

DEVELOP INDIA

YEAR 4, VOL. 1, ISSUE 189, 18-25 MARCH, 2012

ALLAHABAD

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English Weekly Newspaper

INDIA FREE FROM POLIO ENDEMIC LIST BY WHO

India, which has been polio-free for over a year now, was taken off the list of polio endemic countries by the World Health Organisation. This announcement was made by Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad at the polio summit 2012 here in the presence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Azad said he has received a letter this morning stating that the "WHO has taken India's name off the list of polio endemic countries in view of the remarkable progress that we have made during the past one year." There were only four countries in the WHO endemic list, including Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan.

After being removed from the list, India will have to remain polio free for the next two years to achieve the polio-free status with concerted efforts and an emergency preparedness and response plan, WHO representative in India Natela Menabde said.

The Prime Minister, while lauding the achievement, said the real credit goes to 23 lakh volunteers who repeatedly vaccinated children even in the most remote areas. He said the success of the effort shows that "team work pays". Singh said, "This gives us hope that we can finally eradicate polio not only from India but from the face of the earth."

Menabde said it was a major public health achievement globally.

She said it is not just an achievement for India but a major progress for global polio eradication.

Though many countries have achieved this goal, every country is still under the threat of polio as long as the virus existed, she warned.

Countries have to keep administering vaccination and keep the immunity level of children high, besides stepping up surveillance to ensure polio virus does not enter the country again. For the first time since November 2010, most of the environmental samples tested to know if the polio virus is circulating in the air, have been found to be negative. Earlier, WHO's Assistant Director-General (Polio) Bruce Aylward, delivered the WHO Director General Margaret Chan's letter to India, which states, "WHO will remove India from the list of endemic countries with polio virus."

Speaking at the Polio Summit, Aylward said "it is an incredible achievement" which has come about due to the perseverance of Indian government and its people.

"India's success has inspired the world," he said, adding that, India remains at a "high risk" of importation of the polio virus and and it needs to be even more vigilant against it.

"India has given a great gift to protect the children from the horrific virus and it needs to keep vigilant. It is a precious gift, protect it," Aylward said. He also expressed concern over the upsurge of polio cases in Pakistan and Nigeria in the last six months and urged the world community to build on from New Delhi.

The WHO official also stressed on evolving multiple strategies to focus on missed children and sought India's support. He also expressed concern over the importation outbreak of polio in China's Xinjiang province, saying the virus sequencing found in it originated in Pakistan. Among others who also spoke at the Summit included Pakistan's Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Hazar Khan Bijrani, who said Pakistan will follow in the footsteps of India in eradicating polio.

Also present at the Summit were Nepal's Minister of Health and Population Rajendra Mahato and Sri Lanka's deputy minister of Health Lalith Dissanayaka, besides India's Ministers of State for Health Sudip Bandyopadhyay and S Gandhuselvan, Rotary International President Kalyan Banerjee and Health Secretary P K Pradhan.



World Health Organization

Pak notifies negative list for trade with India

The Pakistan government on Wednesday issued a notification for switching over to a negative list regime for trade with India, where the number of products facing a bar on import from the eastern neighbour will come down to 1,209. The Commerce Ministry in Islamabad issued a Statutory Regulatory Order for trade with New Delhi under the negative list regime, officials said.

According to the notification, 1,209 items have been included in the negative list and will not be importable from India. Of the importable items from India, 137 products can be brought in from India through the Wagah land border crossing.

Last month, Pakistan had announced that it would be shifting from a positive list regime to a smaller negative list for trade with India in order to normalise bilateral trading relations. This technically means that the moment Pakistan notifies the decision, India would be allowed to export the remaining around 6,000 items to Pakistan.

Major items included in the list of items importable through Wagah are livestock, vegetables and newsprint in rolls or sheets. Manufacturers can import raw materials, except basic materials that are locally manufactured, and packing material needed for pharmaceutical products once they are approved by the Director General of Health, according to officials. The import of vaccines will be allowed only from Indian plants that have been approved by the World Health Organisation.

For long, Pakistan had been complaining about several non-tariff barriers that India maintains on imports from that country. These included stringent tests, complex classification of codes, strict import licensing procedures and requirement of special labelling — all leading to delay and complex paperwork. Till now, Pakistan had been trading with India under a positive list regime that allowed the import of less than 2,000 items. The imported Indian products coming through other countries increased the cost of items in the local market, officials said. Finalising the negative list will help to formally start trade between both countries, which will be beneficial for the people of India and Pakistan, an official said. In 2010-11, the India-Pakistan trade stood at \$2.6 billion. Both sides have set a target of \$6 billion worth of bilateral trade by 2014.

Anna Hazare fasts at Jantar Mantar

After a brief bout of illness, anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare the 74-year-old activist has decided to focus on. The veteran anti-graft activist is on a day-long fast at the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, demanding adequate protection for whistleblowers in the country.



Kisan Baburao Hazare, popularly known as Anna Hazare is an Indian social activist and a prominent leader in the 2011 Indian anti-corruption movement, using nonviolent methods following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Hazare also contributed to the development and structuring of **Ralegan Siddhi, a village in Parner taluka of Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra, India.** He was awarded the Padma Bhushan—the third-highest civilian award—by the Government of India in 1992 for his efforts in establishing this village as a model for others.

Anna Hazare started an indefinite hunger strike on 5 April 2011 to exert pressure on the Indian government to enact a stringent anti-corruption law as envisaged in the Jan Lokpal Bill, for the institution of an ombudsman with the power to deal with corruption in public places. The fast led to nation-wide protests in support. The fast ended on 9 April 2011, a day after the government accepted Hazare's demands. The government issued a gazette notification on the formation of a joint committee, consisting of government and civil society representatives, to draft the legislation.

MUTINY in African Country Mali

In what appeared to be a coup attempt, renegade Malian soldiers traded gunfire with troops outside the presidential palace on Wednesday and seized the state broadcasting station amid fury over the government's handling of an uprising by Tuareg rebels.

President Amadou Toumani Touré was holed up inside the palace, an adviser said, and he was under the protection of his elite unit of paratroopers. "We are in control of the presidential palace," a member of the presidential guard said by telephone. "People are shooting towards us and we are returning fire." Soldiers have been pleading for better resources and weapons to fight the rebels. Many soldiers were believed to have died in fighting with the rebels over the last two months, although no official death toll was available, and up to 200,000 people have fled the violence.

Mr. Touré is due to step down before an April 29 presidential election.

The Tuareg rebellion is part of a decades-old bid for independence, but the recent offensive, the first since 2009, was heightened by the return of heavily armed men who fought in Libya last year for Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi before he was ousted and killed.

France and the United States expressed alarm at unfolding events and urged a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

"The situation is currently unclear and unfolding quickly," said a State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, urging American citizens to stay indoors. "We believe that grievances should be addressed through dialogue, not through violence," she said.

The anger erupted earlier in the day when the new defense minister, Sadio Gassama, visited the Kati military camp outside the capital to appease tensions over the continuing insurgency.

His efforts failed and soldiers protested, firing shots into the air and demanding proper weapons with which to face the rebels, who have seized several towns in the north.



GOVT LOST RS 10.7 LAKH CRORE BY NOT AUCTIONING COAL BLOCKS: CAG

The CAG is at it again. About 16 months after it rocked the UPA government with its explosive report on allocation of 2G spectrum and licences, the Comptroller & Auditor General's draft report titled 'Performance Audit Of Coal Block Allocations' says the government has extended "undue benefits", totalling a mind-boggling Rs 10.67 lakh crore, to commercial entities by giving them 155 coal acreages without auction between 2004 and 2009. The beneficiaries include some 100 private companies, as well as some public sector units, in industries such as power, steel and cement.

The CAG-estimated loss figure of Rs 10.67 lakh crore at March 31, 2011 prices is six times that of its highest presumptive loss figure of Rs 1.76 lakh crore for the 2G scam. This, it says, is actually a conservative estimate, since it takes into account prices for the lowest grade of coal, not the median grade. CAG says even by the price levels prevailing at the time of allocations, the estimate of loss would be over Rs 6.31 lakh crore.

The reasoning behind taking 90% of the total reserves rather than the entire lot, according to CAG, is that "detailed exploration establishes reserves at a confidence level of 90%". The report points out that the coal ministry had maintained in 2004 that the chances of any allocatee not being able to recover this much from the reserves "would be, if at all, very remote". CAG has added that "the actual amount of gain to the allocatees may change depending upon the mining plan, cost of extraction of coal, market price of coal and quality".

The report has listed both private entities and public utilities as beneficiaries of the alleged largesse. It says private firms cornered more than Rs 4.79 lakh crore of the giveaway, while around Rs 5.88 lakh crore went to government utilities. Significantly, most PSUs employ private miners to extract the coal.

Among the major private sector beneficiaries are Tata Group entities, Jindal Steel & Power Ltd, Electro Steel Castings Ltd, the Anil Agarwal Group firms, Delhi-based Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd, Jayaswal Neco, Nagpur-based Abhijeet Group, and Aditya Birla Group companies. Essar Group's power ventures, Adani Group, Arcelor Mittal India, Lanco Group and a host of small to medium players also figure in the list.

A major player in power, Reliance Power, which is setting up the Sasan and Tilayia ultra-mega power projects (UMPPs), is missing from the list because the section on "Windfall benefit to private companies" does not include 12 coal blocks given for the government's showpiece power projects as they were allocated through a tariff-based competitive bidding route.

(The blocks given to Reliance Power are dealt with in a separate section, which TOI first reported on February 15 and March 5. CAG's estimate of the "undue benefit" to Reliance Power for these two projects is now placed at Rs 15,849 crore over a 25-year period.)

The coal ministry's justification, quoted in the report, is not dissimilar: "... coal produced from captive blocks was not available for commercial sale and out of 137 blocks, 62 coal blocks were allotted to power sector where tariff is regulated on the basis of input costs and the transfer price of coal is assessed on actual cost basis. In case of steel and cement sectors, though prices of end products are not regulated, a competitive market ensures the best benefit for consumers."

The report rejects the ministry's argument that allocations to the power sector need to be viewed in light of the fact that Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) regulates the power tariffs. The report says such regulations do not apply to merchant power plants set up by independent power producers. "Further, CERC tariff regulations 2009-14, allow normative operation and maintenance expenses for coal- and lignite-fired generating stations as against the actual cost of production of coal. In fact, for steel and cement sectors, the competitive market forces cannot ensure that the allocatee would pass on the benefit of low cost of natural resources to citizens."

The section in the report titled 'Competitive Bidding For Coal Blocks Yet To Commence' points out how "...the policy initiative to introduce competitive bidding with the objective to bring in transparency and objectivity in the allocation process of coal blocks commenced from 28 June 2004. However, the process got delayed at different stages and the same was yet to materialize even after a lapse of seven years".



INDIA-LANKA TIES COULD BE HANGS IN BALANCE AFTER UNHRC VOTE

After India joined a majority of UNHRC members to support a resolution censuring Sri Lanka for alleged rights violation of its Tamil minority, focus now is on its impact on Colombo-New Delhi ties. After the resolution Sri Lanka said it was unhappy with New Delhi. But Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, "We don't want to infringe on Sri Lanka's sovereignty but our concerns should be expressed so Tamils get justice and dignity."

India voted in favour of the UN resolution against Colombo to placate the UPA's ally DMK with party chief M Karunanidhi taking a hard line on the issue.

The UN rights chief warned today against reprisals against Sri Lankan activists, noting "threats and intimidation" carried out by Colombo in the run-up to a contested war crimes probe vote. The UN human rights council yesterday adopted to the consternation of Colombo a US-led resolution demanding a probe to violations carried out in Sri Lanka's battle against Tamil Tigers separatists during their war in 2009. The run-up to the vote was marked by "an unprecedented and totally unacceptable level of threats, harassment and intimidation directed at Sri Lankan activists who had travelled to Geneva to engage in the debate, including by members of the 71-member official Sri Lankan government delegation," said Pillay. In Sri Lanka, media outlets have also been running a "continuous campaign of vilification, including naming and in many cases picturing activists, describing them as an 'NGO gang' and repeatedly accusing them of treason, mercenary activities and association with terrorism,"



Weekly Current Affairs

New Railway Minister announces rollback of fares

The hike in rail passenger fares for second class suburban and non-suburban, sleeper, AC chair car and AC 3-tier was rolled back on Thurs-



day with the new Railway Minister Mukul Roy dubbing it as a 'huge drain' on the pocket of masses. He, however, kept untouched the increase of 15 paise per km and 30 paise per km respectively in passenger fares in AC 2-tier and AC-1 announced by his predecessor Dinesh Trivedi in the Railway Budget last week.

Dinesh Trivedi resigns as Railway Minister

Railway Min Dinesh Trivedi has resigned, talking to media persons



in New Delhi on March 19, 2012, Trivedi said he spoke to Trinamool Congress Chief Mamata Banerjee about his decision to quit as Railway Minister. In Kolkata, Mamata Banerjee confirmed the development saying Trivedi called her to tell that he was resigning. Trivedi had incurred the wrath of party chief for hiking passenger fares in the Railway Budget. Trivedi thanked Trinamool Congress Chief and the Prime Minister Dr.

Manmohan Singh for appointing him as the Railway Minister. Meanwhile, Mamata Banerjee reached New Delhi on Sunday night. She told media persons that she will meet Trinamool Congress MPs in the national capital on Monday.

Delta 88

Special Detachment 88 (Detasemen Khusus 88), Delta 88, or Densus 88, is the Indonesian counter-



terrorism squad, and part of the Indonesian National Police. Formed on 30 June 2003, after the 2002 Bali bombings, it is funded, equipped, and trained by the United States and Australia. The unit has worked with considerable success against the jihadi terrorist cells linked to Central Java-based Islamist movement Jemaah Islamiyah. Detachment 88 was formed after the 2002 Bali bombings and became operational in 2003. The name of the organization is a result of a senior Indonesian police official mishearing "ATA" in a briefing on the US Department of State's Anti-Terrorist Assistance program as "88". He thought it would be a good name as the number 8 is a lucky number in Asia and other officials lacked the courage to correct him. However, according to Brig. Gen. Pranowo, the Indonesian Police Headquarter Anti-Terror Director, the number '88' is taken from the number of Australian fatalities in the 2002 Bali bombing, the largest number from a single country. Detachment 88 has disrupted the activities of Central Java-based Islamist movement Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and many of its top operatives have been arrested or killed. Abu Dujana, suspected leader of JI's military wing and its possible emir, was apprehended on June 9, 2007. Azahari Husin was shot and killed in 2005. The Indonesian terrorist organization suffered a

further blow when arguably its last surviving and at-large prominent figure, Noordin Mohammad Top was killed in a shootout against Detachment 88 on September 17, 2009 at Solo, Central Java. Detachment 88 is assisted by foreign agencies, including the Australian Federal Police, in forensic sciences including DNA analysis, and communications monitoring. In pre-emptive strikes in Java, the unit thwarted attack plans to material assembly. Detachment 88 operators were involved in an operation in Poso, where 10 people, including a policeman, were killed in a gunfight during a high-risk arrest operation on January 22, 2007. In 2007, Detachment 88 arrested and interrogated West Papuan human rights lawyer, Iwangin Sabar Olif, and charged him with incitement and insulting the head of state, because he sent an SMS text message critical of the Indonesian military and president. Detachment 88's operations include using US intelligence officers in its Jakarta headquarters to tap the phone calls and read the SMS text messages of Indonesian civilians.

Joachim Gauck elected German president of Germany

Germans resoundingly elected Joachim Gauck, a former Lutheran pastor and human rights activist from communist East Germany, as president of Europe's most powerful country on Sunday, creating a potential political headache for



Chancellor Angela Merkel. In the largely ceremonial office of president, Gauck poses no threat to Merkel's domination of national politics, but his moral authority, independence of mind and lack of party affiliation could make him an awkward partner for her government as it struggles to overcome Europe's economic crisis. Gauck, 72, won 991 votes in the

federal assembly comprising members of parliament and regional delegates that elects German heads of state. His main rival, veteran anti-Nazi campaigner Beate Klarsfeld, got 126 votes. Germans hope Gauck, a prominent player in the peaceful protests that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, can restore dignity to the presidency, a post tarnished by financial scandals that toppled his predecessor Christian Wulff. "I take up this post with the endless gratitude of a person who, after a long trek through the political desert of the 20th century, has finally and unexpectedly found his home again and was able to witness in the last 20 years the joy of shaping a democratic society," he said after taking the oath of office. His victory was never in doubt after all the main political parties, including Merkel's centre-right Christian Democrats, threw their weight behind his candidacy. Merkel played down suggestions that the feisty theologian would use his office as a pulpit to harangue Germany's politicians or that they might clash over policy issues. "He may well disapprove of something, so might I, but we are all adults... I think there will be good collaboration," she told reporters after giving Gauck a large bouquet of flowers. Gauck struck a similar tone in an interview for ARD channel. "I have offered her (Merkel) my trust, my sincerity and loyalty. We have looked each other in the eye and I see no grounds for mistrust," Gauck said. Merkel can ill afford disputes with the president as she tries to build cross-party support for tighter fiscal rules to tackle the euro zone's two-year sovereign debt crisis that has forced Germany to assume greater leadership in Europe. How Budget 2012 affects your earning, investments & spending It didn't announce any bold reforms, nor hand out any big tax cuts. Even so, Pranab Mukherjee's budget for 2012-13 is good news because it is another baby step towards the Direct Taxes Code (DTC). The crucial reform, which promises to overhaul the direct tax regime, has been delayed once again, but

some provisions have found their way into the tax structure. Take the budget proposal that a life insurance policy must offer a cover of at least 10 times the annual premium for tax benefits. Perhaps, in the next few years, this will be raised to 20 times, as proposed by the DTC. This change is necessary to make insurance buyers focus on the risk cover instead of tax savings and investments. There are not too many tax changes this year, but some are quite significant and useful. Check out ' How much tax will you save ' to know how the budget proposals will impact your tax outgo next year. Our calculations assume that the Section 80CCF benefit for infrastructure bonds will continue, although some tax experts believe that since there was no mention in the finance minister's speech, the deduction has been scrapped. The budget also attempts to broaden the capital markets by bringing in more investors. The Rajiv Gandhi Equity Savings Scheme will offer a tax deduction of Rs 50,000 to new investors in direct equities. The problem is that these 'first-time' investors will be sitting ducks for unscrupulous intermediaries out to mislead services. Check out ' Post-budget stock picks ' to know how the budget proposals will impact the markets and the stocks to buy now. The raising of the service tax is a sore point with consumers. The budget has raised it from 10.3% to 12.36%. Even essential services like insurance and banking have not been spared. This will not only dent household budgets, but also fuel inflation as services become costlier. Check out the ' Service tax & home budget ' to see how it impacts your household budget.

US, EU and Japan challenge China on rare earths at WTO

The US, Japan and the European Union have filed a case against



China at the World Trade Organization, challenging its restrictions on rare earth exports. US President Barack Obama accused China of breaking agreed trade rules as he announced the case at the White House. Beijing has set quotas for exports of rare earths, which are critical to the manufacture of high-tech products from hybrid cars to flat-screen TVs. It is the first WTO case to be filed jointly by the US, EU and Japan. They argue that by limiting exports, China, which produces more than 95% of the world's rare earth metals, has pushed up prices. **Environmental concerns?** The co-ordinated complaints are the first step in a process that could ultimately lead to sanctions against China. **What are rare earths?** ● Despite their name, rare earths are not particularly rare. ● They are a collection of 17 elements: scandium, yttrium, and some 15 lanthanides. ● Some are as common as copper or zinc, while even the rarest occur in greater quantities than gold or platinum. ● They are essential in the manufacture of many electronic goods. The filing focuses on 17 rare earth minerals which are essential for making products such as smart phones and camera lenses, as well as many renewable energy devices.

The rare earth complaints follow a WTO ruling earlier this year in favour of the EU. It found China had illegally restricted exports of other materials, such as bauxite, zinc and magnesium. "Despite the clear ruling of the WTO in our first dispute on raw materials, China has made no attempt to remove the other export restrictions," said EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht. "This leaves us no choice but to challenge China's export regime again to ensure fair access for our businesses to these materials." The EU imports 350m euros (\$458m) of rare earth minerals from China each year. The US trade representative's office argues that quotas are one way that China engages in trade protectionism on rare earths, including export duties and pricing requirements. Welcoming Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping to the White House last month, Mr Obama warned that China must play by the same rules as other major powers in the world economy.

Brazil currency wars: the sequel

It's like September 2010 all over again. The real is up against the dollar, Brazil's Finance Minister



Guido Mantega is evangelising about a global "currency war" while his government introduces a series of rather ineffective capital controls. Brazil's government extended the 6 per cent IOF transactions tax to foreign borrowing of up to three years. Previously, the tax had only applied to loans with maturities of less than two years. And the result? Well, the real actually strengthened about 0.3 per cent to 1.71 per dollar on Thursday. (The average maturity of bond placements abroad is currently around ten years anyway). Brazil's central bank also brought a sense of déjà vu to the market on Wednesday when it intervened twice to quell the real's appreciation. First, the central bank used a reverse currency swap, then it bought dollars on the spot market, managing to weaken the real back beyond the R\$1.70 mark to the dollar after it strengthened to R\$1.68 earlier in the day. So is this just a re-run of the currency war that Mantega first declared late in 2010 and which petered out towards the end of last year? The background is certainly similar. Whereas previously, quantitative easing by the US Federal Reserve was blamed for the real's strength, this time it was the European Central Bank's injection of €530bn into the eurozone banking system. But investors should be wary of dismissing Mantega's warmongering rhetoric so quickly. For a start, the president has got involved this time round. In a rare statement on the issue from the Presidential Palace, Dilma Rousseff also vowed on Thursday to defend Brazilian industry, "making sure that the methods that developed countries are using to get out of the crisis don't lead to the cannibalisation of emerging markets". Furthermore, Mantega also knows he has most of the emerging world on his side this time after countries from Peru to South Korea followed his lead throughout 2010 and 2011 by introducing their own capital

Soumitra Chatterjee win Dada Saheb Phalke award



Legendary Bengali actor Soumitra Chatterjee, who has portrayed a versatile range of lead characters in films by Satyajit Ray, has been selected for India's highest film honour - the Dadasaheb Phalke Award - for 2012. Confirming the news, Chatterjee told IANS that his name being selected for the prestigious award has made him "extremely happy". "I am extremely happy. Till this evening I had not thought of this award. But after I got the news, I am extremely happy," Chatterjee said. Soumitra Chatterjee or Soumitra Chattopadhyay is an iconic Bengali actor from India, known among other things for his frequent collaborations with the great Bengali film director Satyajit Ray and his constant comparison with the Bengali screen idol Uttam Kumar. Soumitra was born in Krishnanagar in West Bengal, 100 Kms from Calcutta, in 1935. Soumitra and his family moved to Howrah and Calcutta during his early years. Soumitra graduated from the University of Calcutta with honours in Bengali literature. He has lived for a number of years in Calcutta in Satyajit Ray's old apartment. He studied for his M.A. examination in Bengali from the University of Calcutta. He worked in All India Radio before pursuing a career in films. Soumitra's film debut came in 1959 in Satyajit Ray's Apur Sansar. As noted on the official website for Ray, "At that time, Soumitra Chatterjee was a radio announcer and had only played a small role in a Bengali stage production." Soumitra would eventually collaborate with Ray on fourteen films. His centrality to Ray's work is akin to other key collaborations in the history of cinema — Mifune and Kurosawa, Mastroianni and Fellini, De Niro and Scorsese, DiCaprio and Scorsese, Max von Sydow and Ingmar Bergman, Jerzy Stuh and Kieślowski. He also worked with Sharmila Tagore in a number of Ray films. Chatterjee was cast in diverse roles by Ray and some of the stories and screenplays that Ray wrote were said to be written with him in mind. Soumitra featured as Feluda/ Pradosh Chandra Mitter, the famous private investigator from Calcutta in Ray's Feluda series of books, in two films in the 1970s Sonar Kella and Joy Baba Felunath. Ghare Baire, an adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's novel of the same name and one of Ray's major ventures of the 1980s, featured Chatterjee in a leading role in the character of a radical revolutionary in a love triangle with his friend's wife. These roles showcased Chatterjee's versatility in playing diverse characters, especially in an urban setting. In Shakha Proshakha, Chatterjee turns out a moving performance in the role of a mentally handicapped son of an aging patriarch on his deathbed and the only source of his father's solace, as his siblings squabble. Besides working with Ray, Soumitra excelled in collaborations with other well-known Bengali directors such as Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha. He earned critical acclaim for his role of an impostor in Mrinal Sen's Akash Kusum. He was equally confident in playing the swashbuckling horse-riding villain in Sinha's Jhinder Bandi giving the legendary Uttam Kumar a tough challenge. In Teen Bhubaner Pare, he again shared the screen with the beautiful Tanuja, and his flamboyant and peppy way of teasing and wooing Tanuja in the very first song-sequence ('Ke Tumi Nadini') overnight earned him the 'star' tag along with Uttam Kumar. He acted with great aplomb with the iconic Suchitra Sen in Saat Pake Bandha. He did couple of movies with Uttam Kumar such as Stri, Devdas, Protisodh. His comic timing was brilliant and highly appreciated in Mantramughdha, Basanto Bilap, Chhutir Fande and Baksho Badal. The last one was a fine example of witty comedy written by Satyajit Ray. In the later years of his film career, he kept wowing his audience with memorable performances in films such as Koni, Atanko, etc. Soumitra is known for his experimentation with roles. He played the role of Shekhar in the 1969 Ajoy Kar version of Parineeta. Soumitra has been active in Bengali theatre as an actor, playwright and director. He is a well-known poetry reciter, and has acted on TV and in indigenous folk drama (jatra). A living legend on his own terms, Soumitra has received the 'Officier des Arts et Metiers', the highest award for arts given by the French government, and a lifetime achievement award from Italy. He turned down the honorary Padma Shri award from the Indian government in the 1970s; in 2004, he accepted the prestigious Padma Bhushan award from the President of India. He has been the subject of a full-length documentary named Gaach by French director Catherine Berge. In a gesture of protest against the National Film Awards committee's bias in awarding popular and mainstream cinema, he turned down the 2001 special jury award for best actor. However, on 9 June 2008, he was selected for the 2007 National Film Award for Best Actor by the Government of India. On 21 March 2012, he was selected by the Government of India for the Dadasaheb Phalke Award.

controls. He even believes the IMF is a big fan of his currency crusade. This from Mantega on Thursday: “These (currency intervention) practices were always just in reserve but today they are even recommended by the IMF. The IMF didn’t think this way and then they started to think this way, mainly after Brazil introduced intervention measures which have been successful.” Brazil may well be fighting the same battle that it was in 2010, but don’t expect it to pull any punches this time round.

Euro zone inflation steady, joblessness hits new high

Unemployment rate rises to 10.7 pct in January and Consumer inflation



at 2.7 pct in February. Euro zone joblessness rose to a new euro-era high while inflation was largely steady at the start of 2012, data showed on Thursday, leaving the European Central Bank to juggle the demands of a slowing economy and only mild pressure on prices. A cold snap in Europe and rising oil prices were probably behind the slight rise in February consumer prices that took inflation for the euro zone to 2.7 percent, compared to 2.6 percent in January, figures from the EU’s statistics office Eurostat showed. The euro zone’s economic slump has helped bring the prices of goods, fuel and food down from last year’s peak of 3 percent, but oil prices hit record highs in euro terms this month and undermined inflation’s downward trend. That suggests the ECB is likely to put off any quick decision to take interest rates to below 1 percent for the first time and economists see the bank in “wait-and-see” mode. The bank wants to keep inflation below, but close to 2 percent over the medium term. Stripping out volatile energy and food prices, inflation in January was 1.9 percent on an annual basis, Eurostat said on Wednesday. Falling prices may help European households, but the euro zone is heading into its second recession in three years and unemployment is one of the biggest challenges for EU leaders who meet for a summit in Brussels on Thursday and Friday. The number of people out of work in the euro zone rose to 10.7 percent in January, up from an upwardly revised 10.6 percent in December. That was far higher than the 8-percent rate when euro coins and notes began circulating in 2000, and the latest figure masks the north-south split in the euro zone’s fortunes.

Unemployment in Spain rose to 23.3 percent in January, the highest level in the 17-nation currency area, but was just 4 percent in Austria. Overall, another 185,000 people across the euro zone were out of work in January compared to December, Eurostat said. The rise in unemployment was higher than the 10.4 percent forecast by economists in a Reuters poll. But that was perhaps not surprising, given that business managers in an EU survey released this week said they were generally pessimistic about their ability to hire new staff even as wider business confidence improves.

FTA between the United States and South Korea comes into effect

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and U.S. President Barack Obama celebrated the implementation of a landmark free trade agreement between the two countries Thursday, saying it will serve as a good model for global



free trade and boost the alliance between the sides. The pact, first signed in 2007 and modified in 2010, came into force as of midnight Wednesday. Lee and other officials in Seoul have said the deal will boost exports, create jobs and further strengthen the traditional alliance with Washington.

Moldova elects pro-European judge as president

Moldova’s Parliament elected a judge with a European outlook as president Friday, ending nearly three years of political deadlock in the former Soviet republic. Lawmakers approved the election of Nicolae Timofti, 65, who is chairman of the Superior Council of Magistrates. The opposition Communists, who disapprove of the government’s pro-European policies, boycotted the vote.

Thousands of their supporters later protested the election in the capital’s streets. But Communist leader and former President Vladimir Voronin later said his party has decided to suspend its protests, even though it opposes Timofti’s election. Moldova had been without a president since 2009 because the country’s largest party, which has 58 seats in the 101-seat legislature, could not muster the 61 votes required.

Timofti - who favors Moldova joining the EU and democratic and free-market economic reforms - was elected with 62 votes, including four by independent lawmakers. “The European orientation of Moldova must be a priority,” Timofti told lawmakers ahead of the vote. “This has been the policy of Moldova in recent years and this is the policy that must continue.” Moldova, one of Europe’s poorest nations, is struggling to find a solution regarding the separatist region of Trans-Dniester, which broke away in 1990 over fears that Moldova planned to reunite with Romania. Trans-Dniester’s leaders are pro-Russian, but the area is not recognized internationally. The Council of Europe, the pan-European body for human rights, welcomed Timofti’s victory and urged all political parties to work together.

“I am convinced ... all the political parties will show responsibility by accepting the democratic legitimacy of the country’s institutions and hence the legitimacy of a president elected in accordance with its constitutional requirements,” Jean-Claude Mignon, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, said in a statement.

Romanian President Traian Basescu called Timofti to congratulate him, Basescu’s office said. Some four-fifths of Moldovans are of Romanian descent and the country was part of Romania until 1940. In Russia, members of the nation’s lower house of Parliament, the State Duma, also welcomed Moldova’s election. “Moldova today has finally officially ended a long-term government crisis,” the ITAR-Tass news agency quoted State Duma member Leonid Slutsky as saying.

EC nod for new auditing norms for political parties

The Election Commission has given its nod to new auditing and accounting norms for political parties in the country. This will bring in transparency and help curb black money in the poll process. The norms and guidelines, prepared by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), will soon

be notified to the political parties by the EC and financial enforcement agencies like the Income Tax department and the RBI. Our correspondent reports, ICAI has submitted the final guidance note on accounting and auditing of political parties to the Election Commission last month. The Commission has also approved the norms that ICAI has framed which will act as guidance for accounting and auditing of the financial records of political parties.

The new norms will bring in a generational change in the auditing and financial management of political parties and will enable them to conduct their finances in a corporate-like manner by getting their accounts audited and publishing their audited finance sheets annually.

Every political party will also have to consider March 31 as the end of financial year and consolidated financial statements be prepared incorporating the accounts of taluka, district and state-level party branch accounts. The parties will also have to publish their financial statements within six months which will be prepared by a Chartered Accountant/CA firm affiliated to the ICAI.

India Africa Revise Trade Target to US\$ 90 billion by 2015

The Union Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textiles of India, Sh. Anand Sharma, and the African Trade and Industry Ministers met in New Delhi today for the 2nd meeting of the India-Africa Trade Ministers. The Meeting was co-chaired by Hon’ble Dr. Maxwell M. Mkwazalamba, Commissioner for Economic Affairs, African Union



Commission, and Sh. Anand Sharma. During the meeting, the Ministers launched the India-Africa Business Council (IABC). The IABC is co-chaired by Mr. Sunil Bharti Mittal, Chairman, Bharti Group from India side and Mr. Alhaji Aliko Dangote, GCON, President, Chief Executive, Dangote Group, Nigeria from African side. The Council will suggest the way forward on enhancing economic and commercial relations between India and Africa and also identify and address issues which hinder growth of economic partnership between India and Africa. The core sectors of cooperation which will be explored by IABC are Agriculture, including Agro-processing, Manufacturing, Pharmaceuticals, Textiles, Mining, Petroleum & Natural Gas, Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services, Gems and Jewellery, Banking, Financial Services (including microfinance), Energy, Core Infrastructure including Roads and Railways. The Council met later in the day.

During the meeting, the Cotton Technical Assistance Programme in the C-4 countries (Burkina Faso, Benin, Chad, Mali), Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda was also launched. The Technical Assistance Programme in the cotton sector is an initiative of the Government of India under the umbrella of the ‘India-Africa Forum Summit’ towards helping the above-mentioned cotton growing countries of Africa to build capacity, technical expertise and thereby competitiveness in the field. IL&FS Cluster Development Initiative Limited is the Project Management Agency for implementing the Project.

During the meeting, the Indian and African Ministers set the target of India-Africa bilateral trade as US \$ 90 bn by 2015. In the year 2011, India-Africa bilateral trade has reached US \$ 60 bn. The Ministers agreed on the need to strengthen

the trade relationship between the two sides through, inter-alia, the building of trade-related capacity and the conclusion of trade cooperation agreements between India and African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) / countries. “Our leaders had set a target of US\$ 70 billion by 2015 but we can note with satisfaction that last year we crossed US\$ 60 billion. A 20-fold growth within a decade is indeed an achievement worth applauding. I propose that given the current growth rate, we may agree to revise the trade target to US\$ 90 billion by 2015,” said Shri Sharma. The Ministers recognized the important role of the following Pan-African Institutions being set up by the Indian Government under the umbrella of the ‘India-Africa Forum Summit’, for capacity building and human resource development across many areas :-

- (i) India-Africa Institute of Foreign Trade,
- (ii) India-Africa Diamond Institute,
- (iii) India-Africa Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
- (iv) India-Africa Institute of Information Technology
- (v) India-Africa Food Processing Cluster,
- (vi) India-Africa Integrated Textile Cluster,
- (vii) India-Africa Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting,
- (viii) India-Africa University for Life and Earth Sciences,
- (ix) India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development, and
- (x) India-Africa Civil Aviation Academy.

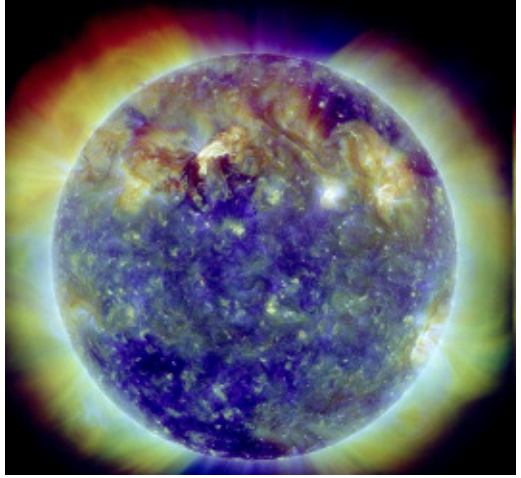
The African Ministers acknowledged the Indian Government’s initiative to set up an Integrated Textiles as well as other clusters in African countries, to address the need for value-addition in the textiles sector in Africa. The proposed Integrated Clusters are expected to garner investments of US \$ 350 mn and generate employment for 60,000 textile workers.

During the meeting, India and Africa reiterated their commitment towards the centrality of the development dimension and the expeditious completion of the Least Developed Countries’ (LDC) issues in the Doha Development Agenda, and agreed that by concluding the Doha Round of negotiations with development at its core, the multilateral trading system envisaged by the WTO would be strengthened. India and Africa share a common platform on many issues of importance to developing countries and their joint efforts have played a key role in preventing any dilution of the development agenda.

The ‘India-Africa Trade Ministers Dialogue’ is an annual event, of which the 1st meeting was held in Addis Ababa in May, 2011, on the occasion of the 2nd Africa-India Forum Summit held at Head of State level.

Massive solar storm hits Earth

A monster solar storm of charged particles that erupted two days ago hit the Earth, which could disrupt power grids, satellite navigation and



flights. The storm, which scientists claimed to be the largest in five years, was triggered by a pair of solar flares early Tuesday and is growing like a giant soap bubble. “The coronal mass ejection (CME) associated with the R3 (Strong) Radio Blackout event from 0024 UTC March 7 (7:24 p.m. EST March 6) arrived at ACE at 1045 GMT today (15:15 IST),” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administra-

tion (NOAA) said. “So far the orientation of the magnetic field has been opposite of what is needed to cause the strongest storming. As the event progresses, that field will continue to change,” NOAA tweeted. Earlier, Joseph Kunches, a space weather scientist at the NOAA said, “Space weather has gotten very interesting over the last 24 hours.” “This was quite the Super Tuesday you bet,” Kunches was quoted as saying by SPACE.com. Several NASA spacecraft caught videos of the solar flare as it hurled a wave of solar plasma and charged particles, called a coronal mass ejection (CME), into space. Early predictions estimate that the CME will reach Earth at 5pm (India time) today, with the effects likely lasting for 24 hours, and possibly lingering into Friday, Kunches said. The solar eruptions occurred when the Sun let loose two huge X-class solar flares that ranked among the strongest type of Sun storms. The biggest of those flares registered as an “X5.4 class” solar storm on the space weather scale and the CME from this flare is the one that could disrupt satellite operations, Kunches said.

BrahMos cruise missile successfully test fired

The Army has successfully test fired the 290-Km range BrahMos supersonic cruise missile at the Pokharan range in Jaisalmer to operationalise the second regiment of the weapon system in service.



“In conformity and pursuit of operational and strategic surface to surface missile capability development, the second BrahMos unit of Indian Army has been operationalised. The Indian Army unit successfully launched BrahMos missile and destroyed the preselected target in the field firing ranges in Rajasthan,” an Army spokesperson said in Jaisalmer. The test was witnessed by senior Army officials including Vice Chief Lt Gen Shri Krishna Singh and Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt Gen A K Chaudhary. The Army has so far placed orders for three regiments of the supersonic cruise missile and with Sunday’s test firing, two of them have been inducted operationally. The Defence Ministry has also given a go ahead to the Army to induct a third regiment for being deployed in Arunachal Pradesh along the China border. One regiment of the 290-km range BrahMos consists around 65 missiles, five mobile autonomous launchers on Tatra vehicles and two mobile command posts, among other equipment. BrahMos Aerospace, an Indo-Russian Joint venture company headed by A Sivathanu Pillai, is also working to develop the submarine launched, air launched and a hypersonic version of the missile in the near future.

It has already been inducted into the Navy and is deployed on almost all the front line surface warships of the maritime force.

India successfully test-fires interceptor missile

India successfully test-fired indigenously developed interceptor missile, capable of destroying any incoming hostile ballistic missile, from a test range off Odisha coast. “It was a fantastic launch. The trial, conducted from two launch sites of Integrated Test Range (ITR) for developing a fully fledged multi-layer Ballistic Missile Defence system, was fully successful,” ITR Director S P Dash said. The ‘hostile’ target ballistic missile,

a modified surface-to-surface ‘Prithvi’, was first lifted from a mobile launcher around 1013hours from the launch complex-III of ITR at Chandipur-on-Sea, about 15 km from Balasore, Orissa. After three minutes, the interceptor Advanced Air Defence (AAD) missile positioned at Wheeler Island, about 70 km from Chandipur, received signals from tracking radars installed along the coastline and travelled through the sky to destroy it, defense sources said. The ITR director said the interceptor hit the ‘target’ missile at an altitude of about 15 km over the sea. “Detailed results and the ‘kill’ effect of the interceptor are being ascertained by analysing data from multiple tracking sources,” a Defence Research Development scientist said. The interceptor is a 7.5-meter long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and an electro-mechanical activator, sources said.

World Bank approves USD 4.3 bn aid to India

The World Bank has announced USD 4.3 billion financial aid to India through a new innovative and flexible financing arrangement to help the country fight poverty.

This arrangement, while facilitating a USD 4.3 billion increase in support to India, is designed to maintain International Bank for Reconstruction and Development’s (IBRD) - which is its lending arm - net exposure within the limit of USD 17.5 billion established by it. In a statement, the World Bank said the new arrangement will allow for special bonds to be issued by the World Bank and purchased by India, to offset additional planned lending.

This will enable India to continue accessing long-term, low-interest IBRD finance for development projects aimed at improving the lives of its people, one third of whom are yet to make their way out of poverty.

“Without taking this action, it would have been difficult for the Bank to assist India meaningfully as it tackles the remaining large challenges of lifting some 300 million out of poverty,” said WB vice president for South Asia Isabel Guerrero.

“This new arrangement will work towards supporting India’s development needs, showing the Bank can be innovative, flexible and responsive to the differentiated needs of our client countries,” she said in a statement in Washington. The Bank said like other emerging economies, India is faced with the challenge of removing bottlenecks in infrastructure and human skill development that can constrain its ability to sustain non-inflationary, rapid and inclusive growth. In line with its aim to support India’s development goals, the World Bank has nearly 80 active projects in India, with several large projects in the critical area of infrastructure. There are “growing demands for the Bank’s low-cost financing and the institution has been exploring innovations to meet these calls for its services,” the statement said.

“The new move is in line with previous commitments by the World Bank that the Bank strives to leverage its financial and knowledge resources to help India as it steps up its response to its development challenges,” it said. Funding for active World Bank Group projects includes USD 9.2 billion in interest-free credits from the Banks fund for the poorest, the



International Development Association (IDA); USD14.6 billion from IBRD; and a committed portfolio of USD3.57 billion from the Banks private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The World Bank Group in its last fiscal year (ending June 2011) made USD 6.32 billion available to India, including USD 2.07 billion from IDA, USD 3.47 billion from IBRD and USD 775 million from IFC.

Gay population in India is 25 lakh, 7 pc HIV infected

India has an estimated 25 lakh gay population and about seven percent (1.75 lakh) of them are HIV infected, Government told the Supreme Court.

“The population of MSM was estimated to be 25 lakhs in India,” the government said in its affidavit filed in the apex court, citing figures of the National Aids Control programme. The affidavit, filed by Ministry of health, said that it is planning to bring 4 lakh high risk Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) under its AIDS control programme and it has already covered around 2 lakh. It further said that estimated HIV prevalence among Female Sex Workers is 4.60-4.94 percent, and among MSM it is 6.54 -7.23 percent and in case of injecting Drug Users it is 9.42-10.30 percent.

The government affidavit was filed in compliance with the Supreme Court’s direction seeking detailed information on the number of homosexuals in the country and how many of them are HIV infected. The government submitted that there has been an overall reduction of HIV prevalence, HIV incidence (new infections) as well as deaths due to AIDS-related causes because of its AIDS control programme. Earlier, gay rights activists came out in support of decriminalisation of homosexual behavior among consenting adults in private saying that it would help in bringing them in national mainstream. Naz Foundation, an NGO, working for the welfare and rehabilitation of HIV infected persons, submitted that criminalising gay sex will lead to preventing homosexuals come out in the open.

“This population is hidden in the society and they are not available for getting proper health care facilities. There is a greater chance of the transmission of disease among them,” advocate Anand Grover, appearing for the NGO, said. A bench headed by Justice G S Singhvi then asked him to place reports and studies done by experts to substantiate his arguments. In the last hearing on 29th February, various social and religious organisations had vehemently opposed decriminalisation of gay sex saying that allowing such acts would lead to a “horrendous” situation. The Delhi High Court had in 2009 decriminalised gay sex as provided in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and had ruled that sex between two consenting adults of same sex in private would not be an offence.

Section 377 (unnatural offences) of the IPC makes gay sex a criminal offence entailing punishment up to life term. The apex court is hearing petitions filed by anti-gay rights activists as also by political, social and religious organisations, which have opposed the high court verdict. Senior BJP leader B P Singhal, who had opposed in the high court the plea for legalisation of gay sex, has challenged the verdict in the Supreme Court, saying such acts are illegal, immoral and against ethos of Indian culture.

Religious organisations like All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Utkal Christian Council and Apostolic Churches Alliance too have also challenged the high court’s order. Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Right, Tamil Nadu Muslim

Munn Kazhgam, astrologer Suresh Kumar Kaushal and yoga guru Ramdev too have challenged the high court verdict before the apex court.

Courts can’t pass general directions to Government: SC said

Courts cannot pass general directions to states and Union Territories,



however well-intended they may be, particularly when it involves huge financial expenditure, the Supreme Court has ruled.

The apex court gave the ruling while upholding an appeal by the Kerala government challenging the state high court’s fiat for construction of large number of bus bays and acquisition of land all over the state for setting up special roadside parking zones to prevent recurrent accidents.

“Such general directions of wide ramifications ought not to have been given in such proceeding... the facts which are relevant and germane for issuance of such directions were not before the court,” said a bench of justices R M Lodha and H L Gokhale, in a judgement. The Kerala government had appealed in the apex court challenging the high court’s 17th September 2008 order, directing it “to provide sufficient parking space for vehicles on road side, if required, by acquiring land, which should also be done within a time frame, even though we do not fix any specific time for this.” The directions were passed while dealing with the compensation claim of the family of one P C Krishnakumar, a motorcycle pillion rider, who died after his bike rammed into a truck allegedly parked on roadside without sufficient indicators at Puthusserichellakkadu, on the Coimbatore-Palakkadu National Highway.

After polio, India to eliminate measles, tetanus child deaths

Laying emphasis on strengthening of routine immunisation, Health Min Ghulam Nabi Azad said the lessons learnt from success of polio campaign could help eliminate measles-related child deaths and neonatal tetanus from the country. In his valedictory address at the two-day Polio Summit in New Delhi on Sunday, Azad said there has to be continued vigil and effective emergency preparedness as India cannot afford to let its guards now on the polio virus. “Emboldened by our progress in polio, we are confident that we can achieve elimination of measles related child deaths. We also now wish to completely eliminate neonatal tetanus in India and are moving towards it. Some of our learnings and lessons from the Polio programme could prove to be extremely useful in accomplishing these tasks,” Azad said. The Minister laid stress on immunisation and said “strengthening routine immunisation is an imperative if we wish to sustain our gains in polio and guard ourselves against both distant and international importations.” He said, “We have declared 2012, the year of the intensification of Routine Immunisation. We intend to accelerate routine immunisation activities from 1st April itself through special immunisation drives, with a special focus on 207 districts recording low routine immunisation coverage.” The minister also reaffirmed India’s commitment to funding the Polio programme and said it willing to lend all possible support for global

eradication of polio. Azad said with increased public investments in health from domestic resources India required “catalytic and technical support” from its various partners in helping eradicate many diseases. He urged Rotary International, WHO, UNICEF, CDC, Gates Foundation, GAVI and other partners to now work to provide impetus to routine immunisation and synergize polio eradication and Routine Immunisation strategies. “I am confident that together we would be able to ensure that India not only becomes Polio-free but that all our children are fully protected against every preventable disease,” he said. Azad said that 26 million mothers and children have already been registered under the web enabled mother and child tracking system set up by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The system generates weekly work plans for the Auxiliary Nurse Midwives through SMS. He informed that in 14 states where coverage is less than 80 percent, introduction of second dose of measles has been started. Our target is to cover more than 130 million children under this campaign.

The minister informed the gathering that President Pratibha Patil, who launches the annual National Pulse Polio round, has conveyed her personal greetings and commendation on the public health milestone that has been achieved with WHO’s decision to take India off the list of countries with active endemic wild poliovirus transmission. The two-day Summit emphasised perseverance, innovation and accountability as the hallmarks of India’s polio programme. Azad said he would look forward to another polio summit after January 2014 when India would be declared Polio Free.

WHO recommends full publication of avian flu studies

The World Health Organization recommended Friday that two reports on avian flu studies by Japanese and European researchers be fully published, following a US call on two leading scientific journals not to print them completely over fears that detailed information about the lethal virus could be used in bioterrorism. Representatives from the United States also backed the recommendation. The WHO also agreed it is necessary to enhance a system to control viruses and make people aware of the system’s safety so relevant people can widely share the results of such studies. The move came after the US National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity called on the American journal Science and the British journal Nature in December to delete parts of the reports on avian flu that the teams of researchers had contributed. The two reports, one by the Institute of Medical Science at the University of Tokyo and the other by Erasmus MC in the Netherlands, contain the results of studies on how strongly the avian flu virus could be contagious in mammals, including humans, using a virus that was genetically modified from the bird flu virus. The board asked the journals not to print parts of the reports that show how to create an avian flu virus that can affect humans. Neither of the magazines has published any part of the reports yet. The move has stirred controversy over whether antiviral research or prevention of bioterrorism should take priority, and prompted a group of 39 scientists to suspend their research for 60 days to publicize the importance of the reports and the credibility of the system controlling viruses. WHO also decided to hold an international conference, possibly in June, to discuss the matter of how to strike a balance between scientific research and anti-terrorism

LATEST BY-ELECTION RESULTS FROM DIFFERENT STATE ASSEMBLIES

In by-elections to different state assemblies, these are the results so far.

The big highlights: Pro-Telenagana TRS, which is K Chandrasekhar Rao's party, does very well in Andhra Pradesh (six of the seven assembly seats that voted are in the Telangana region). Congress punished by voters for centre's refusal to sanction a separate Telangana state. In Gujarat, BJP loses Mansa assembly seat to Congress, worrying for the BJP since state elections are just months away. In Karnataka, BJP loses Udipi Chikmanglur which was former constituency of chief minister Sadananda Gowda. The BJP's tallest leader BS Yeddyurappa was not allowed to campaign here by his party because it was worried the corruption charges against him would turn voters against the party.

State	Const No	Constituency	Winnner	Party
Karnataka	10015	Udupi	Chikmagalur Jai Prakash Hegde	Cong
Andhra Pradesh	01074	Mahabubnagar	Y. Srinivas Reddy	BJP
Andhra Pradesh	01099	Ghanpur (Station)	T.Rajaya	TRS
Andhra Pradesh	01085	Kollapur	J. Krishna Rao	TRS
Andhra Pradesh	01007	Adilabad	J. Ramna	TRS
Andhra Pradesh	01016	Kamareddy	G. Goverdhan	TRS
Gujarat	06084	Mansa	Thakur Babu Singh Mohan Singh.	Cong
Kerala	11085	Piravom	Anup Jacob	UDF
Odisha	18089	Athgarh	Ralendra Pratap Sai	BJD

measures. Yoshihiro Kawaoka of the Japanese institute described the results of the latest WHO meeting as a “reasonable conclusion” and said he and the 38 other scientists will resume their research if conditions permit. 'Rockstar' wins top honours at FICCI Frames Ranbir Kapoor-starrer 'Rockstar' won top honours including the best actor and best director titles at the



FICCI Frames Excellence Awards in Mumbai. 'Rockstar' won a total of four awards making it the biggest winner, last evening. Imtiaz Ali won the best director while Ranbir bagged the best actor award. Music maestro A R Rahman won the best music director award and Mohit Chauhan bagged the honour for best singer (Male). Producers Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani walked away with the best film award for their path-breaking movie 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara'. Actress Vidya Balan continued with her winning spree in the best actress category for 'The Dirty Picture'. Hosted by Mandira Bedi, the awards featured stunning performances by singer Usha Uthup and rock sensation Papon. In the debut category of awards, newbie Parineeti Chopra won the best debut (Female) for 'Ladies VS Ricky Bahl' while Vidhut Jamwal won best debut award (Male) for 'Force'. Abhinay Deo was given best debut director for Imran Khan-starrer 'Delhi Belly'. Playback singers Usha Uthup and Rekha Bhardwaj received the award for best singer (Female) for '7 Khoon Maaf'. Megastar Amitabh Bachchan was honoured with the award for maximum impact made by a personality. In the television category, 'Bade Achhe Lagte Hai', a popular show on Sony, fetched producer Ekta Kapoor the 'Best Fiction Programme' award while both the protagonists--Ram Kapoor and Sakshi Tanwar--were adjudged as Best Actors in the Male and Female category respectively. Game show 'Kaun Banega Crorepati' won the best non-fiction programme. The award ceremony will be aired on UTV Stars, the official broadcast partner, on a later date. The FICCI Frames event, which

unfolded in Mumbai over three days, from the March 14-16, concluded with the award function.

Facebook Warns Employers Not to Ask Job Applicants for Log-in Credentials

Facebook on Friday warned em-



ployers about trying to gain inappropriate access to Facebook accounts to check out private information about potential employees, citing possible legal liability. In recent months, Facebook has seen a "distressing increase" of reports about employers trying to access user accounts in the U.S., Erin Egan, Facebook's chief privacy officer, said in a post. "The most alarming of these practices is the reported incidences of employers asking prospective or actual employees to reveal their passwords." A user should never be forced to share private information just to get a job, she added. According to Facebook, these practices undermine the privacy expectations and the security of users' and their friends' accounts. Employers who ask job applicants if they can log in to their Facebook accounts or reveal log-in credentials are potentially subject to unanticipated legal liability, Egan warned. Facebook announced it has changed its Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, making requests to share or solicit a Facebook log-in a violation of the social networks' rules. Egan also cited possible legal action from Facebook against violators of these rules: "We'll take action to protect the privacy and security of our users, whether by engaging policymakers or, where appropriate, by initiating legal action, including by shutting down

applications that abuse their privileges." The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) stated on Tuesday that employers asking for Facebook log-in credentials are out of bounds and are invading people's privacy. ACLU attorney Catherine Crump emphasized on the ACLU website that asking for someone's password is equal to asking job applicants to open their postal mail to get a job. Crump made this remark in reply to an Associated Press report about a job applicant who was asked to log in to his Facebook wall, to show the interviewer his private profile.

42nd International Film Festival of India

The 42nd International Film Festival of India with its inherent theme of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' meaning 'The Whole World is One Family' is successfully moving forward. For delegates there are so many movies of their taste including documentaries, classics, feature



and non-feature films in various Indian as well as foreign languages. This time some technologically advanced films including Three Dimensional are also being screened. The atmosphere at the main venue, Macquence Palace, fills with oomph when some of the Indian actors, especially female, come to watch their movie in theatres. They create flutter amongst the public for some time and then everything starts moving at the same pace. Madhuri Dixit was one such beautiful actress whose presence at the Macquence Palace mesmerized

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OPINION - EDITORIAL

TUAREG REBELLION IN MALI

Chitra Singh Rajput

A nomadic community of some 1.5 million people, Tuareg of various tribes are scattered in several countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Niger and Mali. March 17, 2012 marked two months since the first shots were fired in Mali's latest Tuareg rebellion. Since then, Mali's army has been humiliated as the country now faces a real possibility of territorial division.

The Tuareg number an estimated two to three million. Nomadic pastoralists by tradition, they occupy a vast swathe of the Sahara and Sahel, from Libya, through northern Niger, southern Algeria and northern Mali to Burkina Faso. The largest number, estimated at approaching one million, live in Mali. The post-colonial history of Tuareg in both Mali and Niger has been characterised by a series of rebellions, the underlying causes of which have been the Tuaregs' marginalisation and the failure of their governments to adhere to peace agreements. Mali has experienced major Tuareg rebellions in 1962-64, 1990-95 and 2007-2009. The catalyst for the present rebellion was the return of an estimated two to three thousand experienced well-armed Tuareg fighters who had served in Gaddafi's battalions. Their anger at events in Libya was compounded by the lackadaisical attitude and the complete failure of Mali's President Amadou Toumani Toure and his government to address the problems created by their return.

Estimates of the number of returning Tuareg fighters range between 800 and 4,000. On their return to Mali, many stopped short of Kidal in the mountainous region around Tim-n-Asselak in the Abeibara district where they linked up with the fighters of former rebel leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga's (who died in August 2011) *Mouvement Tuareg du Nord Mali (MTNM)*. On October 16, these and various other groups merged to form the *Mouvement National de Liberation de l'Azawad (MNLA)*.

'Illegal occupation'

The *MNLA*'s first press statement said that it aimed "to free the people of Azawad from the illegal occupation of its territory by Mali". Azawad is the Tuareg name for the region north of Timbuktu that today covers the regions of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao. The word is also used, by extension, to include the traditional Tuareg domains of northern Niger and southern Algeria. Within a few weeks, the *MNLA* was reinforced by Tuareg deserting the Mali army and young recruits from within the region. Estimates put the former as high as 1,500 and the latter at 500. After two months of fighting, the Malian army has lost control of most of Azawad, while the number of troops that have either been killed, taken captive or deserted is now thought to be at least 1,000. In a humiliating incident, the army base at Aguelhok was overrun on January 24 when the troops defending it ran out of ammunition.

However, from a strategic point of view, the most significant fighting was at Tessalit. Close to the border with Algeria and with an army base and airport, Tessalit is a strategic town. By March 4, three Malian army units abandoned their attempts to relieve the *MNLA* siege of the base. A week later, the troops retreated to Algeria, leaving the base and the airport in *MNLA* control. The number of

soldiers killed, taken captive or deserted, along with equipment destroyed or captured in these twin setbacks is thought to be considerable.

The two outstanding questions are: (1) Where do the *MNLA* and Mali go from here; and (2) Is the *MNLA* guilty of the "war crime" of which it is being accused by the Mali government?

It is conceivable that further attacks on the highly vulnerable, nomadic civilian population, may bring the rebels to submission, as has been the case in previous Tuareg rebellions. It is also conceivable that the Malian government's undercover militias, ethnic hatred campaigns, military in civilian clothing acting in mobs shouting "death to the Tuaregs" and internet propaganda might succeed in opening cleavages within the complex political, ethnic and social mix that comprises the totality of the Azawad population.

However, the signs are that the rebellion is capable of sustaining itself for much longer, especially if the *MNLA* receives support from Niger's well-armed and battle-experienced Tuareg, as unverified reports suggest. With Tessalit in *MNLA* hands, it may be difficult for the army to regain any momentum. The future of Bamako's control over the vast expanse of Azawad now depends almost entirely on whether the dispirited and ill-led Malian army can repulse the *MNLA* assault - if and when it comes - on the regional capital of Kidal.

If Kidal falls, then much of the current media talk about a negotiated ceasefire will be largely academic. The reality of such a situation would be that Mali would have become a divided territory, a situation that would not only seriously concern Mali's neighbours, but also leave the *MNLA* in a very strong bargaining position. The *MNLA* says it won't negotiate unless it is about the Republic of Azawad. However, even with the model of southern Sudan in its sights, the *MNLA* knows from past experience that demands for independence will get watered down. It is therefore likely to establish the facts on the ground, in the form of the capture of Kidal and possibly even Gao, before contemplating any such negotiations.

If the *MNLA* does establish such a strong negotiating position, there is no certainty that the current Mali government will still be around to negotiate with. Since early March, there have been rumours of fissions within the Mali government and even talk of a Gao-based *coup d'etat*. Moreover, while it is all very well for Bamako to debate whether military force or negotiation is the solution, the reality may well be that the former is not an option.

Guilty of a 'war crime'?

The second question is whether the *MNLA* is guilty of the war crime. The government claims that the *MNLA* executed 82 captured soldiers and civilians at Aguelhok (pop. 8,000-10,000) on January 24. There is no doubt that many people were killed at Aguelhok. A Mali security source told Reuters that dozens of Malian troops were killed. "It was real carnage," he said. An *MNLA* spokesman confirmed that at least 50 soldiers were killed in the fighting. Government sources have put the number higher, at 82 and 97.



News of the deaths was quickly followed by rumours that the troops stationed in Aguelhok had run out of ammunition. Not surprisingly, public demonstrations immediately demanded to know why soldiers had been sent into battle so ill-equipped. Within forty-eight hours, reports began circulating that many of the soldiers had been taken captive by the rebels and then executed, either with a bullet to the head or by slitting their throats. The defence ministry stated that the attack had been undertaken by "AQIM jihadists, *MNLA* forces and others".

After a hasty commission of enquiry, the army stated that both soldiers and civilians had been executed, some with their throats cut and that these acts could only have been done by AQIM. Speaking earlier the same day, French Development Minister Henri de Raincourt, who visited Bamako, said "there was absolutely atrocious and unacceptable violence in Aguelhok. There were summary executions of soldiers and civilians... There's talk of around 100 who were captured and killed in cold blood," he added, saying the tactic "resembled that used by al-Qaeda".

If captured soldiers were executed, as the Mali government claims, then it was a war crime. But, was such a war crime committed and, if so, by whom? The government's evidence consists of little more than its own assertions and photographs of dubious authenticity. Photographs of the supposed killings placed on Facebook and the internet by Mali government "supporters" at the end of January have been removed. However, five of them remain accessible, with one identified by the *MNLA* as being of a massacre undertaken by Boko Haram in Nigeria on March 2, 2010; the authenticity of the other four has not yet been established. The *MNLA*'s communications officer has confirmed that they are not of Aguelhok. International news agencies remain suspicious of their authenticity. Until a credible international agency undertakes a full examination of the incident, including the exhumation and forensic examination of the bodies, the executions must remain unproven allegations.

However, if we accept, for the time being, that a war crime was perpetrated at Aguelhok, the question still remains: Who was responsible for it? Aguelhok villagers say that the *MNLA* attacked Aguelhok on January 24 and killed only soldiers in the fighting. The next day, people whom the villagers identified as AQIM came and carried out the massacre. There were no *MNLA* in Aguelhok at the time.

The *MNLA* returned three days later and raised their flag over Aguelhok. The Mali authorities, as well as Mauritania's President Abdel Aziz,

accuse the *MNLA* of being in an alliance with AQIM and insist that the executions are proof of this alliance. However, as Tuareg are not known either to slit throats as a form of killing humans or to kill their captives in cold blood, the accusation is directed more at the AQIM part of the supposed *MNLA*-AQIM alliance, with the name **lyad ag Aghaly** being mentioned prominently. Indeed, a propaganda video believed to have been produced by Mali's intelligence service, Mauritania's President and a number of reports attributed to Mali official sources, have all pointed the finger at lyad.

lyad is a former Tuareg rebel leader who has been involved with Algeria's secret police, the DRS, in several operations since 2003. He is also closely associated with AQIM's local emir, Abdelhamid Abou Zaid, who, in turn, is a DRS agent. In December, lyad announced his own jihadist group, the **Ansar al-Din**. If lyad was involved in the executions, the question is whether he was operating on his own initiative or whether he involved with either or both Algeria's DRS and Abdelhamid about Zaid's group of AQIM, which is based near Aguelhok.

If Abou Zaid and AQIM, either independently or in association with lyad, were responsible for the alleged executions, then Algeria's DRS is implicated, begging the question: What was the Algerian army doing in Aguelhok at or around that time? Local observers reported an Algerian army convoy of five army trucks with trailers and 24 heavily armed 4x4s heading south from Bordj Mokhtar to Tessalit and Aguelhok around December 20. They estimated the number of troops, garrisoned at both Tessalit and Aguelhok, at around 200. What were these troops doing in Aguelhok and had they been withdrawn by the time of the alleged executions? The Algerian government said its army was in Mali to help combat AQIM. That, however, was untrue, as no attacks have been launched at any time against AQIM in Mali by either Mali or Algerian forces. Indeed, one of the *MNLA*'s main complaints against the Mali government has been its reluctance to undertake any meaningful attack on AQIM.

Many local Tuareg believe that the Algerian army's presence at Tessalit and Aguelhok was not to fight AQIM, but to protect it from the *MNLA*, which has threatened to rid Mali of AQIM. Indeed, the *MNLA* has said that the reason why AQIM is protected by both Algeria and Mali is because AQIM is a cover for the massive, billion-dollar, cocaine trafficking industry that is controlled by rogue elements in the political-military elites of both countries and which has turned Mali into a "narco-state".

EDITORIAL
DEVELOP INDIA

English Weekly Newspaper
Year 4, Vol. 1, Issue 189, 18-25 March, 2012

INDIA-ASEAN
RELATIONS

India has been following a "Look East Policy" since 1990s. There has been steady progress in the India-ASEAN relationship since the policy was initiated in 1991. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992, which was upgraded to full dialogue partnership in 1996. Since 2002, we have had annual Summits with ASEAN. To mark the 20th anniversary of our dialogue-level partnership and the 10th anniversary of our Summit-level partnership with ASEAN, India would be hosting the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit on the theme "India and ASEAN: Partners in Progress and Prosperity" in New Delhi on December 20-21, 2012.

2. India-ASEAN functional cooperation is diverse and includes cooperation across a range of sectors, such as trade, science & technology, human resource development, health and pharmaceuticals, space sciences, agriculture, new and renewable energy, information and communication technology, telecommunications, transport and infrastructure, and tourism and culture.

3. At the 7th India-ASEAN Summit in October, 2009, India announced a contribution of US\$ 50 million to the India-ASEAN Co-operation Fund to support India-ASEAN projects across the range of sectors mentioned above. In addition, the India-ASEAN Science & Technology Fund has been set up with an initial corpus fund of US \$ 1 million. Further, India has set up a US\$ 5 million India-ASEAN Green Fund for pilot projects to promote adaptation and mitigation technologies in the field of climate change.

4. The total trade between India and ASEAN increased by 30% in 2010-11, reaching US\$ 57.89 billion. At the ASEAN-India Economic Ministerial Meeting held in Bangkok, the India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement was signed on 13 August, 2009. It has been implemented by India and all ten ASEAN Member States since 1 August, 2011.

5. Co-operation between India and ASEAN is being intensified, including in the cultural, educational and academic fields, through the promotion of people-to-people contacts, and initiatives such as the Eminent Persons Lecture Series, Youth Exchange Programmes, Special Training Courses for ASEAN Diplomats and Media Exchange Programmes. India has established Centres for English Language training (CELT) and Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDC) in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV countries).

6. The Indian Parliamentary delegation attended the 31st General Assembly of ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) held in Hanoi, Vietnam from 20-25 September, 2010, where India was accorded "Observer Status" by AIPA. The Indian Parliamentary delegation also attended the 32nd General Assembly of AIPA held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 18-24 September 2011.

7. An ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG) has been set up to draft a new India-ASEAN Vision - 2020 document to be adopted at the Commemorative Summit. The first and second meetings of the AIEPG were held in Phnom Penh from August 2-3, 2011 and New Delhi from 20-21 October, 2011 respectively. The third meeting is scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur from March 9-10, 2012.

8. An India-ASEAN Business Summit and Exhibition was held from March 2-6, 2011 at New Delhi. Delhi Dialogue-III, a 'Regional Security and Cooperation Dialogue', was also held back-to-back with the Business Summit. The Secretary-General of ASEAN visited India to grace this occasion.

9. Delhi Dialogue IV on the theme "India and ASEAN: Partners for Peace, Progress and Stability" was held from February 13-14, 2012 in New Delhi. The visit of the ASEAN Committee of Representatives (CPR) to India from February 12-17, 2012 coincided with Delhi-Dialogue IV.

10. At the 8th India-ASEAN Summit held in Hanoi, Vietnam, in October, 2010, Prime Minister announced the extension of Visa on Arrival facility to Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines and Laos with effect from January 1, 2011. In fulfillment of this announcement, India has extended visa on arrival facility to six ASEAN countries, namely, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.

11. A MoU on Strengthening Tourism Co-operation between India and ASEAN was signed at the India-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Tourism on January 12, 2012, in Manado, Indonesia.

12. The 9th India-ASEAN Summit was held in Bali, Indonesia on 19 November, 2011. The Leaders took stock of the progress made in the India-ASEAN relationship and agreed to enhance co-operation on a range of issues, including trade, maritime security, food and energy security, and physical and people-to-people connectivity. They reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen India-ASEAN cooperation, through the implementation of the Plan of Action 2010-15, in the run-up to the Commemorative Summit.



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everyone. Where delegates (read general public) were eager to just have a look of this Dhak..Dhak..lady, photo-journalists were all the more excited to have a best 'kill' of the day. Despite having advanced cameras with which one can click a good picture from some distance, they were having close-ups from close quarters. The visits were later followed by Hollywood based Indian actress, Freido Pinto, pretty Kalki Koechlin, not-so-old, Padmani Kolhapure, lanky Preeti Jhangiani.

Jackie Shroff aka Jackie Dada also attracted many with his Bumbbee language.....'Eh Beeru.....Dekh tu meri baat sun na.....

Going by the response of the people films are getting here, a director of the stature of Phillip Noyce from Australia who has films like Newsfront, Dead Calm, Blind Fury, The Bone Collector and Salt, to his credit, has termed this festival a gift to filmmakers. He even said the Indian market has opened up to global movies and the acceptability of international projects has flourished.

Francisco Manso, Director of Portuguese film, 'The Consul of Bordeaux', which was the opening movie of the event, was also charmed by the response his and other movies are getting.

An Argentinian filmmaker, Pablo Cesar, who is intended to make a film on India's literary giant, Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore, for the first time has announced here that he wants Amitabh Bachchan to play the lead role. Meanwhile, IFFI, for the first time in its history has included social responsibility as part of the festival by taking up the cause of intellectually challenged people. What was purely an entertainment and cultural event, will now have a much needed social dimension as well.

SAATH, a group of more than 250 parents from across the country, led by a Fellow of IIM, Ahemdabad, Shalini Gupta has convinced the IFFI top shot to take the initiative. So, a special segment was created and three short films titled 'JANAM', 'AAGAZH' and 'PARVAZ' were shown at the festival for public awareness. These were about true stories of intellectually challenged children narrated by their parents out of which some of them were present there.

For those who love documentaries, there is good news for them. The Indian Documentary Producers Association (IDPA) led by Mike Pandey, has entered into an agreement with Doordarshan to documentaries on social issues at prime time on Sunday mornings from January onwards. These films will be telecast on various Doordarshan channels in different Indian languages over five years. Passing through good times, the festival had an unpleasant day also when a Brazilian filmmaker, Oscar Maron Filho died of severe heart attack during an Open Forum event. However, following a well-known phrase in the show business that 'The Show Must Go On', the festival will go on till December 3rd, hopefully without any hindrance, whether Natural or manmade.

Swine flu outbreak in India kills 12

Twelve people have died from swine flu in India since the beginning of March and nearly 110 others have been infected with the virus, the country's health ministry said. The ministry announced in a statement late on Thursday that the victims were from the western states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan as well as southern Andhra Pradesh



and Karnataka.

"The government is taking all necessary steps to curb the spread of influenza A (H1N1) virus across the country," health ministry. "The states where cases had been reported have been advised to step up surveillance to control the further spread of the virus," she said. More than 500 people died from swine flu in India and more than 14,000 people tested positive in 2009.

Taj Mahotsav 2012

Taj Mahotsav, one of the most eagerly awaited festivals, is celebrated from 16th to 25th March this year at Shilpgram near the



Eastern gate of "Taj Mahal".

This 10 days long carnival is actually a vibrant platform that gives you information of India where you can find India's rich arts, crafts, cultures, cuisine, dance and music. Taj Mahal is the most beautiful historical place of India which tells about incredible India. Taj Mahotsav is organized by UP Tourism and it is a source to increase Indian Tourism.

The city of the Taj Mahal has got its own anthem and it is being played at road junctions, schools and colleges as a part of the ongoing Taj Mahotsav.

The 11-day Mahotsav will end on March 26.

Titled "Mere Agra, oh mere Agra...", the song was launched Sunday by Mayor Anjula Singh Mahaur. Its CDs are being distributed in schools to popularise it.

"Mere Agra, oh mere Agra..." has been penned by eminent poet Shiv Shankar Sharma and sung by pop singer Babul Supriyo. Adesh Srivastav has composed the music. The song, which glorifies the monuments, the Yamuna ghats and the poetry of Ghalib and Mir, is an initiative by the Hindi daily Dainik Jagran to motivate people to work for the city's growth and promotion.

About Taj Mahotsav This cultural bonanza was started in year 1992 and since then its grandeur has reached to greater heights. In the year 2010, we are celebrating the 21th year of this Mahotsav. This festival also figures in the calendar of events of the Department of Tourism, Government of India. A large number of Indian and foreign tourists coming to Agra joins this festivity in the month of February. One of the objectives of this craft mela is to provide encouragement to the Artisans. It also makes available the magnificent work of art and craft at the most reasonable and authentic prices that are not inflated by high maintenance cost.

Hindus in Russia tense ahead of final verdict on Gita ban

India's diplomatic efforts to resolve a controversy relating to Russian state prosecutors' bid to get a Russian interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita banned and branded extremist literature will be put to test again



with a high court in the Siberian city of Tomsk set to deliver its final verdict on Tuesday. Anxiety and frustration has gripped Hindus in Russia as they feel there was a state-sponsored effort to proscribe "Bhagavad Gita As It Is", written by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of

the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Prosecutors have gone in appeal against a Tomsk lower court's dismissal of their plea December 28 last.

Indo-Asian News Service(IANS) had brought the case to global notice in December when Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was in Moscow for a summit meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, resulting in an uproar back home in India. Parliament was rocked for two days over the Russian prosecutors' attack on their supreme religious text and philosophical treatise.

This led to External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna making a statement in parliament on the Tomsk city case that was filed in June 2011 and the Indian government mounting a diplomatic effort at the "highest levels" with the Russian government to get the matter resolved.

"Anxiety is mounting. The appeal by the state prosecutors is coming up for a final hearing on March 20 at the higher court in Tomsk," Bhakti Vijnana Goswami, the international chief of ISKCON, told IANS over the phone. He is currently on international tour and was somewhere in West Asia.

"This is the final hearing in the state prosecutors' appeal beginning on Tuesday. The verdict in the case may be pronounced either on Tuesday or Wednesday," ISKCON devotee Sadhu Priya Das told IANS from Moscow.

The appeal came up for hearing March 6 and, after hearing the prosecutors, the court fixed March 20 to hear the Hindus on their defence before the verdict is delivered.

Tomsk region prosecutor general Vasily Voikin, in his appeal, demanded that a Russian interpretation included in 'Bhagavad Gita As It Is' be banned.

"The prosecutor has demanded that a Russian translation of a comment in this book, earlier published in English, be banned as extremist, not the canonical text of the scripture," Tomsk region deputy prosecutor general Ivan Semchishin argued. "The bid to ban the Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita has been misunderstood," Tomsk region prosecutor general Alexander Buksman said.

"It's important to discern gems from the chatter in this very case; the society's perception of this issue is that prosecutors are standing against the concepts of this religion (Hinduism). However, the problem is that the Russian translation has paragraphs that could be seen as promoting extremism; prosecutors started the case for that reason," Buksman said.

"The prosecutor (Voikin) is now maintaining his claims in an appeal court for that very reason," Semchishin added. However, Hindus have dismissed the prosecutors' claim, saying these were "twists" being given for public consumption.

"The prosecutors have based their appeal on the lines of the same arguments they placed before the lower court -- that the book is extremist and spread hatred against non-believers," Mikhail Frolov, the advocate for Hindus in the case, told IANS from Moscow. He pointed out to Semchishin's remarks that the prosecutor is maintaining his claims on Bhagavad Gita in the appeal too.

"In reality, the prosecutors are seeking a ban on Bhagavad Gita. They do not want to see the tradition related to commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita," Mr Goswami said. Interestingly, Krishna devotees in Russia held a conference on Bhagavad Gita in Tomsk on March 1, ahead of the appeal in the case coming up before the higher court. Scholars, a majority of them Russian, came out strongly in support on 'Bhagavad Gita As It Is' and condemned the prosecutors' attempts to ban it.

In another effort to drum up support, a group of 20 Russian scholars on India wrote an open letter to

FILM AGENT VINOD REVIEW



The best way to diffuse a bum is through butt crunches. Unless one is referring to the Hinglisized word for a bomb. And the much-awaited dhamakata that this thriller hoped to detonate at the box office might just be diffused once you read this review. Despite miraculous leaps in production values, spy thrillers in Bollywood end up looking like Chinese equivalents of western products. And here, the characters are even stereotyped to the extent of detectives wearing trench coats and moles being obvious, shifty-eyed and literally uncomfortable in their own skin. So let's just say foreign locales, weapons to annihilate the world, designer suits and not-so-excruciating interrogations don't cumulatively justify 'Agent Vinod' as a thrilling movie-watching experience.

RAW agent Vinod (Saif Ali Khan) divides his screen time between being questioned (when he is captured) and playing real-life Counter Strike when he's trying to escape from the baddies. Now when you're a spy in a movie, you need to be indestructible, trained to do just about anything and hop across continents like they were puddles on the ground after a drizzle. So Vinod does all this without a scratch – until he's commissioned a case that allows enough air miles to win a free ride to Pluto. So he jets to Russia, Latvia, Morocco, Pakistan and a dozen other countries to solve the mystery of this curious super weapon referred to as "242" and nothing else. While these three numbers don't seem world-threatening and knee-trembling, we soon learn that they refer to a nuclear bomb, no less. And it is indeed a unique product: it looks like a mosambi juice-maker and the detonator fits snugly into a poetry book. And the very minute this magical device is handed over to the controller, a few words of caution are offered, "Yeh nuclear bomb ka detonator hain, don't lose it." Now that's something that should be included in the manual as well just to be doubly sure.

In his quest to discover and diffuse "242", Vinod meets Irum Bilal (Kareena Kapoor), an agent just like him (only with far fewer facial expressions) from our neighbouring wonder, Pakistan. Irum and Vinod are obviously headed for a common goal and are subjected to endure the same misadventures: surviving bombs, Prem Chopra (as a Moroccan gang-lord perpetually dressed in a maxi), double agents, triple agents but thankfully no LIC agents. During this, the two try very hard to evoke feelings for each other but if they do, they really don't make it apparent to the audience. So if there was to be love story hidden cleverly somewhere within the indiscriminate firing, we really need a spy to crack it.

Vinod and Irum have to be the most tormented secret agents ever. While severe interrogations and dodging a million bullets can be exhausting, what seems to hurt them the most is assuming any recognizable facial expression. Perhaps special agents are trained to be poker faced. Perhaps Saif was too cautious of not letting out his potato-chips-endorsing self. We will never know.

While this film will be forgotten for many reasons, it has a few remarkable sparks that will regrettably stay with the audience. One of them being how Ram Kapoor (playing an international arms dealer) can't spot the mole amongst his personal security that comprises a Russian, another Russian and Ravi Kishan. Then there is an epic scene where Irum smashes out of the window of a towering building to point out the villain who is about to make a slippery exit by an aircraft awaiting him. All this, after she has been shot repeatedly, damaging her liver and a few other organs. But life is yet to be sucked out of her and she later even has a painfully long phone call with Vinod who is on the verge of transporting the live nuclear bomb outside Delhi on a chopper. Will Irum die before the people in the audience breathe their last? Will transporting the nuclear bomb outside Delhi save most earthlings that matter? These questions are best left unanswered.

When the lead cast of the film fails you, it's like the tail-enders are put to task. But with Saif and Kareena both believing that expressions are injurious to health, there was little that the supporting cast could do to save the day. The VFX of the film is being widely discussed and even appreciated by those who form opinions based on promos. But the climax features Saif piloting a chopper that nails aerial somersaults to celebrate the bomb's diffusion. The point being, this chopper looks like a remote controlled toy being maneuvered by an inebriated person.

Music director Pritam's chori has been caught openly and his uninspired tunes don't inspire much either. While Kareena's mujra song was badgered by the media for not being an authentic one, her moves and grooves are more aerobic and less graceful to suit the genre. We hear that Saif is already planning a sequel. Perhaps he could call it 'LIC Agent Vinod: The return of the killer policies'.

Kremlin duo, Dmitry Medvedev and president-to-be Vladimir Putin, to take personal interest relating to the controversy and get the prosecutors' attempts to get Bhagavad Gita ban dropped.

"The book does not contain any signs of extremism and does not incite hatred on ethnic, religious or any other grounds. On the contrary, the book written in the commentary tradition of Bengali Vaishnavism, one of the most popular branches of Hinduism, is considered sacred by a section of believers," the scholars said.

The scholars warned that the trial "discredits Russia's cultural and democratic credentials in the eyes of the civilised world and is driving a wedge in Russian-Indian relations."

Powerful earthquake rattles country's southwest

More than 500 homes damaged or destroyed by 7.4-magnitude quake, but no casualties reported. A major earthquake struck Mexico on Tuesday, unleashing panic as it damaged hundreds of buildings and



caused homes in the capital to bounce like "trampolines". Office workers fled into the street when the 7.4-magnitude quake shook Mexico City for more than a minute. Cellphone service was out, building were evacuated, traffic snarled and the stock exchange closed early.



The governor of the southwestern state of Guerrero, Angel Aguirre, said he had received reports of 800 homes damaged, with some of them knocked down, but he had no more details. The tremor was one of the strongest since the devastating 8.1-magnitude earthquake of 1985, which killed thou-sands in Mexico City. No deaths were reported on Tuesday and the quake caused no major disruptions to air travel or to oil installations, but it scared many residents.

Martha Suarez, an Argentine living in the capital's Roma neighbourhood said she had never known anything like it: "My TV set fell over, the building felt like it was on a trampoline. This one was like no other I have felt before," Suarez said. Emergency services said 800 houses were damaged in Guerrero state, many of them in Ometeppec, near the epicentre of the quake. In the neighbouring state of Oaxaca, 68 mud-brick houses were damaged and five people were injured, one of them seriously, in the hardest-hit area around the town of Pinotepa Nacional near the Pacific coast, local emergency services

said. Some buildings in the capital's trendy district of Condesa were cracked by the earthquake on Tuesday, and residents raced out of buildings with young children and dogs in their arms.

"I swear I never felt one so strong, I thought the building was going to collapse," said Sebastian Herrera, 42, a businessman from a Mexico City neighbourhood hit hard in 1985.

Television images showed part of a bridge collapsed onto a vehicle on the outskirts of Mexico City, but Mayor Marcelo Ebrard said no one was injured and that helicopter flyovers showed there was no sign of major damage in the capital. President Felipe Calderon also said there were no reports of serious damage.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said the inland earthquake would not generate a destructive widespread tsunami, but there was the possibility of some local tsunami effects.

TEST SERIES

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GREEK PARLIAMENT APPROVES NEW BAILOUT DEAL

The Greece parliament has approved measures needed to receive a second package of emergency international loans as thousands of anti-austerity protesters rallied peacefully outside the building. The rescue package, which combined with a first bailout will reach •172 bn (\$226 bn), has already been approved at committee level. It was passed easily in the 300-seat house with the support of the majority Socialists and conservative New Democracy, coalition partners in the government headed by former central banker Lucas Papademos. The Communists and other left-wing opposition parties oppose the agreement, which they say will further increase suffering for ordinary Greeks. Formed in November, the government was tasked with saving Greece from looming bankruptcy by securing the new bailout and seeing through a massive write-down of the country's privately held debt. That mission will be completed in weeks, after which Papademos will call national elections. The Socialists will head into the election under the new leadership of Evangelos Venizelos, who resigned as finance minister on Monday after being elected to the party leadership the previous day. The government is expected to announce a new finance minister, but has refused to specify when. Despite the new bailout, a debt sustainability analysis by the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank warned that Athens may still be unable to implement reforms at the necessary pace. The report obtained by The Associated Press news agency on Tuesday said the programme's balance of risks is leaning toward the downside scenario which would see debt falling to only 145.5 per cent of national income by 2020 even after taking into account the recent losses accepted by private holders of Greece's bonds. The aim of the bond swap that will erase more than •100 bn from Greek debts held by banks, pension funds and other private investors, was to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 120.5 per cent in 2020 - from the current 169 per cent. While sky-high interest rates prevent Greece from raising cash through bond issues, the country is keeping a market presence through regular short-term debt auctions. On Tuesday, the public debt management agency said borrowing costs dropped in a new 13-week treasury bill auction that raised •1.3 bn, with the country paying 4.25 per cent compared to 4.61 per cent last month. So far, keeping Greece afloat has come at a high cost for the country's citizens, who have already seen their standard of living reduced by two years of austerity. Greece has been dependent on a first •110 bn since May 2010. In return for the second bailout, already depleted pensions and salaries have been further cut, while the government pledged to abolish 15,000 public sector jobs this year. Athens has also committed to raise •19 bn (\$25 bn) by 2015 under an open-ended •50 bn (\$65.7 bn) programme to privatise or develop state property. On Tuesday, authorities launched an international tender to develop 186 hectares of coastal land, including a golf course, on the resort island of Rhodes. A similar process is under way for land on the island of Corfu. The widely resented cutbacks have been compounded by a flurry of tax hikes, as authorities failed to adequately address rampant tax evasion and incompetent tax collection. Labour unions have reacted with a string of strikes and protests. Greek ferry crews, on strike for two days, voted on Tuesday to call off a series of rolling 48-hour walkouts over planned reforms to their pension fund. The decision followed talks with government officials. Seamen will return to work early Wednesday morning, their union said. Staff at the state Sotiria hospital in Athens also walked off their jobs on Tuesday to protest the planned merger with a neighbouring hospital, while lawyers in many parts of the country launched a two-

day strike. **History of Debt Crisis** The Greek government debt crisis is one of a number of current European sovereign debt crises. Beginning in late 2009, fears of a sovereign debt crisis developed among investors concerning Greece's ability to meet its debt obligations due to strong increase in government debt levels. This led to a crisis of confidence, indicated by a widening of bond yield spreads and the cost of risk insurance on credit default swaps compared to the other countries in the Eurozone, most importantly Germany. Downgrading of Greek government debt to junk bond status in April 2010, created alarm in financial markets. On 2 May 2010, the Eurozone countries and the IMF agreed on a •110 billion bailout loan for Greece, conditional on the implementation of harsh austerity measures. In October 2011, Eurozone leaders agreed to offer a second •130 billion bailout loan for Greece, conditional not only the implementation of another harsh austerity package, but also that all private creditors should agree to a restructure of the Greek debt, reducing the debt burden from a forecasted 198% of GDP in 2012 to only 120.5% of GDP by 2020. The second bailout deal was finally ratified by all parties in February 2012, and became activated one month later, after the last condition about a successful debt restructure of all Greek government bonds, also had been met. Money-wise the latest bailout plan is set to cover all Greek financial needs in the next three years from 2012-2014. If Greece can manage to comply with all economic targets outlined in the bailout plan, a full return to use the private capital markets for covering future financial needs will be possible again in 2015. **Causes** In order to understand when, how and why the Greek government-debt crisis erupted (and eventually can be solved), it is important to remember the crisis is not limited to a simple debt level problem. Several other main causes exist along with the debt level problem. Already in January 2010, before the extent of the debt-crisis was truly known, the Greek Ministry of Finance highlighted in their *Stability and Growth Program 2010*, these 5 main causes for the significantly deteriorated economic results recorded in 2009 (compared to the published budget figures ahead of the year): **GDP growth rates:** Developed more negatively after 2008, than the Greek national statistical agency had anticipated. With the Greek government now acknowledging the need for implementing economic reforms to improve competitiveness (being hampered during the last decade, due to excessive salary increases and counterproductive bureaucratic laws and procedures), and the need to redirect much of its current governmental spending from non-growth sectors (e.g. military) into growth stimulating sectors. **Government deficit:** Huge fiscal unbalances developed during the past six years in 2004-2009, where *"the output increased in nominal terms by 40%, while central government primary expenditures increased by 87% against an increase of only 31% in tax revenues."* Thus the Greek government now acknowledge the need to restore the fiscal balance of the public budget, by implementing permanent real expenditure cuts (meaning expenditures are only allowed to grow 3.8% from 2009 to 2013, which is below the expected inflation at 6.9%), and with overall revenues planned to grow 31.5% from 2009 to 2013, secured not only by new/higher taxes but also by a major reform of the ineffective Tax Collection System. **Government debt-level:** As it had not been reduced during the good years with strong economic growth, there was no room for the government to continue running large deficits in 2010 and a few years ahead. So it was not enough for the government, just to implement the needed long term economic reforms, as the debt then rapidly would develop into an unsustainable seize, way before the results of such reforms were achieved. Thus the government acknowledged, that

they now needed immediately on the short term, to implement both permanent and temporary austerity measures, so that this in combination with an expected return of positive GDP growth rates in 2011, would result in the baseline deficit decreasing from •30.6 billion in 2009 to only •5.6 billion in 2013, finally making it possible to stabilize the debt-level relative to GDP at 120% in 2010 and 2011 - followed by a downward trend in 2012 and 2013. **Political budget compliance:** Was acknowledged to be in strong need of future improvement, and for 2009 it was even found to be: *"A lot worse than normal, due to economic control being more lax in a year with political elections"*. In order to improve the level of budget compliance for upcoming years, the Greek government wanted to implement a new reform to strengthen the monitoring system in 2010, making it possible to keep better track on the future developments of revenues and expenses, both at the governmental and local level. **Statistical credibility:** Problems with unreliable data had existed ever since Greece applied for membership of the Euro in 1999. In the five years from 2005-2009, Eurostat each year noted a reservation about the fiscal statistical numbers for Greece, and way to often previously reported figures got revised to a somewhat worse figure, after a couple of years. In regards of 2009 the flawed statistics made it impossible to predict accurate numbers for GDP growth, budget deficit and the public debt; which by the end of the year all turned out to be far worse than originally anticipated. As the new Greek government acknowledged the need for a stronger statistical credibility, both in order to restore the trust among financial investors and as a mean for the government to better know the level and necessity of future economic reforms (in advance), they now pledged to correct all previous statistical methodological issues, *"by making the National Statistics Service an independent legal entity and phasing in, during the first quarter of 2010, all the necessary checks and balances that will improve the accuracy and reporting of fiscal statistics"*. **Bailout loans** **First (May 2010 - June 2011)** On 1 May 2010, the Greek government announced a series of austerity measures to persuade Germany, the last remaining hold-out, to sign on to a larger EU/IMF loan package. The next day the eurozone countries and the International Monetary Fund agreed to a three year•110 billion loan (see below) retaining relatively high interest rates of 5.5%, conditional on the implementation of harsh austerity measures. Credit rating agencies immediately downgraded Greek governmental bonds to an even lower junk status. This was followed by an announcement of the ECB on 3 May that it will still accept as collateral all outstanding and new debt instruments issued or guaranteed by the Greek government, regardless of the nation's credit rating, in order to maintain banks' liquidity. The new austerity package was met with great anger by the Greek public, leading to massive protests, riots and social unrest throughout Greece. On 5 May 2010, a national strike was held in opposition to the planned spending cuts and tax increases. In Athens some protests turned violent, killing three people. Still the situation did not improve. It

was originally hoped that Greece's first adjustment plan together with the •110 billion support package would reestablish Greek access to private capital markets by the end of 2012. However it was soon found that this process would take much longer. The November 2010 revisions of 2009 deficit and debt levels made accomplishment of the 2010 targets even harder and indications signaled a recession harsher than originally feared. In May 2011 it became evident that due to the severe economic crisis tax revenues were lower than expected, making it even harder for Greece to meet its fiscal goals. Following the findings of a bilateral EU-IMF audit in June, which called for even further austerity measures, Standard and Poor's downgraded Greece's sovereign debt rating to CCC, the lowest in the world. After the major political parties failed to reach consensus on the necessary measures to qualify for a further bailout package, and amidst riots and a general strike, Prime Minister George Papandreou proposed a re-shuffled cabinet, and asked for a vote of confidence in the parliament. The crisis sent ripples around the world, with major stock exchanges exhibiting losses. To ensure the release of the next 12 billion euros from the eurozone bail-out package (without which Greece would have had to default on loan repayments in mid-July), the government proposed additional spending cuts worth •28 billion over five years. On 27 June 2011, trade union organizations commenced a forty-eight hour labor strike, intended to pressure parliament members into voting against the austerity package, the first such strike since 1974. One United Nations official also cautioned, that the next planned package with new extra austerity measures in Greece could potentially pose a violation of human rights, if it was implemented without careful consideration to the peoples need for *"food, water, adequate housing and work under fair and equitable conditions"*. Nevertheless, the new extra fourth package with austerity measures was approved on 29 June 2011, with 155 out of 300 members of parliament voting in favor. **Second bailout (July 2011 - current)** EU emergency measures continued at an extraordinary summit on 21 July 2011 in Brussels, where euro area leaders agreed to extend Greek (as well as Irish and Portuguese) loan repayment periods from 7 years to a minimum of 15 years and to cut interest rates to 3.5%. They also approved to construct a new •109 billion support package, of which the exact content was to be debated and agreed on at a later summit, although it was already certain to include a demand for large privatization efforts. In the early hours of 27 October 2011, eurozone leaders and the IMF also came to an agreement with banks to accept a 50% write-off of (some part of) Greek debt, the equivalent of•100 billion, to reduce the country's debt level from •340bn to •240bn or 120% of GDP by 2020. On 7 December 2011, the new interim national union government led by Lucas Papademos submitted its plans for the 2012 budget, promising to cut its deficit from 9% of GDP 2011 to 5.4% in 2012, mostly due to the write-off of debt held by banks. Excluding interest payments, Greece even expects a primary surplus in 2012 of 1.1%. The harsh austerity measures have helped

Greece bring down its *primary deficit before interest payments*, from •24.7bn (10.6% of GDP) in 2009 to just •5.2bn (2.4% of GDP) in 2011, but as a side-effect they also contributed to a worsening of the Greek recession, which began in October 2008 and only became worse in 2010 and 2011. Overall the Greek GDP had its worst decline in 2011 with -6.9%, a year where the seasonal adjusted industrial output ended 28.4% lower than in 2005, and with 111,000 Greek companies going bankrupt (27% higher than in 2010). As a result, the seasonal adjusted unemployment rate also grew from 7.5% in September 2008 to a record high of 19.9% in November 2011, while the Youth unemployment rate during the same time rose from 22.0% to as high as 48.1%. Overall the share of the population living at *"risk of poverty or social exclusion"* did not increase noteworthy during the first 2 year of the crisis. The figure was measured to 27.6% in 2009 and 27.7% in 2010, which was also just slightly worse than the EU27-average at 23.4%, but for 2011 the figure was now estimated to have risen sharply above 33%. In February 2012, an IMF official negotiating Greek austerity measures, admitted the so far implemented measures were harming Greece in the short term, and cautioned that although further spending cuts were certainly still needed, it was important the fiscal consolidation was not implemented with an excessive pace, as time should now also be given for the implemented economic reforms to start to work. Some of the economic experts had argued in June 2010, that the best option both for Greece and EU, would be to engineer an orderly default on Greece's public debt, and by the same time force Athens to withdraw from the eurozone, with a reintroduction of its national currency the drachma at a debased rate. The argument for the latter part of this radical approach, was that Greece also strongly needed to improve its competitiveness in order to reestablish positive growth rates, and a reintroduction of the old drachma would enable Greece to return using the devaluation tool as a mean for that. In June 2011, a majority of the economists indeed agreed to recommend an orderly default straight away, as it was predicted to be unavoidable for Greece at the long term, and that a delay in organising an orderly default (by lending Greece more money throughout a few more years), would just wind up hurting EU lenders and neighboring European countries even more. However, if Greece were to leave the euro, the economic and political impact would be devastating. According to Japanese financial company Nomura an exit would lead to a 60 percent devaluation of the new drachma. UBS warned of *"hyperinflation, military coups and possible civil war* that could afflict a departing country". A confidential staff note drawn up in February 2012 by the Institute of International Finance, also revealed that they now favoured an orderly default with a continued Greek membership of the Euro, as the opposite scenario was expected to create losses of at least •1 trillion. To avoid a chaotic Greek disorderly default and/or the systemic risks to the Eurozone in the scenario with Greece leaving the Euro, the EU leaders decided in October 2011, to engineer and offer an orderly default combined with a •130bn bailout loan, making it possible for Greece to continue as a full member of the Euro. The offered orderly default and bailout loan, was however conditional, that Greece at the same time approved a new harsh austerity package. On 12 February 2012, amid riots in Athens and other cities that left stores looted and burned and more than 120 people injured, the Greek parliament approved the new harsh austerity package, with a 199-74 majority. Forty-three lawmakers from the ruling Socialist PASOK and conservative New Democracy who voted against the bill were immediately expelled from their parties, reducing the ruling coalitions's majority in the 300-seat parliament from 236 to 193. The vote is now expected to pave the way for the EU, ECB and IMF to jointly release

the funds, which are supposed to cover all the Greek financial needs in 2012-2014. According to the bailout plan, Greece should then be stable enough for a full return in 2015, to obtain all its future needs of economic funding from the private capital markets. On 21 February 2012 the Eurogroup finalized the second bailout package (see below), which was extended from •109 billion to •130 billion. In a marathon meeting in Brussels private holders of governmental bonds accepted a slightly bigger haircut of 53.5% Creditors are invited to swap their Greek bonds into new 3.65% bonds with a maturity of 30 years, thus facilitating a •107bn debt reduction for Greece. EU Member States agreed to an additional retroactive lowering of the bailout interest rates. Furthermore they will pass on to Greece all profits that their central banks made by buying Greek bonds at a debased rate until 2020. Altogether this is expected to bring down Greece's unsustainable debt level from 163% in 2011, to a more sustainable level of 117% of GDP in 2020, somewhat lower than the originally expected 120.5%. The deal is expected to be finalized before 20 March, when Greece needs to repay bonds worth •14.5bn or default on its debts. On 9 March 2012 a crucial milestone was reached, when it was announced that 85.8% of private holders of Greek government bonds regulated by Greek law (equal to •152 billion), had agreed to the debt restructuring deal. As this number was above the 75% threshold, it enabled the Greek government to activate a collective action clause (CAC), so that the remaining 14.2% (equal to •25 billion) were also forced to agree. At the same time it was announced that 69.8% of private holders of Greek government bonds regulated by foreign law (equal to•20 billion), also had agreed to the debt restructuring deal. Thus, the total amount of debt to be restructured was now guaranteed to be minimum 95.7% (equal to •197 out of •206 billion), while the remaining 4.3% of the private holders (equal to •9 billion) were offered a prolonged deadline at March 23 to voluntarily join the debt swap. After the announcement from Greece, that minimum 95.7% of the holders of Greek government bonds would be a part of the scheduled debt swap, the president of the Euro Group Jean-Claude Juncker declared, that Greece had now also met the last of the conditions, for the next bailout package to be activated. As the debt swap deal caused significant economic losses to private creditors, Fitch downgraded Greece's sovereign debt rating from **C to RD** (Restricted Default), and the ISDA declared a credit event, meaning that •3.5 billion worth of credit default swaps (CDSs) on Greek debt would be triggered. The deal is the largest government debt restructuring in history. **International ramifications** Greece represents only 2.5% of the eurozone economy. Despite its size, the danger is that a default by Greece may cause investors to lose faith in other eurozone countries. This concern is focused on Portugal and Ireland, both of whom have high debt and deficit issues. Italy also has a high debt, but its budget position is better than the European average, and it is not considered among the countries most at risk. Recent rumours raised by speculators about a Spanish bailout were dismissed by Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as "complete insanity" and "intolerable". Spain has a comparatively low debt among advanced economies, at only 53% of GDP in 2010, more than 20 points less than Germany, France or the US, and more than 60 points less than Italy, Ireland or Greece, and according to Standard & Poor's it does not risk a default. Spain and Italy are far larger and more central economies than Greece; both countries have most of their debt controlled internally, and are in a better fiscal situation than Greece and Portugal, making a default unlikely unless the situation gets far more severe. ●●●



G.K. Test Series - 2

These questions are very useful for you

1. Eminent Assamese litterateur and Jnanpith award winner, Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami passed away in Guwahati. Which of the following facts regarding her is/are not true?

- Goswami who was an expert in Ramayani studies, published her first collection of short stories Chinaki Morom at the age of 20.
 - She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her powerful novel Dasarathir Khoj in 1982
 - She was India's first Principal Prince Claus Laureate.
 - Dr. Goswami in 2004 mediated between the Centre and the ULFA and succeeded in convincing both the government and the ULFA to come forward for negotiations
- a. 1 & 2
b. Only 2
c. Only 3
d. 3 & 4
Answer: (b)

2. Social activist who was chosen for the Basava award for the year 2010 for excellence in service in the social sector by the Karnataka State Government?

a. C.R. Neelakandan
b. Reetika Khara
c. Medha Patkar
d. Aruna Roy
Answer: (c)

3. Which one of the following governments launched Kishori scheme for adolescent girls?

a) Delhi State government
b) Haryana state government
c) Bihar state government
d) Orissa state government
Answer: (a) Delhi State Government

4. One of India's former Prime Minister joined the elite club of Singapore christened Friends to our Shore on 20 November 2011. The bust of this former PM was unveiled by on the banks of the Singapore river by the Indian PM Manmohan Singh who visited Singapore for a bi-lateral discussions in November 2011. Name the former PM in question.

a. Jawaharlal Nehru
b. Indira Gandhi
c. Rajiv Gandhi
d. P V Narasimha Rao
Answer: (a)

5. Former India captain Ajit Wadekar was selected for the Col C.K. Nayudu Lifetime Achievement award. Which one of the following personalities have not received this award in the past?

a. Mohinder Amarnath
b. Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi
c. Salim Durrani
d. Sachin Tendulkar
Answer: (d)

6. Uttar Pradesh assembly passed a resolution to divide the state into _ parts.

a) Four
b) Five
c) Three
d) Two
Answer: (a) Four

7. The Planning Commission of India approved anti erosion measures to protect Moisa and Belguri villages in ____.

a) Assam
b) Jharkhand
c) UP
d) Bihar
Answer: (a) Assam

8. Which one of the following states became the only state in India to implement public service guarantee act?

a) Haryana
b) Rajasthan
c) Bihar
d) UP
Answer: (b) Rajasthan

9. Jharkhand government introduced Right to Service Act that came into force in the state on ____.

a) 14 November 2011
b) 12 November 2011
c) 15 November 2011
d) 20 November 2011
Answer: (c) 15 November 2011

10. Pioneering Indian American biochemist Har Gobind Khorana died in Massachusetts on 9 November 2011. Which of the following facts about him is/are not true?

- Har Gobind Khorana won the 1968 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine with Robert W. Holley of Cornell University and Marshall W. Nirenberg of the National Institutes of Health
- In 1972, Dr. Khorana reported construction of the first artificial gene, using off-the-shelf chemicals.
- Khorana was New York University 's Alfred P Sloan Professor of Biology and Chemistry emeritus. He joined the M.I.T.

faculty in 1980 and retired in 2009.

- Dr. Khorana who became an American citizen in 1966, received the Lasker Award for basic medical research in 1968 and the National Medal of Science in 1987.

a. 1 & 4
b. Only 4
c. 1 & 3
d. Only 3
Answer: (d)

11. Eminent Kannada author S. L. Bhyrappa was honoured with 20th Saraswati Samman in literature for 2010 for his epic novel. Name the novel for which he received the honour?

a. Mandra
b. Dharmashree
c. Vamshavruksha
d. Satya matta saundarya
Answer: (a)

12. Legendary singer-composer and Padma Bhushan awardee Bhupen Hazarika died in Mumbai on 5 November 2011. Which of the following facts about him is not true?

- At the age of 12, Hazarika sang his first song Biswa Bijoy No Jowan for an Assamese film Indramalati
- Hazarika featured in his first music video -Our Northeast, Our Star with Shantanu Moitra and Swanand Kirkire
- He was awarded the National Award in 1975 for Chameli Memsaab.
- He was the chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi from 1999-2004.
- He was chosen as a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1972-77.

a. 1 & 4
b. 2 & 3
c. Only 2
d. Only 5
Answer: (d)

13. Name the Indian Union Minister who represented India at the meeting of the Heads of Governments of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in St. Petersburg on 7 November 2011.

a. Union Power Minister Sushilkumar Shinde
b. Union Minister of External Affairs S.M. Krishna
c. Union Minister of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Vilasrao Deshmukh
d. Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy Dr. Farooq Abdullah
Answer: (a)

14. Which one of the following ministries launched a scheme, Adivasi Shiksha Yojana on 2 November 2011?

a) Tribal Affairs Ministry
b) Home Ministry
c) Ministry of Rural Development
d) Ministry of Power
Answer: (a) Tribal Affairs Ministry

15. The state cabinet of __recently decided to waive VAT on fertilizers to provide relief to the farmers.

a) Delhi
b) Bihar
c) UP
d) Gujarat
Answer: (a) Delhi

16. UP state government increased the age limit for recruitment of Primary school teachers from 35 to __ years.

a) 40
b) 38
c) 45
d) 42
Answer: (a) 40 Years

17. The Save Sharmila Campaign was flagged off by Magsaysay award winner Sandeep Pandey on 16 October 2011. In which of the following Indian cities was the campaign launched?

a. Imphal
b. Srinagar
c. Guwahati
d. Shillong
Answer: (b)

18. Scientists identified the bug, which caused the Bubonic plague (Black Death) in Europe between 1347 and 1351. Consider the following statements on Bubonic plague:

i) Bubonic plague still strikes somewhere between 1000 and 3000 people.
ii) Bubonic plague is caused by Yersinia pestis.

Choose the right option:

a) Both i and ii are correct.
b) Only i is correct.
c) Only ii is correct.
d) Neither i nor iii is correct.
Answer: (a) Both i and ii are correct.

19. Scientists identified the genes, which increase a Person's risk of getting Dengue. Dengue is the most common mosquito-borne infection after ____.

a) Malaria
b) Yellow Fever
c) Japanese encephalitis
d) West Nile Virus
Answer: (a) Malaria

20. Scientists found the Ozone hole above Antarctica, which is the fifth largest on record. The size of this Ozone hole is ____ square kilometres.

a) 27
b) 25
c) 23
d) 29
Answer: (b) 25

21. Union government of India decided to ban the use of infertility drug Letrozole. Letrozole is mainly recommended for treating ____.

a) Cancer
b) AIDS
c) Dengue
d) Malaria
Answer: (a) Cancer

22. Australian Scientists created the world's first drug, which can prevent blindness from cataracts. Cataracts are formed when a protein, known as calpain, clouds the eye lens and impairs vision.

a) Hemoglobin
b) Keratin
c) Calpain
d) Myosin
Answer: (c) Calpain

23. India and Iran agreed to set up a mechanism for payment of crude oil. Consider the following statements:

i) Iran is second only to Saudi Arabia as an oil supplier to India.
ii) India is Iran's second biggest crude buyer after China.

Choose the right option:

a) Both i and ii are correct.
b) Only i is correct.
c) Only ii is correct.
d) Neither i nor ii is correct.
Answer: (a) Both i and ii are correct

24. Nobel peace prize winner and environmentalist Wangari Maathai died on 25 September 2011. She won the Nobel peace prize in ____.

a) 2004
b) 2005
c) 2003
d) 2007
Answer: (a) 2004

25. South Sudan recently chose __ as its official language.

a) French
b) Arabic
c) English
d) Spanish
Answer: (c) English

26. Which one of the following launched the social auditing programme of gram Panchayats?

a) Goa
b) Assam
c) UP
d) Bihar
Answer: (b) Assam

27. The Supreme Court on 1 September 2011 ordered Delhi's private hospitals to provide free treatment to the poor. The bench asked the city hospitals to reserve __ percent of their out-patient department capacity and__ percent of beds at the indoor level for free treatment of the poor.

a) 25; 10
b) 35; 20
c) 10; 25
d) 25; 25
Answer: (a) 25; 10

28. A fresh offering on the lives of 20 great personalities titled Of a Certain Age: Twenty Life Sketches penned by former West Bengal governor was released by Penguin Books India in New Delhi on 26 September 2011. Name the writer.

a. M.K. Narayanan
b. Gopalkrishna Gandhi
c. Akhlaqur Rahman Kidwai
d. Saiyid Nurul Hasan
Answer: (b)

29. Shaurya, was test-fired from Chandipur-on-sea off the Orissa coast on 24 September 2011. Which of the following facts about the missile is/are not true?

- Shaurya is a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface medium range missile.
- Land version of the underwater-launched missile K-15, it is 10 metre in length and about half-a-metre in width. It uses solid fuel that gives it a longer service-life and shorter launch time compared to the missiles which use liquid fuel.
- The high maneuverability of the missile makes it less vulnerable to available anti-missile defence systems.
- The last test of Shaurya was conducted in 10 November 2005.

a. Only 1
b. Only 4
c. 2 & 3
d. 1 & 2
Answer: (b)

30. Surface to surface strategic PRITHVI (P-II) Missile developed by DRDO was successfully flight tested on 26 September 2011. Which of the following facts about the missile are not true?

- PRITHVI (P-II) Missile developed by DRDO was successfully flight tested from

Launch Complex-III, ITR, Chandipur, Balasore District in Orissa & the launch operations were carried out by the Armed Forces.

- PRITHVI-II is the first indigenous surface to surface strategic Missile.
- The surface-to-surface missile has a range of 350km and can carry a warhead weighing up to 500kg.
- It is capable of hitting targets at ranges of 530 kms.

a. Only 4
b. 1 & 3
c. Only 3
d. Only 2
Answer: (a)

31. Uttar Pradesh government announced the creation of three more districts. What is the total number of districts in the state now?

a) 75
b) 72
c) 73
d) 71
Answer: (a) 75

32. National Commission for Safai Karamcharis presented its __Annual report to Government on 28 September 2011.

a) 10th
b) 9th
c) 8th
d) 7th
Answer: (a) 10th

33. India and Nepal on 22 September 2011 resumed security dialogue after a gap of __ Years.

a) Four
b) Three
c) Two
d) Five
Answer: (a) Four

34. With which one of the following countries India agreed to allow the entry of law firms?

a) United Kingdom
b) USA
c) China
d) Pakistan
Answer: (a) United Kingdom

35. India and Myanmar on 27 September 2011 agreed to set 3 billion US dollars as trade target which is to be achieved by 2015. At present, the bilateral trade between India and Pakistan is __ billion dollars.

a) 1.7
b) 1.5
c) 2.3
d) 2.5
Answer: (b) 1.5

36. Wangari Maathai an environmentalist & first African woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize died on 25 September 2011 in Nairobi. Which African country did she belong to?

a. Ghana
b. Kenya
c. Euthopia
d. South Africa
Answer: (b)

37. World Tourism Day (WTD) is observed annually on 27 September. What was the theme for WTD 2011?

a. Tourism – Linking Cultures
b. Tourism & Biodiversity
c. Tourism opens doors for women
d. Sport and tourism
Answer: (a)

38. European Scientists reported particles apparently travelling faster than light called__.

a) Neutrinos
b) Endothelial
c) Polyglactin
d) Pollen
Answer: (a) Neutrinos

39. Planetary scientists provided new insights into the process behind the evolution of Earth. Earth's core is mainly made of _

a) Iron
b) Silicon
c) Oxygen
d) Nitrogen
Answer: (a) Iron

40. China Successfully launched its first unmanned space laboratory. What is the name of this space laboratory?

a) Tiangong-1
b) MEASAT-1
c) ZY-2
d) CH 726
Answer: (a) Tiangong-1

41. Scientists recently discovered genetic factors in frogs that make it immune to the fungal disease__.

a)Pathogenic
b) Chytridiomycosis
c) Sporothrix schenckii
d) endophyte
Answer: (b) Chytridiomycosis

42. What is the name of the powerful Typhoon which hit Japan on 21 September 2011?

a) Roke
b) Nargis
c) Nesat
d) Nalgae
Answer: (a) Roke

43. Which Formula One Driver won the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix on the Marina Bay City Circuit in Singapore on 25 September 2011?

a. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
b. Jenson Button (McLaren-Mercedes)
c. Lewis Hamilton (GBR/McLaren-Mercedes)
d. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
Answer: (a)

44. Name the Kenyan athlete who on 25 September 2011 shattered the world men's marathon record by 21 seconds when he clocked two hours three minutes 38 seconds in Berlin course?

a. Japheth Kimutai
b. Reuben Kosgei
c. Patrick Makau
d. Musa Amer Obaid
Answer: (c)

45. Chen Long claimed his second title in two weeks on 25 September 2011 when he shocked World No. 1 Lee Chong Wei to win the men's singles badminton title at which of the following championships?

a. Indonesian Open
b. China Open
c. Japan Open
d. Indian Open
Answer: (c)

46. Name the Indian who settled for a silver after being defeated by China's Cheng Ming 5-6 in the tie-breaker of the women's individual recurve summit clash at the World Cup archery finals in Istanbul on 25 September 2011.

a. Deepika Kumari
b. Bombayala Devi Laishram
c. Dola Banerjee
d. Chekrovolu Swuro
Answer: (a)

47. The Indian kabaddi team lifted its first-ever Circle Style Asian kabaddi title by defeating which team at Tabriz in Iran on 27 September 2011?

a. Phillipines
b. Japan
c. Pakistan
d. Iran
Answer: (c)

48. Union Government on 26 September 2011 announced the reconstitution of the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council (NMCC) under whose chairmanship to energise and sustain the growth of manufacturing industries and help in the implementation of strategies by the government?

a. V. Krishnamurthy
b. Pranab Mukherjee
c. U K Sinha
d. Dr D Subbarao
Answer: (a)

49. According to the report by Crisil Research, companies are likely to post a revenue growth of what per cent in the July-September quarter of 2011 as compared to 19 per cent in April-June quarter and 22 per cent in July-September quarter of 2010?

a. 10%
b. 13.2%
c. 15%
d. 17.1%
Answer: (c)

50. Government panel headed by Planning Commission member Arun Maira in its report presented on 27 September 2011 suggested giving more powers to which of the following bodies with respect to mergers and acquisitions in the pharmaceutical sector?

a. Competition Commission of India
b. Finance Ministry
c. Reserve Bank of India
d. Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
Answer: (a)

51. As per the provisional data released by the the Commerce Ministry on 27 September 2011, the eight core infrastructure industries registered an output growth of what per cent in August 2011 lower than the 4.4 per cent growth witnessed in the corresponding period in 2010.

a. 4%
b. 3%
c. 3.5%
d. 2.2%
Answer: (c)

52. The finance ministry on 27 September 2011 released the draft national public-private partnership (PPP) policy. Which of the following facts given below in this regard are not true/

- PPP is aimed at creating a framework for implementing infrastructure projects across sectors.
- It addresses the issues concerning

definition of various terms and also processes so that a clear and consistent position can be adopted by stake holders, including centre, states and private investors.

- The policy was designed to ensure that a value-for-money rationale is adopted with optimal risk allocation in project structuring with life cycle approach.
- The government is envisaging an investment of USD 7 trillion in infrastructure sector during the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-17), up from USD 700 million in the current Plan

a. 1 & 2
b. Only 4
c. 1 & 3
d. Only 3
Answer: (b)

53. The consortium of Singapore's PSA and the ABG group in India was awarded a contract worth Rs 6,700 crore by which of the following port trusts in India in September 2011?

a. Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust
b. Mumbai Port Trust
c. New Mangalore Port Trust
d. Kolkata Port Trust
Answer: (a)

54. Which automaker on 27 September 2011 introduced Brio Hatchback, its second hatchback and cheapest car yet in India?

a. Toyota
b. Honda
c. Hyundai
d. Maruti Suzuki
Answer: (b)

55. Which Indian PSU bank in tune with its plans to expand its retail division in the UK entered the mortgage market in the country for the first time?

a. Punjab National Bank
b. Oriental Bank of Commerce
c. State bank of India
d. Indian Overseas Bank
Answer: (c)

56. Name the chairman and managing director of Madison World, who was unanimously elected as chairman of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), the body that monitors sales of publications, for the year 2011-12.

a. T Venkatram Reddy
b. Aritra Sarkar
c. Madhukar Kamath
d. Sam Balsara
Answer: (d)

57. Which company declared on 29 September 2011 that it entered into an agreement with Nokia Siemens Networks (NSN) to expand its 2G (GSM/EDGE) networks and deploy 3G networks in seven African countries?

a. Essar
b. Idea Cellular
c. Bharti Airtel
d. Unitech
Answer: (c)

58. Which one of the following became the first Indian state to launch health insurance policy covering all its people?

a) Goa
b) Haryana
c) Bihar
d) Kerala
Answer: (a) Goa

5. Who was honoured with the Swiss Ambassador's award for exceptional leadership and his contribution to strengthening bilateral ties between India and Switzerland on 16 October 2011?

a. Anil Ambani
b. Rattan Tata
c. Narayan Murthy
d. G D Birla
Answer: (b)

59. West Bengal state cabinet approved the newly drafted land acquisition and resettlement bill. Consider the following features of the bill.

i) The private enterprises would have to acquire land for their projects directly from the landowners.
ii) The new policy provides that the government would acquire land only for projects of public utility like building, hospitals, irrigation projects, bridges, laying railway tracks, setting up of embankments, and projects relating to internal security.

Choose the right option:

a) Both i and ii are correct-
b) Only i is correct
c) Only ii is correct
d) Neither i nor ii is correct
Answer: (a) Both i and ii are correct ●●●●

Editorial and Corporate Office
West Vinod Nagar, New Delhi - 92
RNI
UPENG/2008/26617
Publisher, Editor and Owner
D.S. Rajput
Allahabad; Sunday; Year 4, Vol. 1, Issue 189, 18-25 March, 2012

Place of Publication & Registered Office
331/240 A, Stainly Road, Nayapura, Allahabad (UP)
Printing Press & Address
Academy Press Daraganj, Allahabad (UP)
Website : www.developindiagroup.com
E-mails :
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subscription@developindia@gmail.com
developindiamedia@developindia@gmail.com
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