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National News

India a moderate-performing country: report

- India has been named a moderate-performing country in combating climate change with Australia being the worst, according to a report released at climate negotiations.
- India was ranked 31. "India climbs five places and continues to profit from the very low level of per capita emissions, but overall CO2 emissions have risen constantly over the past five years to about 40 per cent," said the Climate Change Performance Index 2015 report by Germanwatch and Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe.
- Australia was the worst performing industrial country in terms of climate change in 2014. The report by two NGOs said the poor ranking was due in part to policy changes made by the current coalition government.

N. Srinivasan must keep off BCCI meetings: SC

- The Supreme Court questioned the "rationale" behind N. Srinivasan stepping aside as BCCI president but attending its meetings as Tamil Nadu Cricket Association president.
- "You even attend the meeting of the working committee of the BCCI to delay the BCCI elections.
- We understand your passion for the game, but don't be so passionate," Justice T.S. Thakur told Mr. Srinivasan's counsel Kapil Sibal.

RS agree for 49% FDI in insurance

- Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Select Committee Chandan Mitra tabled the report on the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2008, recommending a hike in FDI in insurance sector from 26 to 49 per cent.
- The report, carrying dissent notes from four of the 15 members, incorporated Congress party's demand for a composite cap on such investments.
- The dissenting parties include the Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Janata Dal (United). These parties are opposed to further opening of the insurance sector to foreign investment.
- The Union Cabinet that met late in the evening approved the incorporation of amendments suggested by a Parliamentary select panel in the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2008.
- Following the Cabinet's approval, the Bill is expected to come up for consideration and passage in the Rajya Sabha next week.

Modi talked with Putin, discussed defence, energy

- Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to further boost cooperation between the two strategic partners in crucial sectors like defence, energy and trade at a time when Russian economy was facing Western sanctions.
- Mr. Putin, who arrived, is likely to push for enhancing supply of military hardware to India as well as expansion of bilateral economic engagement in a range of areas.

- It is the first annual summit meeting between Mr. Putin and Mr. Modi. The two leaders had met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Brazil in July and during the G-20 summit in Australia last month.
- “The bond between the people of Russia & India is very strong. Our nations have stood by each other through thick and thin,” the Prime Minister said in another tweet.
- In his talks with Mr. Modi, both in restricted and delegation level formats, Mr. Putin is likely to seek deeper economic engagement with India with an aim to minimise impact of sanctions against Russia by the US and its Western allies over the Ukraine issue.

States rejected Centre's GST Bill

- The States have rejected the draft Bill for the Goods and Services Tax (GST), dealing a major blow to the Centre's resolve to roll it out at the earliest.
- The Centre-States stalemate has put a question mark over whether the government will be able to introduce the GST Constitution Amendment Bill during the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.
- Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said in the Lok Sabha last month that he would introduce this Bill during the session. The GST rollout has missed several deadlines in the absence of a Centre-States consensus.
- At a meeting of the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers, the States opposed the draft Bill and its proposal to extend the GST to petroleum goods and entry tax.
- “Consensus eludes the Centre and the States on the three main issues of compensation, petrol tax and entry tax,” Empowered Committee Chairman Abdul Rahim Rather told presspersons.
- He said the Empowered Committee would not support the Centre's Bill unless it conceded the States' three demands. The GST will subsume all excise and service taxes.
- The States want compensation from the Centre for the revenues they will lose over five years from the shift to the GST regime. They want a clause on the compensation to be inserted into the Bill, Mr. Rather said.
- The Centre's proposed draft does not have such a provision at present. “We were surprised to know that the Centre has only agreed to one of our recommendations,” said Mr. Rather.

Better to 'Make in India' primarily for India: Raghuram Rajan

- Reserve Bank Governor Raghuram Rajan cautioned the government on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' mantra, suggesting that India would have to look for regional and domestic demand for growth — to make in India primarily for India.
- Dr. Rajan said that at this stage, an exports-push strategy for growth would be ineffective; as the industrial world stagnated, many emerging markets were rethinking their export-led growth model, he said. He was delivering the Bharat Ram Memorial Lecture.

- “There is a danger when we discuss ‘Make in India’ of assuming it means a focus on manufacturing, an attempt to follow the export-led growth path that China followed ... But the world as a whole is unlikely to be able to accommodate another export-led China,” Dr. Rajan said.
- Since the global economy was still weak, he argued, it would be much less likely to be able to absorb a substantial additional amount of imports in the foreseeable future.
- “Export-led growth will not be as easy for India as it was for the Asian economies that took that path before.”
- He also cautioned the Modi government against picking a particular sector such as manufacturing for encouragement, simply because it had worked well for China.

Govt. introduced Bill in LS to amend companies law

- The government introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha to amend the companies law to provide stringent punishment for illegal money pooling activities, among other things.
- The Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2014, introduced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, proposes as many as 14 changes in various provisions of the new companies law, which was passed by the previous UPA regime.
- The Bill proposes punishment for illegal money pooling activities, amid rising instances of people getting duped by such fraudulent schemes.

Lok Sabha passes coal mines bill, 2014

- The government assured the Lok Sabha that Coal India Ltd., would not be denationalised. “We are in fact strengthening it,” said Union Minister of State for Coal Piyush Goyal while steering The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014, through the Lower House with a voice vote.
- Though some Opposition parties made out a case for referring the Bill to the Departmental Standing Committee, their resistance to the draft legislation petered out by the time the discussion was wrapped up.
- The Opposition strategy appeared to be to force the Bill to a Select Committee in the Rajya Sabha, where it has the strength to do so; using the Lok Sabha merely to voice their reservations, particularly on the end use clause which has “left a door open for discretion.”
- With the Opposition questioning the government’s haste in pushing the Bill without scrutiny, Mr. Goyal said such “alacrity” was needed owing to the Supreme Court order cancelling allocation of 204 coal blocks.

Electricity amendment Bill focuses on renewable energy

- The Electricity Amendment Bill 2014, introduced in the Lok Sabha, lays strong emphasis on promoting renewable energy generation in the country while also aiming at increasing accountability and transparency in the functioning of regulatory bodies.
- For the first time, the Bill, introduced by Power Minister Piyush Goyal, proposes to make it mandatory for any company establishing lignite and coal-based thermal power plants, to generate renewable energy.
- While the amount of renewable energy to be generated by such plants will be decided later, the Bill proposes it to be not less than 10 percent of the total installed capacity of a thermal plant.

- The Planning Commission had in March 2011, constituted a working group on power sector reforms. The group had recommended several amendments to the Electricity Act 2003.

Government pushes historic GST tax reform

- The Government took the first step towards switching to a Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime by introducing The Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha amid demands for referring it to a Departmental Standing Committee.
- Though in favour of GST, Trinamool Congress opposed the introduction as some concerns of West Bengal were not addressed and the AIADMK followed suit citing irregularities and lacunae.
- Introducing the Bill, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley pointed out that the issue had been discussed by a Standing Committee in the past and was non-committal on the Opposition demand.
- Assuring MPs that he “would not rush through” the Bill, he indicated that the Government was prepared to wait till the next session to get it passed.
- Later, briefing mediapersons, he said in his “personal view” the Bill does not need to be referred to a Standing Committee as it had already gone through the process. He added that the Government was hoping to roll it out in April 2016.
- Flagging key issues of concern, Mr. Jaitley said: “Service tax is entirely the Centre’s domain now. It is going to be shared with States. Places like Maharashtra, from where one-third of the national service tax comes, will benefit.

State Cabinet approved draft CRDA Bill

- The State Cabinet approved the draft Capital Regional Development Authority (CRDA) Bill with four changes. The Bill will be tabled in the Assembly on December 19.
- Besides giving nod to the changes in CRDA Bill, the meeting chaired by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu also discussed the Debt Redemption Scheme and the strategy to be adopted in the Assembly.
- The Cabinet approved transfer of assets and liabilities of Vijayawada-Guntur-Tenali-Mangalagiri Urban Development Authority to the CRDA. The Chief Minister will be chairman of the 14-member CRDA and the Municipal Administration Minister vice chairman.
- The CRDA will have Rs. 1000 crore as development fund and Rs. 250 crore as working capital. A detailed master plan for the capital region will be ready in six months.
- It is learnt that the Cabinet also approved increase in retirement age of teachers in aided colleges from 58 years to 60 years and from 60 years to 62 years in the universities.
- Another important decision taken by the Cabinet is to allow intra-State sale of paddy and also allow export to other States if farmers themselves pay Central Sales Tax.
- The Cabinet which discussed various issues during the four-hour meeting approved proposals to fill 4,000 field assistant posts under MNREGA and 6,000 posts in Panchayat Raj departments.

India successfully test fires GSLV Mark-III

- India moved forward in rocket technology with the successful flight testing of its heaviest next generation rocket and the crew module.
- Precisely at 9.30 a.m., the 630-tonne Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle-Mark III (GSLV Mark-III), standing 43.43-metre tall, freed itself from the second launch pad and with a reverberating deep throated roar, rose into the sky.
- With a thick orange flame at its tail, the expendable rocket ascended towards the heavens with one way ticket as its design life span is just around five minutes.
- The Rs.155-crore mission has twin purposes. The main purpose is to test the rocket's atmospheric flight stability with around four tonne luggage.
- The second and incidental objective is to study the re-entry characteristics of the crew module — called Crew Module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment — its aero braking and validation of its end-to-end parachute system.
- According to an Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) official, it will be of the size of a small bedroom and can accommodate two to three people.
- Just over five minutes into the flight, the rocket spat out the giant cup cake shaped 3.7-tonne crew module at an altitude of 126 km.

India is third on black money list says report

- As India continues its pursuit of suspected black money stashed abroad, an international think-tank has ranked the country third globally with an estimated USD 94.76 billion (nearly Rs 6 lakh crore) illicit wealth outflows in 2012.
- Russia is on the top with USD 122.86 billion, followed by China at the second position (USD 249.57 billion) in terms of the quantum of black money moving out of a country for 2012 — the latest year for which these estimates have been made.

Telangana decided to declare Dec.26 as public holiday

- Government of Telangana has issued an order declaring December 26 as a public holiday. Hitherto, it was an optional holiday only.
- Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao referred to Boxing Day (December 26) being declared as a public holiday when he addressed the gathering after laying the foundation stone for the 'Christian Bhavan'.

Govt. employees under Lokpal Act have to disclose deposits in foreign banks

- Amending the rules for voluntary disclosure of assets and liabilities by government employees under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has effected some changes in the form, making it mandatory for them to disclose deposits in foreign banks.
- The deadline has been extended by four months from December 31. "Details of deposits in the foreign bank (s) to be given separately," states the DoPT order, adding that government employees have to file statements of movable property separately for self, spouse and dependent child.
- While investments above Rs.2 lakh have to be reported individually, amounts below that can be reported together. Apart from cash and bank balance, government servants would now be required to also reveal details of other movable assets including furniture, fixtures, antiques, paintings and electronic equipment.

- However, this only if the total current value of any particular asset in any particular category exceeds two months' basic pay or Rs. 1 lakh.
- Another order amending the previous Lokpal and Lokayuktas (Removal of Difficulties) Order, 2014, gives six months more to the government to make further amendments to the rules formulated thereunder.
- While the government intends to make all the declarations public, many government officials have expressed concern that the information on their assets could be misused. The latest order does not have any provision ensuring secrecy of the disclosures made.

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International News

Philippines braces for powerful typhoon 'Hagupit'

- A wide swath of the Philippines, including the capital Manila, braced for a dangerously erratic and powerful typhoon approaching from the Pacific, about a year after the country was lashed by Typhoon Haiyan that left more than 7,300 people dead.
- Typhoon Hagupit Filipino for "smash" strengthened overnight with its sustained winds intensifying to 215 kilometres (134 miles) per hour and gusts of 250 kph (155 mph). The local weather agency PAGASA's forecasts show the typhoon may hit Eastern Samar province.
- But a forecast by the U.S. military's Joint Typhoon Warning Centre in Hawaii said Hagupit (pronounced HA'-goo-pit) may veer northward after making landfall and possibly threaten Manila, which has population of more than 12 million people.
- "We have alerted the people of Manila and we're ready," Mayor Joseph Estrada said, while acknowledging "these typhoons change direction all the time".
- It is currently 450 kilometres (280 miles) from the country's eastern coast in the Pacific Ocean and moving slowly.
- If the first forecast holds, Hagupit's path will send it barrelling inland into central Philippines along the same route where Typhoon Haiyan levelled villages and left more than 7,300 dead and missing in November last year.
- Still, Hagupit's erratic behaviour prompted the government to call an emergency meeting of mayors of metropolitan Manila to warn them to prepare. Manila is north of the path that Haiyan took.

Japan's economy likely shrank less than expected in Q3

- Japan's economy likely shrank less than initially estimated in the third quarter thanks to an increase in capital expenditure, underscoring views that the country only slipped into a shallow recession.
- The world third-largest economy probably shrank an annualised 0.5 percent in July-September, compared with a preliminary reading of a 1.6 percent contraction, according to a Reuters survey of 24 economists.
- Capital expenditure is seen to have risen 0.8 percent for the quarter from a preliminary 0.2 percent fall, the poll showed.
- The data could offer relief for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who called a snap election for December 14 after just two years in office to seek voters' mandate on his "Abenomics" strategy to reflate the economy and his decision to postpone a second sales tax hike originally scheduled for next year.
- But the expected upward revision will unlikely be strong enough to alter analysts' view that the economy remains fragile after a sales tax increase in April dampened consumer spending.
- "Although the economy continues rebounding from falls after the sales tax hike, there is no change to our view that the pace of recovery will be only moderate," said an economist at Japan Research Institute in the survey.

- Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute, said "the economy will likely return to growth in October-December, but there is still a high chance the economy will shrink for this fiscal year.
- "The Cabinet Office will release the revised GDP data, and the finance ministry will announce the current account balance for October at the same time. The current account balance probably shows a surplus of 366.3 billion yen (\$3.06 billion) in October, helped by gains in income balance which includes earnings from overseas subsidies. It would follow a 963 billion yen surplus in September.
- The nation's leading indicator of capital spending, which will be released, is expected to fall in October for the first time in five months, but analysts said the fall will be temporary as firms' strong earnings will help their expenditure.

Pak PM inaugurates China-Pakistan 'Economic Corridor' project

- China and Pakistan have kicked off their multi-billion dollar 'Economic Corridor' project that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) by laying the foundation of a fenced four-lane motorway, setting in motion a mammoth project connecting the two countries.
- Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif performed the groundbreaking of a section of the motorway in the country's northwest, signalling the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement.
- The 60-km-long, 4-lane fenced Hazara Motorway in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province will cost \$297 million and will take two years to complete.
- During his China visit earlier this month, Mr. Sharif signed deals worth \$45.6 billion that included projects connected with the Corridor, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.
- India has expressed its reservations to China over the project as it is laid through the PoK.
- But, China defended the project saying it will help regional development. Sceptics in both the countries, however, point to the rising tide of extremism in Pakistan which makes its construction extremely difficult.
- The tenuous political and security situation in Pakistan prompted Chinese President Xi Jinping to cancel his trip to Islamabad in September during which he visited the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India.

US passes bill to use of military force against ISIS

- A key US Congressional committee has passed a bill authorising use of military force against the dreaded Islamist State militant group that has seized swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria.
- The Authorisation for Use of Military Force (AUMF) bill allows the President to use military force against ISIS for up to three years.
- "But (it) limits the activities of US Armed Forces from participating in ground combat operations except in defined circumstances," said Senator Robert Menendez, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- AUMF passed by a vote of 10 to 8. This AUMF would also require a report on the comprehensive strategy for this campaign after 60 days and sunset the 2001 al-Qaeda

AUMF after a period of three years enactment, unless it is reauthorized, he said.

- Earlier, Secretary of State John Kerry appeared before the Committee urging Senators to approve force authorization.

After Bullet train's success, China wants to develop world class nuclear technology

- After successfully competing for high-speed rail links abroad, China now wants to develop world class nuclear technology — a move that would not only lighten its carbon footprint, but also help it emerge as a major exporter of atomic power.
- Last week, China decided to set up an undisclosed number of shore-based nuclear power plants, lifting the bar on new ventures that was imposed in the aftermath of the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan.
- The London-based World Nuclear News website reported that days after the Fukushima accident, China's State Council decided to halt approvals and licensing for new reactors until a safety plan was in place.
- It also sought assurances that existing plants were adequately designed, sited, protected and managed. Li Pumin, the spokesman of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), China's top economic planner, announced that all projects will comply with the highest international security standards.
- Currently, China runs 21 nuclear power reactors, generating 19,095 MW of power. An additional 27 units are under construction, which would yield around 30,000 MW of electricity, when completed.
- Yet, it is estimated that China would need to set up another 13 reactors, if it is to meet its 2020 target of generating 58 GW of atomic power.
- The post-Fukushima drive for nuclear energy has been significantly spurred by the clean-energy target set by President Xi Jinping, who had announced that China is focusing on peaking its emissions by 2030, before its carbon footprint begins to slide.
- Nuclear power generation has come into sharper focus because of some of the problems that China has recently encountered with renewables. Last year, China, the world's largest producer of wind energy and solar power, was unable to utilise 11 per cent of wind power capacity because of grid problems.

China setting the stage for Silk Road extension

- China is setting the stage for linking Southeast Asia with its New Silk Road initiative, through a railway corridor that would connect the country's Yunnan province with Thailand and Laos.
- China's visiting Prime Minister Li Keqiang is expected to sign an agreement with Thailand on setting up two strategic dual-track lines covering 734 km and 133 km. Once completed, these lines will connect Bangkok with Thailand's Nong Khai and Rayong provinces.
- Mr. Li is in Thailand to participate in the meeting of leaders of Mekong River region countries — Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

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India And The World

India signs up for a multi-crore project

- Union Minister for Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan signed a multilateral agreement admitting India's participation in the development of the Thirty Metre Telescope (TMT) in Hawaii.
- This project was rapidly cleared by the Union Cabinet and India has agreed to spend Rs. 1299.8 crores over the next decade for this project.
- Besides learning about the universe, India will gain the technology to manufacture fine aspherical mirror segments from the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). This technology, say experts, will form the basis of the next generation of spy satellites.
- TMT will contain 492 hexagonal mirror segments of 82 different kinds. These will behave like a single mirror with an aperture of 30 metre diameter.
- This large collecting area of 650 square metres is thrice as sensitive as the Hubble Space Telescope. India's role will primarily be to create the control systems and software that keep the mirrors aligned and collects the data.
- The control system is an intricate process involving edge sensors—that detect the mutual displacement of mirrors, actuators to correct their alignment, and the segment support assembly.

India and France agreed to fast-track Rafale deal

- Indian and France to overcome differences and fast-track ongoing negotiations for the purchase of 126 Rafale fighter jets from France, a Defence Ministry spokesperson said.
- The decision came during discussions between visiting French Defence Minister Yves Le Drian and his Indian counterpart, Manohar Parrikar. Both sides also decided to expand strategic cooperation, the official added.
- Negotiations have been going on since 2012 when India selected Dassault Rafale from among competing medium multi-role combat aircraft. Differences cropped up between the two sides on delivery guarantees and price.
- The tender stipulates that the first 18 jets should come in "fly-away" condition from France, while the remaining 108 will be manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) in India over seven years with Transfer of Technology (ToT).
- Dassault has refused to give delivery guarantees for HAL-made aircraft, which the Air Force is insisting on. With the ToT, the cost too escalated from the initial estimate of \$10 billion to almost \$30 billion.

India "very important player" in climate talks says the US

- Terming India as a "very important player" in the climate change negotiations, the US has said it is not involved in any agreement on climate with India ahead of President Barack Obama's Republic Day visit to New Delhi.
- "India's obviously a very important player. We don't have anything in the works of the kind that we were involved with China," U.S. State Department Special Envoy

on Climate Change Todd Stern said referring to the recent US-China climate agreement.

- Expressing hope for a “productive” meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Stern said the U.S. had done a lot of bilateral work on energy with India.
- Mr. Stern noted that the US-China agreement did not come to fruition overnight. It took several months of bilateral talks to produce it and that there is no such process going on at the moment with India, he said.
- He also said that U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will be arriving in Lima as part of a larger regional trip and will spend a few hours at the COP.
- He is not expected to play any role in the negotiations and that Kerry’s visit was slated earlier and not in response to the slow progress of talks, he said.
- The draft elements text is “mostly done” and will certainly pass on to the next Co-Chairs of the committee, he said.
- Mr. Stern said the U.S. position on Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) was to “not make it complicated” and just ask countries for a limited set of information like types of gasses covered, sectors of the economy and any assumptions made

India advocates ‘balanced approach’ to cut global carbon emissions

- India strongly advocated a “balanced approach” in the draft text of a new binding pact to cut global carbon emissions to make sure that polluting countries pay and not the poorest nations, as crucial U.N. climate talks remained deadlocked.
- The negotiators from more than 190 countries, who have been in the Peruvian capital for about two weeks, have struggled to prepare the elements of the draft due to the logjam between developing countries and industrialised nations that haggle over the formula of sharing the burden for cutting emissions, and who should pay.
- Several developing nations rejected a draft decision they said did not make the distinction between what rich and poor countries were expected to do.
- The informal plenary regarding the Ad hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform (ADP) again met here after breaking at 4 a.m. Parties reviewed the draft text and reconvened to state their positions on it.
- Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar delivered India’s statement, saying a “balanced approach” in the draft text was required to make sure polluting countries pay and not the poorest countries.
- He began his statement by saying that what the like-minded developing countries, least developed countries and the Africa group is saying “must be appreciated” because they are all “speaking their heart”.
- India stuck to the consistent position that all the elements of adaptation, mitigation, finance, technology, and capacity building should be included in the intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs).

Business and Economy

Mallya resigns from Mangalore Chemicals Board (MCFL)

- In a surprise move the UB Group Chairman Vijay Mallya has resigned from the Board of Directors of Mangalore Chemicals and Fertilizers Ltd (MCFL) with immediate effect.
- What prompted this move is still not known. The company has intimated this development to the stock exchanges. Soon after the announcement MCFL stock prices rose sharply on the stock markets.
- The prices moved from Rs. 80 range to around Rs. 92. The volume was as high as nine lakh shares in early morning trade.
- MCFL is amidst a takeover battle between Deepak Petrochemicals and Fertilizers and Zuari Agro Chemicals and Fertilizers. Mr. Mallya had sided with Zuari to ward off the takeover bid of Deepak Fertilizers.
- Recently, Deepak's bid to acquire 26 per cent addition stake had failed and Dr Mallya had retained control over the company.
- Currently Deepak holds 32 per cent stake in the company, Zuari 16 per cent, UB Group 22 per cent and the rest by public shareholders.

Reliance Industries signs agreement with Mexican company for oil and gas

- Reliance Industries has signed an agreement with Mexican state-owned company, Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) for cooperation in upstream oil and gas production as well as in refining business.
- As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) "RIL will cooperate with PEMEX for assessment of potential upstream oil and gas business opportunities in Mexico and jointly evaluate value added opportunities in international markets," a company statement said.
- RIL and PEMEX will also share expertise and skills in the relevant areas of oil and gas industry, including for deep—water oil and gas exploration and production.
- "The MoU envisages sharing of RIL's pioneering expertise in deep-water development and best practices in East Coast of India and RIL's experience in shale gas in United States," it said.
- RIL will also provide technical support and share experience with PEMEX for refining value maximisation and other technical optimisation strategies.
- "RIL's cooperation with PEMEX is in line with its growth strategy to explore opportunities to expand its international asset base in regimes having internationally attractive competitive terms.
- "The company hopes to leverage its organisational capabilities and expertise to create long-term value for Exploration and Production Business and for RIL on the whole," it added.

Govt. relaxed FDI policy for investors in construction sector

- To help attract foreign funds in construction of townships, hospitals and hotels, the government relaxed the FDI policy for this sector by easing exit norms and reducing built-up area and capital needs.
- The revised norms relating to construction development sector has been notified by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP). India allows 100 per cent FDI in the sector through the automatic route.
- The new policy has done away with the three-year lock-in period for repatriation of investment.
- "The investor will be permitted to exit on completion of the project or after development of trunk infrastructure, that is, roads, water supply, street lighting, drainage and sewerage,"

Shome panel: Tax cash withdrawal beyond limit in a day

- A high-level official panel proposed levying of banking transaction tax on withdrawal of cash beyond a specified limit in a day to check black money, and was not in favour of the tax amnesty scheme.
- A report by the Parthasarathi Shome Committee, appointed by the previous UPA government, suggested taxing farmers with large land holdings in addition to a host of measures to widen the net.
- "Taxpayers keep waiting for amnesty schemes to be announced and take advantage of these schemes to build their capital.

More steps to rationalise subsidies: Jaitley

- Assuring India Inc. of the National Democratic Alliance's commitment to economic reforms, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that the government would announce more steps to rationalise subsidies.
- "I had a series of meetings with the Expenditure Management Commission. In the next few months ... maybe earlier than that, they will come out with some interim recommendations so that we can proceed with rationalisation," Mr. Jaitley said.
- Recalling the government's decision to link the diesel price with the market price, the Minister told the India Economic Conclave, organised by the television channel ET Now, it would help reduce the subsidy burden.

Kisan Vikas Patra, re-launch with very few justifications

- Despite some criticism and misgivings in certain quarters, the government has decided to re-introduce the Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP), a savings instrument that was discontinued three years ago.
- Positioned as a savings instrument in line with other continuing 'small savings schemes' such as the Public Provident Fund (PPF) and the National Savings Certificates (NSCs), the new KVP, like its predecessor, has certain advantages as well as disadvantages over these. Most ordinary investors will compare the new KVP with bank deposits and other debt instruments.
- Broad features of the new KVP
 - * Interest: 8.7 per cent.
 - * Tenure: eight years and four months (100 months).

- * Investment doubles in 100 months.
- * Minimum lock-in period two years and six months.
- Liquidity
 - * Can be encashed in eight equal monthly instalments after the lock-in period
 - * Can be transferred to another person by endorsement and delivery
 - * Can also be given as collateral for loans by banks
 - * Minimum investment Rs.1,000. Thereafter, in denominations of Rs.5,000, Rs.10,000 and Rs.50,000. There is no maximum limit.
 - * Taxability: fully taxable
 - * Mode of investment: cash or cheque
 - * Know your customer (KYC) norms: PAN not required but identity/address proof required
 - * Will be sold initially through post offices across the country, but later through some government-owned banks also.
- Taking three other relevant traits — liquidity, convenience and tax advantage — the new KVP is reasonably liquid. Investors can come out after the minimum lock-in period in eight equal instalments. The KVP can also be given as collateral. Unlike PPF and NSCs, the KVP does not have a tax advantage. Interest on it is fully taxable.
- Bank deposits are superior to KVP in terms of returns — three year fixed deposits offer 9 per cent and some banks even more. The argument that deposit rates are set to fall over the medium-term is no doubt valid, but one expects the banks to safeguard their depositors' concerns by floating innovative schemes.
- It is also certain that the corporate bond market will revive and be a conduit for infrastructure finance. This will matter to senior citizens and others who want a fixed, steady return in the form of investment in infrastructure bonds.
- Bank deposits are liquid, absolutely secure and highly accessible to most middle-class investors. They have a minimum tax advantage — practically restricted to interest on savings accounts.

Dubai will invest \$32-billion to build world's largest airport

- To further secure its position as the world's aviation hub, Dubai Airports is building a whopping USD 32—billion greenfield airport at the upcoming Dubai World Central, 30 km off the present international airport which already is the second busiest in the world.
- The proposed new airport will become the world's largest aviation facility on completion and will have five runways which all will be simultaneously operational, all A380-compatible with a length of 4.5 km each.
- "We are planning a USD 32—billion brand new airport at the Dubai World Central at Al Maktoum, 30 km off the present Dubai facility.

Inflation declined to 4.38% in November

- Declining for the fifth consecutive month, retail inflation dropped to 4.38 per cent in November, the lowest since the new series of data was introduced in January, 2012,

on the back of high-base effect of last year and softening of prices of food items.

- The Consumer Price Index-based inflation or retail inflation stood at 5.52 per cent in October, while it was 11.16 per cent in November, 2013.

Incentivise domestic savings to boost economy: RBI Chief

- Reserve Bank Governor Raghuram Rajan cautioned the government on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' mantra, suggesting that India would have to look for regional and domestic demand for growth — to make in India primarily for India.
- Dr. Rajan said that at this stage, an exports-push strategy for growth would be ineffective; as the industrial world stagnated, many emerging markets were rethinking their export-led growth model, he said.
- "There is a danger when we discuss 'Make in India' of assuming it means a focus on manufacturing, an attempt to follow the export-led growth path that China followed ... But the world as a whole is unlikely to be able to accommodate another export-led China," Dr. Rajan said.
- Since the global economy was still weak, he argued, it would be much less likely to be able to absorb a substantial additional amount of imports in the foreseeable future.
- "Export-led growth will not be as easy for India as it was for the Asian economies that took that path before."
- He also cautioned the Modi government against picking a particular sector such as manufacturing for encouragement, simply because it had worked well for China.

CII demanded clarity and stability in tax policy

- In pre-budget consultations with Revenue Secretary Shaktikanta Das and other officers of the Finance Ministry, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) emphasised the need for the government to implement steps for reviving the economy.
- It also demanded a bunch of tax concessions. The CII demanded simplicity, clarity and stability in the tax policy regime and technology based e-governance initiatives on procedural simplification at the meeting, according to a press release.
- To boost the investor sentiment, the CII demanded that the government take the 'Make in India' initiative to a new level and galvanise the economy to a higher and inclusive growth path.
- The CII team was led by past President Arun Bharat Ram. He stated that the CII was deliberating in a constructive manner on the possible solutions for fundamental design issues on Goods and Services Tax (GST) and asked for opportunities for regular interaction with the officials dealing with the reform.

India sees 'clear pick-up' in growth momentum says OECD

- Reflecting improved prospects, India is the only major economy seeing a 'clear pick up in growth momentum' while mixed trends are predicted for developed countries, according to Paris-based think tank Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

- The OECD said growth would continue to lose momentum in Europe. For other major economies, the outlook is for stable growth momentum.
- The readings, for the month of October, are based on composite leading indicator (CLI), which is designed to anticipate turning points in economic activity relative to trend.
- "India is the only major economy where the CLI points to a clear pick-up in growth momentum," OECD said in a statement.
- The country's CLI rose to 99.6 in October from 99.4 in the previous month. Last month, the OECD said the Indian economy was expected to see an average growth of 6.7 per cent over the 2015-19 period, while a further boost would depend on reform plans of the government.
- In October, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank projected 5.6 per cent growth rate for India this year, citing renewed confidence in the market due to a series of economic reforms pursued by the new government.

SEBI barred 260 entities for suspected money laundering

- In its biggest ever crackdown for suspected tax evasion and laundering of black money through stock trading platforms, the Securities and Exchange Board of India barred 260 entities, including individuals and companies, from the securities markets.
- While SEBI would further probe these cases, it has also decided to refer the matter to the I-T Department, the Enforcement Directorate, the Financial Intelligence Unit, among other agencies, for necessary actions on their part.
- Through two separate interim orders, SEBI said that these 260 entities would be restrained from accessing the securities market and from buying, selling or dealing in securities, either directly or indirectly, with immediate effect till further directions.
- It has also asked stock exchanges and the depositories to ensure that all its directions are strictly enforced. While 152 entities have been barred in one case relating to an entity, named First Financial Services Ltd, another 108 entities have faced the action in a case related to Radford Global Limited.
- The action comes at a time when the government has sharpened its focus on unearthing black money stashed abroad and within the country, while SEBI also recently tightened its surveillance of shell companies .
- In the first case, the suspected dealings took place on the stock market for almost two years till March 31, 2014, while the second case relates to a period of little more than a year starting January, 2013.

Existing account enough to avail 'Jan Dhan' benefits: govt.

- Government said persons already having bank account need not to open a fresh one to avail benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).
- "A person who is already having a bank account with any bank need not have to open a separate account under PMJDY. He/she will just have to get issued a RuPay card in his existing account to get benefit of accidental insurance," a Finance Ministry statement said.

- The overdraft facility can be extended in existing account, it said. Accidental insurance of Rs 1 lakh will be available to all RuPay card holders between 18-70 years. They will need to use their RuPay card once in 45 days of receipt of the card to get the benefit.
- The accidental claim intimation should be given to bank within 30 days from the date of accident, it added. For life insurance coverage, one person per family will get a single cover of Rs 30,000 on one card only despite having multiple accounts/cards.
- "The claim of Rs 30,000 is payable to the nominee of account holder who need to submit necessary documents to the nodal branch of the concerned bank," the Ministry said.



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Science and Technology

World's oldest computer is even older than scientists thought

- Antikythera Mechanism, the world's oldest computer, is even 100 years older than scientists previously thought, say Argentinian researchers.
- Discovered from a Roman cargo shipwreck off the Greek island of Antikythera, the bronze device was used to track the movements of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.
- The device provides a wealth of astronomical information and offers practically the only possibility for a close astronomical dating of the mechanism, the New York Times reported.
- The device was discovered in a wooden box and consists of bronze dials, gears and cogs.
- The complex device, made up of up to 40 bronze cogs and gears, was used in ancient times to track the cycles of the solar system. On the back were two further dials displaying information about lunar cycles and eclipses.

Ability of HIV to cause AIDS slowing found study

- A research study has found that HIV – and as a consequence AIDS — is slowly becoming less aggressive in parts of Africa.
- These are the significant findings of a study conducted by Professor Philip Goulder and his team at the Nuffield Department of Medicine at Oxford University that have been published in the journal Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences.
- Based on a study of about 2,000 pregnant women in Botswana and South Africa, the team has demonstrated that the weakening of the immunodeficiency virus is due to its rapid evolution and ability to mutate over time.
- In Botswana the epidemic took off in the 1980s, a decade before it hit South Africa. "Overall we are bringing down the ability of HIV to cause AIDS so quickly," Prof. Goulder told Reuters.
- Scientists were aware that a gene known as HLA-B*57 in a person acted as a protection against the HIV virus. The new study finds that the virus has adapted to the gene, which therefore no longer offers protection.

Shela River route closed after Sundarbans oil spill

- The Bangladesh government has closed Shela River route to all vessels after the sinking of an oil tanker that led to a massive oil spill in the Sundarbans mangrove forest.
- Carrying 357,664 l of furnace oil, the tanker 'OT Southern Star 7' went down after being hit by another vessel on the Shela at Mrigmari in the Sundarbans Chandpai range three days ago.
- The massive oil spill from the sunken tanker has put the biodiversity and ecology of the world's biggest mangrove forest, a world heritage site since 1997, at risk.
- Forest officials suspect that all of the furnace oil in the sunken tanker has already

spread into the rivers and canals of the Sundarbans.

Stem cells in eye can restore vision: scientists

- In what promises to be an alternative to corneal transplantation in treating blindness caused from damage to cornea, scientists from city-based L.V. Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI) in collaboration with U.S. scientists claimed to have discovered potent stem cells in the eye that possess the ability to restore lost sight.
- The findings were published in Science Translational Medicine. Dr. Sayan Basu, LVPEI consultant corneal surgeon, said he along with other scientists at the laboratory of Prof. James L. Funderburgh, Professor of Ophthalmology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, tested stem cells obtained from human eyes on an experimental model of corneal scarring.

Mountains of plastic waste floating in world's oceans

- Believe it or not, nearly 269,000 tonnes of plastic comprising an estimated 5.25 trillion plastic particles are floating in the world's oceans, including the Bay of Bengal.
- This estimate does not take into account the amount of plastic waste found in the shorelines, on the seabed, suspended in the water column and that consumed by marine organisms.
- The plastic particles are found in three size ranges — microplastic (less than 4.75 mm), mesoplastic (4.75-200 mm) and macroplastic (above 200 mm). The microplastic particles alone are in two size classes — 0.33-1.00 mm and 1.01-4.75 mm.
- Of the 269,000 tonnes of floating plastic waste, the larger plastic items are predominant (an estimated 233,000 tonnes).
- The results of a study by Marcus Eriksen (the first author) from the Five Gyres Institute, California, are published (December 11) in the journal PLOS ONE.
- The results are based on 24 expeditions undertaken between 2007 and 2013 across all the five sub-tropical gyres — North and South Pacific Oceans, North and South Atlantic Oceans and the Indian Ocean — coastal Australia, Bay of Bengal and the Mediterranean Sea.

Nine new frog species add to Western Ghats inventory

- The inventory of amphibian diversity in the Western Ghats has just got longer with the discovery of nine new species of bush frogs in this mountain range.
- Some as tiny as a thumbnail, other brightly coloured or plain slimy, each of these creatures adds important insights into the evolutionary biodiversity of the Western Ghats, says Kartik Shanker of the Indian Institute of Science and co-author of a paper published in international journal Zootaxa.
- Researchers trekked through the Western Ghats during the rainy season (when bush frogs are most active) training their ear to tell tale bush frog calls and scouring tree trunks for them.
- Bush frogs are miniature frogs distributed throughout south and southeast Asia.
- They then used genetics, geography, morphology and acoustics to separate the frogs into "lineages" (descendants of a common ancestor that lived a million or more years ago).

- There could be at least 15 new species of bush frogs waiting to be discovered adding to the over 50 species known from the Western Ghats, said Dr. Shanker.

New evidence of water on Mars, NASA report

- Led by a team of scientists of Indian-origin, NASA's Curiosity rover has found new evidence of water on Mars, indicating that the planet most like Earth in the solar system was suitable for microbial life.
- Pictures and other data collected by NASA's Mars rover Curiosity show that rivers once flowed into a lake or lakes at the bottom of Gale Crater, an enormous dimple carved out by an incoming space rock.
- NASA said its interpretation of Curiosity's finds in Gale Crater suggests ancient Mars maintained a climate that could have produced long-lasting lakes at many locations on the Red Planet.
- The American space agency said Mars's Mount Sharp was built by sediments deposited in a large lake bed over tens of millions of years.
- "If our hypothesis for Mount Sharp holds up, it challenges the notion that warm and wet conditions were transient, local, or only underground on Mars," said Indian-American Ashwin Vasavada, who is the Curiosity deputy project scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.
- The thickness of the rock outcrops indicates that the lake — or lakes — must have sloshed around the bottom of 154-km Gale Crater over the course of millions of years, though the lake probably dried up and then reappeared a number of times, the researchers said.

African Snail will make a comeback says experts

- The Giant African Snail, an invasive species that has established itself in large parts of the State, could re-emerge from its dormant state and pose a greater menace before the next wet spell, a consultative workshop held warned.
- The molluscs that have gone into aestivation (period of hibernation to escape summer heat and dryness) could come out in a big way during the summer showers and go on to expand their area of distribution, according to T.V. Sajeew, Entomologist and Head, Forest Health division, Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Peechi.
- Experts participating in the workshop cautioned against the use of chemicals to control the snail that has ravaged crops and posed a threat to native ecosystems in parts of the State.
- The workshop was organised by the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE) and the Centre for Innovation in Science and Social Action.
- Highlighting the potential ecological damage caused by chemicals, speakers called for organic methods to check the biological invasion.
- In his presentation, Mr. Sajeew suggested nicotine-based pesticides to keep a check on snail populations. He said studies had proved the efficacy of tobacco decoction to quell the marauding pest.
- The KFRI, he said, had initiated efforts to develop a plant extract with molluscicidal activity. "It is important to ensure that the control agent used against a pest does not become a problem in itself," he said.

Discarded laptop batteries have enough life to power slums

- Discarded laptop batteries still have enough life in them to power slums in India and other developing countries, a new study by IBM India has found.
- The research presented at a conference in San Jose, U.S., analysed a sample of discarded batteries and found 70 per cent had enough power to keep an LED light on for more than four hours a day for a year.
- According to researchers at IBM India, many of the estimated 50 million lithium—ion laptop batteries discarded every year could provide electricity storage sufficient to light homes in developing countries.

Bio-digester technology of DRDO can give thrust to Swachh Bharat campaign

- A simple, low-cost technology for treating human waste – developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) – can aid in putting an end to open defecation and manual scavenging in the country.
- The bio-digester technology of DRDO has the potential to give a thrust to the ambitious Clean India campaign, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- A recent report “Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation, update 2014”, by WHO and UNICEF, estimates that about 597 million people in India resort to open defecation, the highest in the world.

Epidemic outbreaks test health apparatus

- Whenever there is an epidemics outbreak, the health apparatus is put to the test. Most of the burden in tackling epidemics falls on the State since a majority of the population flock to the Government Hospitals and Primary Health Centres as not many can afford the huge costs of hospitalisation in private sector.
- While the recent outbreak of Avian Influenza or the bird flu in the neighbouring State poses little risk to men, since it does not easily infect human beings, the State Health Department has put all PHCs on Kerala border on alert. As it is a virus-borne disease, it can spread quickly and infect a lot of people in a short time.
- Coimbatore is no stranger to epidemic outbreaks. Right from Swine Flu to dengue and diarrhoea, the city has seen it all since it's a major transmit point and also has an international airport.
- S. Somasundaram, Deputy Director of Health Services, says while prevention measures are given importance, the department has also protocols in place to contain outbreaks.
- The foremost priority was identifying the source of the outbreak such as mosquito breeding points for dengue. These will be destroyed and awareness programme will be taken up among the public. The health department has put in place protocols for all diseases, he adds.
- Coimbatore Medical College Hospital has created an isolation ward to treat epidemic outbreaks patients. Further, another infectious disease ward has been created to quarantine patients with deadly disease such as Ebola, says the hospital Dean S. Revwathy.

- The bio-technology and microbiology laboratories of the CMCH were equipped to detect most of the viral-borne disease. However, complicated cases such as ebola are sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, for confirmation, she adds.

'Mental health programme' to focus on the elderly

- Over the last few years, a lot of the patients senior geriatrician V.S. Natarajan has seen were in need of mental health services.
- "Financial, health and social problems – these are the issues the elderly have. With many elderly citizens living alone in both villages and cities as their children migrate elsewhere for work, cases of depression and dementia are on the rise," he said.
- To take care of the mental health needs of the elderly, an expansion of the district mental health programme (DMHP) in Tamil Nadu has been planned, under which, psychiatrists in every district will be trained to take care of geriatric needs. Once a week, a special clinic for senior citizens will be held.
- "We already have psychiatrists in 25 districts; in four others, psychiatrists are being posted and in the three others, the process has begun. Since we have the infrastructure and the resources and have a geriatric care policy in the State, we decided to link them and meet this essential need," a senior health official said.
- This apart, caregivers will also be trained, said the official. "This is important as caregivers too need to be trained in the needs of the elderly.
- This area is generally not looked into as most caregivers are family members, but we are planning to focus on this," he said.
- "There has been an increase in longevity thanks to better healthcare, but the aim of the DMHP's geriatric care services is to improve the quality of life of senior citizens," said State nodal officer, C. Ramasubramanian.

NASA's Kepler spacecraft discovers 'super-Earth'

- NASA's planet-hunting Kepler spacecraft, which is carrying out a new mission, has made its first exoplanet discovery — a 'super-Earth' located 180 light-years from Earth.
- Lead researcher Andrew Vanderburg, a graduate student at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts, studied publicly available data collected by the spacecraft during a test of the new K2 mission in February 2014.
- This led to the discovery of a planet, HIP 116454b, which is 2.5 times the diameter of Earth and follows a close, nine-day orbit around a star that is smaller and cooler than our Sun, making the planet too hot for life as we know it. HIP 116454b and its star are 180 light-years from Earth, toward the constellation Pisces.
- The discovery was confirmed with measurements taken by the HARPS-North spectrograph of the Telescopio Nazionale Galileo in the Canary Islands, which captured the wobble of the star caused by the planet's gravitational tug as it orbits.
- HARPS-N showed that the planet weighs almost 12 times as much as Earth. This makes HIP 116454b a super-Earth, a class of planets that does not exist in our solar system. The exoplanet discovery was made after astronomers and engineers repurposed Kepler for its new mission.
- "Last summer, the possibility of a scientifically productive mission for Kepler after

its reaction wheel failure in its extended mission was not part of the conversation," said Paul Hertz, NASA's astrophysics division director at the agency's headquarters in Washington.

Microsoft pitches for 'White-Fi' technology to provide last mile broadband connectivity

- Microsoft is looking at starting a pilot project of its 'White-Fi' technology that uses the unused spectrum in frequencies used for broadcasting of television signals, and is likely to offer solution to tackle the problem of last mile broadband connectivity in the country.
- "In a country of massive change, digital divide can pose serious challenge. In all the initiatives by the government — Digital India, Swachh Bharat or Jan-Dhan Yojna — technology has a role to play, and we want to be part of it," Microsoft India Chairman Bhaskar Pramanik said, adding that at present, the company was talking to all stakeholders, including the government, for its 'White-Fi' technology to provide last mile connectivity.
- "We are waiting for licence to start our pilot of the technology. Where ever spectrum is involved government permission is needed... We will start with IIIT, Bangalore. We may start with the campus, but want to take it to rural areas to see how it works with all natural barriers," he added.
- The pilot, once started, is expected to last for about three months. Other countries where Microsoft has helped implement the technology are Kenya, Singapore, the U.S. and London.
- The 200-600 MHz frequency is used for TV channels to carry data. In India, 93 per cent of this spectrum is not utilised. 'White-Fi' will use this vacant spectrum to provide connectivity.
- In technology parlance, these unused spectrum spaces are called White Space, and many technology companies are looking at using this to provide free last mile internet access to users.
- Under the 'Digital India' initiative, the government plans to use the national optic fibre network project to deliver e-services to all corner of the country.

INS Arihant (S2) may be of a limited utility submarine

- India's first indigenous nuclear submarine, INS Arihant (S2), which made its first foray into the sea for mandatory trials ahead of induction into the Navy, may in effect be a limited utility submarine, if not just a technology demonstrator.
- The ballistic missile nuclear submarine (SSBN), said to add the third dimension of the nuclear triad by giving India the vital survivable second-strike capability, falls short of ensuring credible minimum deterrence, sources said.
- Worse, the capacity of the reactor suggests that Arihant will hardly be available for operational patrol even for one-fifth of its lifespan, having to spend great amounts of time on transit to patrol areas.
- "The effective fuel inventory of the submarine reactor is insufficient for longer duration deployment of the vessel far away from Indian shores, as it will necessitate frequent fuel changes that are time-consuming," said a Navy veteran, who was previously associated with the project.

- Fuel change in a submarine reactor, he said is a protracted and cumbersome process requiring the hull of the submarine to be cut open.
- The nuclear attack submarine (SSN) that India operates on a 10-year lease from Russia, INS Chakra (S1), for instance, is said to have reactor with a longer effective core life, granting it more time on patrol."
- The Arihant project — the first of the three SSBNs built by India under its ATV [Advanced Technology Vessel] programme under the supervision the Prime Minister's Office and involving agencies and establishments such as the DRDO, the Department of Atomic Energy, the Submarine Design Group of the Directorate of Naval Design, besides companies such as L&T — had been under wraps for decades until its high-voltage launch in 2009.
- The 83-MW uranium reactor, developed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) with generous support from Russia, went critical in August last year. The submarine should have entered service in 2012, as originally planned.

Coconut plucking, women take high wages

- Even though Cuddalore district abounds in coconut trees, the price of coconuts is high. The reason trotted out for such market behaviour is the lack of manpower to pluck coconuts or the high wages the workers demand.
- It has created a situation in which even the ripe coconuts are left either to rot on the trees or fall. It has become consternation for the coconut growers to find the workforce on time to harvest, not to speak of the plight of the households having a few coconut trees in their garden.
- To overcome the problem, the M.S. Swaminatan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has launched the "Friends of Coconut Tree" programme for farmers and the unemployed youth.
- R. Elangovan, Project Officer of the MSSRF, told that the six-day training programme organised under the aegis of the MSSRF Village Resource Centre at Parangipettai was intended to help the farmers and unemployed youth learn to climb trees to pluck the coconut.
- To start with, 20 persons, including four women hailing from Killai, Nochikadu, Manikkollai and Parangipettai, joined the programme conducted recently.
- It was conducted in coordination with the Coconut Development Board that provided the device for climbing the trees free of cost.
- It was a sort of an in-house training as the trainees would stay at the Parangipettai centre throughout the training programme. Besides mastering the tree climbing techniques, they were also taught yoga and pranayam.
- Mr Elangovan said the Coconut Development Board had made it mandatory that 30 per cent of the trainees ought to be women. It was a surprise that four women had come forward to enroll their names in the programme.

The pollutants causing discolouration of Taj Mahal identified

- Finally, the specific pollutants in the air that are responsible for the discolouration of the white marble of Taj Mahal have been identified. Particulate carbon and fine dust particles that are deposited on the marble are responsible for its browning.

- Carbon is of two types — black carbon and light absorbing organic carbon or brown carbon. The results from a study were published a few days ago in the journal Environmental Science & Technology.
- Besides studying air samples collected from the area, the authors used marble samples on the building to collect the pollutants. They also undertook computer modelling to study the colour change brought about by reflectance of the particles.
- Both organic carbon and dust particles have the ability to preferentially absorb light in the blue region of the spectrum. The absorption of blue light by these pollutants in turn gives the marble surface a brown hue.
- “There is one group of organic carbon which absorbs light in the blue region of the spectrum and this is called brown carbon.
- Discolouration is because of what is happening to reflectance, and reflectance is in turn influenced by these particles,” said Prof. S.N. Tripathi from the Department of Civil Engineering and Centre for Environmental Science and Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur. He is one of the authors of the paper.
- The ability of fine dust particles to produce the brown hue is a well known in North India. According to him, it is the presence of haematite in the dust that is responsible for the brown hue.

Remote powered ‘solar ploughing machine’ developed by engineering students

- Ploughing is an arduous task. It takes time and involves physical labour. More farmers now use a tractor for ploughing, than those who still depend on traditional bullocks.
- But a tractor does not come for free. The fuel charges, the driver’s wages all need to be borne by the farmer who rents it. And the charges easily work out to anything between Rs.3,000 to Rs. 3,500 for ploughing an acre.
- And the next issue is the vehicle’s availability to source it on time. In some villages, farmers book the vehicle in advance since it would be busy on rent for days together.
- These things can change — seems to be the concept of a group of engineering students from Mailam Engineering College, Tindivanam, Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu which has devised a new solar powered plougher to till fields.
- Mr. I.Vetrivel, Mr.V.K.Arun, Mr. K.Sivaraman and Mr. V.Premnath comprise the group of final year electronics and communication engineering students who developed this device.
- “Basically our college is situated in an agricultural region and there are plenty of fields surrounding our campus. And many of our students come from agricultural families. As part of annual project work these four students wanted to try doing something different.

DNA reveals history of horse domestication: scientists

- Speed, smarts, and the heart of a champion: using genomic analysis, scientists have identified DNA changes that helped turn ancient horses such as those in prehistoric cave art into today's Secretariats and Black Beautys, researchers reported.
- Understanding the genetic changes involved in equine domestication, which earlier research traced to the wind-swept steppes of Eurasia 5,500 years ago, has long been high on the wish list of evolutionary geneticists because of the important role that

taming wild horses played in the development of civilization.

- Once merchants, soldiers and explorers could gallop rather than just walk, it revolutionized trade, warfare, the movement of people and the transmission of ideas.
- It also enabled the development of continent-sized empires such as the Scythians 2,500 years ago in what is now Iran. It was all made possible by 125 genes, concluded the study in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
- Related to skeletal muscles, balance, coordination, and cardiac strength, they produced traits so desirable that ancient breeders selected horses for them, said geneticist Ludovic Orlando of the Natural History Museum of Denmark, who led the study.
- The result was generations of horses adapted for chariotry, pulling plows, and racing. Genes active in the brain also underwent selection. Variants linked to social behavior, learning, fear response, and agreeableness are all more abundant in domesticated horses.
- The discovery of the genetic basis for horse domestication was a long time coming because no wild descendants of ancient breeds survive.
- The closest is the Przewalski's horse. By comparing domesticated species to their wild relatives, scientists figured out how organisms as different as rice, tomatoes and dogs became domesticated.
- With no truly wild horses to study, Orlando's team examined DNA from 29 horse bones discovered in the Siberian permafrost and dating from 16,000 and 43,000 years ago, and compared it to DNA from five modern domesticated breeds.



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Sports

Quick win for Deepan in National Premier Chess

- Vidit Gujrathi, the highest-rated player, was forced to a draw for the second successive day, this time by his Petroleum Board teammate Abhijit Kunte, in the second round of the South Indian Bank-CMS College 52nd National Premier Chess championship at the CMS College.
- Meanwhile, Deepan Chakravarthy, who was the quickest of the day with a 27-move verdict over P.D.S. Girinath, Deep Sengupta and M.R. Lalith Babu posted wins. Five players, with 1.5 points each, are in the lead.

East Zone reclaims 'Deodhar Trophy' after a long gap

- East Zone proved to be a hard nut to crack and won the Deodhar Trophy after 11 seasons. The game swung back and forth in a tantalising manner, but East struck crucial blows in the closing stages of the match to beat West by 24 runs in the final.
- East's team work stood out in stark contrast to some poor bowling by Shardul Thakur and Yusuf Pathan, and later some poor batting chasing a tall target of 270.
- West's chase suffered as Ashoke Dinda, getting one last chance to impress the selectors before the World Cup probabilities selection, induced errors from Smit Patel, Sheldon Jackson and Ambati Rayudu. His effort earned him the man-of-the-match award.
- As the final drifted towards East, Maharashtra's Kedar Jadhav and his Pune teammate Ankit Bawne pulled their team out of the woods with a solid 74-run stand for the fourth wicket.
- After Bawne's dismissal, Jadhav and local lad Suryakumar Yadav took charge. Jadhav also survived a strong appeal for leg-before off left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem and was lucky to be dropped by Kumar Deobrat at long-on off off-spinner Saurasish Lahiri.
- But once Odisha all-rounder Biplab Samantaray bowled Jadhav and Dinda dismissed Yadav, East's anxiety ended and it went on to win the match.
- Earlier, after electing to bat, East was indebted to skipper Manoj Tiwary — his 75 led the fight-back after early loss of wickets — and Samantaray's quick-fire half-century.

Varun Kakran set a new National record

- Uttar Pradesh's Varun Kakran cleared a height of 1.86 metres to set a new National record in the under-14 boys' high jump in the Jio junior National athletics championship at IGMC stadium here on Saturday.
- Varun eclipsed Maharashtra's Anil Kumar Sahoo's 1.85 metre effort achieved in 2011.
- Kerala and Haryana athletes dominated the penultimate day with Kerala runners hogging the limelight in the relays.
- The results: Boys: U-14: High Jump: 1. Varun Kakran (UP) 1.86m – NR (ONR & NMR 1.85), 2. Anil (Har) 1.70; 3. Ravindra Reddy 1.56.

Chikkarangappa triumphs at CG Open Golf 2014

- S. Chikkarangappa defended his title in style at the CG Open Golf 2014, producing a

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final round of four-under-66 at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club course.

- The Bengaluru golfer totalled 17-under-263 in the PGTI Super Series event and also topped the Rolex Rankings.
- Om Prakash Chouhan bettered the course record with 10-under-60 in the fourth round, and was rewarded with the second spot carding 16-under-264.
- Overnight leader C. Muniyappa of Bengaluru returned a card of 15-under-265 for third place.
- Chikkarangappa (67-66-64-66) started with pars on the first three holes, birdied the fourth, fifth and seventh. Muniyappa bogeyed the 11th, as the former struck form to manage birdies on 16th and 18th for the title.

Indians subdue the Dutch in Champions Trophy

- After two morale-sapping defeats, India finally regained a lot of confidence by notching up a 3-2 upset win over World Cup silver medallist and second-ranked Netherlands in its final Pool B match of the Champions Trophy hockey tournament at the Kalinga Stadium.
- The home team, which opened its account with three points earned from this unexpected victory, finished third in its pool and will meet Pool A's second-placed side Belgium in the quarterfinals.
- The Netherlands frontline, especially the trio of Jeroen Hertzberger, Sander Baart and Rogier Hofman, showed tremendous understanding and agility to invade the Indian circle at lightning speed and came close to taking the lead on several occasions.
- But India remained unaffected mainly due to some fabulous saves by its brave goalkeeper P.R. Sreejesh. V.R. Raghunath and Rupinderpal Singh, who were tested on numerous instances, withstood the nervous moments.
- Against the run of play, India grabbed the lead early in the third quarter. Bubbling with energy, young Gurjinder Singh launched a long-range slap shot and S.V. Sunil deflected it in to trigger celebrations in the stands. The Dutch lost a bit of advantage as its referral challenging the goal did not yield the desired result.

Pakistan wins a thriller, makes final in Champions Trophy

- The blockbuster involving India and Pakistan had disappointment in store for the passionate home fans as the host lost 4-3 an evenly-contested, high voltage semifinal clash of the Champions Trophy hockey tournament at the Kalinga Stadium.
- Incidentally, India had also lost to the same opponent in the last four of the 2012 edition in Melbourne. The defeat also meant that the third place finish in 1982 remains India's best ever performance in the Champions Trophy.
- World No. 11 Pakistan, which reached the final after 16 years on the strength of Muhammad Arslan Qadir's brace, will take on Olympic champion and nine-time winner Germany. The world No. 3 edged past five-time defending champion Australia 3-2.
- It was also a big achievement for Germany, which had struggled throughout the year and came into this event with a team which had several players from the 2013 Junior World Cup-winning squad, as it made the final after 2009.
- As expected, Pakistan used its sharpened wings to cut through the Indian defence frequently and kept hitting into the circle from the right.

IPTL & traditional tennis can co-exist says Carlos Moya

- The innovative rules and format of the International Premier Tennis League (IPTL) may have struck a chord with the Asian fans, generally starved of top-level action, but former World No.1 Carlos Moya believes the 'traditional' sport will stick to its conventional rules, though the inaugural tournament will 'co-exist' and thrive alongside the existing order.

Mahalakshmi in sole lead in National under-17 girls' chess

- Top seed M. Mahalakshmi defeated second seed G.K. Monisha to move into the sole lead at the end of the seventh round of the National under-17 girls' chess championship at Patna on Saturday.
- With four rounds remaining, she has six points, half-a-point ahead of Tejaswini Sagar and V. Varshini. In the boys' event, fifth seed Aradhya Garg maintained his sole lead with 6.5 points, one point in front of V. Pranavananda.

Indians just behind Brazilians in goal-scorers' list

- Indian players have scored 23 goals, only three less than Brazilian imports from all teams, in the Indian Super League football tournament that has entered the knockout phase now.
- Brazilian players, led by eight strikes from Chennaiyin FC's sharp shooter Elano Blumer, have notched up 26 goals overall.
- Indian players — led by FC Goa's Romeo Fernandes and Chennaiyin FC's Jeje Lalpekhlua who have found the target thrice each — have tallied 23 in all.

Trishul Chinnappa wins in Amateur Golf Championship

- Trishul Chinnappa saw off Syed Saqib Ahmed in a closely-contested final to win the Tata Steel 114th Amateur Golf Championship of India at the KGA course.
- Chinnappa laid the foundation for his victory in the 36-hole final with a splendid effort in the first half, when he went five up.
- Notwithstanding a stutter on the second 18, where his advantage had shrunk to one at the turn, Chinnappa held firm to triumph 2 and 1.

Elano Blumer gets the Golden Boot in Indian Super League

- Chennaiyin FC's Elano Blumer and FC Goa's goalkeeper Jan Seda (FC Goa) topped the list for Golden Boot and Golden Glove awards respectively as the inaugural Indian Super League concluded.
- Elano scored eight goals in 11 matches, apart from one assist, according to official website www.indiansuperleague.com.
- He is followed by FC Goa's Miroslav Stolic (five goals/ four assists, 10 games), Kerala Blasters' Iain Hume (five/ three, 16), Delhi Dynamos' Gustavo Santos (five/ two, 15) and ATK's Fikru Lemessa (five/ two, 11).

Germany wins Champions Trophy

- Enjoying the strong backing of a partisan crowd of 7,000 in a city designed by German architect Otto Konigsberger, Olympic champion Germany made itself at home to see Pakistan off 2-0 in the final and lift the Champions Trophy at the Kalinga Stadium.
- The World No.3 could not have asked for more as it ended the year by pocketing its 10th Champions Trophy crown. It had last won the tournament in 2007. A tired and lacklustre India was beaten 2-1 by World champion Australia in the battle for third place.
- This was the fifth Champions Trophy final involving Germany and Pakistan, and the previous time they had met in the summit clash was way back in 1994, when Pakistan had emerged champion through penalty shoot-outs in front of home supporters in Lahore.
- In changed times, with both teams seeking to groom the youngsters in their squads in the run-up to the 2016 Rio Olympics, the duel assumed importance for different reasons.
- Thanks to the plans of master tactician Markus Weise, Germany stifled the Asian Games silver medallist with some brilliant possession and strong marking.
- Germany, which shrugged off a below-par start to beat fine teams like England and Australia in the knockout stage, checked Pakistan's free-flowing style.

Boxing India not recognized by IOA

- N. Ramachandran, President of the Indian Olympic Association, has categorically stated that the Indian Amateur Boxing Federation (IABF) will be the official body and not Boxing India (BI). He added that boxing affairs will now be handled by IOA's ad-hoc committee.
- "This matter was discussed at length at the Executive Committee. The EC unanimously agreed that the body that will be recognised by the IOA will be IABF," said Mr. Ramachandran at a press conference, after attending the IOA's executive committee and the annual general body meeting.
- Explaining the rationale behind the decision, Mr. Ramachandran said IOA refused to give official sanction to BI because BI elections were held without consulting IOA.
- "When the dispute first arose between IABF and Boxing India, the IOA constituted an ad-hoc committee. It is AIBA which recognised Boxing India and the latter's elections. Neither the Government of India nor the IOA sent an observer for the elections.
- "In fact, when the IOA took up the matter with the President of the International boxing body (AIBA) and said that, in the interest of the athletes, the elections should be held under the aegis of IOA and with AIBA's observer present, the latter did not accept these suggestions and BI held its elections under the supervision of AIBA," he said, adding that the IOA had received "many" complaints of irregularities during the elections.
- He said the top three athletes at the Commonwealth Games, Asian Games and Beach Asian Games, will receive a cash award of Rs. 3 lakh, Rs. 2 lakh and Rs. one lakh respectively. He regretted that the government funding for National Sports Federations has been reduced to a larger extent.

79 Indians retained for IPL 2015

- The eight IPL teams have retained 123 cricketers in all — 79 Indians and 44 overseas players — for the 2015 season.
- According to a BCCI press release, five Indian cricketers were traded. The window to extend player contracts on existing terms closed.
- The released players will have the option to put their names up for the player auction for the 2015 season.
- The BCCI-IPL has said that teams have a total salary purse of Rs.63 crore for the 2015 season, a 5% increase over the 2014 season purse, and that the salaries of the players retained will be deducted from this amount.

AIBA bans boxer L. Sarita Devi

- Indian woman boxer L. Sarita Devi was handed a one-year ban by the International Boxing Association (AIBA) for refusing to accept her bronze medal at the Asian Games but the punishment is unlikely to hurt her career too badly as she would be available to compete in the 2016 Olympic qualifiers.
- Sarita, who had refused to accept the medal to protest her controversial semifinal bout loss, has been banned retrospectively from October 1, 2014 to October 1, 2015 and fined 1000 swiss francs.
- Although her repeated apologies failed in getting her AIBA's pardon, even this ban is quite a relief for the lightweight (60kg) boxer, who is currently nursing a broken right wrist.

Bindra wins bronze in National Shooting championship

- India's sole individual Olympic gold medallist Abhinav Bindra bagged the 50-metre rifle prone bronze medal, but the gold went to Hariom Singh in the 58th National Shooting Championships in Pune.
- Competing in the men's 50-metre rifle prone event after a gap of almost a decade, Bindra shot 183.8 to finish third on the podium at the Balewadi Shooting Range.
- Fellow Olympic medallist Gagan Narang finished fourth in the eight-man final, after having finished third in qualifying, marginally ahead of Bindra, who qualified in fourth position.

No FIH event till Pakistan players are punished, decided Hockey India

- Taking strong exception to FIH's "weak" censure to Pakistani players for their obscene behaviour after beating India in the Champions Trophy semifinal, Hockey India decided that it would not host any event sanctioned by the world body until strong punishment is handed out to the offenders.
- The Pakistani players made obscene gestures towards Indian fans and media after their win last night but no action was taken against them by the International Hockey Federation (FIH) after their coach Shahnaz Sheikh offered an apology.
- "It was a shameless and condemnable incident but the FIH took a very weak and feeble decision. It is not acceptable to us.
- We have made it clear to FIH that such sort of behaviour from sportspersons is not acceptable to Indians," HI president Narinder Batra told PTI from New Delhi.

Tendulkar named for ICC World Cup 2015 ambassador

- Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar was named the ICC World Cup ambassador for the second successive edition. "The International Cricket Council today announced Sachin Tendulkar as the World Cup 2015 Ambassador.
- It will be the second successive time that the India maestro will be the Ambassador of ICC's pinnacle tournament, after he fulfilled the role in the previous event in 2011," the ICC said in a statement.
- In his role as ambassador, Tendulkar will promote and support a variety of ICC initiatives to enhance the profile of the tournament, which is the third biggest sporting event in the world and will take place in Australia and New Zealand from February 14 to March 29.
- Tendulkar retired from international cricket last year after representing India in 200 Tests, 463 ODIs and one Twenty20 International. In a career spanning 24 years, the 41-year-old scored a total of 34,357 international runs and 100 centuries.

Gouramangi Singh is Bharat FC's new catch for 2015

- Defender Gouramangi Singh has been roped in by new I-league team, Bharat FC to firm up its squad for the 2015 season which will kick off next month.
- Bharat FC, which will compete in its inaugural I-League season starting on January 17, snapped up Gouramangi from Chennaiyin FC on a season-long contract.
- "I and Stanly have worked at the national team and I know how good he is. I have also been speaking regularly to Stuart and his vision for the team is really exciting.
- I am excited about my role here," said Gouramangi, who joined the Kalyani group-owned team during its pre-season training camp at the BharatiVidyapeeth football ground on Tuesday.
- "I want to transfer my experience of having played in the I-League, help build the team well and win lots of football matches," he added. The 28-year-old, who was a India regular before Wim Koevers became India coach, comes to Bharat FC on the back of an impressive showing in the Indian Super League.
- The centre-back made 11 appearances for Chennaiyin FC, driving them to the semifinals of the competition. One of the most accomplished players in India, Gouramangi who is a graduate of the Tata Football Academy, began his professional football career with Dempo SC in the 2004-2005 season making 40 appearances and scoring one goal.

Srikanth is No. 4 in World Badminton ranking

- Young Kidambi Srikanth continued his meteoric rise in world badminton as he ended the season by becoming only the third Indian male shuttler to break into the top-five, reaching a career-high fourth after hovering in the 40s in the beginning of the year.
- The 21-year-old Indian, who clinched the China Super Series Premier before reaching the semifinals of back-to-back tournaments in Hong Kong and Dubai, jumped two places to join the elite club which comprises Prakash Padukone and national chief coach Pullela Gopichand, who were World No. 1 and 4 respectively in the past.
- "When I started the year, I was in the 40s. Probably somewhere around 45. So I didn't expect that I will reach world number four. But I am really happy with my performance this season, it has been a great year," Srikanth told PTI.

Use of bouncer is the right of a fast bowler says Rackemann

- “He was struck on top of the nose and he went crashing down holding his face. Actually, his face was split right down the middle,” remembered the burly former Australian fast bowler, Carl Rackemann.
- He was recalling a Sheffield Shield contest between Queensland and West Australia at the lively ‘Gabba in the early 90s. Mike Veletta, the batsman who was hit by the Rackemann lifter, was wearing a helmet without a grill.
- Rackemann, now 54, said, “Those were days when many batsmen wore helmets that did not have the grill. They felt the grill affected their overall vision. Mike (Veletta) went to hook a bouncer and he missed.”
- The former Queensland paceman said, “I was really concerned for him. It was really bad. I feared the worst. He was taken in an ambulance. Thankfully, they, at the hospital, were able to stitch his face back. It was a scary moment.”
- A feared and respected paceman in his time — he hustled batsmen with disconcerting lift — Rackemann’s international career was blighted by injuries. He picked up 39 wickets in 12 Tests at 29.15. In the ODI’s, Rackemann scalped 82 batsmen in 52 matches at an economy rate of 3.94.

Elano Blumer gets the Golden Boot in Indian Super League

- Chennaiyin FC’s Elano Blumer and FC Goa’s goalkeeper Jan Seda (FC Goa) topped the list for Golden Boot and Golden Glove awards respectively as the inaugural Indian Super League concluded.
- Elano scored eight goals in 11 matches, apart from one assist, according to official website www.indiansuperleague.com.

‘Be Safe’ wins Indian 2000 Guineas (Gr. I)

- Mr. M.A.M.Ramaswamy’s Be Safe (Suraj Narredu up) won the ABV Nucleus Indian 2000 Guineas (Gr. I), the stellar attraction of the races held. The winner is trained by M.Narredu.

Awards & Prizes

Achiever's award

- Mahajabeen Madarkar's struggle against the odds began at a tender age of three when she was affected by polio. But adversity only made her more determined to excel in academics.
- Ms. Madarkar, a native of Vijayapura district, is now pursuing her Masters in Dermatology from Father Muller Medical College, Mangaluru.
- She recently won the achiever's award on International Day for Persons with Disabilities, by the Department for Women and Child Welfare. She recalled that her early days in school were hard.
- "Since I could not travel on my own and my parents could not take me to school every day, I obtained special permission from school to study from home and attend only the exams. Thus, I missed most of the classes," she said.
- Despite this, she scored 92 per cent in her SSLC and joined PU in Dharwad. Even there she mostly studied from home and would go to college only for the laboratory sessions.
- The daughter of a retired accountant, Sahebpatel Madarkar, she got 93 per cent in PU which enabled her to join MBBS at KIMS, Hubballi, by clearing with a third rank in the disabled category.

In The News(Person)

Tabare Vazquez

- Tabare Vazquez has won the second round of the presidential election in Uruguay and will be taking office on March 1, 2015.
- It will be the Left-wing Broad Front's third consecutive term in government and also the largest margin of victory in a run-off.
- Meanwhile, outgoing president Jose Mujica, whose management had the approval of 65 per cent of the citizens according to a poll last week, said he would now have the task of being the coordinator within the ruling coalition.

Anil Kumar Sinha

- "Do your duty without fear and so far as integrity is concerned, it goes without saying that you all would uphold it," was the first message from Anil Kumar Sinha to his officers, after he took over as Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation at the agency headquarters.
- The CBI Director holds an MA in Psychology and M.Phil in Strategic Studies. He has been the recipient of several awards.
- Mr. Sinha, who belongs to Bihar and was inducted as an IPS officer into his home cadre in 1979, is recipient of Police Medal for Meritorious Services in the year 2000 and President's Police Medal for Distinguished Services in 2006.

Arun Majumdar

- A top Indian-American scientist from Stanford University has been appointed as one of the Science Envoys of the U.S.
- Arun Majumdar, a professor at the prestigious university, along with three others Peter Hotez, Jane Lubchenco and Geri Richmond would serve as U.S. Envoys beginning January next year, the State Department said.
- An IIT-Bombay alumnus, Mr. Majumdar is a material scientist, engineer, who was President Barack Obama's nominee for the Under Secretary of Energy between November 30, 2011 and May 15, 2012.

Shinzo Abe

- Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe won a comfortable re-election in a snap poll that he had billed as a referendum on his economic policies.
- But a low turnout from unenthusiastic voters beset by a heavy snowfall across much of the country could cast doubt on the endorsement he will claim for "Abenomics" — his signature plan to fix the country's flaccid economy.
- "Anerood Jugnauth
- Mauritius President named veteran politician Sir Anerood Jugnauth as Prime Minister, after the 84-year-old won a landslide taking nearly three-quarters of the seats in Parliament.
- Mr. Jugnauth, a former President and Prime Minister, was handed his letter of appointment at a meeting at State House, a statement from the office of President

Kailash Purryag said.

- Mr. Jugnauth's centre-right Alliance Lepep swept 47 out of 62 seats in the Indian Ocean nation's Parliament, after voters rejected the ruling party's bid to boost presidential powers.

M.C. Sampath

- M.C. Sampath, retired Senior Associate Editor of The Hindu, passed away here on Saturday evening after suffering a massive cardiac arrest. He was 78.
- He retired from The Hindu in 2012 after serving the newspaper for 50 years, not counting the five years during which he was the part-time correspondent in Chengalpattu.
- Joining the organisation in June 1961 as a Staff Reporter, he rose to become an Editorial writer and a Senior Associate Editor. He was also in charge of the Book Reviews for some years. For long years, he was writing the Religion column in the newspaper.

S. Narayanan

- S. Narayanan (89), chairman of India Motor Parts & Accessories Ltd (IMPAL), part of the TVS group, passed away.
- He was a doyen of the automobile industry having spent over seven decades in it. He single-handedly nurtured the spare parts industry in the country and held top posts in many industry associations.

Dineshwar Sharma

- Dineshwar Sharma, a Bihar-born, Kerala-cadre Indian Police Service officer of the 1979 batch, will be the new chief of the Intelligence Bureau. Mr. Sharma, and Ashok Prasad, another Bihar-born IPS officer currently in the IB, were the front runners for the post.

Dr. Radhakrishnan

- Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is one of the 2014 top ten scientists chosen by the prestigious journal Nature. This is the first time in the recent past that the journal has chosen an Indian working in India.
- He is listed along with other people like Andrea Accomazzo, the Rosetta flight operations director, European Space Agency. The reasons for choosing Dr. Radhakrishnan are pretty simple and straightforward.

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