

CURRENT AFFAIRS SNIPPETS : FEBRUARY 2017

STATE

Gujarat becomes the first state to go cashless for the distribution of food grains.

Gujarat has become the first state in the country for establishing cashless system in its public distribution system (PDS) of food grains.

The beneficiaries who are eligible for subsidised food grains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) will now need to carry only Aadhaar cards for getting their food grains in Gujarat. Under this new system, the beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act 2013 will need to carry only Aadhaar cards for getting their food grains. According to the Food ministry there are over 81 crore beneficiaries under NSAI in the country. The state government installed Aadhaar enabled payment system in 17,250 fair price shops (FPS), much before the targeted date of March 31. The Gujarat government has partnered with common service centres, a special purpose vehicle of ministry of Electronics and IT by offering 30 digital services through the FPSs. A consumer will also be able to get his rail, air and bus ticket reserved at the FPS itself. A beneficiary can pay his mobile bill, a farmer can deposit crop insurance premium, LIC premium etc at these centres. Further, a farmer can get the soil health card and registration for centrally sponsored schemes.

Assam government launches Chief Minister Samagra Gramya Unnayan Yojana

Assam Government has launched Chief Minister Samagra Gramya Unnayan Yojana (CMSGUY) to bring about paradigm shift towards holistic development of villages in the state. The scheme is a mega mission aimed at bringing in revolutionary changes by doubling the farm income in the State. As per Situation Assessment Survey (period from 2002-03 to 2012-13), the farm income in Assam was recorded only 0.88% as against national average of 5.2%. Under the scheme, a Village Knowledge Centre will be set up in each

village to bring proper balance in the scheme and a MGNREGA playground will be developed in each village of the state.

According to the plan, the average investment of the scheme is around Rs 1.20 crore per revenue village. While the total required amount of the mission is Rs 30,000 crore over a period of five years. An amount of Rs 500 crore was provided in the current financial year 2016-17 which has been handed over by the finance minister to the Chief Minister. Five teams will be established in each block to work and proper implementation of different missions of the programme. As the scheme, this team will prepare development plans for them and that will be implemented in each village. However, the scheme will be implemented through the saturation model' by covering each revenue village and through the focused interventions in direct economic activities, logistic support including market linkages, and community support.

Haryana Government set up sex ratio monitoring dashboard in Panipat

The Haryana government has set up an online system called sex ratio monitoring dashboard as part of the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' Scheme to monitor the sex ratio in the Panipat district. The system will have the data of child sex ratio collected from all villages every month in the district by the state Health and Women and Child Welfare Departments.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 from Haryana for 100 districts across the country to address the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR). It is designed to address the issue of declining CSR and related issues of disempowerment of women through a life cycle continuum. The sex ratio monitoring dashboard as a pilot project has been developed in association with National Informatics Centre. It will have the data on critical villages where more attention was required towards skewed child sex ratio. It will help to take steps needed to tackle the social problem of low child sex ratio. The dashboard seeks to serve

as an effective tool for enhancing ground-level coordination between the state's Health and Women and Child Welfare Departments for enhancing ground-level coordination. Haryana has skewed sex ratio in the state and it is one of the lowest Child Sex Ratio in country which stands at 879 girls per 1,000 boys as against the national child sex ratio of 918 girls per 1000 boys.

Arunachal Pradesh becomes first NE State to implement e-Cabinet Solution

Arunachal Pradesh became the first state in the northeast to implement e-Cabinet solution for the state cabinet members. It is a powerful governance tool that will be used to streamline its decision-making process. Using this system, state cabinet members can access the cabinet notes before the meeting.

Implemented by the department of Information Technology and Communication, the solution lets Ministers prepare for cabinet meetings, conduct them and review minutes, entirely without paper. The e-Cabinet solution will give remote access to the Ministers to view Cabinet notes and the same will be circulated well in advance for proper analysis and feedback. Once Arunachal Pradesh adopts the e-Cabinet system fully, the average length of the cabinet meetings will go down from 4-5 hours to just 30-90 minutes and the government can also eliminate the need to print and deliver thousands of pages of documents. e-Cabinet uses web-based software. The Department of IT and Communication also distributed one secured tablet to each member of the Cabinet through which the ministers can access the e-Cabinet solution.

Rajasthan and Telangana win eGov awards

Under the State category, Rajasthan and Telangana emerged Winners of Excellence while the Award of Recognition went to Odisha and Nagaland. The Centre's intense focus on Digital India seems to have drawn greater response this year to the CSI -Nihilent eGovernance Awards.

Instituted by the Computer Society of India's (CSI) Special Interest Group with sponsorship from Nihilent Technologies, these awards help recognise the efforts of eGovernance practitioners from across central and

state departments, projects and in district administrative units as well. Under the Projects category, 34 projects were from government departments and organisations across the country for their innovative and inclusive eGovernance initiatives.

NATIONAL

India ranks 143rd in Economic Freedom Index 2017

India was ranked 143rd out of 186 economies in the annual Index of Economic Freedom 2017 that measures the degree of economic freedom in the countries of the world. The index was released by top US based Think Tank, The Heritage Foundation. In this edition, India's overall score was 52.6 points, 3.6 points less than scored in 2016 when it was ranked 123rd.

The score is based on ten factors of economic freedom, separated into four categories, using statistics from international organizations like World Bank, IMF, Economist Intelligence Unit and Transparency International. Top 5 countries in this edition of index are Hong Kong (1st), Singapore (2nd) and New Zealand (3rd), Switzerland (4th) and Austria (5th). India with 52.6 points score was ranked 143rd. It was placed in the category of "Mostly Unfree" Economies (points ranging from 50.0-59.9). India is a significant force in world trade, but underdeveloped infrastructure, corruption and poor management of public finance undermines its overall development.

ISRO successfully launches record 104 satellites in single mission

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) created history by successfully launching a record 104 satellites in single mission. These satellites were launched on board of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C37, on its 39th mission from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.'

Of the total 104 satellites, three were Indian and remaining 101 belonged to international customers. India's three satellites included earth-mapping Cartosat-2 satellite (main payload) and nanosatellites INS-1A and INS-1B. Of the 104 small satellites, 96 belong to the United States while Israel, Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, Switzerland and the Neth-

erlands are the other foreign clients. A majority of the satellites have earth-imaging capability and belong to a US company named Planet. For this mission, ISRO had used XL Variant of PSLV rocket standing 44.4 metres tall and weighing 320 tonnes. It is most powerful rocket of ISRO and earlier was used in launching ambitious Chandrayaan and Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM). This mission beat the previous record held by Russia, which in 2014 had catapulted 37 satellites in a single launch, using a modified inter-continental ballistic missile. It also broke ISRO's previous national record set in June 2016, after it had successfully launched 20 satellites, including 13 from the US in single mission.

Union Cabinet approves Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan for rural digital literacy

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved 'Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan' (PMGDISHA) to make 6 crore rural households digitally literate by March 2019. PMGDISHA is expected to be one of the largest digital literacy programmes in the world. This approval comes in line with the announcement made by Union Finance Minister in the Union Budget 2016-17.

Under the scheme, 25 lakh candidates will be trained in the FY 2016-17; 275 lakh in 2017-18; and 300 lakh in 2018-19. The outlay for this project is Rs. 2,351.38 crore to usher in digital literacy in rural India. To ensure equitable geographical reach, each of the 250,000 Gram Panchayats across the country will be expected to register an average of 200-300 candidates. Digitally literate persons will be able to operate computers/digital access devices, send and receive emails, access government services, browse internet, search for information, undertaking cashless transactions, etc. The scheme will be implemented under the supervision of Ministry of Electronics and IT in collaboration with States/UTs through their designated State Implementing Agencies, District e-Governance Society (DeGS), etc.

Budget 2017-18

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley presented the Union Budget 2017. It was fourth annual budget presented by Arun Jaitley as Finance Minister. This

was also first time no separate Railway Budget was presented. The 2017 Union Budget, was broadly focused on 10 themes. They are farming sector, rural population, youth, poor and underprivileged health care, financial sector for stronger institutions, infrastructure, speedy accountability, prudent fiscal management, public services and tax administration for the honest.

Highlights of Budget 2017-18:

Demonetisation

- Demonetisation is expected to have a transient impact on the economy.
- It will have a great impact on the economy and lives of people.
- Demonetisation is a bold and decisive measure that will lead to higher GDP growth.
- The effects of demonetisation will not spillover to the next fiscal.

Agriculture Sector

- Farmer credit fixed at record level of Rs10 trillion. It will ensure adequate flow to underserved areas.
- Government will set up mini labs in Krishi Vigyan Kendras for soil testing.
- Long-term irrigation fund in NABARD increased from Rs 20,000 crore to Rs 40,000 crore. Dairy processing infrastructure fund with a corpus of Rs. 2000 crore will be created.
- Model law on contract farming will be prepared and shared with the States.

Rural Population

- Over Rs 3 lakh crore will be spent for rural India. Government's Mission Antyodaya targets to bring 1 crore households out of poverty by 2019.
- MGNREGA: 48,000 crore has been allocated. Participation of women now at 55%. Space technology to be used in a big way to ensure MGNREGA works. 5 lakh farm ponds will be taken up under MGNREGA.
- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana: 23,000 crore allocated. Government to complete 1 crore houses for those without homes.

- Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojana: 19,000 crore allocated. Along with states, Rs. 27,000 crore will be spent in FY18.
- Panchayat Raj: Human resource reform programme to be launched. Mason training to be provided for 5 lakh people 100% rural electrification will be achieved by May 2018
- Swachh Bharat mission: made tremendous progress, sanitation coverage has gone up from 42% to 60%.

Youth

- Education: System of measuring annual learning outcomes will be introduced with emphasis on science. Innovation fund for secondary education. Focus will be on 3,479 educationally-backward blocks. Colleges will be identified based on accreditation.
 - Reforms in UGC: Based on ranking colleges to be identified and given more autonomy.
 - SWAYAM platform: Leveraging information technology platform for virtual learning National testing agency will be established for all entrance exams, freeing up CBSE, AICTE and other bodies.
 - 100 Indian international skill centres will be established with courses in foreign languages.
 - Rs. 4,000 crore allocated to launch skill acquisition and knowledge awareness.
 - Special scheme for creating employment in leather/footwear sector.
 - Five special zones to be set up for tourism sector.
- Poor an Underprivileged**
- Sum of Rs. 1,84,632 crore allocated for women and children.
 - 500 crore allocated for Mahila Shakthi Kendras.
 - Affordable housing will be given infrastructure status. Under a nationwide scheme for pregnant women, Rs. 6000 will be transferred to each person.
 - Action plan to eliminate leprosy by 2018, TB by 2025, reduce IMR to 29 in 2019 Owing to surplus liquidity, banks have started reducing lending rates for housing.

- 5 lakh Health sub centres will be transformed into health wellness centres.
- Two AIIMS will be set up in Gujarat and Jharkhand and. Structural transformation of the regulator framework for medical education will be undertaken.
- 52,393 crore allocated for Scheduled Castes.
- Aadhaar-based smartcards will be issued to monitor health of senior citizens.

Infrastructure and Railways

- Railways total capex and development expenditure pegged at Rs. 1.31 trillion Railways:
- Passenger Safety fund corpus will be set up.
- Unmanned level crossings to be eliminated by 2020.
- Railway lines of 3,500km to be commissioned.
- Dedicated tourism/pilgrimage trains will be launched. 500 stations to be made differently-abled friendly Rail cleanliness: Introduction of Coach Mitra facility; By 2019, biotoilets for all coaches.
- Competitive ticket-booking facility will be introduced; service charge withdrawn for tickets booked on IRCTC. New metro rail policy will be announced.
- Roads sector: 64,000 crore allocated for national highways.
- Airports Authority of India Act will be amended to enable monetization of land resources. Total Rs. 2 trillion will be allocated to transport sector.
- Telecom sector: 10,000 crore will be allocated to Bharat Net programme.
- Digi-gau initiative will be launched.
- Export infrastructure: New restructured central scheme will be launched. Total Rs. 3.96 trillion will be allocated for infrastructure.
- Energy sector: Strategic policy for crude reserves will be set up. Rs. 1.26,000 crore received as energy production based investments.

Financial Sector

- Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) to be abolished.
- Commodities market: Panel will be constituted to study legal framework for spot and derivative markets Resolution mechanism for financial firms will be set up.
- Cyber-security: Computer emergency response team (CERT) to be set up Listing of PSEs to foster public accountability, mechanism for time-bound listing will be revised.
- New exchange-traded fund (ETF) will be launched.
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana: It will have lending target at Rs. 2.44 trillion.
- Stand-up India scheme: over 16,000 new enterprises will be set up.

Digital Economy

- Government to launch two new schemes to promote BHIM app, including cashback scheme for merchants
- Aadhaar Pay will be launched for people who don't have mobile phones.
- Focus on rural and semi-urban areas. Financial inclusion fund will be strengthened.
- Panel on digital payments has recommended structural reforms.
- Payment regulatory board will be created at RBI. Negotiable Instruments Act might be amended.

Public Services

- Head post-office to be used for passport services.
- Defence: Centralized defence travel system will be developed. Centralized pension distribution system to be established
- Government recruitment: Two-tier exam system will be introduced.
- Government to introduce laws to confiscate assets of economic defaulters.
- High-level panel chaired by PM will be formed to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary

Fiscal management

- Total budget expenditure: 21 trillion.
- Defence expenditure: 2.74 trillion (excluding pensions).
- Fiscal deficit for FY18: Pegged at 3.2% of GDP.
- Revenue deficit for FY18: Pegged at 1.9% Fiscal situation.
- Total expenditure: 21, 47,000 crore.
- Plan, non-plan expenditure is abolished; focus will be on capital expenditure which will be 25.4%. 3,000 crore under the Department of Economic Affairs for implementing the Budget announcements.
- Expenditure for science and technology is Rs. 37,435 crore.
- Total resources transferred to States/UTs is Rs 4.11 lakh crore.
- Amendment proposed to the RBI Act to enable issuance of electoral bonds.

Tax Administration

- Direct tax collection not commensurate with income/expenditure pattern of India
- Black money: Cash transactions above Rs. 3 lakh banned.
- Transparency in political funding: Parties continue to receive anonymous donations; propose system of cleaning up.
- Political funding: Maximum amount of cash donation that can be received is Rs. 2,000. Political parties can receive donations by cheques or digitally. Every party has to file returns within specified time. Amendment proposed to RBI Act to issue electoral bonds.
- Personal income tax: Rate reduced to 5% for income bracket of Rs. 2.5-5 lakh;
- All other categories to get uniform benefit of Rs. 12,500 per person;
- Surcharge on income bracket Rs. 50 lakh-Rs. 1 crore will be levied

- Personal income tax: Simple one-page form for taxable income up to Rs. 5 lakh will be implemented.
- GST: Preparedness of IT system on schedule. Not many changes to excise duties in GST regime.
- FPI category 1 and 2 investors exempted from indirect transfer provisions.
- Time period of revising tax returns reduced to 12 months
- Real estate: Changes will be made in capital gains tax.
- Concessional withholding rate will be extended to 30 June 2020, rupee-denominated masala bonds to be included.
- MAT will be not abolished at present and will be carry-forwarded for 15 years.
- Corporate tax rate: MSMEs' (annual turnover less than Rs.50crore) rate reduced to 25%.
- LNG: customs duty reduced to 2.5%
- Limit of cash donation for charitable trusts reduced to Rs. 2,000.

Cabinet approves 'Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan'

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PMGDISHA is expected to be one of the largest digital literacy programmes in the world. Under the scheme, 25 lakh candidates will be trained in the FY 2016-17; 275 lakh in the FY 2017-18; and 300 lakh in the FY 2018-19. To ensure equitable geographical reach, each of the 250,000 Gram Panchayats would be expected to register an average of 200-300 candidates. Digitally literate persons would be able to operate computers/digital access devices (like tablets, smart phones, etc.), send and receive emails, browse internet, access Government Services, search

for information, undertaking cashless transactions, etc. and hence use IT to actively participate in the process of nation building. The implementation of the Scheme would be carried out under the overall supervision of Ministry of Electronics and IT in active collaboration with States/UTs through their designated State Implementing Agencies, District e-Governance Society (DeGS), etc.

India ranks at 43rd position in the 5th Annual International IP Index of USCC

India ranks abysmally at 43rd out of 45 countries in a global innovation index, according to a report released by US Chambers of Commerce which cited the country's "anemic" intellectual property rights (IPR) policy and patent act as challenges to innovation.

In the 5th annual International IP Index 'The Roots of Innovation' by the US Chambers of Commerce's Global Intellectual Property Center (GIPC), there is slight improvement in India's performance — it was ranked last or next-to-last in the previous four years. India has an 8.4 score as against America's 32.6 which tops the list of 45 countries. The United States is followed by the United Kingdom (32.4), Germany (31.9), Japan (31.3) and Sweden (31). China has 14.83 points. Neighbouring country Pakistan ranks 44th with an 8.37 score. IP-intensive industries faced challenges on the patentability of computer-related inventions and Section 3d of India's Patent Act, 1970 which relates to restrictions on patenting incremental changes. A Delhi court ruling that permitted photocopying of copyrighted material for educational purposes also featured among the factors that went against India.

INTERNATIONAL

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 Nation's 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.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix will be replacing Herve Ladsous, who will step down in March 2017 after six years of service. 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.

Nepal to host 4th BIMSTEC Summit 2017

The fourth edition of BIMSTEC Summit-2017 will be held in Nepal. It was announced in the 17th session of BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) held in Kathmandu, capital Nepal. In this meeting, delegates of seven member countries reviewed the progress made by BIMSTEC and recommended future course of action to strengthen regional cooperation among the group. The importance of BIMSTEC was highlighted during the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit held at Goa in October 2016. In this summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had expressed his desire to promote BIMSTEC and assured full cooperation it needs to move on.

The BIMSTEC is the sub-regional group of seven countries in South Asia and South East Asia lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. They are India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka from South Asia and Myanmar, Thailand from South East Asia. It was established in 6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration. Headquarters: Dhaka, Bangladesh.

UAE to build the first city on Mars by 2117

The UAE has unveiled plans to build the first city on Mars by 2117 as the energy-rich country looks to transport people to the 'Red Planet' over the next few decades. Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan announced the 100-year national project on which the

Gulf state would collaborate with specialised international organisations and scientific institutes.

The UAE will set a plan to prepare national cadres that can achieve scientific breakthroughs to facilitate the transport of people to the Red Planet over the next decades. The 100-year plan will involve scientific research programmes to nurture national cadres specialised in space sciences at universities in the UAE. It will also entrench a passion for space in younger generations. The scientific initiative will first be implemented by an Emirati scientific team, and will eventually expand to include international scientists and researchers that will run in parallel with the coordination of human research efforts in the field of exploring and inhabiting Mars.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier elected as President of Germany

Germany's former foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier was voted in by a parliamentary assembly made up of 1,260 MPs and representatives of Germany's 16 states. He became the 12th person to hold the post in the post war-era.

Steinmeier, a member of the Social Democratic party, had guaranteed the support both of his own centre-left bloc and Angela Merkel's centre-right Christian Democratic party, who between them hold a majority of 923 seats in the assembly. The results were announced by Nobert Lammert, the President of Germany's constitutional body, Bundestag. Steinmeier got a lot of support in the election from German Chancellor Angela Merkel's "grand coalition". The coalition comprises centre-right and centre-left parties. He will be taking oath on 19th March 2017, a day after current President Joachim Gauck steps down from his position.

BUSINESS

Samsung Pay to launch in India

The tech giant Samsung is soon going to launch its mobile payment wallet 'Samsung Pay' in India. For bringing Samsung Pay in India, the company has partnered with American Express (Amex), also the company may be exploring opportunities with giants

such as Visa and MasterCard as well.

American Express has been one of the partners of Samsung for the payment solutions in several other regions including the USA, South Korea and Australia. Elsewhere, Samsung has also partnered with MasterCard and Visa, the two financial services companies that see billions of transactions worldwide on their networks every year. Samsung began testing the service in India in December last year. Earlier this week, the South Korean technology company rolled out an update to the Galaxy Note5 smartphone in India which included the Samsung Pay app. Samsung Pay, which rivals Android Pay and Google Pay, uses NFC-equipped point-of-sale terminals for some of its features. Samsung Pay also supports MST (Magnetic Secure Transmission), a technology that allows it to send a magnetic signal from a compatible device to the payment terminal's card reader. This allows the smartphone to mimic a physical card, enabling the vast majority of existing terminals to support Samsung Pay as well. However, Samsung Pay's reach could be limited in India, as the service only works with high-end premium Samsung smartphones.

Reliance Defence signs warship repair pact with US Navy

Reliance Defence and Engineering Ltd signed an agreement with the US Navy for undertaking service, maintenance and repair of Seventh Fleet of US Navy at the Reliance Shipyard at Pipavav in Gujarat. Front-line warships, supply vessels and patrol vessels are part of the Seventh Fleet, which operates in the Indian Ocean region. These ships currently visit shipyards in Singapore or Japan for repair and maintenance work.

It is said that the deal may generate Rs15,000 crore revenue over next three to five years. In 2015, the Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group company took over Pipavav Defence, a private shipyard in Gujarat. Set up in 1997 by Nikhil Gandhi-promoted Sea King Infrastructure Ltd, Pipavav Shipyard was in 2010 allowed to build strategic and defence vessels. Its name was later changed to Pipavav Defence and Offshore Engineering Co. Ltd. Over 100 ships of US Navy operating in the Indian Ocean can now avail services at Pipavav shipyard. This is for the first time that an Indian shipyard has been selected by the US

Navy for repair and maintenance work. Reliance Defence said it is the first private sector company in India to obtain the licence and contract to build Naval Offshore Patrol Vessels for Indian Navy. The shipyard has the only modular shipbuilding facility in India with a capacity to build fully fabricated and outfitted blocks. The company recently signed an agreement with Gujarat government at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investment Summit for investing about Rs 2,500 crore at Reliance Shipyard for land systems.

Hindustan Motors sells Ambassador car brand to Peugeot

Ambassador, the iconic Indian car brand that till less than a decade ago carried both the Prime Minister and the common man, is being sold to French carmaker Peugeot. The C K Birla Group-owned Hindustan Motors formalised the deal for Rs 80 crore. Production of Ambassador cars had stopped around three years ago.

The Ambassador brand was introduced seven decades ago when Hindustan Motors launched the Morris Oxford series II (Landmaster) in a new avatar with minor changes. It quickly became a national icon and continued to dominate Indian roads till the 1980s, when the Maruti 800 exposed its inadequacies. On May 24, 2014, the inevitable happened when work was suspended at the Uttarpara factory of Hindustan Motors. From 24,000 units a year in the mid-1980s, sales slumped to less than 2,500 units in 2013-14. The Uttarpara plant dates back to 1942, making it the second oldest in Asia after Japanese giant Toyota. It is not clear if Peugeot will use the Ambassador brand for its cars in India.

Uber CEO Travis Kalanick quits Trump's Economic Advisory Council.

Uber Technologies Inc Chief Executive Officer Travis Kalanick quit President Donald Trump's business advisory group on Thursday amid mounting pressure from activists and employees who oppose the administration's immigration policies. Critics included Uber drivers, many of whom are immigrants themselves.

The CEO came under increasing pressure to leave the council after Trump issued an executive order

temporarily barring people from seven majority-Muslim nations from entering the United States. Others expected to take part include the CEOs of JPMorgan Chase & Co, Blackstone Group LP, IBM Corp and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. Others that are part of the council include Tesla Inc CEO Elon Musk, PepsiCo Inc CEO Indra Nooyi and Boston Consulting Group CEO Rich Lesser. Technology companies including Microsoft, Google owner Alphabet Inc, Apple Inc and Amazon.com Inc have opposed Trump's order, arguing that they rely on workers from around the world. Amazon and Expedia Inc have filed court documents supporting a legal challenge to the order by the Washington state attorney general.

AWARDS

89th Academy Awards

The 89th Academy Awards commonly referred to as Oscars was held at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles. The award presented in 24 categories by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), honouring best films of 2016. Musical drama La La Land won the most number of awards totaling to six at the ceremony after it was nominated into 14 categories. It was followed by Moonlight and Arrival with each being nominated in eight categories.

Winners:

Best Picture: Moonlight.

Best Actress: Emma Stone (La La Land).

Best Actor: Casey Affleck (Manchester By The Sea).

Best Director: Damien Chazelle (La La Land). At 32, he became youngest director to win oscar.

Best Supporting Actress: Viola Davis (Fences).

Best Supporting Actor: Mahershala Ali (Moonlight). He is first Muslim to win acting Oscar.

Best Original Screenplay: Kenneth Lonergan (Manchester By The Sea).

Best Adapted Screenplay: Barry Jenkins and Tarell Alvin McCraney (Moonlight).

Best Cinematography: Linus Sandgren (La La Land).

Best Original Score: Justin Hurwitz (La La Land).

Best Original Song: Justin Hurwitz, Benj Pasek and Justin Paul (La La Land).

Best Sound Editing: Sylvain Bellemare (Arrival).

Best Foreign Language Film: The Salesman (Iran).

Best Film Editing: John Gilbert (Hacksaw Ridge). Best Visual Effects: Robert Legato, Adam Valdez, Andrew R. Jones and Dan Lemmon (The Jungle Book).

Best Production Design: David Wasco and Sandy Reynolds Wasco (La La Land).

Best Sound Mixing: Kevin O'Connell, Andy Wright, Robert Mackenzie and Peter Grace (Hacksaw Ridge).

Best Documentary-Feature: Ezra Edelman and Caroline Waterlow (O.J.: Made in America).

Best Animated Feature Film: Byron Howard, Rich Moore and Clark Spencer (Zootopia).

Best Animated Short Film: Alan Barillaro and Marc Sondheimer (Piper).

Best Documentary-Short Subject: Orlando von Einsiedel and Joanna Natasegara (The White Helmets).

Best Live Action Short Film: Kristof Deak and Anna Udvardy (Sing).

Best Make-Up and Hairstyling: Alessandro Bertolazzi, Giorgio Gregorini and Christopher Nelso (Suicide Squad).

Best Costume Design: Colleen Atwood (Fantastic Beast and Where To Find Them).

Indian actor Om Puri, Star Wars actress Carrie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds and Bill Paxton were among late stars who were remembered and honoured at the Oscars.

Hindi scholar Surendra Verma selected for 2016 Vyas Samman Award

Renowned Hindi Scholar, litterateur and playwright Surendra Verma (75) was selected for the prestigious Vyas Samman 2016. He was chosen for this award for his novel Kaatna Shami Ka Vriksha : Padma Pankhuri Ki Dhar Se, published in 2010.

The Vyas Samman award was instituted by the K.K. Birla Foundation in 1991. It is awarded annually to outstanding literary work in Hindi authored and

published in past 10 years by an Indian citizen. The award carries monetary award of 2.5 lakh rupees, a citation and a plaque. His first play was Surya ki antim kiran sesurya kipahli kiran tak (From the Sun's Last Ray to the Sun's First Ray'). It has been translated in six different languages So far he has published fifteen titles of short stories, novels, satires and play. Some of his best works are Mujhe Chand Chahiyae, Surya Ki Antim Kiran Se Surya Ki Pahli Kiran Tak, Athwan Sarg and Qaid-e-Hayat etc. He has won the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1993) and Sahitya Akademi Award (1996).

70th BAFTA Awards

The 70th British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards ceremony was held at the Royal Albert Hall in London. This year the BAFTA awards were conferred for the outstanding performances in films and documentaries screened at British Cinemas in 2016. La La Land won the most awards at the event, winning five and was also most nominated in 11 categories.

Winners:

Best Film: La La Land
 Best Director: Damien Chazelle (La La Land)
 Best Actor: Casey Affleck (Manchester by the Sea)
 Best Actress: Emma Stone (La La Land)
 Best Supporting Actor: Dev Patel (Lion)
 Best Supporting Actress: Viola Davis (Fences)
 Best Original Music: La La Land
 Best Original Screenplay: Manchester by the Sea
 Best Adapted Screenplay: Lion
 Best Cinematography: La La Land
 Best Editing: Hacksaw Ridge
 Best British Short Film: Home
 Best British Film: I, Daniel Blake
 Best Film Not in the English Language: Son of Saul
 Best Documentary: 13th Best Animated Film: Kubo and the Two Strings

Best Costume Design: Jackie
 Best Make Up & Hair: Florence Foster Jenkins
 Best Sound: Arrival
 Best Special Visual Effects: The Jungle Book
 Best British Short Animation: A Love Story
 EE Rising Star Award: Tom Holland
 BAFTA Fellowship: Mel Brooks
 Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema: Curzon Cinemas
 Best Production Design: Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them
 Best Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer: Babak Anvari (Writer/Director), Emily Leo, Oliver Roskill, Lucan Toh (Producers) for Under the Shadow

59th Grammy Awards

The 59th Annual Grammy Awards were announced by the Recording Academy announced at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, California. The ceremony recognized the best recordings, compositions, and artists of the eligibility year from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. In this edition of awards, British singer Adele won the most awards in 5 different categories. She also created history by becoming first artist to win the top three categories twice (for first time in 2012).

Winners

Album of the year: 25 – Adele
 Record of the year: Hello – Adele
 Song of the year: Hello – Adele
 Best rap album: Chance the Rapper – Coloring
 Book Best urban contemporary album: Beyonce – Lemonade
 Best country solo performance: My Church – Maren Morris
 Best rock song: Blackstar – David Bowie
 Best pop duo/group performance: Stressed Out – Twenty One Pilots
 Best new artist: Chance the Rapper

Best pop vocal album: Adele – 25
 Best pop solo performance: Hello – Adele
 Best R&B performance: Solange – Cranes In the Sky.
 Best R&B song: Maxwell – Lake By the Ocean
 Best rap performance: Chance The Rapper featuring Lil Wayne & 2 Chainz – No Problem.
 Best rap/sung performance: Drake – Hotline Bling.
 Best R&B album: Lalah Hathaway – Lalah Hathaway Live
 Best rap song: Drake – Hotline Bling
 Best metal performance: Megadeth – Dystopia
 Best rock performance: David Bowie – Blackstar
 Best dance recording: The Chainsmokers – Don't Let Me Down
 This year Indian-American tabla player Sandeep Das won Grammy Awards won Best World Music Album with Yo-Yo Ma.

Usain Bolt wins Laures 'Sportsman of the Year Award'

World's "greatest" sprinter Usain Bolt pipped the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and LeBron James to win the 'Sportsman of the Year' trophy for a record-equalling fourth time, while gymnast Simone Biles clinched the top honour in the women's category at the Laures World Awards at a glittering ceremony. Bolt received his award from legendary Michael Johnson, They are the little and large of sport – while Bolt stands 1.95 metres, Biles measures just 1.45 metres - but they were both giants at the Rio Olympics, and enjoyed an ecstatic welcome as they received their statuettes here, the birthplace of the first ever Laureus awards 17 years ago. Bolt, who won this award in 2009, '10 and '13, walked away with the 'Oscar of Sports' for the fourth time, thereby joining tennis legends Roger Federer and Serena Williams, and surfer Kelly Slater as four-time Laureus award winner.

PERSON-IN-NEWS

Supreme Court convicted Sasikala in disproportionate assets case

The Supreme Court set aside AIADMK general secretary V.K. Sasikala's acquittal by the Karnataka High Court in the Jayalalithaa disproportionate assets case and "restored in full" the trial court conviction of September 2014. A Bench of Justices P.C. Ghose and Amitava Roy also set aside the acquittal of her two co-accused J. Ilavarasi and V.N. Sudhakaran and restored their conviction in the case. The SC said the appeals filed by Karnataka government and others, including DMK leader K. Anbazhagan, against the former Chief Minister has abated after her death on December 5, 2016.

The Supreme Court ordered Sasikala, Ilavarasi and Sudhakaran to surrender forthwith before the trial court concerned. Even after Sasikala comes out after serving her four-year sentence, she would be disqualified to contest elections for the next six years as per the Supreme Court judgment in *Lily Thomas versus Union of India* of July 2013. The voluminous main judgment authored by Justice Ghose held that the trial court conviction of the three accused — A2 to A4 — on September 27, 2014 has been restored in full along with the consequent directions, including payment of fine and attachment of properties. The trial court had sentenced Sasikala, Ilavarasi and Sudhakaran under Section 109 IPC read with Section 13 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act — abetment of criminal misconduct of a public servant — to simple imprisonment for a period of four years each and pay a fine of Rs. 10 crore each.

Edappadi K Palaniswamy sworn-in as Chief Minister of Tamil nadu

Edappadi K Palaniswamy was sworn in as the 13th Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. He was administered oath of office and secrecy in a simple ceremony held at the Durbar Hall of Raj Bhavan in Chennai, state capital. Along with Palaniswamy, 30 other ministers also took oath, with the total strength of the cabinet at 31. Now Palaniswamy will seek vote of confidence on the floor of the state Assembly.

He is a senior leader of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). At present, he incumbent Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Edapadi constituency in the Salem district in Tamil Nadu. Previously, he had served as Minister for Highways & Minor Ports in then Jayalalithaa and O. Panneerselvam-led Government of Tamil Nadu. He was elected as the leader of AIADMK Legislature Party after incumbent V. K. Sasikala was convicted by the Supreme Court in the 20-year old disproportionate assets case. Palaniswami has won the assembly election to the state assembly four times, in 1989, 1991, 2011 and 2016 from the Edapadi constituency.

Senior IAS Officer Ajay Tyagi appointed as SEBI Chairman

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has appointed senior bureaucrat Ajay Tyagi (58) as the new chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). Mr. Tyagi will have tenure of 5 years or till the age of 65 years or until further orders. He will succeed UK Sinha whose term ends on March 1, 2017.

Ajay Tyagi's name was recommended by the search-cum-selection panel headed by the cabinet secretary along with some other candidates. Prior to this appointment, he was Additional secretary (investment) in the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, handling the capital market division. He had served as the chairman of the finance ministry-appointed panel which monitored the merger of the Forward Markets Commission (FMC) with the SEBI. He had represented India at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an intergovernmental body set up to combat money laundering, terror financing and other related threats. Currently he is also representing India at the Financial Stability Board (FSB), an international body to monitor global financial systems. He also had led the initiatives on corporate bonds markets.