

CURRENT AFFAIRS SNIPPETS : JANUARY 2016
INSTRUCTOR NOTE*Time : 120 minutes*STATE**J&K Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed dead**

Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Mufti Mohammad Sayeed passed away of multiple organ failure.

Mr Sayeed, a two-time chief minister, started his second tenure on March 1st, 2015 in alliance with the BJP, after having led the State government between 2002-05 previously. He was the founder of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party (JKPDP) that he founded in 1999 to persuade "the Indian government into an unconditional dialogue with the Kashmiri people."

In a long career in politics, Mr Sayeed was a Congressman till 1987. He was Minister for Tourism in the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1986, after which he joined former Prime Minister V P Singh's National Front government as Home Minister. His short stint there (1989-90) was marred by the kidnapping by Kashmiri militants of his daughter Rubaiyya Sayeed.

Mr. Sayeed's other daughter Mehbooba Mufti is considered his political heir, and through his illness there has been talk of her succeeding as Chief Minister.

"Wattan Ko Jano" programme

'Wattan Ko Jano' is an initiative under which the children of militancy-hit victims and weaker sections of society in Jammu and Kashmir are identified by J&K State Rehabilitation Council as beneficiaries under the programme. The Ministry of Home Affairs in coordination with various agencies including State Government has been conducting Youth Exchange programme. The programme aims at exposing the youth of Jammu and Kashmir to the vibrant development and vitality of culture of people residing in other states.

Sikkim becomes India's first organic state

Sikkim has become India's first fully organic state by implementing organic practices on around 75,000 hectares of agricultural land.

He said around 75,000 hectares of agricultural land was gradually converted to certified organic

land by implementing organic practices and principles as per guidelines laid down in National Programme for Organic Production.

It was 12 years ago in 2003 when the Pawan Chamling-led government decided to make Sikkim an organic farming state through a declaration in the legislative assembly. Later the entry of chemical inputs for farmland was restricted and their sale banned. Farmers therefore had no option but to go organic.

Organic cultivation is free of chemical pesticides and chemical fertilisers as it tries to strike a harmonious balance with a complex series of ecosystems. In the long term, organic farming leads in subsistence of agriculture, bio-diversity conservation and environmental protection.

Pranab gives assent to Central rule in Arunachal Pradesh

President Pranab Mukherjee approved the Union Cabinet's recommendation for the imposition of President's rule on Arunachal Pradesh.

The assent was given right after he hosted the traditional 'At Home' or reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan for French President Francois Hollande as part of the Republic Day celebrations.

Sources at Rashtrapati Bhavan said Mr. Mukherjee signed on the dotted line after being satisfied that the law and order situation in the border State was sensitive to this uncertainty in government.

"The Governor [Jyoti Prasad Rajkhowa] has been sending multiple reports that even the Raj Bhavan was not safe and had been seized by Congress MLAs and there was no law and order in the State," Mr. Rijju said. The political turmoil in the state is set to deepen inside Parliament with the Congress determined to stall the ratification of President's Rule in the State.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said the imposition of President's rule was a "disaster" in the making. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal likened the situation to the Emergency. "President's rule in Arunachal. Advaniji was right in saying that there are Emergency-like conditions in the country," he said.

Arunachal Pradesh plunged into a political crisis in June last year after a section of Congress MLAs

(14 of them) was suspended by Speaker Nabam Rebia, along with two Ministers. The Congress retained its majority, but very soon Deputy Speaker T.N. Thongdok cleared an impeachment motion against the Speaker “owing to his personal relationship with Chief Minister Nabam Tuki”.

Work on Zojila Pass tunnel in J&K to begin soon

The government set in motion the construction of the much delayed Zojila Pass tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir to provide all-weather connectivity to Leh-Ladakh region. After several extensions and rebidding of the project, the highways ministry is all set to award the work to an infrastructure major to ensure an early start to building of the 14.1 km tunnel through tough terrain.

IRB Infrastructure will take up the work for building this tunnel. The project will bring huge relief to people living in Leh-Ladakh region, which remains cut off for months during winter. It will also push tourist flow in the region and bring economic prosperity.

Delhi scraps management quota in Nursery admissions

In a move that will benefit a large number of people struggling with the nursery admission of their children, the Delhi government has scrapped management quota and all other quotas except for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS).

Announcing the decision, the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal referred to management quota as the “biggest scandal” in education sector in the country. He said that the government would not be a mute spectator to it and the schools that failed to scrap the quota could be taken over by the education department.

Toilet in house made mandatory for contesting in Bihar panchayat polls

The Bihar legislative Assembly passed a legislation incorporating a provision making it mandatory for candidates contesting panchayat polls in Bihar to have toilets at their houses.

The provision has been incorporated in the Bihar Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2015 which was passed by the Assembly by a voice vote amid ruckus created by the opposition BJP members. The candidates desiring to contest panchayat polls from January 21, 2016, must have toilets at their households, he said.

NATIONAL

India on track to register entire population using Aadhaar: World Bank

India is on track to register its entire 1.25 billion

population using its Aadhaar digital ID, the World Bank said, which it said would help the government to promote the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in its welfare schemes.

“India is on track to register its entire population using its Aadhaar digital ID,” the Bank said in its new report *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends*, authored by Co-Directors, Deepak Mishra and Uwe Deichmann.

The report said that while the internet, mobile phones and other digital technologies are spreading rapidly throughout the developing world, the anticipated digital dividends of higher growth, more jobs, and better public services have fallen short of expectations, and 60 per cent of the world’s population remains excluded from the ever-expanding digital economy.

Kaushik Basu, World Bank Chief Economist said it is an amazing transformation that 40 per cent of the world’s population is connected by the internet.

The report noted that digital technologies can promote inclusion, efficiency, and innovation.

More than 40 per cent of adults in East Africa pay their utility bills using a mobile phone.

There are eight million entrepreneurs in China — one-third of them women — who use an e-commerce platform to sell goods nationally and export to 120 countries.

India has provided unique digital identification to nearly one billion people in five years, and increased access and reduced corruption in public services. And in public health services, simple SMS messages have proven effective in reminding people living with HIV to take their lifesaving drugs, the report said.

PM Narendra Modi unveils slew of incentives to boost startups

Declaring that true entrepreneurs were not money-chasers but those possessed by a sense of empathy to solve problems, Prime Minister Narendra Modi rolled out the red carpet for Indian startups, promising them tax breaks, simplified procedures and freedom from inspector raj.

Modi’s speech was the grand finale of the day-long Startup India event, the first of this kind and scale organised by the government targeted at India’s white-hot startup ecosystem. The day saw back-to-back sessions featuring some of the biggest names in the startup world, notably Uber founder Travis Kalanick, SoftBank’s Masayoshi Son and Nikesh Arora and founders of Indian unicorns such as Flipkart, Snapdeal, Ola, Paytm and ShopClues.

Startup activity has been on a roll in the last couple of years in India, attracting the attention of big name investors from Silicon Valley and propelling

valuations of several young companies in billions of dollars.

Most of India's startup successes have been around the world of technology or use technology as a key differentiator. Modi urged Indian entrepreneurs to think of solutions outside the world of IT and also tackle India's fundamental problems.

On its part, the government would do all it can to make life easy for startups, he said, as he unveiled its much-awaited Startup Action Plan that promises no tax on profits for the first three years, no capital gains tax on assets sold to fund a startup, a self-certification-based compliance system for new firms, no inspection for three years and a single-point interaction hub.

The prime minister also said the government would have a Rs 10,000 crore fund for startups, financed by annual contributions of Rs 2,500 crore for four years and another Rs 2,000-crore credit guarantee fund for the sector. Startups would get a role in government procurements, get a 80% cut in patent registration fees and the government would also have an exit policy for startups to get out of failed businesses, he said.

Largest Tricolour to be hoisted in Ranchi

Ahead of the Republic Day, India will get its largest Tricolour, 66 feet high and 99 feet wide, to be hoisted on a 293 feet tall pole in Ranchi.

To be hoisted by Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar on January 23, the flag will be taller than the Qutub Minar.

The event will coincide with the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

The flag has been created by 120 workers engaged in two shifts for the last 40 days and the cost of the project is estimated to be around Rs 1.25 crore, State government sources said.

Currently, the world's largest and tallest Tricolour of 96/64 feet in dimension was hoisted on a 250 feet high pole in Faridabad last year.

Lance Naik Mohan Nath Goswami posthumously awarded Ashok Chakra

Lance Naik Mohan Nath Goswami from the Army's elite Para Special Forces has been awarded the Ashok Chakra, the country's highest peacetime gallantry award, posthumously for his role in saving two colleagues during an encounter with militants in Kashmir last year.

Another of his colleague, Subedar Mahendra Singh was awarded Kirti Chakra for his valiant actions in the same operation.

These are among the 365 gallantry awards and other defence decorations approved by President Pranab Mukherjee on the eve of the 67th Republic Day Celebrations.

These include four Kirti Chakras, 11 Shaurya

Chakras, one Bar to Sena Medal, 48 Sena Medals, four Nao Sena Medals, two Vayu Sena Medals in addition to 298 Distinguished Service medals. Late night on September 2 last year, Lance Naik Goswami was engaged in a fierce encounter with terrorists hiding in the Haphruda forest in Kupwara, North Kashmir.

When two of his colleagues were wounded, he rushed to rescue them, braving the volley of fire despite getting grievously wounded himself.

In the same operation, Subedar Mehendra Singh moved with Lance Naik Goswami to evacuate his colleagues, drawing heavy fire in the process. He returned fire and killed one terrorist at close quarters which also bought them additional time, officials said. He was awarded the Kirti Chakra for his "exemplary leadership, selflessness and courage beyond compare".

The other Kirti Chakra was posthumously awarded to Sepoy Jagdish Chand from the Defence Security Corps for his display of raw courage in tackling terrorists during the attack on the Pathankot air base on January 2.

Of the eight Shaurya Chakra given to Army personnel, two were awarded posthumously.

Among the four Navy gallantry awards, three went to personnel at *INS Shikra*, the naval air station in Mumbai, for their efforts in the rescue of vessels in distress.

In the Air Force, the two Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry) went to Wing Commander Nirmal Kumar Bakshi and Wing Commander Rajiv Dobhal, both Mi-17 helicopter pilots, for their role in Operation Maitri to provide relief operations in adverse weather conditions in Nepal following the devastating earthquake last year.

Pathankot Terrorist attack on IAF (Important)

Gunshots and a blast were heard from the Indian Air Force (IAF) frontier base near Pathankot town morning leading to speculation that one more terrorist could still be holed up inside.

While four terrorists, who carried out a Fidayeen attack at the IAF base, were killed by security agencies during a gunfight that lasted for 15-hours. There were confusing reports about the fifth terrorist being killed.

The technical area, where the IAF's MIG-21 fighter jets, MI-35 attack helicopters and other A thorough search and combing operation continued at the Indian Air Force (IAF) frontier base near Pathankot town.

Security agencies, including the Army, National Security Guards (NSG), Indian Air Force, paramilitary forces and Punjab Police were involved in the massive search operation inside the IAF base and nearby areas.

Security agencies were particularly investigating

the local support that the terrorists got in the area after entering Indian territory from the border belt with Pakistan on December 30-31.

At least four terrorists, suspected to be from Pakistan, were killed in a gunfight that lasted over 15 hours after they breached a high-security perimeter and entered the IAF base in northern Punjab to carry out a Fidayeen attack.

Indo-French military exercise Shakti-2016 begins

Indo-French joint military training 'Exercise Shakti-2016' commenced at the Mahajan field firing range in Bikaner with the opening ceremony that saw the unfurling of the national flags of both countries to the strains of national anthems, "Jana Gana Mana" and "La Marseillaise".

Govt. to implement BS-VI norms by 2020

The government, in a move to fight pollution, will implement Bharat Standard (BS)-VI emission norms by April 1, 2020.

"Pollution is a major concern in our country. The Supreme Court has also stated its stand on the issue regularly. Pollution has been a major issue, especially in Delhi. Along with Swacch Bharat (Clean India), we also want a pollution-free India. We have decided that we will move to BS-VI norms across the country directly from BS-IV norms by April 1, 2020. This is a revolutionary decision and important to address pollution," said Union Road, Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari.

The Supreme Court asked the government to implement BS-VI norms earlier than the April 2021 deadline fixed by the Union government. The apex court also ordered shutting down more entry points at the national capital border for heavy commercial vehicles not meant for Delhi.

The BS-VI norms will be implemented for new vehicles by April 2020 and for existing vehicles by April 2021 and a notification will be issued by the Union government soon, according to sources in the ministry.

Govt decides to merge Overseas Indians Ministry with MEA

Nearly 12 years after it was set up to improve engagement with the Indian diaspora, the government has decided to merge the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) with the External Affairs Ministry in sync with its broad principle of minimum government, maximum governance. The proposal for merger was cleared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who also holds charge of the MOIA said.

He said the process of merger has already begun and the exercise is being personally supervised

by Swaraj while keeping in mind the needs of the diaspora. He said the decision will help government address duplication as well as unnecessary delays in various works.

Ensuring "minimum government, maximum governance" was a major promise of the BJP in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls in 2014.

Swaraj said the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, which used to be a flagship event of the MOIA will be celebrated by the MEA on January 9.

Since creation of MOIA in 2004, there have been two separate ministers in charge of the two ministries. However, since 2014 Swaraj and Minister of State in MEA VK Singh were handling both the ministries, said Swaraj.

Established in May 2004 as the Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs, it was renamed as the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in September 2004.

The primary task of the MOIA was to connect the Indian diaspora with its motherland.

The Ministry initiated various programmes focusing on developing networks with and amongst the overseas Indians with the intent of building partnership with the diaspora.

French troops take part in Republic Day marching practice at Rajpath

French soldiers took part in marching practice at the Rajpath along with Indian soldiers for the Republic Day celebrations next week. This would be the first since independence when foreign troops will march down the Rajpath for Republic Day parade.

French President Francois Hollande is the chief guest for this year's celebrations.

A French contingent comprising 56 personnel of 35th Infantry Regiment of 7th Armoured Brigade have just finished their joint exercise with Indian soldiers in Rajasthan.

The French soldiers were taking part in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency joint exercise called 'Shakti 2016'.

The 35th Infantry Regiment's origin dates back to its raising in 1604 at Lorraine, France.

The regiment has as many as 12 battle honours to its credit. The battalion has varied combat experiences, having served in Algeria, Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan, amongst other places.

Union Government approves reservation for women

In a move to provide increased representation to women in paramilitary forces, the government has approved 33% reservation for women at the constable rank in the CRPF and CISF and 14-15% reservation in the BSF, SSB and ITBP.

The 33% reservation of Constable level posts in

CRPF & CISF and 14-15% posts at Constable level in border guarding forces i.e. BSF, SSB & ITBP will start immediately to begin with. This reservation would be horizontal.”

The government’s approval comes following a recommendation by the Committee on Empowerment of Women in its Sixth Report that there is an “urgent need to provide due representation to women in paramilitary forces”.

Swami Vivekananda Jayanti celebrated on National Youth Day

The 153rd Jayanti of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated as National Youth Day across the country.

Government forms high-level panel on Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project

The Union government constituted a five-member high-level committee chaired by NITI Ayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya to monitor the Rs 90,000 crore Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project. Further, a separate committee under Mr. Das has been formed for inter-departmental co-ordination and resolving all issues related to project implementation. Mr. Mittal and Mr. Kant, who currently holds additional charge as Niti Aayog’s chief executive officer (CEO) role, will also be a part of this committee. Mr. Kant would take over as the full-time of Niti Ayog following his superannuation from service.

India, Japan conduct joint exercise ‘Sahyog-Kaijin’ off Chennai coast

Ships and aircraft of the Indian Coast Guard and the Japan Coast Guard came together to train for the 15th edition of ‘Sahyog-Kaijin’ joint exercise in the Bay of Bengal off the Chennai coast.

Easwar panel recommends lower capital gains tax

The RV Easwar Committee on simplification of income tax laws has suggested amendments to allow for lower capital gains tax on annual earning of less than ₹ 5 lakh from share trading rather than treating it as a business income. Accordingly, it has suggested taxing the gains at 15 per cent and not 30 per cent. But it will be taxed as long-term capital gains if held for more than one year and shown as capital assets.

With a one-year time frame, the committee has said issues requiring deeper review will be dealt with in the next batch of recommendations and even the first report is not fully exhaustive in nature. In all, the report includes 27 suggestions for amendments to the Income Tax Act and eight for reform through administrative instructions.

INTERNATIONAL

Largest blue star sapphire found in Sri Lanka

The world’s largest blue star sapphire, weighing 1404.49 carats and valued at an astonishing \$100 million, has been found in a mine in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan gemmologists say the sapphire was found in the city of Ratnapura, in southern Sri Lanka, which is known as the ‘City of Gems.’ The sapphire has been named the ‘The Star of Adam’ by its current owner, after a Muslim belief that Adam arrived in Sri Lanka after being sent away from the Garden of Eden. It is claimed he then lived on the slopes of a mountain now known as Adam’s Peak.

Illumina Starts Cancer Blood Test Firm With Bezos, Gates Backing

Genetic sequencing firm Illumina Inc. has formed a new company to develop a cancer-screening blood test, with investments from tech billionaires Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos.

The new company, to be called Grail, has more than \$100 million in funding from Illumina, Arch Venture Partners, Sutter Hill Ventures, Bezos Expeditions and Gates.

As the startup’s name implies, such a test is a much-sought and elusive goal for the industry. Using a blood sample to screen for cancer is an increasingly popular idea because blood draws are far cheaper and less invasive than traditional biopsies. Grail is aiming to start a large-scale clinical trial in 2017 and a test for a single cancer condition in the same year. The pan-cancer test will be on the market in 2019, according to Illumina. It should cost less than \$1,000.

Tsai Ing wen wins Taiwan leadership election

Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan’s main opposition party becomes the island’s first female president in a landslide victory over the ruling Kuomintang, as voters turned their backs on closer China ties.

Zika virus linked to birth defects may spread across US

The Zika virus, native to parts of Africa and Asia, has for the first time been introduced into the Americas where it is spreading locally among people who have not travelled abroad.

There is currently no vaccine against the virus or antiviral treatment.

2015 hottest year on record

2015 wasn’t just the Earth’s hottest year on record it left a century of high temperature marks in the dust.

The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration and NASA announced that 2015 was by far the

hottest year in 136 years of record keeping. The NOAA said 2015's temperature was 58.62°F (14.79°C), passing 2014 by a record margin of 0.29°F. That's 1.62°F above the 20-century average. NASA, which measures differently, said 2015 was 0.23°F warmer than the record set in 2014. Because of the wide margin over 2014, NASA calculated that 2015 was a record with 94 per cent certainty, about double the certainty it had last year when announcing 2014 as a record. Although 2015 is now the hottest on record, it was the fourth time in 11 years that Earth broke annual marks for high temperature. Scientists blame a combination of El Nino and increasing man-made global warming.

And it's likely to happen this year, too. NASA scientists and others said there's a good chance that this year will pass 2015 as the hottest year on record, thanks to El Nino.

Measurements from Japan and the University of California at Berkeley also show 2015 is the warmest on record. Satellite measurements, which scientists say don't measure where we live and have a larger margin of error, calculate that 2015 was only the third hottest since 1979.

Confirmation of four new elements completes seventh row of periodic table

Confirmation that four new elements – those with atomic numbers 113, 115, 117 and 118 – have indeed been synthesised has come from the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (Iupac), completing the seventh row of the periodic table.

The groups credited for creating them – in Japan, Russia and the US – have spent several years gathering enough evidence to convince experts from Iupac and its physics equivalent, the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics, of the elements' existence. All four are highly unstable superheavy metals that exist for only a fraction of a second.

Element 113 – currently known by its placeholder name ununtrium – is the first to be discovered in east Asia. Elements 115 (ununpentium) and 117 (ununseptium) and element 118 (ununoctium) have been added.

Filippo Grandi takes helm as UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Filippo Grandi, a UN official who has worked in refugee and political affairs in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, began his five-year term as UN High Commissioner for Refugees on January 1, succeeding António Guterres whose more than 10 years in office ended last week.

High Commissioner Grandi, who arrived at UNHCR's headquarters office in Geneva takes up the position

at a time of unprecedented displacement challenges. Record numbers of people globally are forced to flee war and persecution, including more than one million refugees and migrants who crossed the Mediterranean to Europe during the past year. UNHCR works worldwide to protect, assist and find solutions for refugees, internally displaced people and stateless populations. It has some 9,700 staff across 126 countries, many of them working in humanitarian emergencies and in close proximity to regions of conflict. In June 2015 it reported that worldwide forced displacement had reached a new post-World War II high of 59.5 million people. Displacement levels have continued to rise since, most visibly with the situation of more than one million refugees and migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe during 2015.

Law prof. wins Portugal presidency

A 67-year-old law professor and TV pundit, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, was the clear in Portugal's presidential election, with over 52 per cent of the vote, according to a nearly-complete count. Rebelo de Sousa, a former head of the centre-right Social Democratic Party, secured the post with 52.78 per cent of the vote, far ahead of his closest rival.

Although largely ceremonial, Portugal's presidency has make-or-break power over the nation's fragile ruling alliance and the right to dissolve Parliament in the event of a crisis.

Saudi Arabia cuts diplomatic ties with Iran

Saudi Arabia has announced it is severing diplomatic ties with Iran following attack on its embassy in Tehran during protests against executions in the kingdom.

Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi foreign minister, made the announcement while the foreign ministry said it was asking Iranian diplomatic mission to leave the kingdom within 48 hours.

Saudi Arabia's interior ministry announced the execution of 47 people on terrorism charges, including a convicted al-Qaeda leader and a Shia religious leader.

Many of the men executed had been linked to attacks in Saudi Arabia between 2003 and 2006, blamed on al-Qaeda. Four of those executed were said to be Shia.

Nimr al-Nimr, the Shia leader, was accused of inciting violence and leading anti-government protests in the country's east in 2011. He was convicted of sedition, disobedience and bearing arms.

He accused the Iranian authorities of being complicit in the attack, saying that documents and computers were taken from the embassy building.

Calling the incident an act of "aggression", he

said Iran had a history of “violating diplomatic missions”, citing the attacks on the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 and the British embassy in 2011.

French President declares economic emergency
French President Francois Hollande has declared what he called “a state of economic emergency” and says it’s time to redefine France’s economic and social model.

The first measures he proposed are relatively modest, and he said they would not “put into question” the 35-hour workweek. He did not seek to assume any new emergency powers.

The measures included a loosening of some worker-friendly measures to encourage companies to hire, and new training for half a million workers.

Richest 1% own more than the rest: Oxfam

The richest 1 per cent of the world’s population now own more than the rest of us combined, aid group Oxfam said, on the eve of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos.

“Runaway inequality has created a world where 62 people own as much wealth as the poorest half of the world’s population – a figure that has fallen from 388 just five years ago,” the anti-poverty agency said in its reported published ahead of the annual gathering of the world’s financial and political elites in Davos.

The report, entitled “An Economy for the 1%”, states that women are disproportionately affected by the global inequality.

Although world leaders have increasingly talked about the need to tackle inequality “the gap between the richest and the rest has widened dramatically in the past 12 months”, Oxfam said.

Oxfam’s prediction last year that the richest one percent would soon own more than the rest of us, “actually came true in 2015”, it added.

As a priority, Oxfam is calling for an end to the era of tax havens which has seen the increasing use of offshore centres to avoid paying taxes.

BUSINESS

Nokia completes Alcatel-Lucent merger, announces new team

Finnish telecom gear maker Nokia has announced appointment of executives who will head various units after completion of Alcatel-Lucent’s merger, with officials from Nokia dominating the merged entity.

The company in April had announced acquisition of French firm Alcatel-Lucent in an all-stock deal valued at 15.6 billion euros (\$16.6 billion).

U.S. hikes H1B, L1 visa fee; to hit Indian IT companies

In a blow to Indian IT firms, the U.S. has notified

an additional fee up to \$4,000 for certain categories of the popular H1B and L1 visas.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) said applicants for certain categories of H1B visas post December 18, 2015 must submit an additional fee of \$4,000.

In addition, for those applying for certain L1A and L1B must submit an additional \$4,500.

In a study released in September last year, NASSCOM, a trade association of Indian IT industry, said Indian IT companies have paid between \$70 and \$80 million annually for the U.S. Treasury approximately. Given that, the new punitive measure is expected to raise between \$1.4 billion and \$1.6 billion every year for the next one decade.

In December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue with Obama when the latter telephoned him to thank for his leadership role on achieving the historic agreement on climate change in Paris on December 12.

AWARDS

Lionel Messi wins FIFA world player award for 5th time

Lionel Messi has won the FIFA world player of the year award for a record fifth time. Messi ended Cristiano Ronaldo’s two-year hold on the Ballon d’Or trophy, soccer’s top individual honour. The Barcelona forward regained the prize after his club won five major titles last year, leaving Ronaldo’s Real Madrid with nothing. Ronaldo ended up in second place, with Barcelona striker Neymar in third.

Voting was by national team captains and coaches, plus invited journalists, from FIFA member countries. Barcelona swept the main honours as Luis Enrique was named best coach for guiding the winner of Spain’s La Liga, Champions League and Club World Cup.

Raghuram Rajan conferred central banker of the year award

RBI chief Raghuram Rajan has been named as the “governor of the year” in the Central Banking Awards for 2015 by a British magazine for “his deep understanding of the root causes of economic problems of the country combined with an impressive leadership style.”

The British magazine *Central Banking*, announcing the name of Mr. Rajan as the ‘Governor Of The Year’ said, “Mr. Rajan’s disciplined and focussed approach in leading the Reserve Bank during his first year as Governor was remarkably impressive. This is the second award by the London-based magazine and will be presented in the British capital on March 12.

It further noted Mr. Rajan, who was the chief

economist of IMF and a well-known economist and author's forthright observations about some of the less welcome developments in the global economic, financial and monetary system also represent an important voice for change.

Unicef Goodwill Ambassador David Beckham Receives The Danny Kaye Humanitarian Leadership Award

David Beckham was presented with the Danny Kaye Humanitarian Leadership Award at the sixth biennial UNICEF Ball in Los Angeles last night. Beckham has been a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador since 2005 and last year launched 7: The David Beckham UNICEF Fund, making a personal commitment to use his voice, influence and connections to raise vital funds and rally for lasting change for children.

The UNICEF Ball marked the launch of Louis Vuitton for UNICEF, a global partnership to help support children affected by conflict, disease, natural disasters, and other situations that threaten their safety and well-being.

List of Winners at 61st Filmfare Awards

Best Actress: Deepika Padukone for 'Piku'
 Best Actor: Ranveer Singh for 'Bajirao Mastani'
 Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Female): Priyanka Chopra for 'Bajirao mastani'
 Critics Award for Best Actor (Male): Amitabh Bachchan for 'Piku'
 Best Actor Female Critics Choice (Female): Kangana Ranaut for 'Tanu Weds Manu Returns'
 Best Film: 'Bajirao Mastani'
 Critics Award for Best Film: Piku
 Best Director: Sanjay Leela Bhansali for 'Bajirao Mastani'
 Best Debut Director: Neeraj Ghaywan for 'Massan'
 Best Debutant (Male): Sooraj Pancholi for 'Hero'
 Best Debutant (Female): Bhumi Pednekar for 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha'
 Lifetime Achievement: Moushumi Chatterjee

Jodhpur's Umaid Bhawan Palace named the world's best hotel of 2016

A dazzling Indian palace fit for a maharaja has taken the top spot in TripAdvisor's 2016 Travelers' Choice Awards, receiving glowing reviews from guests who gave it top marks and were effusive with their praise.

In the 14th edition of the travel site's Travelers' Choice Awards, the Umaid Bhawan Palace was named the best hotel of 2016, with a five out of five bubble rating among its 840 guests. Built over 15 years between 1928 and 1943 after its namesake, the Maharaja Umaid Singh, the palatial hotel is literally fit for an Indian king, as the sprawling property is the principal residence of the Jodhpur

royal family.

An architectural blend of western and eastern design, the stately, golden sandstone monument features a 32m-high cupola inspired by the European Renaissance and Art Deco influences, while rows of columns and towers are reminiscent of the Rajput heritage.

The palace features 347 rooms.

The opulence is enough to make even the most jaded and affluent guests nod their approval, with its shiny marble flooring, grand staircases, live peacocks, lavish furnishings and lush palace gardens. Rounding out the list is the Shinta Mani Resort in Siem Reap, Cambodia and the Bellevue Syrene in Sorrento, Italy.

The rest of the top 10 list is made up of European, Southeast Asian and tropical addresses. Winners were determined based on the millions of reviews collected in a single year from TripAdvisor travelers worldwide.

SPORTS

Australia withdraw from U19 World Cup

Cricket Australia cite 'safety and security' concerns as reason for pulling out of global event. Australia have pulled out of the ICC Under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh due to concerns over player safety.

Australia's senior men's side postponed their scheduled tour of Bangladesh in October due to security fears and CA have monitored the situation in the country ever since.

BCCI annual awards: Syed Kirmani gets Lifetime Achievement Award, Virat Kohli receives Polly Umrigar trophy

Former Indian wicketkeeper Syed Kirmani was awarded with the prestigious Col. CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to Indian cricket in the BCCI awards. The 66-year-old former India cricketer and member of the 1983 World Cup-winning squad was presented the award by BCCI president Shashank Manohar. Indian Test captain Virat Kohli bagged the the Polly Umrigar Trophy for Cricketer of the Year.

With 1009 in 323 balls, Mumbai teen scripts rare record

Mumbai teenager Pranav Dhanawade scripted history by becoming the first batsman ever to notch up a four-figure score by smashing an unbeaten knock of 1009 in an inter-school tournament in Mumbai. The 15-year-old, playing for KC Gandhi Higher Secondary School, reached the gigantic score in just 323 deliveries with a strike rate of 312.38 in the game against Arya Gurukul in the Bhandari Cup inter-school tournament organised by the

Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA).

In the course of his awe-inspiring innings, which lasted 395 minutes, Dhanawade smashed a whopping 129 fours and 59 sixes.

The epic knock ended when his school declared at 1465, which is also a world record. His school went past Victoria's 1107 against New South Wales made way back in 1926.

Pranav now holds the record for the highest individual score in any form of cricket, bettering AEJ Collins' 628 not out for Clark's House against North Town in 1899 in the UK.

The 10th standard boy is a ward of experienced MCA coach Mobin Sheikh and the only child of an autorickshaw driver.

The mammoth score was in reply to their rivals' paltry score of 31 all out in 17 overs, at the Vaylengar ground at Kalyan in neighbouring Thane district.

Dhanawade, who was unbeaten on 652 last evening, thus became the world's highest individual scorer in all forms of cricket.

Chandela wins gold with world record effort

Indian shooter Apurvi Chandela broke the world record on way to winning gold in the women's 10 metre air rifle event at the Swedish Cup Grand Prix.

Chandela shot 211.2 in the event held to surpass the feat of Chinese Olympic gold medallist Yi Siling, who held the record with 211.

The result marked a positive start for Chandela, who has already qualified for the Rio Olympics.

Delhi Acers beat Mumbai Rockets to clinch maiden Premier Badminton League title

A high-octane action coupled with Bollywood star quotient kept the spectators enthralled in the final of the Premier Badminton League between Delhi Acers and Mumbai Rockets.

Delhi Acers clinched the title beating Mumbai 4-3 in an exciting tie.

Ronnie O'Sullivan crushes Barry Hawkins to win sixth Snooker Masters title

Ronnie O'Sullivan won his sixth Snooker Masters title after breezing past Barry Hawkins 10-1 in the final at the Alexandra Palace. The 40-year-old lost the first frame but took control and gave no chance to Hawkins, whom he defeated in the world championship final in 2013.

O'Sullivan, also a five-time world champion, had previously won the event in 1995, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2014, equaling the record set by Stephen Hendry.

BCCI imposes life ban on Ajit Chandila; Hiken Shah banned for 5 years

Haryana off-spinner Ajit Chandila was slapped with a life ban for his involvement in the 2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal, while Mumbai batsman Hiken Shah was handed a five-year suspension for making a corrupt approach to a fellow player as the BCCI disciplinary committee sealed their fate after a meeting.

However, the committee, headed by BCCI President Shashan Manohar and comprising Jyotiraditya Scindia and Niranjana Shah, deferred a decision on Chandila's co-accused Pakistani umpire Asad Rauf till February 12, giving him a final deadline of February 9 to file his reply.

The 32-year-old Chandila, an off-spinner who was found guilty of spot-fixing during his stint with Rajasthan Royals, was handed a tougher punishment for violating the codes pertaining to accepting bribes, fixing, underperforming, trying to induce a fellow player and betting.

Batsman Shah, on the other hand, was found guilty of making a corrupt approach to a fellow Mumbai player in the domestic circuit.

India beat Pakistan to win first T20 blind Asia Cup

India defeated Pakistan by 44 runs to win the first blind T20 Asia Cup in Kochi.

Batting first, India put up 208 for 5 on the board in 20 overs. Coming out for the chase, Pakistan were able to score only 164 runs. Pakistan till the final had enjoyed an unbeaten run and had also defeated India by 19 runs in the group stage. Pakistan entered the final by topping the group stage with India placed second. But India had the last laugh in the final clash.

India beats Australia to seal a series win

India recorded their first ever bilateral series triumph on Australian soil, as they clinched the Twenty20 rubber by taking an unassailable 2-0 lead with a comprehensive 27-run victory in the second match, riding on an all-round show here.

Put in to bat, India relied on brilliant innings by Rohit Sharma (60) and Virat Kohli (59), along with a useful 42 by opener Shikhar Dhawan, to post a formidable 184/3.

Defending the target, the Indian bowlers put up a fine collective effort to rip through Australia's middle order and restrict the hosts to 157/8 in 20 overs.

The Indians thus took a 2-0 lead in the three-match series, which ends in Sydney. This was India's first ever bilateral series win Down Under. The Indians had earlier won a tri-series in 2007-08 and the Benson and Hedges World Championship in 1985.

The triumph is a remarkable turnaround for the Indians, who suffered a humiliating 1-4 debacle in the preceding ODI series.

Chetri's strike seals it for India at SAFF

Sunil Chetri scored one of the most important goals of his career when his 101st-minute strike snatched an unlikely win for India in the final of the SAFF Suzuki Cup football tournament against Afghanistan.

The Indian skipper cashed in on some poor defending by the Afghans to squeeze the ball into net past goalkeeper Azizi in the 11th minute of extra-time. The Indians then withstood a barrage of attacks to lift the trophy for the seventh time, and after a gap of four years.

The young Indian players, backed by a vociferous crowd of around 35,000, stood up admirably to the experienced Afghanistan side. They were able to choke the free flowing style of their opponents. They showed enough verve and keenness to win the ball, and didn't provide too many opportunities for the Afghan midfielders to take control.

Afghanistan got the goal against the run of play in the 70th minute. Captain Faysal Shayesteh sent Zubayr clear with a through-ball, and the striker came up with a clinical finish.

However, India equalised within two minutes when Jairu found Chetri with a long ball. The Indian skipper did well to control it and tap it towards Jeje who guided the ball into the back of the net.

The Afghans pressed hard for the winner, putting the Indians under severe pressure. Gurpreet made a mess of a high ball and the rebound came to Zubayr. His shot was, however, cleared. Faysal was off-target for Afghanistan in the 82nd minute.

Lodha panel report submitted on IPL

If the Supreme Court makes Justice R.M. Lodha committee's recommendations on BCCI reforms final and binding, the parent cricket body might have to alter the date of the ninth edition of Indian Premier League, scheduled to start on April 9, this year.

According to one of the recommendations by the Committee, it has been suggested that there should be a 15-day gap between IPL season and national calendar.

The Indian cricket team will take part in the ICC World T20, which will be played in the country from March 14 to April 2.

In case the Indian team qualifies for the final on April 2, the top national cricketers will be playing in IPL within a week from the completion of marquee event.

The page 42 of Volume 1 under the header 'IPL' states: "Cricket calendars also ought to keep this

in mind, and the BCCI should ensure that at least 15 days gap should be provided between the IPL season and the national calendar. A testing and cramped cricketing year takes a substantial toll on a professional cricketer's body and longevity, and it is the responsibility of the BCCI to take remedial measures immediately."

The committee in its observation also reminded the BCCI that Indian players could possibly follow example of foreign cricketers, who have declined IPL contracts for the longevity of their international careers.

PERSONS IN NEWS

Amitabh Kant to take over as NITI Aayog CEO

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appointed Amitabh Kant as the chief executive officer of NITI Aayog.

The Cabinet's Appointments Committee had given Mr. Kant additional charge of the NITI Aayog CEO from January 1, with the extended tenure of the previous CEO Sindhushree Khullar coming to an end on December 31.

Mr. Kant, who was earlier the CEO of India's largest industrial infrastructure project - the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation - has been the Industry Secretary since March 2014. He has been steering the government's two major campaigns to attract investments and create jobs - Make In India, which was launched in September 2014, and Start Up India that would be unveiled by Mr. Modi. Mr. Kant was said to be in the reckoning for a couple of other post-retirement roles, including the chairperson of the Competition Commission of India, whose current chief, Ashok Chawla, retired, and a possible role in the proposed National Industrial Corridor Development Authority.

Sailesh appointed new Registrar General, Census Commissioner

Senior IAS officer Sailesh was appointed as Registrar General and Census Commissioner. He has been appointed in place of C Chandramouli, who completed his tenure.

Sikri takes over as new CCI chairman

Former Gujarat cadre IAS officer Devender Kumar Sikri has taken oath as the Chairman of Competition Commission of India.

Mr. Sikri, a 1975 batch IAS officer, replaces Ashok Chawla who demitted office on January 7 and will be the third chairman of the CCI. Mr. Chawla had taken over from Dhanendra Kumar, who demitted office in June 2011.

The Commission was established in 2003 to replace

the erstwhile Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission. The Commission draws its power from the Competition Act, 2002 and has been empowered to check anti-competitive behaviour and regulate mergers & acquisitions.

Urjit Patel to be RBI deputy governor for 3 more years

The government re-appointed Urjit Patel as the deputy governor of Reserve Bank of India for a three-year term, ensuring continuity for the team spearheading the country's monetary policy under Governor Raghuram Rajan.

Patel, a close confidante of Rajan for shaping and implementing monetary policy, was earlier appointed as deputy governor for a period of three years from January 11, 2013, RBI said in statement.

Patel is the fourth deputy governor, the other three being HR Khan, R Gandhi and SS Mundra.

Maria Teresa de Filippis, first woman to race in F1, dies aged 89

The first woman to compete in a Formula 1 world championship grand prix, Maria Teresa de Filippis, has died at the age of 89.

The Italian started three grands prix in 1958, with her only finish coming in her debut at Spa, where she was the last classified finisher in 10th. Her introduction to racing came as a result of a bet between her brothers over how fast she could drive, which resulted in her entering - and winning - her first event in a Fiat 500.

Iconic singer David Bowie dies at 69

David Bowie, the other-worldly musician who broke pop and rock boundaries with his creative musicianship, nonconformity, striking visuals and a genre-spanning persona he christened Ziggy Stardust, died of cancer. He was 69 and had just released a new album.

Bowie, whose hits included "Fame," "Heroes" and "Let's Dance, long before alter egos and wild outfits became commonplace in pop, Bowie set the music world on its ear with the release of the 1972 album, "The Rise of Ziggy Stardust and Spiders from Mars," which introduced one of music's most famous personas. Ziggy Stardust was a concept album that imagined a genre-bending rock star from outer space trying to make his way in the music world. The persona the red-headed, eyeliner wearing Stardust would become an enduring part of his legacy, and a touchstone for the way entertainers packaged themselves for years to come. Bowie turned 69, the same day as he released a new album called "Blackstar."

Indian-origin cancer expert Harpal Singh Kumar knighted by the Queen

Cancer expert Harpal Singh Kumar, whose parents fled to India from Pakistan during partition and later moved to Britain received a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II for his "influential" work in the annual New Year's Honours list that includes several other Indian-origin individuals.

Cambridge and Harvard-educated Kumar, 50, is the chief executive officer of the prominent charity organisation, Cancer Research UK (CRUK).

The citation accompanying his knighthood said that he "has been hugely influential in promoting research into the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of cancer, and cancer care. CRUK's income and research spend are at an all-time high".

CPI veteran leader AB Bardhan dead

Ardhendu Bhushan Bardhan was a blunt man with a razor sharp memory, a first class raconteur, an oral historian, a communist to boot and a boon to journalists who would land in his small room in Ajoy Bhavan to know about the machination-filled days of Indo-US Nuclear deal in 2007-08.

First he would refuse to utter a word about Left-UPA coordination committee meetings and as journalists too would refuse to budge, he would take pity, forget the promise of secrecy made to government or fellow left leaders. Tea would come, biscuits would be served and Bardhan would hold forth. He would not miss anything neither mince his disagreements with decisions taken. He was the sole window to what happened in a short marriage between Left and Congress. One of the most detailed and colourful description he gave was his encounter with Sonia Gandhi when she called him and Harkishan Singh Surjeet after the 2004 verdict for possible support.

Shyam Benegal to head panel to revamp Censor Board

The Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry constituted a committee, headed by the film-maker Shyam Benegal, to suggest measures to help Board members understand the nuances of film certification.

A press note from the Ministry said the recommendations of the committee were expected to provide a holistic framework for those certifying films.

The exclusion of Mr. Nihalani from the committee raises questions about his controversial decisions — from blocking cuss words to deleting scenes deemed objectionable even from adult films such as the James Bond-starrer Spectre two months ago.

Since its reconstitution in January 2015, when Mr. Nihalani and other members were chosen by the BJP-led government, the CBFC had been locked in battles over film certification.

The decision appears to suggest that an initiative is under way to educate the chairperson and the Board he presides over.

The previous UPA government had set up a panel headed by Mukul Mudgal, former Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, to recommend good certification processes and measures to revamp the CBFC and the nine regional Boards. Before Mr. Mudgal, the CBFC under Leela Samson had made recommendations to revamp and restructure the certification process.

Atulesh Jindal to take over as new CBDT chairman

Senior Indian Revenue Service officer Atulesh Jindal will take charge as the new chairman of the CBDT, the controlling body of the Income Tax department. He will succeed incumbent A K Jain who completes his term.

Jindal, a 1978 batch IRS officer, is currently working as Member (Income Tax) in the CBDT.

He will have a tenure of six months till July. Apart from its Chairman, CBDT has six members and is the supreme body for framing policy matters related to direct taxes in the country.

Former CJI S.H. Kapadia passes away

Sarosh Homi Kapadia, the 38th Chief Justice of India, bid farewell to the world in Mumbai with his integrity, which he considered his "only asset," intact. He was 68.

Shortly after his appointment as the first Parsi Chief Justice of India on May 12, 2010, Justice Kapadia replied to Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's congratulatory message. In this, he spoke of how he had started as a Class IV employee and described integrity as his only asset.

A strict disciplinarian with interests ranging from Theoretical Physics to Buddhist Philosophy, Justice Kapadia was best known for his statistical acumen. One much-quoted instance was during a Law Day function when the then Supreme Court Bar Association president and senior advocate, P.H. Parekh, complained of lack of space for lawyers in the Supreme Court complex. When his turn to speak came, Justice Kapadia reeled out statistics of how lawyers used up a total of 168,000 square feet on the Supreme Court premises while the Supreme Court judiciary and their staff were left with just 2,000 square feet of space.

Justice Kapadia never flinched from taking difficult decisions during his 28-month as CJI. He stood his ground against a concerted move to stop the Allahabad High Court from delivering the Ayodhya

title suits judgment. To arguments that the judgment would trigger communal violence, the Kapadia court replied that judicial functioning just could not be held to ransom. Having authored over 250 judgments, Justice Kapadia is most remembered for his verdict in the Vodafone tax verdict.

Dr Subhash Chandra's book 'The Z Factor' launched by PM Modi

Dr Subhash Chandra's autobiography *The Z Factor* was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at 7 RCR in Delhi. The book will also be unveiled at the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival, on January 21.

This is an unusually candid memoir of a truly desi self-made businessman who came to Delhi at age twenty with seventeen rupees in his pocket. He has a net worth of \$6.3 billion and annual group revenues of in excess of \$3 billion.

Dr Chandra, the promoter of Essel Group and ZEE, is an unlikely mogul. Hailing from a small town in Haryana, where his family ran grain mills, Chandra has been a perennial outsider, repeatedly aiming high and breaking into businesses where he was considered an interloper.

Mrinalini Sarabhai passes away

Noted danseuse and Padma Bhushan recipient Mrinalini Sarabhai passed away. She was 97. Trained in Bharatnatyam, Kathakali and Mohiniyattom, she was educated at Shantiniketan under Rabindranath Tagore. She was married to the architect of India's space programme, Dr Vikram Sarabhai.

Besides being a classical dancer, she was a poet, writer and environmentalist and played a leading role in the social and art scene in Ahmedabad. She was one of the first classical dancer to turn to choreography.

According to family members, she was suffering from an infection and succumbed to it.