

NEWS ANALYSIS

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Lead Article

The Governor's Role in The Hung Assembly

The Assembly Elections in Goa and Manipur produced an inconclusive verdict. As a result, there were Hung Assemblies. In Manipur, the BJP won 21 constituencies and the Congress won 28 constituencies out of 60 Constituencies. But BJP managed to form an alliance. In Goa, the BJP won 13 seats and the Congress won 17 seats out of 40 constituencies. Here also, BJP managed to form an alliance.

In Goa, the Congress Party protested at the Governor's decision to invite the BJP to form the government. It triggered a debate about the role of the governor in government formation in the states. Especially, in the case of Hung Assembly, what are the constitutional provisions and what we need to know are explained below.

History of such cases

There are many such incidences in history where the political parties with fewer seats were invited to form the government by the governor. The BJP won 30 out of 81 seats in Jharkhand in 2005. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha who won only 17 seats was invited to form the government. In Jammu and Kashmir 2002, the National Conference won 28 constituencies but the governor invited the Congress and PDP who won 21 and 15 constituencies. The BJP won 31 seats in Delhi in 2013, but the AAP who won 27 seats was invited to form the Government. There are other such incidences which took place in 1952 (Madras), 1967 (Rajasthan) and 1982 (Haryana).

Role of the Governor in the government formation

In 2006, President of India (then) Dr A P J Abdul Kalam while addressing the governors had emphasized the relevance of recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and said "While there are many checks and balances provided by the Constitution, the office of the Governor has been bestowed with the independence to rise above day-to-day politics and override compulsions either emanating from the central system or the state system."

In the Rameshwar Prasad Vs Union of India, 2006, case, a five-judge Constitution Bench, clearly recommended the suggestions made by the R S Sarkaria Commission in its report on Centre-State relations, which had

emphasized on the impartiality of Governors and their role in upholding the constitutional mandate.

Later, the M M Punchhi Commission also elaborated that the governor should follow "constitutional conventions" in a case of a hung Assembly. Further, in a case of a Hung Assembly, the Punchhi Commission prescribed:

1. The party or alliances which get the widest support in the Legislative Assembly should be called upon to form the government.

2. If there is a pre-poll coalition or alliance, it should be treated as one political party. And in case, such coalition gets a majority, the leader of such alliances shall be called by the Governor to form the government.

3. In case no pre-poll coalition or party has a clear majority, the governor should select the Chief Minister in the order of priorities indicated here:

(i) The group of parties which had a pre-poll alliance of the largest number.

(ii) The largest single party which claims to form the government with the support of others;

(iii) A post-electoral alliance with all partners joining the government;

(iv) A post-electoral alliance where parties are joining the government and the remaining including independents are supporting the government from outside.

In the Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix Vs Deputy Speaker case a five-judge Bench, recommended the views of the Punchhi and Sarkaria Commissions regarding giving the Governor an independent discretion to take a call on the floor test when the government has lost the confidence of the legislature.

In the S R Bommai case, a nine-judge Bench had underlined the significance of a floor test when there are claims by two political groups while laying down that the floor test must be conducted by the Governor as soon as possible.

Constitutional Provisions

In 1993, advocates on Record Association Vs Union of India, case which was a case in regards to weight of "constitutional convention", a seven-judge bench, in Supreme Court, had held that "there is no distinction between the 'constitutional law' and an established 'constitutional convention' and both are binding in the field of their operation. The Supreme court also observed that "Once it is established to the satisfaction of the court that a particular convention exists and is operating then the convention becomes a part of the

‘constitutional law’ of the land and can be enforced in the like manner.”. Article 164(2) of the Constitution says that the Council of Ministers must be collectively responsible to the House.

Similar Case in the Lok Sabha

In Lok Sabha, the debate between a combination of parties constituting a majority versus the largest single party lacking majority was answered by the former President Shri KR Narayanan.

Mr. Narayanan elaborated it in his communiqué in March 1998 when he invited Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee to form the Government. He had said “when no party or pre-election alliance of parties is in a clear majority, the Head of State has in India or elsewhere, given the first opportunity to the leader of the party or combination of parties that has won largest number of seats subject to the Prime Ministers so appointed obtaining majority support on the floor of the house within a stipulated time.

This procedure is not, however, all time formula because situations can arise where MPs not belonging to the single largest party or combination can, as a collective entity, outnumber the single largest claimant. The President’s choice of Prime Minister is pivoted on the would be Prime Minister’s claim of commanding majority support.”

Conclusion

In a democracy, the proper representation of public interest is of supreme importance. And the governments are chosen by the people. And, our constitution has clearly directed the ways how the government should be formed in the case of Hung Assembly. And it has given this prerogative to the Governors. So the governor should analyze which political party or alliance is forming the majority on the basis of constitutional provisions. And his decision should be followed by the political parties.

National News

Civil Aviation Minister inaugurated India’s first Integrated Heliport

India’s Civil Aviation Minister, Ashok Gajpathi Raju inaugurated the country’s first integrated heliport at Rohini in North Delhi. The minister dedicated the heliport to the nation. The new facility is expected to push India’s aviation sector to new heights.

Key Highlights

- The heliport has been developed by Pawan Hans, a state-owned helicopter service company.
- It is spread over a large area amounting to more than 25 acres with an investment of about Rs 100 Cr.
- It consists of a terminal building with a capacity of about 150 passengers, 4 hangars with the parking capacity of around 16 helicopters and nine parking bays.
- It also has a maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility for the maintenance and repair of the Pawan Hans fleet as well as for third party repair work.
- The facility has already been successfully tested in trials conducted in February 2016.

The commencement of chopper services from the new heliport is expected to reduce the congestion at the Delhi airport, which currently manages the arrival and departure of around 40-50 helicopters on an average every day.

Besides this, the heliport will be used for operating services for disaster management, law and order surveillance and emergency medical services. It will also operate as a centre for skill development of pilots and engineers and will promote regional air connectivity through helicopters in the northern region.

Indian Railways launched New Catering Policy 2017

Railways Minister Suresh Prabhakar Prabhhu launched New Catering Policy 2017 of the Indian Railways.

This new Catering Policy will delink food production and food distribution. Food will be cooked anywhere in the kitchens of IRCTC in a hygienic manner using mechanized system. While, food will be distributed using professionals from the hospitality industry.

Highlights of the New Catering Policy 2017 in Mobile Units and Base Kitchens

- IRCTC will manage catering service on all mobile units including catering services on all the trains started on short notice.
- Pantry car contracts awarded by zonal railways will also be reassigned to IRCTC.
- Meals for all mobile units will be picked up from the nominated kitchens that are owned operated and managed by IRCTC.
- All four Base Kitchens under departmental operation of Zonal Railways and all kitchen units will be handed over to IRCTC on ‘as is where is basis’.

- Kitchen structures/ land/space will be handed over by Zonal Railways to IRCTC for a period of 10 years which can be extendable for another period of 5 years.
- IRCTC will develop the Business model for the kitchens so that they can expand and enhance the service.
- IRCTC will determine the menu of standard meals and A-la-carte items.
- IRCTC may also involve Self Help groups for providing catering related services.

Highlights of the New Catering Policy 2017 in Static Units

- Zonal Railways will manage the static units except base kitchens and kitchen units to be handed over to IRCTC.
- IRCTC will be responsible for catering services in static units like food plazas, food courts and fast food units.
- Allotment of all minor catering units at all category of stations will be done through open tender.
- Allotment of Milk Stalls at all stations will be done through open tender system as against calling application.
- Tenure of all static units (except kitchen units and food plaza) will be 5 years only.
- 33 per cent sub quota for women in allotment of each category of minor catering units at all category of stations has also been provided.

Railways Ministry inaugurated Antyodaya Express and Humsafar Express

Railways Minister Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu flagged off the first Antyodaya clan of trains and the fourth Humsafar clan of trains through video conferencing.

Sri Ganganagar - Tiruchirappalli Humsafar Express will pass through Krishnarajapuram, Pune and Ahmedabad. While, Ernakulam - Howrah Antyodaya Express will cross Salem, Katpadi and Visakhapatnam.

About Humsafar Express

- This fourth Humsafar Express will cross the entire country from North to South.
- Humsafar train is a fully Air Conditioned 3 AC service having facilities like GPS based Passenger Information System and Passenger announcement System.
- It also features fire and smoke detection and suppression system, CCTVs, comfortable seats, mobile and laptop charging points, integrated Braille display, Fire retardant curtains, etc.

- It will have stoppages at 35 stations including Hanumangarh, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Abu Road, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Lonavala, Pune, Belgaum, Hubballi, Birur, Arsikere, Krishnarajapuram and Bangerpet.
- It's primary maintenance will be held at Sri Ganganagar (NWR).
- Till date, 3 Humsafar Express trains have been introduced on Indian Railways.

About Antyodaya Express

- Antyodaya Express is a long-distance and fully unreserved superfast train service for the common man to be operated on dense routes.
- It will have facilities like Cushioned luggage racks which can serve as seats.
- It also features J-Hook near longitudinal luggage racks, multiple unit cables at both ends of the coach, potable drinking water dispenser, mobile charging points, fire extinguisher with anti-theft lock, modular toilets, LED lights, anti-graffiti coating for exterior painting, etc.
- Covering one way distance of 2307 km, Antyodaya Express will have stoppages at 23 stations including Kharagpur, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Palasa, Srikakulam Road, Vizianagaram, Vijaywada, Ongole, Renigunta, Katpadi, Jolarpettai, Salem, Erode, Coimbatore and Thrisur.
- It's primary maintenance will be held at Santragachi on RBPC (SER).

Union Government decided to set up POSCO Victims Compensation Fund

The Union Government announced setting up of POSCO Victims Compensation Fund to provide financial help to children who are victims of sexual crimes.

The announcement was made by the Union Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi as a response to a letter, which sought her attention to the plight of a three-year-old from Ahmednagar who was raped in December 2016.

The establishment of the fund is in tune with the objectives of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act, 2012. The money for this fund will be drawn from the Nirbhaya Fund.

About Nirbhaya Fund

- The fund was operationalised by the Union Government in April 2015 with a corpus of Rs 3000 crore.
- The primary objective of the fund is to improve safety and security of women in the country.

• As per the guidelines of the fund, the Ministry of Women and Children (WCD) can be approached by various Ministries and Departments with the proposals and schemes.

• The ministry forwards the suitable proposals to the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) for necessary budgetary allocations in the respective Demands for Grants.

About Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act, 2012

• The Act seeks to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation by establishing special courts.

• The POSCO Act identifies any person below the age of 18 years as a child.

• In certain cases, if the child is between 16 and 18 years, it shall be examined whether consent for the act was taken against his will or was taken by drugs, impersonation and fraud.

• The Act penalises any person who commits offences such as “sexual harassment”, “sexual assault”, “penetrative sexual assault” and “aggravated penetrative sexual assault”.

• A person commits “sexual harassment” if he uses words or shows body parts to a child with sexual intent. The penalty for this offence is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine.

• A person commits “penetrative sexual assault” if he penetrates his penis into the vagina, mouth, urethra or anus of a child.

Health Secretary launched ‘SAATHIYA’ Resource Kit and ‘SAATHIYA SALAH’ Mobile App for Adolescents

The Union Health Ministry launched the SAATHIYA Resource Kit and mobile app named ‘Saathiya Salah’ for adolescents. The kit and the app were launched as part of the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) program.

The key intervention of the programme is an introduction of Saathiyas (the Peer Educators), who will act as a catalyst for generating demand for the adolescent health services. The kit and app will also impart age appropriate knowledge on key adolescent health issues to their peer groups. The Resource Kit comprises of

- i) Activity Book
- ii) Bhranti-Kranti Game
- iii) Question-Answer Book
- iv) Peer Educator Diary

Mobile app ‘Saathiya Salah’

• The app ‘Saathiya Salah’ is downloadable from the Google play store.

• It will act as a ready information source for adolescents when they will not be able to interact with the peer educators.

Besides, the mobile app is also linked to a cost-effective information platform of a toll-free Saathiya Helpline (1800-233-1250). This helpline will act as an e-counselor for the caller.

The SAATHIYA resource kit and the mobile app were launched by CK Mishra, the secretary of health and family welfare.

Adolescents in India

India is a home to nearly 253 million adolescents, which is the largest in the world in terms of absolute numbers. When RMNCH programmes were launched globally, India was the first nation to add the +A, that is, adolescent component to the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH), making it today’s RMNCH+A program’.

Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)

Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram was launched by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in January 2014 with an aim to address and cater to the health and development needs of the country’s adolescents. The karyakram has identified six strategic priorities for adolescents and they are

- Nutrition
- Substance misuse
- Mental health
- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)
- Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)
- Injuries and violence (including gender-based violence)

Why SAATHIYA Resource Kit was launched for the RKSK program?

The SAATHIYA resource kit was launched to enable peer educators to communicate with the adolescents of their community. The kit will help the 1.6 lakh per educators in taking forward their job by answering all queries that are generated in the minds of adolescents.

How Peer Educators would be made effective?

As per a release, the peer educators from across the country will be trained in a phased manner about the optimum use of the kit, which is a ready source of a range of communication material specially designed to help them to be recognised and respected as ‘saathiya’, a good friend for the adolescents.

The peer educators will also play short films at their group meetings. The games and the activity

books will bring about discussion and resolve around adolescent queries.

The Resource Kit was developed by the help of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Population Foundation of India (PFI). The two institutions acted as the development partners of the SAATHIYA Resource Kit.

International News:

India to provide financial assistance to Bangladesh for development of Sylhet city

India and Bangladesh signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide financial assistance to Bangladesh for sustainable development of Sylhet, a north-eastern Bangladeshi city.

Under the MoU three development projects will be taken up in Sylhet. These projects will be developed at an expense of around Taka 240 million.

Projects for which financial aid will be provided under the tripartite agreement are

- India will provide financial aid for construction of a five-storey Kinder Garten and High School Building
- Financial aid will be provided for construction of a six-storey cleaner colony building
- Financial aid will be provided for some development work in Dhupa Dighirpar area

The tripartite agreement was signed in Sylhet by Indian High Commissioner Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Bangladesh's Economic Relations Division Additional Secretary Shah Md. Aminul Haque and Sylhet City Corporation CEO Enamul Habib.

The signing was the follow-up of an earlier MoU which was signed between India and Bangladesh in April 2013 for the implementation of sustainable development projects in socio-economic sectors of Bangladesh.

Sylhet

- Sylhet also known as Jalalabad is a metropolitan city in northeastern Bangladesh.
- It is the administrative seat of Sylhet Division and one of the most important spiritual and cultural centers of Bangladesh.
- The city is located on the right bank of the Surma River in northeastern Bengal.
- It has a subtropical climate and lush highland terrain.

- The city has a population of more than 479837 residents.

- After Dhaka and Chittagong, Sylhet is one of the most important cities of Bangladesh.

- The city's dargahs or burial sites of Muslim saints have helped the city to win a status of tourist destination within and outside the country. Earlier, Sylhet was a part of the former Assam province of India and was a focal point for 1971 Liberation War. Besides, being an ancient city and a historically vibrant city, the city has been a hub of commercial activities.

Besides, the Union Government will also carry out similar development projects for Rajshahi. The project will be carried at an expense of Taka 210 million. A MoU was recently signed in Rajshahi in this regard.

Canada to resettle 1200 Yazidi refugees by the end of 2017

The Justin Trudeau government announced that Canada will give asylum to 1200 Yazidis, the most vulnerable refugees in the world by the end of the year.

The efforts follow the Canadian Parliament's resolution last year to take in the Yazidis facing genocide in Iraq at the hands of the Islamic extremists.

According to Ahmed Hussen, Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, though initially, the aim was to bring over the women and girls who stand the risk of facing persecution, the government decided to help all, especially since the extremist group was also targeting boys.

Key Highlights

- Canada began its operation of rescuing these vulnerable refugees on 25 October 2016.
- Around 400 Yazidis have already been airlifted to the country in the last few months.
- The migrants have been brought over on commercial flights at a controlled pace to avoid overwhelming Canada's refugee system.
- The whole operation is expected to cost around 28 million Canadian Dollars.
- While the majority of the refugees will come from Iraq, some will also be from Lebanon and Turkey.

Ever since Justin Trudeau took over as the Prime Minister of Canada in 2015, his government has helped resettle almost 40000 Syrian refugees.

About the Yazidi community

- Yazidis are ethnically a Kurdish-speaking minority religious community.

- Their pre-Islamic religion is thought to have its origin in the Zoroastrianism of ancient Persia.
- They are neither Arabic nor Muslim and so, the Islamic State considers them polytheistic heretics. The rescue operation for the Yazidis differs slightly from the regular one, as these are being conducted in a more closed manner in order to protect the identity of these vulnerable groups. In addition to the resettlement of the 1200 refugees, the Canadian government also intends to facilitate them with private sponsorships.

While appreciating the efforts of the Trudeau government, Conservative MP Michelle Rempel stressed that like Canada other countries also need to wake up to the fact that if these people are not provided with a safe haven now, they might get wiped off completely.

South Africa's decision to leave ICC ruled invalid

The South African government's decision to withdraw from the International Criminal Court was declared invalid and unconstitutional by the high court in Pretoria.

The court determined that the decision to withdraw from the International court was taken by South African President Jacob Zuma and Minister of Justice Michael Masutha without appropriate approval from the parliament, which amounts to a breach of the separation of powers.

Key Highlights

- South Africa notified the United Nations of its intent to leave the ICC in October 2016, stating the court's intention of pursuing a regime change as one of its main reasons to leave.
- The decision was not approved by the leading opposition party in South Africa, the Democratic Alliance (DA), which approached the Pretoria court arguing that the ruling government had to first seek Parliamentary approval.
- In the latest judgment, the court ruled in the favour of DA, calling the ruling government's action as unconstitutional.
- The court has also ordered the government to revoke its notice of withdrawal.

Responding on the matter, the Justice Minister, Michael Masutha said that the government still intended to quit the ICC. He further stated that the government would be considering all its options including a possible appeal after studying the full judgement.

Background

- South Africa's decision to pull out from the ICC followed a dispute over the 2015 visit of the

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to South Africa.

- Bashir, who has an ICC arrest warrant over him for alleged war crimes, had come to SA to attend an African Union summit in Johannesburg.
- Despite ICC's request to arrest him, South African authorities refused to do so.

CCEA approved SJVN's investment proposal in Arun-3 Hydro Electric Project

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved an investment proposal of the Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVN) in Nepal's Arun-3 Hydro Electric Project (HEP). The approval was given by the CCEA at a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

Details related to the CCEA's approval

- The SJVN, a central public sector undertaking, will invest Rs 5723.72 crore in the 900 MW Arun-3 HEP.
- Completion period of the project shall be 60 months from the date of financial closure of the project.
- Ex-post facto approval was given for incorporation of the SJVN Arun-3 Power Development Company (P) Limited (SAPDC).
- The SAPDC is the implementing agency of the Arun-3 HEP. It was already incorporated in Nepal as a 100 per cent subsidiary of the SJVN.
- Any component of the work already or been made by the Nepalese authorities shall be so certified by Central Electricity Authority (CEA) and shall be accordingly deducted from the project cost requirements.

About Arun-3 Hydro Electric Project

- The project is located on Arun River in Sankhuwasabha District of Eastern Nepal.
- The run-of-river scheme envisages about 70 meters high concrete gravity dam and Head Race Tunnel (HRT) of 11.74 kilometers with underground power house containing four generating units of 225 MW each on the left bank.
- SJVN bagged the project through international competitive bidding. Consequently, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Government of Nepal and the SJVN in March 2008.
- The SJVN executes the project on build, own, operate and transfer (BOOT) basis for a period of 30 years including five years of construction period.

• The Project Development Agreement (PDA), signed on 25 November 2014, provides 21.9 per cent free power to Nepal for the entire concession period of 25 years.

Yemen's conflict forcing displaced to return home amid persisting risks: United Nations

The United Nations (UN) announced that the complex crisis in Yemen continues to deepen. The agency also reported that around one million people, who had fled for safety, are returning to their homes mainly due to a lack of access to income and basic services in the areas of displacement.

The reports, a multi-sectoral location assessment report and a periodically updated population movement tracking report, show that there are currently two million internally displaced people (IDPs) across Yemen and one million IDP returnees.

Key highlights

- About 40% of key informants indicate that internally displaced people now intend to return home within the next three months.
- A lack of access to income and basic services in areas of displacement are the key reasons for pushing IDPs to return to the areas of their origin.
- Yemen's local communities are also under extreme strain with alarming scarcities of food and insufficient access to water and sanitation services.
- Around 84% of the country's two million IDPs have been displaced for more than a year.
- More than 17 million people are frequently forced to skip meals. Seven million people do not even know where their next meal will come from and are ever closer to starvation.
- The risks related to the availability of food in markets and the food pipeline are fast approaching the Yemenis.
- Food shortages are widespread, food and fuel prices are rising, there are disruptions to agricultural production, and purchasing power is plunging, especially brought about by the lack of salary payments in the public sector for over six months.

About Yemeni Civil War

- The Yemeni Civil War is an ongoing conflict that began in 2015.
- The conflict is between two factions claiming to constitute the Yemeni government, along with their supporters and allies.

• Houthi forces controlling the capital Sana'a and allied with forces loyal to the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh have clashed with forces loyal to the government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, based in Aden.

• Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant have also carried out attacks.

• The UN states that 16200 people have been killed in Yemen, including 10000 civilians, from March 2015 to January 2017.

Pakistan Senate approved Hindu Marriage Bill

The Senate of Pakistan gave its approval to the Hindu Marriage Bill.

The bill seeks to regulate marriages of minority Hindus in Pakistan. It will be the first personal law for Hindus living in Pakistan.

The bill was approved by the lower house of the Pakistan Legislature, National Assembly, on 26 September 2015.

Highlights of Hindu Marriage Bill

- The bill seeks to provide a special form of marriage and divorce among Hindus in Pakistan.
- The provisions of the bill are not applicable if neither of the parties to the marriage has a spouse living at the time of marriage.
- However, this provision shall not apply if a wife cannot conceive a child and medically declared to be so.
- The bill allows judicial separation of couples on five grounds. **Most important among them are–**
 - i. The other party renounced the Hindu religion and adopted another one
 - ii. If the partner has been suffering from a virulent and incurable form of disease
- The bill sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls.
- It will be applicable in Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. The Sindh province has already formulated its own Hindu Marriage Act.
- Most importantly, the bill is considered as a progressive piece of legislation as it will help Hindu women get documentary proof of their marriage.
- Previously, married Hindu women had to prove that they were married, which was one of the key tools for miscreants involved in forced conversion.
- The law paves the way for issuance of a document called as Shadi Parath. This document is similar to the 'Nikahnama' for Muslims.

- The bill defines Shadi Parath is a certificate or document of marriage issued by the Marriage Registrar.
- Every marriage solemnized under this Act shall be registered within fifteen days in accordance with the provision of this Act.

UAE revealed its plan to build the first city on Mars by 2117

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced its intention of building the first-ever city on the Red Planet by 2117. The Nation would be undertaking the project in collaboration with specialised international organisations and scientific institutes.

The Mars project was announced by Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and the Ruler of Dubai and Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the nation's Armed Forces.

Key Highlights

- To get the 100-year programme in motion, the UAE plans to put together a group of professionals, experts with the potential to achieve scientific breakthroughs in order to facilitate the transport of people to Mars over the next few decades.
- The government will be initiating scientific research programmes to nurture the national cadres specialised in space sciences at various universities in the UAE.
- The announcement of the programme was made on the sidelines of the World Government Summit amidst representative from 138 governments, six major international organisations, as well as leading international technology companies.
- The project will involve a lot of research, especially focussing on the transportation means, energy and food on Mars.
- The project also aims to find a faster transportation method to Mars.

Commenting on the program, Vice President of UAE, Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid said that the landing of people on other planets has been a long-time dream for humans and UAE plans to spearhead international efforts to turn this dream into a reality.

He further added that the Mars 2117 project is a long-term one, the short-term goal is to develop the capacities and skills of Emiratis, in order to

empower them to enter all disciplines of scientific research fields.

The nation would be launching its first-ever Mars mission, an unmanned orbiter called 'Hope', in 2020 from a Japanese space centre.

Economy

CBEC launched a mobile application for Goods and Services Tax

The Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) launched a mobile application for Goods and Services Tax (GST). The app will inform the taxpayers of the latest updates on GST among others.

The mobile application for GST was launched in-line to the Union Government's Digital India Initiative. The application will provide latest updates on GST to the taxpayers.

The application will help taxpayers to access certain information related to the GST like

- Migration to GST-Approach and guidelines for migration
- Draft Law-Model GST Law, GST Compensation and Law IGST Law
- Draft Rules-Rules related to Registration, Payment, Returns, Refund and Invoice
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on GST
- Various resources on GST like videos and articles among others
- Links related to website as well as email and helpdesk contacts

At present, the application is available for the android platforms. The iOS version of the application will be launched soon.

Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC)
CBEC is a part of the Department of Revenue under the Union Ministry of Finance. **The nodal national agency is responsible for administering**

- The tasks of formulation of policy concerning levy
- Collection of Customs & Central Excise duties and Service Tax
- Prevention of smuggling and administration of matters relating to Customs, Central Excise, Service Tax and Narcotics
- It is the administrative authority for its subordinate organisations, including Custom Houses, Central Excise and Service Tax Commissionerates and the Central Revenues Control Laboratory.

Goods and Services Tax (GST)

The Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) (GST) Act 2016 passed by both houses of the Parliament and approved by President Pranab Mukherjee is a proposed system of indirect taxation of India. It will be created by merging most of the existing taxes (central and state taxes) into a single system of taxation.

The proposed bill is being looked out by the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council who will decide the tax rate, cess and surcharges. The council being headed by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will comprise of state Finance Ministers.

Digital payments industry to hit USD500 billion by 2020: Google-BCG study

The Digital Payments 2020 report said that digital payment industry in India is expected to reach USD 500 billion by 2020. The USD 500 billion accounts for about 15 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

The report was jointly published by Google and Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

The report says that by 2020, over 50 per cent of Internet users in the country will be using the mode of payment.

Digital Payments 2020 estimates

- The report projects that the non-cash contribution in the consumer payments segment will double to 40 per cent.
 - The estimates say digital technology in India will influence up to 45 per cent of all retail sales by 2025.
 - It says that the non-cash transactions will exceed cash transactions by 2023.
 - It says that the about 81 per cent of the existing users of the digital payments prefer it over other methods of non-cash payments.
 - IT highlights that the 90 per cent Indian consumers will be using digital payment mode for both online as well as offline points of sale in fields.
 - It says that over 60 per cent of digital payment value will be contributed by offline points like unorganised eateries, transport and retail among others.
 - Three activities where digital payment is used in excessive at present include payment of utility bills, online shopping and buying movie tickets.
- Besides, the report counts on union government's plan to develop 100 smart cities across India as well as Digital India. Digital India aims at increasing the optical fibre network to thousands

of villages where two-third of the population lives. In addition, the report also appreciates the country for the use of mobile and digital technologies for creating educated as well as digitally literate user base.

About Digital Payments 2020 report

The Google-BCG study report provides a comprehensive overview on the ongoing transformation in digital payments in India. It also talks about its impact on the overall payment landscape of the country. The report is based on Nielsen's qualitative and quantitative research with over 3500 respondents (digital consumers: 1,516, remittance users: 917 and merchants: 917), combined with BCG and Google's industry intelligence.

Report Methodology

The report was prepared on the basis of a qualitative and quantitative research executed by Nielsen. The insights of the research were combined with Google and BCG's industry intelligence as well as BCG's proprietary sizing model.

To conduct the research, Nielsen conducted 14 group discussions as well as 26 in-depth interviews for users and merchants. These inputs were used in making a comprehensive merchant and consumer quantitative survey.

EPFO introduced single page composite claim form for withdrawing money

Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO), the retirement body of India introduced single page composite claim form. The form will allow its subscribers to withdraw money from their PF account at an ease.

Earlier, employees/subscribers were supposed to fill and submit three different forms to EPFO for withdrawing provident fund for different purposes.

Features of the single page composite claim form

- The form does not require employers' attestation, but the facility will be applicable only for those subscribers whose Aadhaar number and bank account details are seeded with their Universal Account Number (UAN).
- Subscribers who want to seed Aadhaar and bank details with their Universal Account Number will have to fill a new composite claim form, which replaces the existing Forms 19, 10C and 31 for filing claims. The new single-page form can be submitted with the attestation of employers.

• The EPFO has also done away with the practice of filing utilisation certificates for advances taken from their PF accounts. The subscribers can submit the self-utilisation certificate. However, in cases of withdrawn for medical purposes, the subscriber will have to submit a doctor's certificate.

This composite form will enable the Employees' Provident Fund account holders, which is more than eight crore in number, to withdraw PF without submitting evidential documents. This means that they can easily avail or withdraw the money to avail housing loans, grant of advances in case of marriage, factory closure and higher education of their children among others.

Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO)

EPFO is a statutory body formed by the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952. It is functional under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment. The organisation is tasked to assist the Central Board of Trustees.

EPFO assists the Central board in administering a compulsory contributory Provident Fund Scheme, a Pension Scheme and an Insurance Scheme for the workforce engaged in the organised sector in India.

Earlier to enable PF number portability, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 1 October 2014 launched Universal Account Number for Employees covered by EPFO.

Piyush Goyal launched TAMRA Portal for transparent Mining Clearances

Piyush Goyal, the Union Minister of State (IC) for Power, Coal, New & Renewable Energy and Mines, launched the Transparency, Auction Monitoring and Resource Augmentation (TAMRA) Portal and Mobile Application.

Simultaneously, the TAMRA portal, developed by the Ministry of Mines, was launched across 12 mineral-rich states.

Objective: TAMRA was created with an aim to speed up mining activity in India and facilitated all stakeholders to track the status of clearances linked to mining blocks for getting mines to reach till operationalisation for the same.

Salient features of TAMRA

• It covers block-wise, mineral-wise and state-wise information of the mines to be auctioned.

• It will also monitor various statutory clearances and highlight the additional resources generated through e-auction.

• TAMRA platform will help in enhancing transparency and accountability in mining.

• In the case of delay in obtaining any clearances, TAMRA will send triggers to the concerned authority. These triggers will help the authority to take the remedial steps immediately.

• The triggers generated by TAMRA will also be sent to the ministry of mines, which will allow the ministry to expedite clearances in case the timelines set against each of the statutory clearances are not met.

• The status of each of the clearances will be reflected on the portal.

• The portal will also enable the successful bidders to give suggestions and inputs to improve the current process of issuing statutory clearances in the mining sector. This process will enable the government in establishing a participative and informative network among all stakeholders.

In addition to the launch of TAMRA, Piyush Goyal also announced that the government is planning to bring amendments to mining rules. The rules will be amended to bring transparency in the award of exploitation and mining licences for the 100 identified off-shore mineral blocks.

Schemes, committees and programmes

Bet Dwarka Darshan Circuit to be developed under HRIDAY

Union Ministry of Urban Development approved the development of 6-kilometer-long Bet Dwarka Darshan Circuit in Gujarat. The circuit will be developed at an expense of Rs 16.27 crore under the Central Scheme 'Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)'.

The Bet Dwarka Darshan Circuit that connects the famous Dwarkadish Haveli and Hanuman Dandi was approved by the HRIDAY National Empowered Committee chaired by Rajiv Gauba, Secretary (UD). Hanuman Dandi is the only temple housing Hanumanji and his son Makardhwaj, in Dwarka district of Gujarat. Ranchod Talav and Shankhudhar Lake are the two important water bodies along the circuit.

Darshan Circuit works to be taken up include

- Development of streets and pedestrian pathways
- Laying of cycle tracks along beach side and plantation, LED lighting and plazas for vending spaces
- Other facilities includes the provision of benches, changing rooms, resting spaces, drinking water and toilet facilities
- Craft and food bazaar will be developed

Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)

Launched on 21 January 2015, the National Heritage Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) seek to preserve and rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of the country. It was launched by the Union Minister of Urban Development M Venkaiah Naidu.

Under HRIDAY heritage related infrastructure development is being taken up in 12 identified cities including Dwarka-Bet Dwarka at a total cost of Rs500 crore. So far, projects with an investment of Rs420 crore have been approved for all 12 mission cities.

The twelve cities that will be developed under HRIDAY and allocations are

- Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)– Rs 89.31 crore
- Amritsar (Punjab) - Rs 69.31 crore
- Warangal (Telangana) – Rs 40.54 crore
- Ajmer (Rajasthan) – Rs 40.04 crore
- Gaya (Bihar) – Rs 40.04 crore
- Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) – Rs 40.04 crore
- Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu) – Rs 23.04 crore
- Vellankini (Tamil Nadu) – Rs 22.26 crore
- Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh) – Rs 22.26 crore
- Badami (Karnataka) – Rs 22.26 crore
- Dwaraka (Gujarat) – Rs 22.26 crore
- Puri (Odisha) – Rs 22.54 crore

RAHAT medical project launched in Rajasthan

The Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje inaugurated a medical project called Rajasthan Heart Attack Treatment programme (RAHAT), launched by Eternal Heart Care Center Hospital in Jaipur, .

The programme involves creation and management of a telemedicine platform to treat ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (STEMI), a very serious type of heart attack.

The telemedicine platform will help capture and transmit patient's EKG along with clinical history from remote geographical locations to the heart command center (HCC) hub, where a team of expert cardiologists will provide an immediate interpretation of the EKG

and real time STEMI guidance and management through tele-consultation after instantly recognising the EKG abnormalities.

About RAHAT

- The programme aims to provide timely treatment to those who undergo heart attack in rural and remote areas.
- Under it, the patients suffering a stroke would be provided with immediate ambulance service and telemedicine service.
- While basic treatment would be provided to the patient in the ambulance on the way to the nearest hospital, the details of the same would be shared with the experts at the HCC through tele-consultation.

Rajasthan has previously launched several significant medical programmes including Arogya Rajasthan, new medical colleges and Bhamashah Swasthya Bima Yojana. The Chief Minister in her inaugural address stated that such projects will only help enhance the medical services in the state and push it to touch new heights in the medical and healthcare sector.

Besides this project, Raje also inaugurated an ambulance fitted with equipment and trained paramedical staff required for treatment of heart disease.

Science & Technology

NASA may send robotic spacecraft to Sun in 2018

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) plans to send its first robotic spacecraft to the Sun in 2018.

The Solar Probe Plus mission, which is going to be NASA's first to the Sun, is expected to get within six million kilometres of the Sun to probe its atmosphere. The Sun is about 149 million kilometres from the Earth.

According to Eric Christian, a NASA research scientist at the Goddard Space Flight Centre, though the spacecraft would not be able to get to the surface of the Sun it would definitely get close enough to answer three very important questions.

- Why is the Sun's surface, which is called photosphere, not as hot as its atmosphere?
- What accelerates the speed of the solar wind?
- Why does the Sun occasionally emit high-energy particles that pose a danger to unprotected astronauts and spacecraft?

Christian explained the queries by saying that according to the data collected by NASA, the surface temperature of the Sun is only 5500 degrees Celsius but the temperature of its atmosphere is about two million degrees Celsius and generally the farther away you go from the heat source, the colder it gets but with the Sun, it's the opposite.

Further, he added that the Sun blows a stream of charged particles in all directions at a million miles an hour however, it is not clear from where it gets that much speed.

Special Features of the spacecraft

It will have a 11.4 centimetres carbon-composite shield that has been designed by NASA to withstand temperatures outside the spacecraft of 1370 degrees Celsius.

The spacecraft will also have special heat tubes called thermal radiators, which will radiate the heat that permeates the heat shield to open space so that it does not reach the instruments that are sensitive to heat.

World's first robot table tennis tutor sets new Guinness World record

FORPHEUS, the world's first robot table tennis tutor has created a new Guinness World Record with its extraordinary technological intelligence and educational capabilities.

The Japanese technology has been given the Guinness title for being able to play table tennis way better than most humans.

About FORPHEUS

- FORPHEUS is short for Future Omron Robotics Technology for Exploring Possibility of Harmonised automation with Sinic Theoretics.
- It has been developed by Omron Corporation, a leading electronics company based in Kyoto, Japan.
- According to its lead developer, Taku Oya, the main aim behind the technology is to harmonise humans and robots by teaching table tennis to human players.
- The machine is enabled to act as a coach with assistance from cutting edge vision and motion sensors that help it gauge movement during a match.
- It also features several cameras that are located above the ping pong table, which monitor the position of the ball at a rate of 80 times per second.
- The cameras help the robot to show its human student a projected image as to where the ball will

land when returned in order to help them improve their skills.

- Further, a speed sensing component in the robot helps it calculate the opponent's ball at 1000 times per second and as a result it is easily able to determine how good its opponents are at playing the game.
- The robot also encourages the human players to give their best shot by showing supportive messages along the LED screen situated on the tables net.

Talking further about the advancement in technology, Taku stated that though at the moment it is a human who teaches a robot how to behave or teach, but in the next 20 years it may be possible that a robot is teaching a robot or a robot is developing a robot.

Defence

Military Exercise Cobra Gold 2017 commenced in Thailand

The Cobra Gold 2017 commenced in Thailand. Cobra Gold is an annual multilateral military exercise co-sponsored by Thailand and the USA.

Highlights of Cobra Gold 2017

- The Cobra Gold 2017 is the 36th edition of the multinational military exercise.
- Around 30 nations will take part in the exercise that will continue till 24 February 2017.
- Cobra Gold includes a staff exercise with a senior leader seminar, a field training exercise and humanitarian civic assistance projects.
- Approximately 3,600 soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines of the USA are involved in these activities.
- The exercise includes an amphibious assault demonstration, noncombatant evacuation operation and combined arms live fire exercise.
- The emphasis of the Cobra Gold 2017 is on coordination of civic actions such as humanitarian assistance.
- The exercise is a part of the USA's efforts to expand regional cooperation and collaboration in vital areas such as disaster relief.

About Cobra Gold

- It is considered as the largest military exercise in the Asia-Pacific region. Thailand hosts the exercise every year.
- It is also among the largest multinational military exercise in which the USA participates.
- Cobra Gold has three distinct activities - the Combined Arms Live Fire Exercise (CALFEX),

Command Post Exercise (CPX) and activity related to assisting the local Thai population.

- It was first held in 1982 to improve coordination between the armed forces of the USA and Thailand in both hostile military and humanitarian efforts.
- Some of the key participants in the exercise are Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea.
- China participated in the exercise for the first time in 2015. India participated in the exercise in 2016.
- The exercise has proven its effectiveness in improving coordinated military response to natural disasters, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2011 Tohoku tsunami.

Awards

Oscar Awards 2017 conferred; La La Land won maximum awards

The 89th Academy Awards, popularly called Oscar Awards, were conferred. The award ceremony was held at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles.

Comedian Jimmy Kimmel hosted the awards ceremony.

The Oscar Awards for the year 2017 were presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) in 24 categories.

The nominees for the 89th Oscar Awards were announced on 24 January 2017, via global live stream from the Academy. Movie **La La Land** received the most nominations with a record-tying fourteen.

Major wins at the 89th Academy Awards

Award	Winner
Best Picture	Moonlight
Best Actor	Casey Affleck for Manchester by the Sea
Best Actress	Emma Stone for La La Land
Best Director	Damien Chazelle for La La Land
Best Supporting Actor	Mahershala Ali for Moonlight
Best Supporting Actress	Viola Davis for Fences
Best Animated	Zootopia

Feature Film	
Best Foreign Language Film	The Salesman (Iran) in Persian
Best Documentary – Feature	O.J.: Made in America
Best Animated Short Film	Piper
Best Documentary – Short Subject	The White Helmets
Best Live Action Short Film	Sing
Best Sound Editing	Sylvain Bellemare for Arrival
Best Sound Mixing	Kevin O'Connell, Andy Wright, Robert Mackenzie and Peter Grace for Hacksaw Ridge
Best Production Design	La La Land
Best Costume Design	Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them
Best Visual Effects	The Jungle Book
Best Cinematography	La La Land
Best Original Score	La La Land
Best Original Song	"City of Stars" from La La Land

Sahitya Akademi awards 2016 presented to 24 authors

Sahitya Akademi Awards 2016 were conferred on twenty-four writers. The eminent authors were conferred with the award/honour for writing in as different Indian languages.

The awards were conferred on them at the annual Festival of Letters. The festival, which began 21 February 2017, will continue till 26 February 2017. The distinguished physicist and Marathi writer Jayant Vishnu Narlikar was the chief guest of the award ceremony.

The awards were conferred in different genres and they included poetry, essay, short story, novel, criticism and play.

Awardees in different genres were

- **Poetry**
• Jnan Pujari: Was awarded for book Meghmalar Bhraman written in Assamese.
- Anju (Anjali Narzary): Was awarded for book

Ang Maboroi Dong Dasong written in Bodo.

- Kamal Vora: Was awarded for book Anekek written in Gujarati.
- Prabha Varma: Was awarded for book Shyamamadhavan written in Malayalam.
- Sitanath Acharya: Was awarded for book Kavyanirjhari written in Sanskrit.
- Gobinda Chandra Majhi: Was awarded for book Nalha written in Santali.
- Nand Javeri: Was awarded for book Akhar Katha written in Sindhi.
- Papineni Sivasankar: Was awarded for book Rajanigandha written in Telugu.

Genre Short Story

- Chhatrapal: Was awarded for book Cheta written in Dogri.
- Shyam Darihare: Was awarded for book Barki Kaki at Hotmail Dot Com written in Maithili.
- Moirangthem Rajen: Was awarded for book Cheptharaba Eshingpun written in Manipuri.
- Asaram Lomate: Was awarded for book Aalok written in Marathi.
- Paramita Satpathy: Was awarded for book Prapti written in Odia.
- Bulaki Sharma: Was awarded for book Murdhat Ar Dujee Kahaniyan written in Rajasthani.
- Vannadhasan: Was awarded for book Oru Siru Isai written in Tamil.

Genre Novel

- Gita Upadhyay: Was awarded for book Janmabhumi Mero Swadesh written in Nepali.
- Jerry Pinto: Was awarded for book Em and the big Hoom written in English.
- Nasira Sharma: Was awarded for book Paarijat written in Hindi.
- Boluwaru Mohammad Kunhi: Was awarded for book Swatantryada Ota written in Kannada.
- Edwin J.F. D'souza: Was awarded for book Kale Bhangar written in Konkani.

Genre Criticism

- Aziz Hajini: Was awarded for book Aane Khane written in Kashmiri.
- Nizam Siddiqui: Was awarded for book Mabad-e-Jadidiyat Se Naye Ahed Ki Takhliqiyat Tak written in Urdu.

Genre Essay

- Narsinghaprasad Badhuri: Was awarded for book Mahabharater Astadahi written in Bengali.

Genre Play

- Swarajbir: Was awarded for the play titled Masia Di Raat written in Punjabi.

About Sahitya Akademi

Sahitya Akademi award is a literary honour that is conferred annually on Indian authors/writers for

their outstanding works of literary merit. The award established in 1954 is given on books of literary merit written in any of the major languages of India. The 2016 recipients of the honour were awarded a plaque and a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh each. Indian film-maker Satyajit Ray is the designer of the plaque awarded by the Sahitya Akademi.

Rajkummar Rao's 'Newton' won Art Cinema honour at Berlinale

Rajkummar Rao and Anjali Patil starrer Political satire "Newton" won the International Federation of Art Cinemas (CICAIE) award in its Forum segment. The film had its world premiere at the 67th Berlin Film Festival.

Newton was chosen for the award from the total 43 films which were screened in the segment at the festival. On behalf of the director, the award was received by curator Meenakshi Shedde.

Directed by Amit Masurkar, the film received a standing ovation at the festival, with a long and engaging Q and A post the screening.

The film Newton was labelled as a wonderful and exceptional film by the jury, consisting of Spanish film composer Pedro Barbadillo, French producer Rainer Wothe and the Croatian director and Pula Film Festival producer Tanja Milicic.

Statement of the jury is "This exceptional film within the rich and varied Forum selection deals with the various issues of democracy and fight for it during the elections in India. "It's modular portrayal of Indian culture, the dark humour and ironic approach as well as the positive use of typical cliches in Indian society gives 'NEWTON' a unique form and style which will delight audiences in art house cinemas all over the world."

Film Newton

The film revolves around the story of a rookie clerk on election duty in a conflict-ridden jungle of central India. He tries his best to conduct a free and fair voting. Amit Masurkar, the director of the film, had earlier said that the movie will be released in mid-2017.

Kohli named captain of the year at ESPNcricinfo awards

Indian national cricket team captain, Virat Kohli was named the 'Captain of the Year' at the 10th annual ESPN cricinfo awards.

The winners were decided by an independent jury comprising some of the world renowned former cricketers including Ian Chappell, Aakash

Chopra, Mahela Jayawardene, Iain O'Brien, Courtney Walsh, Ramiz Raja and the Editor-in-chief, Assistant editor and senior correspondents of ESPNcricinfo.

While Kohli won the esteemed title for his impressive tally of leading India to nine wins from a total of 12 tests, England's Ben Stokes won the title of 'Test Batting Performance of the Year' for his incredible innings of 258 runs off 198 balls against South Africa in Cape Town.

Another English player, Stuart Broad was honoured with the 'Test Bowling Performance of the Year' award for the second year in a row for taking 6 wickets and giving away just 17 runs in England's third test against South Africa in Johannesburg.

Further, the 'Debutant of the Year' title very deservedly went to Mehedi Hasan Miraz, a young Bangladeshi bowler who took 19 wickets in just two test matches against England.

Following is the full list of winners:

Award	Winner
Test batting winner	Ben Stokes
Test bowling winner	Stuart Broad
ODI batting winner	Quinton de Kock
ODI bowling winner	Sunil Narine
T20I batting winner	Carlos Brathwaite
T20I bowling winner	Mustafizur Rahman
Captain of the year	Virat Kohli
Debutant of the year	Mehedi Hasan
Associate batting winner	Mohammad Shahzad
Associate bowling winner	Mohammad Nabi
Women's batting winner	Hayley Matthews
Women's bowling winner	Leigh Kasperrek

Sports

India defeated South Africa to win ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier 2017

India defeated South Africa by one run to win the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier 2017 at the P. Sara Stadium, Sri Lanka.

Set to chase 245, India had all but lost its way after a flurry of wickets. However, stand-in captain Harmanpreet Kaur kept her cool to score

the nine runs required off the last over from pace bowler Marcia Letsoala.

South Africa's **Sune Luus** is named as the **Player of the Series**, while India's **Deepti Sharma** is the **Player of the Match**.

About 2017 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier

• The 2017 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier was an international women's cricket tournament.

• The tournament was held from 7 to 21 February 2017 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

• It was the final stage of the qualification process for the 2017 World Cup in England.

• The tournament was the 4th edition of the World Cup Qualifier. It was also the first World Cup Qualifier tournament to be held in Sri Lanka.

• Along with India and South Africa, both Sri Lanka and Pakistan have also qualified for the 2017 Women's Cricket World Cup.

• Bangladesh and Ireland kept their ODI status until 2021 by virtue of them reaching the Super Six stage of the tournament.

The qualified teams that will participate in the 2017 World Cup are:

• India (Bottom 4 of ICC Women's Championship)

• South Africa (Bottom 4 of ICC Women's Championship)

• Pakistan (Bottom 4 of ICC Women's Championship)

• Sri Lanka (Bottom 4 of ICC Women's Championship)

• Zimbabwe (Africa regional qualifier)

• Thailand (Asia regional qualifier)

• Papua New Guinea (East Asia-Pacific regional qualifier)

• Scotland (Europe regional qualifier)

• Bangladesh (automatic qualification – ODI status)

• Ireland (automatic qualification – ODI status)

Gopi, Athare won men's and women's races in New Delhi Marathon

Thanackal Gopi and Monika Athare won the men's and women's title in the second edition of the IDBI Federal Life Insurance New Delhi Marathon.

The Rio Olympian Gopi won the men's full marathon by clocking 2 hours, 15 minutes and 37 seconds. This was his first appearance in the race. Gopi, who is from Army Sports Institute in Pune, has already qualified for the World Athletics Championships to be held in London in August

2017. Earlier, he had clocked 2 hours, 15 minutes, 25 seconds while finishing 25th during Rio Olympics.

Bahadur Singh Dhoni, also from Army Sports Institute, finished the race at the second position, while TH Sanjith was third. The second and third finishers also breached the World Championships qualifying time of 2 hours and 19 minutes.

In women's full marathon, Monika Athare from Nashik completed the race in 2 hours, 39 minutes and 08 seconds. This was her maiden title at this distance. She also qualified for the World Championships breaching the entry standard. Athare was followed by Jyoti Gawate in the second position, while Ranjan Kumari finished at the third position.

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar and legendary distance runner Haile Gebrselassie of Ethiopia flagged off all the categories of the New Delhi Marathon.

Results of the half marathon

• **Men's title:** G Lakshamanan won the title in men's half marathon. Man Singh was second while Olympian marathoner Kheta Ram was third.

• **Women's title:** Manju Yadav won the women's half marathon. Arpita Saini was second while Neetu Singh was third.

Adam Voges retired from international Cricket

Australian Cricketer Adam Voges announced his retirement from international cricket. Voges, who will lead the Prime Minister's XI against the visiting Sri Lankans in Canberra, said that this will be his last game against the international team.

He will continue to play for Middle sex. He had not played a single Test match since November 2016, when he suffered a concussion during Western Australia's Sheffield Shield match against Tasmania.

The 37-year-old will end his cricket career with the second highest Test average (61.87 from 31 innings) of all time behind Australian great Sir Donald Bradman. Bradman's career average is 99.94 from 52 Tests.

About Adam Voges

Adam Charles Voges has played for the Australian national team at Test, One Day International (ODI), and Twenty20 International (T20I) level. At present, he captains Western Australia and Perth Scorchers in domestic cricket.

Earlier in 2016, he was included in the 2016 ICC Test Match Team of the Year.

Details of his Cricket career

• **Test:** Batted in 31 innings of 20 matches and scored 1485 runs of which 269 not out was his highest score. He also bowled in 6 innings.

• **ODI:** Batted in 28 innings of 31 matches and scored 870 runs of which unbeaten 112 was his highest score. He bowled in 15 innings and took 6 wickets.

• **T20Is:** Batted in 5 of 7 matches and scored 139 runs of which 51 was his highest score. He also bowled in 1 innings and took 2 wickets.

Miscellaneous

Justice Abhay Manohar Sapre appointed chairman of Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal

Justice Abhay Manohar Sapre, a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India, was appointed as the chairman of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. He was nominated for the post by the Chief Justice JS Khehar.

The post was vacant since Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan resigned from the post. Justice Chauhan, who retired from the apex court in July 2014, was heading the Cauvery Water Disputes tribunal as its Chairperson.

In addition to this, Justice Sapre's appointment as Chairman of the tribunal turns up to be a significant one as the Supreme Court will start hearing the Cauvery case on a regular basis from 21 March 2017.

Earlier in December 2016, the Union Cabinet approved a proposal to set up a single, permanent Tribunal to adjudicate all inter-state river water disputes subsuming existing tribunals. The tribunal was established with an aim to speed up water sharing disputes among states. In addition to this, the Union Government also proposed to float some benches to look into disputes.

Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)

The Tribunal was constituted by the Union Government on 2 June 1990 with an aim to give its ruling on the water dispute regarding inter-state river Cauvery and the river valley thereof. It was constituted under the chairmanship Justice NP Singh.

Cauvery water sharing dispute

The water sharing dispute of Cauvery is a long pending dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The dispute saw a new height in 2016 when Tamil Nadu government claimed its share in the water from Cauvery, which was denied by Karnataka government. Karnataka said no with an argument that it does not have much water to share due to drought in the state.

Earlier, both states challenged the award of the Cauvery Waters Tribunal in the Supreme Court. The award was delivered in 2007 by a tribunal headed by Justice NP Singh. In its decision, the tribunal decided the usable quantum of water of the River at 740 tmcft. **Entitlement of water to different states as per the order of tribunal was**

- Karnataka is entitled to 270 tmcft
- Tamil Nadu to 419 tmcft
- Kerala 30 tmcft
- Puducherry 7 tmcft
- Apart from this, the tribunal allocated 14 tmcft for environmental purposes.

The supreme court in its last order directed Karnataka government to release 2000 cusecs of water on a daily basis to Tamil Nadu till further orders, but the state failed to comply with the water and didn't release any water for Tamil Nadu.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix appointed as new UN peacekeeping Chief

France's Jean-Pierre Lacroix has been appointed as the Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations' Peacekeeping Operations. He has been appointed for the period of one year beginning 1 April 2017.

The announcement was made by the United Nations' new Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who took over from Ban Ki-moon on 1 January 2017.

Besides this, Guterres also announced the extension of the term of three other officials including Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support and Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support until 1 April 2018.

Key Highlights

- The two Under-Secretary-General positions are among the most high-profile posts at the United Nations.
- In his new position, Jean-Pierre Lacroix will be replacing Herve Ladsous, who will step down in March 2017 after six years of service.

• Hervé Ladsous had informed UN chief that he would be unavailable for an extension at the end of his current term.

• Lacroix will be taking over the role at a time when UN peacekeeping is struggling to overcome a scandal over increasing number of sexual abuse cases by troops serving in peacekeeping missions.

• Apart from this, Guterres also announced that he will be setting up an internal review team to look into the international body's peace and security strategy, functioning, and architecture.

About Jean-Pierre Lacroix

• Born on 2 May 1960, Lacroix holds a bachelor's degree in law and master's degree in political science.

• He was a technical advisor to the French Prime Minister from 1993 to 1995.

• He is currently serving as the Director of United Nations and International Organizations (NUOI).

• In total, he has over 25 years of political and diplomatic experience.

• He has handled several multilateral organisations, UN activities and programmes.

National Science Day observed on 28 February

28 February: National Science Day

National Science Day was observed across India on 28 February 2017. The year's theme for the day is "Science and Technology for Specially Abled Persons".

The day is observed to mark the discovery of the Raman Effect (a phenomenon of scattering of photons) by Indian physicist Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman on 28 February 1928.

For his path-breaking discovery, CV Raman was knighted in 1929 and awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930. This was the first Nobel Prize won by an Indian or any Asian in the field of Science.

The second objective behind celebrating 28 February as the National Science Day is to spread a message about science and its importance in the daily life of the people.

How the day came into existence?

The day came into existence after the National Council for Science and Technology Communications (NCSTC) in 1986 asked the Union Government to designate 28 February as National Science Day. Later in the same year, the government designated 28 February as National Science Day. The first National Science Day was celebrated on 28 February 1987.

Raman Effect

Raman Effect or scattering is a process in which wavelength light changes. The light beam changes its wavelength when its molecules are deflected. The molecules deflect when the light passes through a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound or something else. In this case, a fraction of the light emerges in directions, that is, other than that of the actual beam. Maximum of the scattered light is of unchanged wavelength. The small part of deflected light or the light with a different wavelength from the actual light is the result of the Raman Effect.

Kabir Bedi appointed as Brand Ambassador of Sightsavers

Noted film actor Kabir Bedi was on 27 February 2017 appointed as the Brand Ambassador of Sightsavers, a global organisation working to prevent avoidable blindness.

Kabir Bedi is known in the United Kingdom for his role as villainous henchman Gobinda in 1983 James Bond movie 'Octopussy'.

On the occasion, six blind girls from Madhya Pradesh, who won medals in the 5th National Blind and Deaf Judo Competition in January 2017, were felicitated by Kabir Bedi and SY Quraishi, Chairman of the India chapter of the Sightsavers and former Chief Election Commissioner of India.

About Sightsavers

- Sightsavers is an international organisation that works in more than 30 countries to eliminate avoidable blindness and support people with visual impairments to live independently.
- The organisation has been working since 1966 to support people who are irreversibly blind or disabled.
- Sightsavers has presence in around 13 states of India.

Background

Sight is fundamental to the functionality of life. The problems of sight need to be taken care of at school level as 80 per cent blindness in the country is avoidable if proper intervention is made.

There are 39 million blind people in the world, but 31.2 million people are blind when they need not be.

Andaman's Radhanagar beach featured in top 10 beaches of World

TripAdvisor, an American travel website ranked Radhanagar beach of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands among top 10 beaches in the world. The beach on the Havelock Island in the

Andamans has secured the 8th position in the world in TripAdvisor's 'World's Travellers' Choice Award-Winning Beaches'

In addition, the Radhanagar beach has notched the top position in TripAdvisor's list of the top spot in Asia.

TripAdvisor has honoured 343 beaches, including the top 25 in the world. Winners were determined based on the quantity and quality of traveller reviews and ratings for beaches on TripAdvisor, gathered over a 12-month period.

The Baia do Sancho Fernando de Noronha in Brazil topped the list and was followed by Grace Bay Providenciales in Turks and Caicos, Eagle Beach in Aruba. **Top 10 beaches in the world ranked by TripAdvisor are**

- Baia do Sancho: Fernando de Noronha, Brazil
- Grace Bay: Providenciales, Turks and Caicos
- Eagle Beach: Palm - Eagle Beach, Aruba
- Playa Paraiso: Cayo Largo, Cuba
- Siesta Beach: Siesta Key, Florida
- La Concha Beach: San Sebastian - Donostia, Spain
- Playa Norte: Isla Mujeres
- Radhanagar Beach: Havelock Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Elafonissi Beach: Elafonissi, Greece
- Galapagos Beach at Tortuga Bay: Puerto Ayora, Ecuador

Besides, the TripAdvisor has also released the list of the top beaches in Asia. The list features two Indian beaches among the top five Asia list and they are Radhanagar (No 1) and Agonda Beach in Goa (No 5). **Top 5 beaches in Asia are**

- Radhanagar Beach: Havelock Island, Andaman and Nicobar Island
- White Beach: Boracay, Aklan Province
- Ngapali Beach: Ngapali, Myanmar
- Nai Harn Beach: Rawai, Thailand
- Agonda Beach: Agonda, India

Radhanagar Beach

Radhanagar beach is situated 12 km from Havelock's ferry pier. Also known as Number 7 Beach, the Radhanagar beach is located on the western coast and was named as the Best Beach in Asia by Time in 2004.

The beach with fine white sand, turquoise blue waters and more is not a huge island with an overall length of 2kilometers and with of 30 to 40 meters.

Central Excise Day celebrated on 24 February 2017

24 February: Central Excise Day

The Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) on 24 February 2017 celebrated the Central Excise Day across the country.

To mark the occasion, the Central Excise officers all over the country organized seminars, workshops, trade interactions and cultural events.

The Central Excise Day is celebrated every year to commemorate the Central Excise and Salt Act, which was enacted on 24 February 1944.

About Central Board of Excise and Customs

- Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) is a part of the Department of Revenue under the Union Ministry of Finance.
- The CBEC deals with policy formulation concerning levy and collection of Customs and central excise duties and service tax.

• The Board also deals with matters related to smuggling and administration of matters relating to Customs, central excise, service tax and narcotics to the extent under the CBEC's purview.

• The Board is the administrative authority for its subordinate organizations, including Custom Houses, Central Excise and Service Tax Commission rates and the Central Revenues Control Laboratory.

• The board primarily deals with the Customs Act, 1962, Customs Tarriff Act, 1975, Central Excise Act, 1944 and Service Tax Act.

• However, after the roll out of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from 1 July 2017, the activities of the board will be guided by the GST-related Acts.

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