



CURRENT AFFAIRS JANUARY 2015

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

FOREIGN FUNDING OF NGOS

FROZEN OUT
MHA DIRECTS RBI TO BLOCK FOREIGN FUNDS FLOW TO 4 NGOs



- Avaaz, New York, organises citizens to address public issues
- BIC, Washington, holds public debate on energy projects in India
- 350.org, New York, spearheads climate change campaigns
- Sierra Club, California, opposes Australian coal imports for Indian thermal plants

Green groups take part in the People's Climate march organised by Avaaz in Delhi on September 20, 2014. – PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

MHA to launch probe into remittances from the NGOs to Indian units since 2013

- The government has clamped down on **four American NGOs** — Avaaz, Bank Information Centre (BIC), Sierra Club and 350.org. Earlier it had acted against **Greenpeace**. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has directed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to stop all foreign funding into the accounts of these NGOs or their representatives without MHA clearance.
- Bank Information Centre, Avaaz, 350.org and Sierra Club are engaged in work related to the social and environmental impact of coal projects.

INTELLIGENCE BUREAU REPORT 2014

A Intelligence Bureau report, “Concerted efforts by select foreign-funded NGOs to take down Indian development projects”, in 2014 alleged that several foreign-funded environmental NGOs were targeting development projects across the country.

According to report, the following categories of developmental projects have been opposed by NGOs.

- Nuclear power plants.
- Uranium mines.
- Coal-Fired power plants (CFPPs).
- Genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
- Mega industrial projects (Posco and Vedanta).
- Hydel projects (at Narmada Sagar and in Arunachal Pradesh) and
- Extractive industries (oil, limestone) in the north-east.

Blaming the NGOs for serving as tools for the strategic foreign policy interests of western governments, the IB report claims that **the negative impact of NGOs is about 2-3 of the GDP per annum**.

ANALYSIS

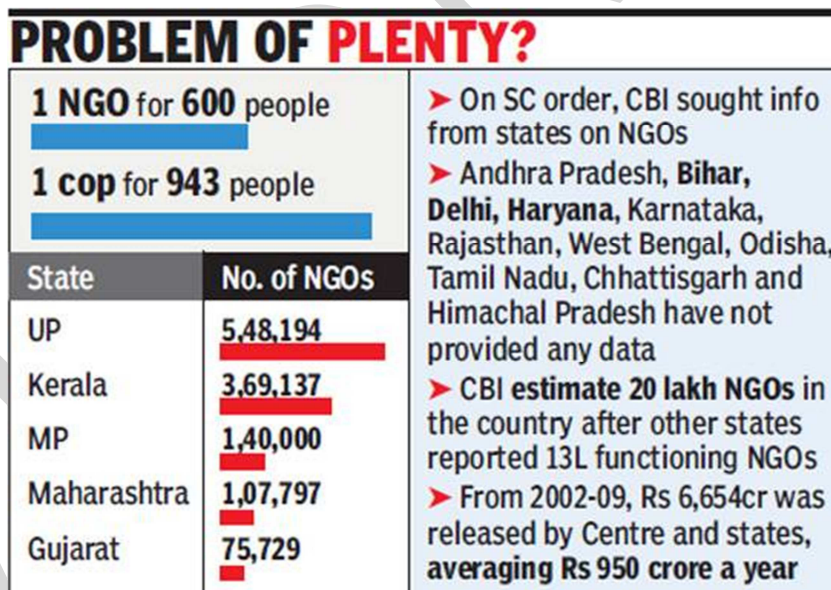
- Many eminent citizens have voiced their concern about clamped down on NGOs, they alleged that government is working under the pressure of corporate.
- Government should not curb the dissenting voices generated by various NGOs on the behalf of marginalized section of society since NGOs and civil society organizations are very much part of democracy.
- At the same time, there is urgent need to regulate the foreign funding of NGOs that require suitable amendment in Foreigners' Contribution and Registration Act (**FCRA**).

CBI Analysis about NGOs Fund

BACKGROUND

- A PIL petition was filed by advocate Manohar Lal Sharma in the Supreme Court for a direction to the CBI to probe the 'irregularities' in Anna Hazare's Hind Swaraj Trust.
- Acting on the PIL, the Supreme Court directed the CBI to file an affidavit giving details of the NGOs registered with the various authorities and indicate whether they were filing the balance sheets regularly.
- The court had expanded the scope of the petition and directed the CBI to file the entire list of NGOs in the country registered under the Societies Registration Act.

CBI FINDINGS



- Only about 10 per cent of the over 22 lakh non-government organisations file their annual income and expenditure statements with the authorities they are registered with.
- The CBI urged the court to impose a pre-condition on NGOs that they first submit their balance sheets, including income and expenditure statements, for the preceding three years before further grants were allowed.

SMART CARDS FOR UNORGANISED SECTOR WORKERS

Every worker in the unorganised sector may soon be issued a smart card with a unique identification number for accessing social schemes and benefits. It was launched in Gujarat.

- The Gujarat launch (a card, “**U-WIN**”) was a pilot for launching the card in all States.
- The proposal is all workers must get **three things — health insurance, pension and disability assistance.**
- This card will allow workers to self-certify that they are unorganised sector workers, and get these benefits through a portable card
- The portable benefits card will be issued under the **Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008.**

BACKGROUND

- The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) Report, 2005, over 394 million workers, **87 per cent** of the country’s working population, are **in the unorganised sector.**
- The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008, passed after the setting up of the NCEUS in 2004 under Arjun Sengupta.
- Act provides for constitution of the National Social Security Advisory Board at the Central level, which is to recommend social security schemes, health and maternity benefits and pension schemes for unorganised workers.

NRI VOTING

BACKGROUND

NRIs were given voting rights in 2010 through an amendment in the Representation of People Act, 1951. Parliament passed the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act in 2010 to introduce Section 20A, before that amendment, only “ordinary residents” could cast their vote.

With the amendment, NRIs can exercise their voting rights, but have to fulfill two conditions.

- **Registered as a voter:** NRIs have to be registered in electoral rolls of the constituency where they are listed as residents before leaving India.
- **Physically present:** Section 20A had required NRIs to be physically present in their respective constituencies at the time of elections.

PETITION IN THE SUPREME COURT

Public interest litigation was petition filed in the Supreme Court against the “inherent inequality” created by Section 20(A) of the Representation of Peoples (Amendment) Act of 2010.

The petition argued that the provision was in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution to the extent that it impliedly treated persons on a different footing based on economic classifications.

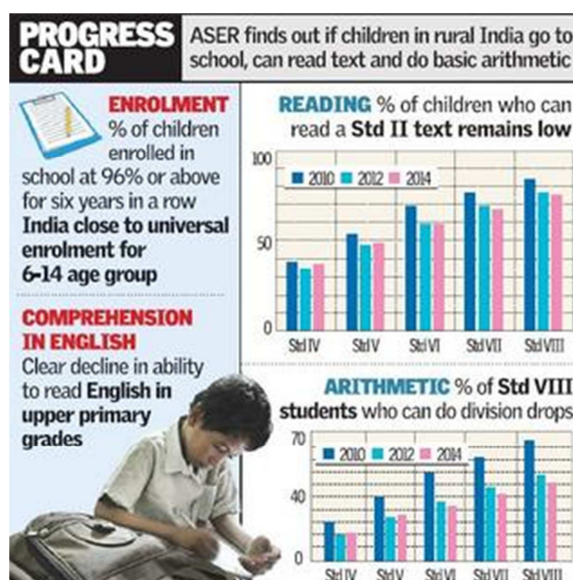
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

- A report was prepared by Election Commission, for ‘Exploring Feasibility of Alternative Options for Voting by Overseas Electors.’

- The Union government informed the Supreme Court that it had accepted Election Commission's recommendation to allow NRIs to vote through **e-ballot system** or **through proxy**.

IMPACTS OF NRI VOTING

- There are 10 million Indian citizens staying abroad, this means an astonishing average of 18,000 votes per constituency may get polled from abroad.
- These additional votes, if polled, will obviously play a crucial role in state and general election.



The 10th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2014, released by the Pratham Educational Trust, flags gaps between input and outcome in elementary education.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2014, says only an average 48.1 per cent of Class V children across India can read a Class II-level text.
- While this is an improvement from the 47 per cent in 2013, the percentage shot up to 46.9 from 31.9 in Tamil Nadu.
- Across the country, the ability of class V children to divide a three-digit number by a single digit has fallen from 36.2 per cent in 2010 to 26.1 per cent in 2014.
- Learning outcomes have stagnated in reading and arithmetic since 2013.
- Close to universal enrolment in the 6-14 age group for six consecutive years.

ANALYSIS:

- Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's caution regarding the insecurity that people face over a lifetime due to the deprivation of basic education.
- Nobel laureate Amartya Sen says that people face insecurity over a lifetime due to the deprivation of basic education.
- ASER findings amount to a distressing catalogue of the failures inherent in the pedagogic methods of instruction in vogue. The foremost among them is the overemphasis on a curriculum that is geared to

outcomes in the form of examination results, at the expense of a process of learning that is oriented to a mastery of concepts.

MINES AND MINERALS (DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATION) (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE, 2015

BACKGROUND

- The number of new Mining Leases granted in the country have fallen substantially.
- Subsequent renewals have also been affected by Court judgements.

As a result, the output in the mining sector has come down drastically, leading to import of minerals by users of those minerals.

The promulgation of Ordinance became necessary to address the emergent problems in the mining industry. The ordinance has following important provisions:

STRONGER PROVISIONS FOR CHECKING ILLEGAL MINING

- In order to bring a check on illegal mining, the penal provisions have been made further stringent. Higher penalties and jail terms have been provided in the ordinance.
- A provision has been made for constitution of special courts by the state govt. **for fast-track trial of cases related to illegal mining.**

SIMPLIFICATION OF PROCEDURE AND REMOVAL OF DELAY

- In respect of ten minerals in Part C of First Schedule (like iron ore, manganese, bauxite, copper, gold, etc.), State Government needed to obtain the prior approval of the Central Government before grant of mineral concession. The amendment removes the need for such prior approval from the Central Government.
- The Ordinance also provides that the tenure of any Mining Lease would now be 50 years in place of 30 years in the existing Act.
- The ordinance removes the concept of renewal of leases and after the end of the lease period, leases will be auctioned.
- Central government has been given powers to intervene where state governments do not pass orders within prescribed timelines. This will eliminate delay.

ENCOURAGING EXPLORATION AND INVESTMENT

- The Ordinance proposes to setup a National Mineral Exploration Trust created out of contribution from the mining lease holders. This would allow the Government to have a dedicated fund for undertaking exploration.
- The transferability provision (in respect of Mining Leases to be granted through auction) would permit flow of greater investment to the sector and increasing the efficiency in mining.

SAFEGUARDING INTEREST OF AFFECTED PERSONS

- There is provision to establish **District Mineral Foundation (DMF)** in the districts where mining takes place. This is designed to address the long time grievance of the civil society with people affected by mining are not cared for.
- There is separate provision for contribution to the DMF not exceeding 1/3rd of the royalty rate in the respective minerals.

REMOVAL OF DISCRETION

- **Auction** to be sole method of allotment
- All mineral concessions will be granted only through auction.
- Direct auction for mining leases for bulk minerals; auction of prospecting licences-cum-mining leases for deep-seated minerals.

THE NATIONAL HERITAGE CITY DEVELOPMENT AND AUGMENTATION YOJANA (HRIDAY)

- It is a recently launched scheme that seeks to preserve and rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of the country.
- It was launched by the Ministry of Urban Development HRIDAY seeks to **promote an integrated, inclusive and sustainable development of heritage sites**, focusing not just on maintenance of monuments but on advancement of the entire ecosystem including its citizens, tourists and local businesses.'
- With 32 UNESCO recognized natural and cultural heritage sites, ranking second in Asia and fifth in the world, the tourism potential of the country is still to be fully harnessed and the new scheme will help in this regard.
- Rs.500 cr would be provided to the 12 cities selected in the first phase under the 'Central Scheme' of HRIDAY.

VARANASI-KYOTO DEAL

The Centre has identified five areas for the Kyoto-Varanasi partnership, based on which the Japanese will extend their expertise to help rejuvenate the holy city. These include:

- Solid-liquid waste management
- Transport management
- Developing the Buddhist tourist circuit in and around Varanasi
- Industry-university interface and
- Setting up of a convention centre on public-private partnership basis for giving a fillip to the cultural activities in the city.

A sum of Rs. 80 crore was sanctioned for Varanasi under the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (Hriday).

CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE, 2015

It amends the following provisions of the Indian Citizen Act, 1955

- At present one year continuous stay in India is mandatory for Indian Citizenship which is relaxed stating that if the Central Government is satisfied that special circumstances exist, it may, after recording such circumstances in writing, relax the period of twelve months specified upto a maximum of thirty days which may be in different breaks.
- To enable for registration as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) by a minor, whose parents are Indian Citizens.
- To enable for registration as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) by a child or a grand-child or a great grandchild of such a citizen.
- To enable for registration as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) by such spouse of a citizen of India or spouse of an OCI registered under Section 7A and whose marriage has been registered and subsisted for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the application under this section.
- In respect of existing PIO card holders central government may, by notification in Official Gazette, specify a particular date from which all existing PIO card holders will be deemed to be OCI card holders.

The Indian Citizenship Act, 1955 provides for acquisition, termination, deprivation, determination of Indian Citizenship and other related aspects. The Act provides for **acquisition of Indian citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalization and incorporation of territory** under certain circumstances, and also for the termination and deprivation of citizenship.

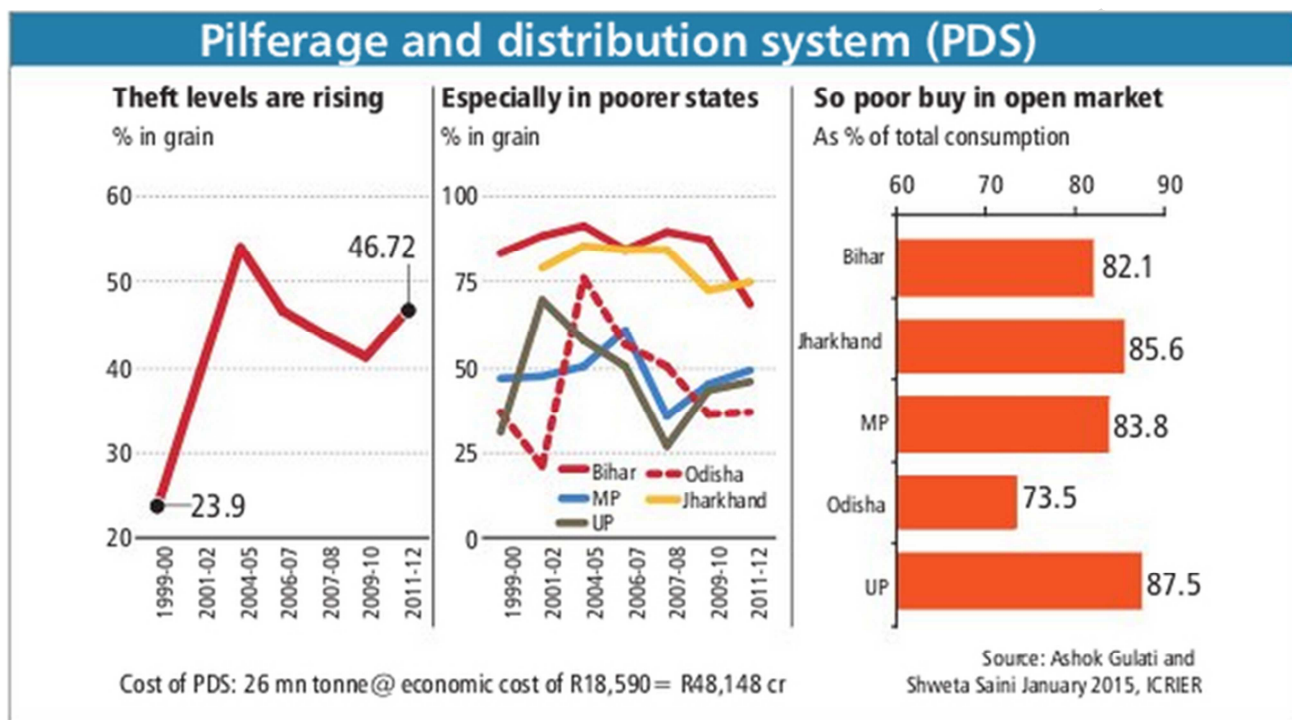
A PERSON OF INDIAN ORIGIN (PIO)	PIO VS OCI	OVERSEAS CITIZEN OF INDIA (OCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Means a foreign citizen (except a national of Pakistan, Afghanistan Bangladesh, China, Iran, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Nepal) ➤ A foreign citizen whose one of the parents/ grandparents/ great grandparents was born and a permanent resident of India ➤ Who is a spouse of a citizen of India or a PIO 		<p>A foreign national, who was eligible to become citizen of India on 26.01.1950 or was a citizen of India on or at anytime after 26.01.1950 or belonged to a territory that became part of India after 15.08.1947 is eligible for registration as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI). Minor children of such person are also eligible for OCI. However, if the applicant had ever been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh, he/she will not be eligible for OCI.</p>
<p>BENEFITS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PIO card holders do not require a visa to visit India for a period of 15 years from the date of issue of the PIO card. 2. They are exempted from registration at FRRO/ FRO if their stay does not exceeds 180 days. In case if the stay exceeds 180 days, they shall have to register with FRRO/ FRO within the next 30 days 3. They enjoy parity with NRIs in economic, financial and educational benefits 4. All future benefits that would be exempted to NRIs would also be available to the PIO card holders 		<p>BENEFITS</p> <p>OCIs are entitled to a multipurpose, multiple entry, lifelong visa allowing them to visit India at any time, for any length of time and for any purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exempted from police reporting for any length of stay in the country ➤ Have also been granted all rights in the economic, financial and education fields in parity with NRIs except, the right to acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties

MERGER OF THE PIO AND OCI SCHEMES

- The amendments to the Citizenship Act will benefit PIOs and will give them benefits like life-long visa and exemption from registering with the FRO/FRRO if their stay here exceeds six months.

- The ordinance rolling PIO and OCI schemes into a single Indian Overseas Cardholder scheme will drop the clause requiring foreigners married to Indian citizens to continuously stay in the country for a period of one year before they can apply for Indian citizenship.
- The amendment will allow foreigners breaks not exceeding 30 days, to travel abroad during the mandatory one-year stay in India.

PROBLEMS WITH PDS SYSTEM




FINDINGS OF ICRIER (INDIAN COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS)

Theft levels have been calculated by taking the foodgrains-distributed figure from FCI and subtracting from this the foodgrains actually received by people.

- ❖ Thefts from the public distribution system (PDS) are consistently rising and, according to the latest data for FY12, were a little over Rs 48,000 crore.
- ❖ Leakages from the PDS have been steadily rising — from 24 per cent of all grain distributed by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) in 1999-2000 to a little under 47 per cent (or 26 million tonnes) in 2011-12.
- ❖ Highest incidence of theft from the PDS system is in states that have the largest number of poor. So, UP, Bihar, MP, Maharashtra and West Bengal, which account for 60 per cent of India's poor, also leaked close to 50 per cent of the country's grain in 2011-12.
- ❖ States like Chhattisgarh, which have used technology — installing GPS sets in PDS trucks and sending SMSes to customers — to fix their PDS systems have not fared much better than others.

U.S. WORRIED ABOUT 'MAKE IN INDIA' RULE

POWER PROBLEM	U.S. RAISES CONCERNS OVER INDIA'S SOLAR POLICY THAT APPEARS TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST U.S. EXPORTS
JAN 2010 India launches national solar policy	
▶ Mission aimed at deploying 20,000 MW of solar power by 2022	
OCT 2013 Cabinet approves domestic content requirements	▶ WTO rules prohibit measures that discriminate against imported goods
▶ Solar power developers must use solar cells and modules made in India	DEC 2014 Cabinet approves scheme to set up 1,000 MW of solar projects
FEB 2014 U.S. challenges India's solar policy in WTO	▶ President Obama may announce fund for projects during India visit

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, during his visit to the Vibrant Gujarat summit, brought up the worries over the government's push for use of indigenous technology, calling it the new "make in India law".

The U.S. administration is irked over the government's announcement of a series of 1,000MW "grid-connected solar PV power projects" that has a "mandatory condition that all PV cells and modules used in solar plants set up under this scheme will be made in India.

India maintains that U.S. subsidies on solar products threaten Indian manufacturers, and the domestic solar industry has accused the U.S. of "dumping cheap outdated technology" on India.

In 2014, India's installed solar power capacity was at about 2,600 MW, and the increase to 100,000 MW (or 100 GW) will require an estimated \$100 billion a year for the next five years for production and \$50 billion a year for transmission and distribution costs, much of which is expected from the United States.

1,000 MW GRID-CONNECTED SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC POWER PROJECTS

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), has approved the scheme for setting up of 1000 MW of Grid-Connected Solar PV Power Projects by Central Public Sector units (CPSUs) and other government organisations.

- These projects are to be established with VGF (viability gap fund) support of Rs.1,000crore over a period of three years (2015-16 to 2017-18).
- The Scheme will have a mandatory condition that all PV cells and modules used in solar plants set up under this Scheme, will be made in India.
- Organisations such as NTPC, NHPC, CIL, IREDA and Indian Railways, among others have agreed to set up solar plants.
- All States and Union Territories are eligible for benefitting under the scheme.

Centre has also **proposed to establish 25 Solar Parks**, each with a capacity of 500 MW and above with a target of over 20,000 MW of solar power installed capacity over a period of 5 years (2014-19).

INDIA-US SOLAR ISSUE BACKGROUND

The US argument against the local buying clause in the solar projects under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission launched in 2010 is that it discriminates against foreign manufacturers of components and thus violates WTO norms.

- The US has filed a complaint in the WTO against India's domestic content requirement (DCR) under the country's Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission.
- On the issue, consultations were held with the US in March 2013 and March 2014 under the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism but no satisfactory result came out.
- The WTO has set up a dispute settlement panel to examine a complaint by the US against India's domestic content requirements under the country's solar power programme.

India has argued that since the purchase of power produced under the mission is by a Government agency, it falls under the category of Government Procurement which is out of the purview of WTO rules.

PRESIDENTS VIEW ON ARTICLE 108

- A joint session of Parliament is **not a “practicable solution”** to resolve a legislative impasse.
- He urged the political establishment as a whole to ensure the passage of laws.
- The President pointed out that he had “seen since 1952 till today **only four times** laws were passed by joint session”.

LAST RESORT

ARTICLE 108 CITES 3 GROUNDS FOR NOTIFYING A JOINT SITTING

- If one House passes the Bill but the **other rejects it**
- If one House passes the Bill, but **6 months lapse** without the other House passing it
- If one House passes the Bill, but the other passes it with certain amendments that the **first House disagrees with and there is a deadlock**



ORDINANCE RAJ

- In the eight months since the new government came to power in May 2014, its Cabinet cleared 11 ordinances, 10 of which have already become law after the President of India promulgated them.
- The government is coming under attack for creating what critics call the “Ordinance Raj”, who accuse the government of bypassing Parliament’s lawmaking powers, only because it is in a minority in the Rajya Sabha

CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION

- **Article 123** of the Constitution allows the government to recommend the President to pass an ordinance if Parliament is in recess and to meet emergent needs.

- Article 123 (2) provides that an ordinance must be replaced by a law not later than six weeks from the re-assembly of the two Houses.

SUPREME COURT RULING LIMITS LIFE OF ORDINANCES

- In 1986, the Supreme Court judgment in **D.C. Wadhwa versus State of Bihar** declared that it was the “constitutional duty” of the public to approach the court against re-promulgation of ordinances in a massive scale as a routine measure.
- The apex court held “the power to promulgate an ordinance is essentially a power to be used to meet an extraordinary situation and cannot be allowed to be ‘perverted to serve political ends’.
- There must not be an Ordinance Raj in the country,” a five-judge Bench led by the then Chief Justice of India, P.N. Bhagwati, observed in the judgment of December 20,1986.
- An ordinance is promulgated by the President on the Union Cabinet’s advice under Article 123 of the Constitution. It is a power wielded in circumstances that require immediate action. Ordinances cannot be re-promulgated on a massive scale in a routine manner, the apex court had held.
- Way Forward: Due to continuous disruption of parliament proceedings, the government was not in position to pass many important legislation that require urgent legislative amendment to promote growth and favorable investment environment in the country. Hence it took the route of ordinance and the government is well within constitutional limits to issue ordinances. Moreover ordinances are short term measures that needs to be taken in the next setting of parliament.

ARTICLE 371(J)

BACKGROUND

Hyderabad-Karnataka is a region located in north-east Karnataka. It is the Kannada speaking part of the Hyderabad State that was ruled by the Nizams of Hyderabad until 1948. After merging with the Indian union, the region was part of Hyderabad State until 1956. The Hyderabad-Karnataka region comprises Bidar, Yadgir, Raichur, Koppal, Bellary and Gulbarga that that are in the present state of Karnataka. **The Hyderabad-Karnataka region is the second largest arid region in India.**

The Constitution (Ninety-Eighth Amendment) ACT, 2012 inserted Article 371(J) aimed at bringing about all-round development in the six districts of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region.

Special provisions with respect to State of Karnataka:

- a) Establishment of a separate development board for Hyderabad Karnataka region with the provision that a report on the working of the board will be placed each year before the State Legislative Assembly;
- b) Equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said region, subject to the requirements of the State as a whole; and
- c) Equitable opportunities and facilities for the people belonging to the said region, in matters of public employment, education and vocational training, subject to the requirements of the State as a whole.

An order made under sub-clause (c) of clause (1) may provide for-

- a) Reservation of a proportion of seats in educational and vocational training institutions in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region for students who belong to that region by birth or by domicile; and
- b) Identification of posts or classes of posts under the State Government and in anybody or organisation under the control of the State Government in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region and reservation of a proportion of such posts for persons who belong to that region by birth or by domicile and for appointment thereto by direct recruitment or by promotion or in any other manner as may be specified in the order.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT

Hyderabad Karnataka Horata Samiti (HKHS), a civil society organisation that had been in forefront of the people's struggles for Article 371(J), has come up with **an idea of launching a website**. So that people of the region will get the benefits without much delay.

- To provide complete information about Article 371(J), related government orders, admission and recruitment notifications on single platform.
- The website will also serve as a general guide for both the people and implementing authorities.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

CONSUMER RIGHTS

According to the Consumer Protection Act 1986, the consumer right is referred to as 'right to be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property.

- Right to Safety
- Right to be Informed/Right to Representation
- Right to Choose
- Right to be Heard
- Right to Seek Redressal
- Right to Consumer Education

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 1986

Enactment of Consumer protection Act 1986 was one of the most important steps taken to protect the interest of consumer. The main features of this Act are:

- This act has provided various rights and responsibilities to consumers.
- It provides safeguard to customers against defective goods, deficient's, services, unfair trade practices and other forms of their exploitation.
- The act has provided three tier redressal agencies where consumer can file complaints.

These are District forum, State Commission and National Commission.

SALIENT FEATURES OF CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- **Coverage of Items:** This Act is applicable on all the products and services, until or unless any product or service is especially debarred out of the scope of this Act by the Central Government.
- **Coverage of Sectors:** This Act is applicable to all the areas whether private, public or cooperative.
- **Compensatory Nature of Provisions:** Consumers enjoy the benefits of these Acts but if a consumer wishes the Consumer Protection Act can provide extra help. As a result the nature of provisions of this Act is compensating for the loss or providing extra help.
- **Group of Consumer's Rights:** These rights are related to safety, information, choice, representation, redressal, education etc.
- **Effective Safeguards:** This Act provides safety to consumers regarding defective products, dissatisfactory services and unfair trade practices.

- **Three-tier Grievances Redressal Machinery:**
- Consumer courts have been established so that the consumers can enjoy their rights. This Act presents Three- tier Grievances Redressal Machinery:
 - At District Level-District Forum
 - At State Level -State Commission
 - At National Level – National Commission.
- **Time Bound Redressal:** A main feature of the Act is that under this, the cases are decided in a limited time of period.
- **Consumer Protection Council:** To favour consumer protection and to encourage consumer’s awareness there is a provision in this Act to establish Consumer Protection Councils.

JAGO GRAHAK JAGO

Jago Grahak Jago, a consumer awareness campaign, started in 2005 by the government of India and is still on progress. But the activists recommended that the consumer protection act needs several amendments to sort out the problems faced by the consumers.

RECENT JUDGEMENT

The North East District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum has directed ICICI Bank and Arcil Arms to pay a compensation of Rs 8.50 lakhs to a couple for defacing their original title deeds in lieu of which they had taken a loan.

RTI APPLICANT NOT A CONSUMER

The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), the apex consumer forum, has held that “no complaint by a person alleging deficiency in services rendered by the CPIO/PIO is maintainable before a Consumer Forum.”

- A person seeking information under the Right to Information Act cannot be said to be a consumer vis-à-vis the Public Authority concerned or the CPIO/PIO nominated by it.
- The RTI Act is a complete code in itself, which provides an adequate and effective remedy to the person aggrieved from any decision/ inaction/ act /omission or misconduct of a CPIO/PIO.
- The NCDRC stated that it is not necessary that the legislature has to provide for grant of compensation in every case of deficiency in the services rendered to a consumer.

GOVERNOR RULE IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

- The Governor's rule was imposed in the state after the assembly election results on 23 December threw up a hung assembly with no party or combination of parties able to stake claim for government formation.
- Once the governor issues the proclamation, the assembly would be kept in suspended animation.

WHAT IS GOVERNOR RULE

- In the event of failure of constitutional machinery in any other state of India, the President's Rule is imposed under Article 356 of the Constitution.

- But in case of Jammu and Kashmir, the Governor's Rule for a period of six months is imposed under the provision of Section 92 of the State Constitution and the proclamation to this effect is issued by the Governor only after the consent of the President of India.
- The State Assembly is either kept in suspended animation or dissolved.
- If it is not possible to restore the Constitutional machinery before the expiry of this six month period, the provision of Article 356 of the Constitution is extended and the President's rule is imposed in the State.

AFSPA IN ASSAM

The Centre has extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 declaring Assam as a 'disturbed area' for another year. The Government of India in exercise of powers under AF(SP) Act, 1958 has also declared, besides other areas, the area falling within 20 km wide belt in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya along their border with the Assam as disturbed area.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) was passed in 1958. It is a law with just six sections granting special powers to the Indian Armed Forces in what the act terms as "disturbed areas". The most controversial sections of AFSPA are:

- **Section fourth:** Enables security forces to "fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death" where laws are being violated (the assembly of five or more persons; or carrying of weapons)
- **Section sixth:** No criminal prosecution will lie against any person who has taken action under this act.

CRITICISM

- There are several cases pending before the Indian Supreme Court which challenge the constitutionality of the AFSPA.
- Under section 4(a) of the AFSPA, which grants armed forces personnel the power to shoot to kill, the constitutional right to life is violated.
- It also contradicts Article 14 of the Indian Constitution which guarantees equality before the law.
- In 54 years, not a single army, or paramilitary officer or soldier has been prosecuted for murder, rape, destruction of property (including the burning of villages in the 1960s in Nagaland and Mizoram).
-

PRESENT STATUS AND RECOMMENDATION

In Manipur, Irom Sharmila has been on an indefinite fast for 11 years, seeking the repeal of the act in Manipur. Till date, the government has not agreed to this demand.

- The 5th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission on public order has also recommended the repeal of the AFSPA.
- Jeevan Reddy Committee submitted its report in 2005, which included the following recommendations:
 - AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967;
 - The Unlawful Activities Act should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces
 - Grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.

ANALYSIS

- It is time India seriously considers a repeal of AFSPA — not merely out of a concern for human rights but also out of a desire to improve and refocus India’s internal security regime.
- A draconian law like AFSPA is inconsistent with the structure and spirit of our democracy and brings down India’s image at the global high table at a time when it is looking to be a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council.
- It also encourages lazy, inefficient soldiering in counter-insurgency situations and actually proves to be counterproductive.
- One has to remember that counter-insurgency, which is an operation directed against one’s own citizens, is not against a foreign enemy.
- The primary focus of a counter-insurgency operation should be WHAM (winning hearts and minds), and not liquidation or elimination.

THE MOTOR VEHICLES (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE, 2015

- It amends the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. The Ordinance **brings e-carts and e-rickshaws under the ambit of the Act.**
- Under the Act, a person is granted a learner's licence to drive a transport vehicle, only if he has held a driving licence to drive a light motor vehicle for at least one year.
- The Ordinance states that the conditions for issuing driver licences for e-carts or e-rickshaws shall be prescribed by the central government.
- The Ordinance also provides for the central government to make Rules on:
 - The specifications for e-carts and e-rickshaws.
 - The manner and conditions for issuing driving licenses.

SHANTA KUMAR COMMITTEE

The government set up a High Level Committee (HLC) chaired by Shanta Kumar in August 2014 to restructure, reorient and reform the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

RECOMMENDATION OF THE HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE

FOR THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT

- To cut the public distribution system beneficiaries for subsidized foodgrains to 40 from 67 per cent under the National Food Security Act.
- The rationed grains to be priced at 50 per cent of the minimum support price paid to farmers.
- Each beneficiary should be given 7 kg of grain instead of 5 kg under the Act, and cash transfers be introduced in a phased manner.
- It is estimated that this will reduce the foodgrain requirement under TPDS from 61.4 million tonnes to about 40 million tonnes.

FOR FCI (FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA)

FCI has not been fulfilling its three key objectives in recent years:

- Providing price support to farmers,

- Delivering food through the PDS, and
- Reducing volatility of food prices (and addressing food security) through public stockholding.

According to the HLC, failure to meet the objective of providing price support is shown by the fact that in 2012-13 only six per cent of agricultural households sold any food grains to procurement agencies. Failure on the PDS front is attested by massive leakages from the system. Food grains rotting in FCI warehouses highlight the failure of the system of public stockholding. Since storage of food grains is costly, it represents a waste of resources that could have been used elsewhere and in more productive ways.

- The panel wants the FCI to hand over the procurement of wheat, paddy and rice to growing States such as Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha with the rider that they will not give bonuses to farmers over and above the MSP determined by the Centre.
- The surplus States must procure for deficit States. The States must also contain the taxes and statutory levies at three per cent of the MSP from the current two to 14.2 per cent in Punjab.
- With these major changes in the procurement, stocking, movement and distribution of grains, the FCI will transform itself into an agency for innovations in food management.

FOR THE MSP (MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE)

The report recommends revisiting the policy of minimum support price (MSP) because it finds no point in announcing MSP for 23 commodities if government can't create an effective support system even for wheat and paddy; pulses and oilseeds deserve priority.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- In case the direct cash transfer system is adopted, the Centre can save around Rs 35,000 crore besides checking pilferage of subsidy
- The entire food grain procurement in states should be handed over the state governments instead of the FCI
- The storage and transportation of food grains should be outsourced to agencies such as Central Warehousing Corporation
- Shut zonal offices such as one in Noida
- Beneficiaries of PDS system be given ration for six months immediately after end of a procurement season
- Departmental labour be given option of voluntary retirement
- Movement of grain is done in containers instead of gunny bags.

ANALYSIS

- United Nations agencies monitoring country-wise performances towards meeting the Millennium goals have praised India for its reduction of malnutrition, giving credit for this to food security systems like the "ICDS [Integrated Child Development Services] as well as the public distribution system."
- In spite of the reduction, which brings India from the "most alarming category" to the "seriously affected" category,
- The country is still home to the largest malnourished population in the world; its rank in the **Global Hunger Index at 55** out of 76 emerging economies is only slightly ahead of Pakistan and Bangladesh but worse than Sri Lanka and Nepal.
- Critics argue that if the recommendation of the committee are being accepted by the government, it will affect the food security for millions of disadvantage peoples.

HINDU WIFE'S RIGHT TO MAINTENANCE

The Law Commission submitted its 252nd Report on "Right of the Hindu Wife to Maintenance: A relook at Section 18 of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956" to the Law Ministry.

BACKGROUND

- The High Court of Punjab and Haryana passed a decision on a matter in relation to maintenance under Hindu law.
- The matter dealt with a Hindu wife seeking maintenance from her father in law as her husband was of unsound mind.
- The High Court asked the Law Commission to examine the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, in relation to the question of maintenance to a woman whose husband is unable to maintain her.

PRESENT STATUS

- The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956 states that a Hindu wife is entitled to claim maintenance from her husband during her lifetime, under certain circumstances including that of desertion etc.
- The Act states that the father in law is required to provide maintenance only in cases where the daughter in law is widowed, and where certain other circumstances exist.

COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION

The Commission recommended that a new clause be inserted in the Act to state that in cases where the husband is unable to provide for his wife, on account of:

- Physical disability;
- Mental disorder;
- Disappearance;
- Renunciation of the world by entering any religious order or other similar reasons, the Hindu wife is entitled to claim maintenance from members of the husband's joint Hindu family.

This would not apply in cases where the husband has received his share in the joint family property.

INITIATIVES TOWARDS NORTH EAST PEOPLE

BACKGROUND

The Union government constituted a committee under M.P. Bezbaruah to look into the problems faced by people from the Northeast living in other parts of the country, especially in metropolitan cities, and suggest remedial measures.

The Ministry accepted recommendations made by the Committee with regard to immediate measures, including:

- Amending the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to insert provisions criminalising:

- Promoting or using criminal violence against members of a race on grounds of their race or place of origin
- Words or actions intended to insult members of a particular race
- Setting up a panel of lawyers by the Delhi Legal Service Authority for providing legal assistance to people from the North East;
- Education related measures, like a scholarship for students from the North East and
- Sports related measures, like identifying talented sports persons from the North East and arranging for their training.

KEY SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE:

- Creating a **computerised database** of people from the North East
- **Establishing a North East Centre** in Delhi which would be an autonomous institution responsible for the above-mentioned database, holding cultural performances, etc.

OTHER MEASURES LIKELY TO BE CONSIDERED:

- Violence, racial remarks and gestures against people from the northeast are likely to be made punishable offences.
- The proposal for insertion of Section 153-C [cognisable and non-bailable] and Section 509-A [cognisable and bailable] in the Indian Penal Code is under consideration.

OTHER INITIATIVES FOR NORTH EAST

- Under the '**IshanUday**' scheme, 10,000 scholarships of Rs. 3,500 to Rs. 5,000 per month will be granted for undergraduates from 2014-15.
- Under the '**IshanVikas**' scheme, select students will be taken to the IITs, the NITs and other engineering institutes for exposure/internship
- Universities had been advised to include in their curriculum the history of the northeast, including participation of community members in the freedom movement.

TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND ISSUES FACED BY THEM

The Report of the High Level Committee on Socio-Economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India, under the chairmanship of sociologist VirginiusXaxa, was prepared. The report details the situation of tribal communities: Scheduled Tribes, de-notified tribes and particularly vulnerable tribal communities.

FACTS ABOUT TRIBAL AREAS

- Sixty per cent of the forest area in the country is in tribal area.
- Fifty-one of the 58 districts with forest cover greater than 67 per cent are tribal districts.
- Three States — Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand — account for 70 per cent of India's coal reserves, 80 per cent of its high-grade iron ore, 60 per cent of its bauxite and almost 100 per cent of its chromite reserves.
- Forty per cent of those displaced by dams are tribal peoples.

GOVERNANCE OF TRIBAL AREAS

- The question of autonomy in scheduled areas has been set out in Schedules V and VI of the Constitution.
- In Schedule V areas, the Tribes Advisory Council — a body with elected and community representatives from Scheduled Tribes — will advise the governor on matters of administration and governance in scheduled areas.
- The deliberations of the Tribes Advisory Councils have been found to be tokenistic, and the councils themselves filled with bureaucrats and ministers instead of representatives of tribal communities with effective voice.
- Even with the Autonomous Councils in the Schedule VI States, which have a more robust formal autonomy, the committee finds that “there is a huge discrepancy between the formal rules guaranteeing autonomy and the informal workings of autonomy on the ground.”

RECOMMENDATIONS OF PROFESSOR XAXA COMMITTEE REPORT

- Government/policy makers must understand the tribal economy before planning any intervention. Tribal economy is the best development model and needs to be replicated anywhere in the country.
- Protection of bio-diversity rich mountains and forests (moratorium of mining in biodiversity rich forest/zones)
- Use of renewable energy like solar and hydro through indigenous techniques → Promote use of traditional transportation system for possible distance coverage
- Implementation of Scheduled Area provisions (PESA) in true spirit
- De-scheduling of schedule area due to decline of tribal population to be abolished. Declare all tribal populated areas as scheduled areas.
- Language used for learning in schools not suitable for tribal children. Teachers are not familiar with tribal language, should be take care of.
- Develop curriculum in all tribal languages till Standard/Class 7.
- Protect and promote traditional herbal medicines through the community ownership
- Ensure ownership of community over their own herbal treatment practices.
- Train traditional healers with improved technology to ensure better healthcare in remote villages
- Ensure all NT and DNT communities are included in census with dignity.
- For social, economic and educational development one independent authority should be established at national and state level.
- The High Level Committee to recommend the setting up of a cell “in order for the Governor to properly carry out the duties of the post vis-à-vis protection of the tribes”

PROBLEMS IN TRIBAL AREAS

LAND ALIENATION

- ✓ Tribal land alienation and dispossession are at the crux of the crisis tribal communities face across the country —
- ✓ Acquisition of land by the state using the principle of ‘eminent domain’;
- ✓ Manipulation of records and incorrect interpretation of law;
- ✓ Encroachment of tribal land by non-tribal people and immigrants;
- ✓ Creation of national parks; and armed conflict resulting in forced migration and eviction from homelands.

ILLEGAL DETENTION

- ✓ There are questions related to the routinisation of arbitrary arrest, illegal detention and torture in custody of tribal people living in conflict areas.
- ✓ Added to this is criminal neglect and violent corruption that has systematically obstructed the delivery of public goods and services.

TRIBALS- POPULATION

Tribals constitute 8.61% of the total population of the country, numbering 104.28 million (2011 Census) and cover about 15% of the country's area.

The fact that tribal people need special attention can be observed from their low social, economic and participatory indicators. Whether it is maternal and child mortality, size of agricultural holdings or access to drinking water and electricity, tribal communities lag far behind the general population.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES

The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Schedule Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of our groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Schedule Tribes (ST) for the purposes of this Constitution".

In Article 342, procedure to be followed for specification of Scheduled Tribes is prescribed. However, it does not contain the criterion for the specification of any community as Schedule Tribe. A well-established criterion being followed is based on certain attributes such as:

- **Geographical isolation:** They live in cloister, exclusive remote and hills and forest areas.
- **Backwardness:** Livelihood based on primitive agriculture, low cost closed economy based on low level of technology which leads to their poverty. They have a low level of literacy and health.
- **Distinctive culture, language and religion:** They have developed their own distinctive culture, language and religion, community-wise.
- **Shyness of contact:** They have marginal degree of contact with other cultures and people.

INDIA'S SMALL FARMERS

Of India's 121 million agricultural holdings, 99 million are with small and marginal farmers, with a land share of just 44 per cent and a farmer population share of 87 per cent. With multiple cropping prevalent, such farmers account for 70 per cent of all vegetables and 52 per cent of cereal output.

ALLEVIATING MARGINAL FARMING

- There is dependence on rain and formulated policies focussed on supporting canal-fed crops and improving agricultural productivity. This they coupled with incentive structures, pricing regimes and input subsidies.
- Array of schemes were formed and released by the government but they mainly focussed on creating yearly jobs and roads, while resisting decentralisation and localised decision-making. Individual symptoms were mitigated, while long-term food security and ecological sustainability were ignored.

PROBLEMS WITH VARIOUS SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES

- The **Drought Prone Area Programme (1974)** was "concerned with drought proofing rather than livelihoods and growth-focussed development

- The **National Policy on Farmers (2007)** focussed on improving farmer income through better risk management and an improved price policy, but implementation was lacking.
- The **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (2011)** allocated Rs.10 lakh to each district to prepare and implement the Comprehensive District Agriculture Plan with the participation of local panchayats with little reflection on farmers' needs.
- A shift back to dryland agriculture, particularly in western India, is much needed. Rajasthan, despite low rainfall, is buffering by integrated farming having subsidiary farm enterprises such as dairy, poultry, sericulture and goats.
- The proportion of districts in the critical, semi-critical and over-exploited category rose from 5 per cent in 1995 to 33 per cent in 2004.

FUNDING FOR RESEARCH

- The Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) has been primarily focussed on breeding higher yielding varieties for rice and wheat, while mostly ignoring coarse cereals.
- The Kelkar Committee in Maharashtra had suggested that funding to SAUs could be increased by at least Rs.100 crore, to upgrade research facilities and set up agriculture labour training schools.
- The National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture would have focussed on mitigating risks associated with climate change and ensuring food security, with a focus on organic farming and System of Rice Intensification propagation.

WAY FORWARD

- A shift to drip irrigation can be instituted by mandating it for all sugarcane plantations and fruit orchards.
- Encouraging micro-irrigation and horticulture incentives might create demand on-ground.
- Agriculture can be further customised through soil test labs at the ground level that provide advice to farmers on a personalised basis, while promoting greater water efficiency.
- Taxes on agricultural machinery should be removed and agro-based industries fostered, with commodity parks created at the district level. Such social and governmental action can help the marginal farmer peer beyond penury.

MAKE IN NORTHEAST

- The Centre recently announced its "Make in Northeast" initiative in an expansion of the scope of Prime Minister's "Make in India" campaign. The initiative has been taken to inspire countrymen to not just "Look East" but also "Act East".
- The new initiative will begin with a comprehensive tourism plan for the region.
- The initiative will seek to promote exclusive Northeast expertise in areas like tea processing, organic farming, food processing, and wind power generation, AYUSH and wellness therapies like spas.
- The mega circuit and mega destination projects of the tourism ministry in the area would be pursued.
- One of the important objectives of "Make in Northeast" initiative will be not only to generate revenue for Northeast but also to create job opportunities to prevent the exodus of youth from the region to the rest of the country.

NORTHEAST STATES GDP CONTRIBUTION

- The gross state domestic product (GSDP) of all the states of the Northeast is characterised by a subdued manufacturing sector.
- Most of the eight states in the region have little contribution of their own to their revenue receipts. Assam has the highest contribution of less than 30 per cent (2013-14) closely followed by Sikkim, which is a leader in organic farming and tourism.
- Nagaland, which has a population of just about 20 lakh, has the worst contribution with just 7.1 per cent of the revenue.
- Arunachal Pradesh contributes 8.8 per cent despite its hydro power potential.

SARDAR PATEL URBAN HOUSING MISSION

‘Sardar Patel Urban Housing Mission’ will soon be launched to ensure housing for all by 2022 by building 30 million houses for the economically weaker sections and low income groups.

- .
- To be built through public-private-partnership, interest subsidy and increased flow of resources to the housing sector, these houses are also aimed at creating slum free cities across the country.

Currently, there are several schemes including Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Rajiv Awas Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana, Rajiv Rinn Yojana meant for providing housing facilities to economically weaker sections. All these schemes will be converged or done away with once the Sardar Patel National Housing Mission is launched. Related info:

- The Ministry had only Rs.35,000 crore to provide for affordable housing and for slum development in the 12th Five Year Plan, but 50 per cent of the Indian population would live in urban areas by 2050.
- To attend this problem, there is a need of public-private-partnership and corporate social responsibility schemes in this sector to bridge the gap in finance.
- Environmental clearance for housing projects would be taken up separately with the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests.

PERMANENT COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

An appeal filed by the government against giving permanent commission to them in the Army lies pending and half-forgotten in the Supreme Court.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

- Women are inducted into the Army as officers under Short Service Commission for a maximum period of 14 years, whereas their male counterparts are eligible to receive permanent commission after five years.
- On a batch of petitions filed in 2003 by women officers demanding an end to the discriminatory practice, the Delhi High Court in March 2010 granted their just and fair claim for permanent commission — with the singeing words that it was not some “charity being sought... but enforcement of their constitutional rights”. While this prompted the Air Force and the Navy to grant women officers permanent commission, the Army took a different stand.
- An appeal was filed in the Supreme Court on behalf of the Army against a Delhi High Court judgment.

REASONS CITED BY THE ARMY AGAINST PERMANENT COMMISSION

- Women officers might not live up to the role models that jawans, mostly from rustic backgrounds, want their officers to be in combat situations.
- The interface between the leader and the led must be without any reserve or preconceived notions, especially in battle conditions.
- The possibility of becoming prisoners of war
- Frontline trauma
- Combat hazards
- Growing demand for spouse/choice postings which is adversely impacting the management of officers to the detriment of male officers

IMPACT OF SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION ON WOMEN

- Due to their limited service span, the women officers are not eligible for pension, which requires a minimum 20 years of service.
- Their release comes at a juncture when they are still in their mid-thirties and not trained for any other job.

NITI AAYOG

NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog is set up in place of the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission was set up in March 1950 through a Cabinet Resolution, which the present government scrapped in August 2014.

The Prime Minister will head the new institution tasked with the role of formulating policies and direction for the government. Its governing council will comprise the Chief Ministers and the Lieutenant Governors of Union Territories.

The body will have a Vice Chairperson and a CEO in addition to five full-time members and two part-time members, while four union ministers would serve as ex-officio members.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PLANNING COMMISSION & NITI AAYOG

BASIS	PLANNING COMMISSION	NITI AAYOG
CHAIRPERSON	PRIME MINISTER	PRIME MINISTER
Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy-Chairperson- To be appointed by the Prime Minister. • Full-time members-the last commission had eight full-time members. • Part-time members-no provision • A member secretary • The commission reported to national development council that had state chief ministers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vice-Chairperson To be appointed by the Prime Minister. • Part time members- Maximum of 2. (not fix, depending on need). They will from leading universities research organizations and other relevant institutions on a rotational basis. • Ex Officio members- Maximum of 4 members of the Union Council of Ministers to be nominated by the Prime Minister. • Governing Council- It will consist of- Chief Ministers (of States) and Lt. Governors (of Union Territories).

	and lieutenant governors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Council- . It will comprise Chief Ministers (of States) and Lt. Governors (of Union Territories). It will be formed on need basis • Special invitees- They will be nominated by the Prime Minister and will be experts, specialists and practitioners with relevant domain knowledge as special invitees. • Chief Executive Officer- (New post, replacing member secretary) Appointed by the Prime Minister for a fixed tenure, in the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.
Financial	Power to allocate funds to ministries and state governments.	Only an advisory body, or a think-tank. The powers to allocate funds might be vested in the finance ministry.
STATE'S ROLE/ Participation	States' role was limited to the National Development Council and annual interaction during Plan meetings. Policy was formed by the commission and states were then consulted about allocation of funds.	State governments are expected to play a more significant role than they did in the Planning Commission. States will be Consulting while making policy and deciding on funds allocation. Final policy would be a result of that.
Constitution	The commission reported to National Development Council that had state chief ministers and lieutenant governors	Governing Council has state chief ministers and lieutenant governors.
Nature	Could Impose policies on states and allocation of funds with projects it approved.	It is a think-tank and does not have the power to impose policies.
Secretariat	YOJNA BHAVAN	IF DEEMED NECESSARY.

FROM "YOJANA" TO "NITI"—AN ANALYSES

It means a sharp break from Soviet inspired National Development (Five Year) Plans to "Niti", that is "Policy" and "Institutional change for 'transforming India'." Paragraph three of the Cabinet resolution states: we "require institutional reforms in governance and dynamic policy shifts that can seed and nurture large-scale change. It will serve as a **'Think Tank'** of the government i.e. a directional and policy dynamo.

OBJECTIVES

- Evolve a shared vision of national development priorities
- Foster cooperative federalism
- Develop mechanisms to formulate credible plans at the village level
- Making states stronger expediting implementation of various schemes,
- And ensuring better Centre-state coordination.

SIGNIFICANCE

Clearly, constitution-wise and in terms of objective, not much has changed. Function-wise, however, the NITI Aayog appears to be playing a much larger role in setting the agenda. But in the absence of the Planning Commission's crucial power of formulating Plans and deciding on devolution of central funds to the states, its predominant job will be to be the idea box for the Centre and the states.

How effective this change will be in deciding the growth path in the coming years will depend on how successful the NITI Aayog turns out to be in convincing the policy-makers.

PRESIDENT GIVES ASSENT TO SETTING UP OF NJAC

- The President gave his assent to the setting up of the National Judicial Appointments Commission as a constitutional body. The commission gives the executive an equal role in the appointment of judges to the highest judiciary.
- The bill, **124th amendment to the Constitution**, grants Constitutional status to the NJAC and its composition which will be headed by the Chief Justice of India.
- The approved bill provides for the **new Article 124A** of the Constitution of India, which will define the composition of the JAC. **Article 124B** will identify its functions.

BACKGROUND

99th Constitution Amendment 2014—

The amendment bill seeks changes in articles 124,217,222 and 231.

NJAC – National Judicial Accountability Bill-

Seeks to replace the **collegium system** of appointing the judges of Supreme Court and 24 High Courts with judicial appointments commission wherein the executive will have a say in appointing the judges.

NJAC –National Judicial Appointment Commission-

Is a proposed body responsible for the appointment and transfer of judges to the higher judiciary in India under this bill?

Constitution of – NJAC---Six-member Commission had-

- The CJI as chairperson , ex officio ,
- Two senior most Supreme Court judges as members ,next to the CJI – ex officio,
- The Union Minister of Law and Justice, ex-officio
- Two eminent persons
- (to be nominated by a committee consisting of the CJI, PM and the Leader of opposition in the LokSabha or where there is no such Leader of Opposition, then, the Leader of single largest Opposition Party in LokSabha), provided that of the two eminent persons, one person would be from the S C or ST or OBC or minority communities or a woman. The eminent persons shall be nominated for a period of three years and shall not be eligible for re-nomination.

Role of NJAC:

- The NJAC is expected to usher in **transparency in judicial appointments** in the highest courts and end

the highest judiciary's two-decade-old grip over appointments of judges through the collegium system.

- Under the **present Collegium system**, the CJI would consult the four senior most judges of the SC for Supreme Court appointments and two senior-most judges for high court appointments.
- It would restore an **equal role** for the executive in higher judicial appointments.
- Ensuring that the persons recommended are of **ability and integrity**.

SC LAWYERS' BODY PLEA TO DECLARE NJAC UNCONSTITUTIONAL

The **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association (SCAORA)** has filed a writ petition seeking a declaration that the Constitution **99th Amendment Act, 2014**, providing constitutional status to the National Judicial Appointments Commission, is **"invalid, void and unconstitutional"**.

BACKGROUND

August 2014 -SCAORA challenged the NJAC law. But the SC had said it was too **premature** as the States were yet to ratify it but allowed to approach it at a later stage.

August 2014- Both the Constitution Amendment Bill and the NJAC Bill were passed by Parliament.

January 2015- President gave his assent to set up NJAC.

January 2015- The Supreme Court declined a plea for early hearing of a petition challenging the National Judicial Appointments Commission, saying it will come up in the **"usual course."**

CONTENTION OF SC LAWYERS' BODY-

- By passing the NJAC Bill, Parliament had **"altered the basic structure of the Constitution"** and **encroached into judicial independence**.
- The NJAC ends the 21-year-old collegium system and **"takes away the primacy of the collective opinion** of the Chief Justice of India and the two senior most Judges of the Supreme Court of India **restores the role of the political class** in appointments to the higher judiciary
- Independence of the judiciary includes the necessity to eliminate political influence even at the stage of appointment of a judge.
- There is no "primacy" for two senior most Supreme Court judges. Even their collective recommendation of a candidate as judge could be frozen if any two non-judicial members on the panel vetoed it.
- No **"suitability criteria"** for appointment as judge, leaving it to the Commission to frame them.
- It sought a return to the recommendations of the **2002 Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah Committee** in which the NJAC was composed of **five** members.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION/INDIA AND WORLD

KERRY-LUGAR-BERGMAN ACT

TOUGH ON PAPER	THE KERRY-LUGAR BILL SPECIFIES CONDITIONS FOR CLEARING THE ANNUAL \$1.5-BILLION CIVILIAN AID TO PAKISTAN
LIMITATIONS ON ASSISTANCE SECTION 203 c (2) of the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, 2009	
The Government of Pakistan during the preceding fiscal year must demonstrate a sustained commitment to:	
(a) Ceasing support to terror groups (b) Preventing al-Qaeda, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed , from operating in Pakistan and carrying cross-border attacks (c) Strengthening counterterrorism and anti-money laundering laws	
	<i>Hafiz Saeed, chief of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, addresses a two-day convention in Lahore on December 4, 2014. – PHOTO: AFP</i>

- **Kerry-Lugar-Bergman Act: The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009** (also known as the Kerry-Lugar-Bergman Act) was an Act of Congress passed into law in 2010. It authorizes the release of 1.5 billion USD per year to the **Government of Pakistan** as non-military aid from the period of 2010 to 2014. It was proposed by Senators John Kerry and Richard Lugar.
 - **Limitations on Assistance: Section 203c (2) of the Enhanced Partnership With Pakistan act, 2009**
The Government of the Pakistan during the preceding fiscal year must demonstrate a sustained commitment to:
 - Ceasing support to terror groups
 - Preventing Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, from operating in Pakistan and carrying cross-border attacks
 - Strengthening counterterrorism and anti-money laundering laws.

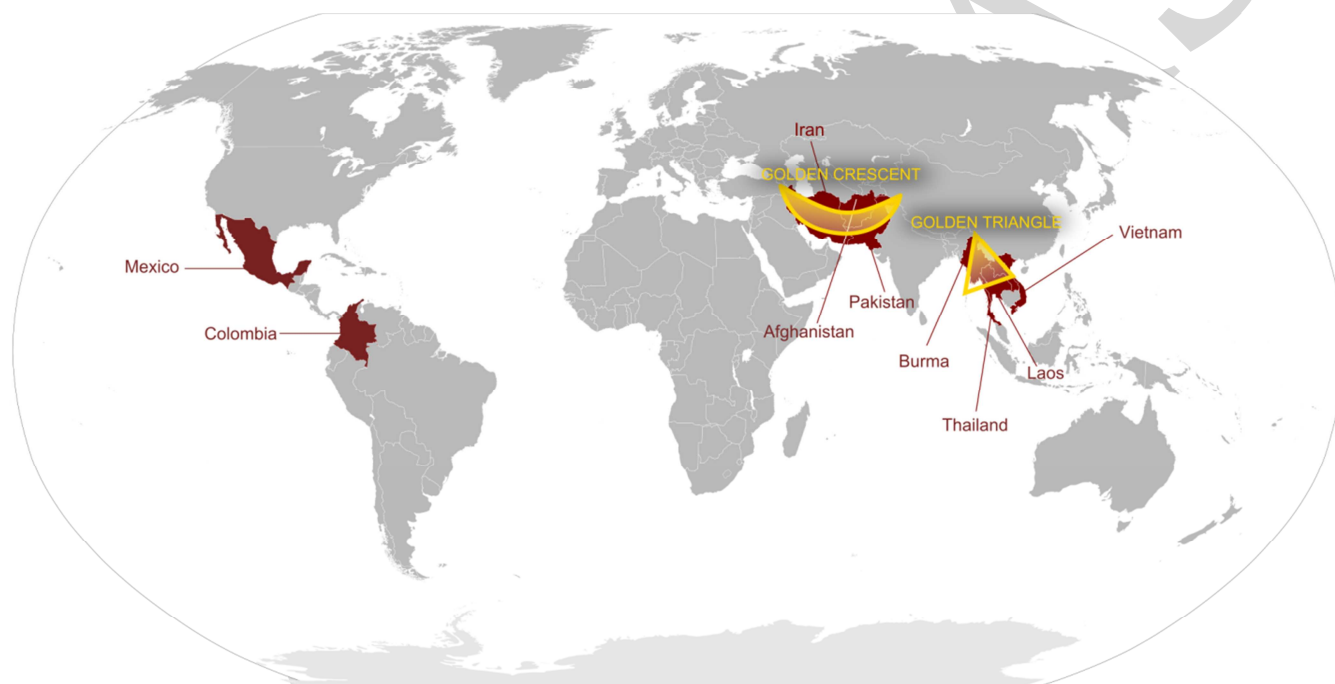
The state department's certification is a condition for the U.S. to disburse funds under the bill.

India's response: India has advocated against the grant of civilian aid to Pakistan. It has contested that most of the aid is used against India also Pakistan is not very serious about reining terrorist groups that are launching attack against India like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. To further India's apprehension about Pakistan duplicity in fighting terrorist groups strengthened by the fact that Pakistani court had granted bail to 26/11 planner and Le T operation chief Zakir-urRahmanLakhavi in the Mumbai case. Also the founder of LeT is holding massive rallies and advocating war against India.

GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The Golden Triangle is a region in Northern Thailand, Laos and Myanmar that is infamously known as a production region of drugs. Historically, the area was famous for its opium production and drug trade including drug trafficking, violence and people smuggling. Opium has been used as a recreational drug in South East Asia since the 1800s when the Opium Wars occurred. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) the Cultivation of opium poppy crops in Myanmar and Laos has tripled the amount harvested in 2006.

“Golden Crescent”: The Golden Crescent is the name given to Asia’s principal area of illicit opium production, located at the crossroads of Central, South, and Western Asia. This space overlaps three nations, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, whose mountainous peripheries define the crescent though only Afghanistan and Pakistan produce opium, with Iran being a consumer and trans-shipment route for the smuggled opiates.



India’s concerns:

- India is sandwiched between two important opium producing regions of the world.
- Drug money is used to finance terror activities in the country.
- There is increase in drug addiction among youth in border area especially in north east and Punjab.
- A nexus among Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Maoists and insurgent groups of North-East is using money earned from drug trafficking to fund terror activities in India.
- Pakistan is waging free of cost proxy war against India through using drug money.
- Trafficking in illegal drug hampering socio-economic condition of the country.

Traditionally India was only a transit route, but now the demand for various drugs is increasing within the country.

PALESTINE TO JOIN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Palestine will join the International Criminal Court (ICC) on April 1, 2015.

BACKGROUND

- In 2012, Palestine was admitted to the U.N. General Assembly as a non-member observer state. The General Assembly's recognition of Palestine as an observer state made it possible for the Palestinians to join the International Criminal Court and other U.N. bodies.
- After suffering loss at the UN Security Council (UNSC) in its efforts to pass a resolution on the settlement of Israel-Palestine dispute, the Palestine leadership has decided to accede to 18 international treaties including ICC.

WHAT CAN PALESTINE GET FROM JOINING INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

- Turning to, the International Criminal Court marks a major policy shift by transforming Palestines relations with Israel from tense to openly hostile.
- The Palestinians believe the strong international support will put pressure on Israel to allow the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.
- It will pressurize the Israelis to withdraw from the Palestinian land and to stop atrocities and attacks on Palestinian civilians and to bring Israel to books for its war crimes.
- The Palestinians can use the court to challenge the legality of Israeli settlement construction on occupied lands and to pursue war crimes charges connected to military activity.

INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO THE PALESTINIAN MOVE

- The Palestinian move has drawn threats of retaliation from Israel and is strongly opposed by the U.S. as an obstacle to reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.
- Mr. Netanyahu called Israel's soldiers "the most moral Army in the world" and said the country would take unspecified "retaliatory steps".
- U.S. State Department spokesman Edgar Vasquez said America strongly opposed the move and warned it would be "counter-productive and do nothing to further the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a sovereign and independent state".

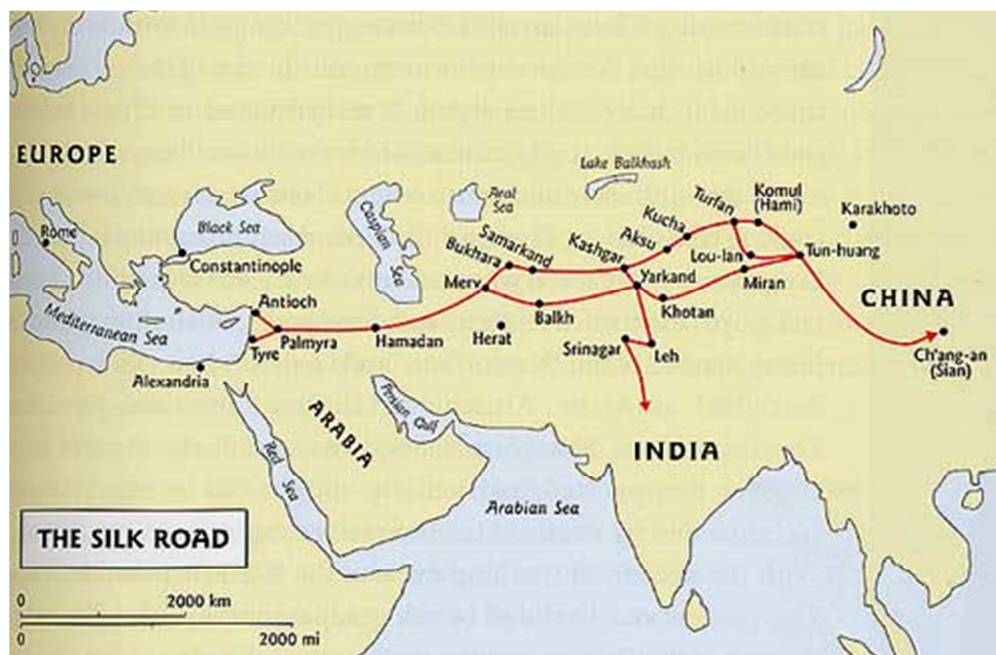
NEPAL TO JOIN SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT

Nepal formally signed a four-point document endorsing the Silk Road Economic Belt for connecting Asia with Europe along a land corridor, with China as its hub. Nepal and China "have agreed to revive the old **Silk Road** that **runs from Lhasa to Kathmandu to Patna**".

RAILWAY LINK

- China wants to connect with Nepal and South Asia through an extension of the Qinghai-Tibet railway.
- The rail line from Lhasa has already been extended to Shigatse, Tibet's second largest city, 253 km away.

- The Chinese plan to build two lines from Shigatse. One would lead to Kerung, the nearest Chinese town from Nepal, from where it would be extended to Rasuwagadhi in Nepal. The other line would head to Yadong on the India-Bhutan border.



ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR NEPAL

- The rail connectivity with China will spur the globalization of the Nepalese economy.
- Once a rail connection with China is established, Nepalese goods can be transited to the international markets through the Eurasian transportation network. This could spur economic renaissance in the country.

INDIA'S CONCERNS

- Nepal is uniquely located between two large neighbors, India and China. Its closeness to one will be a cause of discomfort for another.
- Nepal is currently connected to international trade routes only through India. This will break Indian monopoly in providing the foreign connectivity to Nepal.
- Silk Road would mark the beginning of the Chinese project's penetration into South Asia. It is highly likely that other countries in the region, such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Pakistan, will also join the Silk Road at some point.

U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL

Five new countries joined the U.N. Security Council as non-permanent members — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Venezuela and Spain — have begun their two-year term, replacing Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, South Korea and Rwanda.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.

The 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council are elected by the General Assembly, with five elected in October each year, to join the five permanent and veto-wielding members of Britain, China, France, Russia and the U.S. The council presidency rotates among the members in the English alphabetical order of their names. Each president holds office for one calendar month.

13TH PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIWAS

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated on 9th January every year to mark the contribution of Overseas Indian community in the development of India. External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs Minister inaugurated the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Gandhinagar, as a precursor to the main Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. The minister cited the importance of three 'Cs' in bringing about synergy among Indians worldwide: Come, Connect, and Contribute.

- The 13th edition of PBD marked the 100th year of Mahatma Gandhi's return to India from South Africa.
- The **chief guest** of the 13th PBD was **Guyana President Donald Ramotar**. The theme of 2015 PBD was Bharat kojano and Bharat komano.

BACKGROUND

- January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India's freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.
- PBD conventions are being held every year since 2003.
- These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and people of the land of their ancestors for mutually beneficial activities.
- These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.
- During the event, individuals of exceptional merit are honoured with the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award to appreciate their role in India's growth.
- The event also provides a forum for discussing key issues concerning the Indian Diaspora.
- The decision to celebrate Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was taken in accordance with recommendations of the High Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian Diaspora set up by government of India under the chairmanship of L. M. Singhvi. The then Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Bajpayee on 8 January 2002, announced the "Pravasi Bharatiya Divas" (PBD) on 9 January that year.

INDIA, SOUTH AFRICA INK MOU

A public sector enterprise under the Union Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, **National Small Industries Corporation Limited (NSIC)** on 19 January 2015 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Cooperation with **the Black Business Council (BBC)** of South Africa.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AGREEMENT

- The agreement was signed for developing youth owned enterprises in South Africa.
- The MoU, besides cooperation in MSME sector, also focuses on BBC's efforts to economically empower the marginalized group in South Africa through NSIC's Rapid Incubation Programme.
- BBC plans to establish 5 Rapid Incubation Centres in South Africa in cooperation with NSIC.

EU LIFTS BAN ON INDIAN MANGOES

- The European Commission (EC) voted in favour of lifting the ban imposed on mangoes last May after fruit-flies were found in some consignments.
- The decision was taken following improvements brought about by India in its packaging and inspection process.
- The EU accounts for more than 50 per cent of total exports of fruits and vegetables from India.
- Import ban, however, has not been lifted on the other four vegetables including bitter melon, taro, egg plant and snake melon.
- It is now mandatory for exports of all perishable items to the EU to be routed through pack-houses certified by the Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority under the vigilance of plant protection inspectors.

MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND OMAN

The Union Cabinet has given its approval to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for strengthening cooperation in the field of tourism between India and Oman.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING, AMONGST OTHER THINGS ARE:

- To expand bilateral cooperation in the tourism sector,
- To exchange information and data related to tourism,
- To encourage cooperation between tourism stakeholders including hotels and tour operators,
- To establish exchange programme for cooperation in Human Resource Development,
- To invest in the tourism and hospitality sectors,
- To exchange visits of tour operators / media /opinion makers for promotion of two way tourism,
- To exchange experiences in the areas of promotion, marketing, destination development and management, to participate in travel fairs /exhibitions in each other's country and
- To promote safe, honourable and sustainable tourism.

BACKGROUND

India and Oman have enjoyed a strong historical and long economic and political relationship. The Sultanate of Oman is a strategic partner for India in the Gulf region and an important interlocutor in the bilateral, Arab Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League and the Indian Ocean Rim Association contexts. The two countries are linked by geography, history and culture. Both countries also enjoy warm and cordial relations, which can be ascribed to historical maritime trade linkages, intimacy of the Royal family with India and the seminal role of the Indian expatriate community in the building of Oman.

- In recent years, Oman has emerged as an important tourism source market for India in the West Asian region.
- During 2013, India received 62,252 visitors from Oman. Similarly India has emerged as one of the important source market for Oman in the field of tourism.
- The signing of the MoU will further strengthen and further develop the established relationship between the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of Oman, for strengthening cooperation in the field of tourism on reciprocal basis.

TERROR ATTACK ON PARIS MAGAZINE


Masked gunmen stormed the Paris offices of a satirical newspaper (Charlie Hebdo), killing 12 people, in France's deadliest terror attack in at least two decades.

The horrific terrorist attack in Paris at the office of the French magazine Charlie Hebdo is a direct assault on the freedom of speech, thought and expression, the fundamentals on which all open, democratic societies are built.

BACKGROUND

- Since 2006, when it first published the Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, Charlie Hebdo had been under threat of violent attacks by Islamist groups.
- Refusing to be intimidated, the publication continued to caricature Islam even after a firebombing in November 2011, just as it also relentlessly lampooned Christianity and Judaism — its Christmas week cover caricaturing the birth of Jesus was designed to provoke and cause offence

LONG LINE OF FIRE



A bullet hole in a window at Charlie Hebdo's Paris building. —PHOTO: REUTERS

CHARLIE HEBDO HAS A HISTORY OF RESPONDING BOLDLY TO INTIMIDATION. AFTER ITS OFFICE WAS FIRE-BOMBED IN 2011, IT PUBLISHED A VISUAL STATING "LOVE IS STRONGER THAN HATE"

<p>CHARLIE HEBDO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ HQ: Rive Droite ▶ Begun in 1970 after ban on a publication that mocked Charles de Gaulle 	<p>Feb. 2006 CH reprints cartoons of Prophet Mohammad from Danish daily Jyllands-Posten</p> <p>Nov. 2011 CH office fire-bombed over its cartoon titled 'Charia Hebdo'</p>	<p>Sept. 2012 CH published cartoons on the Prophet amid protests against "Innocence of Muslims"</p> <p>Jan. 2015 Three armed men storm CH building, unleash carnage</p>
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REACTIONS

The murders in Paris are sickening. We stand with the French people in the fight against terror and defending freedom of press
— David Cameron, British PM on Twitter


[This] is an attack on freedom of speech and the press, core elements of our democratic culture
— Angela Merkel, German Chancellor

Sometimes laughter can hurt, but humour and mockery are our only weapons
— Jean Cabut, cartoonist killed in attack

LATEST IN SERIES



▶ Charlie Hebdo's tweet, published early on Wednesday, depicts **IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** saying, "Also, to health"



▶ The magazine's Wednesday issue cover features **controversial French novelist Michael Houellebecq**

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE:

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has expressed outrage over the "cold-blooded" and "unjustifiable" terrorist attack against French magazine Charlie Hebdo, with the UN Security Council underlining the need to bring perpetrators of terrorism to justice.

March of Unity in France: World leaders stood at the front of a unity rally in Paris to show solidarity for the victims of this week's deadly attacks by Islamist extremists.

They were joined by hundreds of thousands of ordinary French citizens shocked and appalled by assault on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

GLOBAL INEQUALITY: OXFAM

Global wealth inequality has reached staggering proportions with 1 in 9 people not getting enough to eat and over a billion on less than \$ 1.25 a day.

ACCORDING TO A REPORT BY OXFAM:

- If wealth concentration grows at the present rate, in two years 1 per cent of the global population will earn more than the remaining 99 per cent.
- Data from Credit Suisse shows that since 2010, the richest 1% of adults in the world have been increasing their share of total global wealth

The international agency is calling on government to adopt a seven point plan to tackle inequality:

- **Clamp down on tax dodging** by corporations and rich individuals
- **Invest in universal, free public services** such as health and education
- **Share the tax burden fairly**, shifting taxation from labour and consumption towards capital and wealth
- **Introduce minimum wages** and move towards a living wage for all workers
- **Introduce equal pay legislation** and promote economic policies to give women a fair deal
- **Ensure adequate safety-nets** for the poorest, including a minimum income guarantee
- **Agree a global goal** to tackle inequality.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON ITALIAN MARINES

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) adopted a resolution calling on India to repatriate the marines to Italy.

DETAILS OF THE RESOLUTION

- Member of European Parliament (MEPs) expressed great sadness at the tragic death of the two Indian fishermen, but also grave concerns about the detention without charge of the Italian marines.
- They also stressed that restrictions on the marines' freedom of movement represent a serious breach of their human rights and ask for their repatriation.
- They also backed the positions stated by Italy on the 2012 incident and therefore hope that jurisdiction will fall to the Italian authorities and/or international arbitration.
- They finally asked Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to take all necessary steps to protect the two Italian marines and state their support for the efforts of all parties involved to work towards a mutually acceptable solution.

INDIA'S REACTION

- The resolution drew sharp reaction from India and it termed the step as not well advised as the matter was sub judice.
- Earlier, Supreme Court on 14 January 2015 granted three months extension to the Italian marine, Massimiliano Latorre, for his stay in Italy on health grounds. The other marine, Salvatore Girone is living in the Italian Embassy in New Delhi.

BACKGROUND

- Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone, were arrested on murder charges after they killed two Indian fisherman off the coast of Kerala on 15 February 2012.
- The two maintain that they fired at the fishermen after mistaking them for pirates while guarding the ship Enrica Lexie.
- The shooting incident sparked a diplomatic row between India and Italy over conflicting opinions on jurisdiction and immunity.

VISIT OF US PRESIDENT

Mr. Barack Obama is the first US president to attend the Republic Day function and also the first to visit India twice. An **'India-US Delhi Declaration of Friendship'** was issued after the Modi-Obama meeting which builds on their 30 September Vision Statement by articulating tangible principles to guide ongoing efforts to **advance mutual prosperity, a clean and healthy environment, greater economic cooperation, regional peace, security and stability for the larger benefit of humankind**. The declaration attempts to define the contours of the India-US strategic partnership.

US ANNOUNCES \$4 BILLION OF NEW INITIATIVES, TRADE MISSIONS

Obama announced \$4 billion of new initiatives aimed at boosting trade and investment ties as well as jobs in India, and opened up a whole new source of financing for social development ventures in the country through a new Indian Diaspora Investment Initiative.

The \$4-billion deals include \$2 billion of leveraged financing for renewable energy investments in India through the US Trade & Development Agency and \$1 billion in loans for small and medium businesses across India through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, or OPIC.

NUCLEAR COOPERATION:

The breakthrough on the nuclear deal – 10 years after the agreement was negotiated and six years after it was signed – paves the way for American companies to set up civil nuclear reactors, which India hopes will contribute to its energy security.

- Both the leaders claimed to have broken the logjam over the Indo-US nuclear deal – after overcoming key hurdles related to the liability of suppliers of nuclear reactors in the event of an accident and tracking of fuel supplied by the US.
- A nuclear risk management fund, worth Rs 1,500 crore, will be created to cover operators and suppliers. This will be led by five Indian public-sector insurance firms, which will together contribute Rs 750 crore to the pool (the rest will be provided by the government).
- India also won U.S. assurances of support for its membership in four nuclear regimes: the Nuclear Suppliers Group, Wassenaar Arrangement, Australian Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

BREAKING THE DEADLOCK: WHAT IT MEANS

➤ The civil nuclear agreement signed in 2008 can now be **operationalized**

➤ US companies like GE Hitachi and Westinghouse can **start building reactors** in India

➤ These companies were allotted sites in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh but **could not start work due to worries over the liability law** which provided right of recourse against suppliers

➤ India's liability law **remains untouched**, while US says its concerns have been addressed

➤ Under the administrative arrangements, US will follow the Canada template which

means it will **go by IAEA inspections** of nuclear material and not demand its own

➤ Symbolically too, development of immense significance: Modi himself said the deal was the **centrepiece of India's transformed relationship** with US, demonstrating new trust

“ We've achieved a breakthrough and are moving towards full implementation of the civil nuclear energy deal...Civil nuclear cooperation is a step to elevate our relationship

— BARACK OBAMA

THE DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY TRADE INITIATIVE (DTTI)

- India and the U.S. agreed to extend the Defence Cooperation Agreement and identified four projects under the Defence Technology Trade Initiative (DTTI) for joint production and development and exploring cooperation for jet engines and aircraft carrier systems.
- The two countries agreed to set up a working group to explore aircraft carrier technology and design and develop jet engine technology in India.
- The projects identified under the DTTI include next-generation Raven mini-unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), roll-on, roll-off intelligence kits for C-130 transport aircraft and mobile electric hybrid power source.
- Both leaders agreed to increase bilateral anti-terror cooperation, intelligence sharing and maritime security.

JOINING HANDS

U.S., India to deepen defence ties through DTTI


September 2013:
Defence Technology Trade Initiative is formally announced

➤ Aimed at increasing bilateral trade **through co-production**

➤ Goals include indigenisation and **technology transfer**

LIKELY CO-PRODUCTION PROJECTS

- Raven **RQ-11 mini** Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
- Surveillance modules for **C-130J transport aircraft**



The Raven
— Photo: AP

CLEAN ENERGY GOAL AND COOPERATION:

The leaders announced actions to advance India's transition to low carbon economy. India intends to increase the share of use of renewable in electricity generation consistent with its intended goal to increase India's solar target to 100 gigawatts by 2022. The United States intends to support India's goal by enhancing cooperation on clean energy and climate change, to include:

- Expanding Partnership to Advance Clean Energy Research (PACE-R)
- Expanding Partnership to Advance Clean Energy Deployment (PACE-D)
- Accelerating Clean Energy Finance
- Launching Air Quality Cooperation
- Initiating Climate Resilience Tool Development
- Demonstrating Clean Energy and Climate Initiatives on the Ground
- Developing cooling solutions to replace hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HFCs)

INDIA, U.S. SIGN THREE MOUS ON SMART CITIES

- India and United States signed three Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) to give a boost to the Centre's flagship 'smart cities' scheme.
- The U.S. has agreed to partner with Indian in developing three smart cities in Allahabad, Ajmer, and Visakhapatnam.
- As per the pacts, the U.S. will assist the cities in project planning, infrastructure development, feasibility studies and capacity building.

ECONOMY

PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS (PSBS) REFORM

PSBs are subject to dual regulation — from the Ministry and the RBI.

PERFORMANCE OF PSBS

The gross non-performing asset ratio of PSBs exceeds five per cent, while the figure for private sector banks is a little over two per cent.

According to the RBI Financial Stability Report (FSR), stressed assets at PSBs, including bad debt and restructured loans, exceeded 12 per cent of the total loans (as of September 30, 2014).

RECENT DECISIONS

The Finance Ministry had issued a direction to banks recently asking them to take decisions without fear or favour and to ignore extraneous considerations in commercial decisions, in the aftermath of the 'GyanSangam'.

The government decided to separate the roles of chairman and managing director (CMD) in public sector banks (PSBs). Since the PJ Nayak committee set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had recommended the eventual separation of the chairman and managing director roles in PSBs.

GYAN SANGAM

A two-day GyanSangam or Bankers' Retreat was arranged by the Finance Ministry in Pune.

In a presentation made to the Prime Minister, on behalf of all bankers, State Bank of India Chairperson Arundhati Bhattacharya reportedly said, "We as a group (all public sector banks) have decided to adopt five major resolutions."

The five points include –

- a) A decision to re-orient the portfolios of small public sector banks to focus on specific and differentiated niches.
- b) Build people capacities.
- c) Use of more technology (especially in the top 30 processes).
- d) Strengthen risk management practices.
- e) Strengthen the partner channels such as business correspondents.

Bankers have also asked the government for some commitment in the following areas.

- a) Fully empower banks on human resource related decisions.
- b) Creating the right environment for minimal interference.
- c) Strengthening the legal framework for recovery of loans.
- d) Strengthening and simplify processes for credit insurance.
- e) Eliminate debt waivers and do away with interest rate caps.
- f) Finally creating the enabling infrastructure for digital banking.

The bankers have also requested the government to move from a state-owned structure to a state-linked structure, as recommended by the P.J.Nayak committee report.

GDR (GLOBAL DEPOSITORY RECEIPT)

GDR is a popular financial instrument used by listed companies in India, as also in many other countries, to raise funds denominated mostly in US dollar or euros.

GDRs are typically bank certificates issued in more than one country for shares of a company, which are held by a foreign branch of an international bank. While shares trade on a domestic stock exchange, which happens to be in India in the present case, they can be offered for sale globally through the empanelled bank branches.

GDR ROUTE UNDER SCANNER IN BLACK MONEY PROBE

- Regulatory and other agencies suspect that GDR route is being used for bringing back suspected illicit funds stashed abroad.
- The capital markets regulator SEBI has come across quite a few cases where GDR (Global Depository Receipt) route could have been used for round-tripping of funds in the name of capital-raising activities of listed companies from abroad.
- Round-tripping of funds has been a major route for those laundering black money. It typically involves an entity transferring an asset or funds, in the name of a business deal, with an agreement to buy it back.
- Besides GDRs, the regulatory and other agencies are already probing the suspected misuse of stock markets within India to evade taxes and launder money through trading in companies that mostly exist on paper.

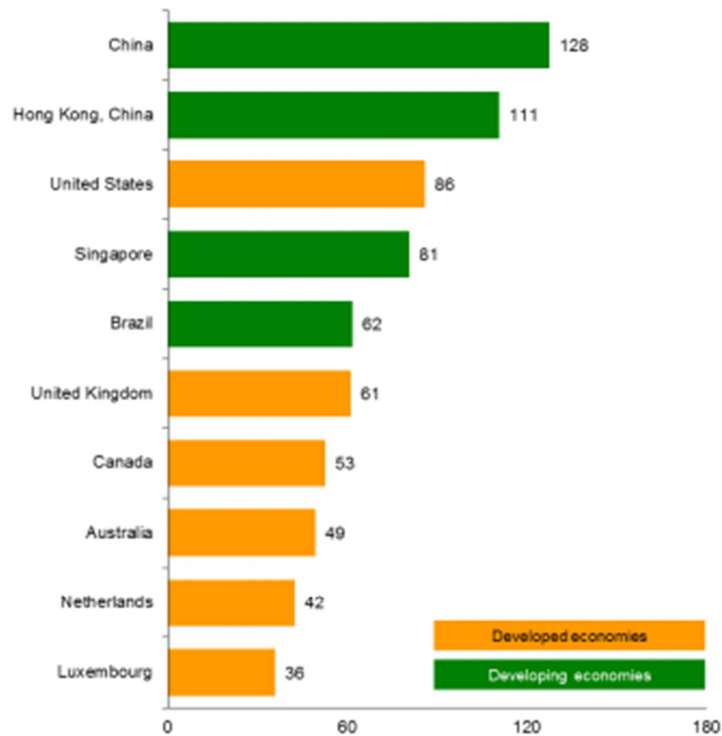
GLOBAL INVESTMENT TREND MONITOR

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on twenty nine Jan 2015 published global Investment Trend Monitor Report. The report provides the worldwide investments trend in 2014 and prospects of world investments in 2015.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2014, global foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows declined by 8% to an estimated US\$1.26 trillion due to fragility of the global economy, policy uncertainty and geopolitical risks.
- FDI flows to developed countries dropped by 14% to an estimated US\$511 billion, significantly affected by a large divestment in the United States.
- FDI flows to the European Union (EU) reached an estimated US\$267 billion; this represents a 13% increase on 2013, but is still only one-third of the 2007 peak.
- Flows to transition economies more than halved reaching US\$45 billion as regional conflict, sanctions on the Russian Federation, and negative growth prospects deterred foreign investors (especially from developed countries) from investing in the region.
- Developing economies saw their FDI reaching a new high of more than US\$700 billion, 4% higher than 2013, with a global share of 56%.
- At the regional level, flows to developing Asia were up, those to Africa remained flat, while FDI to Latin America declined.

With inflows to China at an estimated \$128 billion – including both financial and non-financial sectors – the country became the largest FDI recipient in the world in 2014. The United States fell to the 3rd largest host country. Among the top five FDI recipients in the world, four are developing economies.



Estimated FDI inflows: top 10 host economies, 2014

FOR INDIA

Foreign direct investment inflows to India increased by about 26 per cent to \$35 billion in 2014, despite macroeconomic uncertainties and financial risks.

FOR 2015

The report said that trends in global FDI flows were uncertain. “The fragility of the world economy, with growth tempered by hesitant consumer demand, volatility in currency markets and geopolitical instability will act as a deterrent for investors,”.

FALL IN CRUDE OIL PRICE

REASONS FOR THE FALL OF GLOBAL OIL PRICES

- The main importer of Oil such as China has cut down its oil import by a huge margin thus bringing a huge fall in the demands of the global oil supply.
- America has become the world’s largest oil producer. Though it does not export crude oil, it now imports much less, creating a lot of spare supply.
- The Saudis and their Gulf allies have decided not to sacrifice their own market share to restore the price. They could curb production sharply, but the main benefits would go to countries they detest such as Iran and Russia.
- The inability, or unwillingness rather, of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which accounts for about 40 per cent of global oil output, to cut production to match the demand is a major factor.

BENEFITS FOR INDIA

- The fall in crude oil price is good for all users, including major importers like India, as it lowers their trade deficit and hence strengthens their currencies.
- With low oil price, our production cost will go down, and we will be competitive internationally. With this, our exports will increase.
- Our imports will be down and this will improve our balance of payment situation. The steep fall in crude prices is defacto fiscal stimulus for India as oil accounts for 37 per cent of its imports.
- Lower crude prices have given room to cut petroleum subsidies; it will have positive impact on fiscal deficit.
- Lower oil prices will cut inflation.

LOSSES FOR INDIA

- Today the global economy is just about in a recovery mode and the collapse of any economy, be it Greece or any oil producing country would change the policy actions of central banks which will influence the flow of funds thus impacting our external balances. Hence while we may not be affected on the trade front, it will definitely impact our balance of payments.
- Default in loans given to Russia and to shale gas developers in the U.S. could affect the global banking industry which could cause imbalances.

PANCH DEEP PROJECT

The Centre is implementing a rupees 1,900 crore e-governance project called 'Panch Deep' to automate transactions of the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC). Delegating more powers to the states, the Centre has decided to form the state executive committees for ESI services.

ERP (ENTERPRISE WIDE RESOURCE PLANNING)

- The ERP (Enterprise wide Resource Planning) solution will give a unique card to the employees and facilitate clearance of third party bills.
- It helps in doing away with all the middle layers and make the process easier.
- The ERP solution would help build a massive database of health records of all the members
- The Insured Persons (IP) would get unique biometric cards under the project.

RBI CUT REPO RATE BY 25 BPS

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) cut the reverse repo rate by 25 basis points to 7.75%. The central bank kept the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) unchanged at 4.0%.

RBI Governor listed out several domestic factors for the sudden rate cut decision

- **Path of inflation:** Since July 2014, inflationary pressures (measured by changes in the consumer price index) have been easing
- **Fiscal deficit target:** Rajan has acknowledged the government's assurance of sticking to its fiscal deficit target of 4.1% in the current fiscal year.

- **Inflation expectations:** "Households' inflation expectations have adapted, and both near-term and longer-term inflation expectations have eased to single digits for the first time since September 2009.

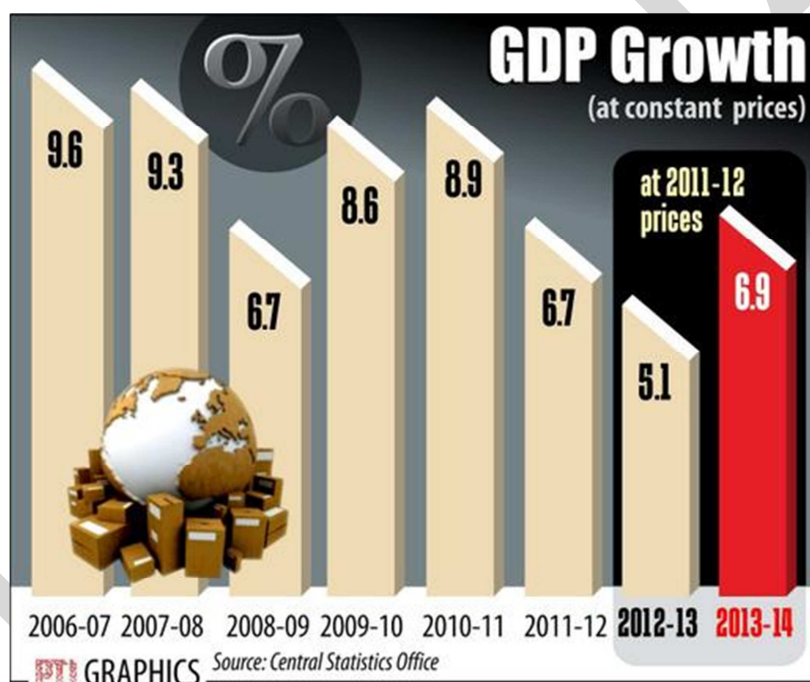
REACTIONS TO RATE CUT

- "Reduction in the rates is a positive development. It will lead to more money in the hand of the consumers and greater spending. It's positive for the Indian economy," said Finance Minister
- Finance Minister said that the RBI decision would "certainly help in reviving investment cycle that the government is trying to restore".
- The industry has also been demanding an interest rate cut to lower their cost of capital and help revive the investment cycle.

BASE YEAR CHANGE

The central statistics office (CSO) has come out with a new series of national accounts with 2011-12 as base year for computing economic growth rate. In January 2010, the base year had been fixed as 2004-05.

As per revised base year India's 2013-14 GDP growth estimate to 6.9 per cent from 4.7 per cent. The 2012-13 growth estimate was revised to 5.1 per cent from 4.5 per cent. The changes have reduced the gap between the way India calculates GDP and the methodology used by the International Monetary Fund.



ADDRESSING INEQUALITY IN SOUTH ASIA: WORLD BANK

A World Bank report has challenged the conventional understanding of India's inequality. The report, "Addressing inequality in South Asia," has found that the probability of a poor person moving out of poverty in India in 2014 was as good as that in the U.S.

UPWARD MOBILITY

- The report has found that sons from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe households are no longer stuck in the jobs done by their fathers.

- Across generations, mobility of occupational profiles among Muslims has been similar to that of higher caste Hindus, whereas mobility among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes has become higher than that of upper caste Hindus over time.
- The report shows that one of the main drivers of upward mobility is the increase in number of non-farm jobs in rural India.

INEQUALITY WATCH

WORLD BANK DATA SHOW POVERTY GAINS WERE NOT FULLY SUSTAINED BETWEEN 2004-2005 AND 2009-2010

40% of India's poor moved above the poverty line

11% of poor, vulnerable entered the middle class

14% of non-poor group slipped back into poverty



HOW CHILDREN OF POOR FARED IN EMPLOYMENT

- ▶ 36% of children of farmers **employed as skilled, semiskilled or white-collar workers**

- ▶ 40% of children of unskilled workers **engaged in skill-based occupations**

Source: Addressing Inequality in South Asia Report

URBANISATION REDUCING INEQUALITY

- Between 2004-05 and 2009-10, 15 per cent of India's population, or 40 per cent of the poor, moved above the poverty line.
- In the same period, a sizeable portion of the poor and the vulnerable — over 9 per cent of the total population or about 11 per cent of the poor and vulnerable — moved into the middle class.
- However, over 9 per cent of the total population, or about 14 per cent of the non-poor group, slipped back into poverty, revealing the greater risks faced by the vulnerable and even the middle class than in other countries.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE REPORT



- Strive for universal health and sanitation;
- Leverage the opportunity for urbanisation; and
- Create jobs for all and build skills not just through technical training but also with servicing the population with primary and secondary education and nutrition.

VODAFONE TAX CASE

The Bombay High Court on October 10, 2014 ruled against the Income Tax Department's demand to the company to pay additional income tax.

The Union Cabinet decided to not challenge a Bombay High Court ruling that said Vodafone was not liable to pay a tax demand of Rs 3,200 crore in a **transfer pricing case**.

Government move aimed at improving the investment climate in the country, the decision not to appeal has implications for other such similar cases involving multinationals and is, in that sense, a significant one.

IMPROVING INVESTOR SENTIMENT	
CABINET DROPS MOVE TO APPEAL IN VODAFONE CASE, CLEARS DECKS FOR SPECTRUM SALE	
Auction of four spectrum bands to begin on March 4 (in cr)	Jan 17, 2014: IT dept. issues show cause notice to Vodafone 
Base price for 1 MHz	• Asks firm to pay Rs.3,200 crore in tax for allegedly undervaluing shares of its Indian subsidiary during transfer pricing
▶ 800 MHz: Rs.3,646	Jan 27: Vodafone moves Bombay High Court challenging the order
▶ 900 MHz: Rs.3,980	Oct 10: High Court rules Vodafone not liable to pay additional income tax
▶ 1800 MHz: Rs.2,191	
▶ 2100 MHz: Rs.3,705	
▶ Estimated proceeds: Rs.1 lakh crore	
 This is a govt. where decisions would be fair and within the law. We have tried to give a positive message to investors — RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD	

INDIA WILL CATCH UP WITH CHINA'S GROWTH IN 2016-17: WORLD BANK

India will catch up with China's growth at 7 per cent in 2016-17. **The country's economy has recovered in the wake of the economic reform measures taken by the new government, falling oil prices and lower interest rates.** The bank expects implementation of reforms and deregulation in India to lift FDI.

- The bank in its report forecast a growth rate of 7 per cent each in the fiscal year 2016 and 2017 as against China's 7 per cent and 6.9 per cent respectively.
- This would be for the first time in recent past that India's growth rate would catch up with that of China.
- Regional growth(South Asia) is projected to rise to 6.8 per cent by 2017, as reforms ease supply constraints in India, political tensions subside in Pakistan, remittances remain robust in Bangladesh and Nepal, and demand for the region's exports firms.

SOCIAL ISSUES/ HEALTH

HEALTH AS FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

NEW POLICY FRAMEWORK DRAFT OF NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY 2015 PROPOSES STEPS TO IMPROVE THE CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Key proposals

- Enact a **National Health Rights Act** to make health a fundamental right
- Raise public health expenditure to **2.5% of GDP** (Rs.3,800 per capita)
- Explore **creation of a health cess** on the lines of education cess
- Ensure **universal access to free drugs, diagnostics** in govt. hospitals

States may voluntarily opt to adopt the Act through a resolution in the Legislative Assembly



THE DRAFT NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY 2015: OBJECTIVE

- Strengthening the **regulatory framework of health care** to include reform of professional councils and ensure a balance between autonomy and accountability of professional councils.
- **Clinical trials** need to be regulated by law.
- Enacting a **National Health Rights Act** to guarantee health as a fundamental right.
- Focussing on targeted investments in building **health infrastructure** and **human resources**.
- Ensuring availability of **free, comprehensive primary health care services and access to free essential drugs, diagnostics** etc.
- Encouraging the growth of the private **health care industry** to make health care more effective and affordable.

The policy is a first step in achieving universal health coverage by advocating health as a fundamental right, whose “denial will be justiciable”.

The current government spending on health care is a dismal 1.04 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), one of the lowest in the world; this translates to Rs.957 per capita in absolute terms. The failure of the public health-care system to provide affordable services has been the main reason that has led to increased out-of-pocket expenditure on health care. As a result, nearly 63 million people are driven into poverty every year.

RAISING PUBLIC HEALTH EXPENDITURE TO 2.5% OF GDP

- The draft endorses that to achieve the millennium development goals we require an increase in public health expenditure from 4 to 5 per cent of the GDP
- 40% of this expenditure will be borne by the central government.
- The government will raise resources by creating a health cess on the lines of the education cess. Special commodity taxes may be imposed on tobacco, alcohol, extractive industries etc.

JUDICIARY INTERVENTION

The Delhi High Court issued a landmark ruling in the Consolidated LaxmiMandal/Jaitun case in June 2010 holding that the denial of maternal health care is a violation of fundamental constitutional and human rights.

Justice S. Muralidhar emphasised that the right to health and the reproductive rights are part of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution. He emphasised that the right to health includes access to and minimum standards of treatment and care in public health facilities.

He also cited India's international legal commitments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

BLOOD GROUPS:

A blood type (also called a blood group) is a classification of blood based on the presence or absence of inherited antigenic substances on the surface of red blood cells (RBCs).

These antigens may be proteins, carbohydrates, glycoproteins, or glycolipids, depending on the blood group system. Some of these antigens are also present on the surface of other types of cells of various tissues. Several of these red blood cell surface antigens can stem from one allele (or very closely linked genes) and collectively form a blood group system. Blood types are inherited and represent contributions from both parents.

A total of 33 human blood group systems are now recognized by the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT). The two most important ones are ABO and the RhD antigen; they determine someone's blood type (A, B, AB and O, with +, - or Null denoting RhD status).

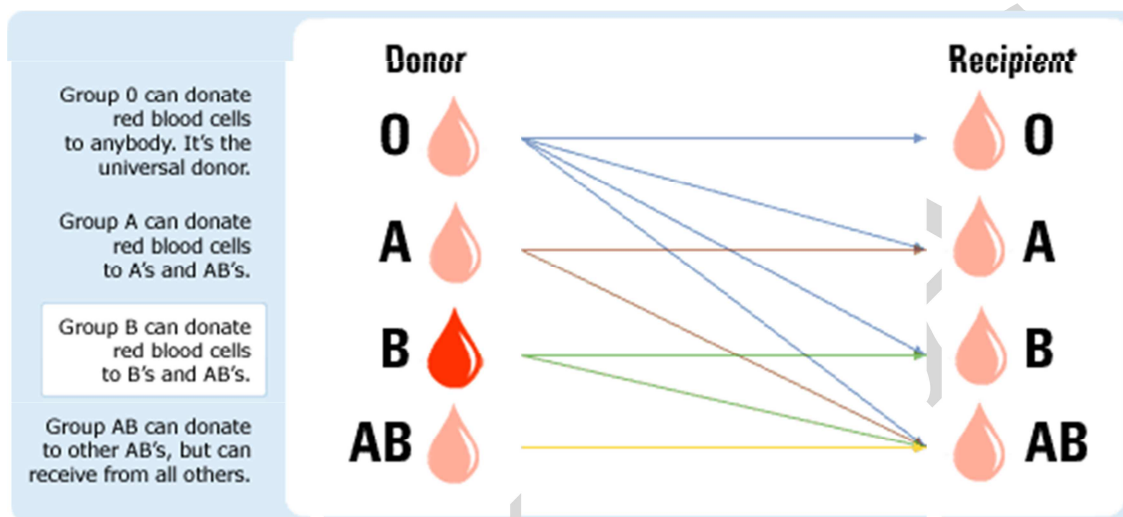
	Group A	Group B	Group AB	Group O
Red blood cell-type				
Antibodies in Plasma	 Anti-B	 Anti-A	None	 Anti-A and Anti-B
Antigens in Red Blood Cell	 A antigen	 B antigen	 A and B antigens	None

THE ABO BLOOD GROUP SYSTEM

There are four major blood groups determined by the presence or absence of two antigens – A and B – on the surface of red blood cells:

- **Group A** – has only the A antigen on red cells (and B antibody in the plasma)
- **Group B** – has only the B antigen on red cells (and A antibody in the plasma)
- **Group AB** – has both A and B antigens on red cells (but neither A nor B antibody in the plasma)
- **Group O** – has neither A nor B antigens on red cells (but both A and B antibody are in the plasma)

There are very specific ways in which blood types must be matched for a safe transfusion. See the chart:



In addition to the A and B antigens, there is a third antigen called the Rh factor, which can be either present (+) or absent (-). In general, Rh negative blood is given to Rh-negative patients, and Rh positive blood or Rh negative blood may be given to Rh positive patients.

- The universal red cell donor has Type O negative blood type.
- The universal plasma donor has Type AB positive blood type.

ROLE OF ABO ANTIGENS IN TRANSFUSION MEDICINE

For a blood donor and recipient to be ABO-compatible for a transfusion, the recipient must not be able to produce Anti-A or Anti-B antibodies that correspond to the A or B antigens on the surface of the donor's red blood cells (since the red blood cells are isolated from whole blood before transfusion, it is unimportant whether the donor blood has antibodies in its plasma). If the antibodies of the recipient's blood and the antigens on the donor's red blood cells do correspond, the donor blood is rejected.

In addition to the ABO system, the Rh blood group system can affect transfusion compatibility. An individual is either positive or negative for the Rh factor; this is denoted by a '+' or '-' after their ABO type. Blood that is Rh-negative can be transfused into a person who is Rh-positive, but an Rh-negative individual can create antibodies for Rh-positive RBCs.

Because of this, the AB+ blood type is referred to as the "universal recipient", as it possesses neither Anti-B or Anti-A antibodies in its plasma, and can receive both Rh-positive and Rh-negative blood. Similarly, the O- blood type is called the "universal donor"; since its red blood cells have no A or B antigens and are Rh-negative, no other blood type will reject it.

COMPOSITION OF BLOOD:

Blood is composed of cells suspended in a liquid-like substance called plasma. Suspended in the plasma are three types of cells:

- **Red blood cells** carry oxygen
- **White blood cells** fight infection
- **Platelets** stop bleeding in injuries

Blood contains red blood cells, floating in fluid called plasma. Red blood cells carry on their surface a set of markers with which the plasma interacts. This compatibility or cross-talk between the cell and the plasma is what makes each blood type special. The markers on the cell are determined by a master type called H, out of which are generated types A, B, AB and AO.

BOMBAY BLOOD GROUP:

The **h/h blood group**, also known as **Oh** or the **Bombay blood** group, is a rare blood type. This blood phenotype was first discovered in Bombay by Dr. Y. M. Bhende in 1952. The hh type (Bombay type people) can accept only from other hh type, and also can receive only from the hh types. This makes the Bombay Blood types a very special and rare category of people.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN AND WHY ARE THESE PEOPLE SO RARE?

It is largely because of extensive inbreeding within the same lineage or close-community marriages, often consanguineous, such that the 'blood type' or the gene pool is greatly restricted. Such intra-community marriages have happened in small isolated communities such as the gypsies, Russian Jewish or Parsi communities. It is thus likely that the Bombay Blood types have common ancestral origins.

People with Bombay blood group appear that they have an O blood group; however, they suffer from a reaction if they are transfused with any other blood group including O blood.

Why does this happen? This happens because the person lacks an antigen called the **H antigen**. The H antigen is a precursor protein that gives rise to the A and B antigens, on the basis of which people are classified into the A, B or AB blood groups. Normally, people with the O blood group do not convert H to A or B. Thus, they have large amounts of H antigen. On the other hand, people with Bombay blood group have the O blood group, but have one difference - they do not have the H antigen. They are said to have the Oh blood group and are described as h/h. Some of these individuals can make a small amount of H antigen, which appears in the secretions. These people are said to have the para-Bombay phenotype.

HOW IS BLOOD TYPE DETERMINED?

It's inherited. Like eye color, blood type is passed genetically from your parents. Whether your blood group is type A, B, AB or O is based on the blood types of your mother and father.

		Father's Blood Type				Child's Blood type Must Be
		A	B	AB	O	
Mother's Blood Type	A	A or O	A, B, AB, or O	A, B, or AB	A or O	
	B	A, B, AB or O	B or O	A, B, or AB	B or O	
	AB	A, B, or AB	A, B, or AB	A, B, or AB	A or B	
	O	A or O	B or O	A or B	O	

SUPER MOSQUITO

Interbreeding of two malaria mosquito species in the West African country of Mali has resulted in a “super mosquito” hybrid that is resistant to insecticide-treated bed nets. “It’s ‘super’ with respect to its ability to survive exposure to the insecticides on treated bed nets.

- ❖ *Anopheles gambiae*, a major malaria vector, is interbreeding with isolated pockets of another malaria mosquito, *Acoluzzii*.
- ❖ Entomologists initially considered them as the “M and S forms” of *Anopheles gambiae*. They are now recognised as separate species.

The research “provides convincing evidence indicating that a man-made change in the environment — the introduction of insecticides — has altered the evolutionary relationship between two species.

IMPACT OF SUPER MOSQUITO:

The World Health Organisation’s World Malaria Report indicates that deaths from malaria worldwide have decreased by 47 per cent since 2000. Much of that is attributed to the insecticide-treated bed nets. However, it was just a matter of time for insecticide resistance to emerge. Now there is “an urgent need to develop new and effective malaria vector control strategies.

MENINGITIS VACCINE

The World Health Organization has approved giving a groundbreaking meningitis vaccine, which does not have to be stored in fridges or iceboxes, to babies across Africa. WHO’s approval means the vaccine meets international safety and quality standards and can be used in children under a year old. It also paves the way for UN agencies to purchase the vaccine for use in routine immunisation programmes.

WHY WHO GAVE APPROVAL

- In the **four years** since its introduction in Africa, **MenAfriVac** has had an immediate and dramatic impact in breaking the cycle of meningitis A epidemics.
- The vaccine has already been used in those aged 1-29 years. The **performance of vaccine is good** so WHO gave approval for use of this vaccine for infants.
- But with the WHO’s approval, the vaccine can be given to **infants** thereby **protecting million more children** at risk of the deadly disease.
- Now it has been approved by WHO for use in infants in sub-Saharan African populations.
- The vaccine **will be introduced** as part of the **routine immunization programme**.
- **The stability and potency** of the meningitis vaccine **remains intact even when exposed to higher temperature**. So it becomes more suitable for African Climate.

Launched in 2010, the vaccine has been administered to more than 215 million people in the 15 countries of the African meningitis belt — Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan and Togo.

MenAfriVac was developed by MVP — a partnership between WHO and Path, a non-profit global health group — and is manufactured by the Serum Institute of India.

Severity of Meningitis in Africa: About 200,000 people suffer from meningitis every year in the region. The disease kills 20,000 to 25,000 people in the region every year. One of the most devastating meningitis outbreaks ever recorded in Africa occurred in 1996-1997, when an epidemic infected more than 2,50,000 people and killed over 25,000 in just a few months.

MENINGITIS

- Meningitis is an acute inflammation of the protective membranes covering the **brain** and **spinalcord**, known as the Meningitis.
- Meningitis can be **life-threatening** because of the inflammation's proximity to the brain and spinal cord.

Symptoms: headache and neck stiffness associated with **fever, confusion or altered consciousness**, vomiting, and an inability to **tolerate light** (photophobia) or loud noises (phonophobia).

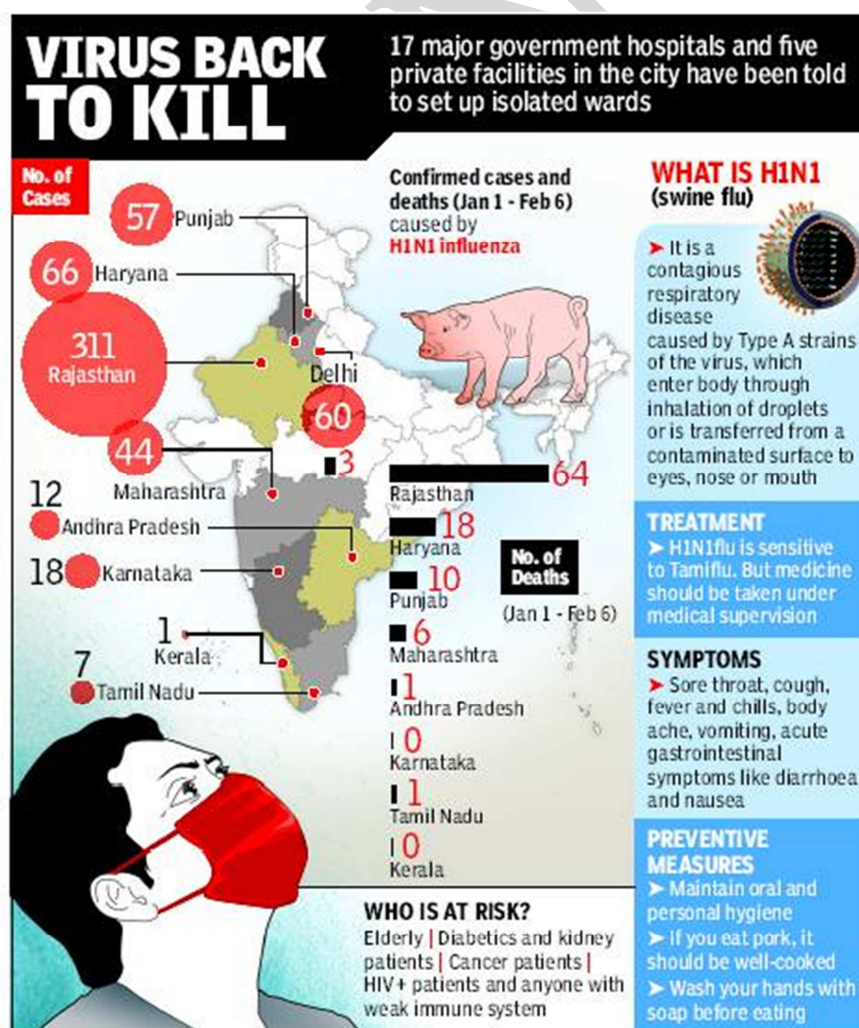
Causes: Most infections are due to viruses, with **bacteria, fungi, and protozoa** being the next most common causes.

Treatments: Antibiotics are used for treatment. The type of antibiotic depends on the bacteria which caused the infection. Vaccination is also widely used for prevention.

SWINE FLU

Swine flu (swine influenza) is a respiratory disease caused by viruses (influenza viruses) that infect the respiratory tract of pigs, resulting in nasal secretions, a barking cough, decreased appetite, and listless behavior. Swine flu viruses may mutate (change) so that they are easily transmissible among humans.

The 2009 swine flu outbreak (pandemic) was due to infection with the H1N1 virus and was first observed in Mexico.



SPREAD IN INDIA AND WORLD

- Early in the spring of 2009, H1N1 flu virus was first detected in Mexico,
- Because of huge spread across the world, the World Health Organization declared the swine flu pandemic officially over in 2010.
- Number of people affected by the H1N1 virus breaches the **10,000 mark** as it spreads to new places like Nagaland.
- **Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh** are the worst-hit States
- Swine flu spread very rapidly worldwide due to its high human-to-human transmission rate and due to the frequency of air travel

Causes/means of spread: Swine flu is **contagious**. When people who have it **cough or sneeze**, they spray tiny drops of the virus into the air. If anyone come in contact with these drops or touch a surface (such as a doorknob or sink) that an infected person has recently touched, one can catch H1N1 swine flu.

Symptoms: Symptoms of swine flu in humans are similar to most influenza infections: fever (100 F or greater), cough, nasal secretions, fatigue, and headache.

TREATMENT:

- **Antiviral drugs** can make the illness milder and make the patient feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- **Vaccination is the best way** to prevent or reduce the chances of becoming infected with influenza viruses. Trivalent vaccines provide protection for a whole year from three viruses, including swine flu virus.

GENDERED APPROACH TO STERILISATION

On October 20, 2014, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare decided to enhance compensation for sterilisations for 11 States which were one of the “main interventions” under the Reproductive Maternal Neonatal Child Health plus Adolescent (RMNCH+A) programme launched to meet the millennium development goals. It also added a new component of Post Partum Sterilisation (PPS) — done soon after delivery or within 7 days.

The recent tragedy in medical camp in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh has brought out the flawed approach adopted by the government to meet millennium development goals.

The Social Justice Bench of the Supreme Court noted that the Bilaspur deaths occurred despite specific directives laid down by the apex court in 2005 in Ramakant Rai versus Union of India, to ensure uniform norms, safety and quality assurance in sterilisation procedures.

GENDER BIAS:

Official statistics suggest that the governments — both at the Centre and States — promote female sterilisation disproportionately.

- Of the total sterilisations performed in 2012-13, as many as 97.4 per cent were tubectomy procedures.
- An analysis by non-governmental organization suggests that in 2013-14, India spent 85 per cent of its family planning expenditure on sterilisation, the beneficiaries of which were mostly women.
- Sterilisation constitutes 75 per cent of India’s total contraceptive use, which is the highest anywhere in the world.

- From the mid-1980s, the numbers of tubectomies have risen steeply and on average 4.5 million surgeries are performed each year.
- The proportion of tubectomies to total sterilisations has been around 95 per cent since 2005.

Sterilisation, particularly tubectomy, has been vigorously promoted and pushed by the state through centrally-decided targets and on a mass scale through a camp approach, largely disregarding other currently available methods such as condoms, oral pills, IUDs.

RECENT GOVERNMENT DECISIONS:

The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry has written to all States to ensure that every person choosing family planning is provided options of his or her choice in a “spirit of voluntarism.”

- Female sterilisation is just one of the options in the “bouquet” of family planning choices and every individual should be counselled about the options available.
- The Centre has cracked the whip on “camps” conducted in unhygienic conditions and by bypassing rules.
- The States have been instructed to ensure that all operations are conducted only inside health facilities with working operation theatres.
- The Centre has asked the States to reorient all programme officers and service providers on the standard operating procedures for sterilisation.

ASIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Asian Centre for Human Rights is an NGO (non-governmental organization) dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Asian region. It is headquartered in New Delhi, India.

Report on Internally Displaced Persons in Assam

- There are over 3,00,000 internally displaced persons in Assam, which is the highest in the world during 2014.
- The displaced persons are currently reeling under a man-made humanitarian crisis in 85 relief camps in four districts of Assam — Sonitpur, Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang districts.
- The IDPs, mainly Adivasis, have been fleeing their homes following the killing of over 80 Adivasis by the NDFB(S) on December 23, 2014 in Sonitpur, Kokrajhar and Chirang districts.

ACHR urged the state government to fully extend humanitarian assistance to all displaced persons. They also demanded rehabilitation of displaced persons by providing adequate assistance such as housing, food rations for six months and ensuring that no relief camp was forcibly closed down and inmates asked to leave.

REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

A top global human rights group has criticised the Indian government for:

- **Its treatment of minorities:** Human Rights Watch noted that there was a “spike” in incidents of violence against religious minorities in 2013 in the run-up to the national elections where 133 people were killed and 2,269 injured in 823 incidents.

- **Lack of protection for women's and children's rights:** In terms of women's rights, In early 2014, the government introduced guidelines for the medical treatment and examination of women and children who report rape, but failed to allocate resources necessary for their implementation, till date only two states had adopted the guidelines.
- **Restrictions on free speech and insufficient support extended for human rights via New Delhi's foreign policy engagements:** administration has been "reticent on many regional and global human rights issues where their voice could make a difference," including India's March 2014 abstained on a resolution requesting the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate serious violations during the conflict in Sri Lanka.

VENTURE CAPITAL FUNDS FOR SCHEDULED CASTE

The Government of India has launched this 'Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes' with initial capital of Rs. 200 crore.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE VENTURE FUND ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- It is a Social Sector Initiative to be implemented nationally in order to promote entrepreneurship amongst the SCs who are oriented towards innovation and growth technologies.
- To provide concessional finance to the SC entrepreneurs, who will create wealth and value for society and at the same time will promote profitable businesses. The assets so created will also create forward/backward linkage. It will further create chain effect in the locality.
- To increase financial inclusion for SC entrepreneurs and to motivate them for further growth of SC communities.
- To develop SC entrepreneurs economically.
- To enhance direct and indirect employment generation for SC population in India

GREEN BUSINESS SCHEME

- NSFDC's 'Green Business Scheme' for providing financial assistance has been launched keeping into the concern for the climate change.
- Under this Scheme, loan for unit cost upto Rs.1 lakh at concessional rate of interest will be provided to Scheduled Castes for activities such as e-rickshaw, Solar Pump and Solar energy powered implements, poly house etc.

'BETI BACHAO-BETI PADHAO' SCHEME

The 'Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao' scheme, which seeks to address gender imbalance and discrimination against the girl child, was launched by Prime Minister at Panipat in Haryana.

BETI BACHAO, BETI PADHAO

- PM Modi launched the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and Sukanya Samridhi Yojna today
- Scheme targets to improve child sex ratio from 918 girls to every 1,000 boys

ACTION PLAN

- Promote early registration of pregnancy and institutional delivery
- Ensure panchayats display gudda-guddi board with number of newborn boys and girls every month
- Hold panchayats responsible for child marriage
- Create parliamentary forum of MPs representing 100 districts



PM Modi and HRD minister Smriti Irani present Sukanya Samridhi account passbook to a girl during the scheme launch in Panipat

SUKANYA SAMRIDHI ACCOUNT

- Account opened in girl child's name any time before she attains the age of 10
- Minimum deposit required Rs 1,000; any amount in multiple of Rs 100s can be deposited subsequently, up to a maximum Rs 1.5 lakh in a year
- Govt will provide rate of interest of 9.1% for the savings account; no income tax will be charged
- 50% money can be withdrawn by the girl child after 18 years
- Account will remain operative till girl is 21 years

'SUKANYA SAMRUDDHI ACCOUNT'

- **Sukanya Samruddhi Account' scheme** under which accounts of girls could be opened from the time of their birth till their attaining the age of 10 by presenting passbooks to five girls.
- The account can be opened with an amount of Rs. 1000 and in a financial year, a sum of up to Rs. 1.5 lakh can be deposited in it.
- Investments made under the scheme will also be eligible for **exemption under 80C of Income Tax Act, 1961.**

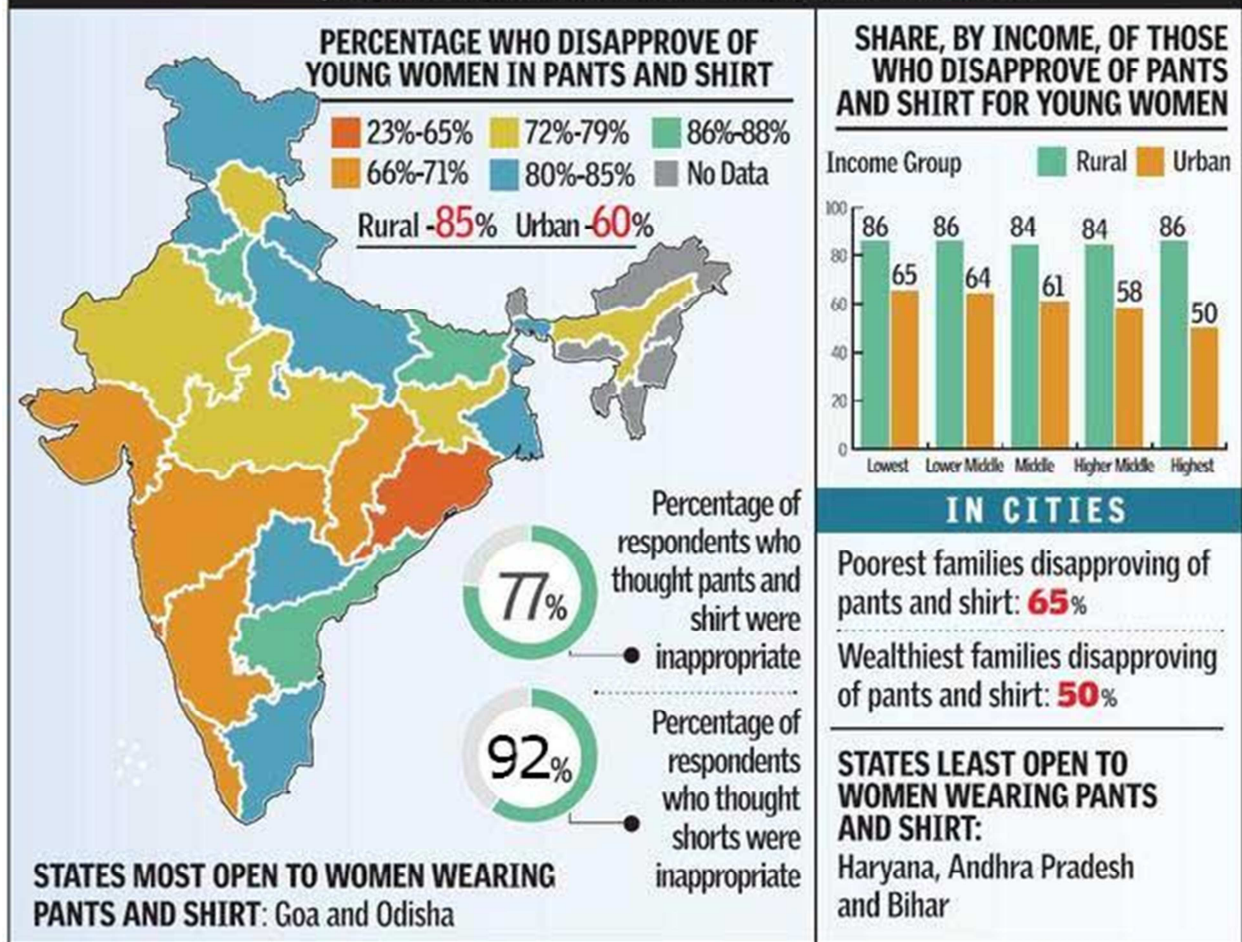
GENDER BIAS

Social bias in India is pervasive across a range of key cleavages — whether caste or class, region or religion.

Over the past three decades — improvements in literacy and levels of education, rapid economic growth, and urbanisation — would have led to a decline in gender bias. While there is undoubtedly some improvement in the gender gap, the growing sex ratio problem and continued gender-based violence reveal just how far India still has to travel to bring dignity to half its population.

DRESSING UP

Would you consider (clothing type) inappropriate for young women in your neighbourhood when they go out with friends?



SHAMEFUL REALITY

- Son preference is widespread across Indian society with little variance across income classes, education levels, and rural/ urban areas.
- Gender discrimination in India is undoubtedly one of the country's most shameful social realities. It is not just that it is inequitable and unfair; quite simply, any society where half the population suffers from social bias has already hobbled itself and its future.
- Although urban Indians are gradually showing more openness in their attitudes on women's attire, this is not the case on the critical issue of son preference, an attitude that remains deeply rooted in India's family ideals and social structure across a wide cross-section of society.

CONCLUSION

Clearly economic growth does not appear to be sufficient to remove the social incentives for having fewer daughters. Without frontally addressing some norms and structures, and fundamentally delegitimising gender bias in wider social discourse, there is little reason to believe that India will see a reversal in male child preferences in the foreseeable future.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CORAL BLEACHING

Coral bleaching is **the loss of intracellular endosymbionts** (*Symbiodinium*, also known as *zooxanthellae*) **through either expulsion or loss of algal pigmentation**. When corals are stressed by changes in conditions such as temperature, light, or nutrients, they expel the symbiotic algae living in their tissues, causing them to turn completely white.

A number of biotic and abiotic factors that lead to coral bleaching are listed below

- Increased (most commonly), or reduced water temperatures: The warm water prompts algae inside the coral to leave, which starves coral and turns it white.
- Oxygen starvation caused by an increase in zooplankton levels as a result of overfishing.
- Increased solar irradiance (Photosynthetically Active Radiation and ultraviolet band light).
- Changes in water chemistry (in particular acidification).
- Increased sedimentation (due to silt runoff).
- Bacterial infections.
- Changes in salinity.

CARBON DIOXIDE FERTILIZATION

The enhancement of the growth of plants as a result of increase in the concentration of atmospheric CO₂. Depending on their mechanism of photosynthesis, certain types of plants are more sensitive to changes in atmospheric CO₂ concentration.

CO₂ ABSORPTION

Tropical forests absorb 1.4 billion metric tonnes of carbon dioxide out of a total global absorption of 2.5 billion - more than what is absorbed by forests in Canada, Siberia and other northern regions, called boreal forests.

Forests and other land vegetation currently remove up to 30 percent of human carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere during photosynthesis.

A new NASA-led study says that Tropical forests may be absorbing far more carbon dioxide in response to its rising atmospheric levels than many scientists thought.

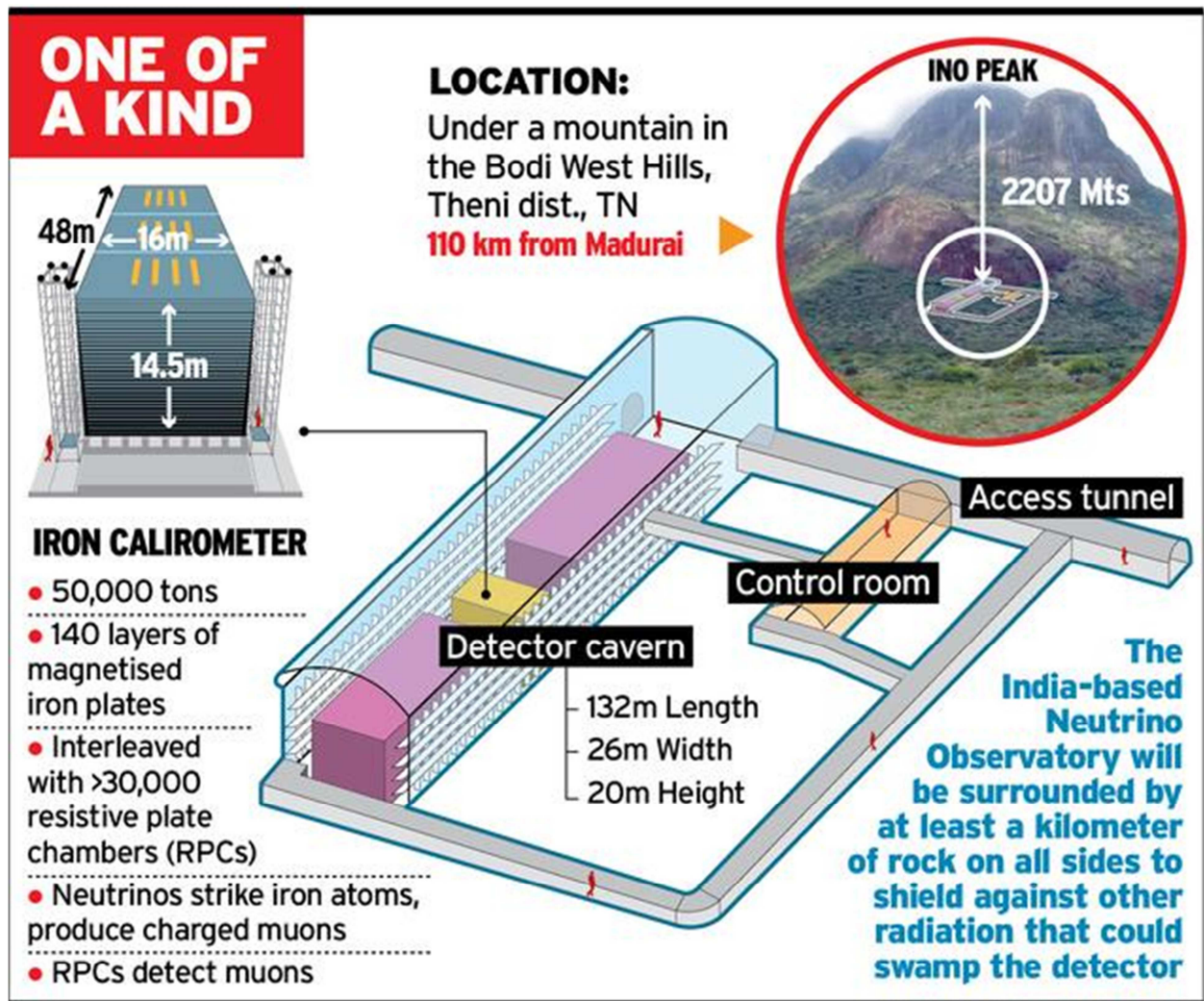
INDIA-BASED NEUTRINO OBSERVATORY (INO)

Neutrinos are one of the fundamental particles which make up the universe. Neutrinos are similar to the electron, with one crucial difference: neutrinos do not carry electric charge.

NEUTRINO

- Tiny electrically neutral particles
- cannot be broken into further smaller pieces
- Chargeless and are almost massless
- second most abundant particle in the universe after photon

The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) Project is a multi-institutional effort aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover of approx.1200 m for non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India.



INFOGRAPHIC: PRATHAP RAVISHANKAR

The INO is set to come up on the hills near Thevaram in Theni district and will have a 50,000-tonne magnetic detector to study neutrinos that are significant in particle physics.

In the 1960s, a neutrino observatory located at the Kolar Gold Fields in Karnataka became one of the world's first experiments to observe neutrinos in the Earth's atmosphere, produced as a by-product of cosmic rays colliding with its upper strata. However, the laboratory was shut in the 1990s because the mines were being closed.

Objective: Determination of neutrino masses is the most significant open problem in particle physics today and is the key goal of the INO project.

Benefits:

- According to government INO will be the agent of transforming physics of this kind in India and will make a global impact. The outcome of this investment will be extraordinary and long term.
- Understanding the particle will help scientists pick the correct theory beyond the standard model of particle physics and address the problem of matter-antimatter asymmetry of the universe.
- Research on neutrino particle would be path breaking in the field of science and will help in knowing more about the universe.
- An important outcome of the project will be training young researchers in large-scale experimental science.

SPACE PIONEER AWARD

India's Mars Orbiter programme team has won the 2015 Space Pioneer Award in the science and engineering category from the US based National Space Society (NSS).

According to the NSS, India's Mars Orbiter launched on Nov 5, 2013 that went into Mars orbit on Sep 24, 2014 achieved two significant mission:

- Firsts in terms of an Indian spacecraft that has gone into orbit around Mars on the very first try and that no other country has ever done this.
- Secondly, the spacecraft is in an elliptical orbit with a high apoapsis, and has a high resolution camera which is taking full-disk colour imagery of Mars.

IRIDS

iRIDS (Intelligent Red Light Violation Identification System), developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), is a state-of-the-art device that captures images and videos of red light violations with the help of vehicle sensors, cameras, and controller hardware installed at busy road intersections.

PRAKASH PATH

Prime Minister launched a scheme for Light Emitting Diode (LED) bulbs distribution under the Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (DELP) in Delhi.

Describing the LED bulb as a 'Prakash Path' (way to light), Modi said that it was much more economical to conserve power than to produce power.

LED bulbs have almost 50 times more life expectancy than ordinary bulbs and 8-10 times than that of CFLs, and therefore provide both energy and cost savings in the medium term.

The entire project of installing these Light Emitting Diode bulbs for domestic and street-lighting in 100 cities is targeted for completion by March 2016.

GORUMARA NATIONAL PARK

Gorumara National Park, one of the smallest national parks in India, has turned out to be a safe haven for butterflies.

- Recent studies have recorded more than 330 species of butterflies in the park.
- There are about 600 known species of butterflies in West Bengal and about 1,500 in India.
- Gorumara alone accounts for more than half of the species found in the State and about one-fifth found in the country.

The park, located in the State's Jalpaiguri district, covers an area of only 80 sq. km., and has recorded at least four species of butterflies that have never been found in the State before.

SL. No	Species of butterflies	Placed under	Protected under
1.	The Bicolour Cupid	Schedule I	the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
2.	The Malayan Nawab	Schedule I	the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
3.	The Witch	Schedule II	the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
4.	The Branded Young Fly	Schedule II	the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT, 1972

The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted for protection of plants and animal species. The Act provides for the protection of wild animals, birds and plants; and for matters connected therewith or ancillary or incidental thereto. It extends to the whole of India, except the State of Jammu and Kashmir which has its own wildlife act.

It has six schedules which give varying degrees of protection.

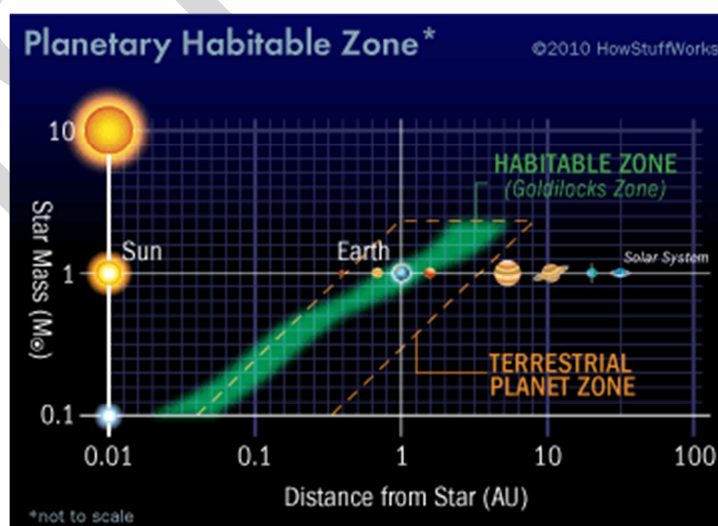
- Schedule I and part II of Schedule II provide absolute protection - offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.
- Species listed in Schedule III and Schedule IV are also protected, but the penalties are much lower.
- Schedule V includes the animals which may be hunted.
- The plants in Schedule VI are prohibited from cultivation and planting.

GOLDBLOCKS ZONE

The Goldilocks region is an area of space in which a planet is just the right distance from its home star so that its surface is neither too hot nor too cold.

Astronomers with the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics (CfA) have discovered eight new planets within the so-called Goldilocks — or habitable — zone of their stars.

To be considered habitable, exoplanets must orbit within a distance of their stars in which liquid water can exist on the planet's surface, receiving about as much sunlight as Earth.



The discoveries of Kepler-438b and Kepler-442b are the latest in several advancements scientists have made to find signs of possible life in the universe.

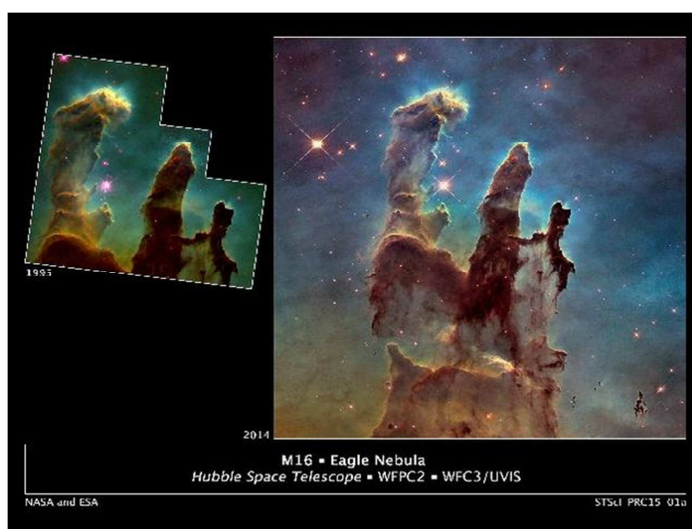
- The couple most like Earth, Kepler-438b and Kepler-442b, both orbit red dwarf stars, which are cooler and smaller than the Earth's sun.

- Kepler—438b's diameter is 12 per cent bigger than Earth and has a 70 per cent chance of being rocky, which means the surface of the planet appears to be like Earth's.
- Kepler—442b is about one-third larger than Earth with a 60 per cent chance of being rocky. Scientists give it a 97 per cent chance of being in the habitable zone.

EAGLE NEBULA'S 'PILLARS OF CREATION'

The Eagle Nebula, also known as Messier 16 or M16, is a young open cluster of stars in the constellation Serpens, discovered by Jean-Philippe de Cheseaux in 1745-46.

Its name derives from its shape that is thought to resemble an eagle. It contains several active star-forming gas and dust regions, including the famous "Pillars of Creation".



The NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope has revisited the famous Eagle Nebula's Pillars of Creation and has captured high-definition images. The telescope had earlier captured the three impressive towers of gas and dust in 1995.

The original image was dubbed the "**Pillars of Creation**", this new image hints that they are also pillars of destruction.

- The dust and gas in these pillars is seared by intense radiation from the young stars forming within them, and eroded by strong winds from massive nearby stars.
- The ghostly bluish haze around the dense edges of the pillars in the visible-light view is material that is being heated by bright young stars and evaporating away.

BANGLADESH'S ISLANDS ARE SINKING DUE TO EMBANKMENTS

According to a study published recently in the journal *Nature Climate Change* (a reputed journal). Some islands have sunk by as much as 1.5 metres in the last 50 years.

REASON

- **Embankments:** Embankment were made in the 1960s and 1970s to protect them against tidal and storm-surge inundation.

- But these earthen embankments, while buffering them against floods, have also **prevented the deposition of sediment** that helps maintain an elevation in this area.
- **Deforestation** in coastal areas

IMPACTS

- **More loss during disasters:** The loss of elevation was felt most significantly during the 2009 cyclone Alia when large areas of land were left inundated for upto two years.
- **Increased risk of flooding:** These islands in the Ganges–Brahmaputra river delta are fast submerging, putting millions of inhabitants at risk of flooding
- The study therefore implicates **direct human modification of the environment** and not global sea-level rise as the most important agent of change in the western Ganges Brahmaputra tidal delta plain.

FOREST OWLET

Forest owl, a critically endangered species, has been sighted in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FOREST OWLET

- Critically endangered species.
- Small bird (23 cm - length).
- Endemic to central Indian forests was said to be extinct in the wild but was rediscovered in 1997.
- Distribution: Central Indian forests.

BLACK-HEADED SQUIRREL MONKEYS

The black squirrel monkey (*Saimirivanzolinii*), also known as the blackish squirrel monkey or black-headed squirrel monkey, is a small New World primate, endemic to the central Amazon in Brazil.

Dispute: Whether the monkeys are a sub-species of another species or a species by itself was the point of dispute among scientists.

RECENT STUDY

The black-headed squirrel monkey is a distinct species found in South America. The scientists from the University of California — Los Angeles (UCLA) in the US and six other countries used genetic and statistical analysis to find that.

- This group of monkeys split from its sister group, called *Saimiriustus*, about 500,000 years ago.
- It formed a group called *Saimiriboliviensis* approximately 1.3 million years ago.

IMPORTANCE OF FINDING:

- This understanding is particularly significant because the monkeys' survival is being threatened by climate change.
- They may lose all of their habitat. This species has the smallest, most restricted habitat of any Amazonian primate. The findings could be particularly important in shaping efforts to conserve the biodiversity of primates in South America.

BEAGLE 2

Beagle 2 is a British landing spacecraft that formed part of the European Space Agency's 2003 Mars Express mission. Beagle 2 is named after HMS Beagle. Beagle 2 -- which measures less than 2 metres across -- was named after the ship Charles Darwin sailed when he formulated his theory of evolution.

- Beagle 2 had been due to land on Mars on Christmas Day 2003, but went missing on December 19, 2003.
- ESA declared the mission lost in February 2004, after numerous unsuccessful attempts to contact the spacecraft were made.
- The spacecraft's fate remained a mystery until it was found in January 2015.
- Beagle 2 had been located intact on the surface of Mars by NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter HiRISE instrument.

Reason of failure: one of the part on which the solar panels of the lander are mounted failed to fully open, preventing deployment of its radio antenna and blocking communication. Because of this communication failure contact was lost to the spacecraft and it was declared lost by ESA.

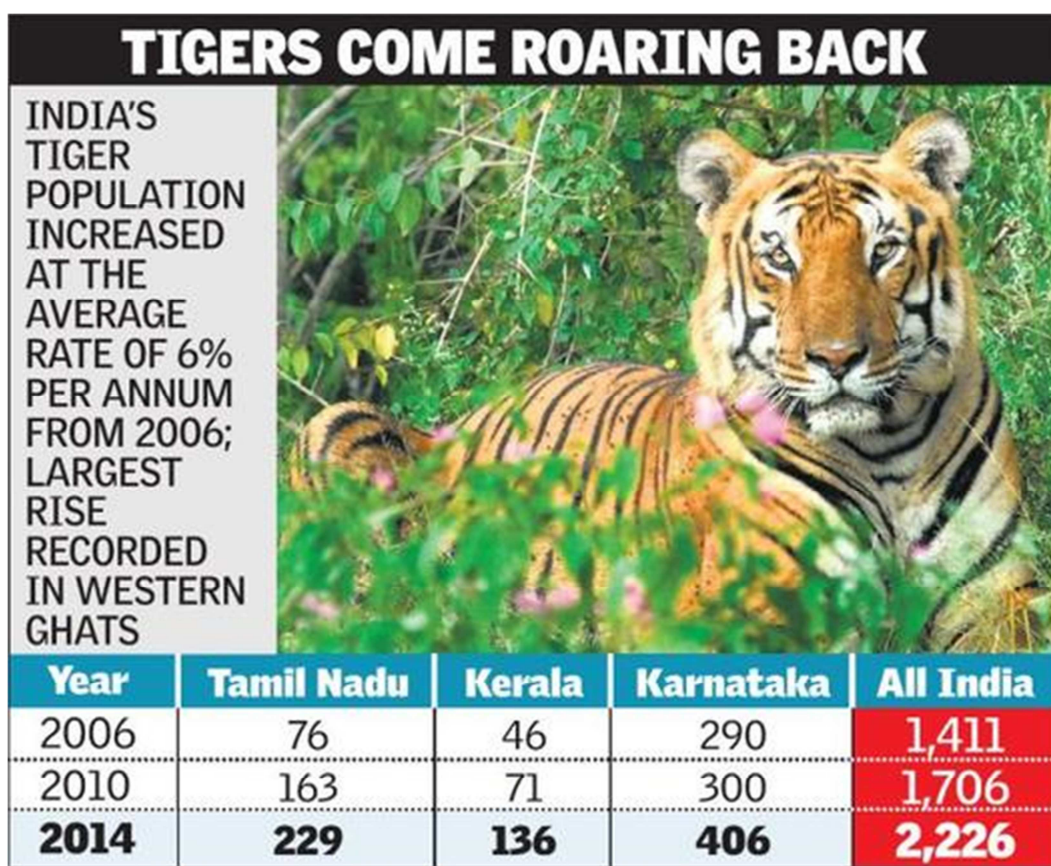
2014 EARTH'S HOTTEST YEAR

2014 was Earth's hottest on record in new evidence that people are disrupting the climate by burning fossil fuels that release greenhouse gases into the air.

The studies, by the U.S. space agency NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), showed climate change was happening now and that action was needed to cut rising world greenhouse gas emissions.

- The 10 warmest years since records began in the 19th century have all been since 1997.
- Record temperatures in 2014 were spread around the globe.
- Since 1880, Earth's average surface temperature has warmed by about 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit (0.8 degree Celsius), NASA said.
- The average temperature across global land and ocean surfaces was 1.24 degrees F (0.69 degree C) above the 20th century average, NOAA said.

TIGER POPULATION



India now has 70 per cent of the tiger population in the world with the latest assessment estimating 2,226 big cats, up 30 per cent from 1,706 in 2010, show preliminary estimates in “Status of Tigers in India, 2014.”

- The **largest increase is recorded in the Western Ghats Landscape complex — Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Tamil Nadu** — with 776 tigers (up from 402 in 2006).
- The Mudumalai-Bandipur-Nagarahole-Wayanad complex holds the world’s single largest tiger population currently estimated at over 570 tigers (in 11,000 sq.km of habitat).
- Goa now has a persistent tiger presence with three to five animals.
- Uttarakhand with 340 tigers is second only to Karnataka, which has 406.

The Periyar Tiger Reserve spread over 925 sq.km. in Kerala, bagged the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) biennial award for encouraging local public participation in managing the reserve.

SOLAR DYNAMICS OBSERVATORY (SDO)

The Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) is a NASA mission which has been observing the Sun since 2010. Launched on February 11, 2010, the observatory is part of the Living With a Star (LWS) program.

The goal of the SDO is

- To understand the influence of the Sun on the Earth and near-Earth space by studying the solar atmosphere on small scales of space and time and in many wavelengths simultaneously.
- During its five—year mission, it will examine the sun’s magnetic field and also provide a better understanding of the role the sun plays in Earth’s atmospheric chemistry and climate.

SDO has been investigating how the Sun's magnetic field is generated and structured, how this stored magnetic energy is converted and released into the heliosphere and geospace in the form of solar wind, energetic particles, and variations in the solar .

The Atmospheric Imaging Assembly, or AIA, on NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) uses four telescopes working parallel to gather eight images of the Sun — cycling through 10 different wavelengths — every 12 seconds.

PENGHU 1

Penghu 1 is a fossil jaw belonging to an extinct hominin species of the genus *Homo* from Taiwan that is Pleistocene in age. The fossil was recovered sometime before 2008 by fishermen working in the Penghu Channel – between the Penghu Islands and mainland Taiwan.

- “Penghu 1,” may represent an entirely new species that lived as recently as 10,000 years ago.
- “Penghu 1,” might have co-existed and even interbred with our species.
- The discovery supports the growing body of evidence that *Homo sapiens* was not the only species from our genus living in Europe and Asia between 200,000 and 10,000 years ago.

CERES

Ceres is a dwarf planet located in the asteroid belt, which lies between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. It was originally classified as a true planet in the 1800s, then demoted to an asteroid and finally in 2006 promoted again as a “dwarf planet” — a status it now shares with Pluto. At 950 km diameter Ceres is the smallest known dwarf planet, but the largest object in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter.

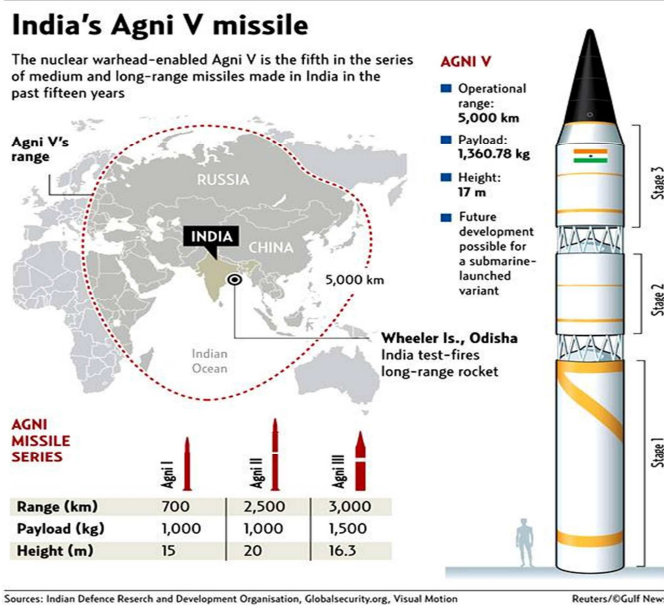
- NASA's Dawn spacecraft has sent back a picture of Ceres taken from a distance of 237,000 km.
- Dawn will enter into Ceres' orbit on March 6 to capture detailed images and measure variations in reflected light to get insights into the planet's surface composition.
- Dawn will be the first spacecraft to visit any dwarf planet

AGNI-V

Agni-V is an intercontinental ballistic missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) of India. Agni V is part of the Agni series of missiles, one of the missile systems under the original Integrated Guided Missile Development Program. The 17-metre-long, three-stage solid-fuelled missile is expected to boost India's nuclear deterrence capability along with other strategic missiles in Agni series. Agni-V is capable of delivering a 1.1 nuclear warhead over a distance of 5,000 km and the range of missile can cover most parts of China and Europe.

CANISTER-BASED TRIAL

The maiden canister-based trial of India's most potent strategic missile, Agni-V was successfully carried out for its full range of more than 5,000 km from the Wheeler Island, off the Odisha . This was the third successful flight test of the Inter- Continental Ballistic Missile and the first canister trial.



CASPOL

The new compound, christened **CASPOL**, is a **water-based, ready-to-coat, and easy-to-use flame-proof coating**.

- It has flame-retardant and thermal-control properties.
- It can be applied on walls, clothes, paper, thatched roofs, wood, and other materials.
- The new compound contains no toxic materials and is eco-friendly.
- A litre of Caspol can coat 1.5 sq meter of surface with a thickness of 500 micron, which is practically adequate for fire protection and thermal insulation.

It is developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to protect the fuel tanks of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle.

USES

- The compound can be used **as a flame-retardant material** for railway coaches and automobiles.
- Shopping malls, theatres, and other closed public places, which are vulnerable to fire, can be made fire-resistant by using the compound.
- It can be applied over concrete surfaces of buildings to **prevent water seepage** as it can fill micro-cracks and holes effectively. The ISRO says it helps keep buildings cooler by at least 5 to 6 degrees Celsius.

CHLOROPHYTUM PALGHATENSE:

Scientists at the Centre for Medicinal Plants Research, Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal, have reported the discovery of a rare plant species from the Dhoni hills in Palakkad district. Named Chlorophytumpalghatense, after the place of discovery.

- The plant belonging to the genus Chlorophytum of the Asparagaceae family
- The plant is a perennial herb endemic to the grassland ecosystem of the Dhoni and Muthikulam forests at a height above 6,000 feet.
- It flowers and fruits from September to November.
- Distributed throughout Africa and India, the Chlorophytum genus is represented by 17 species in India, of which 15 occur in the Western Ghats.

PLANT PROTECTION CODE (PPC)

Plant Protection Code (PPC), a set of guidelines for regulating the chemical inputs in tea cultivation, was rolled out on January 1, 2015. The aim is to make Indian tea a safe and healthy drink.

- The PPC is a comprehensive document, which deals with safe usage of crop protection products and methodologies that would be followed to reduce pesticide residues in tea.
- The code encourages tea growers to critically review their plant protection formulations (PPF), which are a list of chemicals that are used in tea.
- The code is based on the Codex **Alimentarius**, which is **a set of international food standards and guidelines**.
- PPF covers insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and bio pesticides.

The PPF, evolved by Tea Board, has detailed the chemicals that can be used in tea plantations making some exceptions for South India. It said that chemical use should be restricted not only in tea estates, but also near water bodies, wildlife habitats and human dwelling to check contamination.

Tea Board noted that in spite of using PPFs, the tea industry loses nearly 30 per cent of its crop due to pests, weeds and diseases.

CONTACTLESS CREDIT AND DEBIT CARDS

Features: It enables customers to make electronic payments by just waving the cards.

There is no need to dip or swipe these cards.

Technology Used: These cards are based on the **Near Field Communication (NFC) technology**

BENEFITS

Speed: This will improve speed as there is no need to swipe. Also, these cards require less time to complete the transaction.

Security: They remain in control of the customer which will improve security.

Why in news: ICICI Bank announced the launch of the India's first 'contactless' debit and credit cards in Gurgaon, Mumbai and Hyderabad. These cards can also be used as regular cards at all merchant terminals (machine where transaction is done).

NEAR FIELD COMMUNICATION

What it is: It is a technology which enables smart phones and other devices to establish radio communication with each other by touching them together or bringing them into proximity.

NFC standards are based on existing radio-frequency identification (RFID) standards.

Distance between the objects which are communicating: 10 cm (3.9 in) or less

USES: contactless payments, social networking to share data with each other such as phone number, images etc., Identity cards, access tokens.

COMPARISON WITH BLUETOOTH

Tag requires power	No	Yes
Cost of tag	6 Rs.	300 Rs
Frequency	13.56 MHz	2.4–2.5 GHz
Set Up time	< 0.1 s	< 6 s
Bit rate	424it/s	2.1 Mbit/s

DIGITAL VILLAGE

ICICI bank created the 'ICICI Digital Village' at Akodara in Sabarkantha district of Gujarat.

FEATURES OF DIGITAL VILLAGE

- It enables villagers to use technology in various aspects of life including **banking, payments, education and healthcare among others.**
- In this village **financial transactions are cashless, text books are paperless, children read books on LED monitors and Tabs, patients can avail the facility of telemedicine** and wi-fi connectivity is available across the village.

The digital village initiative has **three dimensions:**

- First is to enhance access to **banking** and provide seamless banking services. It will help in fast transactions, more savings and credit opportunity. Also, cashless transactions will **bring down black money** significantly in the system
- Second is to leverage technology in the social sectors for improvement in the lives of the villagers. It includes **digitizing school attendance, school records, school management software**, audio-visual digital content for classes 1 to 10.
- Third is to create **enabling infrastructure to make technology available, and access and disseminate information.** It includes High speed broadband connectivity throughout the village via wi-fi using a wi-fi tower. It also enables farmers to access the latest information on prices of agricultural commodities.

KASTURIRANGAN REPORT

The Udupi Zilla Panchayat unanimously urged the Union and State governments to reject the recommendations of the K. Kasturirangan Panel's report on conservation of the Western Ghats because the people of 38 villages were against the report as it would hamper development in the villages.

K. KASTURIRANGAN PANEL'S REPORT ON CONSERVATION OF THE WESTERN GHATS

- There should be a complete ban on **mining, quarrying, sand mining, thermal power plants, big township projects** in ESA (37% of Western Ghats)
- All other **infrastructure and development projects/schemes** should be subject to environment clearance under EIA Notification 2006.
- The villages falling under ESA will be involved in decision making on the future projects. All projects will require prior-informed consent and no objection from the Gram Sabha of the village.
- To promote sustainable agriculture, it recommends a focused programme to incentivize growers in the Western Ghats to move towards **organic cultivation**.
- All **tourism** hotspots in the Ecologically Sensitive Area should be **monitored** for compliance with environmental conditions and development restrictions and assessed in terms of impact.

CRITICISMS OF THE K. KASTURIRANGAN PANELS REPORT

- The entire report was based on **satellite images**, which had little resemblance to ground realities.
- The proposal to declare 37 percent of the Western Ghats as ESA has raised fears of **relocation** among local communities, although the report only recommends banning activities such as mining and thermal plants in these areas.
- Critic says that Kasturirangan Committee permitted **mining and quarrying in 63 per cent area** (as only 63% area is under ESA) which will open the ecologically sensitive areas of Western Ghats to mindless exploitation which would seriously hazard ecology.
- According to Madhav Gadgil, Kasturirangan report on Western Ghats replaced the pro-people and pro-nature attitude of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel report with an **autocratic approach in terms of development and ecological conservation**.

SECURITY

CENTRAL ANTI-TERROR MECHANISM

Investigating agencies have recommended the setting up of a central anti-terror mechanism for more coordinated action against emerging internal security challenges.

Such unified body shall include

- Intelligence gathering
- Analysis and dissemination wing
- Forensic divisions
- Investigation and prosecution wing

It was after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack that the then Home Minister suggested setting up of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) for coordinated counter-terror operations. It would be empowered to conduct searches and arrests under Sections 43 and 43A of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

The idea of NCTC was opposed by many state governments; they gave following argument against NCTC.

- It is against the spirit of federalism
- Agency could well be abused by the Centre for political ends
- Law and order is state subject
- Proposed Agency has to function under the Intelligence Bureau.

HIMMAT APP

The Delhi Police have launched a mobile application 'Himmat', meant for women's safety.

The application will allow women to send a distress call to the Police Control Room and their relatives in case of any emergency.

The apps will allow a woman to call up the control room and also start a 30-second audio-video recording by simply pressing the phone's power button.



Time to Display Courage

Himmat is an Android-based mobile app that lets registered woman users send out SOS alerts to the police for help in case of a dangerous situation

14,000 Number of women who have downloaded the app so far

The app ensures that apart from the friends or relatives of the woman using it, an SMS alert relating to the distress is sent simultaneously to police control room

SMS alert is also transmitted simultaneously by the police control room to the police patrol cars in the area and the local station house officer

During an emergency, the mobile app also captures audio and video from the environment of the person in distress and transmits the same to police control room

HOME MINISTRY NOTE
Addressed to state police chiefs

It is suggested that a similar initiative can be adopted at state/UT level, specially in metro cities to provide a safe and secure environment for women in society in your jurisdiction

INVESTIGATIVE UNITS ON CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN (IUCAW)

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) proposes to set up Investigative Units on Crimes against Women (IUCAW), in 20% of the districts of each State on a 50:50 cost sharing basis with the states.

Union home minister, in a recent letter to all state chief ministers, mooted setting up of 150 such IUCAW units in most crime-prone districts, on a pilot basis.

The units, each of which will have 33% representation of women in its staff, shall help augment the investigative machinery of the states as regards heinous crimes against women and encourage women to lodge complaints of offences targeted at the fairer sex.

The objective of the dedicated IUCAWs is

- To investigate cases referred to them;
- Augment the investigative machinery of the states in relation of heinous crimes against women such as rape, dowry death and acid attacks;
- Encourage women to come forward and lodge their complaint; and
- To improve the gender ratio in the state police forces, which was adversely impacting effective implementation of laws relating to women?

The units would perform additional functions such as

- Proactive policing,
- Intelligence gathering,
- Tackling organized crime,
- Monitoring proper implementation of the legislative provisions,
- Awareness generation and promotion of community participation in checking crimes against women.

SECTION 69 A OF IT ACT

What it is: Section 69 of IT Act empowers the Central Government/State Government/ its authorized agency to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource if it is necessary or expedient so to do in

- Interest of Sovereignty and Integrity of India;
- Defense of India;
- Security of State;
- Friendly relations with foreign states or public sections;

When used: 32 websites were blocked using this. Government justified that these websites are used for Jihadi Propaganda by Anti National Groups.

Criticism: This Section provides arbitrary powers to the Govt. to impose restrictions on the Fundamental Rights of Freedom of speech and expression as envisaged in Art 19(2) of the Constitution.

UNHCR (UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES) REPORT

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe

refugee in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in its new Mid-Year Trends 2014 report said of the 5.5 million who were newly displaced, 1.4 million fled across international borders becoming refugees, while the rest were displaced within their own countries.
- India was home to over 2,00,000 refugees in the first six months of 2014, a period that saw over 5.5 million people displaced worldwide mainly due to war and violence across large swathes of the Middle East and Africa.
- Syrians, for the first time, have become the largest refugee population under UNHCR's mandate, overtaking Afghans, who had held that position for more than three decades.
- Pakistan, which hosts 1.6 million Afghan refugees, remains the biggest host country in absolute terms.
- Another major finding in the report is the shift in the regional distribution of refugee populations from Asia and the Pacific and now as a result of the crisis in Syria, the Middle East and North Africa.

REFUGEES STATUS IN INDIA

- The Hindu rulers of Gujarat granted refuge to Parsi settlers from erstwhile Persia in the first millennium.
- At present, refugees in India hail from places such as Tibet, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and even conflict zones further away, such as Iran, Somalia and Sudan. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), India has close to 2 lakh refugees living within its territory.

LEGAL POSITION OF REFUGEES IN INDIA

- In the absence of specific legislation pertaining to refugees, the general law applicable to foreigners, The Foreigners Act, 1946, applies to refugees as well.
- Refugee status determination, the process by which an asylum seeker is determined to be a 'refugee', is carried out by the UNHCR

PRESENT PROBLEMS.

- First, the lack of a law providing certain basic rights to refugees violates India's obligations under customary international law, notwithstanding the fact that it is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- Second, India's national security interests are hampered by the absence of a coherent legal structure to ensure that all non-citizens residing in India are properly documented and have a legitimate reason for their presence in India.

Many have advocated the need for a comprehensive legislation regulating refugees and their rights. An Eminent Persons' Group under the chairmanship of former Chief Justice of India, P.N. Bhagwati, drafted a model law in 2002. This was followed up by a draft Refugee Protection Bill, though it did not gain the political consensus to get passed as a law.

REFORM NEEDED IN PRESENT ACT.

- The foremost requirement is a definition of the term 'refugee.'
- The single most important principle relating to refugees in international law needs to be recognised in Indian law — that of non-refoulement, which means non-expulsion or non-extradition to the place from which the refugee has fled as long as the compelling circumstances for fleeing persist.

- A structured system must be put in place for refugee status-determination at the borders. As a result of this procedure, once a person is admitted into the country as a refugee, he/she needs to be issued a permit, either in form of a long-term visa or a refugee permit. This will serve as an identity document, and assist the government in maintaining records.

ADVANTAGES FROM SUGESTED REFORM

- It would allow the government to maintain greater accountability for its large non-citizen population.
- To advancing the interests of national security and order.
- Allowing refugees to enjoy basic rights and privileges.

CONCLUSION

Due to rise in regional conflict and internal disturbance in neighboring countries. The number of refugees will likely to increase in coming days .so it is pertinent to have a comprehensive legislation that will address both national security and humanitarian aspects .

As a responsible state, India should take the first step in setting up a legal regime for refugees, thereby setting a regional precedent.

CULTURE

CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS

The Sahitya Akademi's expert committee mentioned four criteria for a classical language.

- One is the high antiquity of early texts/recorded history of over 1500 to 2000 years.
- The second is a body of ancient literature/texts that is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
- The third criterion is that the literary tradition should be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
- Fourthly, the classical language and literature should be distinct from the modern, and there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or offshoots.

Following Six languages have been declared as classical Languages by the union government

1. Tamil (in 2004)
2. Sanskrit (in 2005)
3. Telugu (in 2008)
4. Kannada (in 2008)
5. Malayalam (in 2013)
6. Oriya (in 2014)

BENEFITS

As per Government of India's Resolution No. 2-16/2004-US (Akademies) dated 1 November 2004, the benefits that will accrue to a language declared as "Classical Language" are

- Two major international awards for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian Languages are awarded annually.
- A 'Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages' is set up.
- University Grants Commission can be requested to create – to begin with at least in Central Universities – a certain number of professional chairs for classical languages for scholars of eminence in the language.

SCIENCE CONGRESS LAUDS 'FEATS' OF ANCIENT INDIA

The Indian Science Congress made history with a symposium on "Ancient Sciences through Sanskrit" that included a paper on the existence of interplanetary aircraft in India around 9,000 years ago, references to "cosmic connection" and a phenomenon explained as "fusion of science and spirituality due to inter-penetration law".

- In the Sulbha Sutra written in 800 BCE, Baudhayan wrote the geometric formula now famously known as **Pythagoras theorem**. It was written by Baudhayan 300 years before Pythagoras.
- SulbhaSutrawas also the first to crack the pi ratio.

GLORY FROM ANTIQUITY

DELEGATES CALL FOR RESEARCH ON SCIENCE AND SANSKRIT TEXTS



Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar at the 102nd Indian Science Congress in Mumbai on Sunday. – Photo: PTI

CLAIMS AT SCIENCE CONGRESS

- ▶ Shivkar Bapuji Talpade was the **first man to fly an aircraft** in 1895
- ▶ The Sulbha Sutra, written in 800 BCE, **first referred to pi**
- ▶ Baudhayan devised the formula now known as **Pythagoras' theorem**

 **The scientific community should pay attention to Sanskrit knowledge and use it for human development** — Prakash Javadekar

EXCAVATION AT HARAPPAN SITE REVEALS HOUSE PLAN

Excavation conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at the late-Harappan site of Chandayan in Uttar Pradesh has, for the first time, revealed the plan of a house on the Ganga-Yamuna doab, with its mud walls, four successive floor levels and post-holes.

ROCK PAINTINGS

The **rock paintings in the Marayur-Chinnar forest belt of Kerala, the second largest concentration of cave paintings in south India, are at high risk of degeneration.**

Over 50 caves, situated in the forest belt, are believed to be of the prehistoric period.

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