

Weekly Current Affairs



News From:
5th May to 11th May 2014

- National
- International
- Economy, India and The World
- Sports, Environment, In The News
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Weekly Current Affairs Update For IAS Exam

5th May 2014 TO 11th May 2014

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NATIONAL PORTAL OF INDIA

A GLINT OF INDIA

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

464 Political Parties Participated in General Elections 2014

The 16th General Elections saw participation of 464 political parties. This comprises 6 national parties, 39 state parties and 419 unrecognized parties. In the 2009 General Elections, 363 parties participated, comprising 7 national parties, 34 state parties and 322 unrecognized parties.

The total number of registered parties was 1,687 before General Elections 2014; this comprised 6 national parties, 47 state parties and 1,634 unrecognized parties. The total number of registered parties was 1,060 in 2009. The increase in the total number of parties from 764 in 2004 to 1,687 in 2014 has been largely due to the rise in the number of unrecognized parties from 702 in 2004 to 1,634 in 2014.

Participation of Political Parties in General Elections

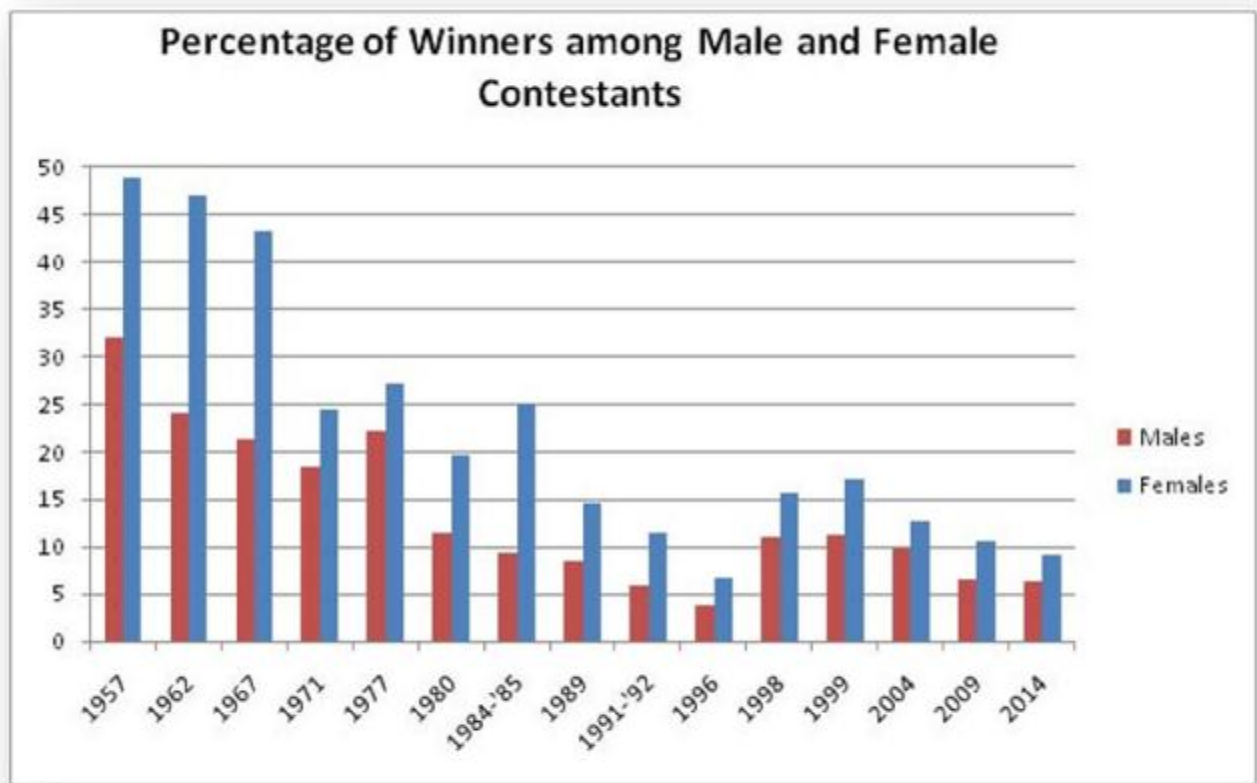
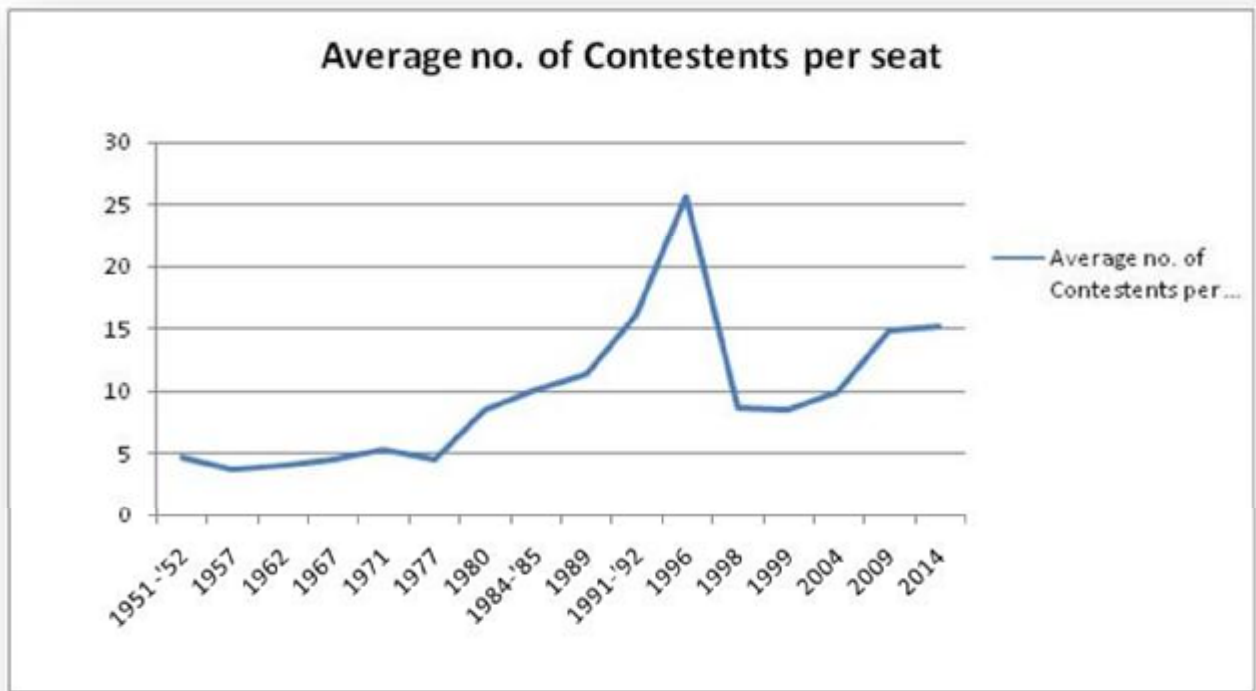
YEAR			
2004	National Parties	6	6
	State Parties	56	36
	Unrecognized Parties	702	173
	Total Registered Parties	764	215
2009	National Parties	7	7
	State Parties	39	34
	Unrecognized Parties	1014	322
	Total Registered Parties	1060	363
2014	National Parties	6	6
	State Parties	47	39
	Unrecognized Parties	1634	419
	Total Registered Parties	1687	464

Number of Contestants and Winners - Gender-Wise

In the General Elections 2014, 8251 candidates contested the elections, out of which 668 were women and 7,578 were men. 61 Women will enter the Lok Sabha compared to 59 Women members in 2009. The winning percentage of women in the 16th General Elections is 9.13% while that of Men's winning percentage is 6.36%. The Average number of contestants per seat is 15.2 in 2014.

Contestants and Winners - Gender-wise

General Elections	Year	Total Number of Seats	Total Number of Contestants	Average Number of Contestants Per Seat*	Male			Female		
					Contestants	Elect ed	Winni ng %	Contesta nts	Elect ed	Winni ng %
First	1952	489	1,874	4.67	--	--	--	--	--	--
Second	1957	494	1,519	3.77	1474	472	32.02	45	22	48.89
Third	1962	494	1,985	4.02	1919	463	24.13	66	31	46.97
Fourth	1967	520	2,369	4.56	2302	491	21.33	67	29	43.28
Fifth	1971	518	2,784	5.37	2698	497	18.42	86	21	24.42
Sixth	1977	542	2,439	4.5	2369	523	22.08	70	19	27.14
Seventh	1980	542	4,629	8.54	4486	514	11.46	143	28	19.58
Eighth	1984-85	542	5,492	10.13	5321	500	9.4	171	43	25.15
Ninth	1989	543	6,160	11.34	5962	514	8.62	198	29	14.65
Tenth	1991-92	543	8,749	16.11	8419	496	5.89	330	38	11.52
Eleventh	1996	543	13,952	25.69	13353	503	3.77	599	40	6.68
Twelfth	1998	543	4,750	8.75	4476	500	11.17	274	43	15.69
Thirteenth	1999	543	4,648	8.56	4364	494	11.32	284	49	17.25
Fourteenth	2004	543	5,435	10.01	5080	498	9.8	355	45	12.68
Fifteenth	2009	543	8,070	14.86	7514	484	6.44	556	59	10.61
Sixteenth	2014	543	8,251	15.2	7,578	482	6.36	668	61	9.13





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Ministry of External affairs

‘New Frontiers Award’

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

- Honouring India’s efforts to rebuild infrastructure and its Rural Tourism economy after two natural disasters, Uttarakhand floods (June) and Cyclone Phailin (October) in the North East, struck the nation last year, the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) named India as the as the recipient of the ‘New Frontiers Award’ 2014.
- The Award is given to destinations that have overcome great adversity to bring much needed tourism back to their shores, and honors the strength and determination of the local people who work tirelessly to rebuild lives and communities following disaster as well as highlighting the crisis management capabilities of local tourism authorities.
- Devender Singh, Economic Advisor, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, received the award from Mark Walsh, Portfolio Director, Reed Travel Exhibitions, organiser of ATM, at a special seminar session.

NEW RICE VARIETY DEVELOPED IN ASSAM

- Climate change not only pushes farmers in Brahmaputra basin to adopt new varieties of crops that can resist vagaries of weather but also compels agro-scientists to merge into research works to invent modified better varieties, especially rice. Recently the Regional Agricultural Research Station (RARS) of Assam Agricultural University at Titabor has developed a submergence resistant gene in rice variety of Ranjit which will bring good harvest to flood-hit farmers offering great relief to them. RARS is a research institute of Assam Agriculture University in Jorhat and has been devoting for better scientific cultivation and production for years.
- Since flooding is one of the major hazards of rice cultivation in Brahmaputra basin areas, tolerant varieties are urgently needed to help protect the farmers from submergence. So as a result of this urgency, the research works to develop new better varieties became a compulsion for the scientists from Assam, a highly climate change effected state of India.
- Though the variety has not been released to farmers yet, it will come out of experimental complex soon.

- Biotechnology has been instrumental in the development of new and improved crop varieties at a faster pace than conventional breeding. Conventional breeding requires 10-12 years for the development of a new variety.
- The first variety developed in India through marker aided selection is the improved Pusa Basmati during 2008, a bacterial leaf bright resistant introgressed variety developed from Pusa Basmati. It is to be noted that Assam have already completed a new variety rice production circulation experimentally. Scientists from RARS completed the research work of the four flood-fighter varieties. The new variety will be a higher version of existing 'Suvarna Sub-1' with more aided features.
- Flood-hit farmers have successfully harvested from the submergence-resistant Suvarna Sub-1(SS-1) variety paddy in last December (2013). In 2009 for the first time farmers of the state had harvested from the water-resistant variety SS-1 in the flood prone areas.

Planning Commission of India

“Development of water supply” to Keoladeo National Park

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

- A proposal for water supply to Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur was forwarded by the Government of Rajasthan seeking assistance from Planning Commission as advised and approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Keeping in view the uniqueness of the eco system and the capacity to attract a variety of migratory birds the project was thought to be approved in principal with the caveat that the cost be firmed up after a visit to the site by an expert team. The park is in danger of being removed as a Ramsar Site, due to severe drought and abandoning of the park mid way by nesting birds .

The Keoladeo National park (KNP):

This is a man-made and man managed wetland. The reserve protects Bharatpur from frequent floods, provides grazing grounds for village cattle and earlier was primarily used as a waterfowl hunting ground. This was notified as a bird sanctuary in the year 1956 and declared as Ramsar site and elevated to a National Park in 1982. In 1985, the Park was declared as a World Heritage Site under the world Heritage Convention It is a reserve forest under the Rajasthan Forest Act, 1953 and, therefore, it is the property of the State of Rajasthan of the Indian Union.

The 29-sq. km. Reserve is locally known as Ghana, is a mosaic of dry grasslands, woodlands, woodland swamps, and wetlands. These diverse habitats are home to 366 bird species, 379 floral species, 50 species of fish, 13 species of snakes, 5 species of lizards, 7 amphibian species, 7 turtle species, and a variety of other invertebrates.

Every year thousands of migratory waterfowl visit the park for wintering breeding etc. The highlight of the park is that it is the only known wintering area of the highly endangered central population of Siberian Cranes. The Sanctuary is the richest bird area in the world. It is known for nesting of its resident birds and visiting migratory birds including water birds. The rarest Siberian cranes arrive here to winter.

According to Sir Peter Scott Keoladeo Sanctuary is the world’s best bird area. By virtue of being one of the best bird watching sites of Asia more than 100,000 visitors come to the park every year. The range of visitors varies from very serious birdwatchers to school children and general tourist of which nearly 45,000 foreign tourist. In addition the location of the park is such that tourist visiting Agra, Mathura and Jaipur invariably stop over at Bharatpur. One third of the KNP habitat is wetland systems with varying types of microhabitats having trees, mounds, dykes and open water with or without submerged or emergent plants. The uplands have grasslands (savannas) of tall species of grass together with scattered trees and shrubs present in varying density. A similar habitat with short grasses, such as *Cynodon dactyl* on and *Dicanthium annulatum* also exists. Woodlands with thickets of huge Kadam trees (*Mitragyna parvifolia*) are distributed in scattered pockets. Richness and diversity of plant life inside the Park is remarkable. The Park’s flora consists of 379 species of flowering plants of which 96 are wetland species.

Macro invertebrates such as worms, insects and mollusks, though more abundant in variety and numbers than any other group of organisms, are present mostly in aquatic habitats. They are food for many fish and birds, as well as some animal species, and hence, constitute a major link in the food chain and functioning of the ecosystem. Land insects are in abundance and have a positive effect on the breeding of land birds.

Keoladeo National Park is popularly known as “bird paradise”. Over 370 bird species have been recorded in the park. Ornithologically, the park assumes significance in two respects. One because of its strategic location being a staging ground for migratory waterfowl arriving in the Indian subcontinent before dispersing to various regions. Further waterfowl converge here before departing to breeding grounds in western Palearctic region. In addition, the wetland is a wintering area for massive congregations of waterfowl. Two, it has been the only regular wintering area in India for the rare and highly endangered Siberian Crane.

Mammalian fauna of KNP is equally rich with 27 identified species. Blue bull, feral cattle, and spotted deer are common while Sambhar are few. Wild boar and porcupine are often spotted sneaking out of the Park to raid crop fields. Two species of Mongoose, and the small Indian mongoose, and the common mongoose are occasionally found. Two species of lesser cats – the jungle cat and the fishing cat and two species of civets – common palm civet and small Indian civet though rare are present. The smooth Indian otter can be seen attacking birds such as coots and at times crossing the woodlands. Jackals and Hyaenas are also sighted and have taken up the role of predators and feed on birds and rodents. Many species of rats, mice, gerbils and bats are also found in the Park.

Fish fauna of the park comprises 43 species, of which 37 enter the park along with the water from Ajan Bund, and six species are breeding residents. During good rainy season the park receives a maximum of around 65 million fish fry and fingerlings. The fish population and diversity are very important as they form the food source of many birds.

Herpetofauna of KNP is very rich. Out of the 10 species of turtles that are seen in Rajasthan, seven are present in this park. Besides this, there are five lizards species, thirteen snakes species and seven species of amphibians. The Bullfrog and skipper frog are commonly found in the wetlands. It is very easy to see a python basking in the sun out its burrow on a sunny winter day. The common monitor lizard, Indian porcupine and Bi-coloured leaf-nose Bat have been seen in the same burrow as that of the python. The poisonous snakes found in the park are krait, cobra and Russel’s viper.

The checkered keel back water snake is very common and is fed upon by herons, storks, and the Sarus cranes. The common Indian monitor preys upon eggs of birds and pythons. All seven species of turtles are aquatic, although the dominant species, the Indian flap-shell moves on to drier areas for aestivation. The sight of a turtle upside down, being torn from its shell by a scavenger vulture in the dry marsh, is quite common in the summer.

The Wetland is a part of the Indogangetic Great Plains. It is a fresh water swamp and is flooded during the monsoon. For most part of the year, effective wetland is only 10 sq. kms. The rest of the area remains dry. Dykes divide the wetland into tan units.

Each unit has a system of sluice gates to control its water level. Depth of water ranges from 1 metre to 2 metre during rains (July, August and September). In subsequent months, October to January, the level gets lowered. The area starts drying from February. In May and June, the entire area dries. Water remains only in some depressions. This alternate wetting and drying helps to maintain the ecology of the fresh water swamp, ideal for water-fowl and resident water birds. Arrangement to pump water from deep tube wells to fill small depressions to save seeds, spores and other aquatic life also exist. They are also helpful in extreme years of

drought .During the tear 2007-2008 attempts have been made to eradicate Prosopis Juliflora/ Cineraria to rid the park of mono culture and enable natural vegetation to regenerate.

The Project

A proposal for water supply to Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur was forwarded by the Government of Rajasthan seeking assistance from PC as advised and approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forests vide their letter dated 10.04.2008. As per the Ministry of Environment and Forests the proposal , is beyond the purview of the existing centrally sponsored scheme of the MoEF , seems to be viable and has the potential to put an end to the eternal water scarcity in Bharatpur National Park.

The Keoladeo National Park(KNP) is a Ramsar Wetland Site and a World Heritage site. Due to acute water scarcity the eco-system of the Park has been affected badly and this has resulted in reduction in the arrival of migratory birds in the National Park.

Water supply is absolutely essential for the National Park, which is a wetland and a Ramsar site facing acute shortage of water for the last few years. Currently apart from rain fall the Park receives water from “Ajan Bund”, a temporary reservoir via the Dakan canal. Through a small canal dug last year water from Khokhar Weir (Bees Mora) is also available. The total requirement of water for the Park is estimated at about 14.17 Million cubic metre (500 MCft). The supply from Ajan Bund is irregular and subject to the bund being full to the extent of reservoir level at 8.5 meters. During the last several years either water is not supplied or supplied insufficiently.

The project has been prepared keeping in view the need for 400 MCFT of water during late July to August , for a period of 30days to the Park which is to be had by diverting and lifting flood waters of Yamuna. The project thus covers diversion of water during monsoon through underground pipes with lifting arrangements over a length of 16 Kms. from the off-take point of Goverdhan drain near Santruk village.

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NATIONAL EVENTS

‘Super city’

- In line with the principles of sustainable development advocated in the Medellin Declaration, Gravity 2.0 Research Foundation recommended that a capital city region be considered rather than a single urban agglomeration for the location of a new capital for the State of Andhra Pradesh post bifurcation.
- In a representation submitted to the Expert Committee on identification of location of new capital for the State of Andhra Pradesh, the Gravity 2.0 Research Foundation, suggested that the new capital be located in the Visakhapatnam-Rajahmundry-Vijayawada ‘Super City’ ensuring inclusive growth.
- They also suggested that coastal shipping be promoted and the National Waterway 4 be extended to Visakhapatnam.

Mining ban issue

- The Meghalaya Government has constituted a one-man Committee to guide the State Government prepare the compliance report to be submitted to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on rat-hole mining ban in Meghalaya.
- The Committee would be headed by additional chief secretary KS Kropha and the report and other points would be prepared before the NGT holds its next hearing in New Delhi on May 19.
- The Tribunal, on April 17, in its interim order banned rat-hole mining and transportation of coal in Meghalaya in the interest of people working in the mines as well as for protection of the environment.
- The order was passed after the Assam-based All Dimasa Student’s Union and Dima Hasao District Committee filed a petition stating that the illegal rat-hole mining in Jaintia Hills is polluting Kopili river by turning its water acidic. They also placed before the Tribunal two survey reports of 2006 and 2010 in which pH level of the water in Kopili river showed considerable difference.

Constitutional validity of RTE Act

- The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of Articles 15(5) and 21-A of the Constitution in so far as it relates to unaided educational institutions to provide compulsory education for children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.
- A five-judge Constitution Bench comprising Chief Justice R.M. Lodha and Justices A.K. Patnaik, Dipak Misra, S.J. Mukhopadhyaya and Ibrahim Kalifulla also upheld the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2010.

- The Constitution 93rd Amendment Act, 2005, inserting clause (5) in Article 15 enables the State to make special provisions for members of the SCs, STs and socially and educationally backward classes, for admission to all educational institutions, including private unaided institutions, but except minority institutions. The right to education law was enacted by Parliament in 2009 by inserting Article 21A to provide free and compulsory education to children between 6 and 14 years.
- It imposed obligations on the schools, which included privately-managed unaided educational institutions to admit at least 25% students from weaker sections. A three-judge Bench upheld the constitutional validity of this Act by a majority of 2:1. On a reference that the matter ought to have been decided by a Constitution Bench, it was heard by a five-judge Bench.
- Writing the judgment, Justice Patnaik, however, said the minority unaided educational institutions could not be compelled to provide free and compulsory education to children belonging to weaker sections. To this extent the Bench overruled the three judges' decision upholding the RTE law.
- The Bench held that the 93rd Constitution Amendment inserting clause 5 in Article 15 to provide for reservation to weaker sections in admission to unaided private educational institutions did not violate the basic structure of the Constitution.

INS Vikrant's another lifeline

- India's first aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, which was headed for the scrap yard, got another breather from the Supreme Court as it blocked the vessel's journey to ignominy.
- The ship was due at the scrapyards on May 17 after it was sold for Rs.60 crore through an e-auction to the Mumbai-based IB Commercials Pvt Ltd.
- Through the 'Save Vikrant Committee', Mr. Paigankar and other activists last month moved the apex court in a bid to save the vessel which saw action in the 1971 India-Pakistan war.
- The imposing vessel, commissioned in the Indian Navy in 1961, was decommissioned in 1997 and has been kept anchored at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai.
- During the hearing of Mr. Paigankar's public interest litigation in January, the Central government informed the Bombay High Court that the 15,000-tonne ship had completed its operational life.
- The Maharashtra government expressed its inability to preserve it as a floating museum owing to financial constraints, following which the Bombay High Court dismissed Mr. Paigankar's PIL.
- The 70-year-old vessel, purchased as HMS Hercules from Britain in 1957 and rechristened as 'INS Vikrant', helped enforce a naval blockade of East Pakistan — now Bangladesh — during the 1971 war.

Mother tongue in primary schools

- The Supreme Court recently held that the government cannot impose mother tongue on linguistic minority for imparting primary education.

- The bench, also comprising justices A.K. Patnaik, S.J. Mukhopadhaya, Dipak Misra and F.M. Ibrahim Kalifulla, was hearing the issue which had come before the apex court as two Karnataka government orders of 1994 making mother tongue or regional language compulsory for imparting education from class I to IV, had come under challenge.
- In July 2013, a two-judge bench of the apex court had said its Constitution Bench will examine whether government can impose mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction at the primary education stage as it has a far-reaching significance on the development of children.
- The court, which was of the opinion that it was a fit case for consideration by a larger bench, had said that the issue involved in this case concerns the fundamental rights of not only the present generation but also the generations yet to be born.
- It had said that the issue had to be referred to a larger bench as a two-judge bench of the court in 1993 had refused to interfere with a Karnataka government order specifying mother tongue Kannada as the medium of instruction at the primary school level and making it mandatory for every child.

Saradha chit fund scam

- In a setback for the West Bengal government, the Supreme court has handed over investigation into Saradha chit fund scam to the CBI.
- The court also asked the CBI to investigate ponzi scheme scams in Odisha, Assam and Tripura.
- The West Bengal government, all through the hearing of the matter, had strongly resisted the plea for handing over the investigation to the CBI.
- The apex court asked the West Bengal government to hand over all Saradha chit fund scam cases to CBI.
- It also said that the CBI will investigate all cases against 44 chit fund companies in Odisha.
- The SC said the state police have not yet been able to trace the money trails that clearly had an inter-state as well as possible international links.
- The SC also asked the Enforcement Directorate to join CBI in finding the money trail. The ED is already conducting a probe into the scam.
- The apex court said it wanted the chit fund scam in these states to be probed by an independent agency like CBI because of involvement of politicians and influential persons in the cases.
- Saradha Group chairman Sudipta Sen was arrested from Sonmarg in Kashmir on April 23, 2013 along with two close associates.

INTERNATIONAL

Abuse of power case

- Thailand's Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra defended herself against abuse of power allegations in a crucial court case that is one of several legal challenges, which could remove her from office.
- Ms. Yingluck is accused of abusing her authority by transferring her National Security Council chief in 2011 to another position. Critics say the transfer was to benefit her ruling party and violated the Constitution.
- The case was lodged by anti-government senators, who won an initial victory in February when another court ruled that the official, Thawil Pliensri, must be restored to his job.
- If Ms. Yingluck is found guilty of interfering in state affairs for her personal benefit or that of her political party, she would have to step down as Prime Minister.

First 'Born Free' election

- South Africans voted in the first "Born Free" election, although polls suggest the allure of the ruling African National Congress as the conqueror of apartheid will prevail even among those with no memory of white-minority rule.
- Opinion polls suggest there is no doubt about the overall result, with ANC support estimated at around 65 percent, only a shade lower than the 65.9 percent it won in the 2009 election that brought President Jacob Zuma to power.
- The resilience of ANC support has surprised analysts who a year ago were saying it could struggle at the polls as its glorious past recedes into history and voters focus instead on the sluggish economic growth and slew of scandals that have typified Zuma's first term.
- Africa's most sophisticated economy has struggled to recover from a 2009 recession - its first since the 1994 demise of apartheid - and the ANC's efforts to stimulate growth and tackle 25 percent unemployment have been hampered by powerful unions.
- South Africa's top anti-graft agency accused Zuma this year of "benefiting unduly" from a \$23 million state-funded security upgrade to his private home at Nkandla in rural KwaZulu-Natal province that included a swimming pool and chicken run.

Ceasefire in South Sudan

- South Sudan's President has reached a ceasefire agreement with a rebel leader, an African regional bloc said, after a vicious cycle of revenge killings drew international alarm.

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- The deal means “an immediate cessation of hostilities within 24 hours of the signing” and “unhindered humanitarian access” to all people affected by the months-long conflict, said a statement by the political bloc known as IGAD, which is mediating the conflict.
- Ethnically targeted violence in the world’s youngest country broke out in December, killing thousands of people and forcing more than 1.3 million to flee their homes. The U.N. Security Council has expressed “horror” at recent killings of civilians.
- U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice welcomed the peace agreement in a statement, saying it “holds the promise of bringing the crisis to an end”.
- South Sudan is a largely Christian nation that broke off from the Muslim-dominated Sudan after a 2011 referendum. The fighting is an embarrassment to the U.S., which has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and has been its strongest international champion.



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INDIA AND THE WORLD

Statue of Gandhiji

- A life-size bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi would be installed in Irving in Texas, fulfilling a long-cherished dream of Indian-Americans living in the city. A 7-foot tall and 30-inch wide bronze statue of Gandhiji, cast in Andhra Pradesh, will be installed on a 6-foot tall pedestal.
- It will have a granite wall as a backdrop, inscribed with Gandhiji's memorable words, as well as those from Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Albert Einstein, Barack Obama and others.

Tax data exchange

- In another step towards shedding banking secrecy practices, 47 nations including Switzerland and India, have agreed upon automatic exchange of information on tax matters.
- The endorsement of the 'Declaration on Automatic Exchange of Information in Tax Matters' by 47 countries under the aegis of OECD will come as a boost for India, which is stepping up pressure on Switzerland to share details on alleged illicit funds stashed away by Indians there.
- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the global body that frames economic policies and conventions against tax frauds, said the latest declaration commits countries to implement a new single global standard on automatic exchange of information.
- Switzerland, long perceived as a safe haven for stashing away untaxed money, is an OECD member.
- Such a protocol was required between the countries as tax crimes rob countries of their genuine revenues.

ECONOMY

E-auction of iron ore

- The Goa Mines and Geology Department will hold its third e-auction of iron ore on May 12, wherein six lakh tonnes of ore, lying at jetties and the Mormugao Port Trust (MPT) would be e-auctioned.
- The State, through MSTC Ltd., has auctioned 1.62 million tonnes of iron ore through two e-auctions in February and March, realising around Rs.260 crore, which would go to the State treasury.
- These e-auctions are held under the supervision of a Supreme Court-appointed monitoring committee, headed by U. V. Singh.
- The Supreme Court, partially relaxing its October 5 ban on iron ore activities in the State, in December last had permitted the Goa Mines Department to auction about 15 million tonnes of iron ore lying at jetties, mining leases, plots, beneficiary plants and port, all under the supervision of its committee.
- However, on April 21, the apex court lifted its ban on mining activities, but putting a cap of 20 million tonnes for annual production and ruling that since the renewal of all the deemed mining leases in the State had expired on November, 2007, and the operations carried out, thereafter, have been termed illegal, the mining lessees will not be entitled to the sale value of the ore sold in e-auction but to the approximate cost (not actual cost) of the extraction of the ore.
- Making government the custodian of the money collected through e-auction, the court directed the State to pay 50 per cent of wages of all the workers who were laid off or were not paid salaries since the time the mining operations were suspended.

Metro AG

- German retailer Metro AG plans to have 50 wholesale stores in India by 2020 and make the country one of its 'focus expansion' markets alongside Russia, China and Turkey.
- India has always been an important future growth market of Metro .
- The Dusseldorf-based company was the first global player to enter the cash-andcarry wholesale segment in India, back in India. It currently operates 16 outlets in the country.

Prepayment fee on floating rate term loans

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that banks cannot levy charges on individual customers if they choose to close their floating rate loans.
- Some banks charge a fee if an individual borrower chooses to close his or her loan. This fee varies from bank to bank, and is mostly in the range of 1-3%.

- In its first bi-monthly monetary policy review on 1 April, RBI had indicated that in the interest of their consumers, banks should consider allowing their borrowers the possibility of prepaying floating rate term loans without any penalty.
- Accordingly, it is advised that banks will not be permitted to charge foreclosure charges/pre-payment penalties on all floating rate term loans sanctioned to individual borrowers.

No Special trade benefits for Russia

- U.S. President Barack Obama intends to withdraw special privileges granted to Russia because the country is too economically advanced to need preferential treatment reserved for less developed countries.
- Mr. Obama notified Congress that he intends to remove Russia from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme as Moscow is “sufficiently advanced” to warrant any preferential treatment.
- Once Russia’s eligibility is withdrawn, which would be effected via a presidential proclamation, U.S. imports of GSP-eligible goods from Russia will be subject to normal, non-preferential rates of duty.
- The purpose of the programme, which allowed \$19.9 billion in imports to enter the U.S. duty-free in 2012, is to assist developing countries to use trade to boost their economic development.
- Russia has advanced beyond the level of economic development and competitiveness for GSP eligibility. As such, Russia should no longer qualify to receive GSP benefits.

'Global 2000'

- Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries leads the pack of 54 Indian companies in Forbes' annual list of the world's 2000 largest and most powerful public companies, with Chinese companies occupying the top three slots on the list.
- The Forbes 'Global 2000' is a comprehensive list of the world's largest, most powerful public companies, as measured by revenues, profits, assets and market value.
- China is home to the world's top three biggest public companies and five of the top 10.
- The US retains its dominance as the country with the most Global 2000 companies at 564.
- Japan trails the US with 225 companies in aggregate.
- India is home to 54 of the world's biggest companies.
- Reliance Industries is ranked 135 on the list with a market value of 50.9 billion dollars and 72.8 billion dollars in sales as on May 2014.

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- Reliance is followed by State Bank of India which is ranked 155 and has a 23.6 billion dollars market value.
- The other Indian companies on the list are Oil and Natural Gas ranked 176, ICICI Bank (304), Tata Motors (332), Indian Oil (416), HDFC Bank (422), Coal India (428), Larsen & Toubro (500), Tata Consultancy Services (543), Bharti Airtel (625), Axis Bank (630), Infosys (727), Bank of Baroda (801), Mahindra & Mahindra (803), ITC (830), Wipro (849), Bharat Heavy Electricals (873), GAIL India (955), Tata Steel (983) and Power Grid of India (1011).
- Also making the list are Bharat Petroleum (1045), HCL Technologies (1153), Hindustan Petroleum (1211), Adani Enterprises (1233), Kotak Mahindra Bank (1255), Sun Pharma Industries (1294), Steel Authority of India (1329), Bajaj Auto (1499), Hero Motocorp (1912), Jindal Steel & Power (1955), Grasim Industries (1981) and JSW Steel (1990).

Issue of natural gas export

- A bi-partisan group of 22 American senators have expressed reservation on the export of natural gas to Asian countries such as India and China, arguing that such a move by Obama Administration would result in an increase in cost for consumers and businesses at home.
- They said the “large-scale exports of natural gas to Asia could also jeopardize America’s goal of achieving energy independence, a goal made more achievable by the recent increase in domestic gas production”.
- The senators urged Mr. Obama to consider the impacts on American manufacturing and families that rely on natural gas.
- The recent approval for export of liquefied natural gas from a sixth export facility has meant that the total approved exports now exceeds the amount of gas currently being used in every single American home and commercial business.
- The exports well exceeds the high export scenario referenced by a Department of Energy study in 2012 that indicated prices could increase by up to 54 per cent and it would translate into more than \$60 billion a year in higher energy costs for American consumers and businesses.

U.K. rich list

- India-born Hinduja brothers have emerged as Britain’s richest, valued at £11.9 billion, in the Sunday Times’ annual list of the super rich.
- Gopichand and Srichand Hinduja run the multinational Hinduja Group with interests across automotive, real estate and oil.
- Arsenal shareholder and Russian tycoon Alisher Usmanov fell to second place after his estimated fortune dropped to £10.65 billion. He is followed by Laskshmi Mittal with £10.25 billion, registering a growth of £250 million.

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- London now has the most billionaires for any city with 72. The total number for U.K. has crossed 100 for the first time to reach 104 billionaires with a combined wealth of over £301 billion. The next most prosperous city in the world is Moscow with 48 billionaires, just ahead of New York and San Francisco.
- The Duke of Westminster is the richest Briton with around £8.5 billion and is ranked 10th.

Automatic tax information

- As they continue their efforts to clamp down on the menace of black money, India and other countries will have to wait at least till 2017 before the new global standard for automatic exchange of tax information comes into effect.
- India, Switzerland and 45 other nations had agreed upon automatic exchange of tax information, which is seen as a major step forward in global efforts against banking secrecy practices.
- Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) sets the global tax standards and frames conventions against tax frauds, among others.
- The new standard, expected to be finalised in September this year, provides for exchange of information on bank account balances, interests, dividends, other financial income and sales proceeds to compute possible capital gains.
- By becoming part of the declaration, these countries have committed to implementing automatic exchange of tax information. The declaration also comes as a boost for India, which is making efforts to get details from Switzerland on alleged illicit funds stashed away by Indians there.
- Automatic exchange of information would allow for “collecting all bank information on non-resident to pass this information on to the countries of residence of these taxpayers so that they can no longer hide money on offshore accounts.
- The standard was developed at the OECD and endorsed by the G20 Finance Ministers.

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SCIENCE AND TECH

KLOTHO

- People who have a variant of a longevity gene have improved brain skills such as thinking, learning and memory. Researchers found that increasing levels of the gene, called KLOTHO, in mice made them smarter, possibly by increasing the strength of connections between nerve cells in the brain.
- The study was published in Cell Reports. Those who have one copy of a variant of the KLOTHO gene, called KL-VS, tend to live longer and have lower chances of suffering a stroke whereas those who have two copies may live shorter lives and have a higher risk of stroke.
- The study also found that those with one copy performed better on cognitive tests regardless of age, sex or the presence of the apolipoprotein 4 gene, the main genetic risk factor for Alzheimer's disease.

India's first cyber lab

- The National Law School of India University (NLSIU) on May 6 will launch what is touted to be the country's first cyber lab in a legal academic institution.
- The lab, co-funded by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEITY), Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, will be inaugurated by Shyamal Ghosh, the former Telecom Secretary, Government of India; Gulshan Rai, Director-General, Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) and R. Venkata Rao, Vice-Chancellor, NLSIU.
- A release from NLSIU's Advanced Centre for Cyber Law and Cyber Forensics, said the centre also offers training programmes for bank officials and other professionals who want to gain knowledge of cyber technology and forensics crucial for detection and investigation of cyber crimes.
- The centre launched its Postgraduate Diploma in Cyber Law and Cyber Forensics in June 2013, which senior police officers, IT security officers and lawyers have enrolled for.

Implantable device to control BP

- Not being able to control blood pressure even after gulping pills would no longer be a problem. Soon, an implantable device will reduce blood pressure by sending electrical signals to the brain.
- In a first, German researchers have successfully reduced the blood pressure in rats by 40 percent with this device without any major side effects.
- This could offer hope for a significant proportion of patients worldwide who do not respond to existing medical treatment for the condition.
- The implantable device uses an intelligent circuit to record the activity of the patient, for instance when they are exercising, and adjust the blood pressure accordingly.

- The device consists of 24 individual electrodes that are integrated into a micro-machined cuff. It is designed to wrap around the vagus nerve, which extends from the brainstem to the thorax and abdomen — supplying and stimulating various major organs including the heart and major blood vessels.

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ENVIRONMENT

Indian cities with minimum air pollution

- Hassan city is among three Indian cities with minimum air pollution, according to the latest World Health Organisation (WHO) study on ambient air quality. The study spanned over 1,600 cities in 91 countries.
- Of the 123 Indian cities that were covered by the study, Hassan ranked third in terms of least concentration of dust particles in air. The other two cities are Kollam and Pathanamthitta in Kerala.
- The WHO conducted the study and prepared a database of ambient air quality, considering the concentration of particulate matter in air. Particulate matter with a diameter of 10 micron (PM10) and 2.5 micron (PM2.5) were considered for the study. The collected daily measurements or data were aggregated into annual mean for the database.
- As per the database, in Hassan, the annual mean of PM10 was recorded at 44 µg/m³ (micrograms per cubic metre of air) and PM2.5 at 19 µg/m³.
- In Kollam, it was 39 µg/m³ and 17 µg/m³ respectively and in Pathanamthitta, it was 23 µg/m³ and 10 µg/m³ respectively.
- The concentration of particulate matter recorded in Pathanamthitta is closer to the recommended level.

New species of dancing frogs

- Scientists have discovered 14 new species of so-called dancing frogs in the Western Ghats, just in time, they fear, to watch them fade away.
- Indian biologists say they found the tiny acrobatic amphibians, which earned their name with the unusual kicks they use to attract mates, declining dramatically in number during the 12 years in which they chronicled the species through morphological descriptions and molecular DNA markers. They breed after the yearly monsoon in fast-rushing streams, but their habitat appears to be becoming increasingly dry.
- The study listing the new species published in the Ceylon Journal of Science brings the number of known Indian dancing frog species to 24.
- Only the males dance: it's actually a unique breeding behavior called foot-flagging. They stretch, extend and whip their legs out to the side to draw the attention of females who might have trouble hearing mating croaks over the sound of water flowing through perennial hill streams.
- They bigger the frog, the more they dance. These are tiny, delicate frogs no bigger than a walnut and can easily be swept away in a gushing mountain stream. So breeding happens only once the level of a stream drops to the point where the water babbles over stones.

WHO Report on Pollution

- The 2014 version of the Ambient Air Pollution (AAP) database contains results of monitoring of outdoor air pollution from 1600 cities in 91 countries and it found that Delhi has the highest concentration of PM_{2.5} - particulate matters less than 2.5 microns - form of air pollution.
- According to WHO, this type of concentration is dangerous because it consists of tiny particles that increase the risk of respiratory diseases and other health problems.
- The Delhi air has PM_{2.5} concentrations of 153 micrograms and PM₁₀ concentrations of 286 micrograms, which is much more than the permissible limits.
- Beijing, which was once regarded by many as the most polluted cities in the world, has PM_{2.5} concentration of 56 micrograms and PM₁₀ concentration of 121 micro grammes.
- The WHO study covers the database from 2008 to 2013, with the majority of values for the years 2011 and 2012.

Change in U.S. Climate

- The effects of human-induced climate change are being felt in every corner of the United States, with water growing scarcer in dry regions, torrential rains increasing in wet regions, heat waves becoming more common and more severe, wildfires growing worse, and forests dying under assault from heat-loving insects.
- Such sweeping changes have been caused by an average warming of less than 2 degrees Fahrenheit over most land areas of the country in the past century, the scientists found. If greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane continue to escalate at a rapid pace, they said, the warming could conceivably exceed 10 degrees by the end of this century.
- Climate change, once considered an issue for a distant future, has moved firmly into the present.
- The report is the latest in a series of dire warnings about how the effects of global warming that had been long foreseen by climate scientists are already affecting the planet. Its region-by-region documentation of changes occurring in the United States, and of future risks, makes clear that few places will be unscathed — and some, like northerly areas, are feeling the effects at a swifter pace than had been expected.
- Alaska in particular is hard hit. Glaciers and frozen ground in that state are melting, storms are eating away at fragile coastlines no longer protected by winter sea ice, and entire communities are having to flee inland — a precursor of the large-scale changes the report foresees for the rest of the United States.

SPORTS

Validity of sports code

- The Delhi high court has directed all National Sports Federations (NSF) to follow the national sports code. This simply means that the Union sports ministry's guidelines on age and tenure restriction have attained legal sanctity.
- This is a shot in the arm for the ministry which suspended the Indian Amateur Boxing Federation (IABF) and Archery Association of India (AAI) for not implementing age and tenure directives. The court's directive will certainly make all NSFs accountable and their functioning transparent.
- The sports ministry has repeatedly outlined that recognition to any NSF would rely on the current legal status of the organisation, recognition by the respective international federation, the Asian federation and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA). The IOA had also challenged the government's authority, but the latest directive from the court has come as a jolt.

Most searched IPL player

- Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) skipper Virat Kohli takes the top spot as the most searched IPL player this season, closely followed by Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.
- Yuvraj Singh from Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) captured the third position.
- With one of the most stunning catches taken in cricket history against Royal Challengers Bangalore to his credit, IPL debutant Chris Lynn (KKR) takes the fourth spot as the most searched player.
- Kings XI Punjab (KXIP) lead batsman Virendra Sehwag may not have scored big runs on the ground yet, but continues to attract a lot of queries from his fans on Google Search, thus putting him up at the fifth spot.
- Royal Challengers big man Chris Gayle, Chennai Superkings Suresh Raina, and Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Shikhar Dhawan are also among the top 10 trending IPL players on Google Search.

IN THE NEWS (PERSONS)

Juan Carlos Varela:

- Vice-President Juan Carlos Varela was declared the victor of Panama's presidential election, thwarting an attempt by former ally President Ricardo Martinelli to extend his grip on power by electing a handpicked successor.
- With 60 per cent of ballots counted, officials said Mr. Varela led with 39 per cent of the votes, compared to 32 per cent for former Housing Minister Jose Domingo Arias, the preferred choice of Mr. Martinelli. Juan Carlos Navarro, a former mayor of the capital, was in third in the seven-candidate field with 27 per cent.
- The incumbent party has still never won re-election to Panama's presidency since the United States' 1989 overthrow of military strongman Manuel Noriega.

Amit Shah:

- The CBI has sought dismissal of the plea by Gopinath Pillai, father of Javed Sheikh alias Pranesh Pillai, who was among those killed with Ishrat Jahan, to arraign Narendra Modi aide Amit Shah and the then Ahmedabad police commissioner K.R. Kaushik in the case. Mr Pillai had cited the resignation letter of suspended IPS officer and an accused in the Ishrat Jahan case D.G. Vanzara in support of his petition.
- The agency, in its affidavit further, said that the resignation letter contains general allegations against some persons and not providing any concrete information about the role of Shah in this offence. After receiving the letter, CBI examined Vanzara in the jail. However, he has not disclosed any further details during his examinations".
- The CBI also said there was no evidence against Mr Kaushik to show his involvement in the encounter and so he was made a witness in the case. "During further investigation and evidence collected so far, it appears that Mr Kaushik was not involved in the conspiracy of killing the deceased.

Lalit Modi:

- Following the election of Lalit Modi as president of Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA), the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) hits back by 'indefinitely' suspending the association. The cricket board also appointed an ad-hoc body to run RCA's cricket affairs.
- Modi was elected President of RCA, setting the stage for yet another round of legal tussle between him and the Board, which had threatened to ban the state association in anticipation of this result.
- The RCA elections were held in December last year but the results were sealed following a Supreme Court directive. And it was opened recently by a court-appointed observer with the former Indian

Premier League commissioner defeating his opponent, Rampal Sharma. Out of the 33 votes, Modi got 24, while Sharma got five.

- The BCCI had asked the RCA to dissociate itself from Modi, or face action after the latter was banned for life for financial irregularities in the IPL in September 2013.
- However, Modi – riding on the Rajasthan Sports Act 2005, contested the election for the post of president. The former Commissioner of the IPL was seeking to return to cricket administration.

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Selected Editorials of Importance

Lessons from Assam's carnage

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

The killing of over 30 people, most of them Muslim women and children, across Assam's Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) is a deadly reminder of systematic efforts towards ethnic cleansing that is under way in that area. The National Democratic Front of Boroland (Songbijit), fighting for a "Sovereign Boroland" to be carved out of Assam, remains the natural and principal suspect for the carnage: it was behind the violence between the indigenous ethnic Bodo community and the erstwhile East Bengal-origin Muslims who generally speak Assamese and certain Bengali dialects that erupted in July-August 2012, leading to the killing of more than a hundred people and the displacement of about 4.85 lakh. But the difference this time is that the atmosphere has been vitiated seriously in the context of elections. In a manifesto released for Assam in April, the State BJP unit made a potentially incendiary promise that it would identify and expel all illegal immigrants staying in Assam — but with a caveat. It promised to protect Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and members of the Scheduled Castes who have come there from Bangladesh following "religious, political and social persecution", and not to treat them as illegal migrants. In such a context, it is hardly surprising that oblique and not-so-oblique statements have been made by different political leaders linking the BJP's stance on such a sensitive topic, and the recrudescence of violence in the BTAD.

The Assam Police have put the blame on the NDFB (Songbijit). Meanwhile, survivors claimed to have identified some of the attackers as surrendered militants of the erstwhile Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), formed by former leaders of the BLT, that holds the reins of the Bodoland Territorial Council, is also a coalition partner of the Congress in Assam but has indicated it might team up with the BJP, post-election. Significantly, BPF legislator Pramila Rani Brahma had alleged that its candidate for the Kokrajhar constituency was likely to lose as a majority of Muslims did not vote for him. The constituency has about six lakh Bodo voters, nine lakh non-Bodo voters, and four lakh Muslim voters. Narrow election-related interests have complicated the situation, yet it is important that the investigating agencies are able to identify the culprits and reassure the migrant communities of the safety of their lives and property. Urgent steps are needed to ensure their security and protection. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's government should be held to account for the repeated failure in checking the violence, even as it remains under the cloud of militancy that looms over the State. For a start, the government should initiate a process of vulnerability mapping in areas that could see further trouble down the line.

Outrage in Nigeria

(Courtesy: The Indian Express)

As Boko Haram abducts more schoolgirls, the government's incapacity is laid bare.

In a chilling monologue, the head of the shadowy, violent Islamist organisation named Boko Haram — which, in Hausa, roughly translates to "Western education is forbidden" — claimed responsibility for the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from Borno in the largely Muslim north of Nigeria three weeks ago, threatening to "sell them off" because "women are slaves". Abubakar Shekau's horrific statement of intent should not surprise. After all, this is the same Boko Haram that, in the course of a bloody five-year

insurgency, has routinely attacked students and teachers, murdering 59 boys in their school earlier this year. Its stated aim is to establish a medieval-style caliphate in north Nigeria.

Less predictable was the Nigerian government's shameful response to this tragedy. Not only has the state failed to rescue the young women kidnapped last month, its incapacity to act has meant that suspected Boko Haram militants snatched eight more girls last week. While the Boko Haram has been conducting its campaign of terror and intimidation with near-total impunity, the police saw fit to question the activist behind the #BringBackOurGirls Twitter movement and two women who helped organise protests calling for more government action. The shambolic nature of the government's response has touched off rare expressions of public anger, while uniting the country across the sectarian divide.

The UK and the US, among others, have now been moved to offer assistance to Nigeria. But little in the way of facts is available about the Boko Haram of today. It exploits all the institutional weaknesses that make it difficult to verify even the most basic information in Nigeria, such as the number of girls abducted. Porous borders with Chad and Cameroon mean that the girls are likely to have been separated into small groups and whisked away, making it harder to track them as time passes.

Next government needs to maintain, nurture India and Bangladesh cordial relationship_

(Courtesy: The Economic Times)

Whoever forms the next government in Delhi, one of the most important tasks will be to maintain and nurture the cordial relationship shared between India and Bangladesh over nearly a decade.

Ever since Sheikh Hasina's Awami League came to power in 2001, she has driven the India-Bangladesh relationship forward. The gains to India have been substantially more than the gains to Bangladesh in this period: Dhaka has helped curb militancy in India's northeastern states, by first arresting and then handing over to India important rebel leaders of various militant outfits, including, most notably, the Ulfa.

Border tensions with West Bengal, which used to erupt frequently when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was in power, have also subsided. Cross-border trade has improved and there are plans to connect the remote northeastern states to the Indian mainland by roads passing through Bangladesh.

Economic cooperation, now insignificant, must be the focus of the new regime in Delhi. Given that background, it is distressing to see the tone of the BJP campaign in Assam and Bengal, where the party has chosen to focus on the touchy issue of migration — illegal or otherwise — from Bangladesh.

Arguing that Bengalis who observe Durgashtami, a popular Hindu festival in Bengal, were the only legitimate citizens of the state and the rest ought to pack their bags for Bangladesh by May 16 — when Lok Sabha results will be out — not just breaches electoral codes but creates schism in the region's populace and between India and Bangladesh.

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Assam has also faced problems — and great conflict and social strife — over the issue of migration. To state there, as Narendra Modi has done, that the state's rhinoceroses should be protected, instead of so-called illegal migrants was provocative, to say the least.

If the BJP does form the next government in Delhi, as many expect it to, its members, especially its leadership, must learn to choose their words with more care. Because in the larger scope of things, good relations with neighbours, which boost India's self interest, are more important than scoring dubious points in election speeches.

MCQs

:: NATIONAL ::

Q1.

- i) The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of Articles 15(5) and 21-A of the Constitution in so far as it relates to unaided educational institutions to provide compulsory education for children in the age group of 6 to 14 years.
- ii) The Constitution's 93rd Amendment Act, 2005, inserted clause (5) in Article 15 and enables the State to make special provisions for members of the SCs, STs and socially and educationally backward classes, for admission to all educational institutions, including private unaided institutions, but except minority institutions.

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) South Sudan has reached a ceasefire agreement with a rebel leader , after a vicious cycle of revenge killings drew international alarm.
- ii) U.S. is against the peace agreement as it holds the promise of bringing the crisis of the country to an end.

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 ::

Q3.

- i) German retailer Metro AG plans to have 50 wholesale stores in India by 2020 and make the country one of its 'focus expansion' markets alongside Russia, China and Turkey.
- ii) U.S. intends to withdraw special privileges granted to Russia because the country is too economically advanced to need preferential treatment reserved for less developed countries.

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

:: ENVIRONMENT ::

Q4.

- i) Scientists have recently discovered 14 new species of so-called dancing frogs in the Western Ghats.
- ii) Hassan city is among three Indian cities with maximum air pollution, according to the latest World Health Organisation (WHO) study on ambient air quality.

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

:: IN THE NEWS ::

Q5.

- i)** Juan Carlos Varela was declared the victor of Panama's presidential election held recently
- ii)** Lalit Modi as been elected as president of Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA), which has been opposed by BCCI.

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

MCQs Answers

Ans 1: c

Ans 2: a

Ans 3: d

Ans 4: b

Ans 5: c

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