

# **Weekly Current Affairs Update for IAS Exam**



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**News From:  
2nd to 8th December 2013**

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## NATIONAL EVENTS

### Narendra Modi calls for debate on Article 370

- BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi called for a debate on Article 370 of the Constitution ( which gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir)and it triggered a fresh round of debate on the controversial issue.
- But many legal experts are of the view that abrogating the provision would put the accession of the state to India in jeopardy.
- Some experts believe that if Article 370 was abrogated, then technically and legally the foundation of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India would cease to exist
- However, few lawyers believe that under Article 368, Parliament does have power to amend the Constitution. But in view of the Supreme Court's ruling in the Kesvanand Bharti case, Parliament can't amend the basic structure of the Constitution..

### Gujarat snooping row to be probed:

- The Centre might order a probe into the alleged illegal surveillance and phone tapping of a women in Gujarat in the wake of demand from certain quarters, including Congress.
- The "snooping" on the woman architect, allegedly by the Gujarat Police at the behest Amit Shah, a close aide of BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, was apparently in violation of phone tapping rules as it was reportedly carried out without the mandatory permission from the Centre when the woman went out of the state.
- Home Secretary is empowered to order phone tapping of a person within the state but when the surveillance is carried out in multiple states, permission of Union Home Secretary is mandatory. The Gujarat Police seems to have tapped the telephone of the woman when she was even in Maharashtra and Karnataka, besides Gujarat, without taking any authorization from Union Home Secretary.
- Congress has been maintaining that the episode raised questions about the Gujarat Chief Minister's disregard for law and intrusion into the privacy of the Bangalore-based architect whose family hails from Kutch.
- The party questioned the use of state agencies like anti-terrorist squad and state intelligence to keep tabs on the woman.

### Several projects inaugurated in Raebareli

- Congress President Sonia Gandhi recently inaugurated several roads in her parliamentary constituency Raebareli, where she launched a host of projects, including a railway line.



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- Sonia Gandhi, laid the foundation of over 50 roads constructed under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojna ( PMGSY) connecting various villages of her constituency. She also inaugurated a water treatment plant at Saraimugla.
- During the visit, she laid the foundation of a new railway line -- Raebareli- Maharajganj-Akbarganj.
- This line brings Mahrajganj tehsil of Raebareli on the railway map for the first time. Besides, Raebareli will be connected to Faizabad by the shortest railway route.

## **Only Parliament can make laws to deal with terror**

- In a legal opinion Solicitor General Mohan Parasaran told the government that "only Parliament and not the state legislature has the exclusive power to legislate" on an issue dealing with terrorism.
- Passed by the Madhya Pradesh Assembly on March 25, 2010, the proposed law was referred by the Governor, taking resort to the powers under Article 200 of the Constitution, to the President for consideration and assent on the ground that it was inconsistent or repugnant with legislations passed by Parliament, particularly the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2008 as well as the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, the Limitation Act, 1963, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872.
- On October 22, 2010, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs said the proposed Bill was repugnant to the main central legislation dealing with terrorism — the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2008.

## **Big win for India in Bali**

- India had its way on the Bali Package at the Ninth Ministerial of the World Trade Organization.
- The draft Ministerial Decision put up for endorsement to the member-countries was the draft India submitted; it took care of India's position on both food security and trade facilitation.
- Cuba and Venezuela and one other country were holding up/delaying the adoption of the Ministerial text for some issues they have with it.
- It was decided to adopt the draft at the closing ceremony.
- Adoption of the text was the first major decision of the century on global trade after the WTO came into being.
- India said that the interim solution on food security designed was not acceptable and the country won't compromise its farmers' interest or succumb to mercantilist ambitions of rich nations. There was a national consensus and complete political unanimity on this matter in India.
- Developed countries proposed an interim solution of four-year 'peace clause' during which period India would not attract penalty even if the 10 per cent cap is broken.

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- As per the existing Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the Geneva-headquartered WTO, farm subsidy was capped at 10 per cent of the total value of the farm production. Though India raised issues regarding the way the cap value is benchmarked to the base price.

## Creation of Telangana

- The Union cabinet finally gave the go-ahead for the creation of a 10-district Telangana and outlined the blueprint for carving out the country's 29th state from the current Andhra Pradesh.
- Dropping a controversial move to add two districts of Rayalaseema — Kurnool and Anantapur — to Telangana, which was opposed by various stakeholders, the cabinet, presided over by prime minister Manmohan Singh, approved a draft reorganisation bill based on recommendations of Group of Ministers (GoM).
- According to the Union cabinet's decision that deliberated on the GoM's report and the draft bill for more than two hours, Telangana shall consist of 10 districts as envisaged in the beginning.
- The successor state of Andhra Pradesh will comprise 13 districts. Union home minister Sushilkumar Shinde said Greater Hyderabad will be the shared capital of both the states for a period of not less than 10 years.
- Though the usual practice is to give at least a month's time to the state legislature to vet the state Reorganisation Bill, the government may seek a lesser time in its eagerness to place it in the parliament in winter session itself.
- The bill gives Telangana governor special responsibility to secure the life, liberty and property of all the people residing in the common capital with the help of two advisors appointed by the Centre. The Centre will extend financial and other support to the creation of a new capital for successor Andhra Pradesh that will be identified by an Expert committee.
- Also, the cabinet decided to continue Article 371 D status for both the successor states to ensure equitable opportunities for education and public employment.

## Communal Violence Bill

- The UPA government has scrapped a controversial provision from the Communal Violence Bill, that is facing stiff opposition from parties, which defined the victim of communal violence as essentially a person belonging to "religious or linguistic minority".
- Under the draft of the Prevention of Communal Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2013, a person of any religious or linguistic identity could be a victim. The 2011 Bill was also applicable to SCs/STs and even in cases of sexual assault, but these two groups have been removed from the latest draft.

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- The BJP and other parties had expressed apprehension that the Bill would divide the country on communal lines.
- Effectively, bureaucrats have been made accountable to the NHRC. Similar powers vested in the 'National Authority' in the earlier Bill had been opposed by several states.
- One important change in the present Bill is that the responsibility of public servants in cases of breach of command and failure to exercise control over subordinates is applicable only when they are under his or her "direct command".
- The NHRC, at present, is mostly a recommendatory body, as in that when it sends its probe reports to governments, they are only obliged to "forward their comments, including the action taken or proposed to be taken". There is no obligation to act.
- The commission has now been given wide powers, carried forward from the 'National Authority' provision of the 2011 Bill. So under the new Bill, the government is mandated to act on the NHRC's advisories.
- Besides, the NHRC shall observe, monitor and review performance of bureaucrats, and is to act as an appellatory body if there is any discrepancy in maintaining records of relief and rehabilitation of victims.

## Revised wages under the MGNREGA

- A committee set up by the Ministry of Rural Development to revise wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offered suggestions that were likely to iron out long-standing issues relating to disparity in earnings under the scheme.
- Currently, MGNREGA wages are lower than the minimum wages in several States, including in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.
- According to a notification from the Ministry dated 15 October 2013, a new committee had been constituted to "suggest a proper index for revising the MGNREGA wage rates every year, by protecting the wages against inflation."
- A key recommendation was that any State which raised the minimum wages arbitrarily had to bear the extra cost from its own resources. However, this increase would be taken into account once the base index is revised every five years.
- The Committee also recommended that "it would be better to link the wages to an established index rather than trying to create a new one."

## Drinking water initiative by NABARD

- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard), along with the government of Karnataka, will promote water purifying plants throughout the State to provide clean drinking water in rural areas at more affordable rates.

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- The bank wants to set up 600 plants by 2014. At present, there are 200 such plants in the country, including in Dharwad and Chitradurga. The plants have been set up in Maharashtra earlier.
- The plants would be set up under Nabard's Umbrella Programme for Natural Resource Management (UPNRM). After setting up the plant, its maintenance would be handed over to the local community.

## **Panjab University overtakes IITs, JNU in ranking**

- Panjab University has overtaken the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) to become the highest-ranked educational institution of the country in the first-ever ranking of universities in BRICS and emerging economies.
- The 131-year-old university, which happens to be the alma mater of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, emerged 13th in the ranking carried out by *Times Higher Education* magazine. It shares this position with Renmin University of China.
- Indian institutions account for 10 per cent of the list but do not make the cut for the top 10, which is comprised by varsities of China, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey and Russia. Besides the five BRICS countries, universities from 17 other emerging economies were ranked.
- According to a release put out by *Times Higher Education*, China emerged as the higher education superpower among BRICS economies with 23 institutions in the rankings compared to India's 10, South Africa's five, Brazil's four and Russia's two.
- Nine Indian institutions find a spot among the top 50 ranks, with the IITs coming a distant second to Panjab University.
- The six IITs that made it to the rankings are Kharagpur (30), Kanpur (34), Delhi (37), Roorkee (37), Guwahati (46) and Madras (47). IIT-Madras shares its position with Jadavpur University while Aligarh Muslim University stands at 50 and JNU at 57.

## **ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS RESULTS , 2013**

### **DELHI:**

- Sheila Dikshit, Delhi's chief minister for 15 years, resigned after the Congress was routed in assembly elections, with she herself set to lose to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal.
- Dikshit submitted her resignation to Lt. Governor Najeeb Jung as vote count showed that the Congress might not win even a dozen seats in the 70-member assembly. Not surprisingly, the wave of change has started with Delhi witnessing a Congress rout after 15 long years.

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- BJP became the biggest party with most number of seats, with Congress pushed from first to third place by an impressive debut from the anti-corruption Aam Aadmi Party.
- BJP won 31 seats with AAP close behind at 28 seats. Congress managed to grab only 8 seats.
- Delhi Assembly election result was seen as an indicator of the mood of the urban electorate ahead of the general election.

### Mizoram

- Congress got absolute majority in Mizoram where results for the 40-member Legislative Assembly. They won 33 seats out of 40 seats in the state.
- Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla, seeking a fifth term, won the Serchhip seat. He also won from Hrangturzo seat.

### Madhya Pradesh

- The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party government led by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan romped home to a triumphant victory as results for 230-assembly seat showed the BJP returning to power for the third consecutive five-year term.
- The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured 165 seats, zooming past the half-way mark in the 230-member assembly and ensuring a third term as chief minister for Chouhan.
- The Congress was a distant second, bagging only 58 seats. Others emerged victorious in seven places.

### Rajasthan

- The Bharatiya Janata Party on Sunday secured a landslide victory in 2013 Rajasthan Assembly polls, winning more than three-fourth of the total 199 seats for which votes were counted.
- As per the final tally, the Opposition party stormed back to power with a stellar performance, winning 162 seats - a jump of 84 seats from its 2008 tally. In terms of vote share, the party garnered 14 per cent more votes than it secured last time – again a massive surge.
- Anti-incumbency ridden Congress – the ruling party – could manage a meagre 21 seats – a loss of 74 seats from the 2008 numbers. In terms of vote share, it lost the support of its 3 per cent electorate.

### CHATTISGARH

- In Chhattisgarh, Congress was in a neck-and-neck race with the BJP.
- But, riding on the popularity of Chief Minister Raman Singh, BJP managed to defeat Congress. BJP managed to secure 49 seats in the 90-seat assembly. Meanwhile Congress managed to secure 39 seats and remaining two seats were won by independent candidates.

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## INTERNATIONAL

### **Al Qaeda branch claims attack in Yemen**

- An al Qaeda-linked group has claimed responsibility for the attack on Yemen's defence ministry that killed at least 52 people, the country's worst militant assault in 18 months.
- As part of the policy of targetting the operation rooms of pilotless planes, the mujahideen (holy fighters) have heavily struck one of these rooms in the Ministry of Defence headquarters.
- The group is an offshoot of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).
- The US military raised its alert status in the region after the coordinated strikes on Yemen, which is also home to what Washington has called the most active arm of al Qaeda. The security threat is an international concern. The country shares a long border with Saudi Arabia.

### **China, Japan and America face-off**

- The announcement by a Chinese military that any aircraft flying through the newly designated Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea must notify Chinese authorities in advance and follow instructions from its air-traffic controllers. America's response was rapid.
- On November 26th Barack Obama sent two B-52 bombers to fly through the new zone without notifying China. This face-off marks the most worrying strategic escalation between the two countries since 1996, when China's then president, Jiang Zemin, ordered a number of exclusion zones for missile tests in the Taiwan Strait, leading America to send two aircraft-carriers there.
- Plenty of countries establish zones in which they require aircraft to identify themselves, but they tend not to be over other countries' territory. The Chinese ADIZ overlaps with Japan's own air-defence zone. It also includes some specks of rock that Japan administers and calls the Senkaku islands (and which China claims and calls the Diaoyus), as well as a South Korean reef, known as Ieodo.
- The move is clearly designed to bolster China's claims. On November 28th Japan and South Korea sent aircraft into the zone.

### **Mullah Fazlullah returns home to lead insurgency**

- The elusive new chief of the Pakistani Taliban, Mullah Fazlullah, has returned to his homeland from a secret mountain hideout in neighbouring Afghanistan to lead the insurgency, militant and intelligence.

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- Fazlullah, known for his hardline Islamist beliefs and rejection of peace talks with the Pakistani government, was named the leader after Hakimullah Mehsud, his predecessor, was killed in a US drone strike on November 1.
- Hakimullah's death set off a power struggle within the already deeply fractured insurgency, with Fazlullah's extended absence fuelling infighting among the Taliban.
- Nicknamed "Radio Mullah" for his fiery broadcasts in Pakistan's Swat valley, Fazlullah is best known for ordering the assassination of teenage female education activist Malala Yousafzai.
- The Pakistani Taliban are fighting to topple the government and impose Islamist rule in the nuclear-armed nation. Under Hakimullah, the insurgency appeared open to the idea of peace talks. Fazlullah ruled out any negotiations from the day of his appointment and promised a new campaign of shootings and bombings.

## **Thailand Political Crises**

- Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra said that she would "open every door" to find a peaceful solution to the current political crisis, as thousands of protesters took to the streets of the capital seeking to topple her government.
- The violence is the latest twist in a conflict pitting Bangkok's middle class and royalist elite against the mostly poor, rural supporters of Yingluck and her brother, Thaksin Shinawatra, a populist former prime minister who was ousted in a military coup in 2006 and lives in self-imposed exile.
- Reporters said that demonstrators had succeeded in taking down at least one outer layer of the concrete barriers set up by the authorities to defend Government House, Yingluck's office in the heart of Bangkok.
- Thaksin, who won over poor rural and urban voters with populist policies, was convicted in absentia of graft in 2008 but he dismissed the charges as politically motivated. He is widely seen as the power behind Yingluck's government, sometimes holding meetings with the cabinet by webcam.
- The protests have been joined by the opposition Democrats, Thailand's oldest political party. It has not won an election in more than two decades and has lost every national vote for the past 13 years to Thaksin or his allies.

# INDIA AND THE WORLD

## **Madiba's Indian connection**

- While Nelson Mandela was a symbol of the struggle against oppression across the globe, he and his movement always had a very special connection with India.
- A Bharat Ratna awardee in 1990, he is the only non-Indian to receive the honour. He was also given the Nishan e Pakistan in 1992.
- Mahatma Gandhi, who evolved and perfected his technique of Satyagraha in South Africa, was a source of great inspiration to Mandela. On his India visit in 1990, Mandela, when informed of a veteran journalist's 13-year-old daughter, who was his fan, said "Tell her that I was in fact inspired by a man who was born right here in India."
- Mandela used Gandhi's tactics at several points as he went about evolving his own philosophy.
- Mandela kept a diary while in prison (in 1970s), and hid it in the grass to ensure that the wardens do not destroy it. After twelve years in prison with Mandela, another Indian, Mac (Sathyandranath) Maharaj, who was released after 12 years, as opposed to Mandela's 27 years, transcribed his notes and smuggled the account out, which was known to the world on its release in 1976 as 'The Long Walk to Freedom'.

## **India is planning nuclear ties with Japan**

- Japan said that the main purpose of Emperor Akihito's visit to India was to add ballast to the bilateral relationship.
- One of the elements that would add greater depth to the ties would be a civil nuclear agreement.
- India and Japan share the goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons and Parliaments of both countries pay tributes to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- But a section of Japanese opinion, including senior Ministers, wants India to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- India has been averse to this idea and wants to sign a civil nuclear deal with Japan on the basis of its existing strong anti-proliferation credentials.
- Relations with Beijing, faced difficult times recently but the Emperor's visit should not be interpreted as an attempt to check China, said the diplomats.

## **India to help Syria destroy chemical weapons**

- India, an aspirant to next month's Geneva-II talks on Syria, has offered the services of its experts to help in the destruction of Damascus' chemical weapons arsenal and related facilities
- India has also decided to offer a contribution of 1 million dollars for use in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and related facilities by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).
- India has found support from Russia for its participation in an international conference called Geneva-II which seeks to bring together all warring parties, domestic and international, to stabilise Syria.
- India would also offer the services of its experts to be used by the OPCW in the destruction verification activity as well as training slots for personnel participating in the UN/OPCW mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

## **India & Maldives to repair their relationship**

- After almost two years of testy ties, India and Maldives will seek to repair their relationship in the run-up to the visit by the newly elected President, Abdulla Yameen, from December 23 to 25, according to sources in the government.
- The process will begin next week during the visit of Maldives Defence Minister Col. (retd.) Mohamed Nazim when India will formally hand over an indigenously made helicopter for surveillance and domain awareness operations in northern Maldives.
- India has already gifted Maldives an advanced light helicopter (ALH) for its southern most island Addu. This ALH will be for the northern most inhabited island.
- During Mr. Yameen's first overseas visit after taking over as President, both sides would be signing a package of measures to resume projects that seem to have gone on the backburner after Mohd Nasheed was ousted as President in February last year.
- These include the construction of a national police academy, refurbishing of the Indira Gandhi Hospital in Male and setting up a faculty for teaching tourism and hospitality.

## **SCO to play a bigger role in Afghanistan, India**

- India has always held the position that full-scale cooperation by the SCO could be vital for stabilising Afghanistan. Bulk of the SCO's members and observers are Afghanistan's neighbours.
- However, Iran's defiance of the West and the SCO's tendency of trying not to annoy the West led to the organisation playing a more subdued role in Afghanistan.

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- Addressing the SCO Heads of Government Council in Tashkent , Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh felt that the SCO could also play a useful role in promoting trade connectivity in the region and countering terrorism.
- The kind of intervention she envisaged for the SCO in Afghanistan is in common projects and financial commitments.
- India has been an observer country in the SCO since 2005. India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia have expressed their readiness to join Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan as its full members.



## ECONOMY

### **'Ipsos Economic Pulse of the World'**

- Buoyed by healthy farm output and narrowing current account deficit, India is the seventh most economically confident country in the world, a study by global research firm Ipsos has said.
- Saudi Arabia is the most economically confident country, followed by Germany, Sweden, Canada, China and Australia in that order, according to the study.
- India's economic confidence jumped sharply by 11 points to 51 per cent in November from the previous month.
- According to the study 'Ipsos Economic Pulse of the World', India's economic confidence revived substantially due to healthy farm output, a sharp boost in exports and narrowing of current account deficit.
- Saudi Arabia continues to dominate the global ratings of national economies as 85 per cent of respondents in Saudi Arabia are confident about their country's economy, followed by Germany (68 per cent), Sweden (67 per cent), Canada (66 per cent), China (65 per cent) and Australia (64 per cent).
- Three in ten (32 per cent) Indians believe that the local economy which impacts their personal finance is good.

### **ADB to support Flood control programme in Assam**

- Over one million people will benefit from the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-supported flood control programme along the Brahmaputra river, the first tranche of which is likely to be completed by May 2014.
- The \$150 million project to protect the urban and rural areas along the Brahmaputra river in Assam will cover areas of Palasbari-Gumi, Kaziranga and Dibrugarh in the State.
- As part of the project embankments are being built to prevent land erosion along the Brahmaputra, which is the fifth largest river in the world. Frequent floods and erosion displaces a large number of the population in Assam.
- About 7 per cent of the land in the State's 17 districts has been lost because of river erosion over the past 50 years.
- Nearly 23.91 lakh people were affected by floods during 2012 which also damaged about 2.55 lakh hectares of crop areas and claimed 112 lives.

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- The project aims to promote people's livelihoods through a comprehensive Flood and River Erosion Management. The ADB provides soft loans to emerging countries for development projects.

## Current account deficit narrows to 1.2% of GDP

- The Current Account Deficit (CAD) of the country has narrowed down sharply to \$5.2 billion, or 1.2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), for the second quarter — July to September — in the current financial year.
- This was much lower than 5 per cent of the GDP (\$21 billion) recorded in the corresponding period of the last financial year and 4.9 per cent of the GDP in the first quarter of the current fiscal.
- On a Balance of Payments (BoP) basis, merchandise exports increased by 11.9 per cent to \$81.2 billion in the second quarter of 2013-14 on the back of significant growth, especially in the exports of textile and textile products, leather and leather products and chemicals.

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## India's economic agenda for 2020

- Setting a 2020 Perspective Economic Agenda for India requires clarity about the framework within which economic policy choices have to be made.
- There is a wide global consensus today that democracy and competitive market economy provide that framework. Democracy is a system of governance by consent of the people.
- Democracy has become the trend, the accepted system of government globally, and it is spreading worldwide.
- Furthermore, devolved democracies better manage contradictions and conflicts arising out of a heterogeneous society and provide effective feedback through an independent press to enable corrective action by the government.
- It empowers people to question the authorities and make them accountable in an election.
- Moreover, the comparative economic results in East and West Germany, North and South Korea, China before reform and China now, have conclusively proved that a competitive market system driven by incentives is superior to a coercive, state-controlled system, and that transparent democracy is a better system of governance than a closed dictatorship.

## Indian manufacturing activity picks up pace :

- Indian manufacturing returned to growth as a strong rise in orders pushed factories to step up production, a business survey showed, suggesting a slow economic recovery is on its way.
- An expansion in manufacturing can only boost optimism as Asia's third-largest economy grew at a higher-than-expected rate in the three months.
- The HSBC Manufacturing PMI, rose to 51.3 in November from October's 49.6.

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- The PMI index is the highest since March and marks its first time above the watershed level of 50 that divides growth from contraction .
- Offering hope that softness in domestic demand may be leveling off, overall orders grew for the first time in six months despite demand for the country's exports easing off.
- The new orders sub-index rose to 51.9 last month, its highest since April. In October it shrank to 48.9.
- Such strong demand augurs well and will be welcome news for a government losing popularity ahead of an election next year because of slowing growth and stubbornly high inflation.
- The survey pointed to some good news on inflation as well, bringing relief to the Reserve Bank of India, which hiked interest rates by 25 basis points at back-to-back meetings to curb rising prices, taking the policy repo rate to 7.75 percent.

## **Norms for airlines flying abroad to be eased**

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has advocated the abolition of the minimum eligibility criteria for Indian carriers to launch international services and said that the norm is acting as an impediment for the Indian aviation sector.
- According to the regulation, every Indian carrier needs to complete five years of flying in the domestic space and needs to have a fleet of 20 aircraft to launch international operations.
- Meanwhile, the civil aviation ministry has started the process of abolishing the five year/20 aircraft rule.
- The abolition of minimum eligibility for international flying is first on the agenda of civil aviation minister Ajit Singh.
- The abolition of international flying norm, making Air Navigation Services a separate company and creation of an aviation force are the three things to be done before the Lok Sabha elections scheduled to be held in 2014.
- The abolition of this rule will benefit GoAir, which has completed more than five years of operations but does not have a fleet of 20 aircraft yet, and two new airlines that are being launched.

## **RBI begins process to identify too-big-to-fail banks**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has started the process to identify domestic systemically important banks (D-SIBs)—large and highly interconnected financial institutions—whose failures can impact the orderly functioning of the financial system and harm the economy.
- In a separate notification, RBI emphasized the need for stress tests by banks to ascertain the state of the banking system and identify risk elements in the economy.

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- RBI governor Raghuram Rajan has all along been arguing for identification of SIBs, often perceived as institutions too-big-to-fail as a precondition for financial stability, among other issues.
- Similar efforts have been made in major financial markets to safeguard the financial system from any possible crisis situation such as the one in 2008, where large financial institutions faltered due to loss of confidence in the financial system.
- Though foreign banks in India have smaller balance sheets, some of them will be included in the list as they are active in the derivatives market.
- Banks classified as D-SIBs will be subjected to additional capital requirement in the range of 0.2% to 1% of their risk weighted assets.
- The higher capital requirements will be applicable from April 2016 in a phased manner and the process will be completed by April 2019. The names of the banks classified as D-SIBs will be disclosed in August every year, starting from 2015.
- The D-SIBs will be subjected to tighter regulatory measures, including liquidity surcharges, tighter large exposure restrictions and more intensive supervision in the form of higher frequency and higher intensity of on- and off-site monitoring.

## India and its energy needs

- With India expected to become world's third largest energy consumer in seven years, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that market-based pricing and technology are essential for meeting the nation's needs in this regard.
- India, is currently is world's seventh largest energy producer. With oil and gas constituting around 41 % of India's primary energy consumption, India is expected to be the 3rd largest energy consumer by 2020.
- India is currently fourth largest energy consumer behind US, China and Japan.
- To bridge the gap between supply and demand, the government is encouraging domestic and global companies to explore onshore and offshore regions.
- India is also progressively pursuing other options to achieve energy security.
- India, which imports about 80 % of its oil needs and more than half of its natural gas requirement, has market based pricing for crude but sub-market rates for gas.
- It is expected that Asia will continue to occupy the same share in global LNG demand despite its growth being projected to go up by 2 to 3 times the current levels by the year 2020.

## Indian consumers & eco-friendly products

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- A significant percentage of Indian consumers (81%) are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products than their counterparts, reveals a global study by UL, a leader in advancing safety, making them highly conscious about eco-friendly products.
- According to the study, nearly three-quarters (73%) of Indian consumers believe that manufacturers use eco-friendly processes. UL employed an independent research firm to conduct a global quantitative survey among 1,528 consumers and 1,521 manufacturers across five countries: Brazil, China, Germany, India and the United States.
- Indian consumers are driving manufacturers towards producing safer and more eco-friendly products. Consumers clearly desire stringent regulations. In response, Indian manufacturers are increasing their global operations to optimize supply chain practices, embed safety in view of regulatory compliance. They are more proactive now than ever to step up transparency and provide all information about their products to consumers.

## Direct tax collections up by 13 %

- Gross collections from direct taxes, that include personal income tax, corporate taxes and wealth tax, rose by 13.18 per cent to Rs.3.69 lakh crore in the April-November period of this fiscal, government data showed .
- According to the data released by the Finance Ministry here, gross collections from personal income tax jumped by 19.60 per cent to Rs.1.40 lakh crore in the first eight months of the current financial year from Rs.1.17 lakh crore.
- Gross collections from corporate taxes rose to Rs.2.25 lakh crore during the period under review from Rs.2.05 lakh crore recorded in the corresponding period last year, registering a year-on-year increase of 9.66 per cent.
- Sluggish economic growth has negatively impacted the collections from corporate taxes.
- Net direct tax collections were recorded at Rs.3.10 lakh crore in April-November period of current year as compared to Rs.2.71 lakh crore in the same period last year, registering an increase of 14.60 per cent.
- The difference in gross and net collections is due to tax refunds.

## Cabinet note on surplus coal

- The Coal Ministry will move a Cabinet note shortly to finally put in place a policy on disposing surplus coal.
- A three-member panel, headed by Planning Commission member B.K. Chaturvedi, has held the view that captive coal mining players should not be allowed to transfer surplus coal outside the end-use sector which they had been allocated for, and any surplus coal with them should be transferred to either the nearest Coal India Ltd. (CIL) subsidiary or other firms in the same sector facing shortage of coal in linkage coal from CIL.



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- The Power Ministry had conveyed to the committee as well as the Planning Commission that any coal banking system should not lead to profiteering among coal block holders. The government has allocated a total of 218 captive blocks to companies between 1993 and 2011.
- Of these, 47 blocks have been de-allocated. Captive coal-mining companies were expected to produce 100 tonnes by the end of the last five-year Plan period in March 2012.
- There is also a view that the new policy will have to be notified after approval by the Cabinet through an amendment to the Coal Mines Nationalisation Act, 1973, and the existing 170-odd letters of allocation.
- The coal banking proposal will allow companies to transfer coal to another company, where the end-use project has been commissioned before the coal block, and receive the coal at a later stage.

## SPORTS

### Macau Open Grand Prix Gold Title

- P.V. Sindhu continued to take giant strides towards asserting herself as a rising star in Indian badminton by lifting the Macau Open Grand Prix Gold title with a thumping win over Canada's Michelle Li in the summit clash.
- The top-seeded 18-year-old won 21-15, 21-12 in 37 minutes to clinch her second Grand Prix Gold title after the Malaysia Open in May.
- The Indian sensation, who was bestowed the Arjuna award this year, dominated from start to finish in the lopsided encounter against the seventh-seeded Canadian.

### Asian Tour title

- Gaganjeet Bhullar carded 16-under-268 for the week to lift his fifth Asian Tour title with victory at the Indonesia Open.
- Bhullar, who had a forgettable outing at the World Cup of Golf, fired a bogey-free final round to come home the winner. He thus ended up being the wire-to-wire leader from round one till the end. He shot scores of 64 67 69 and 69.
- Another Indian, Jyoti Randhawa claimed fifth place at 11-under-273 while Anirban Lahiri secured tied sixth at 10-under-274 to make it three Indians in the top-6. PGTI member Mohammad Siddikur Rahman of Bangladesh finished with a four-day total of 12-under-272 to bag fourth place.
- Bhullar posted a runner-up finish at the Avantha Masters, a European Tour & Asian Tour co-sanctioned event, earlier this year. This win is expected to push him up on the Asian Tour Order of Merit, where he is currently ranked sixth.

### ICC teams of the year

- India captain MS Dhoni has been named as the skipper of ICC ODI Team of the Year.
- Apart from Dhoni, Ravindra Jadeja and Shikhar Dhawan are the other two Indians in the ODI Team of the Year.
- Dhoni also features in the Test Team of the Year to be captained by England's Alastair Cook.
- Cheteshwar Pujara is the other Indian in the line-up. R Ashwin has been picked as the 12th man.
- Seven countries are represented in the 12-man line-up and only one player - Dhoni - finds a place in the side for the sixth consecutive years.

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- The ICC Champions Trophy 2013-winning captain has also been named as the captain, and will lead the side that also includes Kumar Sangakkara and Lasith Malinga of Sri Lanka, who were members of the ICC ODI Team of the Year 2012.

## ICC LG People's Choice Award 2013

- India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has won this year's ICC LG People's Choice Award. He now becomes only the third cricketer to win this coveted prize after Sachin Tendulkar, who was the first-ever recipient in 2010, and Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara, who won it in 2011 and 2012. Other nominees for this year's LG People's Choice Award were Australia's Michael Clarke, England's Alastair Cook, India's Virat Kohli, and South Africa's AB de Villiers.
- The award, which was introduced at the 2010 LG ICC Awards in Bangalore, was voted upon by close to 188,000 cricket fans around the world, who voted for their favourite player either via [www.lgiccawards.com](http://www.lgiccawards.com) or via Twitter using the hashtag #LGICCAwards.
- The short list was nominated by an elite panel of cricket experts, which is headed by ICC Cricket Committee Chairman and former India captain Anil Kumble.
- Other members of the panel are England's Alec Stewart, New Zealand's Catherine Campbell, Pakistan's Waqar Younis and South Africa's Graeme Pollock.
- The five players were nominated by the panel using the criteria set out by LG and the ICC. This dictated that the nominees should have displayed some of the attributes regarded by LG as being in line with its corporate qualities such as innovation, dynamism, strength in decision-making, performing well under pressure and executing a plan to distinction.

## 2017 Under-17 FIFA World Cup

- India will host the FIFA Under-17 World Cup in 2017. It was decided at the FIFA executive committee meeting held on December 4 and 5 in Brazil.
- India won the hosting rights ahead of Ireland, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and 2010 FIFA World Cup hosts South Africa.
- Legendary Indian footballers were ecstatic about the news. They said that it was good for the future

## IN THE NEWS (PERSONS)

### **Sushma Singh :**

- Sushma Singh, the senior most Information Commissioner, is the next Chief Information Commissioner of India and will succeed Deepak Sandhu, who completes her term.
- The decision on appointing Singh, a former IAS officer, as the next CIC was taken unanimously by a panel comprising Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Sushma Swaraj and Law Minister Kapil Sibal.
- Singh will be the second woman to become CIC after Sandhu, whose term comes to an end.
- Sushma Singh became Information Commissioner on September 23, 2009 in the Central Information Commission. She had retired from IAS on May 31, 2009.
- She is a former Secretary to the Government of India and belongs to the Jharkhand cadre. She had joined IAS in 1972. Singh has served as Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- She has also served in the capacity of Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and also in the Ministry for the Development of the North Eastern Region (DONER).

### **Nelson Mandela:**

- South Africa's first black president and anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela died on 5th of December, 2013. Mr Mandela, 95, led South Africa's transition from white-minority rule in the 1990s, after 27 years in prison. He had been receiving intense home-based medical care for a lung infection after three months in hospital.
- The Nobel Peace Prize laureate was one of the world's most revered statesmen after preaching reconciliation despite being imprisoned for 27 years.

### **TIMELINE : THE LIFE OF NELSON MANDELA**

1918 Born in the Eastern Cape

1943 Joined African National Congress

1956 Charged with high treason, but charges dropped after a four-year trial

1962 Arrested, convicted of incitement and leaving country without a passport, sentenced to five years in prison

1964 Charged with sabotage, sentenced to life

1990 Freed from prison

1993 Wins Nobel Peace Prize

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1994 Elected first black president

1999 Steps down as leader

2001 Diagnosed with prostate cancer

2004 Retires from public life

2005 Announces his son has died of an HIV/Aids-related illness.

## **Raman Singh:**

- Ayurvedic doctor-turned-politician Raman Singh was sworn in as Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh for the third consecutive term recently.
- Singh, the two-term Chief Minister who had an uninterrupted 10-year rule in the tribal-dominated state, earned the 'Chawal Wale Baba' sobriquet for the popularity of his unique pro-welfare schemes including distribution of rice at Rs one and Rs two per kg to families belonging to extremely poor and below poverty lines categories.

## **Arvind Kejriwal:**

- AAP president Arvind Kejriwal was in news for his spectacular performance in Delhi polls.
- His party secured 28 seats, only second to BJP out of 70 seat in the recently conducted State elections.

## **Lal Thanhawla:**

- Four-time chief minister Lal Thanhawla has won from two seats - Serchhip and Hrangturzo in 2013 state election . It is his ninth electoral victory since Mizoram became a Union territory in 1972 and a full-fledged state in 1987.
- A jubilant Lal Thanhawla said that he was confident of a clean majority this time as well and would continue with his developmental work for the people of his state.



## Science & Technology

### **INS Vikramaditya**

- Decks have been cleared for the aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya's passage through the Suez Canal during its maiden voyage from Russia, where it was modernised, to its homeport at Karwar in Karnataka.
- The Suez Canal Authority is understood to have given the go-ahead for the ship to transit through the narrow channel.
- Vikramaditya, now docked at the Russian port of Murmansk for replenishment, was to leave for Lisbon, Portugal, on December 8, escorted by Indian naval frigate Trikhand and fleet tanker Deepak. After a brief halt at Lisbon, it would go through Gibraltar and cutting across the Mediterranean Sea to the Suez Canal before reaching Karwar in mid-January.
- The vessel will have covered 7,500 nautical miles when it reaches Karwar. Besides its Indian crew, the ship is carrying 177 Russian specialists as part of its guarantee team.

### **Next trial of Agni V will be canister-based**

- With the success of the "Missile Ejection Test" (MET), DRDO missile technologists are gearing up to conduct the first canister-based test-firing of 5,000-plus km range nuclear weapons-capable Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) Agni-V in March-April, 2014.
- Missile exit velocity, inter-locking of instruments, sensors functioning and the subsequent sequencing of events were some of the crucial objectives that were met successfully.
- As the missile got ejected from the canister, sensors gave the signal to the computer to commence commands for subsequent events such as igniting the missile's first stage.
- Another top missile technologist, who is closely involved with Agni-V mission, described the MET success as a "very important milestone and a prelude to the main launch."
- It laid the foundation and provided core competence to the DRDO for the canister launch system.
- India joined an elite club of nations that possess the ICBM launch capability when the maiden test-firing of Agni-V was successfully conducted on April 19, 2012.
- Soon after the resounding success of the second Agni V mission on September 15 this year, Avinash Chander, DRDO Director General and Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister, and Director General (Missiles and Strategic Systems) V.G. Sekaran had announced that the next trial would be canister based.

### **Microplastic pollution threat to marine life**

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- Microplastic particles, measuring less than 5mm in size, have been accumulating in the oceans since the 1960s and are now the most abundant form of solid-waste pollution on Earth.
- Two U.K.-based studies published in the journal Current Biology looked at whether these near-invisible, microscopic plastics that sink into mud and sand in high concentrations are causing harm to species at the base of the food chain that ingest this sediment during feeding, and play a key ecological role as a source of food for other animals.
- Using the lugworm as an indicator species, the first study, from the University of Exeter, found that worms feeding in highly contaminated ocean sediment ate less and had lower energy levels.
- The second study, from Plymouth University, has established for the first time that ingesting microplastics can transfer pollutants and additives to worms, reducing health and biodiversity.
- Ingestion of microplastics by species at the base of the food web is a cause for concern as little has been known about its effects until now. Many other organisms that have a similar feeding behaviour, such as starfish, sea cucumbers and fiddler crabs, may be similarly affected.

## New bird flu virus

- Bird flu strain H7N9 emerged in China in March last year, causing infections in about 134 people and killing 43, another novel bird flu strain, H6N1, emerged this May in Taiwan.
- Unlike the H7N9 strain, the latest one has infected just one person, a 20-year-old woman who presented with typical influenza-like symptoms.
- What is puzzling is that she had not come in contact with poultry and did not travel outside the country for up to three months prior to infection. This leaves the transmission pathway inconclusive.
- Yet, there are indications that the source could be poultry as the H6N1 strain has been endemic in poultry in Taiwan since 1972.
- Strengthening the possibility of the source is the prevalence of the virus with the same mutation (G228S substitution in the haemagglutinin) in poultry as the one isolated from the woman.

## Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the gingivo-buccal region

- A team of Indian scientists has identified new genes and new biological pathways that are specific to driving oral cancer associated predominantly with smokeless tobacco consumption in India.
- Further detailed study on these discoveries may lead to finding better therapies for oral cancer, the researchers point out. The findings have been published in the journal Nature Communications.
- The Indian group is part of the International Cancer Genome Consortium (ICGC), an initiative started in 2009, to understand the genomic basis of 50 different types of cancer with clinical and societal importance around the globe.

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- The Indian component is being conducted collaboratively by the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG), Kalyani, West Bengal, and the Tata Memorial Centre (TMC), Mumbai.
- This is the first set of results to come out of the India Project, which has been noted as an important contribution to cancer genomics.
- Oral cancer is the eighth most common cancer worldwide and is the leading cancer among males in India. Unlike in the West, where 65 per cent of oral cancers are tongue cancer, in India, oral cancer predominantly (60 per cent) is of the lining of the mouth, lower gum and other mucosal regions of the oral cavity, termed the Oral Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the gingivo-buccal region (OSCC-GB).
- Tobacco chewing is a major cause of OSCC-GB, which accounts for over half of the oral cancers in India.
- Cancer is known to be associated with changes in the DNA contained in the cells of the tumour tissues. However, these genetic changes — triggered by lifestyle or other environmental factors such as exposure to tobacco, chemicals and radiation — occur only in non-reproductive cells and are called somatic alterations.

## Climate change, challenge for India

- India joined nearly 140 countries in staging a walkout during the recent climate negotiations in Warsaw to oppose the attempt to avoid creating a strong institutional mechanism.
- The term “loss and damage” was introduced into international climate negotiations by small island nations and least developed countries in Cancun in 2010, and is now formally a part of the language of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- As a legal concept, it conveys the historical liability for climate change that is largely borne by the rich countries of the world.
- During the past century-and-a-half or so, carbon has been mined in enormous quantities from the depths of the earth and burned in engines generating vast amounts of goods and services while releasing about two trillion tonnes of carbon dioxide, much of which remains in the atmosphere today.
- Developed regions such as the United States, Europe and Japan are responsible for more than two-thirds of the stock of carbon dioxide, with the remaining portion due to India, China and the rest of the developing world.
- Climate change is expected to cause severe droughts in some parts of the world and flooding in others, and coastal erosion and an increased frequency of extreme weather events such as cyclones, tornadoes, storm surges and heatwaves.

## Oldest-known ‘human’ DNA decoded in Spain

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- Anthropologists have said they had decoded the oldest DNA ever found in the human family, extracted from a 400,000-year-old thigh bone found in a pit in Spain.
- The feat expands knowledge of human genetics by some 300,000 years, they said, but also suggests the odyssey of Man's evolution may have been more convoluted than thought.
- The bone was dug up at a presumed burial site dubbed the Sima de los Huesos ("Pit of Bones"), preserved by a deep subterranean chill in Spain's northern Sierra de Atapuerca highlands.

## BURNING TOPICS

### **A retrograde decision on section 377**

(Courtesy: THE HINDU)

The Supreme Court's retrograde decision to overturn the 2009 Delhi High Court verdict that decriminalised gay sex has enthroned medieval prejudice and dealt a body blow to liberal values and human rights. Through its path-breaking judgment in Naz Foundation, the Delhi High Court had laid the foundation for "reading down" and eventually amending Section 377 to decriminalise consensual sex among adults irrespective of gender. While the Union government too came around to the High Court's view, a politically wary establishment left it to the Supreme Court to decide on the penal provision. In the result, Section 377 — which punishes "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" — is now back in force and hangs over the heads of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT). It was Parliament's prerogative to amend Section 377 in tune with the social circumstances, declared the court — in a show of restraint that is uncharacteristic of its attitude in recent times. The court has stepped in wherever the executive had failed and has not hesitated to read into the constitutionally enumerated fundamental rights to life and to equality an expansive set of human rights including the right to education, the right to work with dignity and the right of prisoners to humane treatment. That is all the more reason why it should not shy away from correcting a centuries-old law and an outdated mind-set that offend against basic rights and human dignity.

Changes in law have come about both by legislation and through the judiciary's constitutional interpretation. The Supreme Court bench has shut the door to the judicial route to bringing the law in line with fundamental human rights. It is strange that a decision involving a major constitutional issue and the hard-won rights of large sections of the socially oppressed should have been decided by a two-member bench rather than by a larger Constitutional Bench. Whether a judicial correction is still possible in the near future is a moot question. The legislative route to decriminalising gay sex would seem to be problematic in this election season both because the issue may not be accorded priority and also because it may be difficult to forge a political agreement. Barring a sudden dawning of a humane sense of fairness all around, Section 377 is here to stay in the medium term with all its horrific consequences. If harassment by law enforcement agencies drives sections of the LGBT community underground and makes them terrified of disclosing their orientation, it would have serious public health consequences as well, particularly in the fight against AIDS. Above all, it is a test of humane values, fairness and dignity in a society. It is important that institutions of the state acknowledge the importance of these values.

### **One problem is The Dynasty**

(Courtesy: INDIAN EXPRESS)

**Congress's secular nationalist narrative has lost its vigour. Internal elections must be brought back even if they oust its first family.**

However one wishes to cut the statistical cloth, the recent state elections have delivered a resounding defeat to the Congress party. Of course, there are other issues that have emerged, too: whether the Aam Aadmi Party has the potential to extend its reach beyond Delhi and the extraordinary implications that might have for the nation's politics; how Narendra Modi's charisma was unable to turn anti-incumbency into a BJP win



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in Delhi and why the margin of BJP victory was so narrow in Chhattisgarh; and, finally, why the BSP got nearly wiped out in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, in each of which it had established a promising foothold.

There are at least two large and noteworthy conclusions. First, India has yet again watched a remarkable festival of democracy. Turnouts rose, a new party emerged, the Maoists were unable to disrupt elections in Chhattisgarh, and no losing party questioned the integrity of the verdict, as was customary in India in the 1980s. For all its flaws, India's democracy is by now deeply institutionalised. There are legitimate questions about how to improve the quality of Indian democracy, but there is no threat to the existence of democracy per se, a historically unique phenomenon at a low level of national income.

But the bigger conclusion, from an immediate perspective, is the abysmal performance of the Congress. For the party, it can hardly be a consolation that relative to 2008, its vote share went up in MP and Chhattisgarh (and it won Manipur). The more politically salient point is that in MP and Chhattisgarh, where the BJP has been ruling, it could not create an anti-incumbency wave, whereas its own incumbents in Delhi and Rajasthan were virtually decimated.

## **Co-opetition in Telecom Sector**

(Courtesy : BUSINESS LINE)

The coming together of competitors' isn't always bad for customers. The announcement of a comprehensive telecom infrastructure sharing agreement by Bharti Airtel and Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio Infocomm is a win-win for them as well as consumers. The two groups, not known to enjoy the most amicable of business relations, have signed a deal to use each other's cellular base station towers, optic fibre cable networks and other infrastructure. For Reliance Jio, access to Bharti's nationwide network of nearly 1.5 lakh towers (including that of its joint venture, Indus Towers) and over 1.75 lakh route-km of optic fibre will expedite the launch of its high-speed internet and telecom services. Faster rollout apart, sharing saves on the cost of building the entire infrastructure oneself. For Bharti, the main benefit is the extra income earned from leasing out its telecom assets.

Consumer interest is well served if relying on existing infrastructure reduces the lead time for Reliance Jio to start offering services. Also, the cost savings from not having to lay fresh cables or setting up mobile towers can be passed on to consumers. Finally, a lot of energy of telecom operators is now consumed in negotiating rights-of-way with public authorities or roof rents with landlords, which detracts from spending more time to attend to the need of consumers. This would be possible if all shareable telecom infrastructure were owned by a separate company or companies. Pooling of resources by operators for infrastructure is good, but only the second best solution. As the experience with Indus Towers shows, such sharing of assets doesn't discourage competition or affect consumer interest. This company, the world's largest mobile tower owner with 1.12 lakh sites, is jointly owned by Bharti, Vodafone and Idea Cellular. All three compete strongly in the marketplace.

Given the high capex costs, the sharing of towers and other infrastructure has been very much a part of the telecom business model in the U.S. and Europe for many years now. The agreement between Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio – similar to that inked by the latter with Anil Ambani's Reliance Communications – underlines the importance of saving costs in a highly capital intensive sector. But it also has lessons for the Government. The companies with real shareable infrastructure today are Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL), RailTel and Power Grid Corporation, which together have almost 7 lakh route-km of fibre on the

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ground – much more than what any private operator has or intends to lay. The time has come for the Government to think in terms of getting its own companies to share infrastructure, with private operators as well. This will not only avoid the waste of parallel networks, but also ensure that the likes of BSNL have a bigger and more useful role than competing with private players in the delivery of services.

## **The Shift to Consumer Driven Agriculture**

(Courtesy: THE ECONOMIC TIMES)

How responsive is agriculture to consumer demand? More than any other industry in the world. Agriculture only appears to be slow, traditional and caught in a time warp. In reality, it is more agile than manufacturing.

When consumers rush to buy any product, and prices rise, they clearly signal a business opportunity. A company usually needs a couple of years to put up a factory of any significant size for this new demand. Farmers take six months. The moment they realise a crop has profit potential, more area goes under it.

A classic Indian example is guar. In 2011, when American drilling companies discovered money in shale gas, Indian farmers immediately understood guar's golden moment had come. As demand trebled, guar gum became India's most valuable commodity export, beating jewellery. American companies spent \$2.5 billion that year on this small neglected bean with an outsized role in shale gas extraction.

By 2012, guar production had doubled. Traditionally, guar was grown on malnourished, arid farms with little or no investment by the farmer. Today, this 'orphan crop' is planted in irrigated areas, displacing grains and cotton. Guar has made geography history. News of windfall gains in Rajasthan and Gujarat spread like wildfire and farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana, Punjab and Chhattisgarh jumped onto the bandwagon.

What makes the guar story truly remarkable is the complete absence of any government policy, subsidy or even a minimum support price to encourage farmers. Agri-business was equally quick to seize the opportunity. Capacity to manufacture guar gum and powder was rapidly scaled up. More than 100 companies sprang up around Jodhpur and grabbed 40% of the \$3-billion export market. No one waited for an SEZ, an export sop or an Apeka scheme. Entrepreneurs were pumping in capital because the profits in 2012 were 10 times more than those in 2011. In Pakistan, guar and guar products export was just \$29 million in 2006-07. It shot up to a record \$152 million in 2011-12.

Farming doesn't have entry barriers like industry. So abnormal profits are short-lived. Guar is no longer enjoying triple-digit price increases because supply has caught up with demand. The consumer too is becoming wiser. Halliburton, an oil company, is reportedly spending \$800,000 annually in Texas on guar research. Food ingredient companies, worsted by drilling companies in the scramble for supply, are searching for chemical substitutes. The US-based Guar Global Ltd is using technology to help Rajasthan farmers increase yields and make the supply chain more efficient. These are all signs of a maturing market and sustainable prosperity.

But those crazy profits are not the real story. Guar shows how intelligently Indian farmers were tracking consumer demand. Easier access to real-time information - mobiles, internet, futures trading - allowed them to pick up early signs of a boom. Guar also shows the future of Indian agriculture. More farms will shift to

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demand-driven agriculture. They will grow more crops people value highly, be it guar, onions, cotton, fruits, or maize. They won't grow a crop and then go seeking a buyer. They will analyse what people want to buy and then decide what to grow.

The success of demand-driven agriculture rides on one crucial factor: the price signal from buyer to seller. If the price signal is clear, farmers will decide well. If signals are distorted by market aberrations, politics or cartels, farmers will remain victims of circumstance. But if we can get the price signals right for all crops, demand-driven agriculture can change the lives of 600 million Indians.

Their finances will strengthen. Consumers want variety, convenience, affordability. Farmers will invest in technology that creates this extra value. Since the stakes are higher, farmers will use their computer, social networking and communications skills to find multiple marketing channels for capturing higher margins and mitigating risk. Both consumers and farmers will demand more transparency. Eventually, both will come out ahead.

It is a myth that agriculture is a slow-moving behemoth that requires government support and large subsidies to move with the times. All that farmers today need is a phone signal and a price signal.

## MCQs

### :: NATIONAL ::

Q i) The 'Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill was passed in the last parliament session and is on its way of becoming a law.

ii) Article 371-D, which was inserted through 32nd Amendment in 1973, empowers the President to issue orders from time to time providing for equitable opportunities for people belonging to different parts of the state.

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

Ans: b

Q. i) The Group of Ministers (GoM) has cleared the draft bill for the creation of a state of Telangana by bifurcating Andhra Pradesh.

ii) The rural tele-density of India is one of the highest in the world at present.

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

Ans: a

## **:: INDIA AND THE WORLD ::**

Q i) ADIZ areas are not territorial claims, but defined zones in international airspace within which countries monitor aircraft heading towards their territorial airspace, which extends 12 nautical miles from coastlines.

ii) China, which successfully launched its first ever mission to land an unmanned spacecraft on the Moon, has made it clear that it has no interest in space cooperation with India .

**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

**Ans: b**

## **:: INTERNATIONAL ::**

Q i) Thailand Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra has recently dissolved Parliament in the face of mass demonstrations against her government that showed no sign of being called off.

ii) North Korea is the second country to have expanded its Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in an apparent response to China's November 23 decision to set up its first such zone over disputed parts of the East China Sea.

**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

**Ans: a**

Q. i) U.N. sent a special envoy to Sri Lanka to examine the status of people rendered homeless by the country's three-decade civil war.

ii) Drones, known for unleashing Hellfire missile attacks in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, may be delivering a much softer range of products in the future — products sold by Google.

**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

Ans: a

## **:: SCIENCE AND TECH ::**

Q. i) With the success of the “Missile Ejection Test” (MET), DRDO missile technologists are gearing up to conduct the first canister-based test-firing of 5,000-plus km range nuclear weapons-capable Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) Agni-V in March-April, 2014.

ii) Pharmacokinetics is the metabolism of the drugs in only children younger than two years.

**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

Ans: a

## **:: IN THE NEWS ::**

Q. i) India captain and wicketkeeper M.S. Dhoni has won the ICC’s LG People’s Choice Award for 2013.

ii) Dhoni is the second Indian to win this special category award after Sachin Tendulkar.

**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

Ans: d

Q i) Late Nelson Mandela, has been awarded the 2013 UN Human Rights Prize, in recognition of his outstanding achievement in human rights.

ii) The prize is awarded every three years .

**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

**Ans: d**

## **:: ECONOMY ::**

**Q. i)** The trade deal reached at the Bali Ministerial Conference is bound to benefit India's exports and shift the focus away from preferential trade arrangements.


**ii)** Air India has finalised a deal to sell its five wide-body Boeing 777 aircraft to Etihad Airways by signing an agreement with the Abu Dhabi-based carrier.

**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

**Ans: c**





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