

## CURRENT AFFAIRS SNIPPETS : MARCH 2017

### STATE

#### **Odisha becomes first state to bring banking to remote rural areas.**

Odisha became the first state in the country to carry financial inclusion and extend banking services to unbanked areas through Self Help Groups (SHGs). The state government signed an agreement with State Bank of India in this regard.

This is a historic agreement to leverage the reach and resources of Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM) under which SHGs operate, to provide banking facilities to people in unbanked areas. Odisha is a pioneer state in carrying forward financial inclusion through close cooperation between SHGs and banks. In the first phase SHGs would be engaged as BCs in around 1,000 remote Gram Panchayats having no banking facilities, Singh said adding, gradually it would be extended to 4,000 non-banked panchayats. The process would be later on extended across the state as a supplement to banking service. Chief Manager, SBI, Prasanna Kumar Behera said through this arrangement, people would get services like opening of bank accounts, cash deposits and withdrawals, Aadhaar-enabled payment, use of Rupay Cards and other banking facilities.

The system would be of great help to people in rural areas under social security schemes like Pradhan Mantri Bima Surakshya Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana etc and would also be helpful in promotion of digital banking.

#### **Assam launched SaCReD Project to protect environment of Majuli Island**

The project titled 'Sustainable Action for Climate Resilient Development in Majuli' (SACReD, Majuli) has been initiated by Assam's department of Environment and Forest and was launched by Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Biodiversity and Climate) A K Johari at Majuli.

The project, SACReD, Majuli has been initiated to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Majuli Deputy Commissioner Pallav Gopal Jha said. The project was launched on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2017 to mark the International Day of Forests. Assam government has initiated a project to make river island Majuli the country's first ever Carbon Neutral district by 2020. Mitigation through forestry activities and biodiversity conservation will be the starting points for the carbon neutral agenda followed by other interventions over the next three years. The project will be designed and implemented in partnership with other departments of the district for which a district level committee under the chairmanship of Deputy

Commissioner has been constituted.

#### **NTPC installs India's largest Floating Solar PV Plant in Kerala**

State-run NTPC (National Thermal Power Corporation Limited) has installed India's largest floating solar photovoltaic (PV) plant at Rajiv Gandhi Combined Cycle Power Plant (RGCCPP) at Kayamkulam in Kerala. The 100 kWp (kilowatt peak) floating solar PV plant has been indigenously developed as a part of Union Government flagship 'Make In India' initiative.

It has been indigenously developed by NETRA (NTPC Energy Technology Research Alliance), R&D arm of NTPC, in collaboration with Central Institute of Plastic Engineering & Technology (CIPET), Chennai. The system was installed by Chennai based Swelect Energy Systems Ltd with support from NETRA and NTPC Kayamkulam station in a short span of 22 days. Floating Solar PV system has various benefits like conserving water through reduction of evaporation, increased power generation due to cooling effect on the panels, reduced installation time etc. NTPC limited is a Central Public Sector Undertaking (CPSU), operational under the Ministry of Power. It is India's largest power generator and accounts for 25% of total electricity generated in the country.

#### **Andhra Pradesh approves renaming of Tirupati and Vijayawada airports**

The Andhra Pradesh legislature passed resolutions urging the Union Civil Aviation Ministry to rename Tirupati and Vijayawada airports, after Lord Venkateswara and legendary Telugu actor N T Rama Rao, respectively.

The resolutions to rename both the existing airports were moved, on behalf of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, first in the Legislative Assembly and later in the Legislative Council, and were approved unanimously. In a resolution, the Andhra Pradesh government requested the Aviation Ministry to change the names of the Tirupati airport as Sri Venkateswara Airport, Tirupati, after the famous deity. In another resolution, it wanted Vijayawada airport at Gannavaram renamed as Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao Airport, Amaravati, after the legendary Telugu film star and former Chief Minister. Since the Vijayawada airport is located in NTR's home district Krishna, the government wanted it named after him.

#### **Uttarakhand HC accords human status to Ganga, Yamuna**

In a landmark judgement, the Uttarakhand High Court today accorded the status of "living human entities"

to the Ganga and Yamuna, two of India's most sacred rivers. Exercising extraordinary jurisdiction vested in the court, a division bench of Justices Rajeev Sharma and Alok Singh of the High Court said, "Holy rivers Ganga and Yamuna have been declared to be treated as living human entities." Agreeing with advocate MC Pant, the court cited the example of river Whanganui in New Zealand which has been given such status. Giving the "legal status" of living humans to the holy rivers, the court ordered that the Director, Namami Gange project for cleaning and rejuvenating the river, the Chief Secretary and the Advocate General of Uttarakhand will act as the "legal parents" of the holy rivers and work as a the human face to protect, conserve and preserve them and their tributaries. These officers will be bound to "uphold the status" of the two rivers and also promote their "health and well being".

**Yogi Adityanath sworn-in as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh** Five-time Parliamentarian and BJP's firebrand leader Yogi Adityanath was sworn in as the 21st Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Keshav Prasad Maurya and Dinesh Sharma were sworn in as Deputy Chief Ministers. They were administered the oath to the office and secrecy by Governor Ram Naik at oath taking ceremony held in Kanshiram Smriti Upvan in Lucknow. Besides them 47-member council of ministers consisting of 22 cabinet ministers, 9 ministers of state (MoS) with independent charge and 13 ministers of states (MoS) also took oath. The cabinet has 5 female ministers and 1 Muslim Minister, Mohsin Raza. He was elected as a MP of Lok Sabha from the Gorakhpur Constituency, Uttar Pradesh for five consecutive terms (1998, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014). He was the youngest member of the 12th Lok Sabha at 26. He is also the founder of the Hindu Yuva Vahini.

**Trivendra Singh Rawat sworn-in as Chief Minister of Uttarakhand**

Former RSS pracharak and Uttarakhand BJP chief Trivendra Singh Rawat was sworn in as ninth Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. He was administered oath to office and secrecy by Governor Krishan Kant Paul at oath taking ceremony held in Parade ground of Dehradun.

He had joined the right-wing organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), ideological parent of BJP in 1979. He became its pracharak for the Dehradun region in 1985 and subsequently joined the BJP. He was elected from Doiwala in the State's first legislative assembly elections in 2002 and later in 2007 and 2017. He had served as the State's Minister of Agriculture from 2007 to 2012.

**Captain Amarinder Singh sworn-in as Chief Minister of Punjab**

Punjab Congress chief Capt. Amarinder Singh was sworn in as the 26th Chief Minister of Punjab in the

presence of Congress leaders, including former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi, at the swearing-in ceremony held at the Punjab Raj Bhawan in Chandigarh.

Capt. Amarinder was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor V.P. Singh Badnore. The Congress MLAs—Brahm Mohindra, Navjot Sidhu, Manpreet Badal, Sadhu Singh Dharamsot, Tript Rajinder Bajwa, Rana Gurjeet Singh and Charanjit Singh Channi took oath as cabinet ministers and two women legislators—Aruna Chaudhary and Razia Sultana took oath as minister of State.

**Nongthombam Biren Singh sworn-in as Chief Minister of Manipur**

Ending 15 years of Congress rule in Manipur, BJP leader Nongthombam Biren Singh was sworn in as the state's chief minister in Imphal. Y Joykumar Singh of the National People's Party was sworn in as the deputy chief minister at the Raj Bhawan in Imphal.

This is the first time the BJP has come to power in the north-eastern state. Manipur threw up a hung verdict in the state assembly election. While Congress emerged as the single largest party with 28 seats, the BJP came in at second place with 21 seats.

**Manohar Parrikar sworn-in as Chief Minister of Goa**

Manohar Parrikar was sworn in as Chief Minister of Goa along with nine others after the Supreme Court paved the way for the BJP to form the government in the state and rejected a plea by the Congress for a chance to be given to the largest party.

The Congress emerged as the largest party in the 40-member Goa assembly with 17 seats, while the BJP won 13. The remaining seats went to the other parties and independents. Goa Governor Mridula Sinha invited a BJP-led post-poll alliance led by Manohar Parrikar to form the government, prompting the Congress to move the Supreme Court.

**NATIONAL**

**Lok Sabha passes four GST Bills**

Lok Sabha has passed four Bills relating to the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). It paves way for implementing a new, consolidated indirect tax regime from the proposed date of July 1, 2017. The four bills passed were Central GST Bill, Integrated GST Bill, GST Compensation Bill, and the Union Territory GST Bill, 2017. These Bills were passed as Money Bills, thus eliminates the role of Rajya Sabha. The tax rates under GST regime will be based on the recommendation GST Council. Council has two-thirds voting by States and one-third by Centre. The GST laws passed by Parliament will not apply to Jammu and Kashmir, as it will have to legislate its own law and integrate with the GST regime. There will be no

single rate under GST as it will be not possible and it will be highly regressive. So The GST Council has recommended a four-tier tax structure 5, 12, 18 and 28%. On top of the highest slab (28%), a cess will be imposed on luxury and demerit goods to compensate the states for revenue loss for five years. Essential food articles will not be taxed and those will continue to be zero rated under the GST. All other commodities will be fitted into the nearest tax bracket.

#### **Government launches e-challan and m-parivahan apps for enforcement of traffic rules**

The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has launched two mobile applications —e-challan and m-parivahan to provide a comprehensive digital solution for enforcement of traffic rules. These applications will provide access to various services and information, and enable citizens to report any traffic violation or road accident.

m-parivahan is a citizen-centric app that will facilitate access to various transport-related services. It will bring convenience to citizen and transparency in the system. It is an empowering app for the citizen which provides access to various services, information and utilities related to the transport sector. eChallan is an integrated enforcement solution to manage traffic violations through mobile app and back-end web application, for use by the Traffic Police and Transport Enforcement Wing. It will help in improving transparency by connecting all stakeholders through a common system and ensuring data integrity. It will also help in easing operations and efficient monitoring through digitization of records and will enhance the visibility of offenders, leading to better traffic management. Both apps also have additional common functionalities like road accident and traffic violation reporting by citizen, concept of virtual and enforceable DL/RC etc. They will also facilitate “good Samaritans” through technology.

#### **India becomes net exporter of power for the first time**

As per Central Electricity Authority, the Designated Authority of Government of India for Cross Border Trade of Electricity, 1st time India has turned around from a net importer of electricity to Net Exporter of electricity. During the current year 2016-17 (April to February 2017), India has exported around 5,798 Million Units to Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar which is 213 Million units more than the import of around 5,585 Million units from Bhutan. Export to Nepal and Bangladesh increased 2.5 and 2.8 times respectively in last three years.

Ever since the cross border trade of electricity started in mid-Eighties, India has been importing power from Bhutan and marginally exporting to Nepal in radial mode at 33 kV and 132 kV from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. On an average Bhutan has been supplying around 5,000- 5500 Million units to India. India had also been

exporting around 190 MW power to Nepal over 12 cross border interconnections at 11kV, 33kV and 132 kV level. The export of power to Nepal further increased by around 145 MW with commissioning of Muzaffarpur (India)- Dhalkhebar(Nepal) 400kV line (being operated at 132 kV) in 2016.

#### **Parliament passes Mental Healthcare Bill 2016**

The Mental Healthcare Bill, 2016 was passed by Rajya Sabha last week, and is expected to be discussed in Lok Sabha during next session. The Bill repeals the existing Mental Health Act, 1987, which is vastly different in letter and spirit. The Act of 1987 had been widely criticised for proving to be inadequate to protect the rights of mentally ill persons.

The most important feature of this Bill is that a person attempting suicide shall be presumed, though rebuttable, to be suffering from severe stress (the words ‘mental illness’ in the old Bill substituted with ‘severe stress’) and hence, exempt from trial and punishment. The Bill also seeks to impose on the government a duty to rehabilitate such person to ensure that there is no recurrence of attempt to suicide. It seeks to fulfill India’s international obligation pursuant to the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. The Bill creates a rights-based framework for mentally ill persons. This is a remarkable difference from the Act of 1987. Whereas the Act of 1987 provided only general protections against indignant or cruel treatment, Chapter V of the Bill operates as a charter of rights for persons with mental illness consolidating and safeguarding the basic human rights of these individuals.

#### **Union government to launch Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana**

Union Government is going to launch Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) scheme for providing physical aids and assisted-living devices for senior citizens belonging to BPL category. It is the first-of-its-kind Central Sector Scheme (CCS) in India, to be fully funded by the Central Government. It is expected to benefit 5,20,000 Senior Citizens.

Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment said that the Physical Aids and Assisted-living Devices for Senior citizens will be distributed in Camp mode and the Scheme will be implemented through the sole implementing agency, ‘Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (ALIMCO)’, (a PSU under M/o SJ&E), which will undertake one year free maintenance of the aids & assisted living devices. The devices will help the Senior Citizens to overcome their age related physical impairment and to lead a dignified and productive life with minimal dependence on care givers or other members of the family. As per the Census figures of 2011, the population of senior citizens in India is 10.38 crore. More than 70% of the population of senior

citizens live in rural areas of the country. A sizeable percentage (5.2%) of the senior citizens suffers from some sort of disabilities related to old age. Projections indicate that the number of elderly population will increase to around 173 million by 2026.

#### **Cabinet approves setting up of National Commission for Socially and Educationally backward classes**

The Union Cabinet approved setting up of National Commission for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (NSEBC) as a constitutional body. In this regard, constitutional amendment bill for amending Constitution mainly by insertion of Article 338B will be soon introduced in the Parliament.

Composition of the new NSEBC will include Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and three other Members. Insertion of provision after Article 341 and 342 by inserting Article 342 A to provide for Parliament's approval for every inclusion into and exclusion from the Central List of Other Backward Class (OBCs). Insertion of a new Clause (26C) under Article 366 of the Constitution to define Socially and Educationally Backward Classes; Repealing of National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 and Rules framed under it. Dissolution of the Commission constituted under the Act of 1993. NCBC was established in pursuance to the Supreme Court judgement in the Indra Sawhney case (Mandal case) as per the NCBC Act, 1993.

#### **India ranks 131 in 2016 Human Development Index**

India was ranked 131 in the 2016 Human Development Index (HDI) among the 188 countries. India scored 0.624 and was placed in medium human development category. The index was unveiled recently as part of the Human Development Report (HDR) 2016 titled Human Development for Everyone published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The top three countries are Norway (0.949 score), Australia (0.939) and Switzerland (0.939). India ranks lowest among BRICS nations. Russia (49), Brazil (79), China (90), South Africa (119) and India (131). Among SAARC countries, Sri Lanka (73) and Maldives (105) were placed in "high human development" category, followed by India (131), Bhutan (132), Bangladesh (139), Nepal (144), Pakistan (147) and Afghanistan (169). In 2015 HDI, India ranked 130 with score of 0.609 and was placed in the medium human development category. The HDI is a measure for assessing countries progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life (life expectancy), access to knowledge and access to a decent standard of living. Countries are ranked based on scale ranging between 0 (low) to 1 (high).

#### **ISRO commissions world's third largest hypersonic wind tunnel**

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) created

history by commissioning the world's third-largest hypersonic wind tunnel at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. In this regard, ISRO chairman A S Kiran Kumar commissioned two facilities – a 1-m Hypersonic Wind Tunnel and a 1-m Shock Tunnel. These facilities are the third largest in terms of size and simulation capability in the world next only to the ones in the United States (US) and Russia.

These wind tunnels will be used to study the effects of air flowing past a solid object and in ISRO's case, space vehicles. These new facilities will help aerodynamic characterisation of advanced space transportation systems in a hypersonic environment. Significance: Such facilities will provide adequate data for design and development of current and future space transportation systems in the country. Commissioning of these facilities also symbolises the country's capability in establishing such world-class facilities wherein technology from outside is restricted or not available.

#### **India ranks 122 in 2017 World Happiness Report**

India ranked at 122 out of 155 countries in the World Happiness Report 2017 published by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network on the eve of International Day of Happiness (20 March). The rankings are based factors such as inequality, life expectancy, GDP per capita, public trust (i.e. a lack of corruption in government and business), and social support. Together they are used to generate a happiness score of country on a scale from 1 to 10. This year it is fifth such report since the first was published in 2012

According to the report, the ten happiest countries are: Norway (1), Denmark (2), Iceland (3), Switzerland (4), Finland (5), Netherlands (6), Canada (7), New Zealand (8), Australia (9) and Sweden (10). The entire top ten were wealthier developed nations. But the report mentioned that money is not the only ingredient in the recipe for happiness. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and those hit by conflict were ranked lower. India was placed behind the majority of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations, apart from war-ravaged Afghanistan (141). In the previous edition of the report, India ranked 118.

#### **INTERNATIONAL**

#### **US Senate approves Montenegro as NATO's 29<sup>th</sup> member**

US Senate has voted overwhelmingly to approve Montenegro as 29<sup>th</sup> member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) by 97-2 vote. So far, 25 other NATO members have ratified Montenegro's accession, a country of 620,000 people seen as a geostrategic ally. The Spain and Netherlands have yet to do so.

The NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance based on the North Atlantic Treaty signed in April 1949. It consists of 28 independent member countries across North America and Europe. It is based on a system of collective defence whereby its member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party. NATO's headquarters are located in Brussels, Belgium. Its headquarters of Allied Command Operations is near Mons.

#### **Earth Hour observed across the World**

The eleventh edition of the Earth Hour was observed across the world on 25 March 2017 to take a global call on climate change. To mark this day, cities worldwide turned their lights off from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm local time. This year millions of people from some 170 countries and territories had taken part in the annual event in a bid to highlight global warming caused by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas to drive cars and power plants.

Environmental activists this year also have focused to raise awareness on another problem that gets far less attention: Light Pollution. Earth Hour is an annual international event organised by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The first Earth Hour was held on March 31, 2007 in Sydney, Australia. Its goal is to raise awareness for sustainable energy use and create a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle. Since its inception, it has become annual global environmental event (movement). Now it has grown to engage more than 7,000 cities and towns across 172 countries worldwide.

#### **Donald Trump signs revised travel ban, excludes Iraq**

President Donald Trump removed Iraq from a list of countries targeted in a US travel ban when he signed a new executive order on Monday after his controversial first attempt was blocked in the courts. The new executive order would keep a 90-day ban on travel to the United States by citizens of six Muslim-majority nations - Iran, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Iraq was taken off the list in the original order, issued on January 27, because the Iraqi government had imposed new vetting procedures, such as heightened visa screening and data sharing, and because of its work with the United States in countering Islamic State militants. Trump's original order barred travelers from the seven nations from entering for 90 days and all refugees for 120 days. Refugees from Syria were to be banned indefinitely but under the new order they are not given separate treatment. Refugees who are "in transit" and already have been approved would be able to travel to the United States. The order also ensures that tens of thousands of legal permanent residents in the United States - or green card holders - from the listed countries would not be affected by the travel ban.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Forbes World's Billionaire's List 2017 released**

Forbes Magazine released its yearly list of the richest people in the world. There are more billionaires than ever before - a record 2,043 billionaires on Earth. Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, once again, is number one, his fourth straight year at the top. The magazine reports his wealth to be \$86 billion. The estimate is up \$11 billion from last year. Businessman Warren Buffett, re-gained his number two position on the list this year with \$75.6 billion. Another American, Jeff Bezos is at third place with the biggest jump in wealth. The creator of the online market Amazon is \$27.5 billion richer this year. The **entrepreneur** has \$72.8 billion, according to Forbes.

Spain's Amancio Ortega, the founder of the women's clothing **retailer** Zara, was in second place last year. His fortune rose by \$4.3 billion in a year. Ortega is listed in fourth place with \$71.3 billion. The rest of the top ten is filled with familiar names. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, at the age of 32, is in fifth place. The others are Carlos Slim Helu from Mexico, Larry Ellison of the technology company Oracle, American brother businessmen Charles and David Koch, and New York City's former mayor Michael Bloomberg. There are 227 women on the list this year. They own a combined \$853 billion. The first woman on the list is Frenchwoman Liliane Bettencourt, who owns a third of L'Oréal **cosmetics**. Bettencourt is worth about \$40.7 billion. American Alice Walton of Wal-Mart is the only other woman in the top twenty. 101 Indians, including 13 newcomers made it to the list. With a net worth of USD 23.2 billion, Mukesh Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Industries Ltd is highest-ranked Indian in the list at number 33. He is followed by Lakshmi Mittal at no. 56, Azim Premji at 72 and Dilip Sanhvi at 84.

### **Amazon acquires Souq.com, the Middle East's biggest online retailer**

Amazon.com buys Dubai-based online retailer Souq.com, betting that e-commerce in the Middle East is poised to take off. The U.S. e-commerce giant beat out Emaar Malls PJSC, which runs the world's biggest shopping center and had bid \$800 million for Souq.com. Amazon and Souq.com didn't disclose deal terms and declined to comment.

Amazon has been stepping up its overseas expansion. Having largely ceded China to Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., the Seattle company is waging a war of attrition with Flipkart Online Services Pvt in India, where it has pledged to spend \$5 billion in the next few years. The Middle East has lagged behind the rest of the world in e-commerce, but online shopping is picking up in such countries as Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, where most people own mobile phones. Souq.com founded in 2005 as part of Arab online

services provider Maktoob, it was spun out following Yahoo! Inc.'s \$164 million acquisition of Maktoob in 2009. It was valued at \$1 billion in its last funding round, people with knowledge of the matter said at the time. The retailer secured \$275 million in February 2016 from investors including Standard Chartered Private Equity, International Finance Corp. and Baillie Gifford. Souq.com's investors also include hedge-fund firm Tiger Global Management LLC and South African media company Naspers Ltd.

The deal is one of Amazon's largest acquisitions in recent years. In 2014 it bought game streaming site Twitch for \$970 million.

**Truecaller ties up with Airtel, Google and ICICI Bank**  
Truecaller introduced Truecaller 8 with a redesign of the Android app and new features. The company has tied-up with Airtel, Google and ICICI Bank to introduce new features to the app.

The app will allow users to identify SMS from unknown numbers among other feature additions. The app makers have partnered with Airtel to launch 'Airtel Truecaller ID' extending caller ID feature to Airtel's non-data users using feature phones which will be delivered to users via Flash SMS before the call hits the users mobile. The service is subscription based. In a strategic agreement with Google, Truecaller will be integrating within the app which will be available in the coming months for Android and iOS as a permission-based service, where users will be able to opt-in and out at any time. Users can now send pre-defined messages to any Truecaller user to let them know if they're in distress. Another feature called 'Truecaller Pay' in collaboration with ICICI Bank, will allow users to send or receive money over their mobile phone.

#### **IDFC Bank launches AADHAR Payment App**

IDFC Bank launched a digital payment platform 'Aadhaar Pay' that will allow even those without mobile phones to do cashless transactions and is expecting the initiative to win 1 crore customers every year. The newest bank in the private sector formally launched the unique identification number-based Aadhaar Pay service, having done a pilot in 16 states three months before.

It is the first bank to launch this merchant solution in the country. The bank will levy no MDR (merchant discount rate) fee on merchants who come on board the Aadhaar Pay application. These merchants, mostly located in remote areas, will simply need a smartphone to download the app and an Aadhaar dongle to read biometrics of a customer for a transaction. IDFC Bank said it will also bear the price of Aadhaar dongles, costing Rs 2,500 apiece for merchants, as recovery can happen by acquiring more savings account customers. The bank has also started offering public distribution system (PDS) to beneficiaries through

Aadhaar Pay. IDFC Bank's Aadhaar Pay app is developed in association with the Ministry of Information Technology & Electronics, UIDAI and the National Payments Corporation of India.

#### **Vodafone and Idea merge to become India's largest telecom company.**

Kumar Mangalam Birla-led telecommunications major Idea Cellular has agreed to merge with the Vodafone India, Indian unit of the UK headquartered Vodafone Plc. The blockbuster merger will create world's second largest (after China Mobile) and India's largest telecom company by overtaking Bharti Airtel Ltd. The merged entity will have almost 400 million customers with 35% customer and 41% revenue market share. It will have revenue of Rs. 81,600 crore and an operating profit of Rs.24,400 crore. Together, Vodafone India and Idea Cellular have debt of Rs. 1.08 trillion. The merger is expected to be completed in 2018.

Vodafone will own 45.1% in the combined entity, while Kumar Mangalam Birla and other promoters of Idea Group will own 26% and the rest will be owned by the public. The merger will be completed by 2018, subject to approvals from shareholders, creditors, stock exchanges, SEBI, telecom department and Competition Commission of India (CCI).

#### **AWARDS**

#### **French mathematician Yves Meyer wins 2017 Abel Prize**

French mathematician Yves Meyer has won the prestigious 2017 Abel Prize for his pivotal role in the development of the mathematical theory of wavelets (small waves or ripples).

His theory is used for applications ranging from image compression to the detection of gravitational waves from the merging of black holes. It also allowed scientists to create unique wavelet transforms suited to specific signals. Wavelets are widely used in signal processing, including in compressing certain formats of JPEG images. The Abel Prize is awarded annually by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters to one or more outstanding mathematicians. It is named after Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel. The award was established by the Government of Norway in 2001. It carries monetary award of 6 million Norwegian kroner (NOK) (around 600,000 Euros). Indian American mathematician R. Srinivasa Varadhan was bestowed with this award in 2007 for his fundamental contributions to probability theory and for creating a unified theory of large deviation.

#### **Konkani writer Mahabaleshwar Sail selected for Saraswati Samman 2016**

Eminent Konkani writer Mahabaleshwar Sail (74) was selected for the prestigious Saraswati Samman 2016 for his novel Hawthorn. His novel was shortlisted out

of 22 books written in as many languages. He will receive cash prize of Rs 15 lakh and a citation. He is bilingual writer based in Goa. He has written four Marathi dramas and seven Konkani novels. He has also written five short stories and a novel in Marathi. He is best known for his work, 'Paltadcho Munis', which inspired a film by the same name. Most of his short stories and novels are translated into English and Hindi, 'Hawtha', his work of fiction presenting the cultural map of the traditional potter community of Goa was published in 2009. Saraswati Samman is an annual award bestowed upon Indian citizen for his outstanding literary work written in any Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of Constitution and published during last 10 years. Eminent Hindi author Harivansh Rai Bachchan was the first recipient of this award for his autobiography in four volumes.

#### **BCCI Annual awards 2017**

The BCCI Awards are a set of annual cricket awards given by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). These awards in various categories recognise and honour the best Indian international and domestic cricketers of the past year. The awards were first given in 2006-07.

##### **Winners**

CK. Nayudu Lifetime achievement award: Padmakar Shivalkar, Rajinder Goel.

BCCI Lifetime achievement award: Shantha Rangaswamy.

BCCI special award: Late Ramakant Desai, VV Kumar. Polly Umrigar Award: Virat Kohli. For third time, he was conferred with this award after 2011-12 and 2014-15 season.

Lala Amarnath Award for the best all-rounder in the Ranji Trophy: Jalaj Saxena (Madhya Pradesh).

Lala Amarnath Award for the best all-rounder in domestic limited-overs competitions: Axar Patel of (Gujarat).

Madavrao Scindin Award Highest scorer in the Ranji Trophy: Shreyas Iyer (Mumbai).

Madavrao Scindin Award Highest wicket-taker in the Ranji Trophy: Shahbaz Nadeem (Jharkhand).

A. Chidambaram Trophy Highest scorer in (U-23): Jay. G. Bosta (Mumbai).

A. Chidambaram Trophy Highest wicket-taker in (U-23): Satyajeet Bachhav (Maharashtra).

NKP Salve Award Highest scorer in (U-19): Arman Jaffer (Mumbai).

NKP Salve Award Highest wicket-taker in (U-19): Ninad Rathva (Baroda).

Raj Singh Dungarpur Award Highest scorer in (U-16): Abhishek Sharma (Punjab).

Raj Singh Dungarpur Award Highest wicket-taker in (U-16): Abhishek Sharma (Punjab).

Jagmohan Dalmiyra Award (Best Woman cricketer (Sr.): Mithali Raj (Railways).

Jagmohan Dalmiyra Award (Best Woman cricketer (Jr.): Deepthi Sharma (Uttar Pradesh).

Best Umpire in Domestic cricket: Nitin Menon.

Best performance in BCCI Domestic tournaments: Mumbai Cricket Association.

#### **Canadian teacher, Maggie MacDonnell wins Global Teacher Prize 2017**

A Canadian who teaches at a school in a fly-in-only village in the Arctic has won a \$1m (£800,000) Global Teacher Prize at a ceremony in Dubai. Maggie MacDonnell, praised for "changing the lives of her students and transforming her community", was among 10 finalists chosen from 20,000 nominations and applications from 179 countries.

She has taught for the past six years in the Inuit village of Salluit, Québec, in the Canadian Arctic, which has a high rate of suicide, according to her biography provided by the award organisers. MacDonnell has created a life-skills programme specifically for girls in a region where teenage pregnancies are common, alongside high levels of sexual abuse, according to her biography. Many teachers leave their posts midway through the academic year due to stress and the harsh conditions endured by the indigenous community. The Nobel-style award was set up three years ago by the Dubai-based Varkey Foundation. The prize is paid in instalments and requires the winner to remain a teacher for at least five years. Last year a Palestinian teacher, Hanan al-Hroub, won the prestigious prize for her innovative approach of using play to counter violent behaviour among her students in the West Bank.

#### **Aishwarya Rai Bachchan wins Best Actress Award for Sarbjit at IFFAA**

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan who played the character of Sarbjit Singh's sister Dalbir Kaur, has won the Best Actress award at the International Film Festival and Awards of Australia (IFFAA). Aishwarya was seen in a de-glam look in the film, which left the audience in shock.

Sarbjit The Film, directed by Omung Kumar, was the biopic on Sarbjit Singh, an Indian farmer who was convicted of terrorism and spying in Pakistan and was sentenced to death. He was attacked by inmates at a prison in Lahore in April 2013 and died a few days later. The film showcased his journey inside the jail, and his sister's unending fight to free him. The film was critically acclaimed but also received mixed reviews from the audience. However, Aishwarya as Dalbir and Randeep Hooda as Sarbjit won hearts of the audience across the nation. Sarbjit, which marked Jacky Bhagnani's debut as a producer, was also shortlisted as one of the 336 feature films, which were eligible for Best Picture in 2016 at the 89th Academy Awards. However, it could not make it to the final lists of the awards.

### **Singer Rihanna conferred with 2017 Humanitarian of the Year Award by Harvard University**

Rihanna has been named Harvard University's 2017 Humanitarian of the Year. While the Grammy Award-winning star is best known for packing out stadiums and performing to thousands of fans, she is now being honoured for her philanthropic work.

The 29-year-old will receive the Peter J. Gomes Humanitarian Award during a ceremony at the Cambridge, Massachusetts campus in recognition of her personal initiative to develop a breast cancer treatment centre in her homeland of Barbados. The Work singer is an ambassador for charities Global Citizen and the Global Partnership for Education and recently traveled to Africa on behalf of her Clara Lionel Foundation. Last month Rihanna dressed down for a visit to a Malawi school where she met with the students during her charity trip to Lilongwe. In May last year, according to Mail Online, she launched the Clara Lionel Foundation's Global Scholarship Programme, dedicated to giving people in nations such as Cuba, Haiti and her home country, Barbados, the chance to study at universities in the United States. And in December 2016 she joined forces with British royalty to convey a powerful message about HIV. In honour of World Aids Day, Rihanna and Prince Harry took an HIV test in her native Barbados to raise awareness and eradicate the stigma surrounding the disease.

### **PERSON-IN-NEWS**

**Neil Gaiman appointed UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador**  
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, announced the appointment of internationally acclaimed author Neil Gaiman as a global Goodwill Ambassador.

The announcement comes after three years of close cooperation between Gaiman and UNHCR to raise awareness about the plight of forcibly displaced people and to generate much needed funds. Gaiman had been working closely with UNHCR since 2013. He has championed UNHCR's work through media interviews and via his social media channels. As well as travelling to Jordan to meet Syrian refugees, he has supported several fundraising initiatives and UNHCR campaigns and events, including #WithRefugees, the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness, World Refugee Day and the Nansen Refugee Award.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. UNHCR safeguards the rights and well-being of refugees and stateless people. In more than six decades, the agency has helped tens of millions of people restart their lives. UNHCR is on the front lines of the world's major humanitarian crises, including Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and countless other emergencies.

### **UN appoints David Beasley to head World Food Programme**

United Nations General Secretary Antonio Guterres has appointed David Beasley as head of the Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP). Beasley will replace Etharin Cousin, who has been the WFP executive director since 2012. He is former governor of US state of South Carolina.

The WFP is the food-assistance branch of the United Nations. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security. It was established in 1961 after the 1960 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Conference. Its headquarter is in Rome (Italy) and has more than 80 country offices around the world. It provides food assistance to an average of 80 million people in 75 countries each year. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and part of its Executive Committee.

### **Manhar Valji Bhai Zala assumes charge as new Chairperson of National Commission for Safai Karamcharis**

Former BJP legislator from Gujarat Manhar Valjibhai Zala has assumed charge as Chairperson of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK). Along with him, two other members Dilip Kallu Haathived from Maharashtra and Manju Diler from Uttar Pradesh also took charge as members of the NCSK.

The NCSK was established in 1994 to deal with the grievances of persons engaged in manual scavenging. It has a sanctioned strength of four members and a chairperson. It is statutory body established under National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993. It aims to promote and safeguard the interests and rights of Safai Karamcharis. Its mandate is to study, evaluate and monitor the implementation of various schemes for Safai Karamcharis as an autonomous organisation.