- This new discovery highlights the importance of studying these huge and short-lived yellow hypergiants, and could provide a means of understanding the evolutionary processes of massive stars in general.
- Yellow hypergiants are extremely rare and approximately a dozen are known to exist in the Milky Way. In general, they are very unstable because of the stage of their 'life'. The most well-known is Rho Cassiopeiae in the Cassiopeia constellation.

**50. DoT issued new guidelines to tackle the threats of Cyber attack**

- Under the Union Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) issued guidelines to tackle the threats of cyber attacks and hacking of websites.
- As per new guidelines issued by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), all Internet Service Providers (ISPs)
  - Must adopt new security measures for those using fixed-line broadband. The ISPs must advise customers to take necessary precautions to protect modems from malware attacks and hacking attempts.
  - Must assist customers to change the default password of Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) modem to a strong password at the time of installation of modem to avoid unauthorized access to modem. (At present, the ADSL modems are supplied by vendors with default set up of user ID and password as admin. The password is normally installed by broadband service providers).
  - Should disable protocol ports on the modems which otherwise may be used as hacking points to plant malwares.
  - Tell their customers to check their online daily usage, and if any unexpected high usage of data is noticed, they may bring it to the notice of the ISP concerned.
  - Must implement all the guidelines by May 2014 to ensure security of almost 1.5 crore fixed-line broadband users.

- Consumers should also upgrade to latest firmware or software and ISP's should disseminate the message to customers at the time of installation and at regular intervals. Alongside, customers should also be advised to switch off their modem when not in use.

### **51. India is the world's largest arms importer**

- As per the report published by the Sweden-based Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India became the world's largest arms importer over 2004-13 and its import of weapon-systems is three times more than Pakistan and China.
- As per the report of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)
  - Indian imports of major weapons rose by 111% in the last five years compared to 2004-08. Its share of total global arms imports increased from 7 to 14%.
  - World's total arms sales had increased by 14 % from 2009 to 2013.
  - World's top five Global arms importers: India (14%), China (5%), Pakistan (5%), the United Arab Emirates (4%) and Saudi Arabia (4%).
  - Major suppliers of arms to India in 2009-13: Russia (accounting for 75% of imports) and the US (7%).
  - World's top five Global arms suppliers between 2009 and 2013: the United States (29 % of global exports), Russia (27%), Germany (7 %), China (6 %) and France (5%).
  - Imports by European nations decreased by 25 % between 2004-2008 and 2009-13.
  - Britain was the largest importer of major weapons in Europe (received 12 % of deliveries), followed by Azerbaijan (12 %) and Greece (11 %).
  - Arms exports to Africa between 2004-08 and 2009-13 jumped 53 per cent. The three largest importers in the region were Algeria, Morocco and Sudan.
- SIPRI is an independent international institute in Sweden i.e. dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. It provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open source, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

### **52. "Rani-ki-Vav and GHNP" nominated by India for UNESCO's World Heritage Site Status 2014**

- India nominated Rani-ki-Vav and the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) for UNESCO's World Heritage Site Status for 2014. The World Heritage Committee will convene in Doha, Qatar, in June 2014 to review the nomination and take a final decision.
- Only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention and pledged to protect their natural and cultural heritage, can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List.
- Once a site has been nominated and evaluated, the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee meets to decide which sites will be inscribed on the World Heritage list.
- Rani-ki-Vav
  - Location: Patan, Gujarat.
  - Constructed by Queen Udayamati of the Solanki dynasty.
  - The 11th century stepwell and is one of the finest examples of stepwells in Gujarat.
  - The well is subterranean structure with a series of steps, board landings, pavilions and sculpted walls which provides access to water in deep water. It is of seven storeys with five exist and there are more than 800 elaborate sculptures which are survived. This is a protected monument under the Archeological Survey of India.
- Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP)
  - Location: Kullu region in Himachal Pradesh.
  - Established: 1984 and declared as National Park in 1999.
  - Area: 452 sq mi.
  - Known for its biodiversity and has more than 25 forest types, 800 kinds of plants and is home to more than 180 bird species.

- Habitat to numerous flora and more than 375 fauna species that comprises nearly around 31 mammals, 181 birds, 3 reptiles, 9 amphibians, 11 annelids, 17 mollusks and 127 insects.

**53. US FDIC sued 16 world largest banks for manipulating LIBOR rates**

- The US regulator, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) filed a law-suit on 16 world's largest banks, as these global financial institutions are accuse of conspiring to manipulate the LIBOR interest rate.
- The US regulator stated that the manipulation caused substantial losses to 38 US banks that were shut down due to insolvency during and after the 2008 financial crisis.
- These global financial institutions broke certain swap contracts and separately planed to rig the LIBOR rate to which the contracts were signed.
- Banks that have been sued in setting the daily Libor rate: Bank of America, Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase of the United States, Germany's Deutsche Bank and WestLB, Britain's HSBC, Barclays and Lloyds banks, Japan's Norinchukin Bank and Bank of Tokyo—Mitsubishi, Credit Suisse and UBS of Switzerland, Royal Bank of Scotland, Royal Bank of Canada, and Rabobank of the Netherlands.
- **LIBOR (London Interbank Offered Rate) interest rate**
  - The rate at which banks in London lend money to each other for the short-term in a particular currency. In other words, its' an interest rate at which banks can borrow funds, in marketable size, from other banks in the London interbank market.
  - World's most widely used benchmark for short-term interest rates.
  - A new Libor rate is calculated every morning by financial data firm Thomson Reuters based on interest rates provided by members of the British Bankers Association.
- FDIC is an independent agency created by the U.S. Congress to maintain stability and public confidence in the nation's financial system by insuring deposits, examining and supervising financial institutions for safety and soundness and consumer protection and managing receiverships. (Headquarters: Washington, D.C.).

**54. Lok Sabha elections 2014: EC issued detailed guidelines for political ads on social networking sites**

- In a bid to curb paid news in the Lok Sabha elections 2014, the Election Commission issued detailed guidelines to social networking sites on posting of election related matters. The guidelines will be applicable to a range of Internet-based social media viz. Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia, etc.
- As per the Election Commission guidelines, the social networking sites have
  - To maintain expenditure incurred by the political parties and individual candidates on advertisements so that they can be produced to the Commission when requested for.
  - To ensure that contents displayed by them during the electoral process was not unlawful or malicious or violative of the model code of conduct.
  - To get the approval and then publish the election advertisements. To obtain certificate for contents of political advertisements before putting them in public domain. If unlawful comments are present, violating the rule, the EC would take action to remove them.
  - In other words, the content managers of social networking sites have to make sure that candidates do not post anything violative of the model code of conduct.
- The guidelines are issued as part of the EC's efforts to address the problem of paid news.

**55. RBI hiked trade related remittance limit from Rs.2 lakh to Rs.5 lakh per transaction**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) hiked the trade related remittance limit from Rs.2 lakh to Rs.5 lakh per transaction with immediate effect and also increased the number of transaction handled by exchange houses. The hike in per transaction is on the review of the permitted transactions

under the Rupee Drawing Arrangements (RDAs). These changes have been included in the Memorandum of Instructions for Opening and Maintenance of Rupee/ Foreign Currency Vostro Accounts of Non-resident Exchange Houses.

- Vostro account (also known as a loro account) is one in which the domestic bank acts as custodian or manages the account of a foreign counterpart.

**56. India offered 1 billion US \$ line of credit to Bangladesh for trade & infra development**

- India on 13 March 2014 offered 1 billion US dollar line of credit to Bangladesh for development of trade facilities and infrastructure. India made the offer at a 2-days meet of the Joint Working Group on Trade held in Dhaka.
- Apart from the line of credit, India has also offered to supply another 500 megawatts of power to the country on completion of the required infrastructure. During the meet, the officials of both the countries discussed ways to boost trade between the two countries by removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers. The two sides also discussed another issues including resumption of coastal shipping services, India-Bangladesh Container Train Service and finalisation of Cooperation Agreement between Bureau of Indian Standards and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institutions.
- This credit has been offered four years after India gave a credit of the same amount to a neighboring country.
- India (New Delhi) and Bangladesh (Dhaka) in August 2010 signed an agreement of 1 billion US dollar with the Indian EXIM Bank to finance 14 infrastructure projects of Bangladesh of which main would be of communication sector. As per the deal the two sides decided to keep the financial support amount as soft loan.
- Earlier, India in November 2011 announced duty-free access of all Bangladeshi products to the market, except 25 alcoholic and drug items.

**57. India Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2011-12**

- As per the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) survey, 4 out of 10 women in India still have no say in their marriage, 8 out of 10 need permission to visit a doctor, 6 out of 10 practise some form of head covering and the average Indian household gives over Rs.30,000 in dowry.
- Excerpts of the latest data of India Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2011-12
  - Sample size: 42,000 households.
  - Covers economic data on income and expenditure, development data on education and health, and sociological data on caste, gender and religion.
  - Average wedding expense: Groom: Rs 81,952, Bride – Rs 1,26,724.
  - Average dowry: Rs.30, 000.
  - Marriage: 48% women (over 25) were married before age 18 (as opposed to 60% in 2004-5) and 59% women (over 25) with any say in marriage.
  - Around 41% of women still have no say in their marriage.
  - Say in marriage: Best states: Tamil Nadu (94%), Assam (90%), AP and Kerala – 86%, Worst States: Rajasthan (20%), UP(24%), MP & Orissa- 29%.
  - Mean age at marriage - 17.8.
  - Knew their husband before marriage (over 25): 18%.
  - Woman practice head/face covering: Highest: Rajasthan – 96%, Bihar – 91%, Haryana & MP – 88%, Lowest: T.N – 6%, AP – 13%, North east – 15%.
  - 81% women need permission to visit doctor.
  - 60% of women, including 59% of forward caste Hindus and 83% of Muslim women, practise some form of 'purdah' or 'ghunghat'.
  - Most expensive weddings: Kerala & Delhi.

- The practice of marrying a cousin or relative, more common in the south than the north, is becoming less common, but over 20% in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka still marry relatives.
- India Human Development Survey (IHDS) is conducted by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER). It is the largest household survey after the government's National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) surveys.
- NCAER is the only independent body that conducts such large-sample panel surveys. The data shows that with the growing level of education, urbanization and women empowerment programme the condition of women is slightly improving in the society.

**58. "HSP90"- New molecule discovered to kill malaria parasite without harming human red blood cells**

- The researchers from the University of Geneva discovered a new molecule HSP90 (Heat Shock Protein 90) that could be effective for the treatment of malaria. HSP90 has the potential to kill malaria parasite without harming human red blood cells.
- Malaria is a life-threatening blood disease caused by a parasite that is transmitted to humans by the Anopheles mosquito. It is preventable and treatable disease.
- Parasite species that cause malaria in humans: Plasmodium falciparum and Plasmodium vivax. The most severe form of malaria is caused by infection with Plasmodium falciparum. The eradication of this parasite is even more difficult as it becomes resistant to treatments.

**59. U.S.- India Energy Dialogue 2014 to advance clean energy access: Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy (PEACE)**

- India and the USA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to create a joint implementation committee to regularly monitor and boost the PEACE (Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy) initiative in New Delhi. This new initiative PEACE was launched in 2013 under the India-US Energy Dialogue.
- Its objective is to harness commercial enterprise to bring clean energy access to un-served and underserved Indian villages, capture lessons learned, and develop best practices. Reliable and cost-effective off-grid clean energy solutions can significantly improve the quality of life and economic conditions in rural households and communities.
- Focus Areas of Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy (PEACE)
  - Sharing best practices and institutional and other approaches.
  - Finance.
  - Technology innovation, standards, testing, and certification.
  - Skill development and information sharing.
- Under the U.S.-India Energy Dialogue 2014, both the Governments finalized an initial plan of activities viz.
  - To create a new "PACE setter fund" to support the development of early-stage, innovative clean energy solutions for un-served and underserved populations in India.
  - To cooperate on a study to recommend the design of a smart micro-grid pilot to test and validate a business model for scaling up smart micro-grids commercially.
  - Will work with stakeholders to develop a quality assurance framework, including control standards and performance benchmarks, that can serve consumers better in terms of safety, reliability, performance and cost comparison, and facilitate the delivery of high quality products to the market.
  - Off-Grid Alliance: To establish an alliance of businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and government to strengthen India's off-grid ecosystem, bring existing efforts to scale, and attract new businesses and commercial enterprises.

- The implementation of PEACE will be under the New Technology and Renewable Energy (NTRE) Working Group of the U.S.-India Energy Dialogue.

**60. GEAC revalidated 10-GM crops for field trials**

- The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) revalidated the field trials for 10 varieties of Genetically Modified (GM) food crops viz. wheat, rice, maize, cotton, sorghum, etc.
- The panel has allowed multi-national seed companies viz. Mahyco, BASF India and Monsanto India to go ahead with wider or phase-II field trials for these genetically modified crops.
- The companies desiring to go for confined field trials will have to be approved first by the respective State governments because agriculture is a State subject under Constitutional provision.
- Revalidation of GM crops varieties was required due to the lapse of validity period on account of State governments not allowing field trial.
- The GEAC had given its clearance in those 10 cases way back in 2011 and 2012.
- **Functions of Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC)**
  - To permit the use of GMOs and products thereof for commercial applications.
  - To adopt producers for restriction or prohibition, production, sale, import & use of GMOs both for research and applications under EPA.
  - To approve for conduct of large scale field trials, evaluation of large scale field trial data and final approval for release of transgenic crop into the environment.
  - To authorize large scale production and release of GMOs and products thereof into the environment.
  - To authorize agencies or persons to have powers to take punitive actions under the EPA.
- The committee under the chairmanship of additional secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) Mr. Hem Pande did not take decision on any new cases in its meeting on Friday. It will meet again on April 25, 2014 to take a call on 70 fresh applications.

**61. G D Birla award for scientific research 2013: Physicist Prof. Rajesh Gopakumar**

- Physicist Prof. Rajesh Gopakumar (46) to be honoured with 23rd G D Birla award for scientific research for 2013. At present, Mr. Gopakumar working as a theoretical physicist at Harish Chandra Research Institute, Allahabad and has made important contributions on topics in quantum field theory and string theory.
- G D Birla award for scientific research was established in 1991 by K K Birla Foundation to recognise significant scientific research undertaken by Indian scientists below the age of 50, working in India.

**62. SC directed Centre to withdraw all orders making Aadhar mandatory for any service**

- The Supreme Court of India has directed the Union Government to withdraw all orders that make the Aadhaar card mandatory for availing any service and also directed the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) not to share any information pertaining to an Aadhaar card holder with any government agency without the prior permission of the card holder.
- The apex court stated that the project not only violates the right to privacy but the "biometrics", which is the foundation of the project, is an unreliable and untested technology.
- The Justice BS Chauhan bench gave their ruling on the petitions that challenged the Constitutional validity of Aadhaar card with those opposing the mega project saying it was not backed by any statute and compromises with national security.

**63. Aditya Puri committee recommendation: Give customers a free copy of credit profile**

- As per the Aditya Puri committee recommendations, customers should be given a free copy of their credit profile as it would help in promoting financial discipline among loan seekers.

- Headed by Aditya Puri (Chairman of HDFC Bank) recently submitted report of the ‘Committee to recommend Data Format for Furnishing of Credit Information to Credit Information Companies (CICs)’ to RBI.
  - On issues relating to credit information viz. increasing its coverage, format of reports and best practices to be followed by credit institutions, Credit Information Companies (CICs) and the RBI.
  - Provide customers with a free copy of their Credit Information Reports (CIRs) that would help to create awareness about the need to have credit discipline, enable customers to correct their behaviour and improve their score well before they plan to avail fresh credit of any kind.
  - Help to detect identity theft at an early stage.
  - Low usage of credit information by member institutions and other specified users needs to be addressed by requiring CICs to populate their databases with requisite credit information so that enquiries by specified users yield desired information
  - Reduce the information asymmetry between lenders and borrowers and provides a fillip to the growth of credit especially among the disadvantaged sections of society.
  - Use common data formats and a common data quality index that could assist credit institutions in determining the gaps in data.
  - CICs should have a common classification of credit scores so they are easier to understand and interpret.

#### **64. Japanese architect Mr. Shigeru Ban won the Pritzker Architecture Prize 2014**

- The Japanese architect, Mr. Shigeru Ban (56) won the Pritzker Architecture Prize 2014 for his unique approach in using materials viz. paper tubes, bamboo and shipping containers.
- Mr. Shigeru Ban is known for his creative and inexpensive designs for disaster relief shelters. He has designed a range of buildings to help victims of natural disasters and refugees in places viz. Rwanda, Turkey, India, China, Haiti, Japan, etc.
- Pritzker Architecture Prize was established in 1979. It is awarded for a career of achievement in the art of architecture.
- Mr. Ban would be the seventh Japanese architect to receive the prize when it is given away on June 13, 2014 in Amsterdam.

#### **65. Mr. Govind Mishra selected for Saraswati Samman 2013**

- The renowned Hindi author, Mr. Govind Mishra will receive Saraswati Samman 2013 for his book “Dhool Paudho Par” published in 2008. The award would make Mr. Mishra the second Hindi author to receive the honour after noted Indian poet Mr. Harivansh Rai Bachchan.
- Saraswati Samman was established in 1991 by the K. K. Birla Foundation. It is an annual award for outstanding prose or poetry literary works in any Indian language listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution of India. In 1991, Mr. Harivansh Rai Bachchan became the first Hindi author to receive the Saraswati Samman for his autobiography in four volumes.

#### **66. 25th Arab summit 2014: Rejected Israel as ‘Jewish state’**

- The Arab Summit refused to recognize Israel as a Jewish state and condemned the Israeli illegal settlements established on the Palestinian territories.
- Highlights of 25th Arab Summit 2014
  - Took place in Kuwait city, Kuwait.
  - Spoke out against the Israel’s continued settlement activities and attempts to Judaise Jerusalem and its violations against Al-Aqsa Mosque as void and contrary to international law.
  - Stressed on the Arabs support to the Palestinian struggle and called on the UN Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities towards the Palestinian cause.

- To intensify all efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem and invited the UN Security Council to take the necessary steps to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and hold it responsible for the peace process' failure.
- Stressed on Arab solidarity with the Syrian people and their legitimate demands to live in a state based on freedom and equality.
- Invited the international community to put an end to the war in Syria and eliminate the suffering of the Syrian people.
- Arab League is a regional organization of Arab countries in and around North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and Southwest Asia. It represents 21 states and about 350 million people. Its objective is to draw closer the relations between memberStates and co-ordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries.

#### **67. RBI simplified foreign portfolio investment norms**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) simplified foreign portfolio investment norms by putting in place an easier registration process and operating framework to attract inflows.
- The portfolio investor registered in reference to SEBI guidelines is known by Registered Foreign Portfolio Investor (RFPI).
- Registered Foreign Portfolio Investor (RFPI)
  - Purchase and sell shares and convertible debentures of Indian companies through a registered broker on recognized stock exchanges in India as well as purchase shares and convertible debentures, which are offered to public in terms of relevant SEBI guidelines, it said.
  - Also acquire shares or convertible debentures in any bid for, or acquisition of, securities in response to an offer for disinvestment of shares made by the Central Government or any State government.
  - Would be eligible to invest in government securities and corporate debt, subject to limits specified by the RBI and SEBI from time to time.
  - All investments made by that FII/QFI in line with the regulations prior to registration as RFPI shall continue to be valid and taken into account for computation of aggregate limit.
  - Might offer cash or foreign sovereign securities with AAA rating or corporate bonds or domestic government securities, as collateral to the recognized stock exchanges for their transactions in cash as well as derivative segment of the market.
- The existing portfolio investor class viz. Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) and Qualified Foreign Investor (QFI) registered with SEBI included under RFPI.

#### **68. WHO: Air pollution top environmental health risk**

- As per the new estimate of World Health Organization (WHO), Air pollution is the world's single largest environmental health risk that caused 7 million deaths in 2012, 80% of which were from heart attacks and stroke.
- **Excerpts of the UN health agency World Health Organization (WHO) report**
  - Air pollution ranges from cooking fires to auto fumes.
  - Biggest pollution-related killers: heart disease, stroke, pulmonary disease and lung cancer.
  - Hardest-hit regions: Southeast Asia viz. India and Indonesia, and the Western Pacific, ranging from China and South Korea to Japan and the Philippines.
  - Indoor air pollution: The global death toll is 4.3 million deaths, caused by cooking over coal, wood and biomass stoves.

- Outdoor pollution: The global death toll is 3.7 million, with sources ranging from coal heating fires to diesel engines.
- Outdoor air pollution caused by car exhausts, power stations, emissions from agriculture and industry, heating in people's homes (Group 1 carcinogenic, a cancer causing agent in the same category as tobacco smoke, UV radiation and plutonium).
- Its' first time, WHO has directed a link between air pollution and heart disease, respiratory problems and cancer. The latest figures of 2012 are more than doubles from the previous estimates of deaths caused by air pollution in 2008.

## 69. "Universal Account Number (UAN)"- will be provided by EPFO from Oct 2014

- The Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) will provide permanent account numbers to its' over five crore subscribers from October, 2014.
- EPFO is a statutory body of the Government of India under the Ministry of Labour and Employment. It administers a compulsory contributory Provident Fund Scheme, Pension Scheme and an Insurance Scheme. (Headquarters: New Delhi).
- Permanent or Universal Account Number (UAN)
  - Purpose: To provide great relief to those workers in organized sector who frequently change jobs, particularly, in the construction sector.
  - Will facilitate subscribers to avoid filing Provident Fund (PF) account transfer claims on changing jobs.
  - Subscriber would not be issued new PF account number on joining new employer.
  - The UAN would be one account number which would be allotted to a subscriber for various schemes run by the EPFO for his or her entire service period with different employers.
  - The roadmap for implementing the UAN programme will be prepared by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).
  - Benefit: UAN will help to reduce the workload of the EPFO to a great extent as it receives over 12 lakh claims for transfer of PF account on changing of jobs by its subscribers.
- The C-DAC is the premier research and development organization under the Union Ministry of Communications & Information Technology for carrying out R&D in IT, Electronics and associated areas.

## 70. "Indian Rhino Vision (IRV) 2020"-Launched by WHO-India to protect Vulnerable Rhinos

- WHO-India launched Indian Rhino Vision (IRV) 2020 programme to protect and increase the population of the one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*). IRV 2020 is a partnership among the Government of Assam, the International Rhino Foundation, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Bodoland Territorial Council, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife foundation.
- Its purpose is to attain a population of 3,000 wild one-horned rhinos in seven of Assam's protected areas by the year 2020.
- The horns of rhinos will be trimmed before their translocation to Laokhowa-Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary in Nagaon district of the state. The trimming will be done in a way that any damage is not done to their internal organs and the trimmed horns will grow back to their original shape within four to five months. This action of trimming will also protect them from the poachers, who hunt them just to take away their horns.
- Rhinos are listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red list of Threatened Species. To achieve the targeted number, the programme needs an increase by 600 over the existing population available in the state in next 8 years. It means an annual increase of about 3 %.

**71. WHO declared South-East Asia region including India polio-free**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) declared South-East Asia region as polio-free region. The certification is being hailed as a historic milestone in the global fight to eradicate the deadly virus. It came after, when WHO certified India officially polio-free after the country went three years with no new cases of the illness.
- India embarked on the programme to eradicate polio 19 years ago in 1995, when the disease used to cripple more than 50,000 children in the country every year. Since January 2011, India has been polio free nation.
- Southeast Asia is the fourth of six WHO regions to officially eradicate the disease, which means 80 % of the world's population now lives in a polio-free area.
- Other WHO Regions that are certified as polio-free: the Region of the Americas (1994), the Western Pacific Region (2000) and the European Region (2002).
- Though, the disease is still endemic in Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan have been free of the virus for more than 15 years.
- Member states in the WHO's Southeast Asia Region: Bangladesh, Bhutan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste.
- The polio-free tag does not mean the end of polio vaccination. Now, nations will have to work towards introducing the injectable polio vaccine and the eventual phasing out of oral polio vaccines. These countries will introduce a dose of IPV by the end of 2015 as part of their commitment to the global polio endgame plan which aims to ensure a polio-free world by 2018.
- Polio is a viral disease that mainly affects children under five years old. The virus is transmitted through contaminated food and water, and multiplies in the intestine. It can then invade the nervous system, causing paralysis in one in every 200-infections.

**72. Third Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) 2014**

- The Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) 2014 held at The Hague, Netherlands. In the third edition of nuclear summit, 58 world leaders participated to enhance the global nuclear security structure.
- To prevent nuclear terrorism by reducing the amount of dangerous nuclear material in the world, improving the security of all nuclear material and radioactive sources and improving international cooperation.
- Leaders of 35 countries viz. Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, the Netherlands, Philippines, UAE, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Vietnam, etc., agreed to adopt the Nuclear Security Guidelines. These guidelines will bind and engage IAEA teams to assess the security of nuclear materials.
- Permit international experts to evaluate their security procedures for nuclear material. It guarantees that security will be assessed on the basis of international standards and ensures the effectiveness of the measures taken.
- New guidelines of NSS 2014
  - Reduce the amount of dangerous nuclear material (highly enriched uranium and plutonium) in the world that terrorists could use to make a nuclear weapon.
  - Improve the security of radioactive material (including low-enriched uranium) that can be used to make a dirty bomb.
  - Improve the international exchange of information and international cooperation.
  - Keep the quantities of nuclear material as low as possible and to reduce them where possible. Countries that use highly enriched uranium or plutonium as fuel for power generation will limit the quantity involved as much as they can.
  - Also covers other radioactive materials viz. low-enriched uranium, cobalt-60, strontium-90 and caesium-137. These materials have useful applications in hospitals industry, research and can also be used with ordinary explosives to make a dirty bomb.

- The leaders of the countries refused to adopt the Nuclear Security Guidelines, viz. China, Russia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Argentina, Thailand, South Africa, Malaysia, Nigeria, Singapore, Egypt, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Jordan and Gabon.

### **73. Internet transition to speedier Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6)**

- The Internet transition from the current Internet Protocol IPv4 to the next-generation Internet protocol IPv6 is set to speed up in 2014 as web addresses under the system IPv4 come to an end. IPv6 addresses are longer and more complex than the familiar 192.168.0.1-style IPv4 addresses.
- With the growth of the Internet, the number of unused IPv4 addresses will eventually run out soon because every device viz. computers, smartphones, game consoles, etc, that connects to the Internet requires an address. IPv4 provides only 4.3 billion addresses i.e. not enough as the Internet continues to grow exponentially. The new Internet addressing system Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6) is being deployed to fulfill the need for more Internet addresses.
- Switchover from IPv4 to IPv6 will bring about many changes viz. No more NAT (Network Address Translation), Auto-configuration, No more private address collisions, Better multicast routing, Simpler header format, Simplified, more efficient routing, True quality of service (QoS), also called "flow labeling", Built-in authentication and privacy support, Flexible options and extensions, Easier administration, etc.
- The Internet protocol (IP) is a protocol by which data is sent from one computer to another on the Internet. Each computer (known as a host) on the Internet has at least one IP address that uniquely identifies it from all other computers on the Internet.
- Current versions of Internet Protocol (IP): IPv4 and IPv6. IPv6 (Internet Protocol Version 6)- Latest version of the Internet Protocol (IP) provides an identification and location system for computers on networks and routes traffic across the Internet. It is more efficient and more secure than IPv4 and provides for trillions of "IP" numbers or addresses. It also permits automatic setup and quality control.

### **74. "Dendroid" -Android Malware targeting Indian Users**

- The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) warned about a currently active Dendroid malware campaign that is spreading across India, targeting Android users.
- Android Malware "Dendroid" belongs to deadly 'Trojan' family. It is created by modifying the required permissions by any clean APK (Android Application Package) with Dendroid RAT functionality that allows detailed management of the infected devices.
- Once activated in our smartphone, could affect and control all applications in our android phone and intercept private SMSes coming in or going out.
- The malicious toolkit, Dendroid is able to generate a customized malicious APK file that offers many amazing features viz.
  - Can delete and modify call logs and contacts.
  - Can open any web page on device browser.
  - Dialing any number.
  - Recording calls.
  - Intercepting device messages.
  - Uploading s and videos to remote server.
  - Can open an installed application.
  - Able to perform DoS attack from the victim's device.
  - Can change the command and control server location.
- Advise by Indian cybersecurity: To keep an eye on data usage (application-wise usage also) and unusual increase in mobile bills and keep an eye on device battery usage (application-wise usage also).

- The CERT-In is the nodal agency to combat hacking, phishing and to fortify security-related defences of the Indian Internet domain.

**75. Amnesty International released Global death penalty report 2013**

- Amnesty International released the Global Death Penalty Report 2013 in London, with a call on governments who still killed in the name of justice to impose a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to abolishing it.
- Highlights of annual Amnesty International report 2013
  - At least 22 countries which are still applying death penalty, consider the abolition of capital punishment as a top priority. Also, the number of countries which use the death penalty has reduced in the last 20 years.
  - World's Top executioner: China.
  - Overall 32 countries signed pardons on death sentences viz. Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), USA, etc.
  - Countries vindicated convicts: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, the UAE and USA.
  - Nine persistent executioners or 'The 9 Worst Offenders' (as they were known to execute every year since 2007 to 2013): China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, USA, Yemen, Sudan, Bangladesh and North Korea.
  - Public executions were known to occur: Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Somalia.
  - No executions were reported in Singapore, while several death-row prisoners had their sentences commuted in that country in 2013.
  - Pacific sub-region continued to be a virtually death penalty-free zone, despite threats from Papua New Guinea to resume executions.
  - For the first time since 2009, Europe and Central Asia was an execution-free zone, with the only country still clinging to the death penalty being Belarus, although that country did not put anyone to death in 2013.
- Indian figures of annual Amnesty International report 2013:
  - President Pranab Mukherjee rejected the mercy petitions of 18 prisoners on death row in 2013, the highest number of rejections by any President in the last 25 years.
  - The international standards were violated on the execution of Mohammad Afzal Guru in February 2013.
  - Raised concerns about the fairness of Afzal Guru's trial viz. he did not receive legal representation of his choice or a lawyer with adequate experience at the trial stage, Afzal Guru's family were not informed in time of his imminent execution and his body was not returned to the family for last rites and burial.
  - 72 new death sentences were known to have been imposed throughout the year and at least 400 people were believed to be on death row at the end of the year.
- Amnesty International is a Non-profit NGO founded in July 1961 by Peter Benenson in the United Kingdom. It is headquartered in Global International Secretariat in London, United Kingdom. Its objective is to conduct research and generate action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights, and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated.

**76. Mr. Sunil Gavaskar: Appointed by SC as interim BCCI chief for IPL 7**

- The Supreme Court of India appointed batting legend, Mr. Sunil Gavaskar as the Interim BCCI President of BCCI to oversee Indian Premier League (IPL) 2014 in place of N Srinivasan and also directed him to relinquish his job as a Cricket Commentator. The other responsibilities of the board would be performed by BCCI vice-president Shivlal Yadav.

- The apex court cleared that they have not passed any order preventing any player or any team from participating in the IPL tournament 2014.
- They permitted Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals to play IPL matches of season 7 as per the schedule.
- The Justice A K Patnaik bench passed interim order in the IPL fixing and betting case and refused to pass any order for allowing former BCCI chief N Srinivasan to participate in the activities of ICC.

**77. Ebola Virus detected in Guinea**

- Ebola Virus causing haemorrhagic fever was detected on 23 March 2014 in Guinea. More than 80 persons have been detected to have been infected with Ebola virus. Out of this 59 persons from Sierra Leone and Liberia have died. This marks the first time an outbreak among humans has been detected.
- Earlier, in 2012 Ebola outbreaks were reported in Congo and Uganda. The only prior case of a human contracting the virus in West Africa came in 1994.
- An outbreak like Ebola can be devastating for a country like Guinea. As Guinea is a country with weak medical infrastructure. UNICEF has set up Doctors Without Borders in Gueckedou to try to stop the disease from spreading.
- Among humans the disease is transmitted through bodily fluids. The subtype of Ebola was not determined yet, as it could give a better idea of the fatality rate. The fatality rate for Ebola can range from 25 to 90 percent.
- Ebola haemorrhagic fever (EHF) is a viral haemorrhagic fever and one of the most virulent viral diseases known to humankind. There are five distinct species of the Ebola virus: Bundibugyo, Côte d'Ivoire, Reston, Sudan and Zaïre. Bundibugyo, Sudan and Zaïre species have been associated with large outbreaks of Ebola haemorrhagic fever (EHF) in Africa causing death in 25-90% of all clinically ill cases, while Côte d'Ivoire and Reston have not.
- The Ebola virus is transmitted by direct contact with the blood, body fluids and tissues of infected persons. Transmission of the Ebola virus has also occurred by handling sick or dead infected wild animals (chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys, forest antelope, fruit bats). The predominant treatment is general supportive therapy.

**78. President Pranab Mukherjee re-promulgated SEBI ordinance**

- President Pranab Mukherjee cleared the re-promulgation of the SEBI Ordinance that provides powers for SEBI Chairman to authorize Investigating Authority or any other officer of the regulator to conduct search and seizure under the SEBI Act and crack down on Ponzi schemes.
- SEBI ordinance – Securities Laws (Amendment) Bill 2013
  - Its purpose is to arm the regulator with more stringent powers comes in wake of thousands of duped investors reportedly taking to the streets in Siliguri (West Bengal) protesting the proliferation of chit fund companies there and the Rs 2,000-crore Sardhaa chit fund scam.
  - SEBI can regulate any money pooling scheme worth Rs 100 crore or more and attach assets in cases of non-compliance and its Chairman can order “search and seizure operations”.
  - It empowers the market watchdog to seek information, such as telephone call data records, from any persons or entities in respect to any securities transaction being investigated by it.
- The SEBI ordinance lapsed on January 15, has been re-promulgated for the third time as the Parliament could not pass the Securities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2013, in the winter session.

## 79. India's forex reserves near \$300 billion mark

- India's foreign exchange reserves continued their rally for the fourth straight week, increased by \$1.35 billion to 298.64 billion dollar on a surge in currency assets even though the reserve position with the IMF slid heavily.
- As per the data released by Reserve Bank of India( RBI)
  - Gold reserves remained unchanged at \$ 20.978 billion.
  - Foreign currency assets (FCAs), a major part of the overall reserves, rose \$1.58 billion to \$ 271.40 billion.
  - FCAs expressed in dollar terms, include the effect of appreciation/depreciation of the non-US currencies viz. the euro, pound and yen held in its reserves.
  - The special drawing rights were down by \$ 16.9 million to % 4.462 billion, while the country's reserve position with the IMF was down by a whopping \$ 214.7 million to \$1.801 billion.

## 80. India's external debt at \$426 billion in December, 2013

- As per the quarterly report of Ministry of Finance (MoF), India's external debt was at \$ 426 billion – including the government's debt of \$ 76.4 billion in December 2013. The total external debt of \$ 426 billion showed an increase of \$ 21.1 billion over the March-end level.
- Reasons for increase of India's external debt during the period were
  - Due to long-term debt particularly NRI deposits.
  - A sharp increase in NRI deposits reflected the impact of fresh FCNR(B) deposits mobilised under the swap scheme during September-November 2013.
- Excerpts of the quarterly report of Ministry of Finance (MoF) on December 2013 figures
  - Long term debt: \$333.3 billion showed an increase of 8.1 % over March, 2013 level.
  - Short-term debt: Declined by 4.1 % to \$92.7 billion.
  - Government (Sovereign) external debt: \$76.4 billion, (17.9 % of total external debt)
  - The share of US dollar denominated debt was the highest in external debt stock and stood at 63.6%, followed by debt denominated in Indian rupee (19.4 %), SDR (7.1 %), Japanese yen (5.0 %) and Euro (3.1 %).
  - The debt has remained within manageable limits as indicated by the external debt to GDP ratio of 23.3 %, vis-a-vis 21.8 % at end-March 2013 and debt service ratio of 5.9 % in 2012-13.
  - India's foreign exchange reserves provided 69 % cover to the total external debt as of December end, against 72.1 % as of March-end 2013.
  - India's external debt has remained within manageable limits due to prudent external debt management policy of the Government of India.
- The external debt management policy continues to focus on monitoring long and short-term debt, raising sovereign loans on concessional terms with longer maturities, regulating external commercial borrowings through end-use, all-in-cost and maturity restrictions, and rationalising interest rates on Non-Resident Indian deposits.

## 81. Parthasarathi Shome panel for tax administration reform set up

- In a bid to bring more credibility among tax payers and to streamline income tax procedures, the Union Government has set up a Tax Administration Reform Commission (TARC) comprising officials from public and private sector agencies.
- Tax Administration Reform Commission (TARC)
  - Chairman: Dr. Parthasarathi Shome.
  - Focus: On the rules and features and structural reforms in tax administration.

- Members: Former chairmen of two tax boards, Former Chief Financial Officer from IT service provider Tata Consultancy Services and an Ex-Vice President for Taxation from the Murugappa Group.
- Purpose: To bring in more transparency in the tax department and in the collection of taxes as a certain amount of “distrust” emerged between the tax department and the tax payers.

## **82. SEBI extends time to implement FPI regulations to June 30, 2014**

- The market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) extended the time-frame for implementing new Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) regulations by three months to June 30, 2014.
- SEBI has divided FPIs into three categories as per their risk profile and the KYC (Know Your Client) requirements. The new FPI regime makes the KYC norms and other registration procedure much simpler as compared to existing process.
- Its purpose is to make an easier registration process and operating framework for overseas entities seeking to invest in Indian capital markets. The new regulations will replace the existing SEBI norms for Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and the new class of investors, FPIs, would encompass all FIIs, their sub-accounts and qualified foreign investors (QFIs).
- Designated Depository Participants (DDPs): Through which FPIs can apply for registration, may continue to open QFI accounts till May 31, 2014.
- Category I FPIs: It would enlist the lowest risk entities including foreign governments and government related foreign investors.
- Category II FPIs: It would comprise of broad based funds, appropriately regulated entities, funds whose investment manager is appropriately regulated, university funds, university related endowments, pension funds etc.
- Category III FPIs: It would cover all others not eligible under the first two categories.
- FPIs will be granted permanent registration. At present, foreign investors are given only one year or five year approval to invest in the country. They will be permanent unless suspended or cancelled by the board or surrendered by the FPI.

## **83. SC commuted Bhullar's death sentence to life imprisonment**

- The Supreme Court commuted the death sentence of Devinderpal Singh Bhullar to the life imprisonment on 31 March 2014 on the basis of a curative petition. Mental illness and inordinate delay in deciding his mercy petition were the main reasons behind this decision. The landmark judgment of the apex court on 21 January also played a crucial role in the entire case.
- The Supreme Court gave a verdict on 21 January 2014 that inordinate and inexplicable delay by the government in deciding mercy petitions can be a ground for commutation of death sentence as this delay can have a dehumanizing effect on the death convict.
- The Centre while admitting the delay in deciding his mercy petition, informed the Supreme Court on 27 March 2014 that it has no problem with the commutation of death sentence of Devinderpal Singh Bhullar.
- Khalistani terrorist Devinder Singh Bhullar was awarded death sentence for triggering a bomb blast in New Delhi in 1993. 9 persons were killed and 25 persons were injured in the blast.
- The Supreme Court rejected his appeal on 26 March 2002 against death sentence which was awarded to him by a trial court and endorsed by the Delhi High Court. The Apex court also dismissed his review petition and a curative petition. Bhullar filed a mercy petition on 14 January 2003 to the President. The president rejected his petition on 14 May 2011. Citing the delay of 8 years in taking a decision, he again filed a petition for commutation of his death sentence to the Supreme Court. This petition was rejected.

- However, on the basis of the Supreme Court's verdict on 21 January 2014, a bench of Supreme Court stayed the Bhullar's execution and had agreed to relook into its earlier judgment of rejecting the plea of commutating the death sentence.

**84. Supreme Court seeks response from Centre on selection process of Lokpal**

- Supreme Court of India on 31 March 2014 issued a notice to the Union Government and has sought its response on selection process of Chairperson and member of the Lokpal. It has asked the center to justify within four weeks the Search Committee Rules, 2014 that is framed under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2014.
- The bench of Supreme Court comprising Justice RM Lodha and Kurian Joseph has directed the government on a petition filed by an NGO Common Cause questioning the entire process for appointment of chairperson and members of the Lokpal. The NGO in its plea is seeking its stay on the process. NGO's plea sought to declare the pro-illegal the rules under which selections are being done.
- The NGO in its PIL has sought a declaration that certain provisions of the rules are ultra vires of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act. It has also sought quashing of the entire selection process initiated under the rules alleging that it is illegal, arbitrary and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution.
- It has said that the government is going ahead with the selection process despite there being serious flaws in the rules under which selections are being done. The notice of the Supreme Court was accepted by Solicitor General Mohan Parasaran on the behalf of the Center.
- As per the petition, earlier, Justice K T Thomas and Fali Nariman had already declined the proposal to accept the offers on similar grounds at the post of the chairman and member of the search committee respectively.

**85. SC uphold the age of juvenile to 18 years**

- The Supreme Court on 30 March 2014 upheld the age of juvenile to 18 years. SC cited that the legislature has fixed the age which is constitutionally permissible.
- Two petitions were filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy challenging the constitutional validity of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000.
- The petitioners had sought fresh interpretation of the term 'juvenile' in the statute and leaving it to the criminal court, instead of Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), to determine the juvenility of an offender in heinous crimes.
- Under the Chief Justice P Sathasivam, a Bench was formed comprising of three judges. The bench had rejected the petitions and upheld the constitutionality of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000.
- In the judgement, the bench opined that the Union legislature has adopted the age of 18 as the dividing line between juveniles and adults and such a decision is constitutionally permissible and all persons below the age of 18 are put in one class/group by the JJ Act to provide a separate scheme of investigation, trial and punishment for offences committed by them.
- As per the Supreme Court, the object of the JJ Act was to rehabilitate the offenders of under 18 years, so that they could become useful members of the society later on.
- **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000**
  - The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 is the primary legal framework for juvenile justice in India. The Act provides for a special approach towards the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency and provides a framework for the protection, treatment and rehabilitation of children in the purview of the juvenile justice system.

- **Beijing Rules**
  - In September 1980 the United Nations held its Sixth Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in Caracas, Venezuela. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, often referred to as the Beijing Rules was adopted.
  - It is a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly regarding the treatment of juvenile prisoners and offenders in member nations.
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**
  - The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention and opened it for signature on 20 November 1989.
  - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (commonly abbreviated as the CRC, CROC, or UNCRC) is a human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

