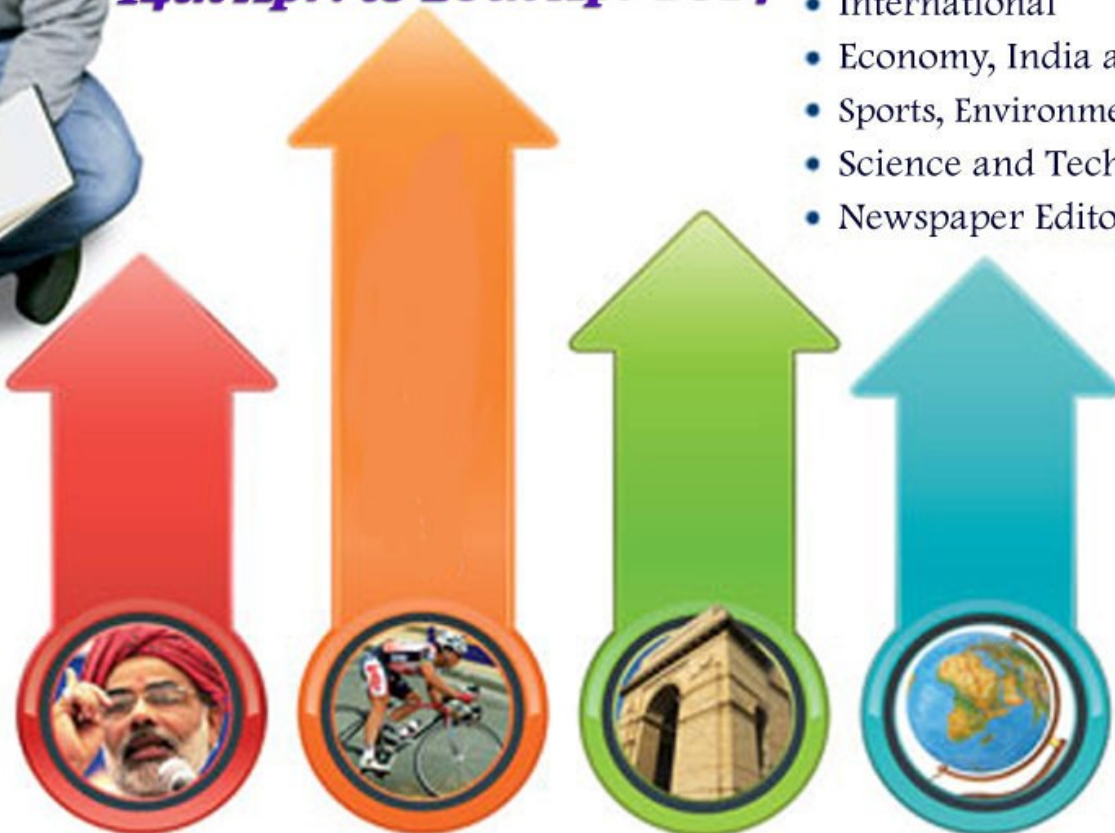


# Weekly Current Affairs



**News From:**  
**14th Apr. to 20th Apr 2014**

- National
- International
- Economy, India and The World
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# Weekly Current Affairs Update For IAS Exam

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**14<sup>th</sup> April 2014 TO 20<sup>th</sup> April 2014**  
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## A GLINT OF INDIA

(Courtesy: <http://india.gov.in>)

### Expert Committee Regarding New Capital for Telangana

The Centre has constituted the following Committee known as the Expert Committee to study the various alternatives regarding the new Capital for the successor State of Andhra Pradesh and make appropriate recommendations in pursuant to the Section 6 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014: -

- a) Shri K C Siva Ramakrishnan, IAS (Retd.), Research Professor & Chairman, Governing Board, CPR – Chairman
- b) Dr.Rathin Roy, Director, National Institute of Public Finance & Policy, New Delhi
- c) Shri Aromar Revi, Director, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru
- d) Prof.Jagan Shah, Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi
- e) Prof. K T Ravindran, Former Dean School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

#### The Terms of Reference of the Committee are as follows:

1. To study various alternatives for locating the new capital of the successor State of Andhra Pradesh and evaluate their comparative suitability based on available data, site visits and consultations with the stakeholders, central government and the existing government of Andhra Pradesh and the successor State of Andhra Pradesh and submit its report within 31st August, 2014.

2. To evaluate the possible alternatives and make appropriate recommendations based on the following considerations:

a) Availability of sufficient land, water and other essential natural resources with due regard to the possibility of de-reservation of degraded forest land.

b) Conduct an assessment of the potential for planned growth for the estimated population with appropriate zoning regulations as well as the feasibility of accommodating large structures to house the Raj-Bhawan, State Legislature (Assembly and Council), Secretariat, High Court, office buildings, guest houses, residential quarters and physical infrastructure including stadia, conference halls, convention centres, hotels, hospitals, schools, colleges, educational and training institutions, libraries, museums, theatres, places of recreation and tourism, parks and markets etc.

c) Potential for connectivity by rail, road and air with various districts of the successor State of Andhra Pradesh and the present common capital of Hyderabad and other major cities of the region as well as the possibility to develop rapid mass transit systems within the city.

d) Assess the potential for developing a vibrant economic, social and cultural infrastructure for a symbiotic growth with the other important cities in the region.

3. The Committee while making its recommendations will inter-alia consider allied issues such as:

- a) The least possible dislocation to existing agriculture systems as well as ensure minimum resettlement of people and their habitations.
- b) Preservation of local ecology and natural features including water bodies.
- c) Promoting environmentally sustainable growth coupled with measures for pollution mitigation including solid and liquid waste management.
- d) Vulnerability assessment from natural disasters like floods, cyclones and earthquakes.
- e) Assess the scope for minimizing the cost of construction and acquisition of land
- f) Ascertain the availability of raw materials, skilled and unskilled labour etc. required for the construction of a new capital.

## Global crude oil price of Indian Basket

The international crude oil price of Indian Basket as computed/published today by Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas went up to US\$ 107.13 per barrel (bbl) on 24.04.2014. This was higher than the price of US\$ 106.81 per bbl on previous publishing day of 23.04.2014.

In rupee terms, the price of Indian Basket increased marginally to Rs 6542.43 per bbl on 24.04.2014 as compared to Rs 6522.89 per bbl on 23.04.2014. This was due to increase in price in dollar terms. Rupee-dollar exchange rate remained unchanged at Rs 61.07 per US\$ on 24.04.2014 as compared to 23.04.2014.

**The table below gives details in this regard:**

Particulars	Unit	Price on April 24, 2014(Previous publishing day i.e. 23.04.2014)		For Pricing Fortnight effective 16.4.2014
				(March 27 to 10 April , 2014)
Crude Oil (Indian Basket)	(\$/bbl)	107.13	(106.81)	104.25
	(Rs/bbl)	6542.43	(6522.89)	6262.30
Exchange Rate	(Rs/\$)	61.07	(61.07)	60.07

## Mineral Production (Feb 2014 )

The index of mineral production of mining and quarrying sector for the month of **February** (new Series 2004-05=100) 2014 at 126.3, was 1.4% higher as compared to **February** 2013. The cumulative growth for the period **April- February** 2013-14 over the corresponding period of the previous year stands at (-) 1.1%.

The total value of mineral production (excluding atomic & minor minerals) during **February** 2014 was Rs. 18118 crore. The contribution of coal was the highest at Rs. 6372 crore (35%). Next in the order of importance were: petroleum (crude) Rs. 5354 crore, iron ore Rs.2762 crore, natural gas (utilized) Rs. 1712 crore, limestone Rs. 386 crore and lignite Rs. 519 crore. These six minerals together contributed about 94% of the total value of mineral production in **February** 2014.

Production level of important minerals in **February** 2014 were: coal 518 lakh tonnes, lignite 40 lakh tonnes, natural gas (utilized) 2675 million cu. m., petroleum (crude) 29 lakh tonnes, bauxite 1660 thousand tonnes, chromite 321 thousand tonnes, copper conc. 11 thousand tonnes, gold 158 kg., iron ore 130 lakh tonnes, lead conc. 16 thousand tonnes, manganese ore 242 thousand tonnes, zinc conc. 94 thousand tonnes, apatite & phosphorite 157 thousand tonnes, dolomite 593 thousand tonnes, limestone 231 lakh tonnes, magnesite 13 thousand tonnes and diamond 3199 carat.

The production of important minerals showing positive growth during **February** 2014 over **February** 2013 include 'iron ore'(27.9%), 'gold' (23.4%), 'chromite' (20.5%), 'diamond' (14.9%), 'copper conc.' (14.8%), 'bauxite' (7.5%), 'petroleum (crude)' (1.9%), 'manganese ore' (1.8%) and 'coal' (0.8%). The production of other important minerals showing negative growth are: 'limestone' and 'dolomite' [(-) 2.5%] each, 'lead conc.' [(-) 3.7%], 'natural gas (utilized)' [(-) 5.0%], 'lignite' [(-) 5.2], 'magnesite' [(-) 17.7%], 'apatite & phosphorite' [(-) 31.0%] and 'zinc conc.' [(-) 31.8%].

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## Ministry of External affairs

### Recognition of India`s world heritage

(Courtesy: <http://www.mea.gov.in>)

India's cultural and civilisational heritage is reflected in the World Heritage List of the World Heritage Committee but in an incomplete manner. There has been a greater emphasis on cultural sites while natural and mixed sites have not been fully reflected. This is a phenomenon in many parts of the world including in old Europe, where cultural heritage overwhelmingly dominates recognition of Europe's great cultural heritage on the World Heritage List. Natural heritage, whether in India or in Europe, is inadequately represented.

Perhaps the reason for this imbalance lies in the process of nomination and inscription, painstakingly elaborated in the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention. Perhaps it is also because tangible heritage, as represented in magnificent monuments and buildings such as the Taj Mahal are much easier to justify in accordance with the guidelines for inscription, as opposed to natural and mixed sites.

#### World Heritage Convention:

The Convention adopted in 1972 has proved to be a remarkably visionary instrument for safeguarding the world's heritage. It has been dubbed as the flagship programme of UNESCO and has set the standard for conventions, instruments and programmes for conservation. Its Secretariat, known as the World Heritage Centre, is headed by an eminent Indian from the Indian Forest Service of 1976 batch, Shri Kishore Rao, who is also an expert on natural heritage.

Today, the World Heritage map has come to cover the globe. It has helped to recognize and protect properties whose exceptional universal value would make their disappearance and an irreparable loss, not only for the country concerned but for humanity itself. Perhaps, the greatest achievement of the Convention is that it has deepened public awareness of the need to protect and nurture this precious international legacy of the world. For if heritage attests to our common history, its preservation demonstrate our concern for our environment and our commitment to our collective future.

#### Operational Guidelines leading to inscription of Properties on the World Heritage List:

The preparation of the nomination dossier is central to the process of inscription. According to existing rules of business, it is the Archaeological Survey of India headed by its Director General with overall supervision by Secretary (Culture) that spearheads the process in India including the politically sensitive process of

selection from the vast number of sites in India which all deserve inscription. The Indian Ambassador/PR to UNESCO plays the role of adviser in the process and later as India's member on the World Heritage Committee, plays a crucial role in the intricate and, unfortunately, highly political process of background negotiations within the Committee, leading to inscription.

Before States Parties begin to prepare a nomination of a property for inscription on the World Heritage List, they should become familiar with the nomination cycle. It is desirable to carry out initial preparatory work to establish that a property has the potential to justify Outstanding Universal Value, including integrity or authenticity, before the development of a full nomination dossier.

The above demonstrates that inscription on the World Heritage List is a time-bound process that should respect the procedures elaborated in the Operational Guidelines, from the inscription on the Tentative List, to the preparation of the "nomination dossier", to active lobbying of other members of the Committee regarding the merits of the site proposed, to the interaction and engagement with the concerned Advisory Body, whether ICOMOS or IUCN, to the actual presentation of the case before the Committee. Sometimes, a nomination can fail because of a cultural divide within members of the Committee or because of a one-sided presentation by the Advisory Body concerned. For instance, in the case of Majuli Island, on the Brahmaputra river in Assam, an Island larger than Belgium, despite best efforts to present dossier as an outstanding cultural landscape symbolising India's Shivate heritage, the representative of the Advisory Body was concerned only on climate change issues arguing that Majuli Islands' Outstanding Universal Value would diminish because of the changing course of the Brahmaputra river. There was little understanding of the cultural issues at stake, and of the impact of its inscription, the first in Assam, on its future existence and conservation. Ultimately, it became the victim of a highly political vote with Western countries voting against India.



# Planning Commission of India

## HDBI Project

(Courtesy: <http://planningcommission.nic.in>)

## THE GENESIS

Since 1999, UNDP and Planning Commission have been supporting State governments in preparation of State level Human Development Reports and mainstreaming human development agenda in State and district planning. UNDP has supported People's Mid-Term Assessments of the five Year Plans of the Government of India.

Initiated in 1999 with the project Capacity Building for preparation of State level Human Development Reports (1999-2005), this collaboration was followed by the second project on Strengthening State plans for Human Development (2004-2009). In the first phase, the focus was on developing local capacities for preparation of State HDRs. Twenty one Indian States have prepared their HDRs in this phase. The second project focused on mainstreaming human development in State planning with activities spread across 15 States focusing on preparation of district level HDRs, engendering planning, strengthening statistical systems, capacity development for human development and providing options for financing human development.

An independent Assessment of Development Results that examined UNDP India's contributions to national development goals and its relevance and strategic position within the country during the period between 2004 and 2011 acknowledges that engagement on HDRs is one of the most acclaimed contributions of the UN in India and that this collaboration should continue. The same view has been echoed by the mid-term review of the UNDP Country Programme Action Plan and validated by an evaluation of the UNDP - Planning Commission programmes on human development.

## BACKGROUND

The project "Human Development: Towards Bridging Inequalities" (HDBI) responds to a strong endorsement from the Planning Commission, State governments and experts for continued relevance of the Planning Commission-UNDP collaboration on human development. The project focusses on providing innovative policy options for tackling issues of persistent exclusion, particularly at the State level. In this context, issues of inequality, with particular attention to gender and social inequalities are emphasised upon. Initiatives at the national level provide an enabling framework for translating human development agenda into action at the State level.

## OBJECTIVES

*The project aims at influencing national and State policies to improve human development outcomes through research and advocacy.*

## **BUDGET**

The HDBI project proposes to cover 15 States from 2011 till 2017 with a total budget of USD 2.7 million.

## **COMPONENTS**

State level initiatives include: Preparation of State level Human Development Reports with a focus on inequalities, District Human Development Reports, Regional Human Development Reports, Research based policy advocacy on reducing inequalities and strengthening programme implementation, Capacity development, Strengthening statistical systems, analysis of fiscal policy including budget analysis, including from a gender lens, of partner State governments to achieve HD outcomes and use of Community monitoring tools.

National level initiatives includes- HD Policy advocacy, Preparation of Regional/Thematic Human Development Reports Capacity development, Strengthening statistical systems, Budget analysis for improving human development, facilitating knowledge sharing in the South-South context and among project partners.

HDBI project also aims to foster partnership across a range of stakeholders including Parliamentarians, the private sector, Civil society organizations, Universities, media, etc.

## **MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENT**

1. **Implementation Arrangements:** The project will be implemented by the Planning Commission in collaboration with UNDP. The project is anchored with the State Plans division, Planning Commission and the Joint Secretary (State Plans) is the National Project Director (NPD). The project team is based at the Planning Commission and provides support for day to day operations of the project.

The Planning Commission signs a budgeted Annual Work Plan with UNDP on an annual basis, as per UNDP rules and regulations, and submits signed financial report as per UNDP rules. As a co-implementer, UNDP undertakes certain number of activities in the annual work plans.

2. **National Steering Committee** has been constituted vide Office Order dated 12 January 2011 to guide, monitor, review project expenditures against activities and outcomes; and Approve Annual and Quarterly Work Plans. Likewise State are also required to constitute the **State Project Steering Committee** to provide guidance for project implementation at the State level.

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## NATIONAL EVENTS

### Interceptor missile test

- India for the first time tested a state-of-the-art interceptor missile at supersonic speed that sought, to engage and destroy an incoming target missile at a very high altitude of 120-140 km over the Bay of Bengal.
- Entirely new interceptor and target missiles have been developed by scientists of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the upcoming engagement, to be conducted in exo-atmosphere (altitude above 40-50 km) on April 27 or 28. The test was originally planned to be conducted in November, 2013 but had been delayed since then.
- Describing it as a “big challenge,” they said the interceptor’s “kill vehicle,” equipped with a dual seeker, would attack the payload (warhead portion) as it descends towards its intended target. The advantage of intercepting an incoming missile at such a high altitude was that the debris would not fall on the ground and there would be no collateral damage.
- After some more trials, India plans to deploy a two-tiered Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system to protect important cities from external threats. In the first phase, incoming enemy missiles of 2,000-km range are envisaged to be waylaid and destroyed, while those with about 5,000-km range would be tackled by the interceptors in the second phase.
- So far, six of the seven interceptor missile tests, carried out by the DRDO, have been successful. While two interceptions were conducted in exo-atmosphere (altitudes between 47 and 80 km) the rest were in endo-atmosphere (below 40 km altitude).

### Transgenders as third gender

- The Supreme Court has recognised transgenders or eunuchs as third category of gender and directed Centre and States to grant them all facilities, including voters ID, passport and driving licence.
- The Centre and States were also directed to take steps for bringing the community into the mainstream by providing adequate health care, education and employment.
- A bench of Justices K.S. Radhakrishnan and A.K. Sikri directed the government to take steps for granting recognition to transgenders as a separate third category of gender after male and female.
- The bench also said they are the citizens of the country and have equal rights to education, healthcare and employment opportunities like other people belonging to male and female gender.
- The apex court expressed concern over transgenders being harassed and discriminated in the society and passed a slew of directions for their social welfare.

## **Scientific methods in crime detection**

- The Supreme Court has asked investigating agencies to adopt scientific methods in crime detection to save the judicial system from low conviction rates.
- “The criminal judicial system in this country is at a crossroads. Reliable, trustworthy, credible witnesses to the crime seldom come forward to depose before the court and even hardened criminals get away from the clutches of the law. Even reliable witnesses for the prosecution turn hostile due to intimidation, fear and a host of other reasons. Investigating agency has, therefore, to look for other ways and means to improve the quality of investigation, which can only be through the collection of scientific evidence.”
- Writing the judgment, Justice Radhakrishnan said there was a need to strengthen forensic science for crime detection. The judiciary needed to be equipped to understand and deal with such scientific materials.
- The Bench gave this ruling while modifying the death sentence awarded to Dharam Deo Yadav, who murdered Diana Clare Routley, a 22-year-old girl from New Zealand who visited Varanasi in 1997. The trial court had awarded death sentence and it was confirmed by the Allahabad High Court.

## **Dying declaration of Nirbhaya**

- The Supreme Court has directed the Delhi Police to place before it the dying declaration of the December 16 gangrape victim along with other trial court records of the case in which four convicts were awarded death sentence.
- Besides Mukesh (27) and Pawan (20), the Delhi High Court had also upheld the conviction and death penalty of Akshay Thakur (29) and Vinay Sharma (21).
- While dismissing their appeals, the High Court had termed the offence as “extremely fiendish” and “unparalleled in the history of criminal jurisprudence” and said the “exemplary punishment” was the need of the hour.
- The 23-year-old paramedic, on the night of December 16, 2012, was brutally assaulted and gangraped by six persons in a moving bus in South Delhi and thrown out of the vehicle with her male friend. She died in a Singapore hospital on December 29, 2012.
- The prime accused in the case Ram Singh was found dead in Tihar Jail in March last year and the trial against him was abated.
- The sixth accused, a juvenile, was on August 31, 2013, convicted and sentenced to a maximum of three years in a reformation home by the Juvenile Justice Board.

## **Cancellation of tax benefits**

- The Election Commission (EC) has sought withdrawal of tax exemption benefits to ten political parties from the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) on the grounds that they failed to submit their mandatory expenditure contribution reports on time to the poll body.
- The EC, in its latest communication, has asked the CBDT to take action against the defaulting parties under provisions of Section 29C (Declaration of donation received by the political parties) of the Representation of the People Act in consonance with I-T laws
- The EC has identified the ten parties as Nagrik Ekta Party, Dharamrajya Paksh, Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist), Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party, Sunder Samaj Party, Loktantrik Manavtawadi Party, Rastriya Mahila Janshakti Party (RMJP) and the Indian People Green Party as the defaulters in filing their contribution and donation receipt reports for the financial year 2012-13.
- The stipulated time limit for this exercise was September 30, 2013 but all these parties defaulted in submitting the records to EC by an average of one-five months while one party (RMJP) did it within the time limit but the poll body found some discrepancies in their records and hence referred it to the CBDT.

## **The curious case of ‘ Transsexual’**

- A woman, who was terminated from the Tamil Nadu police service last year after a medical examination report declared her a ‘transsexual,’ is set to get the job back, thanks to a Madras High Court order .
- Allowing a petition challenging the termination, the court declared the petitioner as a female for all purposes. She has right to retain such sexual/gender identity.
- Setting aside the termination order, Justice S. Nagamuthu directed the police to issue the consequential order within six weeks permitting her to join duty as a Grade II Police Constable (woman) with continuity of service.
- She had the liberty to choose a different sexual/gender identity as a third gender in future based on the medical declaration, if a law was put in place recognising female to males (FTMs) as a third gender.



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## INTERNATIONAL

### **U.N. Security Council meet**

- The U.N. Security Council recently met in emergency session amid growing violence in eastern Ukraine, with Western powers and Russia blaming each other for the deepening crisis.
- Russia called the meeting hours after Ukrainian special forces exchanged gunfire with a pro-Russia militia in an eastern city, and at least one security officer was killed and five others wounded. Ukraine's president accused its powerful neighbour of fomenting unrest, and announced that it would deploy armed forces to quash an increasingly bold pro-Russian insurgency.
- Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin denied Western and Ukrainian claims that Moscow was behind the violence, and told U.N. diplomats that Ukraine has been using radical neo-Nazi forces to destabilize its eastern region.
- Russia has tens of thousands of troops massed along Ukraine's eastern border, and there are fears that Moscow might use the violence in the mainly Russian-speaking region as a pretext for an invasion, in a repeat of events in Crimea earlier this year.

### **U.S. -Taiwan update**

- The United States has said it will help Taiwan to build diesel-electric submarines on its own.
- Asked at the committee hearing whether a policy to build submarines locally has been finalized, Yen said Taiwan has launched a plan to build submarines domestically after trying to buy U.S. submarines without success for 13 years.
- The Ministry of National Defense (MND) confirmed that it has begun preparations to build submarines on its own and that the chances for success would grow if the U.S. could help with project management and technology transfer or even engage in co-production.
- The MND said Washington agreed to sell Taiwan submarines in 2001, but no progress has been made on the deal.
- Pressured by lawmakers across party lines and the people of the country, the MND has decided to begin the pre-production phase of the process to show its resolve to defend itself.
- The ministry said it has exchanged views with the U.S., and Washington has expressed its understanding of Taiwan's determination to build its own submarines.
- It will also seek support from U.S. policymakers to help Taiwan with its plans through bilateral military exchanges.

## **Military operation in Ukraine**

- Ukraine has launched a military operation to crush anti-government protests in the Russian-speaking eastern part of the country, deploying thousands of troops, armour and aircraft to Donetsk region where protesters seized government buildings in a dozen cities and towns.
- The military, in armoured personnel carriers backed by aircraft, stormed a small airfield near Kramatorsk. Unconfirmed reports said between four and 11 protesters had been killed in the attack.
- Following the attack, hundreds of unarmed Kramatorsk residents drove to the airfield to protest against the killing of civilians.
- The Russian TV channel Rossiya-24, which has several reporters in eastern Ukraine, said about 500 government troops and 20 armoured personnel carriers entered the city of Sloviansk, not far from Kramatorsk.
- A militia commander in Sloviansk, which is under full control of the protesters, told Russia's Itar-Tass news agency that the city had been surrounded by Ukrainian tanks and armoured vehicles.
- In Kiev, two presidential candidates representing eastern Ukraine were attacked by armed far right radicals. Oleg Tsarev, an independent, was severely beaten after appearing in a TV show called "Freedom of Speech." The mob demanded that he and the other candidate, Mikhail Dobkin, withdraw from the elections scheduled for May 25.
- Ukrainian authorities confirmed that a battalion of newly formed "National Guard" made up of "Maidan activists" had been deployed for action against pro-Russian protesters in the east.

## **Germany's new initiatives**

- Germany, one of the three most-visited places in Europe for Indian, plans to grow this traffic of travellers by about 10 per cent this year with a focus on its heritage sites.
- The German tourism department has budgeted 5 lakh euros for promotional activities in this respect.
- Germany is known not only for its excellent cars and high tech, but even more for its heritage – a vibrant, reunified Berlin, modern designs and magnificent monuments that have stood the test of time, like the castles in Potsdam and the Cologne Cathedral.
- There are 38 UNESCO world heritage sites in Germany, 36 of them cultural and two natural. Among these are also the top three heritage sites in Europe.
- Last year, more than 615,000 Indians visited the country. The plan is to increase that by 8-10% this year and towards this it will spend an equivalent of Rs4 crore. That might not be so difficult after the 5% growth they managed last year.

## **Accord on Ukraine**

- Russia, the United States, the European Union and Ukraine have agreed on a plan to resolve the crisis in Ukraine through a constitutional reform that would grant more powers to Russian-speaking regions.
- After eight-hour talks in Geneva, the Foreign Ministers of the four nations signed a joint statement on de-escalation of the Ukraine crisis.
- Russia, the U.S. and the E.U. have called on Ukraine to launch a broad national dialogue involving all political forces and all regions with the aim of undertaking a constitutional reform.
- The constitutional reform should provide for “decentralization” of authority, election of regional bodies of power and guaranteeing the language rights of Russian-speaker.
- The monitoring mission of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which has already been deployed in Ukraine, must play “the lead role” in assisting the Ukrainian authorities to resolve the crisis.
- The plan, at least on paper, has incorporated Russia’s main demands for a settlement in Ukraine.

## **Library in Osama bin Laden’s honour**

- A controversial Pakistani cleric who runs an Islamic seminary for girls in the capital of Islamabad has named the school’s newly built library in honour of Osama bin Laden.
- The tribute is an unusual first, though there have been cases in recent years of Pakistanis naming their sons or even their stores and places of business after the terror network’s slain leader.
- Bin Laden was killed in a May 2011 raid by U.S. Navy SEALs in his hiding place in Abbottabad, a garrison town about 125 kilometres north of Islamabad. The unilateral raid at the time angered the Pakistani government, which said the United States had violated the country’s sovereignty.
- In the immediate aftermath of bin Laden’s death, Islamists held small rallies across Pakistan to denounce the killing. The slain al-Qaeda chief is still regarded as a hero by most students at Islamic schools, or madrassas.

## **Everest's worst tragedy**

- An avalanche swept down a slope of Mount Everest on Friday killing 12 Nepali mountaineering guides at the beginning of the main climbing season.
- The avalanche, the deadliest in eight years, hit the most popular route to the mountain’s peak. Three Nepali guides were injured and up to five people were missing. It was the first major avalanche on Mount Everest this climbing season, when hundreds of foreign and Nepali climbers flock to the mountain to attempt to reach its 8,850 metre peak.

- More than 4,000 climbers have scaled Everest's summit since it was first climbed by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa in 1953. The route they took is the one hit by the avalanche. Nearly 250 people have died on the mountain.
- Everest is on the border between Nepal and the Chinese region of Tibet and can be climbed from both sides.
- Nepal's Tourism Ministry has issued permits to 334 foreign climbers to scale Mount Everest this season, up from 328 the whole of last year. Nepal plans to cut fees to climb the mountain despite concern about overcrowding.

## Bill That Bars Iran's Envoy

- President Obama signed a bill into law recently that would prohibit anyone who has engaged in espionage or terrorism against the United States from obtaining a visa to enter the country as a representative to the United Nations.
- Congress passed the bill last week after Iran named Hamid Aboutalebi as its ambassador to the United Nations; Mr. Aboutalebi was an interpreter for the militant student group that stormed the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held Americans hostage for 444 days.
- Iran has insisted that the United States has no right to dictate whom it may choose to represent it. Mr. Obama said the Constitution gave him exclusive discretion to receive or reject ambassadors, and if a case arose where the law would interfere with his exercising that discretion, he would treat it as advisory.

## Maritime Silk Road

- China has for the first time released details of its recently announced "maritime Silk Road" plan, announcing that the Indian Ocean-focused initiative will prioritise building ports and improving infrastructure in littoral countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.
- China is also planning to establish free trade zones in Indian Ocean countries as part of the plan — a move that will reinforce China's deepening economic presence in the Indian Ocean Region and in India's neighbourhood.
- The maritime Silk Road plan was unveiled in October last year when President Xi Jinping travelled to Southeast Asia. Since then, Chinese officials have highlighted the initiative as a key diplomatic priority for Mr. Xi's government.
- Nations from Malaysia and Singapore to India, Sri Lanka and the Gulf countries have all been sounded out about the plan. It had, however, remained unclear what the plan would actually entail.
- The plan is expected to focus on infrastructure construction of countries along the route, including ports of Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. China is already involved in port projects in the three countries, in Gwadar, Hambantota and Chittagong.

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- China hopes to “coordinate customs, quality supervision, e-commerce and other agencies to facilitate the scheme”, as well as set up free trade zones.

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# INDIA AND THE WORLD

## India- China Strategic Dialogue

- India has assured China of its commitment to consolidate strategic bilateral ties based on mutual trust as well as sensitiveness to each other's concerns and aspirations, as their top diplomats held the annual strategic dialogue here amid the Indian general elections.
- Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh co-chaired the sixth round of the Strategic Dialogue with her Chinese counterpart Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin at the picturesque Diaoyutai guest house.
- The talks were held as the long-running Lok Sabha elections, hailed as the world's biggest democratic exercise, got underway in India that will form a new government at the Centre.
- Stating that the annual Strategic Dialogue is being held in less than a year, she told Liu that "it is symbolic of the fact that our relations are growing and our interactions are increasing".
- China said it was "confident" that India will stay committed to strong bilateral ties irrespective of whichever party comes to power after the polls.

## Temporary Indian workers in US

- More than one-third of the temporary workers in the US in 2012 were from India, which also accounted for the largest number of non-immigrants residing in the US that year, according to an official report.
- Out of the 1.87 million resident non-immigrants in the US in 2012, India accounted for the maximum number of 430,000 residents, followed by China with 210,000 residents and South Korea with 140,000, the Department of Homeland Security said in its latest report.
- Out of the 1.9 million non-immigrants residing in US in 2012, the largest categories were temporary workers (45 per cent, or 840,000) and students (38 per cent, or 720,000), the report said.
- Slightly more than 50 per cent of the students were ages 18-24, the report said.
- Among the top 10 leading countries of citizenship, Germany and France led the exchange visitor category, making up more than 60 per cent of the total, the report said.
- California was the leading destination state, with 270,000 (15 per cent) of the total 1.9 million non-immigrants choosing to reside in that state.
- The next leading destination states were New York (210,000), Texas (140,000), Florida (100,000) and Massachusetts (90,000).

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- The top 5 destination states accounted for 44 per cent of the total and the top 10 accounted for more than 60 per cent.
- Compared to the nation as a whole, disproportionately large percentages of the temporary worker population resided in Texas, New Jersey and Washington. This was substantially larger than average percentages of the student population resided in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.



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# ECONOMY

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## Global trade to increase

- Global trade is expected to increase by 4.7 per cent in 2014, better than the average of 2.2 per cent in the past two years, on the back of projected improvements in the developed economies, according to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
- The world trade growth is projected to accelerate to 5.3 per cent in 2015.
- Although the 2014 forecast of 4.7 per cent is more than double the 2.1 per cent increase of last year, it remains below the 20-year average of 5.3 per cent. For the past two years, growth has averaged only 2.2 per cent.
- The sluggish pace of trade growth in 2013 was due to a combination of flat import demand in developed economies (0.2 per cent) and moderate import growth in developing economies (4.4 per cent).
- On the export side, both developed and developing economies only managed to record small, positive increases (1.5 per cent for developed economies and 3.3 per cent for developing economies).
- In 2013, the dollar value of world merchandise exports rose 2.1 per cent to \$18.8 trillion, while the value of world commercial services exports rose 5.5 per cent to \$4.6 trillion.
- The trade forecast for 2014 is premised on an assumption of 3 percent growth in world GDP growth at market exchange rates, while the forecast for 2015 assumes output growth of 3.1 percent.

## March Inflation at 5.7 per cent

- Snapping the declining trend, the inflation rose to a three month high of 5.7 per cent in March mainly due to spurt in prices of food items like potato, onion and fruits.
- The inflation in the food items, based on the wholesale price index (WPI), shot up by 9.9 per cent in March as against 8.12 per cent in the previous month.
- The overall WPI inflation, which was on decline since December, had dropped to a nine-month low of 4.68 per cent in February.
- The government further said the build up of inflation rate in the 2013—14 financial year was 5.70 compared to a build up rate of 5.65 per cent in the earlier fiscal.
- The data further revealed that prices of sugar, pulses, cereals, cement and minerals eased in March compared to the previous month.

- Inflation in the fuel and power category (LPG, petrol and diesel) rose to 11.22 per cent versus 8.75 per cent in February.

## **Pact between Green Trend and BMB**

- Trends in Vogue, Cavinkare's arm that manages unisex hair salon network Green Trends, and Bharatiya Mahila Bank (BMB) have entered into a pact that seeks to make the entrepreneurial plunge easier for women.
- Budding women entrepreneurs who take up a franchisee of Green Trends (GT) can get two-thirds of their total investment (Rs.40-50 lakh) financed by BMB without any collateral.
- Collateral security is the key in getting loans from banks for entrepreneurs. This agreement will help all prospective franchisees, especially women, across the country to get collateral-free loans.
- The company helps franchisees choose right location, get good realty deal and select right vendors for supplying equipment and systems. It has lined up a string of vendors who could do the works in salons at a competitive rate than others.

## **El- Nino and it's impact on Indian economy**

- Recently, private forecaster Skymet predicted a sub-normal monsoon in India, courtesy El Nino that's threatening a widespread devastation globally. Given the fears of an imminent drought, the next government has a tall task ahead of it
- The Skymet CEO feels an equitable distribution of rains can be a silver lining in this situation. According to him, there is a 40% chance that rainfall in June-September would be less than average, a 25% chance of a drought and zero percent chance of excess rains.
- The impact of El Nino need not be source of concern for staples. Its impact on food prices is expected to be minimal as India has sufficient stock of cereals. Most fruits track 30% import duty, if that is brought down, it can be controlled too.
- Staple inflation is never a problem, but soaring prices of fruits, vegetables, pulses, fruits etc are.
- By June-July the monsoon effects will begin to feed into the households and market.
- Statistically India has faced drought every 4.4 years. All El Nino years were not necessarily drought years, though the opposite is true. Since last drought in India was in 2009, this year can be a drought year. There is a consensus among the experts that if the next government manages to keep the lid on fiscal deficit, and if RBI governor Raghuram Rajan keeps his promise on rates, India may avert El-Nino devastations.

## **IFFCO's urea plant in Canada**

- Leading fertiliser cooperative IFFCO said that its subsidiary received permission from the provincial government of Quebec to set up a \$ 1.6 billion urea plant.

- The proposed facility will have a production capacity of up to 1.6 million tonnes of urea and 7,60,000 tonnes of diesel diesel exhaust fluid (DEF).
- The estimated project cost of \$ 1.6 billion is based on the most recent feasibility study.
- La Coop fr an agri-food organisation in Quebec that is one of the project shareholders, has agreed to purchase some 5,00,000 tonnes of urea a year for distribution across the province, Canada and several US states.
- In January 2013, IFFCO's Canadian subsidiary acquired the land for the plant. The site is at Bncour Port and Industrial Park, which provides access via land, rail and water to markets across North America.
- The deep-water port will also facilitate exports, especially to markets in Europe. Quebec province, Canada's largest, is located in the east-central region of the country.

## Universal numbers by EPFO

- Retirement fund body EPFO will provide permanent or universal account numbers (UAN) on the pattern of core banking services to its over five crore active subscribers by October 15 this year.
- Under core banking services, a customer can avail the bank services in any of its branch through his allotted unique account number.
- The UAN will facilitate subscribers in avoiding filing of PF transfer claims on changing jobs.
- UAN will be allotted to the present active members by October 15, 2014 and thereafter the coverage of other members will be taken up.
- After getting UAN, a subscriber would not be issued new PF account number on joining new firm. It is expected to provide great relief to those workers in organised sector who frequently change jobs, particularly, in construction sector.
- The UAN would be one account number which would be allotted to a subscriber for various schemes run by the EPFO for his entire service period with different employers.

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## SCIENCE AND TECH

### **The link between tobacco and cancer in India**

- Every year nearly one million new cancer cases are diagnosed in India, the prevalence being 2.5 million. With mortalities of 6,00,000-7,00,000 a year, cancer causes six per cent of all adult deaths in the country.
- The number of deaths per year is projected to shoot up to 1.2 million by 2035, according to a series of papers published in the Lancet Oncology journal.
- Currently, people in the 30-69 age group account for over two-thirds of cancer deaths in India, with less than a third of the patients surviving more than five years after diagnosis.
- The most common, nearly half of all, are cancers of the lung and oral cavity in men, and of the breast and cervix in women.
- Tobacco use alone accounts for about 40 per cent of all cancers in India.
- The geographical distribution of cancers is quite varied across the country. Based on the data from Chennai, cervical cancer was more prevalent (22.7 per 100,000) than breast cancer in Tamil Nadu, while oral cancer accounted for 243 per 100,000 men in Kerala.
- With a rate of 215 per 100,000 women, Delhi had the highest incidence of gall bladder cancer in women in the world.

### **Plant growth chamber for space**

- Astronauts will now turn into cosmic gardeners and grow lettuce in space as United States space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is all set to send the largest ever plant growth chamber to the International Space Station (ISS).
- It will launch the Vegetable Production System aboard SpaceX's Dragon capsule.
- The plant growth chamber will grow lettuce inside prototype flight pillows that will help the plants withstand zero gravity, The Verge reported. Red, blue, and green light emitting diodes (LEDs) will help sustain the vegetables, and the plant chamber itself can grow to 11.5 inches wide and 14.5 inches deep.
- This will be "the largest plant growth chamber for space to date.
- The chamber may even be used for more ambitious projects, like providing food for the average person back on Earth. After extensive testing on weightless horticulture, NASA is confident the lack of gravity will not impede growth.

- However, space-borne microbes that may develop during growth are a cause of concern. Therefore, the lettuce will undergo extensive testing before astronauts chow down.

## **High manganese level in Selaulim reservoir**

- High manganese level has been detected in the Selaulim reservoir in Goa, which supplies drinking water to more than half of the coastal State. The government engineers have however said that there was “no reason” to worry.
- The State Public Works Department has started monitoring the water content at the South Goa reservoir.
- The manganese level in the water from the reservoir has risen up from 0.1 to 0.8 mg per litre.
- The reservoir has an earth dam with concrete spillway and is on the Selaulim tributary of Zuari river.
- The reservoir has production capacity of 214 MLD of water, which is supplied to entire South Goa and some parts of north district.

## **LADEE**

- NASA's robotic moon explorer, LADEE, is no more.
- Researchers believe LADEE likely vaporized when it hit because of its extreme orbiting speed of 3,600 mph (5,800 kph), possibly smacking into a mountain or side of a crater. No debris would have been left behind.
- LADEE - short for Lunar Atmosphere and Dust Environment Explorer - was launched in September from Virginia. From the outset, NASA planned to crash the spacecraft into the back side of the moon, far from the Apollo artifacts left behind during the moonwalking days of 1969 to 1972.

## **Earth-like planet spotted**

- Astronomers have discovered what they say is the most Earth-like planet yet detected a distant, rocky world that's similar in size to our planet and exists in the Goldilocks zone where it's not too hot and not too cold for life.
- The planet was detected by NASA's orbiting Kepler telescope, which examines the heavens for subtle changes in brightness that indicate an orbiting planet is crossing in front of a star. From those changes, scientists can calculate a planet's size and make certain inferences about its makeup.
- The newfound object, dubbed Kepler-186f, circles a red dwarf star 500 light years from Earth in the constellation Cygnus. A light year is about 9.5 trillion km.
- The planet is about 10 per cent larger than Earth and may very well have liquid water a key ingredient for life on its surface. That is because it resides at the outer edge of the habitable

temperature zone around its star the sweet spot where lakes, rivers or oceans may exist without freezing solid or boiling away.

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# ENVIRONMENT

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## **15 endangered Indian birds**

- Fifteen Indian bird species are part of a list of avians which are evolutionarily distinct and globally endangered. The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Yale University has come out with a study of 100 Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) species worldwide.
- The study says Bengal Florican, Lesser Florican, Great Indian Bustard, Sociable Lapwing and Jerdon's Courser are birds that are under threat due to the destruction of their habitat of grasslands and scrub forests. The survival of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Siberian Crane and White-bellied Heron greatly depend on the existence of their wetland habitat.
- Forest Owlet's survival is impossible if its habitat of deciduous forests in central India is destroyed, the study said. Officials of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), which works on the conservation of 12 of these threatened birds, said these species were threatened by human factors such as uncontrolled urbanisation, unsustainable industrialisation and rampant use of chemicals in agriculture.

## **Indian projects shortlisted for Green Oscars**

- IT giant Infosys leads five Indian clean energy projects that have been shortlisted for the annual Ashden Awards, referred to as the Green Oscars.
- The awards recognise worldwide contributions towards green energy initiatives and a move away from fossil fuels.
- Infosys has been nominated in the 'Ashden Award for Sustainable Buildings' category for the Bangalore-based company's cutting edge design of new buildings which helps keep offices cooler and maximises natural light.
- The other finalists include two projects from Maharashtra — Sakhi Unique Rural Enterprise (SURE) and Greenway Grameen — which have been nominated in the 'Ashden Clean Energy for Women and Girls Award' category.
- SURE is a not-for-profit social enterprise in central Maharashtra that has selected, trained and supported more than 600 women micro-entrepreneurs to sell clean energy products like solar lanterns and cleaner cookstoves to other women.
- Mumbai-based Greenway Grameen's mission is to provide an affordable, desirable cookstove to improve quality of life for Indian women.



# SPORTS

## Texas Open squash final

- Deepika Pallikal stumbled on the final hurdle against Egyptian teenager Nour El Sherbini in the title clash of the Women's Champion Fiberglass Texas Open.
- Eyeing maiden major title of her career, world No 12 Deepika faltered against the 18-year-old qualifier 7-11, 11-5, 7-11 to lose in 48 minutes.
- The 22-year-old Deepika was celebrating the biggest Tour final of her career - while world junior champion El Sherbini was continuing the form of her life which had seen the youngster reach last month's WSA World Championship final after upsetting world No 1 Nicol David.

## Shotgun World Cup

- Mohammed Asab missed the double trap knock-out phase by one point in the Shotgun World Cup in Tucson, US. Ankur Mittal finished 19th with a 132 while Ronjan Sodhi placed 35th with 120 in a field of 41.
- Joshua Richmond of the US who made the cut for the knock-out, one point above Asab, following a shoot-off on 138, went on to bag the silver after losing the shoot-off for gold against compatriot Jeffrey Holgun.
- In women's skeet, Saniya Sheikh shot 64 to be placed 25th among 31 shooters. National champion Rashmee Rathore could muster only 57. Danka Bartekova of Slovakia won the gold as she beat Wei Weng of China, 14-13.

## 2014 South Asian Judo Championship

- Humera Ashique recently became the first Pakistani woman to win a judo gold medal in an international event in Nepal.
- The 24-year-old took the gold at the 2014 South Asian Judo Championship in Kathmandu as she defeated a local athlete to clinch the 48kg event.

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## IN THE NEWS (PERSONS)

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### **Pulitzer Prize**

- Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, already among the most popular and celebrated novels of the past year, has won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. One of the country's top colonial historians, Alan Taylor, has won his second Pulitzer, for *The Internal Enemy — Slavery and War In Virginia*.
- The Washington Post and the Guardian have won Pulitzer Prizes in public service for revealing the massive U.S. government surveillance effort.
- The newspapers' disclosures about the National Security Agency's spy programs show the U.S. government has collected information about millions of Americans' phone calls and emails based on its classified interpretations of laws passed after the Sept. 11 attacks.
- The Boston Globe has been awarded a Pulitzer Prize in breaking news, and The New York Times has won two Pulitzers in photography categories — Tyler Hicks was honoured in the breaking news category for documenting the Westgate mall terrorist attack in Kenya, and Josh Haner was cited for his essay on a Boston Marathon bomb blast victim who lost his legs.
- The Center for Public Integrity won the award for investigative reporting for reports on how some lawyers and doctors rigged a system to deny benefits to coal miners suffering from black lung disease.
- The Pulitzer for explanatory reporting was given to The Washington Post for reporting on the prevalence of food stamps in America.
- Annie Baker's *The Flick* won the Pulitzer Prize for drama, a play set in a movie theater that was called a "thoughtful drama with well-crafted characters" which created "lives rarely seen on the stage".
- The award for general nonfiction went to Dan Fagin's *Toms River*, an acclaimed chronicle of industrial destruction in small New Jersey community. Megan Marshall's *Margaret Fuller*, about the 19th century transcendentalist, won for biography; and Vijay Seshadri's witty and philosophical *3 Sections* received the poetry prize.

### **Silvio Berlusconi**

- A Milan court has ruled that Silvio Berlusconi will perform a year of community service for his tax fraud conviction at a centre for the elderly.
- The assignment curtails Berlusconi's ability to participate in the upcoming European election campaign a point of contention among his political allies. The 77-year-old, three-time former premier cannot run due to the conviction, the first against him ever confirmed by Italy's high court, but remains a political force as head of Forza Italia.

- Berlusconi was sentenced to four years for tax fraud, reduced to one year for a general amnesty.

## **Amit Shah**

- In a major relief to Narendra Modi's close aide Amit Shah, the Election Commission (EC) has lifted its ban on his participation in Lok Sabha poll campaign in Uttar Pradesh after he assured the poll body that he would not disturb the public tranquillity and law and order.
- The Commission allowed Mr. Shah to hold public meetings, public rallies and roadshows and take out public processions in U.P.
- The EC had "censured" Mr. Shah for his controversial "revenge" remarks. On April 11, it had ordered the U.P. government to ban Mr. Shah and U.P. minister Azam Khan from campaigning in the state following their controversial remarks.
- Mr. Shah had landed in a major controversy for his remarks that the general election was an opportunity to seek "revenge for the insult" inflicted during the riots in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh last year.
- The Commission also noted that Mr. Shah had pledged that he will in no manner give cause to be accused as having indulged in any act of commission or omission which has the effect of prejudicially affecting the public tranquillity and law & order.

## **Ramdev**

- An FIR has been lodged against Yoga guru Ramdev for alleged violation of the model code of conduct and prohibitory orders by holding a press meet without the permission of the administration.
- Ramdev addressed a press conference at the residence of a yoga centre coordinator after participating in a 'yoga diksha' programme recently.
- He said the administration's permission was not taken to hold the press conference due to which a case has been lodged against Ramdev and the coordinator.
- The information has been sent to the Election Commission.

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## Selected Editorials of Importance

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### Salutary judgment

(courtesy: The Hindu)

By recognising the transgender community as a third gender entitled to the same rights and constitutional protection as all other citizens, the Supreme Court has put in place a sound basis to end discrimination based on gender, especially gender as presumed to be assigned to individuals at birth. Further, beyond prohibiting discrimination and harassment, the Court has extended global principles of dignity, freedom and autonomy to this unfairly marginalised and vulnerable community. The verdict lays down a comprehensive framework that takes into its fold not merely the negative right against discrimination, but also “the positive right to make decisions about their lives, to express themselves and to choose which activities to take part in.” In particular, its direction that they should be treated as ‘socially and educationally backward’ and given reservation in education and employment, is a far-reaching contribution to their all-round development. The jurisprudential basis for the judgment is that sex identity cannot be based on a mere biological test but must take into account the individual’s psyche. The Court has noted that Indian law treats gender as a binary male/female concept, with sections of the Indian Penal Code and Acts related to marriage, adoption, divorce, succession, and even welfare legislation, being examples. The Court has also relied on the Yogyakarta Principles — norms on sexual orientation and gender identity evolved in 2006 at Yogyakarta in Indonesia — to bolster its reasoning.

The separate, but concurring, opinions of Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan and Justice A.K. Sikri contain some subtle criticism of the Supreme Court’s earlier ruling in Suresh Kumar Koushal upholding Section 377 of IPC that criminalises even consensual same-sex activity. While conscious that they cannot depart from the ruling of a Division Bench, both Judges have highlighted the fact that misuse of Section 377 is one of the principal forms of discrimination against the transgender community. By noting that Section 377, despite being linked to some sexual acts, also highlights certain identities, Mr. Justice Radhakrishnan sees a link between gender identity and sexual orientation, something that the Koushal formulation missed when it concluded that the provision criminalised the act and not any identity or orientation. The sentence that transgenders “even though insignificant in numbers... have every right to enjoy their human rights” is a fitting rebuttal to the claim in Koushal that because the LGBT community is a minuscule minority, it could not be held that the Section is invalid. Constitutional protection ought to be made available to a particular group regardless of its size. The verdict on the transgender community now provides one more reason why Section 377 ought to be amended to de-criminalise gay sex.

### A dark Chapter

(Courtesy: The Indian Express)

As a symbol of the excesses that have come to haunt the US “war on terror” since 9/11, the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq is perhaps rivalled only by Guantanamo Bay. Both embody the tragic over-extension of power and disregard for human rights that is seen to characterise US military operations overseas.

Made infamous by the scandal that erupted in 2004, when leaked photographs showed enlisted US soldiers engaged in the shameful physical and sexual abuse of Iraqi detainees, Abu Ghraib has an equally sordid

record of being used by the Saddam Hussein regime as a site where political prisoners were held and tortured for decades.

Now, citing security concerns after hundreds of inmates escaped last year, Iraq's government has closed the prison complex, though it remains unclear as to whether the shutdown is permanent.

The decision ought to be welcomed, given the prison's notoriety. When news of the prisoner abuse scandal broke in 2004, then US President George W. Bush had vowed to "demolish the Abu Ghraib prison as a fitting symbol of Iraq's new beginning" — lofty rhetoric now seen as yet another broken American promise. The mistreatment of inmates provoked worldwide outrage and severely damaged the US mission to "win the hearts and minds" of the Iraqis, leaving it struggling to patch relations with Iraqi officials. Now, almost three years after the last US troops left Iraq, the shutdown also underscores the country's deteriorating security situation, which has seen a renewed surge of violence that has claimed more than 2,000 lives this year. The prison structure is located in west Baghdad, which is particularly insecure, as last July's mass breakout showed, and is only a short drive from Fallujah, which was recaptured by the Sunni insurgency earlier this year. Even in closure, Abu Ghraib remains emblematic of the darkest chapters of Iraq's recent past.

## Real cure for Inflation headache

(Courtesy: The Economic Times)

Inflation — retail as well as wholesale — has increased in March over relatively benign levels in February. At 5.7%, the growth of inflation based on the wholesale price index (WPI) was at a three-month high, compared to a ninemonth low of 4.7% seen in February. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) now sets policy rates by looking at inflation based on the consumer price index (CPI). And even here, things do not look good. After having fallen to 8% in February, CPI inflation has crept up to 8.3% in March. Yet, we believe that the RBI can afford to hold its policy rates, if not cut rates marginally, as a signal to boost growth, during its next policy review in June. Isn't that a contradiction? After all, faced with inflation, central banks tighten rates. But the current inflation spiral in India stems from things that are outside the pale of monetary policy: deep structural defects that boost the prices of food, especially vegetables, meat, eggs and milk.

Eggs, meat and fish became dearer by more than 11% in March, compared to 9.7% a month before. Vegetable prices soared by 8.6% and fruit cost 16.2% more. Overall food inflation was 9.9% in March, compared to 8.1% in February. High food inflation eventually seeps into wage inflation, making services, especially in India's vast informal sector, far more costly. Our food policy has so far concentrated mostly on cereals, but without success. Our grain stocks are at a record 80 million tonnes. The government should sell a lot of it, in relatively small quantities, across the entire country to moderate cereal prices. An entirely different approach is required for the rest of the food basket.

India's rural productivity has to go up. Investment must flow into infrastructure such as cold chains and rural roads to create markets for vegetable, fish and poultry farmers. Around 40% of such produce is wasted on the way to the market now. To prevent that, food processing must penetrate all the way into villages. To help that, power sector reforms are required urgently. Together, these measures can create jobs for millions of young people in rural India, besides taming inflation.

## MCQs

### :: In the News ::

#### Q1.

- i) The Washington Post and the Guardian have won Pulitzer Prizes in public service for revealing the massive U.S. government surveillance effort.
- ii) Vijay Seshadri's witty and philosophical 3 Sections received this years Pulitzer Prize in poetry section .

Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?

- a) Only i
- b) Only ii
- c) Both i and ii
- d) Neither i nor ii

### :: INTERNATIONAL ::

#### Q2.

- i) Ukraine has recently launched a military operation to crush anti-government protests in the Russian-speaking eastern part of the country.
- ii) Blufin-21 is an Indian missile that has been launched recently.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?

- a) Only i
- b) Only ii
- c) Both i and ii
- d) Neither i nor ii

#### Q3.

- i) United Nations peacekeepers are planned to be deployed in eastern Ukraine soon.
- ii) The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was formed after the end of cold war between US and USSR.

Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?

- a) only i

- b) only ii
- c) both i and ii
- d) neither i nor ii

**:: NATIONAL ::**

**Q4.**

- i) The Supreme Court has recently recognised the transgender community as a third gender
- ii) Eunuchs, however cannot be treated as a “third gender”.

**Which of the above statement/statements is/are NOT true?**

- a) Only i
- b) Only ii
- c) Both i and ii
- d) Neither i nor ii

**Q5.**

- i) Six out of seven interceptor missile tests, carried out by the DRDO, have been successful, of which two interceptions were conducted in exo-atmosphere (altitudes between 47 and 80 km) the rest were in endo-atmosphere (below 40 km altitude).
- ii) India soon plans to deploy a two-tiered Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system to protect important cities from external threats.

**Which of the above statement/statements is/are true?**

- a) only i
- b) only ii
- c) both i and ii
- d) neither i nor ii



**:: ECONOMY ::**

**Q6.**

- i) According to the WTO, world trade growth is projected to accelerate to 5.3 per cent in 2015.
- ii) Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced its decision to award 'in-principle' approval to two applicants, IDFC Limited and Bandhan Financial Services Private Ltd., to set up banks.

**Which of the above statement/statements is/are false?**

- a) only i
- b) only ii
- c) both i and ii
- d) neither i nor ii

**:: SCIENCE AND TECH ::**

**Q7.**

- i) Currently, people in the 30-69 age group account for over two-thirds of cancer deaths in India.
- ii) The most common form of cancer affecting both men and women in India is lung cancer.

**Which of the above statement/statements is/are NOT true?**

- a) only i
- b) only ii
- c) both i and ii
- d) neither i nor ii

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## MCQs Answers

**Ans 1: c**

**Ans 2: a**

**Ans 3: a**

**Ans 4: b**

**Ans 5: c**

**Ans 6: d**

**Ans 7: b**

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