CURRENT AFFAIRS
MARCH 2015

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SECTION 66A OF IT ACT

The Supreme Court, in Shreya Singhal versus Union of India, has quashed Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act), terming it "vague" and "unconstitutional".

THE SUPREME COURT STAND

- In the judgment, the court said the liberty of thought and expression was a cardinal value of paramount significance under the Constitution.
- Three concepts fundamental in understanding the reach of this right were discussion, advocacy and incitement. Discussion, or even advocacy, of a particular cause, no matter how unpopular it was, was at the heart of the right to free speech and it was only when such discussion or advocacy reached the level of incitement that it could be curbed on the ground of causing public disorder.

SUPREME QUOTES

WHY COURT KILLED SECTION 66A, WHAT IT SAID

Discussion or advocacy particular cause **howsoever unpopular** at **heart of right to freedom of speech** and expression

Sec 66A has **no** proximate **relationship** to **public order**

Sec 66A cast so widely that virtually any opinion on any subject would be covered by it

It is clear that expressions in 66A are **open-ended** and **undefined**

Govt may come and may go but **sec 66A goes on forever.** An assurance from the present govt even if carried out faithfully would **not bind any successor govt**

It is clear that expressions in 66A are **open-ended** and **undefined**

Complete violence to **language** of Sec 66A to read into it something **never intended** to be read into it

Law may be made curtailing speech or expression that leads to/ tends to cause public disorder... affects sovereignty & integrity, security of India

Analysis:

- This verdict is a hugely important landmark in the Supreme Court's history for many reasons. It represents a rare instance of the court adopting the extreme step of declaring a censorship law passed by Parliament as altogether illegitimate.
- In quashing Section 66A ,the Supreme Court has not only given a fresh lease of life to free speech in India, but has also performed its role as a constitutional court for Indians with considerable élan
- The court implicitly acknowledges that the right to critique and the right to dissent are a substantive part of the freedom of speech.

UPHOLDING RIGHTS

The law will no longer allow someone to be arrested for posting any content online

2008 UPA government amends IT Act, 2000 **adds Section 66A,** punishment up to three years in jail

question shut down of Mumbai for Shiv Sena patriarch Bal Thackeray's funeral

Sept. 10, 2012 Aseem Trivedi held for cartoons allegedly **mocking the Constitution**

Nov. 29, 2012 Shreya Singhal **files a PIL** against **Act,** seeks amendment in Section 66A

Nov. 19, 2012 Two girls held in Thane for **Facebook post**

May 16, 2013 Supreme Court **issues advisory** that arrests need consent of senior officers

The public's right to know is directly affected by Section 66A of the Information Technology Act – supreme Court Beach

What Section 66A says:

The IT Act had been passed in 2000, but had not included the contentious section. An amendment to the law in 2008 had inserted Section 66(A).

Section 66(A) reads:

"Any person who sends, by means of a computer resource or a communication device

(a) any information that is grossly offensive or has menacing character; or
(b) any information which he knows to be false, but for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will, persistently by making use of such computer resource or a communication device,
(c) any electronic mail or electronic mail message for the purpose of causing annoyance or inconvenience or to deceive or to mislead the addressee or recipient about the origin of such messages, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and with fine."

POLITICAL PARTIES DEFYING RTI

Six national parties in India have refused to comply with the Central Information Commission (CIC) order of 2013 declaring them as Public Authorities. They have not sought legal remedy either by appealing against the CIC order declaring them to be Public Authorities

RECENT ORDER OF CIC

- On March 16, 2015, the CIC passed another order which in effect said that it was helpless in the matter and would not impose penalty or enforce compliance of its 2013 order.
- Earlier, it had issued summons on three occasions to the parties concerned to present their arguments, all of which were ignored.
- The new order says that penalty can only be imposed on the Public Information Officer (PIO) and since the political parties have not appointed them, no action can be taken.
- Faced with the only such case of non-compliance in the RTI's history, the CIC suggested that further action be taken by the **Union government or by courts**.

PETITIONER'S REACTIONS OF CIC ORDER

- The petitioners called the CIC move "an abdication of its responsibilities". "The CIC is not a court, but a quasi-judicial body. It is expected to follow not the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. Following this, the Act clearly gives it the power to award penalty and compensation,"
- "The CIC's verdict will have far-reaching, dangerous consequences when bodies declared by the CIC as public authorities will no more care to obey the CIC's directions, thus giving a final blow to the RTI Act by none other than CIC itself," .

POSSIBLE REMEDIES TO PRESENT SITUATION

- There are a few possible remedies.
  - ✓ One is for political parties to be more responsible and follow the CIC order or have the courage to challenge it in court.
  - ✓ No individual party is willing to challenge the order since it would go against public opinion.
  - ✓ Another remedy is to amend the Act to clarify the consequences of defying a CIC order and arm the CIC with explicit powers.
  - ✓ A third is for the court to give a judgment.
- It will be very difficult for Parliament to pass an amendment to exempt only political parties from the RTI while retaining other organisations under it. It would be struck down as being unconstitutional as an earlier judgment in fact did to an amendment to the Representation of the People Act (RP) Act which exempt candidates from disclosing their assets.

NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

- Political parties apparent objection that minutes of internal meetings of a political party — that discuss party strategy or suitability of candidates for ticket distribution for example — cannot be made public, are excuses.
- However, the real fear is exposure of their finances. Their declared income does not disclose the source of about 75 per cent of their donations.
- We are at a critical point in our democracy. Today, money plays an important role in winning elections. If that changes, then people become more important than money.
- Real democracy where political parties are not mere vote gathering machines, but are vibrant, democratic organisations that are truly representative of the people, by the people and, most importantly, for the people.

CIC Order OF June 13 and The Counter –Arguments

In an appeal made by Subhash Aggarwal to the CIC on refusal by political parties to share information sought under RTI, the CIC held that by all accounts they were public bodies and the six national political parties needed to provide information as sought. The logic:

1. They were recipients of valuable state resources in the form of land, accommodation, and tax exemptions which amounted to "substantial funding" by the public exchequer.
2. Free airtime on AIR or DD during election time.
3. Also by the virtue of acting for the public they should be open to public scrutiny.
4. PPs have constitutional recognition under Article 102(2), 191(2), and Tenth schedule as well as statutory recognition under section 29(A) of RPA 1951.

The day the order was announced, everyone knew that most political parties would come together to annul the damage done by the CIC. Baring the CPI, no other party has implemented the CIC order even though the deadline has passed. The govt has then decided to amend the RTI Act to negate the order of CIC to bring it under the ambit of RTI Act. The major points of discord are:

1. Unfurling the RTI umbrella over political parties has implications for political strategy and functioning as once conceded, even information on the distribution or denial of ticket can be sought — clearly a situation that is untenable given the competitiveness, secrecy and intricacy of political decision-making.
2. Political parties do not maintain the documentation needed to respond to wide-ranging RTI queries and they cannot be expected to establish a new organisation only to fulfil the sweeping questions that will come under the RTI.
3. If the argument that political parties received "substantial funding" is applied equitably, it would apply to all similarly placed NGOs.
4. When it is well known and publicly admitted that most political funding comes from black money sources and in cash, it is impossible to declare whose contribution it was without first cleaning up the "number two" monopoly.

TWITTER SAMVAD

- Prime Minister NarendraModi launched Twitter Samvad, a service that allows people to receive tweets by government leaders and agencies as text messages over mobile phones.
- Twitter Samvad is based on a platform provided by ZipDial, an Indian company recently acquired by Twitter, making this its first Indian service launched using indigenous technology.
- The service can come in handy during emergencies as government agencies can share live updates, even time-sensitive information on law and order or rescue.

SPECTRUM AUCTION

- The biggest telecom spectrum auction ended after 19 days of fierce bidding that fetched about Rs.1.10 lakh crore to the government.
- A total of 380.75 MHz of spectrum was put on sale in the premium 900 MHz band, 1,800 MHz and 800 MHz, while 5 MHz was up for bidding in the 2,100 MHz band, used for 3G mobile services, across 17 out of 22 telecom circles.

- Telecom operators are required to pay an upfront payment of 33 per cent in case of 2100 MHz, 1800 Mhz bands and 25 per cent for 900 MHz and 800 MHz bands within ten calendar days of the close of auction.

Auction fetches Rs. 1.10 lakh crore

The Department of Telecom has disclosd the results and the names of successful bidders after the Supreme Court granted permission

4 bands Up for auction	The auction included airwaves held under nine licences of Idea Cellular, seven each of Reliance Telecom and Vodafone and six Bharti Airtel that are set set to expire.	Telecos are required to pay upfront 33 per cent of the bid amount for the 2100 MHZ, 1800 MHZ and 800 MHZ bands within 10 calender days of the close of auction.	The winning bidders will pay the rest of the amount over a period of 12 years – two years moratorium and then 10 yearly installments.
19 days Up for auction			
115 total rounds of bidding	Rs. 1,09,874 cr: Total value of bids that the government got in spectrum auction	The spectrum auction conducted in 2010 brought about Rs. 1.06 lakh crore, which included Rs. 30,000 crore payment from BSNL and MTNL	

Analysis:

- Spectrum auction bellied zero-loss theory of previous government.
- Experts believe that the companies will raise tariffs in an effort to recover their spectrum costs.
- Also due to high bidding cost the balance sheet of telecom operators will be hit and there is apprehension that operators may not be able to provide quality service to consumers as happened in 3G-auction.

  ✓ The 3G auction held in 2010 fetched a windfall for the government but dealt a blow to the telecom industry from which it has yet to fully recover.
  ✓ The consequences of that frenzied round of bidding are still being felt in the form of large loan dues of banks that funded the bidding, frayed balance sheets of telecom operators and poor services for consumers as operators cut down investment on network expansion.

- The government's keenness to maximise revenues and to prevent windfall gains to telecom operators is understandable, but it should be balanced with the interests of the long-term development of the industry and of the consumers.

ELECTORAL REFORMS

The law Commission of India, Headed by Justice A P Shah, submitted its Report No. 255 on "Electoral Reforms" to the Union Law and Justice Ministry. Following is the summery of the report on various issues discussed in the report.

- **Preparation and Use of Common Electoral Rolls**

    ✓ The Law Commission endorses the ECI's suggestions regarding the introduction of common electoral rolls for Parliamentary, Assembly and local body elections.

- **Independent Candidates**

    ✓ The Law Commission recommends that independent candidates be disbarred from contesting elections, who are mostly dummy/non-serious candidates or those who stand (with the same name) only to increase the voters' confusion.
    ✓ Thus, sections 4 and 5 of the RPA should be amended to provide for only political parties registered with the ECI under section 11(4) to contest LokSabha or VidhanSabha elections.

- **Restriction on the Number of Seats from which a Candidate May Contest**

    ✓ TheCommission recommends an amendment of section 33(7) of the RPA, which permits a candidate to contest any election (parliamentary, assembly, biennial council, or bye-elections) from up to two constituencies.
    ✓ In view of the expenditure of time and effort; election fatigue; and the harassment caused to the voters, section 33(7) should be amended to permit candidates to stand from only one constituency.

- **Restriction on Government Sponsored Advertisements**

    ✓ The Commission recommends regulating and restricting government sponsored advertisements six months prior to the date of expiry of the House/Assembly.
    ✓ to maintain the purity of elections;
    ✓ prevent the use of public money for partisan interests of, *inter alia*, highlighting the government's achievements; and ensure that the ruling party or candidate does not get an undue advantage over another in the spirit of free and fair elections.

- **The Right to Recall**

    ✓ The Law Commission is not in favour of introducing the right to recall in any form because it can lead to an excess of democracy, undermines the independence of the elected candidates, ignores minority interests, increases instability and chaos, increases chances of misuse and abuse, is difficult and expensive to implement in practice, especially given that India follows the first past the post system.

- **Totaliser for Counting of Votes**

    ✓ The Commission reiterates and endorses the ECI's suggestion for introducing a totaliser for the counting of votes recorded in electronic voting machines to prevent the harassment of voters in areas where voting trends in each polling station can be determined.

- **NOTA and the Right to Reject**

  ✓ The Law Commission currently rejects the extension of the NOTA principle to introduce a right to reject the candidate and invalidate the election in cases where a majority of the votes have been polled in favour of the NOTA option.

- **Election Petitions**

  ✓ The introduction of one or more "election benches" in each High Court, designated so by the Chief Justice of the particular High Court, exercising jurisdiction over all election disputes under the RPA.
  ✓ The procedure for presenting election petitions should be made simpler and less formalistic.

- **Opinion Polls**

  ✓ The ban on broadcast of election matter 48 hours prior to an election was restricted to the electronic media now; the commission recommended such prohibition for the print media also.
  ✓ The regulation of opinion polls is necessary to ensure that first, the credentials of the organisations conducting the poll is made known to the public; second, the public has a chance to assess the validity of the methods used in conducting the opinion polls; and third, the public is made adequately aware that opinion polls are in the nature of forecasts or predictions, and as such are liable to error. Consequently, new sections 126C and 126D should be inserted in the RPA.

- **Paid News and Political Advertisements**

  ✓ The panel has proposed that "paying for news", "receiving payment for news" and "political advertisement" should be clearly defined in the RoPA, and paid news should be made a penal offence.

- **Strengthening the office of the Election Commission of India**

  ✓ The ECI should be strengthened by first, giving equal constitutional protection to all members of the Commission in matters of removability; second, making the appointment process of the Election Commissioners and the CEC consultative; and third, creating a permanent, independent Secretariat for the ECI.
  ✓ Article 324(5) of the Constitution should be amended to equate the removal procedures of the two Election Commissioners with that of the Chief Election Commissioner.
  ✓ The appointment of all the Election Commissioners, including the CEC, should be made by the President in consultation with a three-member collegium or selection committee, consisting of the Prime Minister; the Leader of the Opposition of the LokSabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party in the LokSabha in terms of numerical strength); and the Chief Justice of India.
  ✓ Elevation of an Election Commissioner should be on the basis of seniority, unless the three member collegium/committee, for reasons to be recorded in writing, finds such Commissioner unfit.
  ✓ A new sub-clause (2A) should be added to Article 324 of the Constitution to provide for a separate independent and permanent Secretariat for the ECI.

- **Proportional Representation**

  ✓ The Commission has not supported a move to proportional representation.

- **Anti Defection Law in India**

  ✓ The Law Commission recommends a suitable amendment to the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, which shall have the effect of vesting the power to decide on questions of disqualification on the ground of defection with the President or the Governor, as the case may be, (instead of the Speaker or the Chairman), who shall act on the advice of the ECI. This would help preserve the integrity of the Speaker's office.

- **Election Finance**

  ✓ The commission has not favored the demand for state funding of elections. It has suggested suitable amendments in law to ensure that the poll expense of a candidate should be taken into account from the date of notification of polls to the declaration of results.
  ✓ The commission has proposed to make it mandatory for political parties to disclose contributions less than Rs 20,000 if such contributions exceed Rs 20 crore or 20 % of the party's total contributions, whichever is less. For this purpose, the commission has recommended amendments to the relevant election rules as well as the Income Tax Act.
  ✓ Make it mandatory for corporates to seek shareholders' approval at their annual general meetings before donating funds to political parties,

- **Regulation of Political Parties and Inner Party Democracy**

  ✓ The commission a wants internal democracy, party constitutions, party organisation, internal elections, candidate selection, voting procedures and and the ECI's power to de-register a party in certain cases of non-compliance.
  ✓ De-Registration of a political party for failure to contest Parliamentary or State elections for ten consecutive years.

AMENDMENT TO THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

- The government faced an embarrassment in the RajyaSabha when an amendment moved by the Opposition to the President's address over corruption and black money was passed.
- This is the fourth time in RajyaSabha's history that an amendment moved by the opposition to the motion of thanks to the President's address has been passed.
- The previous times such a thing happened was on January 30, 1980, during Janata Party rule, then on December 29, 1989, during V.P. Singh-led National Front and third time on March 12, 2001 when AtalBihari Vajpayee-led NDA government was in power.

NOT THE FIRST TIME

Past in stances of govt adopting amendments to Motion of Thanks to the Presidential address in RS **IN 1980,** when Indira Gandhi was in power, does not take notice of disturbing attempts to engineer defections on a large scale in Assemblies in the states ruled by non-Congress(I) Govts.

IN 1989, during VP Singh's rule, six amendments were carried to the effect that it does not mention the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute and the measures proposed toresolve it, does not mention the steps to be taken to avert destabilizing state governments, fails to state that the government will am end the Constitution to ensure 'Right to Work' as a Fundamental Right, does not mention about the In do-Sri Lanka Accord and fails to specify government's stand on the question of life and security of Tamils and devolution of power to the North-Eastern Provinces.

IN 2001, during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's rule, an amendment was adopted as the Address did not contain the Government's decision to sell out BALCO, a PSU with a track record of continuous profit earning, to a private firm.

MOTOR VEHICLE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2015 PASSED BY PARLIAMENT

- The bill aims at bringing e-rickshaws and e-carts under the ambit of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1957 so that they can ply on roads across the country.
- Government will also make efforts to provide loans at three to four percent interest to people belonging to SCs, STs and OBC for buying e-rickshaws.
- Women and the physically handicapped will be given driving licenses for these.

Significance

- It would give a boost to 'Make in India' initiative as the battery-operated vehicle was now being manufactured indigenously.
- Earlier it was imported from China but now a Pune based company is manufacturing this.
- It will reduce pollution which is a major problem in metro cities.
- According to government It will benefit about 1 crore poor rikshaw pullers across the country.

Background

- E-rickshaws or battery-operated three-wheeler vehicles had gone off roads after Delhi high court had banned their plying in July last year on safety concerns.

PHARMA JAN SAMADHAN SCHEME

The Union Minister of Chemicals & Fertilizers launched 'Pharma Jan Samadhan' scheme.

Features

- It is a web enabled system for redressal of consumers' grievances relating to pricing and availability of medicines.
- It is created by National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA).
- Pharma Jan Samadhan will provide consumers and others with an on-line facility to redress their complaints relating to over-pricing of medicines, non-availability or shortage of medicines, sale of new medicines without prior price approval of NPPA, and refusal of supply for sale of any medicine without good and sufficient reason.
- NPPA will initiate action on any complaint within 48 hrs of its receipt.

Significance

- This phama-literacy initiative would create awareness among the people and would act as a deterrence against black-marketing, spurious medicines, and inflated cost of drugs.
- This step will empower the common man.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION (AIM)

- Finance minister announced the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), in the NITI Aayog, with an initial fund of Rs 150 crore for research and development.
- AIM would draw upon national and international experiences to foster a culture of innovation, research and development and scientific research in India.
- AIM will be involving academicians, entrepreneurs and researchers.

PRICE STABILISATION FUND

The Department of Agriculture & Cooperation has approved the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) as a Central Sector Scheme. The Price Stabilization Fund will be managed centrally by a Price Stabilization Fund Management Committee (PSFMC) which will approve all proposals from State.

Objective:

The objective of the PSF is to support market interventions for price control of perishable agri-horticultural commodities during 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Funding of the Corpus :

- The Price Stabilisation Fund will be established with a corpus of Rs. 500 crores.
- PSF will be used to advance interest free loan to State Governments and Central agencies to support their working capital and other expenses on procurement and distribution interventions for such commodities.

    - ✓ **Revolving fund:** For this purpose, the States will set up a revolving fund to which Centre and State will contribute equally (50:50).

- ✓ The ratio of Centre-State contribution to the State level corpus in respect of North East States will however be 75:25. The revolving fund is being mooted so that requirements for all future interventions can be decided and met with at the State level itself.
- ✓ Central Agencies will, however, set up their revolving fund entirely with the advance from the Centre.

Procurement:

- Procurement of these commodities will be undertaken directly from farmers or farmers' organizations at farm gate/mandi and made available at a more reasonable price to the consumers.
- Initially the fund is proposed to be used for onion and potato only.

Analysis:

- The Government may have three types of agricultural policies to influence price behaviour, namely production policies (influencing production), trade policies (export/import policy influences domestic supplies) and direct price stabilisation policies such as buffer stocks, emergency reserves, price controls, and prohibition of private trade.
- Over the years the prices of perishable agri-products have witnessed wide fluctuation .Price fluctuations are mainly seasonal and spatial. Hindrances in inter-State movement of agricultural goods also have lot to do with this price variation.
- PSF is an important step to safeguard the interest of producers and consumers against price volatility. PSF should include a component for strengthening of data collection and dissemination method.

URJA SANGAM 2015 - INDIA'S GLOBAL HYDROCARBON SUMMIT

- Prime Minister inaugurated 'UrjaSangam 2015' at VigyanBhavan, New Delhi, which is India's biggest global hydrocarbon meet, aimed at shaping India's energy security.
- UrjaSangam aims to showcase India's potential in the hydrocarbon sector to the world and create an investor-friendly atmosphere, besides positioning India's thought leadership by creating a new "Energy Security" platform. On the global level, the summit aims to firm up cooperation agreements with key global players.
- PM urged all stakeholders to increase the domestic production of Oil and Gas to reduce import dependence from 77 % to 67% by the year 2022.
- The Prime Minister appealed to well-to-do sections of Indian society to voluntarily give up LPG subsidy, so that the benefit of the same could be shared more widely with poorer sections of society.

CATTLE SLAUGHTER AND THE BAN ON BEEF

President Mukherjee gave his assent to the *Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill, 1995*. It received assent nearly after 19 years it was passed by State Assembly in 1995. The bill amends *Maharashtra Animal Preservation Act 1976* and bans *slaughter of bulls and bullocks* in the state. As per the new Act, anyone found to be *selling beef or in possession of it can be jailed for 5 years and fined Rs 10,000*. However, this Act allows slaughter of water buffaloes, which provides carabeef that is generally considered as an inferior quality meat. This has raised questions about a State's authority to decide its *citizens' dietary habits* and basis of *discriminations* between the cattles.

Following Maharashtra, recently Haryana Government has also passed **Haryana GauvanshSanrakshan and Gausamvardhan Bill, 2015** that bans _cow slaughter and sale of beef_. The Bill seeks to conserve and develop indigenous breeds of cows in the State. It also seeks to establish institutions for the purpose of sheltering and taking care of infirm, injured, stray and uneconomic cows. Cow slaughter is completely banned and anyone found guilty would be liable for _imprisonment for 3 to 10 years, along with fines from Rs. 30000 to Rs. 1 lakh_. Violation of the ban on sale of beef will entail person _3 to 5 years of rigorous imprisonment with fine of up to Rs. 50000._ Exporting a cow for the purpose of slaughter either directly or indirectly through agent or servant or any person is also banned.

SUPREME COURT STANDINGS ON CATTLE SLAUGHTER

- In **1958,** a five-judge Bench led by then Chief Justice of India S.R. Das was deciding the _constitutionality of cattle slaughter ban laws in Bihar, UP and MP._
    - The bench held that cattle, _except cows of all ages and calves of both cows and buffaloes_, not capable of milch or draught can be slaughtered. The court classified such cattle as "_useless_" and found that keeping "useless cattle" alive would be a "**wasteful drain" on the nation's cattle feed**.
    - The prices of beef and buffalo flesh is nearly half that of mutton or goats' flesh. Poorer people, therefore, who can hardly afford fruit or milk or ghee are likely to suffer from malnutrition if they are deprived of even one slice of beef or buffalo flesh which may sometimes be within their reach. Thus, the Court held that beef or buffalo meat is an **item of food for a large section** of the people in India.
- But in **2005**, a seven-judge Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India R.C. Lahoti, over-rode 1958 verdict and upheld _Gujarat's **total ban** on cattle slaughter_, _regardless of whether the bovine is useless or useful_.
    - It said the 1958 verdict only reflected "**India's panic"** _due to food scarcity of that era_. This is the land of Gandhi, Vinobha, Mahaveer, Buddha, Nanak and others. It will be an act of reprehensible ingratitude to condemn cattle in old age as useless and send them to a slaughterhouse.
    - The court pooh-poohed the reasoning that beef was the poor man's protein-rich diet as beef contributes **only 1.3% of the total meat consumption pattern** of the Indian society.

ARGUMENTS OPPOSING RECENT BANS

- Beef is a _cheap source of protein_ for poors.
- Sale of beef provides _livelihood to millions_ of people. Such ban will need to have a rehabilitation plan for people losing their business.
- Ban will _overburden the keepers_ in feeding the useless or aged animal.
- Regarding the extension of the cow slaughter ban to bulls (male cows), critics are arguing that _why cow slaughter is banned, but not the slaughter of buffaloes?_ Both give milk and, in that sense, both are "holy" or mother-like. Is there an implicit "racist" bias here, given that the buffaloes are mostly black and cows mostly white? Or is it the case that the cow is socialist and therefore fits in with the Preamble of our modified Constitution, and the buffalo is part of a capitalist disorder?

CONSTITUTIONALITYOF TRIBUNALS

- A Division Bench of the Madras High Court struck down key provisions relating to the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) established under the Trade Marks Act, 1999, as unconstitutional.

- The crux of the present case is with regard to the qualification and selection of Chairman, Judicial Member and Technical Member of the IPAB. The High Court declared this unconstitutional, suggesting that an officer working with the Executive cannot act in a judicial capacity.
- The decision of High court has raised the question of constitutionality of various tribunals.
- There has been much concern over the validity, character and competence of several of the tribunals in India

The Supreme Court stand

- The Supreme Court has, in a range of decisions, articulated the principles that a tribunal has to abide by in order to be constitutionally valid.
- The Court in Chandra Kumar (1997) and NCLT (2010) suggested that the tribunals which were replacing the jurisdiction of the Courts should enjoy the same constitutional protections as them.
- This meant that when the jurisdiction is being transferred from a court to a tribunal, the members of this tribunal should hold a rank, status and capacity which is as close to those of the judges in a court as possible.
- The recent Supreme Court judgment which struck down the National Tax Tribunals (NTT) also clearly spelt out the parameters to test the constitutionality of tribunals.
- A Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy report (2014) has identified about 29 different tribunals set up under various Central legislations, and finds several of them to be inconsistent with the parameters laid down by the Supreme Court.

Analysis:

- There is tussle between judiciary and the legislature on the "tribunalisation" of courts. Since tribunals follow the principles of natural justice, they do not follow the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 that is commonly followed in Courts.
- Tribunals are designed for speedy disposal of specialised disputes. But a tribunal which is biased, incompetent and unfair, cause more harm than serve such intended purposes.
- At stake are core principles of an independent judiciary and separation of powers, a part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- The Bench headed by Chief Justice R M Lodha ruled if judicial powers were transferred to tribunals it would affect the basic structure of the Constitution and judicial independence.

SC STRIKES DOWN QUOTA FOR JATS

The Supreme Court struck down the March 4, 2014 notification issued by the then UPA government to include the Jats in the Central list of OBCs for the nine States.

THE COURT OBSERVATIONS

- Politically organised communities like the Jats cannot be included in the Central list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs),
- Social backwardness had to be the prime consideration for granting OBC status and such recognition could not be associated with caste alone
- The State should not go by the "perception of the self-proclaimed socially backward class or advanced classes.

- The Supreme Court directed the government to recognise emerging socially and educationally backward groups like transgenders.
- Terming the notification an instance of "retrograde governance," the court found that the government's decision was based on statistics dated over a decade ago.
- Caste may be a prominent and distinguishing factor for easy determination of backwardness of a social group", such determination must not be made "solely on the basis of caste".
- Identifying the "most deserving" groups "must necessarily be a matter of continuous evolution," requiring the state to look beyond caste.
- The judgment held that the government was both judicially and statutorily bound to comply with the NCBC's decisions.

Background

CAST ASIDE

Supreme Court sets aside notification giving quota to the jat community on the basic of caste backwardness

Feb 26, 2014 National Commission for Backward Classes report **rejects Centre's request** to include Jats in Central List of OBCs

Mar. 4 UPA govt. issues **notification** to given quota to Jats

Mar. 5 Model Code of Conduct for Lok Sabha elections comes into force

Apr. 1 SC asks Centre why it **ignored NCBC's advice**

Apr. 9 SC **rejects plea to stay** Centre's poll-eve notification

Aug.11 NDA govt. supports UPA's decision

- The March 4 notification was issued even after the National Commission for Backward Classes, in an advice to the government in February 2014, rejected the inclusion of Jats on the list.

GOVERNMENT ARGUMENT

- The government had argued that it was empowered under **Article 16 (4)** of the Constitution to overlook equality of opportunity in public employment.
- It said the inclusion of the Jats was based on the "compelling factor" that they had already been included in the State Lists over a decade ago.
- The government has argued that the test laid down by the apex court in the Mandal judgement for determination of "social, educational and economic backwardness" of Jats had been complied with.

- It has argued that its power to make available quota for a community is not dependent on the advice of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).
- The Centre moved the Supreme Court seeking review of a March 17 judgment quashing a UPA government notification including Jats in the Central list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in nine States.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR UPPER HOUSES

The setting up of legislative councils in States has to be cleared by an Act of Parliament. Assam and Rajasthan want to join the small seven-member club of States (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh) with a Legislative Council in the country and Odisha is also examining the creation of one.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE CREATION OF AN UPPER HOUSE

- The parliamentary standing committee reports on the setting up of legislative councils in Assam and Rajasthan recommended that the Central government should evolve a national policy for the creation of an Upper House in State legislatures so that it is not abolished by the incumbent government.
- This is in recognition of the fact that the issue of setting up legislative councils has become a highly politicised decision.
- **National policy is** a better way to address the issue instead of relying on ad hocism

ARGUMENT FOR SECOND CHAMBER

- Upper House will provide a better opportunity for people's participation in governance and decision-making.
- A second chamber will be a useful forum to play an advisory role in legislative matters
- Members of various communities and ethnic groups which could not be sent to the Assembly could be accommodated in the council for fair representation.

ARGUMENT AGAINST SECOND CHAMBER
- The Council is nothing but a body to accommodate various political interests within a party
- The power of the legislative councils was not the same as the Second chamber would be used only to accommodate defeated candidates of the ruling party.
- Rajya Sabha since they cannot delay legislation for more than four months.
- It will increase the exchequer burden.
- Recent experience suggests that even Chief Ministers choose the Legislative Council route when the option is available.

INDIA'S DAUGHTER: IS THE BAN JUSTIFIED

BBC made a documentary on the Delhi gang-rape of 2012 — the rape that shocked. This documentary was banned by Indian government, raising several criticisms from different corners. Below is an argument in favor of and against the ban:

Arguments Supporting The Ban	Arguments Against The Ban
Procedural Non-compliance • The filmmakers had expressly taken permission for *social research*, but eventually took the film to be broadcast on BBC4. Thus, instead of sticking to its stated objective of a social purpose, this documentary has acquired an underhand commercial sheen. • The filmmakers had signed a legal undertaking to submit their *unedited footage* to the authorities. This was not done. • The filmmakers had given a written undertaking that the film *would not be broadcast before the end of the judicial process*, as it may interfere with due process. Yet, the filmmakers and the BBC broadcast the documentary. • Providing a platform for a man convicted of rape and murder to "use the media to further his own case" when an appeal is pending in the Supreme Court of India is *sub judice.*	• Compliance with the procedures was flawless at every step of the way. The govt. has withheld from the public the fact that the original condition laid down, in an official letter dated 26 July 2013, from the office of the DG (Prisons) that permission was being given for "*releasing the documentary film which is being made for **purely social purposes with no commercial interest***" ***was dropped*** after film-maker wanted a change in the language. • ***British film producer Leslee Udwin brought some 13 hours of raw, unedited footage for screening before the review committee which discovered nothing negative that could lead to a breach of prison security.*** • "The Nirbhaya incident" has been an obvious matter of public interest and has been through all the stages of investigation, trial, and confirmation by High Court. It has been subjected to a widespread public debate, demonstrations, and enquiry by the Justice Verma Commission. To raise the issue of ***sub judice*** now at the stage of final appeal in the Supreme Court is absurd.
Threaten Public Order Broadcasting or otherwise disseminating *India's Daughter*, and especially the interview with Mukesh Singh, the convicted rapist and killer, will threaten public order by "encouraging and inciting violence against women," instilling fear in them, and leading to "a huge public outcry ".	• Indian authorities have been acting as though interviews with convicted criminals were something new to journalism and film-making. • The defence lawyers, whose interviews in the film have been widely telecast, speak a language more violent than the rapist himself. Don't their statements amount to misconduct for disqualification as members of the Bar? Did they give the right advice to their client to give such an interview? If the home minister is concerned about derogatory remarks in the interview by the rapist, who is on death row, why has no FIR been filed against the lawyers for hate speech and incitement to violence?
Defame India's Image The film falsely demonises the Indian man and portrays us as a ***perverted society***. *That is not who we are*. We are, instead, a society that came out in unprecedented numbers to protest the commission of a brutal rape. We are a	• Although there may be moments when you think a particular scene could have been done differently, it is on the whole ***a powerful and moving depiction, without frills, without sermons, without sensationalisation***, of the events that shook India and awakened the spirit of resistance and anger of thousands of young people against sexual assault and violence

society that pushed govt to enact a criminal amendment law in 2013. We are a society that celebrates the courage of women each year on Dec' 16 to remind ourselves of the promise we made to fight violence against women. If this documentary was supposed to be fair, shouldn't the action taken by our society also be shown as a "*mirror*" to who we are? Let's not forget that rape and violence against women is a deep-seated issue from _Washington to Bogota to London_. If you come here with preconceived notions, it becomes hard to look beyond those coloured thoughts to notice that our law is so progressive and protective that _a woman's statement in a rape case is sufficient for prosecution_. In other countries, incidents of rape do not even make it to local or national news. India has a _higher conviction rate_ than some "progressive" countries like the UK.	against women. • It is a mirror that reflects some of the **structural reasons** behind the proliferation of rape cultures. Sometimes, as in this film, the words of a criminal bring home the cruel reality of the familiarity of the words, the language, the thinking he represents. Descriptions of the "monster", the "evil one", for the rapist tend to ignore the truth that we as a society are creating, replicating, encouraging misogyny and its violent expression. *The film brings this home.*
The government charged that this would "***affect tourism***".	This is rather like saying, ***save India's reputation, not its women***.

CONCLUSION

So, there is one group which views that it is with the complete understanding that we are in the internet age, where the material could have been accessed despite a ban, that Parliament stood its ground to make a point about ***its sense of morality and contempt for such a violation of Indian law and journalistic ethics***.

While the other group believes that *India's Daughter* is a powerful, sensitive, and well-crafted exploration of the life and dreams of Nirbhaya and her progressive working class family who sold ancestral land and made sacrifices to see her through her para-medical education. The central narrators are Nirbhaya's parents who want her story to be told, real name, provenance, and all. The unprecedented outpourings of solidarity and protest on the streets, led by young women and girls who are deterred neither by water cannons nor tear gas shells, offer the documentary a cathartic start. There is no editorialising but the message comes through. The Central government needs to realise that its objections to *India's Daughter* have no leg, social, moral, or legal, to stand on and that the longer it is in denial about this, the more embarrassing it will get for India's image in the world, on the gender and free speech questions.

BHARAT RATNA FOR A B VAJPAYEE AND MADAN MOHAN MALVIYA

- Former PM A B Vajpayee and late educationist Madan Mohan Malviya have been awarded Bharat Ratna.
- It is country's highest civilian award given to citizens for their exceptional work in the field of art, literature and science, and public service. In Dec' 2011, govt had changed the criteria for including sportsperson for this award thus added category for *performance of highest order in any field of human endeavour*. The Prime Minister himself recommend this awrad to the President.
- The recipient receives a Sanad (certificate) signed by the President and a medallion. *It does not carry any monetary grant*.
- So far 45 people have been honoured with the Bharat Ratna since its inception (including Madan Mohan Malviya and A. B. Vajpayee). In February 2014, it was awarded to eminent scientist Prof C.N.R. Rao and cricketer Sachin Tendulkar.
- **Madan Mohan Malviya**
  o Born on 25 Dec'1861 and was an educationist and notable politician.
  o He founded Asia's largest residential university – Banaras Hindu University.
  o Malviya was the President of the INC in 1909, 1918, 1932 and 1933.
  o A staunch proponent of Hindu nationalism. Associated with right-wing Hindu Mahasabha.
  o He died in 1946.
- **AtalBihari Vajpayee**
  o Born on 25th Dec' 1924.
  o Elected to the LokSabha for 9 times and twice to the RajyaSabha.
  o Cabinet Minister of External Affairs in Janta Government headed by Morarji Desai from 1977-79.
  o First PM from outside the Congress party to serve a full five-year term.
  o He is amongst the founder members of erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh which later became known as BJP in 1980.
  o In 2009, he retired from active politics due to health concerns.
  o Recently, Union government had announced to observe his birthday as *Good Governance Day*.

KERALA TOURISM WINS GOLDEN GATE AWARD IN GERMANY

- Kerala Tourism, on March 8, 2015, bagged the Golden Gate Award at the InternationaleTourismus-Borse Berlin (**ITB-Berlin**) 2015 for its popular multimedia campaign to promote the backwaters.
- The tourism department of the state has won the **Golden Stadttor** (Golden Gate) Award for the second consecutive time for its '**The Great Backwaters**' campaign. In 2014, the campaign had won the state **Gold Prize** in the Golden Gate Awards in the Print category at the ITB-Berlin. However, the state tourism has won **Silver Prize** for the same campaign in different category at the prestigious awards in 2015.
- The ITB Berlin is the *world's largest tourism trade fair*. Countries, cities and regions, tour operators, online booking portals and hotels and many other service providers from over 180 countries present their products and services. The ITB Berlin takes place annually in March at the Messe Berlin. Presented every year at the ITB-Berlin, Golden Gate Awards, dubbed the *'Oscar in tourism communication'*, is considered the ultimate recognition in global tourism communication.

NPCI LINKS 150 MILLIONS DBT ACCOUNTS WITH AADHAAR

- National Payments Corporation (NPCI), the **country's umbrella body for all retail payments system**, has reached a new milestone after successfully linking as many as 15 crore bank accounts with the Aadhaar numbers, moving closer to map the overall 17 crore DBT accounts before 30 June.
- The Reserve Bank of India-promoted NPCI said it expects that all beneficiaries of all government subsidies/benefit transfers will be brought under the linkage programme.
- The government has been focusing on DBT to plug leakages and save cost.To push DBT and financial inclusion, the government in 2014 launched the *'PradhanMantri Jan DhanYojana'* under which banks had opened more than 12.5 crore accounts by January 26.
- NPCI is the nodal agency for all retail payment systems under the Jan Dhan scheme.

PM SETS 13 GOALS FOR 'TEAM INDIA' TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2022

PM Narendra Modi has set 13 goals that have to be achieved by 'Team India' led by the States, and guided by the Centre. These goals cover every aspect of human lives that can take India to the pinnacle of excellence, if fulfilled.

CBI COURT SUMMONS MANMOHAN IN COAL CASE

- A special CBI Court summoned former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and five others to appear before it as accused, in a case relating to the allocation of the Talabira II/III coal blocks in Odisha, in 2005.
- The court observed that there were enough "incriminating circumstances" to prosecute Dr. Singh for criminal conspiracy.
- Special CBI judge had called the inclusion of Hindalco in the Talabira-II coal block "dishonest."

- Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh moved the Supreme Court against the order of a trial court that summoned him as accused in a coal scam case.
  - ✓ Dr. Singh has sought quashing of the summons issued to him by the special CBI judge on the grounds that there was a complete 'non-application of mind' while issuing the order.
  - ✓ The Supreme Court stayed a summons issued by a special court against the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and five others.

• The Talabira-II/III coal blocks are located in odisha's mineral-rich jharsuguda district	• Birla writes to PM saying old coal linkage was not used as a bauxite mine lease had not materiallsed
• In 2005, they were allocated to Mahanadi Coalflelds and Neyvell Lignlte Corporation (NLC)	• Birla says his request for Talabira-II has backing of Odisha CM Naveen Patnik
• Allocation made by a Screening Committee headed by then Coal Secretary PC Parakh	• PM clears change in allocation: 70% to Mahanadi Coalfields; 15% to NLC; 15% Hindalco
• KM Birla writes to Manmohan singh asking for reallocation of the blocks to Hindalco	• In August 2012, CAG faults coal block allocations overall; pegs loss at ₹ 1.86 lakh crore
• Birla meets Singh, who also heads Cols Ministry, Singh directs him back to the ministry	• In 2014, CBI given clean chit to Singh, Birla and Parakh saying it cannot question govt policy
• Ministry says Hindalco was not using coal available to it from Mahanadi Coalfields	• March 11,2015: Court summmons Singh, Birla, Parakh as suspects in the case pertaining to the block

COAL, MINING BILLS PASSED BY PARLIAMENT

Parliament cleared both the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2015, and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2015.

All the money collected in national treasury through the auction of coal and minerals will be given to the coal and mineral-bearing states.

COAL MINES (SPECIAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2015

The coal bill opens the sector for commercial mining and aims to facilitate the auction of over 200 cancelled coal blocks.

- There will be a concrete arrangement of computerized auction of coal and mineral blocks. The auction of these blocks was being carried out through an *e-auction process* to transparency of the process.

- The main purpose of the ordinances, which are now being replaced by the bill, was to overcome acute shortage of coal in core sectors and ensure energy security. They facilitated *allocation of coal mines to steel, cement and power utilities* which are vital for development.
- Assuring states that their interests would be taken care of, Govt said *upfront fees as well as their share in royalty payment would go to the states*. However, Congress found fault with the government's plan to let states having coal blocks alone to have the lion's share of revenue generated by the their auction and demanded other states should also be given a slice of the cake.
  - ✓ Coal is a national asset and the Constitution makers put it on central list because they wanted all states to pitch for developing the sector and share the profit or loss.
  - ✓ Over 95% of coal is produced by 5 states and they, under the new law, would pocket the windfall brought by its auction.

MINES AND MINERALS (DEVELOPMENT & REGULATION) AMENDMENT BILL 2015

- The Bill amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.
- The new act, once in force, will add *a new 4th schedule* to include mining of bauxite, iron ore, limestone and manganese ore, now called <u>notified minerals</u>, under its purview
- Primarily, the new bill seeks to introduce a regime of auction to grant prospecting licences, like for coal blocks. It proposes that there will <u>no renewal of mining concessions</u>, unlike the original act of 1957. But it proposes a licence for 50 years as against 30 now. The government has already identified 199 mines for auction. The new act will call for *state governments to grant mining leases and prospecting license-cum-mining leases for notified and other minerals, with the central government's approval*, which will prescribe the terms and conditions for selection of bidders as also the procedure for auction.
- The central government may also *reserve some mines* exclusively for some specific purposes, as also set the eligibility conditions for the same.
- To plug another loophole that leads to arbitrariness, the central government will be *permitted to increase the area allowed for mining*, instead of granting additional leases. Presently, while 10 sq km is set as maximum limit for prospecting per lessee, a leeway is given to alter this.
- The proposed legislation also calls for the setting up of a *District Mineral Foundation* where mining takes place that will address the grievances of the people affected by mining, with a contribution not exceeding a third of the royalty rate.

Another body, the *National Mineral Exploration Trust*, shall be appointed by the central government for regional and pan-India planning.

POLICY PORTAL

- Union Information and Technology Minister launched Bharatniti.in, a public policy portal that attempts to put into perspective policy matters using an "ancient yet contemporary" approach.
- Bharatniti.in describes itself as an "endeavour, a platform to shape up the narrative of contemporary India necessarily through what we believe are the intrinsic values soaked with centuries of wisdom."
- The portal will attempt to put into perspective "the 'whats' and 'hows' (of information) with the help of a traditional prism."

ATAL PENSION YOJNA (APY)-

Necessity for Pension Scheme?

- To address the longevity risks among the workers in unorganised sector and to encourage the workers in unorganised sector to voluntarily save for their retirement
- Workers in unorganised sector constitute 88% of the total labour force of 47.29 crore as per the 66th Round of NSSO Survey of 2011-12, but do not have any formal pension provision
- The Government had started the Swavalamban Scheme in 2010-11. However, coverage under Swavalamban Scheme is inadequate mainly due to lack of clarity of pension benefits at the age after 60.
- Hence, the Finance Minister has announced a new initiative called Atal Pension Yojana (APY) in his Budget Speech for 2015-16.
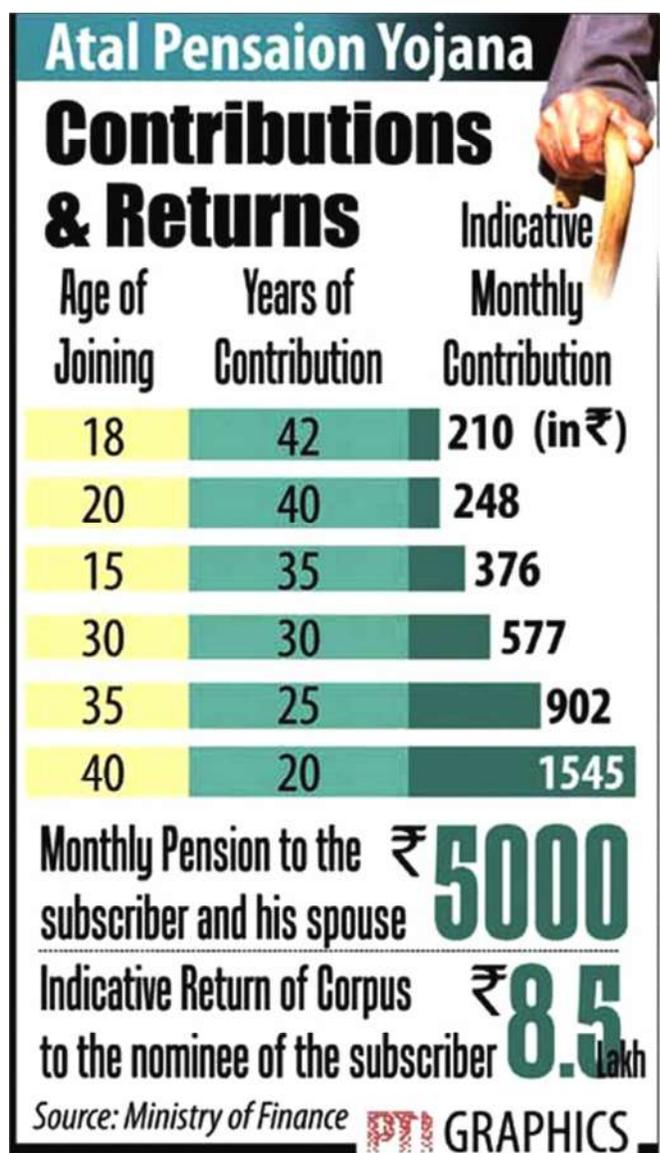
The APY will be focused on all citizens in the unorganised sector, who join the National Pension System (NPS) administered by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme.

- **Benefit of APY:** Fixed pension for the subscribers ranging between Rs. 1000 to Rs. 5000, if he joins and contributes between the age of 18 years and 40 years. The contribution levels would vary and would be low if subscriber joins early and increase if he joins late.
- **Eligibility for APY**: Atal Pension Yojana (APY) is open to all bank account holders who are not members of any statutory social security scheme.
- **Age of joining and contribution period:** The minimum age of joining APY is 18 years and maximum age is 40 years. Therefore, minimum period of contribution by the subscriber under APY would be 20 years or more.
- **Focus of APY:** Mainly targeted at unorganised sector workers.
- **Enrolment and Subscriber Payment**: All bank account holders under the eligible category may join APY with auto-debit facility to accounts, leading to reduction in contribution collection charges.
- **Enrolment agencies:** All Points of Presence (Service Providers) and Aggregators under Swavalamban Scheme would enrol subscribers through architecture of National Pension System.
- **Operational Framework of APY:** It is Government of India Scheme, which is administered by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. The Institutional Architecture of NPS would be utilised to enrol subscribers under APY.
- **Funding of APY:** Government would provide
  - ✓ Fixed pension guarantee for the subscribers.
  - ✓ Would co-contribute 50% of the subscriber contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to eligible subscriber.
  - ✓ Would also reimburse the promotional and development activities including incentive to the contribution collection agencies to encourage people to join the APY.

Analysis – The proposed APY differs from the NPS-S (NPS Swavalamban) in two significant ways.

- ✓ The NPS-S is a **defined contribution** scheme where the subscriber's contribution is invested in government securities, corporate bonds, and equity instruments-the scheme does not guarantee fixed returns to subscribers. Whereas, the APY is a **defined benefit** scheme that will provide the subscriber with fixed monthly incomes between Rs.1000 and Rs.5000 based on the respective monthly contribution amounts.
- ✓ Under the APY, the government will match either 50 per cent of the subscriber's contribution or Rs. 1000, whichever is lower (initially for a five year period till 2019-20). This paves the way for the creation of a graded matching scheme where subscribers who contribute below Rs. 1000 also receive a (less than equal) matching contribution. For availing the same amount of co-contribution as under the NPS-S, a subscriber will need to contribute Rs. 2000 into APY (Rs. 1000 under NPS-S).

INTERNATIONAL /INDIA AND WORLD

PRIME MINISTER VISIT OF INDIA OCEAN COUNTRIES

India's Prime minister visited three Indian Ocean counties to enhance economic and security cooperation. PM visit to the three Indian Ocean Island countries reflects our foreign policy priorities in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood. This highlights the renewed focus by India to take lead role in the region. China has in recent times made significant investment in infrastructure projects in these nations causing concern in New Delhi.

- India's role as the "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean region received a major boost when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited three India Ocean nations of Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka from March 10-14.
- India invited Seychelles and Mauritius to join the existing maritime security cooperation arrangement among India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Mr. Modi has batted for the creation of a strong regional grouping around the Indian Ocean.
- India seeks a future for Indian Ocean that lives up to the name of 'SAGAR — Security and Growth for All in the Region'.
- India is helping Indian Ocean littorals as part of capacity and capability enhancement in strengthening their maritime domain awareness capabilities.
- Mr. Modi said those who lived in the region had the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean.
- Mr. Modi said that our goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime security issues; and increase in maritime cooperation.

Given that the Indian Ocean channels carry two-thirds of the world's oil shipments, a third of the bulk cargo and half of all container traffic, the region's strategic significance is unquestionable. Also to counter china's presence in Indian Ocean require strategic relation with our extended neighbourhood.

INDIA AND MAURITIUS RELATIONS:

India and Mauritius share unique bonds based on our shared cultural heritage and traditions. Indo-Mauritians form about 70% of the country's population.Mauritius celebrates its National Day on March 12 as a mark of respect to Mahatma Gandhi, who began his Dandi march on this day in 1930.

India and Mauritius have signed five Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Mauritius .India has extended a $500-million Line of Credit for development or security projects that Mauritius will decide on.

- Mauritius has a vast 2.3 million sq km of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- An India-built naval patrol vessel 'Barracuda' for Mauritius was commissioned by Prime Minister NarendraModi who said it will make the Indian Ocean "more safer and secure."
- Mauritius by virtue of its strategic location is recognised as a hub of maritime activities in Indian Ocean. The induction of coastal patrol vessel was yet another step for better control of its large assets besides helping in policing transnational crimes like piracy and bridging the communication gaps among its various islands.

LIST OF MOUS SIGNED BETWEEN INDIA AND MAURITIUS DURING THE VISIT OF THE PRIME MINISTER TO MAURITIUS

- **Memorandum of Understanding in the field of Ocean Economy**

    ✓ This MoU will provide an extensive framework for cooperation in the field of Ocean Economy, a novel and critical area of sustainable development in the Indian Ocean Region.
    ✓ It provides for mutually beneficial cooperation for exploration and capacity development in the field of marine resources, fisheries, green tourism, research and development of ocean technology, exchange of experts and other related activities.

- **Programme for Cultural Cooperation for the year 2015-18**

    ✓ This programme will provide for enhanced bilateral cooperation in this field for the term 2015-2018.
    ✓ The programme, inter alia, envisages exchange of cultural troupes, training in fine arts, organization of cultural exhibitions, preservation of cultural heritage, promotion of Indian languages, exchange of students, etc.
    ✓ This programme will also enhance greater people-to-people participation between the two countries

- **Protocol for the importation of fresh mango from India**

    ✓ The aim of this Protocol is to facilitate importation of fresh mango fruits from India by Mauritius.

- **Memorandum of Understanding for the Improvement in Sea and Air Transportation Facilities at Agalega Island of Mauritius**

    ✓ This MoU provides for setting up and upgradation of infrastructure for improving sea and air connectivity at the Outer Island of Mauritius which will go a long way in ameliorating the condition of the inhabitants of this remote Island.

- ✓ These facilities will enhance the capabilities of the Mauritian Defence Forces in safeguarding their interests in the Outer Island.
- ✓ this agreement would give India a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean region

- **MoU on Cooperation in the field of Traditional System of Medicine and Homeopathy**

  - ✓ This MoU will promote cooperation in the field of traditional system of health and medicine between the two countries which already share these traditions due to our unique historical and cultural ties.
  - ✓ It envisages exchange of experts, supply of traditional medicinal substances, joint research and development and recognition of the traditional systems of health and medicine in both countries.
  - ✓ It also aims at promotion and popularization of the various Indian traditional systems which fall under AYUSH

INDIA AND SEYCHELLES RELATIONS:

As part of his recent three nation Indian Ocean tour, NarendraModi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Seychelles after 34 years. Seychelles is one of the largest recipients of Indian assistance in this area.

- The close relationship between the two countries is based on the twin planks of maritime security and development cooperation. India has been involved with Seychelles in helping bolster its need for maritime security as it has a large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 1.3 million square kilometers.
- Development cooperation encompasses capacity building where more than one percent of the Seychelles' population is trained under ITEC, provision of patrol vessels, hydrographic surveys etc besides cooperation in counter piracy and counter terrorism in high seas, which is critical for India's extended maritime security as well.
- There is a tradition of bilateral development cooperation in health, science & technology, renewable energy, providing advisors in critical areas and in bilateral exercises.
- Seychelles is a part of the Pan African e-Network project between India and the African Union.

WHY IS SEYCHELLES IMPORTANT FOR INDIA?

- Seychelles' strategic importance traces back to the Napoleonic era when Britain gained control over this island which straddled the trade route to the East Indies.1 Given its proximity to the oil sea lanes and oil producing nations, US wanted to build a base at Aldabra Island in the Seychelles, but had to shift it to Diego Garcia due to political constraints.
- India is trying to influence Indian Ocean Region by extending economic, military and diplomatic cooperation and through strategic partnership. From 2005, India has embarked upon a policy to engage four western Indian Ocean island nations and Seychelles forms a crucial part of it.
- Apart from its strategic location on international sea lanes of communication, Seychelles is a leader among SIDS group (Small Island Developing States) which has multifold areas of convergence with India.
- It is a leader in advancing the concept of 'blue economy', which covers a huge panoply of aspects like environment, hydrocarbons, marine economy, renewable energy and exploration of continental shelf and as Modi said, 'this Ocean Economy is indispensable to meeting our future challenges.'
- China has began making inroads into these island nations with infrastructure projects that have raised India's eyebrows. A report published in a Namibian newspaper on November 11 of last year, quoting a Chinese media report that China plans to set up 18 naval bases in Indian Ocean Region including

Seychelles has further added to Indian concerns. Hence, it is imperative for India to actively engage with this island nation to neutralize economic or commercial advantage that China offers to that country, thereby limiting its use for the Chinese as a `resupply` base.2

- This island nation also forms the entry gate to eastern Africa with which India has had historical socio-commercial links and now forms a huge market for Indian firms.

OUTCOME OF VISIT

- India secured a pact to develop infrastructure of Assumption Island in Seychelles, which gives a strong boost to this partnership. Spread over 11 sq.kms, it is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar. 'Island development' is an internationally accepted euphemism for developing strategic assets, with US and China known to be developing infrastructure in islands all over the world.

    ✓ Assumption Island, which India leased from Seychelles, has been voted multiple times of having the best beach in the world

- Mr. Modi also inaugurated the first of the eight Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems (CSRS) being set up by India. India is helping Indian Ocean littorals as part of capacity and capability enhancement in strengthening their maritime domain awareness capabilities.
- The two nations signed four agreements for cooperation in hydrography, renewable energy, infrastructure development and hydro-graphic survey. Another important agreement is for infrastructure development in the Assumption Island.
- India agreed to help Seychelles in mapping its hydrology reserves under four agreements signed with it, which is the science of measurement and description of features which affect maritime navigation, marine construction, dredging, offshore oil exploration/drilling and related activities, thus helping Seychelles bolster its maritime security. Also, India will be giving a second Dornier maritime patrol aircraft to Seychelles.
- India also agreed to provide free of cost visas for three months for citizens of Seychelles and making it available to them on arrival.

Thus this 'Dakshinayan' is a step in the right direction to secure and generate confidence in India's extended neighbourhood and the success of the Seychelles trip spells good omen for Indian efforts in connecting dots, with no string (of pearls) attached.

MODI'S VISIT TO SRI LANKA

Prime Minister NarendraModi visited Sri Lanka in last leg of his tour to three Indian ocean region countries. He advocated for strengthening India's historical links with Sri Lanka, invoking the ancient ethnic, linguistic and religious ties that bind them. He also said that India stands for a "united Sri Lanka", but wants an "early and full implementation of the 13th Amendment" that provides for devolution in the Tamil majority Northern and Eastern provinces. Mr. Modi became the first Indian PM and the third Indian leader to visit Jaffna, after Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

HIGHLIGHTS OF VISIT:

- Four MoUs have been signed during visit
    ✓ visa exemptions for official passport holders
    ✓ customs cooperation

- youth exchanges and education, and
  - ✓ The construction of a university auditorium.
- e-visa on arrival services for Sri Lankans
- $318 million Line of Credit to upgrade Sri Lanka's railways, and a promise to build Trincomalee as a "petroleum hub".

SAARC YATRA:

SAARC Yatra is India's attempt to hold Secretary level talks in order to resolve disputes among the neighboring SAARC nations and to extend cooperation with them in different areas .

In this Context India's Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar started his visit from Bhutan, and went to Bangladesh, Pakistan and concluded his visit with Afghanistan.

FOREIGN SECRETARY VISIT TO BHUTAN

- Foreign Secretary held talks with Bhutan's top leadership on stepping up India's ties with SAARC nations besides reviewing regional cooperation and bilateral ties.
- The Foreign Secretary called on Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and met Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

FOREIGN SECRETARY VISIT TO BANGLADESH

- Indian Foreign Secretary discussed a wide range of topics including SAARC, BIMSTEC and other bilateral issues, regional and international issues including the Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta with his Bangladesh counterpart.
- Issues like power generation and distribution, infrastructure development like road, housing and port and investment in prospective areas also reportedly came up during his interaction with Bangladesh Foreign Minister.

FOREIGN SECRETARY VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN

- Security, and talks with the Taliban, development and connectivity were at the top of the agenda when Foreign Secretary visited Kabul on the last leg of this phase of his "SAARC yatra"
- Afghanistan's senior leadership, including President Ashraf Ghani, CEO Abdullah Abdullah and Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani also discussed the strategic and defence cooperation between India and Afghanistan in meetings with foreign secretary.
- Indian and Afghan officials also discussed projects being developed by India in Afghanistan including new projects worth about $120 on laying water pipelines announced in January 2015. India has announced development aid of $2 billion to Afghanistan.

FOREIGN SECRETARY VISIT TO PAKISTAN

- Foreign secretary travelled to Pakistan seven months after India cancelled foreign secretary-level talks because the Pakistan High Commissioner here held consultations with Kashmiri separatists.
- Apart from exchanging concerns over terror, the two sides discussed ceasefire violations at Line of Control (LoC) and international border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The two sides also discussed the agenda for the SAARC summit, with a focus on improving trade and travel links across the region, ahead of the summit which will be hosted in Pakistan in 2016

ANALYSIS OF SAARC YATRA

- The most significant outcome of the visit has been the thawing of ties with Pakistan. Apart from the discussions on Saarc, bilateral issues were also taken up with each of these countries as a follow up to Prime Minister Modi's vision of 'neighbours first'.
- SAARC Yatra also reflects the new government foreign policy to constructively engage SAARC countries to resolve outstanding issues. Peaceful south Asian region is a key for India's growth.

OPPOSITION FROM JAPAN BLOCKS INDIA-U.S. DEAL

- Even as Indian and U.S. officials try to finalise "administrative arrangements" for the civilian nuclear deal, they have run into opposition from Japan.
- While the issue of 'liability' has been resolved, according to U.S. and Indian government officials, the major opposition from Japan is over the issue of "tracking" India's Nuclear plan.

UP AGAINST JAPANESE WALL

DEADLOCK IMPERILS INDO-U.S. NUCLEAR DEAL

STICKING POINTS IN INDO-JAPAN NUKE PACT

- **India:** Refusal to sign **nuclear test ban**
- **Japan:** Wants more data sharing and national tracking than **IAEA requirements**
- **Japan:** Wants immediate cancellation and withdrawal of supplies if **India tests nuclear weapon**
- **India:** Wants more time on **deal cancellation**

JAPAN'S STAND MAY AFFECT INDO-U.S. NUKE BUSINESS AS:

- Japanese and U.S. nuclear firms **co-produce nuclear components**
- **Alternatives** to the components, critical for reactors, **are Chinese**
- Japan is **part of informal grouping at NSG** with Australia and U.S.

- The two issues holding up the India-Japan civilian nuclear deal are data sharing and weapons testing. Japan wants India to give nation-specific data over nuclear material like uranium, plutonium and nuclear parts.

- The second issue, which is a red line for India, is that if India were to break its self-imposed moratorium on weapons testing, Japan wants an immediate cancellation of the civilian nuclear deal.
- Japan would further seek a return of all Japanese-origin equipment and parts, which would damage India's energy security considerably.

IAEA ACKNOWLEDGES INDIA'S NEED FOR MORE AUTONOMY IN NUCLEAR REGULATION

After completing a 12-day review of India's nuclear safety standards, UN'S International Atomic Energy Agency said that India has a "strong commitment to safety" but the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) needs more independence and separation from the government, for its efficient working.

- The IAEA's review report was completed as its Director General Yukiya Amano visited Mumbai, Delhi and Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS). According to a release from the IAEA in Vienna, six preliminary suggestions were given at the end of the review which was accepted by the Indian agency.
- India currently operates 21 nuclear power plants with an installed capacity of 5780 MW.
- Global nuclear watchdog IAEA asked India to ensure
  - ✓ Its atomic regulator's independence to prevent an "undue influence"
  - ✓ Come out with a national policy for radioactive waste management,
  - ✓ Promulgate a national policy and strategy for nuclear safety, and
  - ✓ Allow more on-site inspections at the nuclear power plants (NPPs) under international safeguards as a statement of the government's intent

Prime Minister

Oversees

Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)

AERB Monitors the PSUs under the purview of DAE and reports to AEC, But since the DAE Secretary is also the chairman of AEC, the monitored party and the party being reported to are the same - calling the independence of the process into question

The secretary to the Government of India in the DAE in also the ex - offcio chairman of the AEC

Oversees and formulates policies for

DAE provides technical support and staff to AERB.

Oversees

Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)

Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)

Monitors, regulates the safety aspoctso of

Research & Development Centres

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre

Public Sector Units

Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited

uranium Corporation of India Limited

Electronics Corporation of India Limited

Industrial Units

Nuclear Fuel Complex

Heavy Water Board

THE PROBLEM AND THE NEED FOR REFORMS

- Currently, the AERB, established in 1983, is tasked with regulating the safety and security aspects of the country's civilian nuclear facilities. However, it is not an autonomous body as it depends on the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) for all practical purposes.
- Critics say, it has been unable to perform its regulatory functions effectively. The demand for establishing a truly autonomous nuclear regulatory authority has been a long- standing one.
- In 1997, the Raja Ramanna Committee report had recommended that the Atomic Energy Act (1962) should be amended to enhance the effectiveness of the nuclear regulatory system in the country.
- To give more teeth to the AERB and ensure its independence, the Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority (NSRA) Bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2011. The bill has now lapsed and will have to be reintroduced in the new Lok Sabha.

COMPULSIONS FOR INDIA TO BRING BETTER NUCLEAR REGULATIONS

- India, which has tested nuclear weapons but is a non-signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), announced a major deal in January designed to open India's nuclear power sector to U.S. investment.
- Some countries like Japan view the fact that India is a non-signatory to the NPT, which was set up to prevent states from acquiring nuclear weapons, as a stumbling block to it joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- Membership in the NSG, a trade body established to ensure that civilian nuclear trade is not diverted for military aims, could boost India's international standing as a responsible atomic power and also give it greater influence on issues related to global nuclear trade.

U.S. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA EASES PROCESS TO OBTAIN L-1B VISAS

- In a major move that could benefit Indian tech firms and their employees, U.S. President Barack Obama has eased the process to obtain L-1B work visas for corporate executives to attract foreign investment and bring workers with specialized knowledge to the country for up to seven years.
- It will allow corporations to temporarily move workers from a foreign office to a U.S. office in a faster, simpler way.

WHY HAS U.S BEEN COOPERATIVE BY EASING ITS VISA REGIME?

- Such a move, Mr. Obama argued would attract larger foreign direct investment to the U.S. A large number of Indian companies are participating in the Select USA Summit aimed at increasing U.S. exports and attracting more foreign investment into the U.S. Large scale decline of L-1 visas was a major hindrance in Indian companies investing in the U.S.

INDIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RENEWING THE MARITIME TRADE AND CIVILISATIONAL LINKAGES

- The conference — India and the Indian Ocean: International Conference on Renewing the Maritime Trade and Civilisational Linkages — witnessed participation of many countries in Bhubaneswar, between March 20 and 22.
- The three-day conference was jointly organised by the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).
- Top Ministers, bureaucrats and more than a dozen Ambassadors in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) are met for the first time in Odisha to discuss strategic challenges in the region.
- The objective of the conference is to draw a resolution outlining India's role, including trade ties and strategic challenges, in the Indian Ocean region.

HISTORICAL LINKAGE

- The Indian Ocean has been our common maritime home since time immemorial. India was home to some of the earliest seaports in the world and has had a long maritime tradition. The seas around us have facilitated links of commerce, culture, and religion with our extended neighbourhood across several millenniums. This is evident from our cultural footprints which stretch across Asia and Africa.

- Importance of the Indian Ocean region from the stand point of historical and cultural linkages is no less than other.

INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), formerly known as the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative and Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), is an international organisation consisting of coastal states bordering the Indian Ocean.
- It is based on the principles of Open Regionalism for strengthening Economic Cooperation particularly on Trade Facilitation and Investment, Promotion as well as Social Development of the region. The Coordinating Secretariat of IORA is located at Ebene, Mauritius.
- The objectives of IORA are as follows:
  - ✓ To promote sustainable growth and balanced development of the region and member states
  - ✓ To focus on those areas of economic cooperation which provide maximum opportunities for development, shared interest and mutual benefits
  - ✓ To promote liberalisation, remove impediments and lower barriers towards a freer and enhanced flow of goods, services, investment, and technology within the Indian Ocean rim.

- The Association comprises 20 member states and six dialogue partners.

INDIA'S CONCERN:

- India is worried about Chinese influence in Indian Ocean region through its Maritime Silk Road project. Moreover, China is now proposing that the name of Indian Ocean be changed.

INDIA VOTES AGAINST LGBT BENEFITS

- India voted in favor of stripping benefits to same sex couples in UN general assembly.
- The resolution introduced in general assembly was however defeated with 80 nations voting 'nay' and 37 countries abstaining, which effectively implied the UN was free to extend benefits to partners of LGBT employees.

CRITICISM OF INDIA'S STAND

- India's vote was heavily criticized by US.
- Gay rights are human rights and India cannot pretend to be a democracy when it refuses to recognise the existence and choices of a significant minority of its population.
- Globally, India is now in the minority, one of only 76 countries that criminalise same-sex relationships.
- Mr. Ban Ki-moon has taken a strong stand on gay rights and has passed several decisions seeking to end discrimination and violence against the LGBT community worldwide. During his visit to India in January 2015, he appealed to the government to repeal its anti-gay law -- Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalises homosexuality -- calling it a "matter of human rights and human dignity.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

- Under criticism for voting against the U.N. Secretary-General's decision to extend marriage benefits to LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) couples or same-sex couples, India sought to explain that the vote was more about principle rather than its "anti-gay rights" content.
- The reason for India's vote was that the decision to extend the benefit was taken by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "of his own accord" and "without consultations with member States.
- India had abstained from voting on a previous resolution against LGBT discrimination that was passed by the UNGA in September 2014. However, officials claimed that the current resolution was related to "sovereignty issues" over the U.N.'s administrative and financial functions.

LEE KUAN YEW: FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE PASSED AWAY

The founding father of modern Singapore and the first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, passed away on March 23, 2015.Lee was in power for 31 years, overseeing the island's transformation from a port city battling crime and poverty into one of Asia's most prosperous nations.

- Lee co-founded the People's Action Party (PAP), which has ruled the city since 1959 and led the newly born country when it was separated from Malaysia in 1965.
- Lee drew praise for his market-friendly policies but also criticism at home and abroad for his strict controls over the press, public protest and political opponents.
- His "Singapore model," sometimes criticised as soft authoritarianism, included centralized power, clean government and economic liberalism along with suppression of political opposition and strict limits on free speech and public assembly, which created a climate of caution and self-censorship. The model has been admired and studied by leaders in Asia, including in China, and beyond as well as being the subject of countless academic case studies.
- Mr. Lee was a master of "Asian values," a concept in which the good of society took precedence over the rights of the individual and citizens ceded some autonomy in return for paternalistic rule.

- The Chinese have long admired Singapore's model of authoritarian rule and good governance, which has achieved the rare feat of generating astounding prosperity without sacrificing inclusivity.
- "For years, China's leaders have been obsessed with learning from Singapore's success. The city-state has maintained single-party rule with popular legitimacy, retained good governance with an uncorrupted bureaucracy, and delivered inclusive growth with equal opportunities for its people in a harmonious, multiracial society.

INDIA AND QATAR RELATIONS:

India and Qatar inked six agreements, including one on transfer of sentenced prisoners during the visit of Emir of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani.

List of Agreements /MoUs signed between India and Qatar:

- **Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons**
  - ✓ Under this agreement, Indian prisoners convicted in Qatar can be brought to India to serve the remaining part of their sentence. Similarly Qatari Citizens convicted in India can be sent to his home country to serve their sentence.
  - ✓ This agreement would enable the sentenced persons to be near their families and would help in the process of their social rehabilitation
- **MoU for Cooperation in the field of Information and Communication Technology**
  - ✓ This MoU would provide enhanced business opportunities for Indian IT industry in Qatar. Qatar has embarked on an ambitious programme for overall development as part of their Qatar 2030 vision and has created a dedicated Ministry of Information and Communication Technology for capacity building in ICT.
- **MoU between Ministry of Earth sciences and Qatar Meteorological Department for Scientific and Technical cooperation**
  - ✓ Qatar Meteorological Department under the Civil Aviation Authority, Qatar had expressed their desire for cooperation with Indian Meteorological Department in the field of Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences. The scientific collaboration between India and Qatar will be beneficial to improve atmospheric & Oceanic capacity in both the countries.
- **MoU between Diplomatic Institute of MOFA, Qatar and Foreign Service Institute, MEA**
  - ✓ This MoU would help in exchange of trainees, students, faculty members and experts between India and Qatar to enhance their skills and improve the training programme in both the countries. Foreign Service Institute, MEA has signed MoU with several other countries for the purpose of exchanging information on structure and contents of training programmes for diplomats.
- **MoU for cooperation in the field of Radio and Television**
  - ✓ This MoU intends to encourage regular exchange of radio and TV programmes and material between Prasar Bharati of India and Qatar Media Cooperation
- **Agreement for Mutual Cooperation and Exchange of News**
  - ✓ The agreement between Qatari News Agency and United News of India is to enhance and develop bilateral cooperation in the field of exchange of English-language news on daily basis and free of charge.

Around 600,000 Indian nationals work in Qatar, comprising the largest expatriate community in Qatar. Qatar is also the largest source of India's LNG imports, at 86 percent. Bilateral trade stands at USD 16 billion.

YEMEN CRISIS:

WHO ARE THE HOUTHIS?

- The Houthis are followers of the Shia Zaidi sect, the faith of around a third of Yemen's population. Officially known as Ansarallah (the partisans of God), the group began as a movement preaching tolerance and peace in the Zaidi stronghold of North Yemen in the early 1990s.
- The group launched an insurgency in 2004 against the then ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh that lasted till 2010. They participated in the 2011 Arab Spring inspired revolution in Yemen that replaced Saleh with Abdrahbu Mansour Hadi.

YEMEN CONFLICT TIME LINE

- **September 21, 2014:** Houthi rebels seize government and military sites in Sana'a. Rival groups sign a U.N.-brokered peace deal stipulating a Houthi withdrawal from the capital and formation of a new government.
- **October 14, 2014:** The Houthis seize the Red Sea port of Hodeida, 230 km west of Sana'a, then move toward the centre without opposition from government forces but face fierce resistance from AQAP and its tribal allies.
- **January 20, 2015:** Houthis attack Mr. Hadi's residence and seize the presidential palace, and the President and Prime Minister resign two days later.
- **February 6, 2015:** The rebels announce they have dissolved Parliament and installed a presidential council to run the country. The United States and Gulf monarchies accuse Iran of backing the Houthis. In the south and southeast, authorities reject what they brand a coup attempt.
- **February 21, 2015:** Mr. Hadi flees south to Aden after escaping from weeks under house arrest and urges the international community to "reject the coup," rescinding his resignation and subsequently declaring Aden the temporary capital.

SAUDI ARABIA LED AIR STRIKES

- The Saudi intervention began in response to requests for assistance from Yemeni government of President AbdRabbuh Mansur Hadi.

- The advance of the Houthis raised Saudi fears that the Shia minority rebels would seize control of the whole of its Sunni-majority neighbour and take it into the orbit of Shia Iran.
- Saudi Arabia, spearheaded a coalition of nine Arab states, began carrying out airstrikes in neighbouring Yemen on 25 March 2015, heralding the start of a military intervention in Yemen, codenamed Operation Decisive Storm.
- The airstrikes that followed have transformed Yemen into another arena for the regional struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- Observers say the fighting in the strategic Mideast nation is taking on the appearance of a proxy war between Iran, the Shiite powerhouse backing the Houthis, and Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia.
- On 21 April 2015, Saudi Arabia announced an end to Operation Decisive Storm, saying the intervention's focus would "shift from military operations to the political process" and that it had achieved its military objective of "removing the threat to Saudi Arabia and neighbouring countries".

OPERATION RAHAT

- 'Operation Rahat', a rescue operation to evacuate civilians stuck in strife-torn Yemen.
- The Indian government spared no efforts in evacuating Indians from Yemen as fighting raged between the Houthi rebels and the Yemen government supported by aerial bombardment from the Saudi-led coalition.
- The efforts were so effective that over 26 countries including the U.S. and U.K. sought India's help in rescuing their citizens.
- India has ended its massive evacuation efforts in Yemen, pulling out 5,600 people, including 4,640 Indians and 960 nationals from 41 countries.
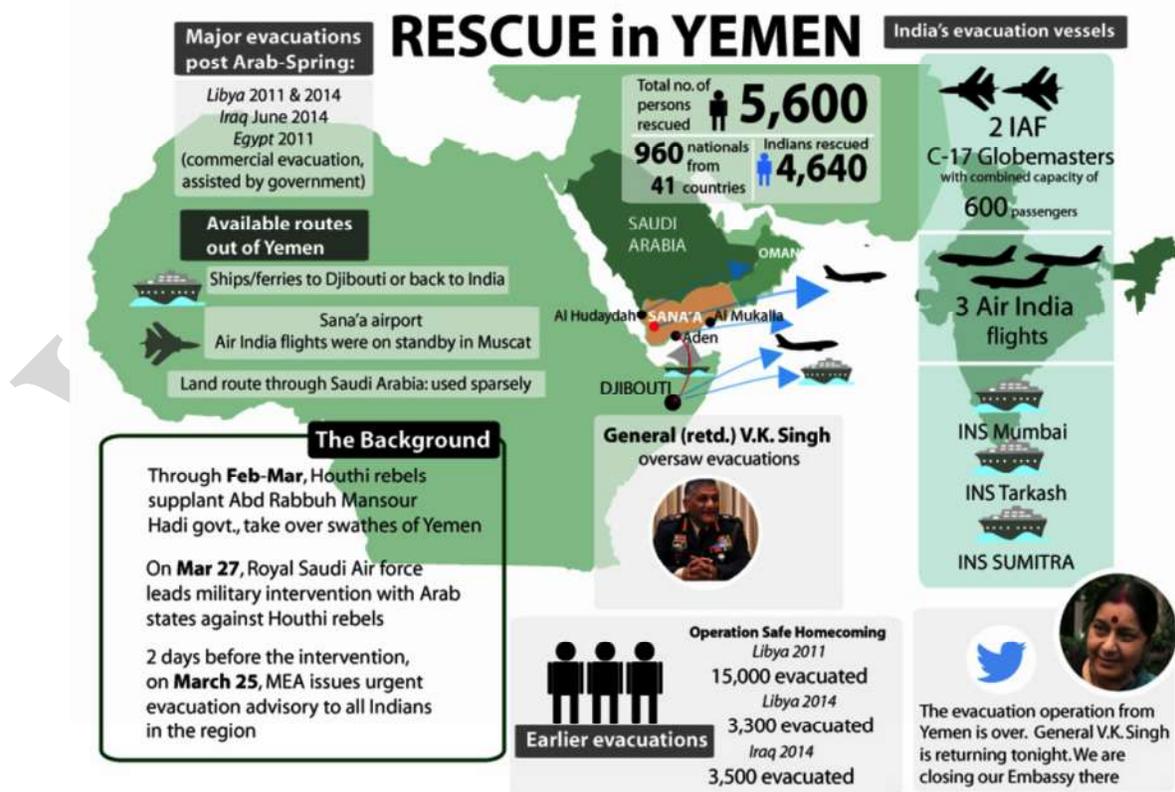
MINE BAN TREATY

The Ottawa Treaty, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, or often simply referred to as the Mine Ban Treaty, but officially known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, aims at eliminating anti-personnel landmines (AP-mines) around the world. To date, there are 162 States Parties to the treaty.

- In 1996, India voted in favour of a UN General Assembly Resolution urging states to vigorously pursue an international agreement banning anti-personnel mines. However, in 1997 when the Mine Ban Treaty came into existence, India chose to remain outside it.
- India has, in the past, stated that it needs landmines to deter incursion by armed militants, especially into Kashmir. In the past, India was a major manufacturer of undetectable landmines and used them along the international border with Pakistan as well as along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.
- India used hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel mines along the international border during Operation Parakram in the wake of the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001.
- According to an April 2005 report of the LokSabha Standing Committee on Defence, the Indian Army suffered 1,776 casualties while laying and removing its minefields on the border between December 2001 and April 2005.
- Anti-personnel mines are an antiquated weapon that can no longer have a place in India's arsenal. The mines laid, and subsequently replenished, over the past decades did not impact the insurgency in Kashmir in any significant way. But the misery they have produced in the communities along the international border and the LoC is real today.

IRAN, WORLD POWERS REACH NUCLEAR ACCORD

- Iran and the P-5+1 grouping of Security Council members and Germany reached an important breakthrough, as they agreed on the "framework for a draft plan of action" that would be ready by June 30th this year.
- The plan of action states clearly the number of enrichment plants and centrifuges Iran will have access to, as well as the verification needed by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, while outlining in what stages financial sanctions would be lifted from Iran.

ACCORDING TO THE DRAFT AGREEMENT, THE FOLLOWING STEPS WILL BE TAKEN BY BOTH SIDES

- Iran will reduce the number of installed centrifuges by two-thirds
- Bring uranium stocks down from 10,000 kg to 300 kg LEU (low-enriched uranium) and
- Turn its nuclear facility in Fordow into an R&D facility for 15 years.
- All the excess stockpile and nuclear parts will be kept at an IAEA-monitored location.
- The U.N., the U.S. and the EU will withdraw all sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy for years.

INDIA'S BENEFIT

- India hailed the agreement reached between Iran and the P5+1 group — U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China and Germany — on Tehran's nuclear programme.

- India has tried hard to maintain its civilizational ties with Teheran in the face of international sanctions, and pressure from the US. However bilateral trade with Iran has suffered because of banking and insurance strictures. India and Iran have an annual bilateral trade of about $14 billion, with an extremely high balance of trade problem.
- The big advantage for India could be a further reduction in the price of oil that India used to source at a much higher quantity pre-2012, when Iran was India's second biggest supplier.
- An important benefit of a peace agreement will also be a renewed push to complete the Chabahar port route to Afghanistan, which for India could mean the opening up of Iran-Afghanistan trade and also a route to Central Asia.

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

- The joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme announced by Iran and the EU 3+3 (the United Kingdom, France, Germany along with China, Russia and the United States), is a significant breakthrough that will have long-lasting implications globally.
- The success of the talks will have also have wider geopolitical repercussions not just on nuclear safety, but on all of West Asia, which is seeing the results of the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, from Syria to Iraq and Yemen.
- **Israel opposed nuclear deal**
    - ✓ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he and his Cabinet are united in "strongly opposing" an emerging framework agreement on curbing.
    - ✓ Netanyahu has harshly criticized the negotiations, demanding instead that the Iranian program be dismantled. He claims Iran cannot be trusted, and that leaving certain facilities intact would allow the Iranians to eventually build a bomb.

CHINA HIKES DEFENCE BUDGET

- China hiked its defense budget by 10.1 per cent, posting a double-digit annual increase in its proposed military spending for the fifth year in a row.
- Amounting to $142.2 billion, China's defence expenditure for this year overshadows India's defence budget of $40 billion - almost $100 billion more.
- The hike marks an increase of about $12 billion over last year's $132 billion, making China the second largest military spender after the United States whose national defence budget was about $600.4 billion in 2013.
- China will comprehensively strengthen modern logistics, step up national defence research and development of new and high-technology weapons and equipment, and develop defence-related science and technology industries.

AIIB MEMBERSHIP GROWS

- Support for a Chinese-led development bank is growing despite US opposition. Top European Union (EU) countries including Germany, France and Italy and United Kingdom (UK) decided to join AIIB as founding members.
- Russia, Australia and the Netherlands, announced its decision to join the China-led AIIB.

- This is a clear acknowledgement of China's growing economic influence in the world. Last year, China along with other BRICS countries, established the New Development Bank, with a subscribed capital of $50 billion, headquartered in Shanghai.
- Chinese currency is likely to be recognised as an official reserve currency by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by the end of this year. This will be a step towards reducing the global dominance of the U.S. dollar.

ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB)

- The **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank** (**AIIB**) is an international financial institution proposed by the government of China.
- The purpose of the multilateral development bank is to provide finance to infrastructure projects in the Asia region.
- AIIB is regarded by some as a rival for the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which are regarded as dominated by developed countries like the United States.
- AIIB was formally inaugurated in Beijing on October 21, 2014 with 21 founding-members including China, India, Pakistan, Singapore and Vietnam.
- India is the second largest shareholder of the bank after China.
- AIIB will have a subscribed capital of $50 billion, which will eventually rise to $100 billion. In comparison, the subscribed capital of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are $223 billion and $165 billion respectively.

CONCERNS

- The U.S. and Japan continue to remain firm about not joining AIIB.
- The U.S. expressed concern about whether the new bank would be able to meet the "highest global standards" of governance or lending.

PRESENT INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- The present international financial institutions were created under U.S. leadership at the end of World War II.
- The U.S., Europe and Japan continue to wield enormous influence in them despite the relative decline of their economies. For instance, the U.S. still has a veto power on major decisions made by the IMF and the World Bank.
- At the same time, these institutions have failed to give due recognition to the growing weight of China and other emerging economies.

CHINA'S 'ONE BELT ONE ROAD' INITIATIVE

- **One Belt, One Road** also known as the **Belt and Road Initiative**; is a Chinese framework for organizing multinational economic development through two component plans, the land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) and ocean going "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR).
  - ✓ The "belt and road" have two components—the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) that would be established along the Eurasian land corridor from the Pacific coast to the Baltic Sea, and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR).

- ✓ The "belt and road" run through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asia economic circle at one end and developed European economic circle at the other.
- ✓ The SREB focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic); linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia; and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean.
- ✓ The 21st-Century MSR, in turn is designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other.
- ✓ On land, the initiative will focus on jointly building a new Eurasian Land Bridge and developing China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia and China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridors.

IMPACT

- Analysts point out that the 'One Belt One Road' initiative, backed by a solid financial institutional network, once implemented, is expected to accelerate the shift of geo-economic power away from the United States, towards Eurasia.
- More than 4.4 billion people, or 63 per cent of the global population countries, are expected to benefit from China's game-changing plans.
- Analysts say that the "belt and road" initiative could shift the center of geo-economic power towards Eurasia, and undermine the "Asia Pivot" of the United States and its allies.
- Chinese President Xi Jinping is hopeful that the mega-trade volumes among the Silk Road economies would touch $ 2.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

ISRAELI ELECTION

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling Likud Party scored a resounding victory in the country's election.
- Mr. Netanyahu focused his campaign on security issues, while his opponents instead pledged to address the country's high cost of living.

IMPLICATIONS

- Mr. Netanyahu's return to power for a fourth term likely spells trouble for Mideast peace efforts and could further escalate tensions with the United States.
- The international community has long pushed for the creation of a Palestinian state on lands captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war.
- Mr. Netanyahu ruled out a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He also opposed Iran nuclear deal.
- Mr. Obama maintained that a two-state solution was "the best path forward for Israel's security, for Palestinian aspirations and for regional stability."

ISRAELI SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

- The **Israeli system of government** is based on parliamentary democracy. The Prime Minister of Israel is the head of government and leader of a multi-party system. Executive power is exercised by the

government. Legislative power is vested in the Knesset. The Judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature.

- The political system of the State of Israel and its main principles are set out in 11 Basic Laws. Israel does not have a written constitution.
- The 120 seats in the Knesset are elected by proportional representation in a single nationwide constituency.
- The electoral threshold for the 2013 elections was 2%, but on 11 March 2014 the Knesset voted to raise the threshold to 3.25%.

INDIA'S AFGHAN DILEMMA

By the end of 2014, two important transitions in Afghanistan had taken place.

- A political transition to a post-Karzai period had begun after a difficult election process.
- Second, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) flag had come down marking the end of the 13-year-long 'Operation Enduring Freedom', transferring primary responsibility for security to the Afghan Army and police forces.

POLITICAL TRANSITION

National Unity Government was sworn in on September 29 with Dr. Ghani as President and Dr. Abdullah assuming charge as CEO, a new position of a coequal but with distribution of powers yet to be defined.
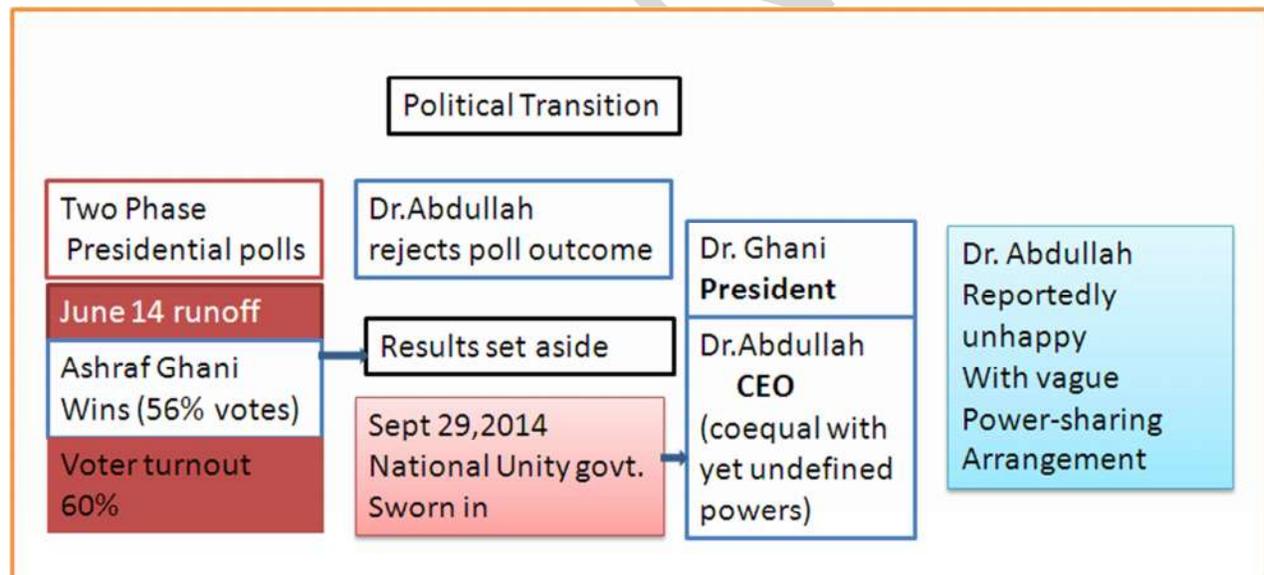
ECONOMIC TRANSITION

- U.S. expenditure on rebuilding Afghanistan stands at $104 billion, slightly more than what the U.S. spent on the Marshall Plan (adjusted for inflation) for rebuilding 16 European countries after World War II. However, delivery on the ground averages below 25 per cent, given inefficient delivery mechanisms, poor planning and excessively high administration overheads.
- Progress has been registered in terms of life expectancy (up from 40 to 61 years), literacy (up from 12 per cent to 33 per cent), school attendance especially for girls, health care, urbanisation, roads, mobile

telephony, TV coverage is 60 per cent and GDP has gone up from $2 billion to $20 billion but is far short of what could have been achieved.

- Development plans need more than $5 billion of external aid annually.
- The fragility of both the political and the security transitions creates uncertainty and, consequently, raises the likelihood of instability.
- India has played a significant role in Afghanistan's economic reconstruction committing and delivering upwards of $2 billion distributed between humanitarian assistance, rebuilding infrastructure and human resource development.

TURNAROUND WITH PAKISTAN

- Mr. Ghani's turnaround with Pakistan is probably the most dramatic shift in Kabul's foreign policy.
- He has invited Pakistan's Army Chief General Raheel Sharif, the ISI Chief, Lt. General RizwanAkhtar, and two corps commanders to Kabul.
- He went to Pakistan in November, visiting the Army General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. Mr. Ghani agreed to send the first batch of six officers to Abbottabad for training in February this year.
- The other part to this closeness comes from Mr. Ghani's desire to restart talks with the Taliban. Much will depend on how much Pakistan delivers in terms of persuading senior Taliban leaders to appear for talks, even while curbing attacks by the groups under its control in Afghanistan.
- Mr. Ghani has, over the last few months, acted against Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) militants operating from Afghan soil, provided Pakistan access to TTP prisoners.

TALK WITH TALIBAN

Negotiations between the Afghan unity government and the Taliban appear likely, with the Pakistan military prodding the Taliban to agree to talks.

- **China's initiative**:One factor is China's attitude. It is increasingly wary of terrorism entering into Xinjiang via Afghanistan and wants Pakistan to calm the borders. It is with this aim that China took a lead in the Heart of Asia conference, institutionalised the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral dialogue.
- The Chinese government is also comfortable working with President Ghani.
- Second, the Taliban position has shifted, a change evident after the U.S. helped establish a Taliban presence in Qatar in January 2012.
- Third, Pakistan's stance has also changed. On February 19, Pakistani military officials revealed that the Taliban had signalled its readiness for talks.

At the end of the day, successful negotiations are predicated on Pakistan being an impartial mediator. There is pessimism whether Pakistan will be able to develop a better relationship with the new unity government in Afghanistan, with distrust running deep between both nations.

INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

- Pakistan's increasing role in Afghanistan is likely to impact India's economic commitments in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan is likely to block progress on the Chabahar Port linking project in order to remain the sole gateway to Afghanistan. India's plans of developing four iron-ore blocks and building a steel plant in Hajigak will also be threatened by Pakistan's presence.
- India's limited influence in Afghanistan's political realm means that it needs to join hands with another major player in the region.

- India will be keeping a close eye on the fate of the dialogue between the Taliban and Mr. Ghani's team, and Pakistan's role therein.
- Pakistan was uncomfortable with India's role in Afghanistan which had remained restricted to the economic sphere.

ECONOMY

THE NEW MONETARY POLICY FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

The Centre and the Reserve Bank of India signed an agreement under which the central bank will priorities controlling price rise above the other objectives of the monetary policy — interest rates and the foreign exchange rate.

The new monetary policy framework is in line with the recommendations of a committee headed by RBI Deputy Governor Urjit Patel.

Objective of monetary policy: Objective of monetary policy is to primarily maintain price stability, while keeping in mind the objective of growth.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AGREEMENTS

- The following shall be the target:
    - ✓ The reserve Bank will aim to bring inflation 6 per cent by January 2016.
    - ✓ The target for financial year 2016-17 and subsequent years shall be 4 percent with a band of ±2 per cent.
- The Governor, in his absence the Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, shall determine the Policy Rate, as well as any other monetary measures, to achieve the target.
- Operating procedure of monetary policy:
    - ✓ The reserve bank shall publish the operating Target(s) and establish an operating procedure of monetary policy through which the operating target will be achieved, any change in the operating targets(s) and the operating procedure in response to evolving macro-financial conditions shall also be published.
- Once every six months , the reserve bank shall publish a document explaining
    - ✓ Source of inflation

- ✓ Forecasts of inflation for the period between six to eighteen months from the date of the publication of the document
- Flexible inflation target
    - ✓ The reserve Bank shall be seen to have failed to meet the target if inflation is
        - ❖ More than six per cent for three consecutive quarters for the financial year and all subsequent years.
        - ❖ Less than 2 per cent for three consecutive quarters in 2016-17 and all subsequent years.
    - ✓ Failure to maintain target: If the reserve bank fails to meet the target it shall set out in a report to the central government
        - ❖ The reasons for its failure to achieve the target.
        - ❖ Remedial actions proposed to be taken by the reserve bank; and
        - ❖ An estimate of the time period within which the target would be achieved pursuant to timely implementation of proposed remedial actions.
- Any dispute regarding the interpretation or implementation of agreement shall be resolved through a meeting between the governor and the central government

INFLATION TARGETING

- Inflation targeting is a monetary policy strategy used by central banks for maintaining prices at a certain level or within a specific range. Using methods such as interest rate changes, this could help guide inflation to a targeted level or range.
- This policy is designed to assure price stability.
- Under inflation targeting, the RBI will target a fixed rate of Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation

MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE (MPC):

To give effect to the agreement, the government will amend the RBI Act. Before amending the Act, there needs to be agreement between the government and the central bank about the composition of the committee.

There are two competing proposals to establish a monetary policy committee, one from an external panel appointed by the Finance Ministry and another from the RBI.

- **RBI panel's key proposals:** Five-member committee
    - ✓ Chairman: RBI Governor
    - ✓ Vice Chairman: Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy
    - ✓ Executive Director in charge of monetary policy
    - ✓ Two external members picked by RBI Governor and Deputy Governor
        - ❖ Each member has one vote
        - ❖ No veto power for Chairman
- **Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission proposals:** Seven-member panel
    - ✓ RBI Governor
    - ✓ 1 executive member of RBI board
    - ✓ 3 external members picked by the government
    - ✓ 2 external members picked by the government in consultation with RBI Governor
    - ✓ Government representative to attend meetings but would not vote
        - ❖ RBI Governor would get power to override panel but would need to issue public statement detailing the reasons
        - ❖ Each member has one vote

INDEPENDENCE AT STAKE

HOW A MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE IN INDIA COULD LOOK

1 The government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are set to consider proposals for the formation of a **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)**, which will take key decisions such as interest rate changes, but have raised concerns over the central bank's independence.

2 There are two competing proposals to establish a MPC, **one from an external panel appointed by the Finance Ministry and another from the Reserve Bank of India**

3 **MPCs are a common feature** in central banks globally.

RBI PANEL'S KEY PROPOSALS

5 *Member committee*

- Each member has **one vote**
- **No veto power** for Chairman

VICE-CHAIRMAN ▸ **Deputy Governor in-charge of Monetary Policy**

CHAIRMAN — RBI Governor

1 **2** ▸ Two external members picked by the RBI Governor and the Deputy Governor

VICE-CHAIRMAN ▸ **Executive Director in-charge of Monetary Policy**
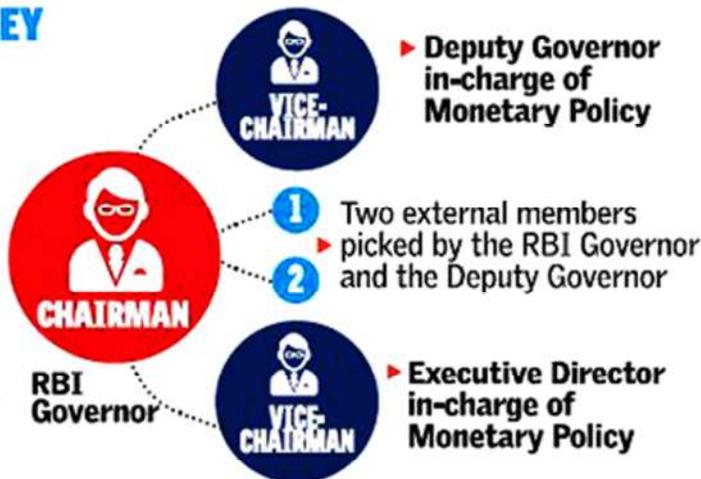
FINANCIAL SECTOR LEGISLATIVE REFORMS COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS

7 *Member panel*

RBI Governor

EXECUTIVE MEMBER ▸ **One executive member of the RBI board**

CHAIRMAN

1 **2** **3** Three external members picked by the government

1 **2** Two external members picked by the government in consultation with the RBI Governor

Analysis:

- Decision to create a monetary policy framework would raise the credibility of the government and the central bank's policy making.
- **Greater accountability -**The central bank will be more accountable now if it fails to meet the pre-set inflation targets.
- RBI will explain the reasons for particular policy rates.
- Composition of Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will decide whether the Reserve Bank of India keeps its independence or if the government will have a say in interest rate decisions.
- Many experts feel that Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) should be independent, autonomous and consist of members who are not beholden to the government. It should not be a committee with a majority consisting of government nominees. That would be a **setback to institutional autonomy and competence**. Such decisions cannot be influenced by short-term considerations and government preferences on interest rates.
- MPC is likely to provide greater transparency in decision making process also central government will have say in monetary policy.
- Setting up of Monetary Policy Committee is in line with international best practices.
- Critics of New Monetary Policy argue that in India inflation is largely driven by food and fuel prices over which Monetary Policy has very little impact. So inflation targeting may not work in India as in case of other developed countries.

IMF RAISES INDIA'S GROWTH FORECAST

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecasted that India will **grow 7.5% in 2015-16, up from 7.2% in the current year using the new method of calculating gross domestic product (GDP).** Though **i**n the Union budget 2015, the government estimated growth of up to 8.5 per cent in 2015-16.

IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE REPORT:

- The report says that India's vulnerabilities have receded more than those of most emerging markets and sentiment has been revived.
- The Indian economy is reviving, helped by positive policy actions that have improved confidence and lower global oil prices. To continue on this trend, India needs to revitalize the investment cycle and accelerate structural reforms
- The IMF report also said that India's economic profile recently got a lift as the country improved the way it measures economic output.
- However, IMF also **cautioned that despite** the reduction in India's external imbalances and strengthening of buffers, the spillover impact of global financial market volatility to India could be very disruptive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Central bank should keep monetary policy tight for a durable slowing of inflation.
- Reported has listed **six reform measures**:
  - ✓ Addressing bottlenecks in energy, mining and power
  - ✓ Increasing investments to help close infrastructure gaps

- ✓ Taking steps to simplify and speed up the process of acquiring land and obtaining environmental clearances
- ✓ Reforming the agriculture sector to ensure greater efficiencies in the public system for food procurement, distribution, and storage
- ✓ Making labour markets more flexible, to encourage young job-seekers and boost currently low female labour force participation
- ✓ Improving education to meet rising shortages of skilled labor.

RAILWAY SIGNS MOU WITH LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION (LIC)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ministry of Railways and Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).

- Under this MoU, LIC will make available to the Ministry of Railways/its entities a Financial Assistance with a limit of 1,50,000 crore over the next five years for implementing Railway projects.
- The Financial Assistance will be available from the Financial Year 2015-16.
- It will help the Ministry of Railways to augment its resources for speedier execution of projects.
- The investment would be done in bonds issued by various railway entities such Indian Railways Finance Corporation (IRFC).

PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING (PSL)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has widened the scope of priority sector lending. The following categories have been included in its ambit.

- Sanitation
- Health care and drinking water facilities
- Renewable energy

Other recommendations of the RBI's panel

- The target for lending to the redefined priority sector is retained uniformly at 40 per cent of adjusted net bank credit (ANBC) or credit equivalent of off-balance sheet exposure (CEOBE), whichever is higher, for all scheduled commercial banks.
- All foreign banks (irrespective of number of branches they have) may be brought on a par with domestic banks and the same target/sub-targets may be made applicable to them.
  - ✓ It suggested foreign banks with 20 and above branches may be given time up to March, 2018, in terms of extant guidelines and submit their revised action plans.
  - ✓ Other foreign banks, that is, with less than 20 branches, may be given time up to March, 2020, to comply with the revised targets as per action plans submitted by them and approved by the RBI.
- The target for lending to agriculture has been retained at 18 per cent of ANBC. But a sub-target of 8 per cent of ANBC has been recommended for small and marginal farmers to be achieved in a phased manner

Priority Sector Lending -Priority Sector Lending are small value loans to farmers for agriculture and allied activities, micro and small enterprises, poor people for housing, students for education and other low income groups and weaker sections. Priority Sectors are those sectors of the economy which may not get timely and adequate credit in the absence of this special dispensation.

- Agriculture
- Micro and Small Enterprises
- Education (educational loans granted to individuals by banks)
- Housing
- Export Credit
- State sponsored organizations for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
- Consumption loans (under the consumption credit scheme for weaker sections)
- Loans to the software industry (having credit limit not exceeding Rs 1 crore from the banking system)
- Overdrafts extended by banks up to Rs.5,000 in PMJDY accounts will be eligible for classification under priority sector advances .

PROVISIONS

- Domestic banks, both the public and private sectors have to **lend 40 % of their** net bank credit(NBC), to the priority sector as defined by RBI, foreign banks have **to lend 32%** of their NBC to the priority sector.
- Domestic banks have to lend **18 % of NBC to agriculture and 10 % of the NBC** has to be to the weaker section. However, foreign banks have to lend **10 % of NBC to the small-scale industries and 12 % of their NBC as export credit.**

RBI RATE CUT

POST-RAJAN REPO RATE CUT SCENARIO

*Mr. Rajan took over as RBI Governor on September 4, 2013
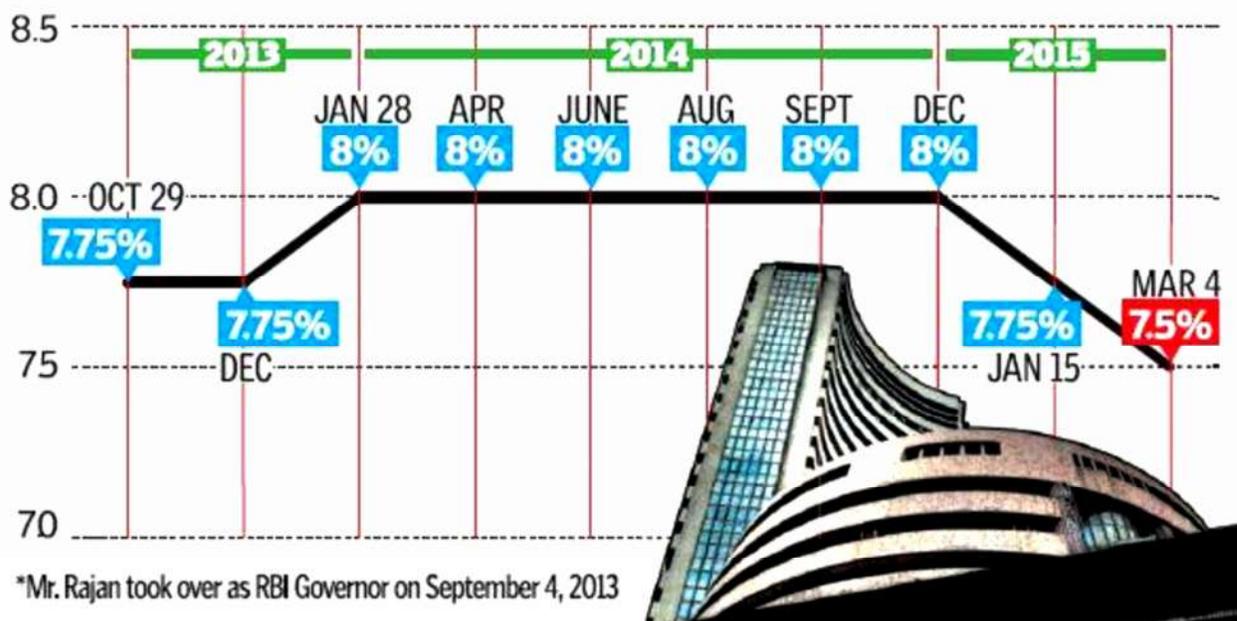
The Reserve Bank of India has cut the key policy rate by 25 basis points. The policy repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) is cut by **25 basis points to 7.5 per cent from 7.75 per cent**.

The RBI has, however, kept the cash reserve ratio (CRR) of scheduled banks unchanged at 4 per cent of net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).

RAJAN ACTS IN TANDEM WITH JAITLEY

THE RBI TARGETING CONSUMER INFLATION **TO STAY ABOUT 6 PER CENT IN JANUARY 2016, AS IT HAS OUTLINED FOR A LONG TIME NOW**

RATE CUT REASONS
- Fall in consumer inflation
- To boost consumer sentiment and spur spending
- To aid economic growth

RATE CUT REASONS
- Will put pressure on banks to pass on rate cut to consumers
- Interest rates on home, car and personal loans to come down
- Consumer loans likely to pick up
- Credit off take to pick

MARKET BEHAVIORS
- Will put pressure on banks to pass on rate cut to consumers
- Profit-booking saw markets close in the red
- Banking stocks take a plunge
- Rupee jumps to one-month high, and slips later by 33 paise

- Fall in consumer inflation: Inflation in January 2015, at 5.1 per cent as measured by the new index, was well within the target of 8 per cent for January 2015.
- To boost consumer sentiment and spur spending
- To aid economic growth
- Relatively realistic projections in the Union budget and attempts to ease supply-side pressures.
- **International Factor -**the central banks of China, Indonesia, Turkey, Australia, Russia, Pakistan and Egypt have all cut their policy rate. Several central banks in Europe have pushed their rates below zero.

IMPLICATIONS:

- Will put pressure on banks to pass on rate cut to consumers
- Interest rate on home, car and personal loans to come down
- Consumer loans likely to pick up
- Credit off take to pick up

RUPEE 1 NOTE RELEASED

After a gap of over 20 years, Re 1 note has been released. The note was released at Shrinathji temple in Nathdwara, Rajasthan, on March 6 by Finance Secretary Rajiv Mehrishi.

Background:

- In November 1994, printing of Re 1 note was stopped mainly due to higher cost and for freeing capacity to print currency notes of higher denomination.
- Printing of Rs 2 and Rs 5 notes too were discontinued in 1995. Since then, only coins have been issued for these denominations.

Details:

- The RBI said the notes to be issued would be legal tender as provided in The Coinage Act 2011.

- The RBI said the note will bear Ashoka Pillar symbol in the window without words 'SatyamevJayate,' and carry a hidden numeral in the centre while hidden word Bharat (in Hindi) will be on the right hand side of the note.
- The re-launched one rupee notes will be made up of 100 per cent cotton rag content.
- It will weigh 90 grams per square metre and have thickness of 110 microns.
- The colour of one Rupee Currency Note is predominantly pink green on obverse and reverse in combination with others.

Additional Information:

- One rupee currency notes will be printed by the Government of India.
- The note will carry bilingual signature of Finance Secretary.
- Other currency notes in India bear the signature of RBI governor.
- The surrounding design of the new note will consist of the picture of Sagar Samart– the oil exploration platform.

"GO INDIA" SMART CARD FOR TRAIN TICKETS

'Go-India' smart card scheme has been launched on pilot basis on **two sectors i.e. New Delhi-Mumbai and New Delhi-Howrah.** At present, the Go-India smart card enables passengers to pay **for reserved and unreserved tickets.**

Key Features:

- Initially, the card can be get issued by **paying minimum Rs.70/-** where passenger will get Rs.20/- balance. After that, card can be **recharged for Rs.20/- or in multiple of Rs.50/- upto Rs. 5000/-.**
- Maximum limit on Go-India smart card is Rs.10,000/-.
- Go-India smart card has life time validity. In case of no usage in six months from the date of last transaction, smart card will be temporarily deactivated which can be activated again by paying Rs.50/- as activation fee.

Impact: This card will be helpful in **reducing the transaction time at the booking counters** for the convenience of passengers as it facilitates cashless transaction.

GOLD METAL ACCOUNT SCHEME

Gold refiner MMTC-PAMP is ready with a gold metal account scheme. The scheme can mobilise gold from small consumers. India is one of the largest consumers of gold in the world and import as much as 800-1,000 tonnes each year. Though stocks of gold in India are estimated to be over 20,000 tonne, mostly this gold is neither traded, nor monetized.

IDEA BEHIND THE SCHEME

- To liquidate a portion of the estimated 20,000 tonne of gold lying idle in the Indian households.
- To increase the availability of the yellow metal in the market.
- To mitigate the fear of a ballooning Current Account Deficit (CAD) owing to high gold imports.
- To curb imports of the yellow metal

- A gold savings account needed to be treated as a rupee savings account, which would earn interest and be as easy to manage.
- The company's proposed scheme envisages a minimum gold deposit of 50 grams, fitting the profile of more than 90 per cent of India's gold consumers.
- When mature, the interest is [paid] not in rupees but in gold and the investor has more gold in the account

MMTC PAMP India is a joint venture between MMTC (a government of India undertaking) and PAMP Switzeland (a bullion brand), a privately-owned precious metals processing facility.

STEP ANNOUNCED IN THE BUDGET

To curb gold imports and monetise large idle stocks of the precious metal, Finance Minister announced three schemes:

- A gold monetisation scheme
- A sovereign gold bond
- Redeemable gold bonds which will carry a fixed rate of interest.

A gold monetisation scheme

The new scheme will allow the depositors of gold to earn interest in their metal accounts, and jewellers to obtain loans in their metal account. Banks/other dealers would also be able to monetise this gold.

A sovereign gold bond

The bonds will carry a fixed rate of interest and also be redeemable in cash in terms of the face value of the gold, at the time of redemption by the holder of the bond.

Other steps

- The government would commence work on developing an Indian Gold Coin, which will carry the Ashok Chakra on its face.
- The coin would help reduce the demand for coins minted outside India and also help to recycle the gold available in the country
- The government also kept the import duty on gold unchanged at 10 per cent.

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK'S PROJECTION ON INDIAN ECONOMY

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has projected that India would grow at 7.8 per cent in 2015-16 and 8.2 per cent the next fiscal 2016-2017, overtaking China.

IMPORTANT PROJECTIONS

- The expected monetary-policy easing and higher capital expenditure on infrastructure projects would lift India's growth from 7.4 per cent in 2014-15.
- China's growth would slow down to 7.2 per cent this year and to 7 per cent in 2016, against an average of 8.5 per cent in the period since the global financial crisis.
- Developing Asia will see slower growth for this and next year. A pick-up in India, cheaper commodity prices and reviving demand in the West will help support the region.

- For next two years, region will continue to grow at an average of 6.3 per cent but slower than the average 6.7 per cent between 2009 and 2013.
- Lower oil prices will reduce inflation in developing Asia to 2.6 per cent from 3.1 per cent last year.
- ADB's Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2015 projects that Developing Asia will grow at a steady 6.3% in 2015 and 2016.
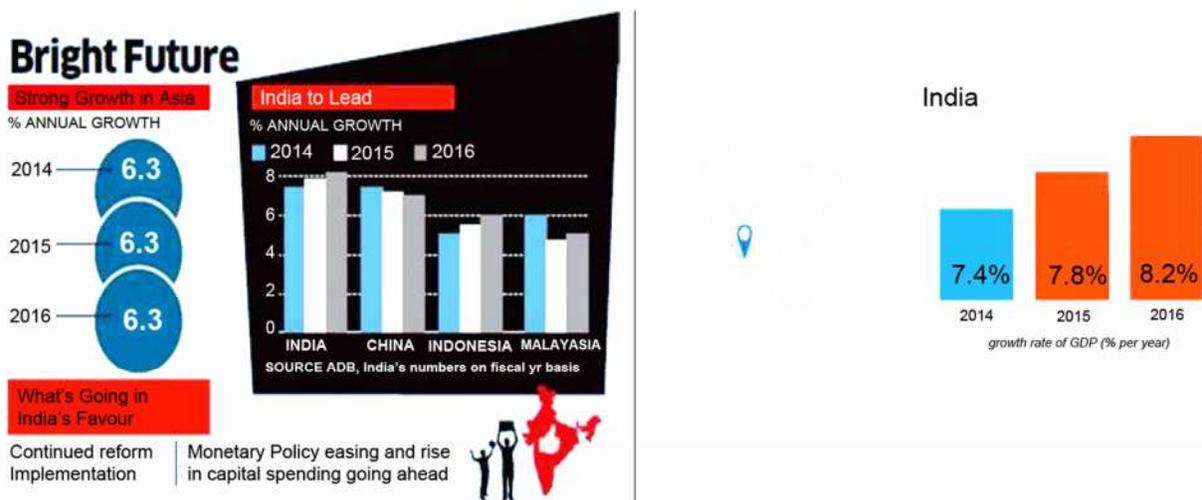
ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a regional development bank established on 22 August 1966 which is headquartered in Metro Manila, Philippines, to facilitate economic development in Asia.
- The ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
- At present, Japan holds the largest proportion of shares at 15.67%. The United States holds 15.56%, China holds 6.47%, India holds 6.36%, and Australia holds 5.81%.

Objective: To facilitate economic development of countries in Asia. It also aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

Members:

- Currently, it has 67 members – of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.
- ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with member's capital subscriptions.

Funding: ADB raises funds

- Through bond issues on the world's capital markets.
- Members' contributions
- Earnings from its lending operations, and the repayment of loans.

BOARD OF GOVERNORS:

- It is composed of one representative from each member state. The Board of Governors also elect the bank's President who is the chairperson of the Board of Directors and manages ADB.
- The Alternate Board of Governors are nominated by Board of Governors of ADB's 67 to represent them at the Annual Meeting that meets formally once year to be held in a member country.

Loans: It offers both Hard Loans and Soft loans.ADB focuses on five core areas of operations: infrastructure, the environment, including climate change, regional cooperation and integration, finance sector development and education.

RUPAY DEBIT CARD

The rail ministry launched a new debit card service for ticket bookings by passengers.

- The RuPay pre-paid card service has been developed by Indian Railways Tourism and Catering (IRCTC) along with Union Bank of India (UBI) and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- RuPay is India's domestic card payment gateway network develop on the lines of Visa and Master Card and provides an alternative system for banks to provide debit card service.
- Railways will not charge any transaction charge for the first five transactions on every card every month done on IRCTC for purchase of tickets for the first six months. For every subsequent transaction post the free usage, customer will be charged Rs 10 per transaction.
- One can have the card with a loading limit of Rs.10,000 with partial KYC detail or Rs.50,000 loading limit with full KYC.

SOCIAL /HEALTH ISSUES

DIGITAL GENDER ATLAS FOR ADVANCING GIRLS' EDUCATION

CONTEXT

India has achieved high enrolment rates for girls at primary and upper primary levels of schooling. However, at the secondary level girls' enrolment remains low. Pockets of low performance persist across the country in many states. That all girls are not in school yet, is amply reflected in the low rural female literacy rates, the prevalence of special focus districts (SFD) and educationally backward blocks (EBB), low attendance rates and the number and proportion of out of school girls.

- What the data reveals about girls needs further analysis to identify the bottlenecks for targeted planning, for effective implementation and monitoring.
- In this scenario, a Gender Atlas for the country has been developed to highlight the issues, geographies and social background of girls that are still a concern and require urgent attention.
- The Gender Atlas is based on existing data and highlights problem areas to serve as pointers for intervention priorities.
- It is seen as a management tool that can focus on 'demand' and 'supply' side issues alike that impinge on girls' education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ATLAS

- To identify low performing geographic pockets for girls, particularly from marginalised groups such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslim minorities, on specific gender related education indicators.
- To ensure equitable education with a focus on vulnerable girls, including girls with disabilities, the Gender Atlas has been developed as a hands on management tool to enable critical decisions and action in pockets where performance is below par.

SALIENT FEATURES

- The Atlas provides a comparative composite index based quartile ranking of gender related indicators at National, State, District and Block levels.
- The Atlas enables a trend analysis and tracking of performance of individual gender related parameters across periods of time.
- The Atlas is constructed on an open source platform with an in-built scope of updating data by authorized persons to retain its dynamic character.

THE BEST AND WORST

The Composite Index ranks States in terms of performance in gender-related education indicators

Primary education
⬆ High
⬆ Low

Secondary education
⬆ High
⬆ Low

Vulnerabillity Index

Gujarat, Rajasthan, M.P, UP., Bihar, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Nagaland

Kerala, Tamil Nadu Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Tripura
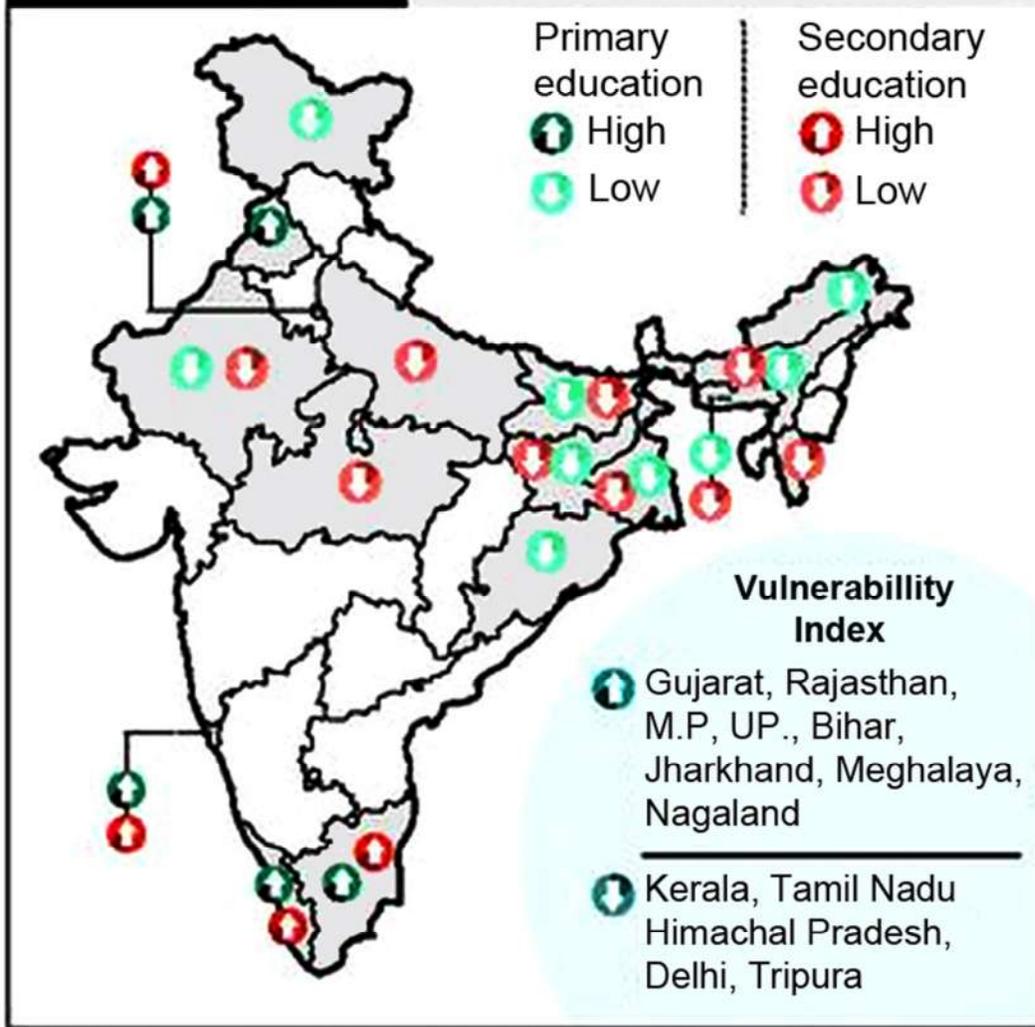
Source: Digital Gender Atlas for Advancing Girls Education (HRD Ministry)

- Delhi, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are India's best-ranked States in terms of gender-related education indicators
- Using district-level indicators of girls' education, health and social disadvantages, the government aims to identify the most backward pockets of the country, requiring the most attention.
- While the atlas uses data earlier collected by other government agencies, it also creates a new composite index using 21 indicators to do with girls' education, along four axes — access, infrastructure, teachers and outcomes.
- The atlas also creates a Vulnerability Index of factors which impinge on girls' education, including the likelihood of joining the workforce early and early marriage.

MUSLIM QUOTA

- The Maharashtra government has officially scraped the five percent reservation to Muslims in education.
- In 2014, the Congress-NCP government announced reservation for Marathas (16 per cent) and Muslims (five per cent). However, this was challenged in court through several petitions. Thereafter, the court scrapped the reservation for Marathas but partially allowed reservation for Muslims (in education) while scrapping quota for their jobs.

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

BJP GOVT. DROPPED THE QUOTA ON MARCH 4

May 2008 Mahmood-ur-Rahman **panel set up** to study backwardness of Muslims

Oct 21, 2013 Panel recommends **8% to 10%** reservation in education, jobs

June 25, 2014 Cabinet approves 16% reservation for Marathas, **5% for Muslims**

July 9 Governor **approves ordinance** to grant quota

July 24 Govt. **issues resolution** ahead of polls

Nov 14 Bombay High Court stays resolution, but **allows quota** for Muslims in education

Dec 23 Ordinance granting quota to Muslims lapses

Analysis:

- Indian constitution prohibits reservation based on only religious ground. However, several courts have recognised that where the reservation is for identified subgroups within a religious community, and extended on the ground of social and educational backwardness based on quantifiable data, such affirmative action is valid.
- In the case of Maharashtra, the quota is applicable to 50 identified sub-communities among Muslims.
- In Tamil Nadu, 3.5 per cent reservation for Muslims is being implemented without any problem, mainly because it is applicable to them not on the ground of religion but on the basis of their social and educational backwardness.
- The Sachar Committee, the RanganathMisra Commission and the Mehmood-ur-Rehman Study Group have accepted that Muslims are educationally and socially backward, and special measures are needed to bring them into the mainstream of secular education.
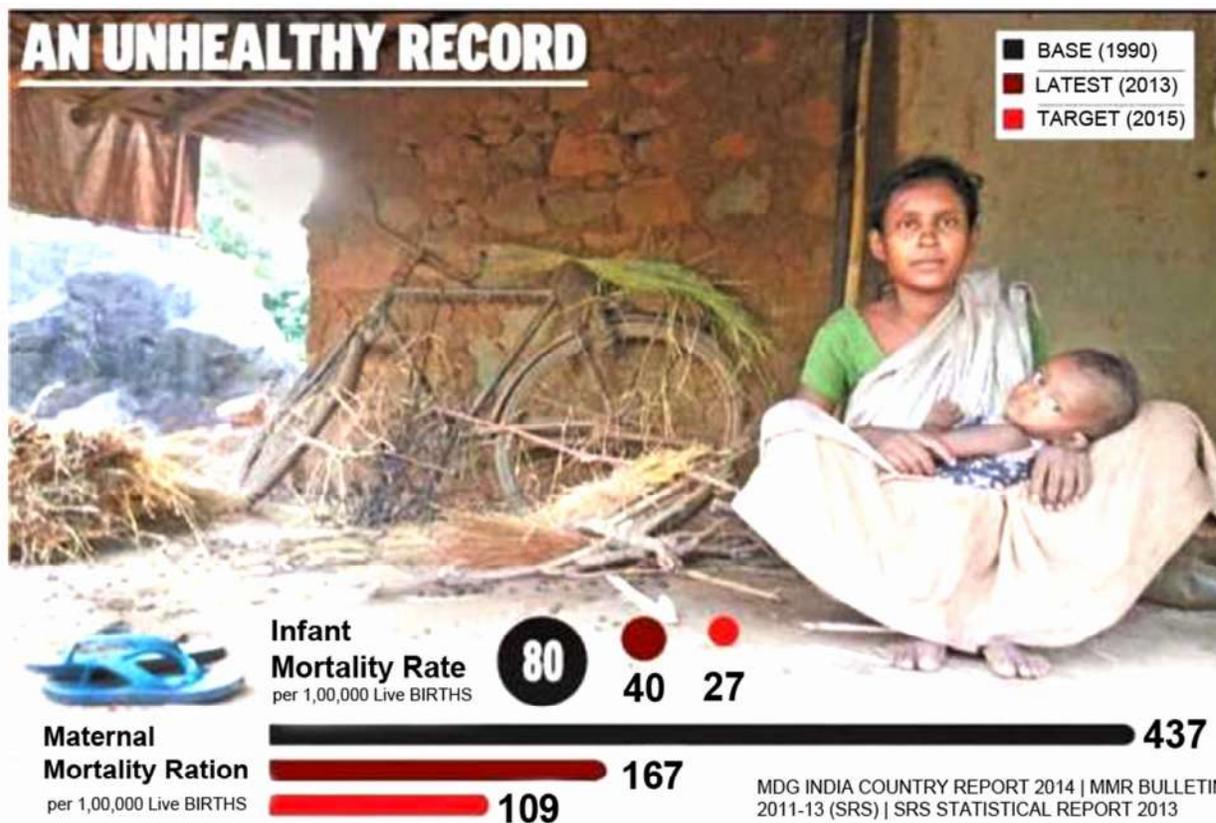
- India is well short of meeting the Millennium Development Goals to reduce the country's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) and the infant mortality rate (IMR).
- The Sample Registration System (SRS), 2013, records MMR at 167 per 1,00,000 live births and IMR at 40 per 1,000 live births with a majority of these infants dying within seven days of birth.
- India's high MMR and IMR are partly due to delayed diagnosis and limited access to health care.
- According to the District Level Household Survey 3, nearly a quarter of women in India do not receive any antenatal care and over 50 per cent do not receive any postnatal care for up to two weeks.

INDIRA GANDHI MATRITVA SAHYOG YOJANA (IGMSY)

In 2010, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) launched the Indira Gandhi MatritvaSahyogYojana (IGMSY) to address this critical situation. Leveraging the Integrated Child Development Scheme's (ICDS) platform, the programme was piloted in 53 districts across the country.

- **Benefits from scheme:**
    - ✓ The IGMSY provides partial wage compensation to pregnant and lactating women in order to promote rest and healthy feeding practices, as well as increase utilisation of healthcare services.
    - ✓ Under the scheme, all pregnant women of 19 years and above, except those employed by the government (Central or State) or Public Sector Undertakings, for the first two live births were entitled to Rs. 4,000 per live birth, in three instalments.
    - ✓ The scheme is conditional on timely registration, complete vaccination, attending counselling sessions and exclusive breastfeeding of the child.

- ✓ In September 2013, the IGMSY cash incentive was increased from Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 6,000 to comply with the minimum maternity entitlement provision of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The MWCD announced a proposed scale up of the IGMSY to 200 additional 'high burden' districts in 2015-16.
- **Inefficient implementation**
    - ✓ IGMSY has not been properly implemented. Only 28 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries were covered between 2010 and 2013. Beneficiaries are unable to get benefit of scheme due to lack of awareness or due to misinformation.
    - ✓ The IGMSY guidelines recommend creation of State and district implementation cells. These cells were either absent or not fully staffed
    - ✓ IGMSY guidelines specify that the accounts should have to be zero-balance no-frill accounts. However, no woman reported having such an account.
- **Improving effectiveness**

    There is significant scope to improve implementation and effectiveness of the programme through compliance with the guidelines. The government needs to commit to the realisation of the right to maternal entitlements of all women as defined in the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

    It is pertinent to focus on the basics such as

    - ✓ Awareness building,
    - ✓ Establishment of implementation cells,
    - ✓ A responsive grievance redress mechanism and
    - ✓ A publicly accessible management information system.

ROTAVIRUS VACCINE

PM launched the first indigenously developed and manufactured Rotavirus vaccine (Rotavac).

EXTENT AND IMPACT OF ROTAVIRUS IN INDIA

- Each year, diarrhoea caused by rotavirus results up to 10 lakh hospitalizations and kills nearly 80 thousand children under the age of 5 years.
- Besides causing emotional stress to the affected families, it also pushes many Indian families below the poverty line and also imposes significant economic burden on the country.

HOW VACCINE DEVELOPED

- Rotavac's development took 25 years. The vaccine has been developed under an innovative public-private partnership model.
- It was developed by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech.
- It involved partnership between the Ministry of Science and Technology, the institutions of the US Government, various government institutions and NGOs in India, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Benefits:

- It will reduce infant mortality due to diarrhoea.
- It proved India's capabilities for

- ✓ **High-end research and development**
- ✓ Manufacture of **sophisticated pharmaceutical products** in India
- ✓ Effective Public-Private-Partnership model for finding affordable solutions to societal challenges.
- The vaccine is a successful example of collaboration between India and the United States in the area of medical research which will fuel further collaborations in this field.
- Very **cost effective** 60 Rs./dose
- India's first indigenously developed Rotavirus Vaccine. The vaccine will be sold to global public markets which will boost **India's exports.**

Rotavirus

Virus which causes severe diarrhea

- **Symptoms**
  - ✓ Fever, nausea, and vomiting, watery diarrhea.
- **Transmission:**
  - ✓ Rotavirus transmitted through contact with contaminated hands, surfaces and objects, and possibly by the respiratory route.
  - ✓ It is highly contagious.
- **Treatment**
  - ✓ According to WHO treatment should include oral rehydration and zinc supplementation as a two-pronged treatment of acute diarrhoea.

PLIGHT OF ELDERLY PEOPLE IN INDIA

- India is home to ***one out of every 10 Senior citizens*** in the world. *10 crore elderly people live in India. Out of which 5.5 crore sleep hungry and 3 crore live alone with no support*.
- Of the 80+ population, more than 80% face abuse within the family, and more than 71% are financially dependent on their son.
- Of the 60+ population, more than 50% have admitted to abuse within the family, primarily by sons.
- The nationwide ***dependency ratio*** of elderly to the general population is *13.1%*.
- India spends only **0.032% of GDP** towards pension, which covers only 25% population. By contrast, *Thailand* spends 0.324% of GDP towards pension, covering 94%
- The Centre has allotted a meager ***Rs 200 per month*** as pension for only those below poverty line.

Constitutional And Legal Provisions For Elderly

Government of India adopted '***National Policy on Older Persons***'inJanuary1999.Thepolicydefines 'senior citizen' or 'elderly' as a person who is of *age 60yearsor above*.

- ***Article 41*** has directed that the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right of public assistance in cases of old age.
- Social security has been made the ***concurrent responsibility*** of the Central and State Governments.
- Maintenance of Parents is included in section125 of ***Criminal Procedure Code, 1973*** and also the ***Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956***. Under both of the above acts, parents can claim maintenance from their children. But the Government wanted to put in place some explicit, speedy, inexpensive process and that is why ***The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and senior Citizen***

> **Act,2007** was enacted, which is also known as "Senior Citizens Act", to eliminate some procedural implications of the erstwhile provisions and legal obligations. The 2007 act explicitly maintains that it should be the duty of the children to maintain their parents. <u>It is applicable to all persons irrespective of their religion.</u>

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS FOR SOCIAL SECTOR

WOMEN AND CHILD

- *Steep cut in flagship programmes* for women and child:-17% for MHRD, -51% for MWCD, -51% for MHFW.
- Gender budget had decreased from 4.2% in 2014-15 to 3.7 in 2015-16
- Fall in share of budget for children as a % of total budget: 3.26% in 2015-16 from 4.52% in 2014-15.

SOCIAL SECURITY NET

- There is a conscious push towards spreading the social security net, especially retirement pension coverage, using the Jan Dhan platform.

  - ✓ The **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojna** which will offer accident cover of Rs.2 lakh at a premium of just Rs.12 per year and

  - ✓ **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti BimaYojana** which will offer life cover of Rs.2 lakh at a premium of just Rs.330 per annum are commendable plans that will take social security to the poor who need it the most.

THE GOVERNMENT WILL GIVE GUARANTEED PENSION OF UP TO RS 5,000 A MONTH TO SUBSCRIBERS UNDER THE PROPOSED ATAL PENSION YOJANA. EMPLOYMENT

- Need to reform MGNREGS as making an allocation for MGNREGA is not enough without drastically reforming MGNREGA.
- The **National Skill mission** will be launched to develop employability of youth below 25 years of age.

HOUSING SECTOR

- Housing for all by 2022.
- 2 crore houses to be built in rural India, and 4 crore in urban areas.
- The housing sector could have received a further boost if the income tax concession on interest paid had been raised from to Rs.2, 50,000 from Rs.2, 00,000.

EDUCATION

- 5 more AIIMSs in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and Assam.
- IIT in Karnataka. While, the Indian School of Mines in Dhanbad, Jharkhand will be converted into IIT.
- 2 more IIMs in Jammu and Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh.
- Post-Graduation institutes of Horticulture in Amritsar, Punjab.
- University of Disability Studies will be established in Kerala.

- By linking financial inclusion (Jan Dhan Yojna), social security and health insurance agendas, the Finance Minister has provided a holistic roadmap for greater access for all in the future. The health exemptions, particularly, for the elderly, are a major boost. However, cautioned that a lot more needs to be done in terms of providing physical and educational infrastructure that supports the healthcare sector. This has to be done in partnership with and by giving incentives to the private sector that has been providing nearly 70 per cent of the additional beds in India.
- Disappointing as:
    - the medical fraternity had expected the health allocation to be increased to *at least 2.5 % of the GDP* along with separate allocation for disease outbreaks, rare diseases, rural posting of doctors, and free emergency treatment for all. They have also been demanding that health be given *infrastructure status*, which has been completely disregarded yet again.
    - A total allocation of Rs. 33,150 crore for health would not make *universal healthcare a reality*.
    - The health sector has welcomed the increase in tax on cigarette stating that it will be helpful in curbing consumption. But, *why does beedi remain exempted from any tax hike?* The number of beedi smokers has more than doubled when compared with that of cigarette smokers. The beedi industry kills users and exploits the manufacturer (beedi rollers).
    - The Finance Minister has rightly linked cleanliness and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan with preventive healthcare. But, *preventive healthcare is a bigger concept and should be taken up in isolation* rather than combining it with other elements. The right thing to do would be to link preventive healthcare with the increasing burden of non-communicable diseases.

FARM SECTOR

- The govt. flagged the *PradhanMantri Gram SinchaiYojna* aimed at '*per drop more crop*' and *ParamparagatKrishiVikasYojna* (organic farming) as the two most important progammes in the farm sector to enhance productivity and production. It announced an allocation of Rs. 5,300 crore for micro-irrigation, watershed development and the "sinchaiyojna'' and Rs. 300 crore for organic farming.
- Prime Minister Modi had recently launched the *Soil Health Card Scheme* from Suratgarh in Rajasthan.
- Recognising that agriculture incomes were under stress, Mr. Jaitley announced that a *Unified National Agriculture Market* would be set up to increase farmers' incomes with an "incidental'' advantage of moderating increase in prices which has been the bane of many a government. "While farmers are no longer in the clutches of traders, his produce does not command the best national price,'' he observed.
- "Farm credit has been raised by Rs. 50,000 crore to *Rs. 8.5 lakh crore* for 2015-16, which he expects banks to surpass.
- However, funding for the UPA flagship programmes of RashtriyaKrishiVikasYojna has been reduced and the National Food Security Mission, Extension programme and crop insurance schemes have been ignored.

'AAPKI BETI HUMARI BETI'SCHEME:

Haryana CM ManoharLalKhattar has launched a scheme for girl child- *'AapkiBeti HumariBeti'* on March 8, 2015. It has been launched with <u>an aim to overcome the problem of decline in child sex ratio in Haryana</u>.

- The scheme would be implemented in rural areas as well as urban areas of the state.

- It will include the families having *first girl child* born on or after January 22, 2015 under Scheduled Caste (SC) and Below Poverty Line (BPL). They would be eligible to receive 21,000 rupees.
- Likewise, all *second girl child* of all families who are born on or after January 22, 2015 will get RS 21,000.
- Families with twin girls or multiple girls, will get 21,000 rupees per girl child.

- CM also launched **'Haryana KanyaKosh'** for the welfare and development of girl child and women in the state. The government will increase the amount of this Kosh (Coffer) to 100 crore rupees. About 51 lakh rupees would be given to this Coffer from the CM's discretionary fund.
- A **Multi Sectoral Nutrition Programme** would also be launched by CM in order to concentrate on the maternal and child nutrition in five districts- Mewat, Fatehabad, Namaul, Palwal and Kaithal.
- The amount of **Indira Gandhi Mahila Shakti Award** would be increased from Rs 1 lakh rupees to Rs 1.5 lakh, **Behan Shanno Devi Award** to be increased from Rs 51,000 to Rs 1 lakh, and **Life Time Achievement Award** would be increased from Rs 21,000 to Rs 51,000

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY /ENVIRONMENT

OCEAN AS CARBON SINK

Oceans are at present CO_2 sinks, and represent the largest active carbon sink on Earth, absorbing more than a quarter of the carbon dioxide that humans put into the air. On longer timescales they may be both sources and sinks.

- The atmospheric CO2 enters the ocean through steady exchange at surface. This is a physico-chemical process. The difference in partial pressure of the CO2between seawater and air facilitate gaseous exchange. The diffusion takes place until the partial pressures across the air-water interface are equilibrated.
- Microscopic photosynthetic phytoplankton utilizes CO2 during photosynthesis. The biological pump transfers carbon dioxide from the surface of the ocean to the deep sea.
- CO2 reacts with seawater to form dissolved inorganic carbon, dissolved free Carbon dioxide .Carbonic Acid, Bicarbonate and Carbonate.
- The pH of seawater is regulated by the bicarbonate and carbonate concentrations.
- Marine organisms combine calcium and carbonate ions in the calcification process and manufacture calcareous material. As the organisms die, the skeletal material sinks and buried in sediments.

A **carbon sink** is a natural or artificial reservoir that accumulates and stores some carbon-containing chemical compound for an indefinite period. The process by which carbon sinks remove carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere is known as carbon sequestration.

DEFORESTATION IMPACTS MONSOON

- A study has shown that deforestation in high latitudes and the boreal regions — comprising grasslands and forests of Canada, Russia and Alaska in the U.S. — could affect the monsoon in South Asia.
- The effect of large-scale deforestation could lead to a 12 per cent decline in the monsoons.

INTER-TROPICAL CONVERGENCE ZONE (ITCZ)

- The report point out that the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), which drives rain, moves southwards.
- The monsoon is dependent on landmass covered by the ITCZ. If it moves south, it covers more of the Indian Ocean, and less of India. This will weaken the monsoons.
- On the other hand, monsoons will strengthen in the Southern Hemisphere, leading to immense impact on regional economies.

HOW DEFORESTATION AFFECTS GLOBAL RAINFALL

Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) comprises bands of clouds and thunderstorms

Currently, ITCZ hovers around 8 degree North (just below the tip of mainland India) in summer and 8 degree South (just above Australia)

Removal of trees (which absorb radiation) in Russia and Canada increases the amount of sun radiation reflected there; that is, the land cools in the north

This causes heat from South to move towards North. and ITCZ moves lower

Monsoon movement is strengthened only if ITCZ covers large landmass of South Asia

If it moves further south, ITCZ covers lesser landmass, and monsoons here can decline by 12 per cent

IMPACT OF DEFICIT MONSOON ON INDIA

Deforestation region	Temperature rise (degree Celsius)	Deforestation region
Global level* (US, Europe, Central Asia, China, Chile)	1.5	3.2
Boreal (Canada, Russia)	0.90	1.70
Temperate (US, Europe, Central Asia, China, Chille)	0.47	1.01
Tropical (around the Equator)	0.04	0.05
*Near 35 per cent of all land mass has already been deforested		

Nearly 80 per cent of rice is grown during months (June-September)

Deficit monsoon in 2002 saw dip in food grains of nearly 30 million fonnes

Delay in monsoons can lead to 25 percent lesser wheat production

Food inflation can rise by up to 5 per cent

Impact of deficit rainfall is 2 to 5 per cent dip in agricultural GDP, and nearly 1 per cent in country's GDP

Purchasing power in rural areas will come down

- **Extent of deforestation:** By the 1750s, only about seven per cent of the global land area had been cleared for agriculture but now that proportion has risen to around one-third.
- **Reason of effect on Monsoon:** When forests in the northern high latitudes were removed, more sunlight was reflected back into space and this region cooled sharply.

IMPACT ON VARIOUS COUNTRIES:

- **India:** India was affected the most, with global deforestation producing an 18 per cent reduction in its summer monsoon rains
- **South Africa, South America and Australia:** Deforestation led to moderately increased rains in these countries in the southern hemisphere.

SUNDERBANS LOSING GREEN COVER AND LAND MASS

- The Indian Sunderbans has lost 3.71 per cent of its mangrove and other forest cover, while losing 9,990 hectares of its landmass to erosion in one decade. (According to study done by ISRO)
- The study shows that about 95.14 per cent of the green cover has not undergone gone any change, while fresh vegetation has come up in 1.1 per cent of the entire area.
- ISRO study once again highlighted that the Sunderbans was a very fragile and dynamic landscape.

- The 9,600-sq.km Indian Sunderbans is highly susceptible to coastal erosion and coastal land dynamics. A recent World Bank report pointed out that the carrying capacity of the landmass had exceeded with the population density of over 1,000 a sq.km.

Why study has been done: The National Green Tribunal, which is hearing a case of environmental violations in the Sunderbans, directed holding the study.

Reasons of loss: Natural and anthropogenic (human intervention) processes.

THREE NEW CORALS REEFS FOUND ON THE SINDHUDURG COAST

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has found three new records of coral reef on the Sindhudurg coast near Malvan of Maharashtra during a recent survey.
- Three new coral reefs namely Goniatsreasp, Poritessp and Turbinariasp have been found in the survey conducted by ZSI (Zoological Survey of India).
- Unlike the reefs found in other parts of the country — Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kutch, Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands — those in Malvan are still unbleached.
- This is a value-added attraction and it would boost tourism in the area and adventure tourism would grow further in its surrounding areas.

EFFORTS TO PROTECT CORAL REEFS IN INDIA

- Efforts are on to protect the reef with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has sanctioned Rs. 80 lakh towards capacity building of the local people.
- The ZSI had earlier transplanted coral reef from the Gulf of Mannar in Tamil Nadu to the Gulf of Kutch in Gujarat over one square km with assistance from the World Bank.

RHINO'S POPULATION IS RISING IN WEST BENGAL

- West Bengal is now home to the second highest population of the one-horned rhinoceros in the country after Assam, with the number growing to 250 in the State.
- The Jaldapara National Park in the State has nearly 200 of these endangered animals and the Gorumara National Park, 50.
- Jaldapara now has the second highest population of them after the Kaziranga National Park in Assam, which has over 2,000.
- Rhino population has a skewed male-female ratio — 2:1.4 in Gorumara.

Reason of Poaching: Illegal rhino horn trade has been the main problem facing managers of the rhino-protected areas of Assam. Some other parts like nails, skins have very high value in Asian traditional medicinal market.

EXTENT OF RHINO'S IN INDIA:

- Northern Uttar Pradesh, northernBihar, northern Bengal, and in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam.
- Kaziranga National Park, Pobitora in Marigaon district and Orang National Park in Darrang district of Assam account almost 95% of the total wild one horned rhino in the world.

NEW BUTTERFLY SPECIES

- Wildlife enthusiasts have found the Malayan Green Banded Peacock (Papiliopalinurus), a beautiful specimen found in South East Asia, for the first time in India.
- The butterfly is found in southern Myanmar and peninsular Thailand south-eastward into Borneo and the Philippines.
- While there are about 600 known species of butterflies in West Bengal, India is home to about 1,500 species of butterflies.
- West Bengal is probably the only State which is home to a wide variety of peacock butterflies such as the rare Krishna Peacock, Blue Peacock, the relatively common Paris Peacock, Common Peacock and Common Banded Peacock.
- The only other Peacock butterfly found in the country is Buddha Peacock or Malabar Banded Peacock, which is endemic to south India.

IMPACT OF SEA LEVEL RISE ON PEOPLE LIVING IN SUNDERBANS

- A rapid rise in sea level and salinity in the Sunderbanshas triggered migration of inhabitants from several blocks in the forest to other parts of the country.
- This has in turn brought about a change in the socio-economic condition of the area.
- According to a World Bank report if this is not checked by using the resources for capacity building of the inhabitants, it could lead to massive migration in the coming years
- The rising level of salinity has brought down the quantity of fishes
- Due to rise in the sea level, large parcels of **agricultural land have gone under water**.

PRAGATI (PRO-ACTIVE GOVERNANCE AND TIMELY IMPLEMENTATION)

This is a platform which aimed at addressing common man's grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

Features

- Multi-purpose and multi-modal platform
- Unique integrating and interactive platform
- This platform will fulfill three objectives - : Grievance Redressal, Programme Implementation and Project Monitoring. This is an IT-based redressal and monitoring system.
- It uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation.

Significance

- It will make government more efficient and responsive.
- It is a step in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.

AWACS (AIRBORNE WARNING AND CONTROL SYSTEMS)

- Government approved the development of 2 indigenous Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) (based on the A-330 aircraft) by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Currently, the DRDO is developing two smaller Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C), scheduled to be delivered this year.
- Three AWACS already stand operationalised in the Indian Air Force (IAF).

AWACS USES

- It is described as an **eye-in-the-sky.**
- It can detect incoming **fighter jets and missiles.**
- It can keep an eye on **troop's movement** across the border.
- It enables military commanders to take **quicker decisions** to counter the enemy's military activities on time.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AWACS AND AEW&C

- AWACS have **better capabilities** and are mounted on **larger aircraft**, while AEW&C are mounted on smaller planes.

STIPEND HIKE FOR RESEARCHERS

- The **government** has hiked the stipends of PHD scholars, under which a junior research fellow will get Rs 25,000 (earlier amount 16000) as revised emolument per month.
- Similarly, a senior research fellow with two years of research experience will be getting 28,000 (earlier amount 18000) per month.

REASONS OF RAISING STIPEND

- ✓ To improve quality of research in India
- ✓ To make research an attractive career option.
- ✓ To reduce brain drain as earlier in India stipend was low as compared to other countries, leading to brain drain.

GENETICALLY EDITING HUMAN EMBRYOS

Group of scientists has raised ethical and safety concerns over genetically editing human embryos.

ARGUMENT AGAINST EDITING HUMAN EMBRYOS

- ✓ This has the potential to create the designer baby using specific genes for greater intelligence or specific physical attributes such as blue eyes.
- ✓ This could have unpredictable effects on future generations.
- ✓ The scientist who are representing bioscience institutes in the U.S. — have called for a "voluntary moratorium" in the scientific community to discourage such research.

ARGUMENT IN SUPPORT OF EDITING HUMAN EMBRYOS

- ✓ Genome-editing technology does offer promising tools to correct disease-genes by snipping away harmful mutations to possibly treat human diseases such as HIV/AIDS, haemophilia, sickle-cell anaemia and forms of cancer.

THREE IMMEDIATE SUPPORT VESSELS (ISVS) COMMISSIONED IN NAVY

- The second batch of ISVs - IN ISV T38, IN ISV T39 and IN ISV T40 were commissioned. Now the Eastern Naval Command has its full complement of six ISVs.
- This project of making 6 ISVs was a joint collaboration between Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), the ship builders and the Navy.

USES OF ISVS

- The ISVs are armed with Heavy Machine Guns (HMGs) and are fitted with state-of-the-art radar and navigation equipment.
- These ships are capable of carrying out day and night surveillance.
- They can be used for rapid insertions and extraction of MARCOS (Marine Commandos) for military intervention.

ASTRA MISSILE

Features

- Indigenously developed
- Air-to-air missile
- Supersonic speed (1.2 Mach to 1.4 Mach)
- Beyond Visual Range (Up to 110 km depends on the altitude at the time of launching)
- Can be launched from different altitudes.

- Successfully launched from Sukhoi-30 fighter aircraft to hit a simulated target
- The missile was tested to prove the manoeuvring capability against a simulated target and also to validate various subsystems.
- All the subsystems like propulsion, navigation, guidance as also the smooth separation of the missile from the aircraft were proved.

STOCKHOLM WATER PRIZE

Eminent environment activist Rajendra Singh (known as waterman of India), has been conferred the prestigious Stockholm Water Prize.

WHY HE GOT THIS PRICE:

- For his innovative water restoration efforts and extraordinary courage to empower communities in villages.
- He improved water security and the living conditions of about thousand villages in Rajasthan.
- His methods have also prevented floods, restored soil and rivers, and brought back wildlife.

EARLIER ACHIEVEMENTS

- He has already won Ramon Magsaysay award in 2001 for his work on community-based water harvesting and water management.

TECHNOLOGY USED:

- He uses a modern version of the ancient Indian technique of rainwater harvesting.
- It involves building low-level banks of earth to hold back the flow of water in the wet season and allow water to seep into the ground for future use.

STOCKHOLM WATER PRIZE

- The Stockholm Water Prize is a global award founded in 1991 and presented annually by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) to an individual, organisation or institution for outstanding water-related achievements.
- The Stockholm Water Prize Laureate receives USD 150,000 and a specially designed sculpture.

DIGILOCKER

DigiLocker, the digital locker system launched by the government to securely store documents online, has received good response since its beta launch last month. The locker can be accessed by individuals, using their number.

HOW DOES DIGILOCKER WORK?

> TO Sign-up for the Digilocker you need to have an Aadhaar and **mobile number registered with Aadhaar.**

> Type your Aadhast number and the **captcha code.**

> After clicking signup

> button, an OTP **(One Time Password)** will be sent to the registered mobile number and email-id.

> Enter OTP and click on "Validate OTP" **button to complete the sign up and login.**

Features

- It is a dedicated personal storage space, linked to each resident's Aadhaar number.
- DigiLocker can be used to securely store e-documents as well as store Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) link of e-documents issued by various issuer departments.
- It has an e-Sign facility which is provided as part of DigiLocker system can be used to digitally sign e-documents.
- The users can store their documents such as insurance, medical reports, PAN card, passport, marriage certificate, school certificate and other documents in the digital format.
- 10MB of free space in the locker to securely store resident documents and store links (URI) of Govt. department or agency issued e-documents. The storage space allocation will be increased to 1GB in subsequent release.

Advantages

- It will minimize the use of physical documents and will provide authenticity of the e-documents.
- It will provide secured access to Govt. issued documents.
- It will also reduce administrative overhead of Govt. departments and agencies and make it easy for the residents to receive services.

Why in news: It has received good response since its launch by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology, under the Ministry of Communications and IT last month.

STEPS TAKEN BY RAILWAY TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY

- **Kaya kalp Council**

  ✓ The Minister of Railways has now constituted the 'Kayakulp' Council and has appointed ShriRatan Tata to head this Council.

- ✓ **Purpose:** It is an innovation council called Kaya kalp. Its purpose is to recommend innovative methods and processes for the improvement, betterment and transformation of the Indian Railways.

- **Launched RuPay pre-paid debit card**

  - ✓ The service was launched by the IRCTC in collaboration with Union Bank of India and the National Payment Corporation of India (NCPI).
  - ✓ Availability: UBI offices or through IRCTC online. One does not need to have a bank account in UBI to have the card and you can avail it online also.

USE OF RUPAY PRE-PAID DEBIT CARD:

- Costumer canbook tickets, do shopping and pay service bills using RuPay pre-paid cards.
- Card holder will get free Rs.1 lakh accident insurance coverage as part of the benefits to customers.
- Under this both virtual as well as physical cards are being issued to customers in two variants.

What is Rupay: RuPay is India's own **card payment gateway network** like Visa and Master Card, and provides an alternative system for banks to provide a debit card service.

- ✓ Earlier this month, IRCTC tied with Amazon.in to sell various products to IRCTC customers.
- ✓ IRCTC tied up with Jubilant Food works to deliver Dominos' pizza to the passenger's seat if they were traveling across selected stations in India.
- ✓ IRCTC had also tied-up with BookMyTrain.com to introduce cash on delivery (CoD) payment mode for buying train tickets.
- ✓ Earlier, NPCI had mentioned that users could book train tickets on IRCTC using the RuPay debit card.

NATIONAL ELECTORAL ROLL PURIFICATION AND AUTHENTICATION PROGRAMME (NERPAP)

National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP) is voter registration project of the Election Commission of India. It will link the Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC) with the Aadhar number of the registered voter.

Objective:

- A totally **error free and authenticated** electoral roll.
- The project expects to remove duplicate, fake and ineligible voters, and voters who have shifted to other regions from the databases.

WHAT WILL BE DONE IN THIS PROGRAMME:

- EPIC data of electors will be linked with Aadhar data of UIDAI for the purpose of authentication.
- The voters can submit their Aadhar and EPIC number by SMS, email, mobile application andwebsite.
- Improving image quality of electors along with sorting issues like corrections of errors etc.
- To collect data regarding EPIC and Aadhar Card various provisions are made such as
  - ✓ Organizing Special Camp, Voter Facilitation Centres, e-Sevacentres and Citizen Service Centres
  - ✓ Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will also collect the details of electors during door to door survey.

✓ To ensure maximum public participation, nationwide special camps will be organized by the Electoral Registration Officer in April 2015.
- Facility has also been provided for voluntarily Disclosure of Multiple Entries.

DEFENCE PROCUREMENTS FOR AIR FORCE AND NAVY

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar cleared an order for 38 Pilatus basic trainer aircraft for the Air Force.
- Also it appointed the Goa Shipyard Limited as the lead agency to build 12 Mine Counter-Measure Vessels (MCMV) for the Navy.
- The Air Force has projected a requirement of 181 basic trainer aircraft.
- 75 Pilatus aircraft were procured from Switzerland in 2012 and 38 cleared now.
- The remaining 68 will be supplied by the Hindustan Aeronautic Limited (HAL) by the indigenous development of HTT-40 aircraft.
- The earlier global tender for eight MCMVs was scrapped after allegations of corruption.
- There would be a "Buy and Make" category under the procurement procedure and the GSL would build the ships under transfer of technology with a foreign vendor in a deal worth about Rs. 32,000 crore.

RECYCLE THE BULB

A compact fluorescent lamp (CFL) is a **fluorescent lamp** designed to replace an **incandescent lamp**.

- Compared to general-service incandescent lamps giving the same amount of visible light, CFLs use one-fifth to one-third the electric power, and last eight to fifteen times longer.
- A CFL has a higher purchase price than an incandescent lamp, but can save over five times its purchase price in electricity costs over the lamp's lifetime.
- Like all fluorescent lamps, CFLs contain toxic mercury which complicates their disposal

PROBLEM OF RECYCLING:

- Disused CFL and mercury-laden lamps, and fluorescent tubes, are generally dumped in municipal waste or sold to unorganised recyclers, there is harmful release of mercury into the soil, water, and air.
- Mercury can cause serious, well-recognised health effects when there is chronic exposure. Permanent damage to skin, eyes, and respiratory tract and other symptoms are caused upon skin contact, inhalation of vapour, or ingestion.
- The lamps made in India have a higher mercury content than those in the developed world,
- India's domestic production of fluorescent tube lights (FTL) and compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) involves the use of about eight tonnes of mercury, and imported CFLs, another three tones.
- According to the WHO, inhalation of mercury vapour leads to adverse effects on nervous, digestive and immune systems. Once into the environment it can turn into a deadlier form called methyl mercury, which is extremely harmful to humans and wildlife.
- For human consumption, Food Safety and Standards (Contaminations, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011, have set the limit of 0.5 ppm mercury content in fish and 1 ppm mercury content in other foods.

Way Forward:

- There is need for better management of CFL waste containing mercury. The imperative is to reduce the amount of mercury that goes into CFLs through standards and regulatory controls and enforce the principle of extended producer responsibility for the collection and disposal of waste.
- The way forward would be to provide a financial incentive to consumers for turning in old mercury lamps of all types, particularly conventional fluorescent tube lights and CFLs, and to ensure their scientific disposal through a network of authorised recyclers.
- In the case of used light bulbs, consumers stand to gain if the rewards-based system is introduced. Recycling mercury lamps should be an environmental priority.

SOLAR POWER STATION IN SPACE

Space Solar Power gathers energy from sunlight in space and transmits it wirelessly to Earth. Space solar power can solve our energy and greenhouse gas emissions problems. The solar energy available in space is literally billions of times greater than we use today.

ADVANTAGES OF SPACE SOLAR POWER

- Unlike oil, gas, ethanol, and coal plants, space solar power does not emit greenhouse gases.
- Unlike terrestrial solar and wind power plants, space solar power is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in huge quantities. It works regardless of cloud cover, daylight, or wind speed.
- Space solar power will provide true energy independence for the nations that develop it, eliminating a major source of national competition for limited Earth-based energy resources.
- Space solar power can be exported to virtually any place in the world, and its energy can be converted for local needs — such as manufacture of methanol for use in places like rural India where there are no electric power grids. Space solar power can also be used for desalination of sea water.

CHINESE PLAN

- China plans to build a huge solar power station 36,000 kilometres above the ground in an attempt to battle smog, cut greenhouse gases and solve energy crisis.
- The power station would be a super spacecraft on a geosynchronous orbit equipped with huge solar panels. The electricity generated would be converted to microwaves or lasers and transmitted to a collector on Earth.
- Countries such as the US and Japan have studied space solar power station. Japan leads the development of wireless power transmission technology.
- The electricity generated from the ground-based solar plants fluctuates with night and day and weather, but a space generator collects energy 99% of the time. Space-based solar panels can generate ten times as much electricity as ground-based panels per unit area.

CHALLENGES

- A commercially viable space power station would weigh 10,000 tons. But few rockets can carry a payload of over 100 tons to low Earth orbit.
- It requires a cheap heavy-lift launch vehicle.

ELECTRIC POWER TRANSMITTED WIRELESSLY IN JAPAN

- Japanese researchers have successfully transmitted electric power wirelessly to a pinpoint target using microwaves, an advance that brings space-based solar power closer to reality.
- According to Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or Jaxa, the researchers were able to transform 1.8 kilowatts of electric power into microwaves and transmit it with accuracy into a receiver located 55 metres away.
- The experiment was the first in the world to send out high-output microwaves wirelessly to a small target.
- In space-based solar power generation, sunlight is gathered in geostationary orbit and transmitted to a receiver on Earth.
- Unlike solar panels set on Earth, satellite-based solar panels can capture the energy around the clock and are not affected by weather conditions.

CLIMATE CHANGE MATTER NOT UNDER NGTJURISDICTION

- The Ministry of Environment and Forest has told National Green Tribunal that it does not have the jurisdiction to hear matters relating to climate change as it was covered under international protocols.
- According to Section 14 of the NGT Act, the Tribunal has the jurisdiction over all civil cases where a substantial question relating to environment is involved. Such questions arise out of implementation of enactments specified in Schedule 1 of the Act. The seven enactments specified in Schedule 1 to the NGT Act are –
  - ✓ The Water Act,
  - ✓ The Water Cess Act,
  - ✓ The Forest (Conservation) Act,
  - ✓ The Air (Preventon and Control of Pollution Act) ,
  - ✓ The Environment Protection Act,
  - ✓ Public Liability Insurance Act and
  - ✓ The Biological Diversity Act.

LINEAR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Linear infrastructure projects — roads, trains and power lines that make long intrusions into forests — are the new threat to our forests, in addition to submergence by dams or clearing for mining and agriculture.

PROBLEMS OF LINEAR PROJECTS

- Roads and power lines support economic growth and other needs such as mobility and delivery of services, and are vital in a developing country. But they also bring a host of associated problems that affect natural ecosystems and rural and tribal communities. They cause habitat fragmentation.
- In mountains, roads may lead to severe forest destruction, landslides, and erosion, as seen during road construction in many parts of the Himalayas and the Western Ghats.
- Millions of animals, too, are killed along roads due to collisions with vehicles.
- Power lines also kill unknown numbers of wildlife.

- With trees and forests cut, tree-living animals are forced to cross roads or use electric wires to cross canopy gaps, leading to a double jeopardy of electrocution and road kill.
- linear intrusions affect areas much larger than the actual area set aside for the project, because of negative 'edge effects' that diffuse to varying distances on either side. Each kilometre of road may affect at least 10 ha of adjoining habitat.

WAY FORWARD

- If linear infrastructure can be scientifically informed, ecologically sensitive, and well designed, it can promote economic development and safeguard the habitat as well.
- The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife prepared a detailed background paper and draft guidelines on linear intrusions in 2011, partly incorporated in the December 2014 subcommittee guidelines for roads in protected areas.
  - ✓ The guidelines accord primacy to the 'Principle of Avoidance', whereby wildlife protected areas and valuable natural ecosystems are not unnecessarily disrupted by linear intrusions; and where alternative alignments, routed around wildlife corridors, can provide or enhance connectivity to peripheral villages and towns.

ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY RECENT ORDER

- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has been gradually diluting the norms for such projects. The Centre made environmental clearance for linear projects simpler by allowing non-forest activities like felling of trees right after in-principle approval.
- This is in contrast to the guidelines issued under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, as per which forestry clearance will be given in two stages.
  - ✓ In the first stage, the proposal shall be agreed to in-principle. At this stage, usually the conditions related to transfer and mutation of equivalent non-forest land for compensatory afforestation and realisation of funds are stipulated.
  - ✓ The second stage concerns issuing of formal approval after receipt of compliance report from the State government.

THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL ORDER

- The National Green Tribunal has ordered that no non-forest activity be carried out in a forest area unless a final order has been passed by the State government.
- It issued the direction that such orders be put in the public domain as per the Forest Conservation Act.
- Use of the forest area for non-forest activity can only be permitted under Section 2 of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, by the State Government in whose jurisdiction the forest falls.

CENTRE ARGUMENT

- The Centre has been claiming that relaxation in norms for linear projects will bring in expeditious implementation and execution of projects of public utility like roads, railways lines, transmission lines and pipelines.

WORLD CONFERENCE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction is a series of United Nations conferences on preparing for, responding to and mitigating the risk of natural disasters.

- The conferences bring together government officials, non-governmental experts and other specialists from around the world to discuss the growing trend of people affected by natural disasters. The third conference was held in 2015 in Sendai, Japan.
- The World Conference has been convened since 1994, and in 2005 the second world conference adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.
- The conference formally adopted the successor accord to the Hyogo Framework (2005-2015). It is known as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).

SENDAI FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) was an outcome of the 2015 conference held in Sendai, Japan. The Sendai Framework sets four specific priorities for action:

- Understanding disaster risk;
- Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk;
- Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience;
- Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

To support the assessment of global progress in achieving the outcome and goal of the Sendai Framework, seven global targets have been agreed:
- Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower average per 100,000 global mortality between 2020-2030 compared to 2005-2015;
- Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower the average global figure per 100,000 between 2020-2030 compared to 2005-2015;
- Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product by 2030;
- Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030;
- Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020;
- Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of the framework by 2030;
- Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030.

HYOGO FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The Hyogo Framework for Action (2005–2015) was an outcome of the 2005 conference held in Kobe, Japan. The HFA, which ran from 2005 to 2015, set five specific priorities for action:
- Making disaster risk reduction a priority;
- Improving risk information and early warning;
- Building a culture of safety and resilience;
- Reducing the risks in key sectors;
- Strengthening preparedness for response.

GANDHI PEACE PRIZE

India's space agency -- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) -- has been selected for the Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2014.

The Gandhi Peace Prize was instituted in 1995. It is given to individual or organisation for making social, economic and political transformation through non-violence means.

ISRO CONTRIBUTION

- The space agency through its cutting-edge technologies contributes to the nation's development through satellite based education, health care and connectivity to community activities for sustainable economic development.
- The ISRO through space technology has allowed for improved mapping of agricultural land and water-shed areas, providing advisories to fishing communities, giving information support for decentralised planning, creating data base of heritage sites, better climate and disaster management support and promoting knowledge based society.
- The ISRO has also through tele-medicine, one of the communication technology applications, enhanced the healthcare services delivery, wherein a satellite tele-medicine network through INSAT system links the rural hospitals in the country with specialty hospitals to enable the rural populace to access the specialist medical consultations.

STEPHEN HAWKING

- British physicist Stephen Hawking is getting his name trademarked, joining the ranks of celebrities like J.K. Rowling and David Beckham, who have turned their names into brands.
- The primary aim behind the move for Hawking, who was the subject of the Oscar-winning film The Theory Of Everything, is to prevent the misuse of his name in "inappropriate products".
- His trademark would cover computer games, powered wheelchairs, greetings cards and health care.

ROBOT SUBMARINE TO THE OILY SEAS OF SATURN'S MOON TITAN

- US Scientists are proposing to send a robot submarine to the oily seas of Saturn's moon Titan. The seas are filled not with water, but with hydrocarbons like methane and ethane. These compounds exist in their liquid state on the moon, where the temperature averages 180 degree C.
- Titan resembles a deep frozen version of Earth, making it an attractive target for exploration.
- The plan is funded by an initiative called NASA Innovative Advanced Concepts (NIAC), where researchers are encouraged to think out of the box. It was visited by the European Huygens probe, which touched down on the surface in 2005.

MARS ORBITER MISSION (MOM)

- The Mars Orbiter completed half a year around the Red Planet on 24th March .The orbiter has been designed for six months of work.
- MOM will go through a 15-day "blackout" or eclipsed period from June 8 to 22. Communication with earth will be snapped as sun will block the planet from Mars and MOM.
  - ✓ During this period, the orbiter must take its own decisions in an autonomous mode and will consume more fuel. How much longer it will last and with how much fuel will be left will depend on this phase.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Mars Orbiter Mission was extended for another six months to further explore the Red Planet and its atmosphere.
- As the 1,340 kg Mars Orbiter has sufficient fuel (37 kg) to last longer than it was intended earlier, its mission has been extended for another six months.

'MAITRI' PROJECT

- The Defence Acquisition Council has approved the 'Maitri' project for the co-development of a Short Range Surface-to-Air Missile (SR-SAM) by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) with MBDA of France.
- The project has been in the works since 2007 to meet the requirements of the Army and the Air Force.

MOU WITH MBDA

- The DRDO had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with MBDA in 2013, but there has hardly been any progress because the DRDO's Akash missile system has similar functions.
- The Army and the Air Force have expressed satisfaction with the capabilities of Akash, but the Navy has made it clear that Akash is not suitable for installation on warships.