

Weekly Current Affairs



News From:
27th Jan to 2nd Feb 2014

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Weekly Current Affairs Update For IAS Exam

27th January 2014 TO 2nd February 2014

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NOBEL PRIZE

- On 27 November 1895, Alfred Nobel signed his last will and testament, giving the largest share of his fortune to a series of prizes in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature and Peace - the Nobel Prizes. In 1968, Sveriges Riksbank (Sweden's central bank) established The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel.

FEW FACTS ABOUT NOBEL PRIZE:

- 851 Laureates and 25 organizations have been awarded the Nobel Prize between 1901 and 2013. Of them, 74 are Laureates in Economic Sciences.
- Since the start, in 1901, there are some years when the Nobel Prizes have not been awarded. The total number of times are 50. Most of them during World War I (1914-1918) and II (1939-1945).
- Between 1901 and 2013 the Nobel Prize and Prize in Economic Sciences have been awarded 45 times to women.
- The average age of all Nobel Laureates in all prize categories between 1901 and 2013 is 59 years.
- Linus Pauling is the only person to have been awarded two unshared Nobel Prizes - the 1954 Nobel Prize in Chemistry and the 1962 Nobel Peace Prize.
- The Curies (Marie, Pierre and Irene) were a very successful 'Nobel Prize family'. Marie Curie herself was awarded two Nobel Prizes.
- At the Nobel Prize Award Ceremonies on 10 December the Nobel Laureates receive three things: a Nobel Diploma, a Nobel Medal and a document confirming the Nobel Prize amount. Each Nobel Diploma is a unique work of art, created by foremost Swedish and Norwegian artists and calligraphers. The Nobel Medals are handmade with careful precision and in 18 carat green gold plated with 24 carat gold. (source: www.nobelprize.org)

A GLINT OF INDIA

Nobel Laureates from India

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

- **Amartya Sen (b- 1933) :** Prof. Amartya Sen is the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Economics for the year 1998, becoming the first Asian to have been honoured with the award. The Santiniketanborn economist who is a pioneer in Welfare Economics has to his credit several books and papers on aspects of welfare and development. An economist with a difference, Prof. Sen is a humanist. He has distinguished himself with his outstanding writings on famine, poverty, democracy, gender and social issues. The 'impossibility theorem' suggested earlier by Kenneth Arrow states that it was not possible to aggregate individual choices into a satisfactory choice for society as a whole. Prof. Sen showed mathematically that societies could find ways to alleviate such a poor outcome.
- **Subramanian Chandrashekhhar (1910-1995):** The Nobel Prize for Physics in 1983 was awarded to Dr S. Chandrashekhhar, an Indian-born astrophysicist. Educated in Presidency College, Chennai, Dr Chandrashekhhar happened to be the nephew of his Nobel forbear, Sir C.V. Raman. He later migrated to the United States where he authored several books on Astrophysics and Stellar Dynamics. He developed a theory on white dwarf stars which posts a limit of mass of dwarf stars known also as Chandrashekhhar Limit. His theory explains the final stages of stellar evolution.
- **Mother Teresa (1910-1997):** The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Mother Teresa in 1979. Albanian parentage, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was born at Skopje, now in Yugoslavia. She joined the Irish order of the Sisters of Loretto at Dublin in 1928 and came to Kolkata in 1929 as a missionary, only to find the misery of the abandoned and the destitute. Concern for the poor and the sick prompted her to found a new congregation, Missionaries of Charity. Having become an Indian citizen, Mother Teresa served the cause of dying destitutes, lepers and drug addicts, through Nirmal Hriday (meaning Pure Heart), the main centre of her activity. Her selfless service and unique devotion, not only to helpless fellow-Indians but also to the cause of world peace, earned her and India the first Nobel Peace Prize.
- **Hargobind Khorana (1922-2011):** Hargobind Khorana was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1968. Of Indian origin, Dr Khorana was born in Raipur, Punjab (now in Pakistan). He took his doctoral degree in Chemistry from Liverpool University and joined the University of Wisconsin as a Faculty Member in 1960. His major breakthrough in the field of Medicine -interpreting the genetic code and analysing its function in protein synthesis- fetched him the Nobel Prize.
- **Chandrashekhhar Venkataraman (1888-1970):** India's first Nobel Prize for Physics was claimed in 1930 by the renowned physicist Sir C.V. Raman. Born at Thiruvanaikkaval near Tiruchirapalli in Tamilnadu, Raman studied at Presidency College, Chennai. Later, he served as Professor of Physics at Calcutta University. Recipient of many honours and awards, including the title of 'Sir', Sir C.V. Raman received the Nobel Prize for an important optics research, in which he discovered that diffused light contained rays of other wavelengths-what is now popularly known as Raman Effect. His theory discovered in 1928 explains the change in the frequency of light passing through a transparent medium.

- **Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941):** Rabindranath Tagore was the first Indian ever to receive a Nobel Prize. Popularly known as Gurudev, India's Poet Laureate Tagore was born on 7th May 1861, in Kolkata. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his work Geetanjali, a collection of poems, in 1913. Tagore wrote many love lyrics. Geetanjali and Sadhana are among his important works. The poet, dramatist and novelist is also the author of India's National Anthem. In 1901 he founded the famous Santiniketan which later came to be known as Vishwabharati University.

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Ministry of External affairs

Moscow's World Hindi Day Celebrations

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

- World Hindi Day (Vishwa Hindi Diwas) celebrations were held at the Embassy of India, Moscow on 31 January 2014. Ambassador of India to the Russian Federation H.E. Mr. P.S. Raghavan and Mrs. Barbara Raghavan were the Guests of Honor on the occasion.
- Ambassador of Mauritius to the Russian Federation H.E Mrs Indira Savitree Thacoor-Sidaya and Hindi Teacher at School No. 19 in Moscow Dr. Safarmo Tolibi were among the guests who attended the celebrations.
- In his speech, Ambassador Raghavan noted that Hindi language is taught in all the leading Russian institutions and promised support of the Embassy in further promoting Hindi in Russia.
- Hindi students of the Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre (JNCC), students of School no.19 in Moscow and others presented a cultural program of poems/skits/songs in Hindi language under the guidance of JNCC Hindi Teacher Dr. Gulab Singh. Ambassador Raghavan presented gifts to the participants of the cultural program followed by a reception hosted by the Embassy.
- World Hindi Day is celebrated every year in the month of January after the First World Hindi Conference held on 10 January 1975 in Nagpur, India.

“Interplastica 2014”

- 5 Indian companies participated in “Interplastica 2014”, a prominent Russian Trade Fair for the plastic and rubber industry, held at the Expocentre grounds in Moscow from 29 - 31 January 2014.
- The products exhibited by the Indian companies included polymer additives, rotomoulding plastic machinery, rotomoulding machinery, pulveriser machines, thermoplastic compounds, specialty polymers – compatibilizers, wetting/dispersing agents, impact modifiers, scrap upgraders and chain extenders for polymer compounds, extruder screens, PVC heat stabilizers, and other items for plastic, chemical and polymer industry.
- Ambassador of India to the Russian Federation, H.E. Mr. P.S. Raghavan visited “Interplastica 2014” and interacted with the Indian exhibitors. A delegation from Rubber Board of India, led by its Chairperson Ms. Sheela Thomas, also participated in the Fair.
- The 1st Indian Rubber Meet, a mega event bringing together producers and consumers from around the world of primary, intermediate and finished rubber products, will be held in Kochi, India on 20-21 February 2014.

Planning Commission of India

Rural Development

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

- The function of the Rural Development Division is primarily to provide overall policy guidance in formulation of plans and programmes for Rural Development. This is the nodal Division for matters relating to poverty eradication, employment generation in rural areas, development of watershed & degraded land. The following specific activities are undertaken by Division;
 - i. To assist in formulation of rural development programmes to be included in Five Year Plans and Annual Plans and to make periodic assessment of progress achieved.
 - ii. To analyse and prepare comments on the EFC Memoranda and Cabinet Notes paper for Group of Ministers pertaining to rural development programmes.
 - iii. To maintain liaison with Ministry of Rural Development, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) and other allied organisations mainly and participating in the meetings.
 - iv. To collect information from various Divisions of the Planning Commission, State Governments and also from the Central Ministries which are implementing various schemes related to rural development.
 - v. To organize Working Group meetings to finalise the Draft Five Year Plan proposals of the State Governments. This involves the preparation of background papers, discussions on inter-se plan priorities, critical examination of plan proposals in relation to plan objectives and approaches, preparation of Working Group Reports giving, inter-alia, outlays and physical targets.
 - vi. Finalisation of the Five Year Plan outlays of the Ministry of Rural Development. Finalisation of Annual Plans of the Central Ministry of Rural Development and State Governments. This includes assessment of progress both in physical and financial terms, in relation to the approved targets and outlays, scheme-wise examination of proposals and reviewing targets and finalizing allocation for next Annual Plan.
 - vii. To provide comments, materials etc. for Public representations, VIP references, Parliament Questions and Agenda items for the meetings of Consultative Committee/ Standing Committee for the Planning Commission pertaining to rural development sector are also attended to.

The Rural Development Division looks after the following programmes being implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD):

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA),

- The NREG was launched on February 2, 2006 and the first full year of operation was 2006-07 covering 200 districts. The programme was expanded to 330 districts in 2007-08 and covers the whole country from 1.4.08. The primary objective of the scheme is to provide guaranteed work for 100 days for any household wishing to have such employment. Although all households are eligible, the expectation is that only the poorer sections, i.e., landless labour and marginal farmers would actually seek work. The secondary objective is to ensure that employment generated is from works that raise land productivity.

Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)

- SGSY is a major on-going scheme for the self-employment of the rural poor. The basic objective of the scheme is to bring the assisted poor families (swarozgaris) above the poverty line by providing them income generating assets through a mix of bank credit and government subsidy. Credit is the critical component of the scheme whereas the subsidy is an enabling element. The scheme involves organisation of the poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs) build their capacities through a process of social mobilization, their training, selection of key activities, planning of activity clusters, creation of infrastructure, provision of technology and marketing support, etc. Under the scheme focus is on the group approach. However, individual Swarozgaris are also assisted. The SGSY is being implemented by the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) with the active involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), banks, line Departments and the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).
- The credit mobilization under SGSY has been abysmally low. Further, a large number of SHGs are formed but fizzle out midway after availing the revolving fund. To make the scheme more effective it is being re-structured with a sharper focus on poorest of the poor people. A suitable mechanism will be put in place for higher social mobilization, capacity building and institution building among the target population

Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)

- The IAY is being implemented as an independent scheme since 1996. It aims to provide assistance for construction / upgradation of dwelling units to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) rural households, with special emphasis on SCs, STs and freed bonded labor categories. A maximum assistance of Rs 35,000 per unit is provided for construction in plain areas and Rs 38,500 per unit for hilly/difficult areas. Rs 15000 is given for upgradation of a dwelling unit for all areas. The funding of IAY is shared between the Centre and State in the ratio of 75:25. (100% in the case of UTs).

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

- The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) was launched with the aim to provide social assistance benefit to poor households in the case of old age, death of primary breadwinner and maternity. The programme supplements the efforts of the State Governments with the objective of ensuring minimum national levels of well being and the Central assistance is an addition to the benefit that the States are already providing on Social Protection Schemes. With a view to ensure better linkage with nutrition and national population control programmes, the Maternity Benefit Component of the NSAP was transferred to the Department of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with effect from 2001-02. The schemes of NSAP and Annapurna have been transferred to the State Plan with effect from 2002-03 with a view to provide requisite flexibility to the State / UT in the choice and implementation of the schemes.

Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP)

- During the Eleventh Plan, the three area development programmes, namely, Integrated Wasteland Development Programme, Drought Prone Area Programme and Desert Development Programme have been integrated and consolidated into a single programme called Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP). This consolidation is for optimum use of resources, sustainable outcomes an integrated planning. The common guidelines for the Watershed Development Programme have been formulated and are effective from 1.4.2008. An amount of Rs.1825 crore has been allocated for IWMP during 2008-09. The ongoing projects sanctioned prior to 1.4.2008 under DADP, DDP, and IWDP would be continued to be implemented as per old guidelines.

- The modified IWMP would adopt a three tier approach in which the upper reaches which are mainly forested and hilly would be treated with the support of Forest Department. For land situated intermediate slopes above the agriculture lands, the IWMP would address all the necessary issues of land treatment by adopting best possible options including cropping pattern, horticulture and agro-forestry etc. In the lower tier, which are plains and mainly agricultural lands, the IWMP would be dovetailed with the employment generating programme such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and would fill the critical gaps of NREGS and vice versa.
- Under the new programme, a cluster approach would be followed with a broader vision of natural hydro-geographical unit of average size of 4,000 to 10,000 ha. comprising of clusters of micro-watershed to be selected as project area. The programme would be implemented by dedicated institutional agencies at state and central level. Professional support (in the form of multidisciplinary expert team) would be provided to support these institutions with proper fund allocation. A core GIS facility with spatial and non-spatial data augmented with satellite imagery data would be set up for giving Controlled access/distribution for local project planning.
- The project period is proposed in the range of 5 to 7 years in three distinct phases, i.e. Preparatory, Watershed works and Consolidation phase. The consolidation phase will include livelihood activities, marketing, processing and value addition activities.

National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP):

- The National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP) has been conceptualized as a major system and reform initiative that is concerned not merely with computerization, updating and maintenance of land records and validation of titles, but also as a programme that will add value and provide a comprehensive database for planning developmental, regulatory and disaster management activities by providing location-specific information, while providing citizen services based on land records data.
- Under the NLRMP, the following three layers of data will be integrated on a geographic information system (GIS) platform: Spatial data from satellite imagery/aerial photography, Survey of India and Forest Survey of India maps, and Revenue records: cadastral maps and RoR details. All cadastral maps will be digitized, and data included with plot numbers and unique id for each land parcel. Administrative unit boundaries from village level upwards (including panchayat, block, tehsil, circle, sub-division, district, division, State and national boundaries), forest, water bodies and other physical attributes of land and land use details will be overlaid, and other developmental layers (e.g., watersheds, road networks, etc.) added to the core GIS.
- The activities to be supported under the Programme, inter alia, include survey/resurvey using modern technology including aerial photogrammetry, updating of land records including mutation records, completion of computerization of the records of rights (RoRs), computerization of registration, automatic generation of mutation notices, digitization of maps, integration of the entire system digitization of maps and training and capacity building of the concerned officials and functionaries. Connectivity amongst the land records and registration offices and land records management centers at tehsil/taluk/circle/block level would be supported. Access to land records data would be provided to Cooperative and other financial institutions for facilitating credit operations.
- A major focus of the Programme will be on citizen services, such as providing records of rights (RoRs) with maps; other land-based certificates such as caste certificates, income certificates (particularly in rural areas), domicile certificates; information for eligibility for development programmes; land passbooks, etc.

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- In addition, the Programme will be of immense usefulness to the governments - both Central and State Governments - in modernizing and bringing efficiency to the land revenue administration as well as offering a comprehensive tool for planning various land-based developmental, regulatory and disaster management activities needing location-specific information. Even the private sector will be able to benefit from this comprehensive tool for planning business and economic activities.

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 SANKU KUMAR RANK 772	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787	 SANKU KUMAR RANK 787

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NATIONAL EVENTS

Aadhaar

- Right-wing and left, opponents to the Aadhaar project appear bunched together in two distinct formations as they separately seek to scuttle a project that aims at providing every citizen a unique identity number for targeted benefits from the government.
- Six groups have filed cases in the Supreme Court against UIDAI, the unique identification authority. These have been filed during the last one year; the UPA-II government had set up UIDAI in 2009 and issued the first Aadhaar numbers in September 2010.
- Several of the arguments overlap but what sets two petitions apart from the remaining four is that the former's objections are based on right-wing principles and the latter's on left-wing ones.
- A petition by Justice (retired) Puttaswamy and Parvesh Khanna, and another by Maj. Gen. (retired) S G Vombatkere and Bezwada Wilson, both raise an objection identical to what the the BJP has been raising — that the project has no preventive to block illegal immigrants or non-citizens from getting an Aadhaar number.

India's first cantilever bridge

- A long-time resident of Rameswaram and former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Pamban railway bridge — India's first cantilever bridge, connecting the pilgrim-island of Rameswaram with the mainland.
- Mr. Kalam unveiled a plaque and released a book Marvels of South Indian Railway, marking the inauguration of the nearly month-long celebrations.
- The 65.23-metre-long rolling central lift span (the bridge is 2.06 km long), named after Scherzer, German engineer who designed and built the span, has been given a fresh coat of paint and decorated with lights. It opens up like a pair of scissors to allow vessels to pass through under the bridge.
- Mr. Kalam had played a vital role in preserving the bridge. After the Railways announced its uni-gauge policy in 2006, and almost gave up gauge conversion at the bridge, he brought in IIT-Madras expertise to thrash out an engineering solution.
- The bridge was put to test for the first time in December 1964, when a severe cyclonic storm hit this part of the area. All girders, both RCC and steel, were washed away.

Verdict on criminalised gay sex to stay

- The Supreme Court has refused to relook into its verdict that criminalised gay sex in India.

- A bench of Justices H L Dattu and S J Mukhopadhaya, in inchamber proceedings, dismissed a bunch of petitions filed by the Centre and gay rights activists against its December 2013 verdict declaring gay sex an offence punishable up to life imprisonment.
- In a big setback to the LGBT community, the Supreme Court had on December 11 set aside the Delhi High Court judgement decriminalising gay sex and thrown the ball into Parliament's court for amending the law.
- The judgement revived the penal provision making gay sex an offence punishable with life imprisonment in a setback to people fighting a battle for recognition of their sexual preferences.
- Seeking a stay on the operation of the judgement, gay rights activists, including NGO Naz Foundation, had said thousands from the LGBT community became open about their sexual identity during the past four years after the high court decriminalised gay sex and they are now facing the threat of being prosecuted.
- They had submitted that criminalizing gay sex amounts to violation of fundamental rights of the LGBT community.
- Challenging the verdict, Naz Foundation had said in its review plea that the verdict is contrary to the well-settled legal principles of the Constitution and proscribing certain sexual acts between consenting adults.

T-Bill challenged

- Taking his fight against the Centre to the next level, Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy challenged it to place in Parliament the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill 2013 in the same form as had been referred to the State legislature.
- Mr. Reddy took potshots at the Centre on the penultimate day of the seven-day extension given by the President for the A.P. legislature to complete the debate on the Bill.
- Mr. Reddy reiterated his stand that the draft Bill referred to the State legislature was incomplete in several aspects as it lacked aims, objects and reasons for bifurcation.

Review on death penalty

- A week after the Supreme Court ruled that “delay is a ground for commuting death penalty to life sentence”, the government is set to file a review petition against the verdict.
- Meanwhile, the court is set to hear the petition filed by three convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case — Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan — who have pleaded for commutation of their death sentences, citing delay in disposal of their mercy pleas.
- In their verdict, the three-judge bench of Chief Justice of India P Sathasivam, Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Shiva Kirti Singh had held that the right to seek mercy is a constitutional right “not at the discretion or whims of the executive”, and there cannot be any distinction based on whether a person on death row was convicted on charges of terror or otherwise while entertaining their petition.

- The court said it was also not in favour of adjourning the matter any further. The order puts pressure on the government to file a review petition before its law officers start arguing the case.

Monorail in India

- India's first monorail will be thrown open to the public soon, eight years after it was first proposed.
- With this, India will join countries like the U.S., Germany, China, Japan, Australia and Malaysia that run monorails.
- This is the first phase of operation in which the train will run between the central suburb of Wadala and the eastern suburb of Chembur. A distance of 8.93 km will be covered in 15 minutes. The stretch usually takes about 40 minutes in Mumbai suburban trains. A monorail train of four coaches can carry 560 passengers.

SC order on Bhullar's execution

- The Supreme Court has stayed the execution of Khalistani terrorist Devinderpal Singh Bhullar and agreed to review its judgment by which it had rejected the 1993 Delhi bomb blast convict's plea to commute his death sentence to life term.
- A four-judge bench headed by Chief Justice P. Sathasivam issued notice to the Centre and Delhi government on a curative petition filed by Bhullar's wife Navneet Kaur.
- The bench also comprising justices R.M. Lodha, H.L. Dattu and S.J. Mukhopadhaya directed the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), where Bhullar is being treated, to file a medical report within a week on the condition of the death convict who is alleged to be suffering from a mental illness.
- Bhullar's wife has filed the petition for relook against the apex court verdict which rejected her plea to commute his death sentence to life imprisonment on grounds of delay on the part of the government in deciding his mercy plea.
- Bhullar was convicted and awarded death penalty for triggering a bomb blast in New Delhi in September 1993, which killed nine persons and injured 25 others, including then Youth Congress president M.S. Bitta.
- The apex court had on March 26, 2002 dismissed Bhullar's appeal against the death sentence awarded by a trial court in August 2001 and endorsed by the Delhi High Court in 2002.

Death penalty for Paresh Barua

- Experts on the north-east say the death sentence awarded to United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) chief Paresh Barua and 13 others will have little impact on the outfit as both Barua and most of his cadres have already shifted base out of Bangladesh.
- They were handed the death penalty by a special court in Chittagong for smuggling 10 truck loads of arms into Bangladesh in 2004.

- Intelligence officials in the State, however, feel that the elusive insurgent leader will be under pressure to come forward for talks should Myanmar act on the lines of Bangladesh and evict insurgents from north-east, including Barua and his cadres, from its soil.
- The Assam police have intelligence inputs that Barua is currently operating out of his base along Myanmar-China border.
- Barua headed the military wing of the ULFA as its self-styled commander-in-chief till the insurgent outfit split in 2011, when the outfit's chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and other top leaders were apprehended in Bangladesh in 2009 and handed over to India. They later signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre and the Assam government to pave the way for a formal dialogue.

Asia's first SBTF

- India has joined the elite group of nations when the Shore Based Test Facility (SBTF) was commissioned into the Indian Navy at INS Hansa in Panaji.
- This is the third such facility in the world, after the United States and Ukraine.
- The SBTF, which was commissioned recently, is primarily used for flight testing of Naval aircraft that operate from aircraft carriers.
- Initially conceptualised for flight testing of LCA (Navy), the facility was commissioned right in time for training of MiG-29K pilots of Indian Navy, who are now ready to commence operations from the newly acquired aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya.
- The SBTF has two parts including the Take-off Area with a ski-jump facility and the Landing Area with arresting wire facility, both of which are a replica of INS Vikramaditya.
- This is also being replicated onboard India's first indigenous aircraft carrier Vikrant being built at Kochi.

Petition against Kejriwal's dharna

- Satisfied with the Delhi Police Commissioner's action during Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's dharna, when the prohibitory order was in force, the Supreme Court disposed of a writ petition questioning the police action.
- Earlier Additional Solicitor General Siddharth Luthra explained the series of steps taken by the police, including placing of additional barricades and registration of FIRs. He also informed the court that Section 144 Cr.P.C. prohibitory order was imposed at 5 p.m. on January 19 itself.
- It said the present case was not one where unlawful assembly was permitted. The police sought dismissal of the petition saying that the supporters could not be removed owing to traffic movement.

Top politicians targeted by AAP

- Launching his party's Lok Sabha election campaign, Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal named several leaders across the political spectrum who, according to him, represent "corrupt, criminal and dynastic politics."
- Inaugurating the opening session of the AAP's National Council meeting here, Mr. Kejriwal read out a list which included Suresh Kalmadi, Sushilkumar Shinde, Kapil Sibal, P. Chidambaram, Kamal Nath, M. Veerappa Moily, Pawan Kumar Bansal, G.K. Vasan, Tarun Gogoi, Naveen Jindal, Anu Tandon and Avtaar Singh Bhadana (all Congress); Nitin Gadkari, B.S. Yeddyurappa, Ananth Kumar and Anurag Thakur (all BJP); Mulayam Singh (SP); Sharad Pawar and Praful Patel (both NCP); M.K. Alagiri, Kanimozhi and A. Raja (all DMK); H.D. Kumaraswamy (JD-S); Jaganmohan Reddy (YSR Congress); Mayawati (BSP) and Farooq Abdullah (National Conference).
- The AAP, he vowed, would put up candidates against each of them in the Lok Sabha election.

PIL survey forms

- The Bombay High Court has directed the Union government to respond within two weeks to a public interest litigation petition, which claims that survey data forms for 2011-12 incorrectly mention 'Muslim', instead of 'Islam', in the religion column.
- The petition demands that the correction be carried out and that the erroneous forms be withdrawn immediately.
- Petitioner Aziz Pathan alleged that the government did not respond to his plea despite his bringing the mistake to its notice.
- The forms were meant to collect data on socio-economic and caste and religious issues from the citizens.

Parade telecast on HD channel, YouTube

- On the country's 65th Republic Day, National broadcaster Doordarshan for the first time beamed the live telecast of the ceremony from Rajpath in superior quality High Definition (HD) transmission and also streamed it on YouTube.
- In another first, hearing impaired people were also able to follow the entire live coverage with the help of sign language commentary on three channels — DD News, DD Bharati and DD Urdu.
- The telecast on YouTube had more than 60,000 hits by 3 p.m., with many Indians living abroad expressing their happiness in the comments section for being able to see the parade live.

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INTERNATIONAL

Iran n-talks

- Iran and the six global powers are set to hold fresh nuclear talks on February 18 that promise to encourage further lifting of sanctions and unlock foreign investment flows into the country.
- Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif said that the dialogue will be held in Vienna, the Austrian capital, following a meeting with the European Union (EU) foreign policy chief, Catharine Ashton on the sidelines of a security conference in Munich.
- A decision on the new round of talks is part of cycle of steps that could end sanctions against Iran, after it was verifiably confirmed that Tehran is not pursuing development of atomic weapons. Iran and the five Security Council members--United States, Russia, China, Britain and France--along with Germany signed a nuclear deal in Geneva on November 24.
- On January 20, Iran's negotiating partners confirmed that Tehran had halted production of uranium enriched to 20 per cent level, paving the way for a partial lifting of sanctions.
- The smooth conduct of inspections by experts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), of some Iran's major nuclear facilities, is further building up the momentum of confidence building between the two sides.

Anti-protest laws repealed in Ukraine

- Mykola Azarov, prime minister of Ukraine, resigned, hours before a planned vote of no confidence by Parliament that could have stripped him of his powers.
- The resignation came shortly after the pro-government Party of Regions joined with opposition lawmakers to repeal most of the laws in a package of legislation restricting freedom of speech and assembly that was enacted recently.
- Together, the resignation and repeals were significant concessions by Ukraine's embattled president, Viktor F Yanukovych, as well as clear signs of the building momentum of opposition to his rule.
- Yanukovych has promised other concessions as well, including an amnesty for arrested protesters and a revision of the Constitution to weaken presidential powers.
- Azarov had been a staunch ally of Yanukovych through the two months of protests roiling Ukraine. But neither his resignation nor the repeal of the restrictive legislation, which the opposition calls the "dictatorship laws", were seen as likely to appease the protesters.

Missile strike by US

- The US military launched a missile strike in Somalia recently , targeting a suspected Shebab militant leader.
- The US strike took place just a day after the Shebab, which are linked to Al-Qaeda, called for attacks against foreign forces after arch-enemy Ethiopia joined the African Union force battling the extremists.
- Hardline Shebab insurgents control large parts of rural southern Somalia, and despite having been driven from a string of towns by the UN-backed mission known as AMISOM, guerrilla units stage regular deadly attacks in the capital Mogadishu.
- The United States has sent a handful of military advisers to Somalia in recent months to help bolster an African Union force fighting extremist militants there.
- The deployment marked the first stationing of US troops in the troubled country since 1993, when two Blackhawk helicopters were shot down and 18 Americans were killed in a disastrous operation.
- Ethiopian troops moved into Somalia in 2006 in a US-backed invasion, but pulled out three years later in the face of stiff opposition. They formally crossed back into Somalia in November 2011, where units have remained ever since.
- Ethiopia had sent troops into its lawless neighbor in a US-backed invasion in 2006, but the move sparked a bloody uprising and the troops pulled out three years later after failing to restore order.

Biannual summit in Brussels

- The escalating political crisis in Ukraine has cast a deep shadow over Russia's relations with Europe.
- In a blunt display of their irritation with Moscow, the European leaders have curtailed their summit with President Vladimir Putin, truncated its agenda and cancelled a traditional dinner for the Russian leader.
- What was to be a two-day biannual summit in Brussels has been cut to just three hours of talks , with Mr. Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov sitting across the table from European Council president Herman Van Rompuy, European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso and EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton.
- Russia and the EU have blamed each other for the crisis in Ukraine, triggered by the decision of President Viktor Yanukovich to ditch an EU free trade and association pact last November in favour of building closer ties with Russia.
- After two months of largely peaceful protests against Ukraine's U-turn, violent clashes erupted in the capital Kiev last week, leading to the death of at least three protesters and one police officer.

Air strike in Somalia by US

- The U.S. military carried out a missile strike in Somalia recently targeting a suspected militant leader with ties to al Qaeda and al Shabaab, a U.S. military official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.
- The strike took place in southern Somalia, without offering further information, including the identity of the suspect or whether the strike was believed to have been successful. The operation took place in a remote area near Barawe, Somalia.
- The U.S. forces pulled out after a gun battle without capturing Ikrima, described as a planner and operator who has relentlessly plotted attacks on neighboring Kenya.
- But the rebels, who have waged a seven-year insurgency seeking to impose a strict interpretation of sharia law in Somalia, stunned the world in September when they attacked an upscale shopping mall in Nairobi, killing at least 67 people.
- Late last year, the U.S. military deepened its involvement in Somalia, establishing a unit of fewer than five troops in the capital, Mogadishu, to help advise and support African Union and Somali forces.

U.K's most influential 500

- Nobel Prize-winning author of Indian-origin, Sir V.S. Naipaul, and Pakistani teenage campaigner Malala Yousafzai have been named among Britain's 500 most influential people.
- The first-ever 'Influential 500' list, compiled by specialist publisher Debrett's and The Sunday Times, includes personalities in 25 areas chosen by experts in their field.
- While Ms. Yousafzai makes the cut in the 'charity and campaigning' category, Sir Naipaul stands out as the only Indian-origin author to be featured in the list.
- Trinidad-born Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was singled out for his Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001.
- Other Indian-origin professionals to make their mark include Dr. Chaand Nagpaul, chair of the British Medical Association GP Committee, in the healthcare category, architect Sunand Prasad and Anshu Jain, the Jaipur-born chief executive of Deutsche Bank, the world's fourth-largest investment bank.
- Among some of the other famous names to feature include Prince Charles for his work with more than 350 charities, Victoria Beckham for fashion, novelist Hilary Mantel and Sir Elton John, for both his music and charity work.
- In sports, footballer David Beckham and Olympic champions Jessica Ennis-Hill and Mo Farah are named as being among the most influential figures.

India's re-election to UNHRC

- India has said it will seek re-election to the UN's human rights body this year and would continue to strongly push for early reform of the powerful Security Council.
- On the occasion of India's 65th Republic Day, India's Ambassador to the UN, Asoke Kumar Mukherji, said that India would actively participate in the work of the United Nations during the coming year based on its national objectives and priorities.
- He said early reform of the UN Security Council will continue to be a "priority" for India, adding that maintenance of international peace and security is also a necessary external environment for India's developmental objectives.
- India is currently a member of the 47-nation UN Human Rights Council and its term will end on December 31, 2014.
- It would seek re-election this year when elections are held in October.
- India will compete in the Asia-Pacific category in which four seats will be up for election and so far seven nations have announced their candidature, sources said.
- The Council members are elected for a period of three years by the world body's General Assembly, and have the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year.
- Last year, the General Assembly had elected 14 countries, including China, Saudi Arabia and Russia to serve on the Council.

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INDIA AND THE WORLD

Resettlement issues between India- Sri Lanka

- Foreign Ministers of India and Sri Lanka discussed proposals to eliminate maltreatment of fishermen, operationalise a trilateral maritime security pact in which the Maldives is a third partner, and review the pace of Indian-assisted resettlement work in the Tamil-dominated Northern Province.
- Officials from both sides were tight-lipped on whether External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid and his Sri Lankan counterpart G.L. Peiris dwelt on the U.S. threat to call for international investigation into Sri Lanka's human rights record at the upcoming meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in March.
- But there were indications from official sources that the issue was deliberated upon. Issues of common interest that are likely to figure in forthcoming international meetings, of which India and Sri Lanka are both members, were also discussed.
- The Indian armed forces had entered Sri Lanka as part of Operation Pawan in 1987 to disarm all Tamil militant groups but got bogged down in counter-insurgency operations, leading to charges of human rights abuses against them.

Indian External Affairs Minister to visit Morocco, Tunisia

- External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid will embark on a week-long trip to Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan. India has substantial economic interests in all the three countries linked to its food and energy security.
- The visit to the region comes after Indian participation in the Geneva II Conference on Syria and follows the recent visits of Prime Minister of Kuwait, foreign ministers of Egypt and the UAE and the Secretary General of the Arab League to New Delhi.
- The last foreign office visit to Morocco was by Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed in 2012 but former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited the country 15 years ago while King Mohammad VI visited India 13 years ago.
- Morocco is an importance source of phosphate imports to India. OCP (office Cherifien des Phosphates) has a phosphate related joint venture with Tata Chemicals and Chambal Chemicals & Fertilisers. It produces four lakh tonnes of phosphoric acid for exports to India.
- The visit to Tunisia will be the first bilateral visit ever by an Indian Foreign Minister. Tunisia has been a reliable source for phosphates to India for over five decades.
- In Sudan, the trade relationship cuts both ways — India is the second largest exporter to Sudan, and this year exports could cross the \$1-billion mark.

India - Pakistan trade deadlock

- India has once again called on Pakistan not to hold up the trans-Line of Control (LoC) trade and movement of people for the sake of a truck driver.
- India has also suggested several initiatives that could help break the fortnight-long deadlock after a Pakistani truck driver was arrested following the alleged recovery of drugs from his truck. The incident took place on a day the countries were discussing steps towards normalisation of bilateral trade.
- India has suggested an immediate meeting of mid-level officials at Kaman Post on the LoC to exchange information about recent narcotic seizures. New Delhi has also sought information about Pakistani investigations to uncover the identity of the persons who had sent the drugs in a consignment of almonds.
- At a more senior level, India has proposed a meeting of the official-level Joint Working Group on Trans-LoC CBMs in the second week of February. This would help remove ambiguities in the interpretation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
- India is convinced it had the right to arrest a Pakistani national if he has committed a crime. The MEA drew attention to Clause 9 of the SOP for cross-LoC trade dealing with examination of the goods to verify whether they are covered under the permitted list of items and are as per the declaration made by the exporter.

ECONOMY

Restrictions on gold imports

- The restrictions on gold imports will be reviewed by March-end, according to Finance Minister P. Chidambaram .
- To contain the rising gold imports, the government had increased customs duty on the yellow metal three times in 2013. The levy currently stands at 10 per cent.
- Mr. Chidambaram said there has been about 1-3 tonnes of gold smuggled into the country every month following the restrictions imposed on shipment in 2013.
- Gold smuggling has increased, but the restrictions on gold import were absolutely necessary because it is these restrictions, which have brought down gold import, which in April and May had crossed 300 tonnes.

RBI hikes repo rate and keeps CRR unchanged

- In an unexpected move, the Reserve Bank of India RBI raised the repo rate---its key lending rate---by 0.25 percentage points to 8%, raising fears of yet another rise in home loan EMIs.
- The surprise hike in the benchmark lending rate came in despite lower inflation rates in December. The central bank cut its growth forecast to less than 5% for 2013-14, but placed its bets firmly on the turnaround in the broader economy in the next financial year.
- The central bank, however, made it clear that any action on interest rate movements will be determined by future price data.
- Equity markets reacted sharply with the benchmark Sensex falling by over 100 points shortly after the RBI's rate hike announcement.
- Higher borrowing costs will likely hit consumers squeezed by high prices, flat salary hikes and costly mortgage financing rates.
- The RBI's latest move, however, will likely draw strong reactions from business leaders who have been clamouring for an interest rate cut arguing that costly borrowing and high raw material costs have crimped expansion and hiring plans.
- India's wholesale inflation rate eased to a five-month low of 6.16% in December on plunging vegetable prices, giving some reason to smile for the UPA government battling to help the economy fight through a period of low growth and high prices ahead of national elections.

India Inclusive Innovation Fund

- The National Innovation Council (NInC) and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises announced the creation of the India Inclusive Innovation Fund.
- The fund seeks to combine innovation and the dynamism of enterprise to solve the problems of citizens at the bottom of the economic pyramid in India.
- The fund, launched by Sam Pitroda, head of the NInC, is an autonomous Rs 500-crore fund, with the Union Government contributing 20 per cent. The balance will come from public sector banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, multilateral/bilateral development agencies, Indian & global corporates.
- The fund's life is for nine years, extendable by up to two years (subject to approval of contributors) and it will focus on healthcare, food and nutrition, agriculture, education, energy, financial inclusion, environment, technology as an enabler, among others.

Asia forex bounces

- The South Korean won led a relief rally among emerging Asian currencies as a huge interest rate hike by Turkey's central bank calmed emerging markets after several days of turmoil.
- Turkey followed India by tightening policy at a midnight meeting of its central bank, with the massive hike in the overnight lending rate of 425 basis points taking rates all the way to 12 per cent.
- The won also benefited from stronger-than-expected industrial output growth and a record current account surplus. The won's strength lifted the Taiwan dollar.
- Malaysia's ringgit advanced on buying by offshore hedge funds and demand against the Singapore dollar.
- Asian shares also rallied after Turkey's move, reflecting a broad rise in risk-appetite which provided some respite for the battered Turkish lira.
- Malaysia's central bank is expected to keep its interest rate unchanged at 3.00 percent later in the day.
- The recent selloff in emerging market assets drove Asian currencies sharply lower as investors fretted over the twin concerns of a cutback in U.S. stimulus and slowing growth in China.
- The won rose as offshore funds scrambled to cover short positions and on demand from exporters such as shipbuilders, traders said.
- South Korea's industrial output jumped in December and its current account surplus grew to a record last year, suggesting the economy carried strong momentum into 2014 with sufficient buffers to weather the latest global market turmoil.

FPI and uniform tax rate

- In a major boost for overseas entities, the government has said that foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) will attract uniform tax rate across categories.
- FPIs bring together all the three investment categories — foreign institutional investors (FIIs), their sub-accounts and qualified foreign investors (QFIs).
- Besides, the tax rate for FPIs would be the same as that extended to FIIs. The new system would be especially beneficial for QFIs, who were subjected to higher tax rate earlier.
- The Central Board of Direct Taxes has notified that the new class of investors, FPIs, would be treated as FIIs under the Income Tax Act, 1961.
- Besides, the new class would be given a permanent registration, as against the current practice of granting approvals for one year or five years to the overseas entities seeking to invest in Indian markets.
- Such registration would be permanent unless suspended or cancelled by SEBI or surrendered by the FPI.
- Category I FPIs, classified as entities with lowest risk, would include foreign governments and government related foreign investors.
- Category II would cover appropriately regulated broad based funds, appropriately regulated entities, broad-based funds whose investment manager is appropriately regulated, university funds and pension funds, among others. Those who are not eligible to be in the first and second set of classifications would be considered under Category III.

No round tripping in Mauritius

- Mauritius, which is the single biggest source of foreign direct investment into India, does not encourage round tripping
- When funds flow from one country and through several other countries, it is very difficult for anybody to identify the original source of the money; but the original fault would be with a system that allows money to get out without controls.
- India and Mauritius had agreed on the contours of a 'framework' that would allow the 'exchange of information' between tax authorities in the two countries. Till a few years ago, investments to India accounted for about half of outbound investments from that country, but now it was only about 24 per cent. Meanwhile, investments flowing into the African continent had risen to about one-third of the investments from Mauritius.

FDI ranking of India

- India's FDI ranking has slipped by one notch to 16th position in 2013 among the top 20 global economies receiving foreign direct investment.
- The foreign direct investment (FDI) into India grew by 17 per cent last year to USD 28 billion despite unexpected capital outflows in the middle of the year, according to a United Nations report.
- In 2012, the country was positioned 15th in the list.
- It said that foreign inflows across the world rose to levels not seen since the start of the global economic crisis in 2008.
- However, uneven levels of growth, fragility and unpredictability in a number of economies and risks related to the tapering of quantitative easing could dampen the FDI recovery.
- FDI flows to developing economies reached a new high of 759 billion dollars, accounting for 52 per cent, during the year.
- Developed countries, however, remained at an historical low (39 per cent) for the second consecutive year.
- FDI inflows to developed countries increased by 12 per cent to USD 576 billion, with such investment to the European Union increasing, while flows to the United States continued their decline. The US received USD 159 billion in FDI flows last year.
- The BRICS Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa continued to be strong performers in attracting FDI. Their current share of global FDI flows at 22 per cent is twice that of their pre-crisis level.

World's largest solar plant

- Six state-owned companies have come together to set up the world's largest single-location 4,000-MW ultra mega solar power project in Rajasthan.
- The joint venture company will have equity participation of 26 per cent from BHEL, 23 per cent from SECI (Solar Energy Corporation of India), 16 per cent from SSL (Sambhar Salt Ltd), 16 per cent from Power Grid, 16 per cent from SJVNL (Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam) and 3 per cent from REIL (Rajasthan Electronics & Instruments Ltd).
- The department of heavy industry would set up a special purpose vehicle for executing this project, which will require an investment of Rs 7,500 crore in the first phase.
- The project will come up on 19,000 acre of surplus land available with SSL in Sambhar, Rajasthan.
- The Solar PV (photo-voltaic) power plant will use PV modules based on crystalline silicon technology. With an estimated life of 25 years, the 4,000 MW of the solar plant is expected to supply 6,400 million units of energy per year and consequently help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by over 4 million tonnes per year.

Dogecoin

- When the Reserve Bank of India tacitly acknowledge the existence of dogecoin, a digital currency that was initially started as a joke, the central bank couldn't have imagined that the dogecoin community would put together a fund-raising effort aimed at helping Indian athletes reach the Sochi Winter Olympics.
- The Dogecoin Foundation, a non-profit organisation started by dogecoin creators Jackson Palmer and Billy Markus, has just done that, however. According to several media reports, Indian athletes Himanshu Thakur and Nadeem Iqbal require funding to defray the costs of competing at the Sochi Winter Olympics.
- The dogecoin community took to the challenge, and raised the roughly \$6,000 required to help the athletes.
- Virtual currencies such as bitcoin and dogecoin have received little clarity with regards to regulation from the Government and the RBI.
- The I-T department and Enforcement Directorate have conducted raids against several bitcoin operators despite the current lack of regulation.

GDP growth rate was 4.5 per cent for 2012-13

- The government, said that the economy might have expanded by 4.5 per cent in 2012-13, compared with the earlier estimate of 5 per cent, on account of subdued performance in agriculture, mining and manufacturing.
- However, gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2011-12 has been revised upwards to 6.7 per cent from 6.2 per cent, according to the estimates of national income, consumption expenditure, saving and capital formation.
- Growth in 2012-13 is the lowest in a decade, with the previous low of 4 per cent recorded in 2002-03.
- Growth for 2010-11 was revised downwards to 8.9 per cent from 9.3 per cent earlier in the third and final revision.

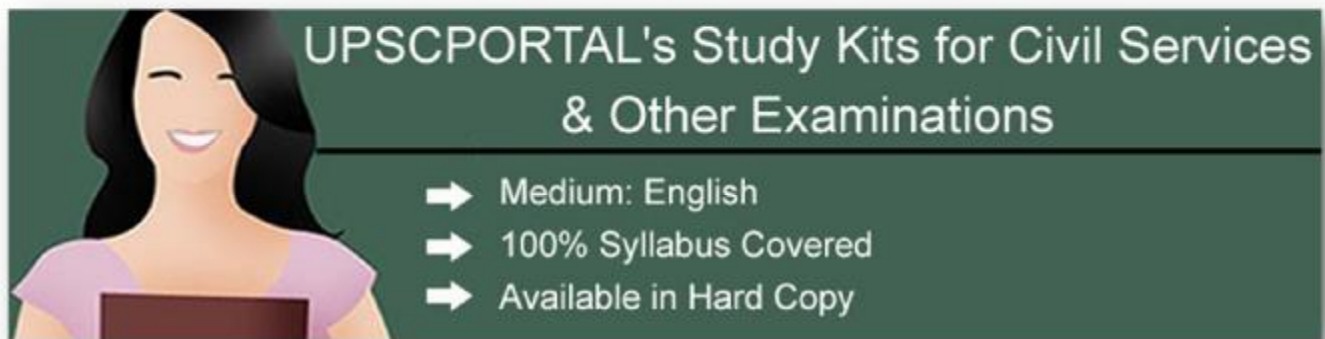
Fiscal deficit in Apr-Dec

- Country's fiscal deficit touched Rs 5,16,390 crore or 95.2 per cent of the annual target during April-December, the Controller General of Accounts said.
- The government had fixed the fiscal deficit target- the gap between expenditure and revenue - at Rs 5,42,499 crore or 4.8 per cent of the GDP in Budget 2013-14.
- The fiscal deficit in the same period last year was 78.8 per cent of the budget estimate.

- The government had repeatedly asserted that the fiscal deficit would be restricted to 4.8 per cent of GDP, down from 4.9 per cent in 2012-13. Finance Minister P Chidambaram had on several occasions said the fiscal deficit target is a red line that would not be breached.
- The revenue deficit at Rs 3,71,242 crore at the end of December was 97.7 per cent of total budgeted for the fiscal.
- The government expects the year-end revenue deficit of Rs 3,79,838 crore.

Claims for Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India

- The Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC) expects to register Rs.1,250 crore gross premium income this year.
- In 2012-13, it was Rs.1,157 crore. Claims settlement was Rs.548 crore last year. This is expected to be more than Rs.600 crore this year.
- ECGC is looking at four new products. It planned to have separate policy for small exporters (with export turnover of less than Rs.5 crore) and micro exporters (who have less than Rs.1 crore export turnover).
- The ECGC planned to introduce a new cover for factoring companies to cover export factoring done by them for MSME exporters and re-start direct factoring.



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SCIENCE AND TECH

Stethoscope faces threat

- The humble stethoscope — the most recognisable symbol of the medical profession for nearly 200 years — may be on its way out, according to researchers.
- The world of medicine could be experiencing its final days of the stethoscope due to the rapid advent of point-of-care ultrasound devices that are becoming increasingly accurate, smaller to the point of being hand-held and less expensive as the years pass, they said.
- In an editorial in the journal Global Heart, a brief history of the stethoscope and ultrasound is given, with the authors suggesting that the stethoscope could soon be exiled to the archives of medical history.
- The editorial highlights that nowadays, more than 20 medical specialities include use of point-of-care ultrasound as a core skill, and that mounting evidence suggests that compared with the stethoscope ultrasound technology can reduce complications, assist in emergency procedures and improve diagnostic accuracy.

Google Glass

- Google Glass is getting glasses. Google is adding prescription frames and new styles of detachable sunglasses to its computerised, internet-connected goggles known as Glass.
- The move comes as Google prepares to make Glass available to the general population later this year. Currently, Glass is available only to the tens of thousands of people who are testing and creating apps for it.
- Glass hasn't actually had glasses in its frame until now.
- Glass is basically a small computer, with a camera and a display screen above the wearer's right eye. The device sits roughly at eyebrow level, higher than where eyeglasses would go.
- It lets wearers surf the web, ask for directions and take photos or videos. Akin to wearing a smartphone without having to hold it in your hands, Glass also lets people read their email, share photos on Twitter and Facebook, translate phrases while travelling or partake in video chats.
- Users can take the frames to any vision care provider for prescription lenses, though Google says it is working with insurance provider Vision Service Plan to train eye-care providers around the US on how to work with Glass. Google says some insurance plans may cover the cost of the frames.
- Isabelle Olsson, the lead designer for Google Glass, says the new frames open the spectacles up to a larger audience.

SPORTS

Olympic torch lit

- The Olympic torch was lit at Russia's highest point with less than a week to go before the opening of the winter Games in Sochi.
- Two experienced mountain climbers lit the flame 5,642 metres above sea level on the western peak of Mount Elbrus, completing the last of four special projects in the biggest torch relay in Olympic history.
- Alpinists Abdul-Khalim Elmezov and Karina Mezova had climbed the western peak of the mountain in the northern Caucasus at the end of October carrying the flame in a special lantern.
- The Elbrus part of the relay had been planned separately to ensure the best possible weather conditions for the climb.

World badminton ranking

- The victory at the Syed Modi International tournament in Lucknow helped London Olympics bronze medallist Saina Nehwal to surge two places to reach the seventh position in the latest world badminton ranking, released in Kuala Lumpur recently.
- The 23-year-old, who broke a 15-month title drought in Lucknow after winning the Grand Prix Gold event, bagged 7,000 ranking points and now has 59,680 points from 14 tournaments.
- P.V.Sindhu, who finished runners-up at that tournament after losing the final to Saina, also broke back into the top 10 with 55,752 ranking points. She gathered 5950 points from her second-place finish at Syed Modi International tournament.
- Rising men's singles player, K.Srikanth, who also finished runners-up at Lucknow, made a massive jump of 10 places to break into the top-20. He is currently the second highest ranked men's shuttler behind Parupalli Kashyap, who is at 18th spot.

Highest base price bracket in IPL auctions

- Virender Sehwag and Yuvraj Singh have retained their highest base price bracket of Rs.2 crore for the upcoming IPL auctions.
- There are 46 capped Indian players on the list of 208 international players who have enrolled for the auction.
- Kiwi sensation Corey Anderson's base price is a relatively modest Rs.1 crore. While Michael Clarke has pulled out of the auction, Ashes hero Mitchell Johnson's base price is Rs.2 crore.

- Like Sehwag and Yuvraj, Ashish Nehra is also expected to fetch atleast Rs.2 crore or more at the auction, going by his highest bracket base price.
- Dinesh Karthik, who was widely tipped to be retained by Mumbai Indians, also has a base price of Rs. 2 crore.
- Yusuf Pathan is in the highest bracket too despite three poor seasons with Kolkata Knight Riders.
- Praveen Kumar, Amit Mishra, Pragyan Ojha, M. Vijay, Manoj Tiwary and Robin Uthappa are the other capped Indian players in the highest bracket.

Prominent Indian players' base prices:

- Rs.2 crore: Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh, Yusuf Pathan, Dinesh Karthik, Praveen Kumar, Ashish Nehra, Pragyan Ojha, Robin Uthappa, Amit Mishra, Murali Vijay, Manoj Tiwary. Rs.1.5 crore: Zaheer Khan, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Cheteshwar Pujara, Irfan Pathan, Ishant Sharma. Rs. 1 crore: Parthiv Patel, Mohit Sharma, Ashoke Dinda, Wriddhiman Saha.

Record set by Anirban Lahiri:

- Confident Top-ranked golfer Anirban Lahiri made his intentions clear by gaining a two-shot lead at the end of the first round of the PGTI Ahmedabad Masters
- The Bangalorean's round one exploits helped him set the KBG course record which is staging its first ever professional event. Angad Cheema, who was part of group comprising Lahiri and Rashid Khan, posted a creditable six-under-66 to lie second.

Rahul Dravid : to mentor junior Olympic, Paralympic athletes

- Former Indian cricket captain Rahul Dravid announced his association with GoSports Foundation with an aim to contribute towards the development and mentorship of Indian junior Olympic and Paralympic athletes.
- Dravid will join the Board of Advisors of sports non-profit organisation and will also institute the 'Rahul Dravid Athlete Mentorship Programme'.
- The mentorship will involve Dravid and his team of experts personally advising select high-potential athletes at key phases in their careers, and also providing them access to scientific expertise, performance and injury management, and allied professional services, so as to provide specific and meaningful support to their young careers.
- Dravid joins 2008 Olympic gold medallist Abhinav Bindra on the Foundation's Board of Advisors.

ENVIRONMENT

Assam elephant corridor

- National Green Tribunal sought a response from the Centre and Assam government on a petition alleging that work of some state-owned companies in and around the Dehing-Patkai wildlife sanctuary in Tinsukia district was affecting the environment.
- Based on the petition, the tribunal also issued notices and sought responses of Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, Oil India Ltd, National Highways Authority of India, Coal India Ltd and various state authorities. The petition alleged that their activities was also affecting the two elephant corridors of Golai and Bogapani.
- The petition, filed by wildlife biologist Kashmira Kakati, has alleged the state government allowed Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) to construct an oil dispatch terminal in the Golai elephant corridor in violation of environment laws.
- Seeking protection of the elephant habitats, the petition also opposed the government's decision to allow NHAI to build the NH-38 bypass through the Bagapani corridor and prayed for directions that no permanent construction be allowed to come up in Golai corridor.

IN THE NEWS (PERSONS)

Janet Yellen

- Janet Yellen, the first woman to chair the Federal Reserve in its 100-year history, took over the reins of the US central bank.
- She succeeded Chairman Ben Bernanke, and was sworn in by Fed Governor Daniel Tarullo,
- Yellen is one of a handful of women heading central banks globally. Her main task will be to navigate the US central bank's way out of its extraordinary stimulus, beginning with a further dialing down of its massive bond-buying program, and deciding when to raise rates.

Harish Rawat

- Union Water Resources Minister Harish Rawat sworn in as the eighth Chief Minister of Uttarakhand
- Mr Rawat succeeded Congress leader Vijay Bahuguna who stepped down from his position of Uttarakhand's Chief Minister after 22 months of holding the office.
- The 11 Cabinet Ministers, who were a part of the Bahuguna government, were also sworn in.
- This decision of the Congress to make Mr Rawat the Chief Minister of the State comes ahead of the Lok Sabha elections to strengthen the chances of the Congress in the Lok Sabha where the State has five seats.
- Mr. Bahuguna's performance during and after the June disaster last year raised questions over his leadership. The slow rehabilitation work after the disaster proved to be detrimental for his tenure.

Silverine Swer

- Meghalaya's oldest voter and the first Padma Shri awardee from the State, Silverine Swer, passed away at the age of 103 at her residence after a brief illness.
- Also affectionately called ,Kong Sil, saw four wars — the two World Wars, the Sino-Indian War and the Bangladesh Liberation War involving India — Kong Sil was born on November 12, 1910, a few years after the 1897 earthquake rocked Shillong.

Michael Rogers

- U.S. President Barack Obama will nominate a senior U.S. Navy officer as the Director of the National Security Agency (NSA), the federal body embroiled in a row over its spying program.
- Vice Admiral Michael Rogers, 53, would take over at a moment when the spy agency is under unprecedented pressure following leaks from ex-intelligence contractor Edward Snowden.

- As commander of the navy's 10th Fleet and U.S. Fleet Cyber Command, he has already demonstrated his leadership and deep expertise in this critical domain. His navy career spans 30 years.

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Selected Editorials of Importance

Decoding the President's address

(Courtesy: THE HINDU)

In his address to the nation on the eve of Republic Day, President Pranab Mukherjee seemed intent on tempering hope with caution and idealism with pragmatism. But what caught everyone's attention was the political undertone of what he himself noted was his last address before the next government takes office. For someone who made a smooth transition from being a Cabinet Minister to becoming the President, Mr. Mukherjee was surprisingly forthright in his warning to the political class. Justifying people's anger at the weakening of democratic institutions, he said: "If we hear sometimes an anthem of despair from the street, it is because people feel that a sacred trust is being violated." For those looking for a warning to the Congress, Mr. Mukherjee had more than a few words on corruption. If Indians are enraged, he said, it is because they are witnessing corruption and waste of national resources. "If governments do not remove these flaws, voters will remove governments." But the veiled attack on the Aam Aadmi Party, the reference to "populist anarchy", now associated with its leader Arvind Kejriwal, captured more mind space. Arguing that populist anarchy cannot be a substitute for governance, the President said: "False promises lead to disillusionment, which gives birth to rage, and that rage has one legitimate target: those in power." If the reference to communal forces is taken as thumbs down to the Bharatiya Janata Party, Mr. Mukherjee appears to have spared none in his address.

Whether read as notes of caution to the Congress, or as articulation of dissatisfaction with the ways of the AAP or the BJP, these remarks assume added importance in the current political context. President Mukherjee clearly wants it to be known that he is on the side of the people and democratic institutions, not blindly supportive of governments and certainly not sympathetic to those in power. Curiously, Mr. Mukherjee also wanted the people to vote in a stable government. True, as he noted, a fractured government, "hostage to whimsical opportunists," would be an unhappy electoral outcome. But to ask the people to vote for a stable government can mean little more than to ask them to vote for a party widely seen as the front-runner. Whether this could be taken as an endorsement of the BJP in the current context is debatable, but it could lend itself to interpretation. So far, Mr. Mukherjee has played by the book in what he has done and what he has not, as President. The political sub-text of his lines and their varying interpretations notwithstanding, the address provides no indication that he is about to change his approach as the President of the Republic.

Every breath we take

(Courtesy: The Indian Express)

Delhi's air pollution is only getting worse. This could be AAP's big chance to make a difference.

Earlier this month, an environmental performance index released by scientists at Yale and Columbia universities ranked India abysmally low in its measurement of overall air quality (174 out of 178). Suggestions that Delhi had beaten Beijing to the uncoveted crown of "most polluted city" — based on comparing average exposure to PM 2.5, microscopic toxic particulates that can enter a person's lungs and bloodstream — followed.

The ensuing squabble has distracted from the bottom line, which is that air pollution has reached dangerous levels in both cities, and that India has a serious air quality problem with terrible health consequences.

Though Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad had disavowed knowledge of “conclusive evidence” that air pollution does, indeed, have an adverse impact on the “prevalence of respiratory and other diseases”, a study published last year found that long-term exposure to pollution, especially particulates of the kind found in such concentration in Delhi air, dramatically affects life expectancy, shaving off as much as five and a half years. The World Bank estimates that India loses 1.7 per cent of its GDP to such ailments caused by increased exposure to outdoor air pollution.

These distressing new studies leave little doubt that levels of pollution are increasing. The Sheila Dikshit government — with a little help from the courts — tried to balance the city’s exponential growth in vehicular traffic with more stringent environmental norms; Delhi Metro began operation, light commercial vehicles were made to switch to CNG, pollution norms were strengthened and stricter emissions norms for new vehicles were adopted. But this only underlines the enormity of the challenge that confronts the AAP government in Delhi. Despite these interventions, Delhi’s air has become progressively more toxic, in no small part due to the crush of cars added to the capital’s choked roads every day.

Unlike Beijing, no Indian city government can impose limits on car ownership. But investment in public transport facilities and an openness to experimentation could set the template on managing pollution. Saurabh Bhardwaj, the AAP’s minister for both transport and environment, is uniquely placed to leave a lasting imprint on an issue dear to the aam aadmi’s heart — literally.

IIT-M's idea of supplying small amounts of DC power to homes will end power cuts

(Courtesy: The Economic Times)

In a welcome collaboration between the government and technologists, a new experiment to spare Indians the travails of power cuts is getting underway in South India.

The idea is very simple. A variety of household equipment now runs on direct current (DC), rather than the alternating current (AC) that is supplied to households from the distribution grid. And these things, LED lighting, flat panel TV or computer monitors, mobile phones and computers, all run on very little power and at low voltage .

These convert the AC supply from the mains to DC at the level of the equipment. What the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras proposes is to run a low-load (100 watts, in place of the typical 4,000-10,000 Watts) DC line to every home, where it would be converted to low voltage, 48 volts, and feed into a separate meter and wiring for lights, TV and fans that run on DC.

Since the power required to run such a system is so low, SEBs will not need to shut this down while carrying out load-shedding. The result would be uninterrupted power supply for a minimal set of appliances.

Such physical segregation of the power supply for a minimal set of household appliances and that for running more power-hungry equipment running on standard AC power will also come in handy for governments to limit their subsidy burden on households. The government could, for example, decide to bear the entire tab for households that only consume power on the DC line.

IIT-M has tied up with the four southern electricity boards to run a pilot project of a few hundred households in every state. The equipment that converts AC from the transformer into DC to be sent to homes must work and household willingness to bear the additional outlay on DC fans and a converter at home must be proved.

If DC wiring were to become standard, solar energy uptake would also get a boost. The larger point is the capacity the present project demonstrates for India's technology institutions and the government system to work together in innovative ways.

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MCQs

:: NATIONAL ::

Q1.

- i) Disability Rights Bill is a watered-down version of what the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had put up on its website in October 2012.
- ii) Indian Museum, Kolkata, is the India's oldest museum .

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) A vote-on account is a statement ,where the government presents an estimate of a sum required to meet the expenditure that it incurs during the first three to four months of an election financial year until a new government is in place, to keep the machinery running.
- ii) Narendra Modi and Sonia Gandhi are not in the list of The Aam Adam Party's list of alleged 'tainted' politicians .

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

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

:: INTERNATIONAL ::

Q3.

- i) Japan established its ADIZ (Air Defence Identification Zone) in 1969.
- ii) Polling ended recently in Thailand, where the general elections were boycotted by the opposition and disrupted by protesters seeking to prevent the re-election of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.

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

:: INDIA AND THE WORLD ::

Q4.

- i) India is currently a member of the 47—nation UN Human Rights Council and its term will end on December 31, 2014.
- ii) India and Japan are promoting energy related investment in the thermal power plant by working together on a project in Tamil Nadu.

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 ::

Q5.

- i) Morocco is an importance source of phosphate imports to India.
- ii) India is the largest buyer of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and phosphoric acid from Tunisia.

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) Mauritius, is the single biggest source of foreign direct investment into India .
- ii) Round Tripping is welcomed in Mauritius's economy .

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 ::

Q7.

- i) Sindh cultural festival was recently held at World Heritage site, Mohenjo Daro.
- ii) K.Srikanth is currently the second highest ranked men's shuttler behind Parupalli Kashyap, who is at 18th spot.

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

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MCQs Answers

Ans 1: c

Ans 2: a

Ans 3: c

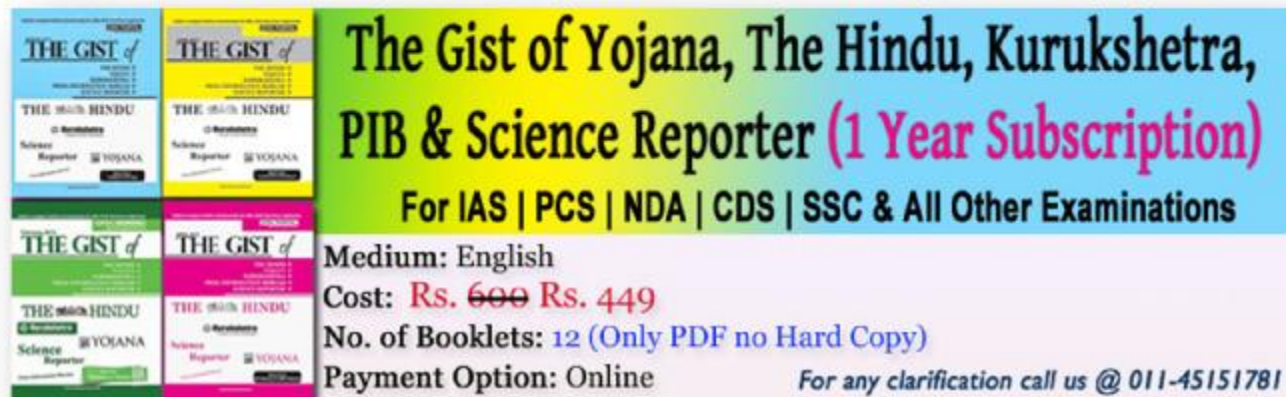
Ans 4: a

Ans 5: c

Ans 6: a

Ans 7: c

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