Weekly
Current Affairs

News From:
17th Feb to 23rd Feb 2014

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Weekly Current Affairs Update For IAS Exam

17th February 2014 TO 23rd February 2014

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What made
Gandhi
Gandhi.

SOUL

NATIONAL PORTAL OF INDIA

A GLINT OF INDIA
(Courtesy: http://india.gov.in)

History of Indian Tricolor

"A flag is a necessity for all nations. Millions have died for it. It is no doubt a kind of idolatry which would be a sin to destroy. For, a flag represents an Ideal The unfurling of the Union Jack evokes in the English breast sentiments whose strength it is difficult to measure. The Stars and Stripes mean a world to the Americans. The Star and the Crescent will call forth the best bravery in Islam."

"It will be necessary for us Indians Muslims, Christians Jews, Parsis, and all others to whom India is their home-to recognize a common flag to live and to die for." - **Mahatma Gandhi**

Every free nation of the world has its own flag. It is a symbol of a free country. The National Flag of India was designed by Pingali Venkayyaand and adopted in its present form during the meeting of Constituent Assembly held on the 22 July 1947, a few days before India's independence from the British on 15 August, 1947. It served as the national flag of the Dominion of India between 15 August 1947 and 26 January 1950 and that of the Republic of India thereafter. In India, the term "tricolour" refers to the Indian national flag.

The National flag of India is a horizontal tricolor of deep saffron (kesari) at the top, white in the middle and dark green at the bottom in equal proportion. The ratio of width of the flag to its length is two to three. In the centre of the white band is a navy blue wheel which represents the chakra. Its design is that of the wheel which appears on the abacus of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka. Its diameter approximates to the width of the white band and it has 24 spokes.

Evolution of the Tricolour

It is really amazing to see the various changes that our National Flag went through since its first inception. It was discovered or recognized during our national struggle for freedom. The evolution of the Indian National Flag sailed through many vicissitudes to arrive at what it is today. In one way it reflects the political developments in the nation. Some of the historical milestones in the evolution of our National Flag involve the following:

The **first national flag** in India is said to have been hoisted on August 7, 1906, in the Parsee Bagan Square (Green Park) in Calcutta now Kolkata. The flag was composed of three horizontal strips of red, yellow and green.

The **second flag** was hoisted in Paris by Madame Cama and her band of exiled revolutionaries in 1907 (according to some inl9OS). This was very similar to the first flag except that the top strip had only one lotus but seven stars denoting the Saptarishi. This flag was also exhibited at a socialist conference in Berlin.

The **third flag** went up in 1917 when our political struggle had taken a definite turn. Dr. Annie Besant and Lokmanya Tilak hoisted it during the Home rule movement. This flag had five red and four green horizontal strips arranged alternately, with seven stars in the saptarishi configuration super-imposed on them. In the

left-hand top corner (the pole end) was the Union Jack. There was also a white crescent and star in one corner.

During the session of the All India Congress Committee which met at Bezwada in 1921 (now Vijayawada) an Andhra youth prepared a flag and took it to Gandhiji. It was made up of two colours-red and green-representing the two major communities i.e. Hindus and Muslims. Gandhiji suggested the addition of a white strip to represent the remaining communities of India and the spinning wheel to symbolise progress of the Nation.

The year 1931 was a landmark in the history of the flag. A resolution was passed adopting a tricolor flag as our national flag. This flag, the forbear of the present one, was saffron, white and green with Mahatma Gandhi's spinning wheel at the center. It was, however, clearly stated that it bore no communal significance and was to be interpreted thus.

On July 22, 1947, the Constituent Assembly adopted it as Free India National Flag. After the advent of Independence, the colours and their significance remained the same. Only the Dharma Charkha of Emperor Asoka was adopted in place of the spinning wheel as the emblem on the flag. Thus, the tricolour flag of the Congress Party eventually became the tricolour flag of Independent India.

Colours of the Flag:

In the national flag of India the top band is of Saffron colour, indicating the strength and courage of the country. The white middle band indicates peace and truth with Dharma Chakra. The last band is green in colour shows the fertility, growth and auspiciousness of the land.

The Chakra:

This Dharma Chakra depicted the "wheel of the law" in the Sarnath Lion Capital made by the 3rd-century BC Mauryan Emperor Ashoka. The chakra intends to show that there is life in movement and death in stagnation.

Flag Code

On 26th January 2002, the Indian flag code was modified and after several years of independence, the citizens of India were finally allowed to hoist the Indian flag over their homes, offices and factories on any day and not just National days as was the case earlier. Now Indians can proudly display the national flag any where and any time, as long as the provisions of the Flag Code are strictly followed to avoid any disrespect to the tricolour. For the sake of convenience, Flag Code of India, 2002, has been divided into three parts. Part I of the Code contains general description of the National Flag. Part II of the Code is devoted to the display of the National Flag by members of public, private organizations, educational institutions, etc. Part III of the Code relates to display of the National Flag by Central and State governments and their organisations and agencies.

There are some rules and regulations upon how to fly the flag, based on the 26 January 2002 legislation. These include the following:

The Do's:

- The National Flag may be hoisted in educational institutions (schools, colleges, sports camps, scout camps, etc.) to inspire respect for the Flag. An oath of allegiance has been included in the flag hoisting in schools.

- A member of public, a private organization or an educational institution may hoist/display the National Flag on all days and occasions, ceremonial or otherwise consistent with the dignity and honour of the National Flag.

- Section 2 of the new code accepts the right of all private citizens to fly the flag on their premises.

The Don'ts

- The flag cannot be used for communal gains, drapery, or clothes. As far as possible, it should be flown from sunrise to sunset, irrespective of the weather.

- The flag cannot be intentionally allowed to touch the ground or the floor or trail in water. It cannot be draped over the hood, top, and sides or back of vehicles, trains, boats or aircraft.

- No other flag or bunting can be placed higher than the flag. Also, no object, including flowers or garlands or emblems can be placed on or above the flag. The tricolour cannot be used as a festoon, rosette or bunting.

The Indian National Flag represents the hopes and aspirations of the people of India. It is the symbol of our national pride. Over the last five decades, several people including members of armed forces have ungrudgingly laid down their lives to keep the tricolour flying in its full glory.

Ministry of External affairs

Joint Statement on India- Maldives Bilateral Talks
(Courtesy: http://www.mea.gov.in)

- The Minister of External Affairs of India, H.E. Mr. Salman Khurshid paid an official visit to Maldives on 20 February 2014, coinciding with his participation in the 35th Inter-Summit Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers, at the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives, Ms. Dunya Maumoon.

- Bilateral talks between the two governments were held on 20 February 2014 in a warm and friendly atmosphere, reaffirming the close and cordial relations shared between the two countries. Minister Salman Kurshid paid a courtesy call on H.E. Mr. Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives.

- The External Affairs Minister of India was assisted at the bilateral talks by Foreign Secretary Smt. Sujatha Singh, High Commissioner of India to the Maldives Shri Rajeev Shahare; Joint Secretary (SM&IOR), Smt. Suchitra Durai, Joint Secretary (EAMO) Shri Sunjay Sudhir, Deputy High Commissioner, Shri Sanjay Rana, Director (EAMO) Shri Vipul and other officials from the Ministry of External Affairs and the High Commission of India in Malé.

- The Foreign Minister of Maldives was assisted at the bilateral talks by Foreign Secretary, Dr. Ali Naseer Mohamed, Deputy Minister, Ms. Fathimath Inaya, Deputy Minister, Mr. Ali Hameed, Permanent Secretary, Mr. Hassan Shifau, Joint Secretary, Ms. Aishath Liusha Zahir, Director, Ms. Farzana Zahir and other officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- Maldives expressed deep satisfaction over President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's successful State visit to India from 1-4 January 2014 at the invitation of the Hon'ble President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee which has further strengthened the long-standing special and close relationship that exists between the two countries. The two sides reviewed the status of implementation of the agreements reached during the State Visit of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. In this regard, they recalled the Joint Statement dated 2 January 2014 issued on the occasion of the State Visit of President of Maldives to India and reiterated their commitment to fully implement it. Issues pertaining to bilateral, regional and multilateral developments were also discussed. There was a convergence of views on all these issues between India and Maldives.

- The two sides reiterated their commitment to work together to promote democracy, development and mutual respect of each other's sovereignty and peaceful co-existence and to contribute to peace, prosperity and security in the Indian Ocean region and South Asia. India noted with appreciation President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's statement that security in the Indian Ocean region is vital to the security of India and Maldives.

- Maldives appreciated the action taken by India regarding removal of the visa requirement for Maldivian nationals for visits to India for medical treatment in addition to tourism as well as doing

away with the requirement of two-month gap between successive visits on tourist visa. The two sides recalled their commitment to address all issues related to welfare of each other nationals, including speedy provision of consular services, on a priority basis.

- In the context of the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development between India and Maldives, signed in November 2011, and their agreement to establish the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) as per Article 9 of the said agreement, the two sides agreed to work towards holding the first meeting of the JCC in the second half of 2014 on a mutually convenient date and venue.

- During the visit, the External Affairs Minister of India formally handed over the building of the India-Maldives Friendship Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies. India has constructed this Faculty Building at a cost of US$11 million. The Minister said that India would continue to remain engaged with the Faculty, including through deputation of experts. The External Affairs Minister also handed over a naval Landing Craft to the Government of Maldives and laid a foundation stone for a new building for the Ministry of Defence, to be constructed with Indian assistance. The Maldivian side appreciated the Indian assistance in building capacity in the Maldives and in creating meaningful infrastructure in the field of education, defence, health etc. The Maldivian side also conveyed that they would send the faculty members for courses and training programmes in India with a view to further enriching their capacity and skill levels.

- Indian side informed the Maldivian side of its agreement to continue supplying essential goods to Maldives. Maldivian side expressed appreciation for resumption of export of stone aggregates. Indian side also informed steps taken with regard to the Maldivian request for import of petroleum products, including diesel, petrol and aviation fuel from Southern India. In this regard, it was informed that the Mangalore Refinery & Petrochemicals Ltd. has agreed, in principle, to export these petroleum products to Maldives on favourable terms.

- The Maldivian side appreciated the work being done by the Indian companies in Maldives and assured their full support for expediting the implementation of the projects being undertaken by them. Both sides reiterated their agreement to consider a Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement at the earliest.

- The two sides agreed to continue working together closely to implement in full the various agreements reached during the State Visit of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom to enhance their bilateral cooperation.

- The Indian side expressed its appreciation for efforts made by Maldives to host the SAARC Inter-Summit Council of Ministers Meeting. In this regard, the Government of Maldives appreciated the continued support of the Government of India to Maldives as the Chair of SAARC.

- The two sides also discussed reform of the United Nations, including expansion of the Security Council in both permanent and non-permanent categories so as to better reflect contemporary geo-political realities and revitalization of the UN General Assembly. Maldives reiterated its support for India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded and reformed UN Security Council.

India reiterated its support for Maldives' candidature for non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council for the 2019-2020 term. Maldives also assured India of its support for India's candidature for the non-permanent seat of the UNSC for 2021-2022 term.

- The External Affairs Minister of India thanked the Maldivian side for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to him and members of the delegation during their stay in Maldives. He invited Foreign Minister H.E. Ms. Dunya Maumoon to undertake a visit to India.

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Planning Commission of India

Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojna

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

Background

Balanced economic growth has been one of the prime objectives of planning. In this regard, successive reduction in regional disparities has been adopted as an appropriate strategy for development. In accordance with the same, Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana (RSVY), a special program was launched by the Planning Commission in the year 2004 with the objectives of removing the barriers to growth and improving the quality of life of the people.

RSVY had three components, namely, (a) Backward Districts Initiative component; (b) Special Plan for Bihar; and (c) Special Plan for the undivided Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput (KBK) districts of Orissa. The Backward Districts Initiative was initiated with the main objective of putting in place programs and policies which would improve the quality of life of the people in the 147 selected backward districts spread over 27 States of the country. The initiative specially aimed at addressing the problems of low agricultural productivity, unemployment and critical gaps in physical and social infrastructure in the selected districts. AMS Consulting was commissioned to conduct the evaluation study of the Backward Districts Initiative component of the RSVY.

Objectives

The core objective of the study was to draw lessons with regard to the processes and outputs of the Backward Districts Initiative of the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojna (RSVY), so that the same can be applied in the future programs. As per the ToR, the specific objectives were —

1. To evaluate the financial & physical progress of the schemes under the program

2. To study the role of people & people's organizations in planning, implementation and monitoring of the schemes under the program

3. To assess the status of achievement of the objectives of the program, that is, to assess the extent of benefits accrued to the target groups/areas

4. To analyze the effectiveness of the administrative & implementing systems for drawing lessons to design future schemes

Overall Impact : Based on different findings of the physical verification of the various interventions, in-depth discussions with the State/district/block-level functionaries, officials of the line departments and the beneficiaries, it can be said that the scheme has unarguably had an overall positive impact in terms of

realizing its objectives and has made a significant contribution in the overall development of the districts/states.

The various RSVY interventions in agriculture and allied sectors have led to significant increase in agricultural productivity. In view of the majority of the population living in the rural areas, RSVY has had a direct bearing in improving their quality of life.

Interventions for enhancing the rural connectivity have been found to be the next most important step in directly addressing the issue of backwardness. Needless to say, the interventions related to other sectors (animal husbandry, horticulture, forestry & soil conservation, electricity, drinking water, etc.) have also made significant contributions.

Lessons Learnt

It needs no emphasis that the strategies aimed at addressing regional imbalance should be formulated with due stress on their incentive effects. When special dispensations are offered to backward areas, care must be taken to ensure that they achieve the desired outcomes besides promoting self-reliance. In order to achieve the objectives and goals of any development scheme, it is essential that its strengths are sustained and consolidated, and that the shortcomings are minimized through applying the lessons learned. The following discussion should be viewed in this context.

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NATIONAL EVENTS

Welfare of ex-servicemen

- Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh has recently promised to pursue the "one rank, one pension" demand of ex-servicemen.

- He said his government was committed to welfare of every section of society irrespective of region and religion, and had adopted the policy of zero-tolerance towards corruption.

- According to the CM , the 13th Finance Commission had grossly underestimated the committed liabilities of the state which "has adversely affected the development". The expenditure on salary was capped at 35 per cent of revenue expenditure and liability on account of interest payment and pension was also grossly underestimated.

Graft cases on IAS officers

- A single-window clearance system has been started by the government to avoid inordinate delays in dealing with corruption cases related to Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers.

- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has also come up with a checklist for authorities handling corruption cases involving bureaucrats and sought mandatory compliance with the same as part of the new system.

- As many as 4,737 IAS officers occupy various state and central posts in the country.

- Inordinate and inexplicable delays in the conduct of disciplinary proceedings are seen to vitiate the exercise, sometimes leading to litigation.

Relief to Rajiv Gandhi killers'

- In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court has granted relief to the three convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case — Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan — by commuting their death sentence into life term on the grounds of inordinate delay in disposal of their mercy petitions by the President.

- A three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice P. Sathasivam rejected the contention of the Centre that the three convicts did not deserve any mercy as they never showed remorse for the killing of the former Prime Minister and they enjoyed their prison life.

- Considering the fact that the convicts were languishing jail for nearly 23 years, the Bench also gave a ray of hope for their release by saying that the State government could exercise its remission powers under Section 432 and 433 and following the due procedure in law.

- In May 2012, the apex court had transferred to itself the writ petitions filed by three convicts in the Madras High Court challenging the rejection of their clemency plea by the former President Pratibha Patil after 11 years. The High Court on August 30, 2011 stayed their execution.

Modernisation of 1.55 lakh post offices

- Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said in his interim Budget speech that Rs.4,909 crore was being spent on modernisation of all 1.55 lakh post offices, and the project would be completed by 2015.

- In the budget estimates for 2014-15, of the total plan outlay of Rs. 800 crore, Rs. 506 crore has been allocated for information technology induction in and modernisation of postal operations.

- Approved by the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs in November 2012, the modernisation has to be implemented through eight projects. All rural post offices will be provided with handheld devices for financial transactions, a solar panel for charging it, a biometric reader for immediate identification and a thermal printer.

'Mehendi Lagao' campaign

- In an attempt to strike a chord with women voters ahead of the general election, the woman's wing of Jharkhand Bharatiya Janata Party has launched a Mehendi Lagao (apply henna) campaign in the pilgrim town of Deoghar.

- It is a door-to-door campaign and mehendi is applied in the form of lotus, the party symbol, on the palms of women voters since last week to garner support for the prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi," Mahila Morcha president Usha Pandey said. The mehendi campaign would continue across the State under the supervision of district committees.

Juvenile justice law for Muslims

- The Supreme Court has said that Muslims can adopt a child under the juvenile justice law as its enforcement could not be impeded by the Muslim personal law.

- The apex court bench headed by Chief Justice P Sathasivam said that the rules framed under juvenile justice law were an enabling provision which is applicable to all religions and communities and the same could not be frustrated by personal religious beliefs.

- The court said this on a petition by a social activist Shabnam Hashmi who had sought the framing of guidelines by the adoption of children by the people belonging to all religions and communities.

Odiya to be the sixth "classical language''

- Odiya became the sixth language of the country to get "classical language'' status after the Union Cabinet conceded a long-pending demand for putting it in the same league as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

- Odiya is billed as the first language from the Indo-Aryan linguistic group and the case for making it a classical language was also premised on the fact that it has no resemblance to Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali and Telugu. The proposal was moved by the Culture Ministry.

- Once a language is declared classical, it gets financial assistance for setting up a centre of excellence for the study of that language and also opens up an avenue for two major awards for scholars of eminence. Besides, the University Grants Commission can be requested to create – to begin with at least in Central Universities – a certain number of professional chairs for classical languages for scholars of eminence in the language.

- The criteria for declaring a language as classical mandates high antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1,500-2,000 years, a body of ancient literature/texts which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers and a literary tradition that is original and not borrowed from another speech community. Also since the classical language and literature is distinct from the modern, there can also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

7,200 km of new national highways

- The government decided to convert 7,200 km of state roads into national highways.

- With this the total length of the state highways converted into National Highways during the UPA regime would reach about 17,000 km.

- About 10,000 km of state highways were declared national highways during the last 10 years.

- These roads are spread across states including Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh besides bordering areas such as Leh and Laddakh regions.

- The present length of the National Highways in the country is about 80,000 km.

Plea to dissolve Assembly of Delhi

- The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the Aam Aadmi Party's plea seeking a direction to the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve Delhi Assembly and hold fresh polls along with Lok Sabha elections.

- The bench headed by Chief Justice P. Sathasivam said that it will hear the petition on February 24.

- The joint petition filed on the basis of newspaper reports and documents available in public domain by AAP and Saurabh Bhardwaj, who was the Transport Minister in Kejriwal Cabinet, challenged the decision to impose President's rule in Delhi on the recommendation of Lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung alleging it was done to protect Congress leaders and former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit from corruption charges.

- It contended that the February 16 order imposing President's rule was with a motive to frustrate the ongoing investigation in those corruption cases in which FIR has been lodged by the Arvind Kejriwal government.

- The petition has said the order to impose President's rule was "illegal, arbitrary and in violation" of Article 14 of the Constitution as after the resignation of Arvind Kejriwal government neither BJP nor Congress were in a position to form the government and they had already expressed their unwillingness in this regard.

- The petition has said that imposition of the President's rule has denied the citizens of Delhi their democratic right to have an elected popular government.

RaGa milk stall

- Congress activists launched a RaGa milk booth in in Bhopal , to counter the Modi tea kiosk programmes the BJP has launched nationwide.

- Led by leaders Monu Saxena and Manoj Shukla, Congressmen offered steaming milk to autorickshaw drivers and pedestrians in paper cups with pictures of their party's Vice President Rahul Gandhi.

- The BJP has had similar programmes at railway stations in Madhya Pradesh, which saw senior party leaders distribute tea along with campaign paraphernalia is in support of their PM candidate Narendra Modi. Mr. Modi has also started "Chai pe Charcha" interactions with voters at tea stalls to project himself as a champion of common people.

- The RaGa milk stall here however is a local campaign by former youth Congressmen in Bhopal.

President's rule in Andhra Pradesh

- Two days after Parliament approved the division of Andhra Pradesh, Congress president Sonia Gandhi set in motion internal consultations on the creation of separate party units for Telangana and Seemandhra.

- After Kiran Kumar Reddy resigned as Chief Minister, the Congress discussed the option of forming a government with a Chief Minister from the Seemandhra region, but at the time of writing, it looked unlikely.

- The Congress's top priority is either to persuade the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) to merge with it or forge an electoral alliance. Of the 17 seats in Telangana, the Congress currently holds 10 .

Whistleblowers' Protection Bill

- A Bill to set up a regular mechanism to encourage persons to disclose information on corruption or wilful misuse of power by public servants, including Ministers, was passed by the Rajya Sabha.

- The Whistleblowers' Protection Bill also seeks to provide for "adequate protection to persons reporting corruption or wilful misuse of discretion which causes a demonstrable loss to the government, or commission of a criminal offence by a public servant."

- The Bill sets forth the procedure for inquiring into the disclosures and provides for safeguards against victimisation. At the same time, it provides punishment for false or frivolous complaints.

- The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha in 2011 and was taken up by the Rajya Sabha in 2012. However, it could not be passed because of the death of Union Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh.

INTERNATIONAL

G20's aim of lifting global GDP

- The Finance ministers and central bank governors of G20 nations decided to work towards lifting their collective GDP by more than two per cent over the next five years and exhorted the United States to go ahead with the IMF quota reforms.

- The group of 20 rich and developing nations said they "deeply regret" the stalling of IMF quota reforms with the United States yet to ratify them.

- The IMF quota reforms, which seek to increase the voting share of emerging economies including India, had hit a roadblock with the US Congress refusing to increase the American contribution to the multilateral body.

- Emerging economies, including India, have been asking the U.S., which has started gradual withdrawal of its fiscal stimulus, to be more predictable in monetary policy. The U.S. Federal Reserve's tapering has caused flight of capital out of emerging economies and in turn hammering their currencies.

- The G20 countries also committed to develop new measures, for maintaining fiscal sustainability and financial sector stability, to significantly raise global growth.

Ukraine's new rating - 'CCC'

- Standard & Poor's ratings agency lowered Ukraine's long-term rating from 'CCC+' to 'CCC' saying the raging political crisis has put the government's ability to service its debt at risk and raised uncertainty over Russia providing promised aid.

- The crisis in economically-struggling Ukraine erupted in November when President Viktor Yanukovych decided unexpectedly to reject a European Union integration deal years in the making in favour of closer ties with Russia.

- Moscow then promised to provide a 15 billion dollar bailout to its former satellite and to slash prices that Kiev paid for energy supplies.

Syria aid resolution

- The U.N. Security Council will vote on a resolution to boost humanitarian aid access in Syria, where the United Nations says 9.3 million people need help, although it is unclear if Russia and China will support or veto the draft.

- Russia, supported by China, has shielded its ally Syria on the U.N. Security Council during the three-year-long civil war. They have vetoed three resolutions condemning Syria's government and threatening it with possible sanctions.

- During a visit to Baghdad, Lavrov said the resolution should spell out that cross-border aid deliveries should be organized in accordance with international humanitarian law, which requires a government's consent for such a move.

Dalai Lama meets Barack Obama

- U.S. President Barack Obama hosts exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama at the White House, prompting China to issue a statement of "serious concern."

- A statement said the U.S. supports the Dalai Lama's so-called "middle way" approach of neither assimilation nor independence for Tibetans in China.

- China's foreign ministry quickly urged the U.S. to cancel the meeting, calling it a "gross interference" that will "seriously damage" U.S.-China ties.

- Beijing regularly threatens nations hosting the Dalai Lama. It views him as a dangerous separatist responsible for a wave of self-immolations by Tibetans.
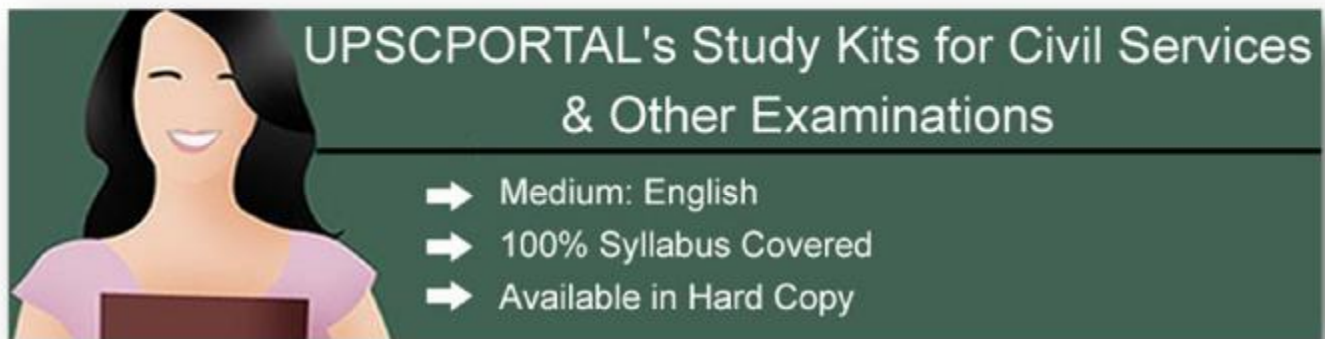
Google Lunar XPrize

- A poorly funded, rag-tag team in India is now among the top contenders for the Google Lunar XPrize, the grand global competition to land a robotic spacecraft on theMoon by December 2015.

- Team Indus, co-founded by IITians Rahul Narayan and Indranil Chakraborty, has just been named among the five finalists for what are called milestone prizes, teams that have achieved certain technological landmarks and appear closest to reaching the final objective.

- The pioneering reality show in space, announced in 2007 by Google and the XPrize Foundation, an education non-profit, promises the world some edge-of-the seat excitement in the months to come. It had 33 teams participating when registrations closed in 2011. Since then, a number of teams have withdrawn or merged. Currently 18 remain, some of which are led by world-renowned robotics and space researchers and super-rich folk.

- The competition carries $40 million in prize money. The organizers' aim is to do something humanity has never accomplished: the safe landing of a private craft on the surface of the Moon, and possibly do so at a fraction of the cost that governmental space bodies incur.

- Of the 18 teams, six are from the US, and others from countries including the UK, Germany, Japan, Israel, Brazil and Malaysia.

'Cyber libel' law

- Philippine President Benigno Aquino defended a controversial cybercrime law penalising online libel, a day after the top court upheld its legality in a setback for campaigners who argue it could curb Internet freedom.

- The Cybercrime Protection Act was passed in 2012 to stamp out online scourges such as fraud, identity theft, spamming and child pornography, but its implementation was suspended after coming under challenge from various groups.

- However the Supreme Court ruled that one of its most controversial provisions, the section which penalises cyber libel, "is not unconstitutional".

- Aquino defended the ruling, saying the law would not be used to stifle dissent in the Philippines, considered to be one of Asia's most freewheeling democracies.

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INDIA AND THE WORLD

India- Canada to improve ties

- India and Canada are pressing ahead with high level engagements to develop closer ties in ensuring food and energy security besides investing in the sub-continent.

- Although there has been disappointment over sourcing Canadian crude because not many public sector can process it, India is pitching for Canadian refineries in the country to overcome this technical glitch.

- According to experts, demand for liquids is expected to reduce due to an increase in energy from gas, nuclear and renewable sources. In India, however, the share of liquids may remain constant but the absolute demand may double in 20 years.

Death of Indian workers in Qatar

- More than 450 Indian migrant workers have died in Qatar in the last two years - the grim statistics once again underscoring the worrisome human rights record of the Gulf state, which is racing to complete mega-construction project ahead of the 2022 football World Cup.

- The Indian embassy in Doha revealed this information in response to a Right to Information request that was filed by AFP.

- The data showed that 237 Indian workers had died in 2012 alone, and another 218, the following year. The shocking numbers, compiled till December 5, showed that the average monthly death toll on Indian expat workers in Qatar is around 20. The monthly fatalities had peaked in August 2013, when 27 people had died.

- The Indian embassy has not provided details regarding the causes or the locations of the deaths. Neither did it reveal its correspondence with the government in New Delhi regarding the overall condition of Indian nationals in the Gulf country.

- In 2013, the International Labour Organisation slammed Qatar for failing to implement an international convention banning the use of forced labour.

India and the piracy contact group

- India, which has the largest number of pirates in its custody, is a very important member of the piracy contact group.

- U.S. Coordinator for Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Donna Hopkins said "India is a very important member of the Contact Group and, in fact, chaired a plenary" and has more pirates under its custody than any other country.

- Ms. Hopkins said at present about 1,430 Somali pirates -- either suspected and being tried or convicted and in prison in 21 countries. Somalia, after India, has the largest number of pirates under its custody.

- There has been a remarkable drop in piracy and it was primarily due to two things: proactive counter-piracy operations by the many national navies and missions that are preventing and disrupting pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia and in the eastern Indian Ocean, and better self-protection by commercial ships, including the use of embarked armed security teams.

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ECONOMY

Service tax exemption for rice

- Finance Minister P Chidambram has announced that service tax would be abolished on rice from the staple's loading to storage stage.

- Rice was originally exempt from service tax. However, later the Finance Ministry had said that only paddy is agri-produce, while rice is a processed item.

- Presenting the interim budget for 2014-15 fiscal, Mr. Chidambram said that by virtue of the definition of 'agricultural produce' in Finance Act 2012, read with the Negative List, storage or warehousing of paddy was excluded from the levy of service tax. Rice was not. The distinction is somewhat artificial. Hence, I propose to exempt loading, unloading, packing, storage and warehousing of rice from service tax."

- The FM's decision comes following pressure from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa who had shot off a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seeking his personal intervention in the issue. She had also sought to remit and return the already levied service tax since July 1, 2012.

China and Pakistan's "economic corridor"

- The economic corridor, envisages expanding road links, building railway lines and installing energy pipelines linking Xinjiang with the Gwadar port in Pakistan.

- Some Chinese companies have voiced concern about stability and security in Pakistan, while violent attacks in southern Xinjiang, located next to the PoK border, have been blamed by local officials on terror outfits with links to Pakistan-based groups.

World's top importer of Gold

- Chinese demand for gold bars, coins and jewelry soared by 32% to record levels in 2013, even as the price of gold slumped 28%.

- The surge in buying saw China overtake India as the world's top consumer of physical gold, importing 1,066 metric tons of the metal to India's 975 metric tons in 2013, according to new data from the World Gold Council. (A metric ton is equal to about 2,240 pounds.)

- In India, consumption increased by 13% but further growth was curbed by import restrictions aimed at narrowing the country's current-account deficit. The council estimates around 200 metric tons was smuggled into the country.

- China's lead over India as the world's top importer is likely to be sustained.

Changes in excise duty

- The Interim Budget has some good news and some bad for consumers. Two-wheelers and cars will be cheaper while low-end mobile phones will be a bit more expensive due to changes in excise duty.

- Auto-makers, including Tata Motors, Hyundai, Maruti Suzuki and Honda Cars India, have already announced that they would be passing on the benefits of the excise duty cut to the consumer.

- Mobile phones that cost less than Rs. 2,000 are set to cost more after Mr. Chidambaram's decision to levy a uniform excise duty on phones across price bands.

Burden of student loan eases

- With an eye on the country's youth bulge, Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has proposed a moratorium period for all education loans taken up to March 31, 2009, and outstanding at the close of the 2012-13 fiscal. However, such student-borrowers – estimated to be in the vicinity of nine lakh -- would have to pay interest for the period beginning January 1, 2014.

- Of the view that such students ``deserve some relief'', the Minister said Rs. 2,600 crore would be set aside in the current financial year itself for the purpose. This will be transferred to Canara Bank which is the designated banker for the Central Scheme for Interest Subsidy (CSIS).

- Dwelling at some length on the CSIS with respect to education loans, Mr. Chidambaram said the Government had introduced this in the 2009-10 Budget to take over the burden of interest for the duration of study and a little beyond from April 1, 2009.

Future of Telangana economy

- Post bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, the information technology and pharmaceuticals manufacturing sectors may become backbone of Telangana economy, leaving power production, ports and oil and natural gas to play a pivotal role in driving prosperity in the residuary state.

- With nearly 1,000km-long coast line, the coastal Andhra has major private ports such as Krishnapatnam, Kakinada and Gangavaram, besides state-owned Vizag Port and can continue to reap rich harvest by way of export and import of commodities such as iron ore and coal.

- According to experts, Telangana is likely to face power shortage of up to 2,000 MW after the state is formed. Of the 8,924.86 MW installed capacity of state power utility APGenco, about 54 per cent (4,825 MW) is located in Telangana, while 46 per cent is in the Seemandhra region.

- However, 52 per cent capacity in Telangana lies in hydro power, which is available only when reservoirs receive good inflows, while just 48 per cent capacity is available through coal-fired power plants.

First 'Auto City' in India

- The Tamil Nadu government will set up an 'Auto City', considered a first of its kind initiative under the automobile and auto component policy launched by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa.

- It will be under the theme 'Tamil Nadu, the Partner in Automotive Sector Investment'.

- The state government would form an Automotive Industrial Development Centre offering investment facilitation services to companies willing to invest in the automotive industry.

- It said AIDC would help the government put in place appropriate policy framework. It would also support and facilitate its implementation and interventions aimed at making Tamil Nadu a destination for manufacture and export of motor vehicles.

- As per AIDC, the government would set up an "Auto City", a state-of-the-art over 1,000 hectare industrial park as a JV for domestic and global automotive and auto-component firms.

- Tamil Nadu accounts for 35 per cent of India's auto component production worth USD 6.2 billion.

- Aimed at making Chennai one of the top five global auto-clusters, the state government unveiled the first of its kind automobile policy, an industrial policy and second volume of 'Tamil Nadu Vision 2023'.

SCIENCE AND TECH

Jade Rabbit

- China's first lunar rover Jade Rabbit, which woke up ten days ago after being declared dead, has entered its third "planned dormancy" even as mechanical issues that might cripple the vehicle still unresolved.

- The rover named Yutu (Jade Rabbit) in Chinese entered its 14-day dormancy, with the mechanical control issues unresolved, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

- Yutu touched down on the moon's surface on December 15, some hours after lunar probe Chang'e-3 landed.

- The rover was designed to roam the lunar surface for at least three months to survey the moon's geological structure and surface substances and look for natural resources.

- China is the third country to soft-land on the moon after the United States and the Soviet Union. Chang'e-3 is part of the second phase of China's lunar program, which includes orbiting, landing and returning to Earth.

- The country has also sent probes to orbit the moon in 2007 and 2010, the first of which crashed onto the lunar surface at the end of its mission.

- According to the SASTIND, the Chang'e-2 has become China's first man-made asteroid, and is currently 70 million km from the Earth.

Photosynthetic cyanobacteria

- Oxygen production by photosynthetic cyanobacteria may have initiated as early as three billion years ago, much earlier than previously thought.

- Researchers at the University of California, Riverside provide a nontraditional way of thinking about the earliest accumulation of oxygen in the atmosphere, arguably the most important biological event in Earth history.

- A general consensus asserts that appreciable oxygen first accumulated in Earth's atmosphere around 2.3 billion years ago during the so-called Great Oxidation Event (GOE).

- However, according to new research, oxygen production by photosynthetic cyanobacteria may have initiated as early as 3 billion years ago.

- Oxygen concentrations in the atmosphere potentially rose and fell episodically over many hundreds of millions of years, reflecting the balance between its varying photosynthetic production and its consumption through reaction with reduced compounds such as hydrogen gas.

ENVIRONMENT

New forest cover to be created

- Government has cleared a plan to create new forest cover and improve the quality of existing forests with an expenditure of Rs. 13,000 crore in the 12th Plan.

- Besides the two components, which are to be implemented through various measures including decentralisation of forest governance, the proposed National Mission for a Green India (GIM) as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme will also strive to achieve increased forest-based livelihood income of households living in and around the forests.

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh approved the proposal of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

- The objectives of the Mission during 12th Plan period includes increased forest/tree cover and improved quality of forest cover in two to eight million hectares, along with improved ecosystem services including biodiversity, hydrological services, increased forest-based livelihood income of households, living in and around the forests, and enhanced annual CO2 sequestration.

- Mission implementation will be on a decentralized participatory approach with involvement of grass root level organisations in planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring.

- The gram sabha and the committees mandated by the gram sabha, including revamped Joint Forest Management Committees will oversee implementation at the village level.

India's first wild dog breeding centre

- In the near future, the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park (IGZP) will be the first zoo in the country to have a conservation breeding centre for the endangered wild dog or 'dhole.'

- Selected by the Central Zoo Authority to carry out this project at a cost of Rs. 50 lakh, the zoo authorities have earmarked an area on the premises for the centre.

- After a series of successful in-breeding of wild dogs in the zoo, its population witnessed a massive increase within the protected area from just two to 22, the highest number of wild dogs in captivity in the country, according to current records.

- Classified as endangered by the IUCN, wild dogs or 'dholes' are dwindling in numbers due to habitat loss, depletion of prey base, and destruction of forest corridors leading to fights with other predators and diseases from domestic and feral dogs.

SPORTS

Delhi Open

- Devvarman accomplished a 6-3, 6-1 win to lift the ONGC GAIL Delhi Open $100,000 ATP Challenger trophy in front of a significantly large crowd at the DLTA centre court.

- Devvarman's reward for a week in which he didn't drop a set will be 100 ATP points and $14,400. This was his biggest success on the Challenger Tour as his previous two titles were at Lexington ($50,000) and Izmir ($75,000).

Mithali Raj to lead the Indian team

- Mithali Raj will lead the Indian team in the three-match Twenty20 international series against Bangladesh in Bangladesh from March 9 and also the ICC World Twenty20 in Bangladesh from March 16.

- The team: Mithali Raj (captain), Harmanpreet Kaur (vice-captain), Smriti Mandhana, V.R. Vanitha, Madhuri Meheta, Latika Kumari, Karuna Jain, Jhulan Goswami, Gouher Sultana, Soniya Dabir, Shikha Pandey, Poonam Yadav, Sravanthi Naidu, S. Shubhlakshmi.

Two ICC awards for Afghanistan

- Afghanistan has taken the top prize of the International Cricket Council Development Programme Annual Awards 2013, claiming the best development programme as well as the award for best junior participation initiative.

- The awards recognised Afghanistan's efforts in developing cricket at all levels, which is reflected in its success in increasing participation rates, promoting the game, and qualifying to the ICC World Twenty20 2014 and the World Cup 2015.

- Afghanistan was also awarded the Best Junior Participation Initiative following its work to introduce cricket into the school curriculum in Afghanistan.

The 2013 winners are:

- Best Overall Cricket Development Programme - Afghanistan Cricket Board

- Best Women's Cricket Initiative - Cricket Thailand

- Best Junior Participation Initiative - Afghanistan Cricket Board

- Best Cricket Promotion and Marketing Programme - Cricket Ireland

- Best Spirit of Cricket Initiative - Argentine Cricket Association

- Photo of the Year - Cricket Namibia

- Volunteer of the Year - Calvin Waldron, Bermuda

- Lifetime Service Award - William Luwagga Kamanyi, Uganda

12th consecutive Test 50 of A.B. de Villiers

- Sporting prodigy A.B. de Villiers is laden with records, even beyond his chosen field of cricket.

- By dragging a Steve Smith long-hop to the boundary just before stumps on the first day in Port Elizabeth, the Proteas' vice-captain reached 50 for an unprecedented 12th consecutive Test.

- In doing so he took sole ownership of a record that, following last week's first Test, he had jointly held with Viv Richards, Gautam Gambhir and Virender Sehwag.

- De Villiers' latest record, which coincided with him reaching 7000 Test runs, drew praise from one of the Australian bowlers who, again, was unable to halt his charge towards yet another 50-plus score.

Himanshu Thakur finishes last

- India's only Olympic Alpine skier Himanshu Thakur finished last in the men's giant slalom in Sochi Games .

- The 20-year-old from the foothills of the Himalayas had to march behind an Olympic flag when the Games began because of a ban on India's Olympic Association due to the election of a corruption-tainted official as secretary general.

- The ban was lifted last week after fresh elections, meaning India's team of three — who entered the Sochi Games as ''independents'' — can wear their country's colours with pride.

Brendon McCullum scores triple hundred

- New Zealand's 680 for 8 declared provides the highest ever total posted by a team in the third innings of a Test match in the annals of Test cricket. The previous best was 671 for 4 by New Zealand against Sri Lanka at Wellington in Jan 1991. Here are some of the other statistical highs that New Zealand team and its players achieved during the two-match series against India.

- Brendon McCullum became the first captain in the annals of Test cricket to score a triple hundred and a double hundred in consecutive Tests. He made 224 at Auckland and 302 at Wellington .

- McCullum aggregated 535 runs in this series which is the record for most runs scored by a captain in a two Test series. The previous record was 510 runs scored by Mahela Jayawardene of Sri Lanka against South Africa in 2005 series. McCullum and Jayawardene are the only two captains to aggregate 500 plus runs in a two Test series.

IN THE NEWS (PERSONS)

K.T. Thomas

- The former Supreme Court judge, K.T. Thomas, will head the eight-member search committee to select the names for various posts of Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman.

- Justice Thomas was unanimously chosen on February 20 by the selection committee, comprising Prime Minister Manmohan Singh; Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar; Supreme Court Judge H.L. Dattu, who is the nominee of the Chief Justice of India P. Sathasivam; Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Sushma Swaraj; and Jurist P.P. Rao.

- This committee will scrutinise the more than 300 applications received for the post of chairperson and eight members (four judicial and four non-judicial) and forward the names to the selection committee.

- The chairperson can be a serving or former Chief Justice of India, a sitting or former judge of the Supreme Court or a person of impeccable integrity and outstanding ability.

Wayne Rooney

- **The 28-year-old England international has extended his current contract by four years in a deal worth up to £300,000 a week.**

- **Rooney has won five Premier League titles and the Champions League in his time at Old Trafford.**

- **The forward, who returned to first-team action at the end of January after nearly a month out with an injury, has made 28 club appearances this season and scored 11 goals.**
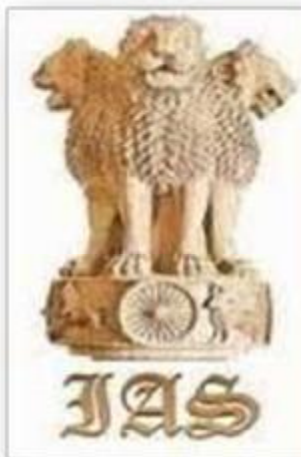
N. Kiran Kumar Reddy

- Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy submitted his resignation to the Governor E.S.L. Narasimhan recently.

- Mr. Reddy had earlier announced his decision to quit from the post and the party in protest against the Central Government decision to "divide the Telugus for the sake of votes and seats".

- Flanked by eight Cabinet colleagues and over a dozen MLAs/MLCs, the Chief Minister alleged that the Congress leadership in collusion with the main Opposition BJP had ensured passage of the bifurcation Bill in Lok Sabha setting aside all the democratic conventions and practices.

- The Chief Minister evaded replies when asked whether he would float a new party as was being reported.

- Mr. Kiran Reddy said he was not against the aspirations of the people of Telangana. But he was opposed to the decision to divide the State as it was not in the interests of the two regions.

Sheila Dikshit

- The Delhi High Court has fixed for February 26, the hearing on Kejriwal government's plea to withdraw the appeal of previous Congress dispensation against a lower court order to register an FIR against former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit in a corruption case.

- A bench of Justice V.P. Vaish, which had pre-poned the hearing on the application , now fixed the plea on February 26, after Delhi Government informed that Additional Solicitor General, who will argue the case, was not available.

- Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party Government had moved the high court seeking to withdraw the appeal on February 14, the day when the Chief Minister and his council of ministers submitted the resignation on the controversy over passage of the Jan Lokpal Bill.

- Highlighting its stand against corruption, the outgoing AAP government, in its plea, has said the Cabinet's decision to take back the appeal, filed by the previous Congress government, has been approved by the Lt. Governor and Ms. Dikshit will have to defend herself as she is no more the Chief Minister and consequently, it lacked the "locus" standi to fight for her.

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Selected Editorials of Importance

A glimmer of Syrian hope
(Courtesy: The Hindu)

The Geneva II conference on Syria ended on Saturday in a predictable standoff between President Bashar al Assad's regime and a section of the opposition National Council for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SNC), but it was remarkable that the talks, held indirectly with United Nations and Arab League mediator Lakhdar Brahimi moving between the two sides, took place at all. The conflict will enter its fourth year on March 15; it has so far killed 136,000 people and displaced over two million amid atrocities by all involved. Even a short truce a few days ago for the residents of the besieged city of Homs to leave or acquire food was negotiated not in Geneva but by the Homs Governor, Talal al Barazi, and the UN's resident coordinator, Yacoub El Hillo. Meanwhile, positions at Geneva II – where the parties were to start implementing the plan reached at Geneva I on June 30, 2012 – remain bitterly entrenched. Damascus brands the opposition terrorists and insists that Mr. Assad will not step down; the SNC, for its part, only attended under pressure from its Western and West Asian allies and after a series of internal disagreements. Of its 119 members, only 75 attended the vote in Istanbul, voting 58-14 to go to Geneva II; the representatives of Syria's 10 per cent Kurdish minority also boycotted the Swiss talks. Any chance of wider participation had ended on January 16, when the officially sanctioned opposition National Coordination Committee (NCC) said it would not attend.

Even worse complications obtain. The Syrian situation has been called a proxy war involving the West, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar on the opposition side, and Russia and Iran plus the Hezbollah on the regime's side, but certain opposition leaders resent being used thus, and government officials speak of being treated like vassals by Iran, Russia, and the Hezbollah. In addition, the al Qaeda-linked faction, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams (ISIS), holds the provincial capital of Rakka in central Syria, and serves a purpose both for Damascus, which tells the West that if the government fell al Qaeda would win, and for the SNC, which submerges its internal differences to fight ISIS. Furthermore, Iran, which could well have some leverage on Mr. Assad, had no option but to pull out of Geneva II when Washington stated the precondition that Mr. Assad step down in any transition process. The one glimmer of hope in all this is that since October 2013, opposition and government members have been meeting privately at the Château de Bossey in Switzerland. As the United States and Russia will almost certainly back any agreement they reach, it is imperative that those involved continue talking and that all others stay away.

Promises, promises
(Courtesy: The Indian Express)

Nearly eight months after the Supreme Court ordered the Election Commission to frame guidelines on what parties extravagantly promise to voters ahead of elections, the EC has incorporated a set of prescriptions in its model code of conduct. It has consulted a range of parties on the subject. Now, it requires manifestos to "reflect the rationale" of a specific promise, and also indicate how these promises will be funded. The Supreme Court's judgment last July was on a petition that sought to declare Tamil Nadu's big election blowouts on household items and welfare schemes for specific interest groups as "corrupt" acts. While the court stopped short of that declaration, its order to the EC stemmed from a sense that populist manifestos are irresponsible and parties must be made more accountable in their electoral appeals.

Well-meaning as it is, it is an unnecessary initiative on the EC's part. Parties do not have to provide public justification on a private calculation or judgement call, and it is for voters to judge their priorities. It is not feasible to expect an informed financial plan for each promise, ahead of the party assuming power and working with the situation it inherits. While the EC's action is gentler than the Supreme Court judgment that held all giveaways and big promises as a distortion of the electoral playing field, it implicitly demands that manifestos be realistic documents, rather than trusting the voter's judgement, her capacity to tell the difference between a transparent bribe and a genuine social benefit. It misunderstands the compact between the voter and the party. While it can be argued that competitive populism can create unrealistic and unmanageable expectations from government, even fostering cynicism when these promises are not met, it is not up to the EC or any external arbiter to enforce correctives.

The EC enjoys tremendous public trust and credibility. Its model code of conduct, even though it lacks statutory force, has an indisputable legitimacy. This is largely because it is a restrained code, and does not venture into issuing dos and don'ts that are difficult to enforce or those that place excessive curbs on a party's freedoms. It is essential for the EC to consider whether its contemplated actions actually advance fair and free elections, or stem from the misguided impulse of disciplining naughty parties.

IMF forecasts: Advice or hostile propaganda?
(Courtesy: The Economic Times)

Time was when the high priests of economic wisdom at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) spoke, policymakers in India listened in awe, ready to take remedial policy action.

That time is gone, thanks to both gradual calibration of policymaking to global standards and superior cross-border flows of private capital that dwarf the few billion dollars that the IMF used to hold out as lender of last resort. The IMF's constant revision of earlier forecasts adds to the scepticism that must attend on the IMF's latest country report on India.

The IMF expects India to grow 4.6% in the current fiscal year, lower than India's official estimate of 4.9%. Look closer, you find that the IMF estimates growth in 2012-13 to have been 5%.

India's revised estimates put that growth figure lower at 4.5%. Growing from a smaller base, the same extent of value addition would yield a higher rate of growth. It is not clear why the IMF should persist with a pre-revised data set in its projections and prescriptions based on them, when more recent data present themselves.

Revision of the current account deficit, however, does not take time, it would appear. The Country Report pegs it at 3.3% of GDP, but the IMF's mission head in India says it could well be 2.5% of GDP, as the government claims. Since these numbers have a huge influence on finance professionals' confidence in the stability of the currency, should the IMF play footloose with its projections?

By repeating broad-brush platitudes on inflation and interest rates, the IMF makes uninformed contributions to an ongoing domestic debate on the efficacy of higher rates in bringing down the prices of fruit, vegetables, poultry and eggs — superior foods demanded by 140 million people who have risen out of poverty. Silence would be better than inane chatter.

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:: NATIONAL ::

Q1.

    i)   As per the interim budget presented recently , all rural post offices will be provided with handheld devices for financial transactions, a solar panel for charging it, a biometric reader for immediate identification and a thermal printer.

    ii)   It was in Nov 1, 1956 that Telangana merged with Andhra State, which was carved out of Madras State, to form Andhra Pradesh, a united state for Telugu speaking people.

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

Q2.

    i)   The Supreme Court has recently reserved orders on PILs seeking a direction to the authorities to declare road accidents as `national emergency' and to take coordinated steps to prevent them.

    ii)   The Constitutional Bill (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) , 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Rajya Sabha and the Council of states.

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

:: INTERNATIONAL ::

Q3.

i) Parts of economic corridor(plan between China and Pakistan), which envisages expanding road links along the Karakoram highway and building energy pipelines, runs through PoK, and is the only possible land link between China and Pakistan.

ii) International Mother Language Day is celebrated on Jan 21 throughout the world to promote importance of English.

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

Q4.

i) The United Nations Security Council has passed a unanimous resolution on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria recently .

ii) According to Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey , Pakistan is sure of meeting it's Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

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

:: SCIENCE AND TECH ::

Q5.

i)   China is the first country in the world to have soft landed on the moon.
ii)   The Chang'e-3 carried China's first lunar rover Jade Rabbit/Yutu to the moon's surface.

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

Q6.

i)   Akash, that was successfully flight-tested recently is a surface-to-air missile.
ii)   It is developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation, from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur, Odisha.

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

:: ENVIRONMENT ::

Q7.

i)   Two rivers Therkaru and Varattaru originating from Sathuragiri hills become one at Sivarakottai to form the Kamandala Nadhi.
ii)   This area is home to a number of water and field birds, spotted deer, fox, rabbits, monitor lizards and a range of snakes.

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 ::

Q8.

i) Bimal Jalan panel is scrutinising applications for new bank licences , which is expected to complete its work by March 2014.
ii) Brazil, Russia, India and China are considered to be the most stable economies of the world , therefore are trusted to have very stable financial markets.

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

:: IN THE NEWS ::

Q9.

i) The Faisalabad government has proposed to develop Bangay, which is freedom fighter Bhagat Singh's village, as a heritage site .
ii) Indian batsman Yuvraj Singh rose to his career-best ninth position in the latest ICC Test rankings.

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

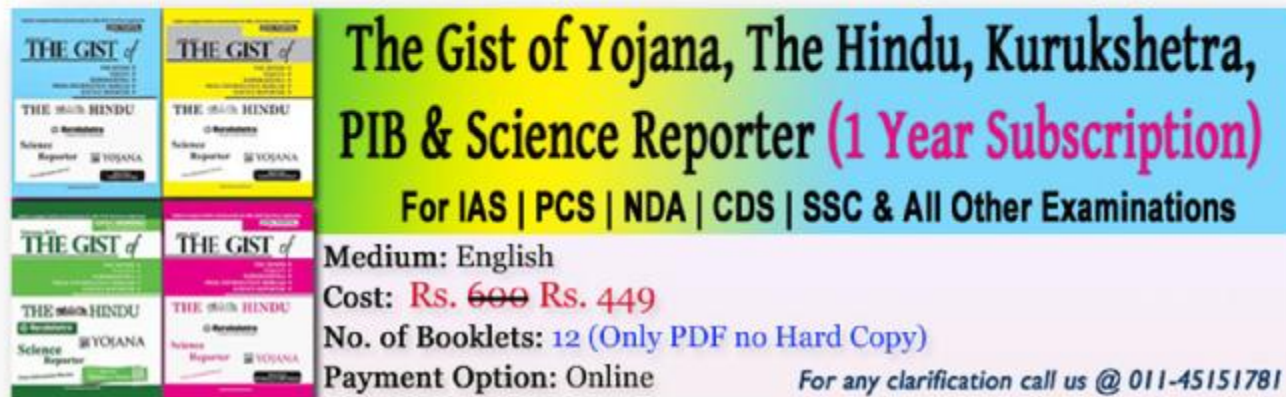**Ans 1: c**

Ans 2: b

Ans 3: a

Ans 4: a

Ans 5: b

Ans 6: c

Ans 7: c

Ans 8: a

Ans 9: a

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