

My Notes....

National

First UDAN of RCS scheme

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the **UDAN regional connectivity scheme** on 27 April 2017 from Shimla that will allow tourists to fly to **Shimla from New Delhi** for just Rs 2,000. UDAN, or "**Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik**" scheme builds efficient regional air connectivity, from Jubbarhatti, the tabletop airport located 2,196 metre above sea-level.

Key features of the scheme

1. The UDAN scheme aims to stimulate regional connectivity with flights covering distances up to 800 km through a market-based mechanism.
2. **43 cities are expected to be mainstreamed on India's flight connectivity grid.**
3. Air India's subsidiary Alliance Air is the first airline to start operating flights between Delhi and Shimla under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS).
4. The government is expected to compensate for the loss with a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) of about Rs. 3,000 per seat.
5. **The VGF will be used to bridge the gap between the cost of airline operations and expected revenue.** Airline operators would be extended VGF estimated to be around Rs 205 crore per annum for the operators chosen in the first round of bidding. So far, 19 States and three union territories have signed a MoU for this purpose.
6. Among the commitments of the States are those to make sufficient land available; ensure adequate security; and provide essential services at concessional rates for the airports or air strips. The Centre would like the States to provide minimum land, free of cost, for development of the RCS airports. More importantly, the States will have to bear 20% towards VGF. **The share will be 10% for North Eastern States and Union Territories.**
7. Five airlines — **Alliance Air, SpiceJet, Turbo Megha, Air Odisha and Air Deccan** — were awarded 128 routes under the scheme after a bidding process.
8. The scheme is a component of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) which was released on June 15, 2016.
9. Hyderabad-Cuddapah, Hyderabad-Nanded, Nanded-Mumbai, Chennai-Mysuru, Chennai-Salem, Mumbai-Porbandar, Kolkata-Aizwal, Pune-Nashik, Delhi-Dehradun, and Ranchi-Raipur are some of the other proposed routes.

What

1. The **Shimla Airport had been shut for scheduled flights since September 6, 2012**, affecting tourists and business travelers to the state.
2. Air India subsidiary Alliance Air will operate the Delhi-Shimla flight.
3. The seating capacity of airlines under the UDAN scheme will range from 19 to 78 and 50 per cent of the seats in every flight will have a fare cap of Rs 2,500 per seat per hour.
4. The airline companies chosen are Airline Allied Services (Alliance Air), SpiceJet, Turbo Megha Airways, Air Deccan and Air Odisha.
5. The operations under the scheme are intended to provide air connectivity to unserved and remote routes with airfare being capped at Rs 2,500 for an hour's journey of around 500 km.

Unique portal of RUSA

Union Minister of Human Resource Development Shri Prakash Javadekar launched the **unique portal and mobile app of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)**, a body under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in New Delhi.

What

1. This is a unique event as well as experiment wherein inaugurated **17 facilities created under Rashtriya Uchchatat Shiksha Abiyan (RUSA) in one go in 14 states.**
2. The Centre and State Government will be deliberating and discussing upon the modalities for bringing improvement further.
3. Under the concept of RUSA the quality of education **can go up by improving the research labs infrastructure and creating smart class rooms** and various other programmes by which the quality enhancement and value addition to the students happen.
4. 'RUSA is a success and during the last three years Modi Government has increased the expenditure to the tune of Rs. 2800 crore for this.
5. The portal is a one-stop for States' Higher Education Plans, decision of the States' Higher Education Councils and details of the resources under this scheme. Also, the gallery is a rich repository of the projects initiated under RUSA.
6. **RUSA is the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) of the Department of Higher Education, MHRD** which aims to provide strategic central funding to State Higher Education Departments and Institutions and achieve the broad objectives of access, equity and excellence.

Background

1. The idea of an additional layer of transparency for the satisfaction of voters in the form of a **'voter verifiable paper trail'** was suggested by the political parties in a meeting taken by the ECI on 4th October, 2010.
2. Accordingly, **introduction of the VVPAT was facilitated by amending the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961** vide Notification dated 14th August, 2013.
3. Thereafter, 20,300 VVPAT Units were purchased by the ECI in 2013. Since then, these units are being deployed in elections in select Assembly and Parliamentary Constituencies.
4. **VVPAT device functions like a printer to be attached to the ballot unit** and kept inside the voting compartment. When the voter presses the button against the name of the candidate of his choice on the Ballot Unit, the VVPAT unit generates a paper slip, called Ballot Slip.
5. This paper slip contains the name, serial number and symbol of the chosen candidate. The voter can see this slip through a screened window where it stays for seven seconds, and then it automatically gets cut and falls down into a sealed drop box.

Agni-III missile successfully test-fired

India on 27 April 2017 successfully **test-fired its intermediate-range ballistic missile Agni-III** from Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast. The missile lifted off from **Launch Pad No 4 of the Integrated Test Range** located on the island.

What

1. **The Strategic Forces Command**, an especially raised missile-handling unit of the Indian Army, carried out the test with logistics support from DRDO.
2. **Agni-III has a strike range of more than 3,000 km** and capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear warheads weighing up to 1.5 tonnes.
3. The missile is powered by a two-stage solid propellant engine. With a length of 17 metres, the missile's diameter is 2 metres and weight is around 2,200 kg.
4. **The missile was inducted in the armed forces in June 2011.**

Allow use of paper trail machines cleared

The Union Cabinet cleared a proposal of the **Election Commission to procure paper trail machines for use during future elections.** The decision comes in the wake of growing demands from opposition parties for holding all future elections using **paper trail machines along with EVMs**, to clear doubts about votes cast. The clearance was given by

the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the proposal of "**procurement of VVPAT units**" after a brief discussion.

What

1. The EC has sought Rs 3,174 crore in all for procuring over 16 lakh paper trail machines to cover all polling stations in the country.
2. The Cabinet has so far cleared two tranches of Rs 1,009 crore and Rs 9,200 for the Commission to buy new **electronic voting machines (EVMs)**.
3. Since June, 2014, the Commission has given at least 11 reminders to the government seeking funds for VVPAT machines.
4. The Supreme Court has asked the Commission to give a tentative time frame by which it can use VVPAT machines in all polling stations.
5. **The VVPAT is a machine which dispenses a slip with the symbol of the party for which a person has voted for.** The slip drops in a box but the voter cannot take it home.
6. The voters see voter-verifiable paper audit trail slip for seven seconds, which would be an acknowledgement receipt for the party they voted for in the election.

Judicial performance index

The **Niti Aayog has suggested introduction of a 'judicial performance index'** to check delay in trial and address the issue of pendency of cases. Asserting that corruption cases get held up in the **judicial system inordinately**, the policy think-tank has also recommended putting a time-limit for processing them. In its draft **three-year action agenda (for 2017-18 to 2019-20)**, the Aayog has suggested several judicial reforms, including increasing the use of information and communication technology, and streamlining judicial appointments.

What

1. **The draft was circulated among the Niti Aayog's Governing Council members** (consisting of chief ministers of all states and others) on April 23.
2. The report says it takes over "eight years to finalise a major vigilance case from the date of occurrence of irregularity" and underlined the need to speed up decision-making process in corruption cases.
3. The judicial system is another avenue where corruption cases get held up. Delays in obtaining justice encourage the corrupt and discourage those who are honest.
4. Beyond the larger reforms in the justice system to reduce pendency, special courts set up to try corruption cases should be strengthened and time limits to process corruption cases should be introduced.
5. The report has also suggested introduction of a 'judicial performance index'.
6. Such an index **could be established to help high courts and high court chief justices** keep a track of performance and process improvement at the district courts and subordinate levels for reducing delay.
7. This would require fixing non-mandatory time frames for different types of cases as broad guidelines to benchmark when a case has been delayed, it said.
8. **The index can also include certain progress on process steps** that have already been approved by high courts, like burden of day-to-day activity being removed from judges and given to administrative officials.
9. The Niti Aayog report has also suggested shifting some workload out of the regular court system and introduction of an administrative cadre in the judicial system.

Operator 4.0

The **Fourth Industrial Revolution** has arrived. **The first was the steam engine-driven Industrial Revolution; the second involved the innovations** from Henry Ford's assembly line. **Third, microelectronics and computer power appeared on factory floors.** Now, manufacturing businesses are beginning to integrate robotics, automation and other data-driven technologies into their work flows.

What

1. Robots have taken over difficult, dangerous and repetitive physical tasks, improving factory safety, worker comfort and product quality.
2. The next phase of labor innovation will do the same thing for cognitive work, removing mentally stressful and repetitive tasks from people's daily routines.
3. **Human work will become more versatile and creative.** Robots and people will work more closely together than ever before. People will use their unique abilities to innovate, collaborate and adapt to new situations.
4. The benefits go well beyond the workplace. Of course, a worker in a powered robotic suit could easily handle extremely heavy objects without losing the flexibility of natural human movements.
5. **The worker would also be far less likely to suffer severe injuries from accidents or overwork.** And at the end of a day, a super-strength worker could take off the exoskeleton and still have energy to play with the kids or spend time with friends.

India changes 'Blindness' definition

India has changed its four-decade old definition of blindness, tuning it with the globally accepted definition of the blindness, as recommended by the World Health Organisation. Going by the earlier definition, **adopted in 1976**, if a person is unable to count its fingers at a distance of six metres, he/she would have been considered a blind. In the new definition, the distance has been cut down to three metres.

What

1. This would not only reduce the number of blind people in India, but would also aid the medical researchers calculate the national burden of blindness in respect to other countries.
2. Currently **Indian data can't be compared with global estimates as other countries follow the WHO criteria.**
3. Uniformity of blindness criteria is a pre-requisite for a reliable estimates of global burden of blindness.
4. Changing the criteria is also driven by India's goal to reduce blindness prevalence in the country to 0.3% of the total population by 2020 in line with the **WHO's Vision-2020 goals.**
5. The probable reason for keeping 6 metres as the cut off distance for defining blindness in India was to include economic blindness cases which referred to a level of blindness which prevents an individual to earn his or her wages.

New schemes to facilitate access to justice

Emphasising "**digital inclusion for Digital India**", Union Minister of Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad inaugurated **three welfare initiatives** that would facilitate access to justice for the poor.

What

1. Prasad launched the schemes, namely, '**Pro-bono (in public interest) legal services**', '**Tele-law service**' and '**Nyaya Mitra**', which aim to connect those in need of legal aid with lawyers through use of technology.
2. Under the 'Pro-bono legal services', lawyers can register themselves to volunteer pro-bono services for litigants who are unable to afford it.
3. 'Tele-law service' seeks to connect litigants with lawyers through video conferencing facilities.
4. Under Nyaya Mitra, a retired judicial officer, or an executive officer with judicial experience, will be put in charge of assisting those suffering due to judicial delays.

India wins elections to two UN bodies

India has won elections to **two subsidiary bodies of a UN organ focussed on social and economic issues.** India along with **12 other members** was elected to the **Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC)**, a subsidiary body of the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**. The country garnered the most number of votes in the Asian group, with 49 out of 50 members of ECOSOC voting in its favour.

What

1. India tops Asian group again @Un elections. 49 of 50 members of Economic & Social Council vote India to Committee for Program & Coordination.
2. The 13 members elected for **three-year terms, beginning January 2018**, include Burkina Faso, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, the United Kingdom and United States.
3. The **CPC is the main subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council** and the General Assembly for planning, programming and coordination.
4. India, along with 19 other nations, was also elected by acclamation to the International Narcotics Control Board for a four-year term beginning January next year.
5. The 20 members included Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Croatia, Czech Republic, Russia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Cuba.

Navy test-fires Brahmos

The Indian Navy has successfully test-fired the **BrahMos Land Attack SuperSonic Cruise Missile** on 21 April 2017. The missile, a variant of the **Long Range BrahMos Missile**, was launched from the **India Naval's guided missile frigate called the Teg. The test firing was conducted in the Bay of Bengal.** The missile test was successful and the results from the firing were as expected.

What

1. The missile is a product of a joint effort with Russia.
2. The Navy has already incorporated the Anti-Ship variation of the missile in its armoury. Many ships of the Indian Navy, such as Kolkata, Ranvir and Teg ships, have facilities required to fire the missile.
3. This Land Attack missile is capable of firing at targets located in the inlands, far away from the coast line, from a stand-off position at sea.
4. The success of this test-firing puts India in the club of selected countries who have access to such missile systems.

Tri-services operational doctrine unveiled

A joint operational doctrine for the army, the navy and the air force to effectively deal with India's security challenges was released on 25 April 2017. The doctrine will serve as a cornerstone for application of military power in a synergised manner, besides ensuring efficiency and optimum utilisation of resources.

What

1. The document was released here by Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba, who is also chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).
2. Chief of the Army Staff Gen Bipin Rawat and IAF Chief B S Dhanoa were also present on the occasion.
3. **'Jointness and Integration'** in the Armed Forces is the order of the day like any other facet of life and therefore release of this Doctrine could not have come at a more opportune time.
4. It said the doctrine will also facilitate establishment of a broad framework of concepts and principles for joint planning and conduct of operations across all the domains of conflict such as land, air, sea, space and cyber-space.
5. In addition, the doctrine will also serve as a reference document for all the three services to plan integrated operations.

7-point agenda for development in NITI Aayog

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will discuss its first three year action plan, seven-year strategy and 15-year vision document for development in the NITI Aayog's Governing Council meet where all the chief ministers of the state are taking part. **The first three-year action agenda will take effect from 2017-18 to 2019-20.** As the government is gearing up for the next 2019 general elections, the Centre's priority would be to implement its strategy on ground. During the day-long meeting, the performance of the

12th Five Year Plan will also be reviewed apart from holding deliberations on the action plan, the strategy and the vision document. **The NITI Aayog has a 15-year vision document** for a period up to 2030. Below is the point-by-point action plan of the NITI Aayog which has prepared a three-year action **plan having a seven-point agenda?**

1. **Revenue Expenditure Program:** The **three-year action plan prepared by NITI Aayog** suggests increasing the expenditure in health, education and defence sectors.
2. **Transform sectors:** NITI Aayog has suggested in its report that sectors should be transformed. Sectors like industry and services, automobile, clothing industry, gems and jewellery etc. should be the main focus. By transforming these sectors, **the government can create more job opportunities**. NITI Aayog has also suggested to transform the agriculture sector in order to double the income of farmers.
3. **Regional Development Plan:** A detailed report has been prepared by the NITI Aayog regarding what needs to be done on the regional development front. Regions like the north-east and south-east should be given importance.
4. **Growth enablers:** NITI Aayog has figured out some sectors which are growth enablers. Transportation, energy, digital connectivity, science and technology can contribute more with the help of public private partnership model.
5. **Sustainability:** Focus of NITI Aayog is also on the sustainability of environment, water and forests. According to the report, the environmental issues need to be looked from the perspective of modernity and industrial advancement.
6. **Social sector:** The report also suggests how to improve the education and health services and what more can be done for the disadvantaged groups.
7. **Governance:** Improvement in governance is the need of the hour, as per the NITI Aayog report.

New India in 15 years

The government think tank **Niti Aayog has envisaged a new India in which all citizens in 15 years** will have houses with **toilets, two-wheelers or cars, power, air conditioners and digital connectivity**. This is a **glimpse of Vision 2031-32 presented by the Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya** to the body's Governing Council, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at a meeting held on 23 April 2017 in the presence of chief ministers. **The India 2031-32: Vision, Strategy and Action Agenda also visualises** a fully literate society with universal access to health care.

What

1. It also calls for having a much larger and modern network of roads, railways, waterways and air connectivity and a clean India where citizens would have access to quality air and water.
2. It **envisioned that per capita income would increase three-fold** to Rs 3.14 lakh in 2031-32 from Rs 1.06 lakh in 2015-16.
3. Besides, it states that the country's gross domestic product or the economy would rise to Rs 469 lakh crore in 2031-32 from Rs 137 lakh crore level in 2015-16.
4. The vision says that **the central and state expenditure will rise by Rs 92 lakh crore in 2031-32** to Rs 130 lakh crore from Rs 38 lakh crore in 2015-16.
5. The work on the **Fifteen Year Vision and Seven Year Strategy** document spanning 2017-18 to 2031-32 is in progress.
6. The **Three Year Action Agenda** covering 2017-18 to 2019-20 was circulated to the Governing Council Members on 23 April and would be finalised shortly.
7. According to the vision presentation, all efforts had to be made to realise the Prime Minister's vision of a vibrant India by 2031-32.

Lokpal verdict

Pushing for the immediacy of a Lokpal for transparency in government and public life, the Supreme Court on 27 April 2017 said the **Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013**, in its original form, is an **"eminently workable piece of legislation"**. There is no need to keep its implementation in abeyance till the parliamentary standing committee's

proposed amendments are incorporated, the court observed. In a judgment, a Bench led by Justice Ranjan Gogoi disagreed with the government's stand that appointment of Lokpal is not currently possible as there is **no Leader of Opposition in the 16th Lok Sabha**.

What

1. **As per the 2013 law**, which was put into force from January 2014, **the LoP is part of the high-level selection committee for Lokpal**.
2. The other members of the selection panel are the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker and the Chief Justice of India.
3. The law has been hanging in limbo since 2014 awaiting an amendment to switch the LoP for the leader of the single largest party in the opposition in the Lok Sabha. If the amendment is made, the single largest opposition party leader can take the place of the LoP at the Lokpal selection panel.
4. The LoP has been substituted with the single largest opposition party leader in other laws concerned with the appointments of the Chief Vigilance Commissioner, CBI chief and Chief Information Commissioner.
5. The court had earlier criticised the government for “dragging its feet” on the appointment Lokpal to usher in probity in public life.

Most places renamed by China have Tibet links

Most of the six places in Arunachal Pradesh that China renamed recently have **some significance related to the Dalai Lama or Tibet**. This is only an attempt to show its **severe displeasure to India**” for allowing the Dalai Lama to visit the **Tawang monastery in Arunachal Pradesh** and address religious congregations there.

What

1. China had earlier this week given a new name, **Wo'gyainling, to Guling Gompa**, located on the **outskirts of Tawang**. This is the place where the **sixth Dalai Lama was born**.
2. **Daporijo town in Upper Subansiri district was named Mila Ri**. It is located besides the **river Subansiri**, which is one of the principal rivers of Arunachal Pradesh and a major tributary of the Brahmaputra. This place has been used by people from Tibet to enter into India and was a corridor that has not seen military presence from either side for many years.
3. **Renaming of Mechuka as Mainquka was to challenge India's claim on the area as it is strategically located**, with heavy military presence. The Indian Air Force maintains an Advanced Landing Ground there, which is located in West Siang district.
4. **Bumla, the place where the Dalai Lama made his first stopover during his April 4-13 visit to Arunachal Pradesh**, has also been renamed by the Chinese as Bumola. This area was invaded in 1962 by the Chinese troops who were subsequently pushed back by the Indian Army.
5. **Namaka Chu area has been renamed as Namkapub Ri**, the area has a **huge potential for hydro-electricity**.
6. China renamed a sixth place as Qoidengarbo Ri area but it is not clear which place in Arunachal Pradesh it refers to. these areas also have a huge potential for agriculture and fisheries besides hydro-electricity.
7. This was part of a trend started by China of giving names to their claims — specifically the islands in South China Sea where it has conflicting claims with Southeast Asian countries.

Exercise 'Varuna' begins

India and France on 24 April 2017 began their week-long bilateral naval exercise Varuna in France's Toulon port. The Indian contingent comprises Indian Naval Ships Mumbai, **Trishul and Aditya**, part of Indian Navy's Overseas Deployment to **the Mediterranean Sea and the west coast of Africa**, and part of an anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden. Another Indian Naval Ship Tarkash, which is also a part of this group, has proceeded to London.

What

1. **Mumbai, Trishul, and Aditya**, will be at Toulon for three days, which will include the harbour phase of the joint exercise.
2. After that, **the exercise's sea leg** will start, and **Tarkash will also have interactions with the French Navy** as a part of the exercise later.
3. **The Varuna series of exercises began in 2000** and have grown into an institutionalised form of interaction between the two navies. The last installment was held off the Indian coast.
4. **Luthra is scheduled to visit the French frigate FNS Auvergne**, a French Nuclear Submarine Unit, as well as an Underwater Weapons Facility.

Country's first digitalised Panchayat ward

A ward in the **district Kottayam** became **India's first digitalised panchayat ward**. Union minister of state for social justice and empowerment Krishan Pal Gurjar inaugurated the website of the **first digitalised panchayat ward number 15 of Aymanam grama panchayat** at a function held at a temple premises.

What

1. **This small panchayat ward in Kerala has become the first one to go digital in the country**, taking a very important step in fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of transforming India into a digitally empowered society.
2. Gurjar hailed ward member Devaki teacher for taking the challenge of collecting details of 423 families and 1,262 members in the ward and made them available in a mouse click away.

North East's first small finance bank

The North East Small Finance Bank (NESFB), which is the **first small bank of North East India**, is ready to start operations in Guwahati from the first week of June 2017. **The Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi Microfinance Limited--North East (RGVNMFL-NE)**, the promoter of North East Small Finance Bank, received the Small Finance Bank License from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on March 31, 2017. They received the **in principle approval from RBI to set up a Small Finance Bank (SFB) in October 2015**, making it the only non-banking financial company (NBFC) in the North Eastern region to be granted the in principle approval.

What

1. **RGVN (NE) MFL already had investments** from Dia Vikas, Oikocredit Netherlands, North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) and SIDBI.
2. **The RBI has approved 164 branch offices to be spread across nine states**, including eight states from the North East and also West Bengal.
3. These 164 branches also include interior areas of Bodoland, Karbi Anglong, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura.
4. The bank is planning to achieve a business of Rs 1,100 crore by March 2018 and scale it up to Rs 2,000 crore in two years.
5. NESFB has planned for various Liability products including dailyweekly deposit accounts, fixed deposits, savings account, current account, etc.
6. NESFB will continue its micro loans and build on its existing base, as it sees a huge potential in the coming months.

India's first book village

A hamlet in **Satara district of Maharashtra**, popular for its strawberries is all set to **embrace the tag of India's first 'village of books'**, a concept inspired by **Britain's Hay-on-Wye**, a Welsh town known for its book stores and literature festivals. **Bhilar village located near picturesque hill station Panchagani** will see this state government initiative being inaugurated by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on May 4.

What

1. This project was undertaken by the **Marathi Bhasha department** wherein 25 artistically decorated locations around the village will turn into reader hot spots with display of books ranging from literature, poetry, religion, women and children,

history, environment, folk literature, biographies and autobiographies to festival specials.

2. The state has provided several facilities such as chairs, tables, decorated umbrellas and glass cupboards to local villagers to help them enhance the reading experience of literary connoisseurs visiting there, he said.
3. The state government had announced its plans to launch such a book village and literary festivals concept in Maharashtra two years back on February 27, 2015 - Marathi Language Day.

'Better Business, Better World' report

Indicating that inequality in India is increasing, a UN report released on 27 April 2017 said that **the richest one per cent own 53 per cent of the country's wealth**. It also said that unlike other countries, development in India is not moving across states. In terms of wealth inequality, **India is second only to Russia**, where the richest 1 percent own 53 percent of the country's wealth," said the report '**The Better Business, Better World**' released in a two-day event of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) focusing on how through bold innovation, businesses can create solutions and tap new opportunities found within the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

What

1. Over 72 million new jobs could be created in India by 2030 by adopting a sustainable business model.
2. About addressing the disparity, the report says that to reduce the inequality, India needs a 'different economic model' -- one that is not only low-carbon but also recognises poverty, inequality and lack of financial access.
3. As the second largest food producer in the world, India needs a more focused approach to developing and managing its agricultural sector and **agri-based industrialisation**.
4. The rising inequality leads to slower progress in reducing poverty, the report added that Oxfam has calculated that if India were to stop inequality from rising further, it could end extreme poverty for 90 million people as early as 2019.
5. The UNGC also called for better infrastructure to improve access to proper medical care for India's rural population.

Test and Treat policy for HIV launched

Union Health Minister JP Nadda has launched the **Test and Treat policy for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) patients**. As per this new policy, anyone who is tested and found positive will get the necessary treatment free of cost. Anyone found positive will be provided with ART (Anti- Retroviral Therapy) irrespective of his CD count. The scheme will be a **centrally sponsored scheme**. All men, women, adolescents and children who have been diagnosed positively can benefit under this new policy.

What

1. **HIV destroys the CD4 T cells** in the human body and weakens the immunity levels.
2. A person who has CD4 cell count below 200 is considered to be at significant risk of developing serious illnesses. Before the announcement of this new policy, the government was providing free treatment to people with a count of 400 and below.

First ever transgender athletic meet

Kerala has conducted the country's first-ever transgender one-day athletic meet in Thiruvananthapuram. The event saw the participation of 132 participants belonging to 12 districts of the state. No participant representing **Idukki and**

AIDS	
1. Acquired Immune Deficiency (AIDS) is caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).	Immune Syndrome
2. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a retrovirus.	
3. It is also known as human T-lymphotropic virus-III (HTLV-III), lymphadenopathy-associated virus (LAV), and AIDS-associated retrovirus (ARV).	

Pathanamthitta districts participated in the event. The event was jointly organised by Kerala sports council and Sexual Gender Minority Federation of Kerala. In the competition, six events were conducted, namely, 100 metres, 200 metres, and 400 metres running; 100x4 relay race, high jump and shot put.

Cost-benefit structure for energy efficiency

Niti Aayog, the central government's think tank has in its **'Three-Year Action Agenda'** suggested that **promotion of energy efficiency** must depend on cost-benefit analysis. **De-carbonisation alone cannot be the justification for promoting a more energy-efficient technology.** The benefit from de-carbonisation must outweigh its cost.

What

1. The central government has been pushing for **energy efficiency throughout the supply chain**– from **low carbon emission power plants to LED bulbs scheme**.
2. It has distributed close to Rs 1 crore LED bulbs under its Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (DELP) installed 21 lakh LED street lights so far.
3. Niti Aayog, in its action agenda, has suggested that the reach of various energy efficiency programs needs to be expanded. "A nationwide awareness programme to build the confidence in energy efficiency gains must be part of this mission.
4. For instance, it wants the Perform Achieve Trade (PAT) scheme to go for a re-run as it over-achieved its targets by 30 per cent.
5. The **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)** had in **2013** launched tradable certificates for industries that achieved energy efficiency standards. Titled as 'Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT)', the scheme was aimed at major sectors such as thermal power, cement, fertilisers, aluminium, iron and steel, and pulp and paper industries. These sectors account for 65 per cent of the total share of electricity consumed for industrial purpose in the country.

Basavanna

1. Basavanna was a 12th-century philosopher, statesman, Kannada poet and a social reformer who lived in Karnataka during the reign of the Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I. He served as the chief minister of his kingdom.
2. **Basavanna rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals.**
3. A 13th-century sacred Telugu text, the Basava purana by Palkuriki Somanatha offers a full account of Basava's life and ideas.
4. In 2003, former President of India Abdul Kalam inaugurated Basaveshwar's statue in the Parliament of India.
5. In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames in London.

International Basava Convention

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unveiled translated volumes of **Vachana in 23 Indian languages on the occasion of Basava Jayanti**. The 23 Vachana volumes were edited by late M M Kalburgi and have been translated into other languages by more than 200 people. Prime Minister also released the digital version of the work. **This is the first ever celebration of Basava Jayanti at the national level in New Delhi.**

What

1. The translated volumes of Vachana was commissioned by the Basava Samithi at a cost of 2.5 crore rupees of which the Karnataka government has contributed 1 crore rupees.
2. The celebrations also coincide with golden jubilee of Basava Samiti that was set up by former Vice President B D Jatti 1964 to spread in Basavannas message.
3. **Vachana is a prosaic form very much popular in the Kannada literature.**

4. It propagates values of universal brotherhood. It was penned by Basavanna and other saints.
5. The 12th-century social reformer Basavanna used this style of writing to spread social awareness and bring equality in the 12th-century society.

First Indian city to win Pierre L'enfant Awards-2017

Bhubaneswar has become the first Indian city to win Pierre L'enfant International Planning excellence award-2017 instituted by the American Planning Association (APA). Bhubaneswar has been chosen for its good and advanced town planning and engaging its residents in the planning process. The APA Awards jury has selected Five Excellence Award recipients in total who will be honoured at the Awards Luncheon at APA's National Planning Conference in New York on May 8.

About Pierre L'enfant Awards

1. Pierre L'enfant was a French-born American architect and civil engineer.
2. He is credited for designing the layout of the streets of Washington, D.C.
3. The American Planning Association (APA) has named an award in his honour to recognize excellence in international planning.

About APA

1. **APA was created in 1978.** It is an independent, not for profit educational organization representing the field of urban planning in the United States.
2. It serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas related to urban planning.
3. The APA through awards, honours outstanding community plans, planning programs and initiatives, public education efforts, and individuals for their leadership on planning issues.

International

Australia first' 457 visa

Australia's controversial decision to scrap a visa programme for temporary foreign workers got a mixed response, with critics slamming it as spin over substance and pandering to anti-immigration rhetoric. The "**457 visa**" allows businesses facing skills shortages to employ labour from overseas, but has been slammed by unions amid claims that bosses were abusing it and local workers were missing out.

What

1. **The 457 visa** is abolished. It will be **replaced by a new system** that will be manifestly, rigorously, resolutely conducted in the national interest to put Australians and Australian jobs first. That's our commitment. Australian jobs, Australian values."
2. The **four-year visa would be replaced by a two-tier system**—valid for either two years or four years—of skilled temporary work permits, and would include tighter requirements for language and work experience. Some 200 jobs would be cut from the list of eligible professions.

Sagarmatha Friendship 2017 begins

Nepal and China on 16 April 2017 began their **first-ever joint military exercise** with a special focus on combating terror, a move that could make India uneasy. The 10-day-long military drill "**Sagarmatha Friendship 2017**" that will last till April 25 is being organised by the two countries as part of their preparedness against terrorism that has posed as a serious security threat globally, the Nepal Army said.

What

1. **Sagarmatha is the Nepali name of Mt Everest**, the world's highest peak.
2. The joint training with China marks Nepal Army's extension of military diplomacy. The Nepal Army has long been conducting joint military drills with Indian and American Army.

3. The drill is a part of its regular bilateral and multilateral military exercises aimed at sharing experiences, skills and professional knowledge which it has been doing regularly with the nations that Nepal shares diplomatic ties.

UN discovers 17 new mass graves

United Nations (UN) investigators have discovered 17 new mass grave sites in central Democratic Republic of Congo, bringing the total to 40 documented in an area where the army has clashed with a local militia, the UN said on 19 April 2017.

What

1. The grave sites were reportedly dug by Congolese soldiers after fighting with the **Kamuina Nsapu militia in Kasai Central province** last month.
2. At least 74 people, including 30 children, were reported to have been killed by soldiers as a result of these clashes.
3. A government spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
4. The government has previously denied that **soldiers have used disproportionate force against militia members** and said the militia had dug the graves.
5. The **Kamuina Nsapu uprising has become the most serious threat to President Joseph Kabila**, whose decision to stay in power after his mandate ran out in December stoked lawlessness in the vast central African nation.
6. More than 400 people have been killed in fighting in **Kasai Central** since last August, when Congolese forces killed the tribal militia's leader Kamuina Nsapu, escalating the conflict.

China launches first home-grown aircraft carrier

Adding to its growing naval might, China on 26 April 2017 launched **its first home-built aircraft carrier**, amid high tensions in the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea. The 50,000-ton carrier, which was launched in **the port of Dalian**, will be operational by 2020. It will take the number of such vessels to two. So far, China's sole aircraft-carrier, Liaoning, is functional. The vessel was bought unfinished from the former USSR.

What

1. The launch comes at a time when **the US has deployed a naval strike group in the Korean Peninsula** in the wake of Pyongyang's latest nuclear missile tests.
2. Beijing is increasingly becoming assertive in the seas and engaged in a rapid build-up of its navy. Besides claiming almost the entire South China Sea, it is gradually increasing its influence in the Indian Ocean.
3. It advised India to focus on the economy rather than building aircraft carriers to check China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean.
4. **China's naval build-up was in sync with its economic** wherewithal and being the world's second-largest economy. It said Beijing was "capable of building a strong navy to safeguard the security of strategic maritime channels.
5. The second-most powerful navy after the US, China has some 65 submarines whereas India has 14. In comparison to China's 48 frigates, India has 14.
6. However, China's naval strength is still far behind that of the US.

First ever United Nations rights in North Korea

North Korea has agreed to host a **UN rights expert for the first time**, granting access next week to the special rapporteur on **disabled people's rights**, the world body said. **Catalina Devandas-Aguilar is scheduled to arrive in the isolated nation** on 26 April 2017 following an **invitation from Pyongyang**, the UN rights office said in a statement. Her visit "will be the **first ever to the country by an independent expert designated by the UN Human Rights Council**."

What

1. **The rights council has accused North Korea** of committing crimes against humanity and detaining up to 120,000 people in brutal prison camps.
2. The North Korean regime last month **boycotted a rights council session scrutinising its record**, branding the body's work a "mere political attack".

3. The upcoming visit marked an important chance to study the situation in the country, with a particular focus on children living with disabilities.
4. Pyongyang ratified an international convention on the rights of disabled people, last December.
5. During her six-day mission, the expert will visit Pyongyang and the South Hwanghae Province, followed by a press conference in the capital on the final day.

Start of 'spring offensive'

The Afghan Taliban announced on 28 April 2017 the start of their "**spring offensive**", saying **they would target foreign forces in the country**, heralding a fresh round of fighting in the drawn-out conflict. **Operation Mansouri** — named after the group's former leader who was killed in a US drone strike in May 2016 — will use strategies from "conventional attack to guerrilla operations".

What

1. The key objective will be the **foreign forces, their military infrastructure and intelligence, and the elimination of their local mercenaries**," the extremist group said.
2. The enemy will be targeted, harassed, killed or captured until they abandon their last posts.
3. The annual spring offensive normally marks the start of the "**fighting season**", though this winter the lull was shorter and the Taliban continued to battle government forces.
4. The Taliban warned of further "**suicide attacks**, complex attacks and inside attacks" by soldiers or police turning against their peers.
5. **So-called insider attacks** — when Afghan soldiers and police turn their guns on their colleagues or on international troops — have been a major problem during the war, which began in 2001.
6. **It was the first time the US military's GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast**, dubbed the "**Mother of All Bombs**" had been used in combat. The target was IS hideouts in the Achin district of Nangarhar province.
7. **US-led NATO troops have been at war in Afghanistan since 2001**, after the ousting of the Taliban regime for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden following the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

India, Cyprus ink four pacts

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades on 28 April 2017 held detailed discussion on **bilateral and regional issues** and agreed on the need for all countries to decisively act against states that shelter and sustain violence factories in their regions. After the meeting between their leaders, **the two sides signed four pacts**, including one for air services and cooperation in merchant shipping.

What

1. At a joint media event with the Cypriot leader, Modi said **India has always stood with Cyprus on crucial issues and firmly supports its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity**.
2. Noting that they had "detailed discussion" on bilateral as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest, the prime minister said, "We agreed on the need for all countries to decisively act against states that generate, support, shelter and sustain violence factories in our regions."
3. The two sides also agreed on the need of early reforms of the UNSC, Modi said and expressed India's appreciation for Cyprus' support to India's bid for inclusion in it as a permanent member.
4. Earlier, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj called on the Cypriot president, and discussed areas of bilateral cooperation.

UN hosts aid-pledging conference

The **United Nations secretary-general and high-ranking government officials from dozens of countries** were meeting on 25 April 2017 in Geneva to drum up funds

for **war-torn Yemen** considered one of the **world's greatest humanitarian crises**. Antonio Guterres and top diplomats from Switzerland and Sweden are co-hosting a pledging conference in the Swiss city that's aimed at helping raise \$2.1 billion in a UN relief appeal that was launched this year.

What

1. **The UN's humanitarian aid coordinator, OCHA**, has pointed to "an alarming 18.8 million people in need of humanitarian or protection assistance" in Yemen.
2. Yemen's war has killed more than 10,000 civilians and pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of famine. Humanitarian aid groups have sought greater access to people in need, a halt to airstrikes by a Saudi-led, Western-backed coalition fighting Yemen's Shiite rebels, and greater respect for international humanitarian law.
3. **The war pits the coalition of mostly Arab Sunni countries against the Shiite rebels known as Houthis**, who seized Yemen's capital and some other areas in 2014 and forced the internationally-recognized government to flee the country.
4. **Since 2015, about 3.3 million people have been forced to flee their homes**, though nearly 1.3 million of the displaced have returned to their home regions, according to the UN's International Organization for Migration.

1st 'India Indonesia Energy Forum'

Union Minister of State (IC) for Power, Coal, New & Renewable Energy and Mines, Shri Piyush Goyal and H.E. Mr. Ignasius Jonan, Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Republic of Indonesia met on **20th April, 2017 for the 1st 'India Indonesia Energy Forum'**, held in Jakarta, Indonesia. The Energy Forum was preceded by **2nd Joint Working Group (JWG) on Oil and Gas, 4th Joint Working Group on Coal** and **1st Joint Working Group on New and Renewable Energy**. The reports of three Joint Working Groups were presented to two Ministers during the Energy Forum.

What

1. **The 2nd JWG on Oil and Gas** discussed policy framework of India and Indonesia, oil and gas infrastructure development, cooperation opportunities in capacity building and business opportunities in oil and gas sector in both countries.
2. Representatives of major Indian companies in oil and gas sector such as **ONGC Videsh Limited, Petronet LNG Limited, Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL)** and **Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL)** participated in the JWG.
3. Indonesian companies such as PT Pertamina, PT Triputra, PT Nusantara Regas, Medco Energy and PT PGN were also represented.
4. **The 4th JWG on Coal has five sessions dedicated to policy framework**, coal resources development, capacity building, research and development and issues and concerns of private sector. Indian companies such as Coal India Limited, Adani Enterprises, Tata Power Company, PT Adani Global, PT Core Mineral Indonesia, PT BaramultiSuksessarana, PT Barasentosa Lestari and PT Jindal Overseas also participated in the JWG.
5. **The 1st JWG on New and Renewable Energy was held through video-conferencing**. The two sides discussed policy framework and investment opportunities in India and Indonesia. Both sides agreed to focus on Capacity building, Exchange of Scientific and Technological information and data, Transfer of Technology on Non-commercial basis in bio fuel and geothermal area, Development on Joint Research or Technical Projects on subject of Mutual interest, Encouragement and promotion of investment and Encouragement of policy Dialogue in solar park.
6. A **Memorandum of Understanding** between the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of the Republic of Indonesia on cooperation in the field of Oil and Gas was signed on the occasion.
7. The **MOU seeks to establish a cooperative institutional framework to facilitate** and to enhance bilateral cooperation in the field of oil and gas sectors on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

8. **India is third largest importer of coal from Indonesia.** India's imports of coal from Indonesia amounted to US\$ 3.5 billion in 2016. Several Indian companies have invested in coal mines in Indonesia.
9. The bilateral trade between two countries stood at US\$ 15.90 billion in 2015-16 with Indonesia's export to India amounting to US\$ 13.06 billion and India's exports to Indonesia amounting to US\$ 2.84 billion.
10. There is an agreed understanding on both sides to increase the exports from India to Indonesia to improve the trade balance.

Journey on modern "Silk Road" completes

Laden with whisky and baby milk, **the first freight train linking China directly to the UK arrived in the eastern Chinese city of Yiwu** after a 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) trip, becoming the world's second-longest rail route. **The journey is the latest effort in China's drive to strengthen trade links** with Western Europe along a modern-day "Silk Road" route.

What

1. **The world's top trading nation launched the "One Belt, One Road" strategy in 2013**, and has since poured millions into constructing vast infrastructure links.
2. The train -- which was also carrying pharmaceuticals and machinery -- departed London on April 10 and passed through France, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan during its 20-day trip before arriving in Yiwu in eastern Zhejiang province, a major wholesale centre for small consumer goods.
3. **The new route is longer than Russia's famous Trans- Siberian railway**, but about 1,000 kilometres shorter than the record-holding China-Madrid link, which opened in 2014.
4. **London is the 15th city to be linked to a new freight network offered by the state-run China Railway Corporation**, which says its services are cheaper than air transport and quicker than shipping.
5. And the train, **named the East Wind**, has much less carrying capacity -- just 88 shipping containers, according to the Yiwu government, compared to the 10,000 to 20,000 containers cargo ships can carry.
6. China already has a regular direct freight train service to Germany, Europe's largest economy.
7. One route links the Chinese megacity of Chongqing to Duisburg, a steel-making town and one of Germany's most- important transportation and commercial hubs.

India, Sri Lanka sign energy pact

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India and Sri Lanka, both sides will **collaborate in a host of energy and infrastructure projects across the island**. The Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi says the MoU provides a road map that will require further discussions.

What

1. The MoU — signed in New Delhi during Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's visit — includes the setting up of a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant in suburban Colombo and a **solar power plant in Sampur in Trincomalee; Indian assistance to enhanced use of natural gas in Sri Lanka**; joint investment in the petroleum sector and partnerships in highways and transportation, the spotlight remains on the proposed joint venture to develop a World War-era oil storage facility in Trincomalee, the strategically located port town on the island's east coast.
2. Currently, **Indian Oil Corporation Lanka IOC runs 15 tanks in the lower farm**, and the joint venture pertains to the remaining 84 in the upper farm, of which Sri Lanka wants to keep 10.
3. Even as per the 2003 agreement, India could have gone ahead with the project. But in keeping with the Prime Minister's neighbourhood first policy, New Delhi was keen on a partnership with Colombo, although much of the investment will come from India.

4. As per the MoU, the countries will also jointly set up Industrial Zones and Special Economic Zones in Sri Lanka. Colombo has been keen on attracting Indian investment into the island.

China's first amphibious aircraft finishes glide test

China's first amphibious aircraft, stated to be the largest in the world, successfully conducted its **first glide test in the Chinese city of Zhuhai** as it braced for its maiden flight. Other tests and check-ups are under way, according to the China Aviation Industry General Aircraft Co Ltd.

What

1. Designed to be the **world's largest amphibious aircraft**, the 37-meter AG600, with a wingspan of 38.8 meters, has a maximum take-off weight of 53.5 tonnes.
2. It **can collect 12 tonnes of water in 20 seconds**, and transport up to 370 tonnes of water on a single tank of fuel.
3. With excellent manoeuvrability and a relatively wide search scope range, **the AG600** will be mainly used for maritime rescue, forest fire fighting, marine environment monitoring and protection.
4. Aviation Industry Corp of China said in March that AG600 would embark on its maiden flight over land in late May and on water in the second half of 2017.
5. The aircraft developer has received orders for 17 AG600s.

Economy

India's most valuable company

Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries (RIL) surpassed **Tata group's Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)** to become **India's most valuable company in terms of market capitalisation (m-cap)** in intra-day trade. RIL, with the m-cap of Rs 457,641 crore was ahead of TCS, which had a m-cap of Rs 457,386 crore at 09.37 am, the BSE data shows. **RIL was trading 1.2% higher** at Rs 1,407.50, while TCS was flat at Rs 2,321.40.

What

1. RIL, however, **trimmed gains as trade progressed and slipped to the No. 2 spot**. TCS reclaimed the at number one position with m-cap of Rs 457,099 crore. RIL m-cap stood at Rs 456,682 crore.
2. Thus far in the calendar year 2017, **RIL has outperformed the market by surging 30% as compared to 11.4% rise in the S&P BSE Sensex**. The technology major TCS, however, has underperformed by falling 1.7% during this period.
3. ICICI Securities expect EBIT margins to be flattish for TCS, led by currency headwind offset by operational efficiency.

Govt eases norms for states to fund infrastructure projects

In a move that will potentially improve **India's infrastructure funding options**, the cabinet allowed state government entities to directly tap bilateral agencies for resources.

Not only will this give greater flexibility to state entities to fund infrastructure projects, it will also enable state governments to move some debt off their books. The **new fundraising route** will allow for direct borrowing by **state public sector undertakings (SPSUs)** from **Official Development Assistance (ODA) partners** in countries like Japan, the US and Germany.

What

1. As part of this new mechanism, **Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority** will be allowed to borrow directly from the Japan International Cooperation Agency.
2. Currently, if an SPSU has to avail of such loans, it has to be facilitated by the respective state government, with such borrowing reflecting on its books. Also, it has to be limited to 3% of gross state domestic product (GDP).

IPPB to start selling MF

India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) will start selling mutual funds and insurance products of other companies by early 2018 and is open only to "non-exclusive" tie-ups, its Chief Executive A P Singh has said. **Nearly 100 firms, both domestic and foreign**, have evinced interest in partnering the government-promoted IPPB. IPPB will start full-fledged operations in every district of the country by **September 2017**.

What

1. **The bank had launched its pilot project with a branch each in Raipur and Ranchi on January 30 this year.**
2. The IPPB will curate third party products before selling it so as to ensure that it is simple for customers.
3. There would not be any training of staff necessary as no individual product of any specific company is to be sold.
4. As per RBI norms, **Payments banks have to focus on providing basic financial services**, including social security and utility bill payments, remittance functions, and can mobilise deposits of up to Rs 1 lakh.

Second state to pass GST bill

Bihar on 24 April 2017 became the second state after Telangana to pass state **Goods and Services Tax bill**, touted as the biggest tax reform since independence. The tax is scheduled to be rolled out in the next quarter of the fiscal year.

What

1. **The state was also the second state in the country, after Assam, to rectify the constitutional amendment bill necessary for the tax reform.**
2. The bill, along with five others, was tabled in a special session of the state legislature. The state cabinet gave its nod to the draft bill regarding the new tax regime earlier last week.
3. The whole country would benefit and hence Bihar will also gain from it. With this bill, Bihar is once again making history.

Model APMC Act unveiled

In order to give more freedom to farmers to sell their produce, the agriculture ministry has unveiled "The State/UT Agricultural Produce and Live stocks Marketing (promotion and facilitation) Act, 2017" which has defined each state/UT as a single unified market area. The draft law is proposed to overhaul the existing laws. **So far 26 states and Union Territories**, including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, have fully or partly modified their APMC laws. Other than Bihar, all other states/UTs have agreed to adopt the model Act.

What

1. The model act proposes to curb the role of APMC mandis.
2. The existing APMC mandis are allowed to enforce regulation only in their market yard and thus encouraging private sector players to set up mandis.
3. Traders would be able to transact in all markets within a state by paying a single fee.
4. The new Act proposes to put a cap on mandi taxes at 1% for foodgrain and 2% for fruits and vegetables as well as commission agent's levy at 2% of the total transaction cost.

Link-II of SAUNI project

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate **phase-I of the Link-II pipeline canal of the ambitious Saurashtra Narmada Avtaran Irrigation (SAUNI) Yojna** in Botad district of Gujarat on 17 April 2017. This will be the second milestone in the Rs 12,000 crore project to pump Narmada water in 115 dams of arid Saurashtra region after the PM dedicated to public phase-I of the Link-I canal in August last year.

What

1. **Link-I canal will take water to 30 dams in Jamnagar and Devbhoomi Dwarka districts**, the Link-II canal is designed to pump Narmada water in 17 dams spread across Botad, Bhavnagar and Amreli districts.
2. The 253-kilometre long pipeline of Link-II originates from Limdi Bhogavo-II dam near Limdi and is planned to terminate at Raidy dam in Amreli district.
3. The phase-I of this pipeline covers a distance of 51 kilometre and brings water from Limdi Bhogavo-II to Bhimdad dam in Gadhda taluka of Botad district.
4. The phase-I will fill up Bhimdad dam which has total storage capacity of 239 million cubic feet (MCFT) and Krushnasagar dam which was a source of drinking water for Botad town till a few years ago.
5. **SAUNI Yojna is a project to divert one million acre feet (MAFT) of floodwater of Narmada to Saurashtra region** and fill up 115 reservoirs of Saurashtra through a 1126-kilometre-long network of giant pipelines.

The pipeline network has been divided into four links. Each link has been subdivided into three phases for execution of work. The entire SAUNI project targets to provide irrigation water for 10.22 lakh acres of land in Saurashtra region.

Science and Technology

New plant species found in Eastern Ghats

Two researchers from the Botany Department of the Andhra University and the National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad, have found a **new plant species in the Eastern Ghats**. The species found on the **Galikonda hill**, known for its scenic beauty in the Araku valley in the tribal area of Visakhapatnam district, is named **Emilia reddyi**. During field studies on the biodiversity and taxonomy on the hill, a researcher of the Forest and Ecology group of the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Hyderabad, K. V. Satish, and faculty of the Department of Botany of Andhra University, J. Prakasa Rao, stumbled upon the plant at 1,245 metres above mean sea level.

What

1. Belonging to the **family of Asteraceae**, the plant with light violet plum-coloured flowers blossoms between September and February.
2. Found it in 2013 and carried out studies using available references in books and expert views and known flora.
3. The plant has been deposited in the herbarium of the Andhra University and the Central National Herbarium, Kolkata. During the studies, 70 Emilia reddyi plants were found in a physical survey of 22.6 ha on the Galikonda hill.
4. Unlike the **Himalayas and the Western Ghats**, the Eastern Ghats are largely unexplored and the plant is endemic to the area in which it is found, the researchers observe.

'Super-Earth' could host alien life

Scientists have discovered a **new Earth-like planet orbiting a red dwarf star** about 40 light-years away, which may be the best place yet to look for signs of life beyond the solar system. Using **European Southern Observatory (ESO)'s HARPS instrument at La Silla**, and other telescopes around the world, an international team of astronomers discovered the exoplanet orbiting in the habitable zone around the **faint star LHS 1140**.

What

1. **This world is a little larger and much more massive than the Earth** and has likely retained most of its atmosphere.
2. This, along with the fact that it passes in front of its parent star as it orbits, makes it one of the most exciting future targets for atmospheric studies.
3. **Red dwarfs are much smaller and cooler than the Sun** and, although the super-Earth LHS 1140b is ten times closer to its star than the Earth is to the

Sun, it only receives about half as much sunlight from its star as the Earth and lies in the middle of the habitable zone.

4. The orbit is seen almost edge-on from Earth and as the exoplanet passes in front of the star once per orbit it blocks a little of its light every 25 days.
5. The present conditions of the red dwarf are particularly favourable — **LHS 1140 spins more slowly and emits less high** — energy radiation than other similar low-mass stars,” said Nicola Astudillo-Defru from Geneva Observatory in Switzerland.
6. This super-Earth may be the best candidate yet for future observations to study and characterise its atmosphere, if one exists.
7. **The LHS 1140 system** might prove to be an even more important target for the future characterisation of planets in the habitable zone than Proxima b or TRAPPIST-1.

New way finds to detect ‘naked singularity’

Scientists have found a **new way to detect a bare or naked singularity** – the most extreme object in the universe where the usual laws of physics break down. When the fuel of a very massive star is spent, it collapses due to its own gravitational pull and eventually becomes a very small region of arbitrarily high matter density that is a ‘singularity’. If this singularity is hidden within an event horizon, which is an invisible closed surface from which nothing – not even light – can escape, the object is called a **black hole**. In such a case, we cannot see the singularity and we do not need to bother about its effects, researchers from the **Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)** in Mumbai said.

What

1. **Einstein’s theory of general relativity** predicts that the event horizon does not form when massive stars collapse at the end of their life-cycles.
2. Einstein’s theory predicts an interesting effect – **the fabric of spacetime in the vicinity of any rotating object gets** ‘twisted’ due to this rotation.
3. This effect causes a gyroscope spin and makes orbits of particles around these astrophysical objects precess (the axis on which the body rotates changes its orientation).

Scientists develop a light weight robotic cheetah

Scientists have developed a **light-weight robotic cheetah that efficiently uses its energy to replicate the movements of the fastest land animal in the world**. The scaled-down robotic version moves using only about **15 per cent more energy than a real cheetah**. As you might expect of the fastest land animal in the world, the cheetah makes very efficient use of its energy,” said Geert Folkertsma from the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

What

1. **Robots are bound to play an increasingly important part in our daily lives** and we therefore have to ensure that they can move effectively in our environment.
2. While walking robots tend to be large and heavy, taking cumbersome steps that use a lot of energy, the cheetah runs swiftly and smoothly.
3. By applying knowledge about the movement patterns of the cheetah, **you can develop robots that walk more elegantly and above all efficiently**.
4. **Cheetahs are also able to store a lot of energy in their muscles for later use**. This too is something we have imitated by fitting carefully selected springs in our robot’s legs.
5. The prototype weighs in at 2.5 kg and is 30 cm long -twenty times lighter than a real cheetah and four times smaller.
6. **The robot moves using only about fifteen per cent more energy than a real cheetah**. The robot can currently reach a speed of about one kilometre per hour.

Solar cells from Jamun created

Scientists at IIT Roorkee have used the juicy, delectable **Indian summer fruit Jamun** to create inexpensive and **more efficient solar cells**. Researchers used naturally occurring pigment found in jamun as an inexpensive **photosensitiser for Dye Sensitised Solar Cells (DSSCs)** or Gratzel cells. **Gratzel cells are thin film solar cells composed of a porous layer of titanium dioxide (TiO₂)** coated photoanode, a layer of dye molecules that absorbs sunlight, an electrolyte for regenerating the dye, and a cathode. These components form a **sandwich-like structure** with the dye molecule or photosensitizer playing a pivotal role through its ability to absorb visible light.

What

1. The **dark colour of jamun and abundance of jamun trees** in IIT campus clicked the idea that it might be useful as a dye in the typical Dye Sensitised Solar Cells (DSSC).
2. Researchers extracted dyes from jamun using ethanol. They also used fresh plums and black currant, along with mixed berry juices which contain pigments that give characteristic colour to jamun.
3. The mixture was then centrifuged and decanted. The extracted coloured pigment called **anthocyanin was used as a sensitiser**.
4. Natural pigments are way economical in comparison to regular Ruthenium-based pigments and scientists are optimising to improve the efficiency.

NASA's SPB lunched successfully

Nasa successfully **launched its football-stadium-sized, super pressure balloon from New Zealand**, that will help **detect cosmic rays from beyond our galaxy** as they penetrate the Earth's atmosphere. The mission will run for 100 or more days floating at **33.5 km in the southern hemisphere's mid-latitude band**.

What

1. The super pressure balloon technology is the main flight objective, the International **Extreme Universe Space Observatory on a Super Pressure Balloon (EUSO-SPB)** payload is flying as a mission of opportunity.
2. **EUSO-SPB's objective is to detect ultra-high energy cosmic rays from beyond our galaxy** as they penetrate the Earth's atmosphere.
3. As these high-energy particles enter the atmosphere, they interact with nitrogen molecules in the air and create a UV fluorescence light.
4. EUSO-SPB will observe a broad swathe of the Earth's atmosphere to detect the UV fluorescence from these deep space cosmic rays coming in from above.
5. EUSO-SPB is now searching for the most energetic cosmic particles ever observed.
6. As the balloon travels around the Earth, **it may be visible from the ground, particularly at sunrise and sunset**, to those who live in the southern hemisphere's mid-latitudes, such as Argentina and South Africa.

Miscellaneous

Navonmesh in School Education

Union Minister of Human Resources Development, Shri Prakash Javadekar was inaugurated the **three day national conference on innovation (Navonmesh) in school education** at NCERT headquarters New Delhi, He emphasised the need to **impart quality Education to students** in such a manner so that they could come up as good citizens imbued with values.

What

1. The govt. are planning to **create awareness among parents and teachers** as well as students regarding the norms of education being given at certain level in definitive mode.
2. For this posters will be displayed in school across the country. Teacher will be provided proper training and accountability will be fixed. Government has drawn up the learning outcome charter to improve and ensure the quality of Education.

3. **Five camps will be organized for innovations in education under the Navonmesh** this year at **Raipur, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Guwahati and Pune** where the aspects of teacher education, imparting of quality education, collaboration of community and proper use of digital means for education will be discussed at length by various state government officers, NGOs and exponent of education doing innovation in education.
4. On this occasion **five books were also released**. They are; **Learning Outcomes at the Elementary Stage, North-East India: People, History and Culture, Barakha: Reading Series for all, Towards Green School (In Hindi also as titled Haritshalaki ore)** and **Dictionary of Geography for Schools (Trilingual)**.
5. The three day conference has participants from **different states and UNESCO in addition to NGOs and Educationists**.

“Quality Mark” Award Scheme by NDDB

As part of the innovative initiatives under the **“White Revolution”** umbrella Schemes, the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries has supported the **National Dairy Development Board(NDDB)** developed initiative of **“Quality Mark”** Award Scheme for dairy Cooperatives to promote and encourage enhancement of safety, quality and hygiene of milk and milk products manufactured by dairy cooperatives.

What

1. It is aimed at bringing about process improvement in the entire value chain from producer to the consumer to ensure availability of safe and quality of milk and products both for the domestic and foreign market.
2. **The Quality Mark” Award Scheme for dairy Cooperatives in the country** has been initiated to instill confidence in the consumers for the quality of milk being marketed by them by ensuring availability of safe and good quality milk and milk products.
3. The quality mark scheme was rolled out on 6th January-2016 after deliberating on the process and award mechanism for over a year.
4. The initiative does not propose any new/ additional system for Food Safety and Quality Management but lays down minimum standards against each link of the processes required for ensuring quality and safety.
5. **The NDDB is in the process of registering the quality mark logo under Trademarks Act, 1998.**
6. **The award of Quality Mark shall be valid for three years** subject to maintenance of quality, food safety standards and compliance with terms and conditions of the agreement.

India is world's fifth largest military spender

India's military expenditure grew around 8.5 per cent in 2016, making it the **world's fifth largest spender at \$55.9 billion**, figures released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) revealed on 24 April 2017. As per the figures, **the US remains the world's largest military spender registering a growth of 1.7 per cent** between 2015 and 2016 to \$611 billion.

What

1. Four others in the top 15 spenders include **China, Japan, South Korea and Australia**.
2. **China is second on the list spending \$215 billion**, an increase of 5.4 per cent.
3. Russia increased its spending by 5.9 per cent to \$69.2 billion, making it the third largest spender.
4. **Saudi Arabia, the third largest spender in 2015**, dropped to the fourth position in 2016 with its spending dropping by 30 per cent in 2016 to \$63.7 billion, despite its continued involvement in regional wars.
5. **Pakistan does not figure in the top 15 spenders and spent \$9.93 billion.**
6. The growth in US military expenditure in 2016 may signal the end of a trend of decreases in spending, which resulted from the economic crisis and the

withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq," the report said, adding however that US' 2016 figures remained 20 per cent lower than its peak in 2010.

7. In **Asia and Oceania, military expenditure rose by 4.6 per cent in 2016**. Spending levels are related to the many tensions in the region such as over territorial rights in the South China Sea.

IOC's Olympic Channel Commission

India's first woman International Olympic Committee member Nita Ambani has made it to two important commissions of the global sports governing body, including the prestigious Olympic channel. Besides the Olympic Channel, the 53-year-old Ambani has also been made a member of Olympic education Commission as IOC announced the composition of 26 commissions for 2017.

What

1. **She is one of the 16 members of the Olympic Channel Commission** headed by United States Olympic Committee Chairman Lawrence Francis Probst.
2. Ambani has replaced International Paralympic Committee President Philip Craven, who was a member of the commission till last year.
3. The Olympic Channel, ambitious brainchild of IOC President Thomas Bach, received the go-ahead from the full IOC in December 2015.
4. The digital channel, projected to cost about \$600 million over the first seven years, was launched in August last year during Rio Games.
5. **The Madrid-based channel is designed to promote Olympic sports** and values year-round. It will be a mix of sports programming, Olympic archive footage, news and other material.
6. **Ambani is also named in the 24-member Olympic Education Commission**, which is headed by New Zealander Barry John Maister, an IOC member and a 1976 Olympic hockey gold medallist.
7. **Ambani, the founder chairperson of Reliance Foundation, was elected as an individual member of International Olympic Committee last year** and became the first Indian woman to join the body, which governs Olympic sports in the world.
8. She will serve the world sport's apex body until the age of 70.

Awards on Civil Services Day

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, presented **awards for Excellence in Implementation of Priority Programmes** and addressed Civil Servants on the occasion of the eleventh Civil Services Day (21 April 2017). The Prime Minister presented a **total of 12 awards**, which include **10 under the five Priority Programmes** and **2 under Innovation category**.

What

1. Under Innovation category, **Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh was awarded for initiative "Cashless Village Palnar"** and Dungarpur district of Rajasthan was given award for initiative "Solar Urja Lamps Project".
2. Under the Priority Programme **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, Siaha district of Mizoram** was awarded in North East and Hill states category and Banaskantha district of Gujarat was awarded under the category of other states.
3. Under the Priority Programme **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the awards were given to Gomati district of Tripura** in North East and Hill states category and Jalna district of Maharashtra under the category of other states.
4. **Under the Priority Programme e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)**, Solan district of Himachal Pradesh was awarded in North East and Hill states category and Nizamabad district of Telangana was awarded under the category of other states.
5. Under the Priority Programme Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, the awards were given to Sivasagar district of Assam in North East and Hill states category and Nalanda district of Bihar under the category of other states.

6. **For Start-Up India, the award was given to Gujarat state under other states category** and for Stand-Up India, the award was given to North and Middle Andaman of Andaman & Nicobar islands under Union Territories category.
7. The Prime Minister also released two books “**New Beginning**” on Innovations for the Prime Minister’s Award for Excellence and “**Fostering Excellence**” for initiatives under identified Priority Programmes.

Indians in Forbes under 30 lists

Over 50 Indians, including gymnast **Dipa Karmakar**, Olympic medallist **Sakshi Malik** and actress **Alia Bhatt**, are among Forbes' list of super achievers from Asia under the age of 30 who are "pushing boundaries of innovation". The second Forbes '30 Under 30' Asia list 2017 features 300 impressive young entrepreneurs -- 30 in 10 categories, including entertainment, finance and venture capital, retail, social entrepreneurs and enterprise technology, under the age of 30 years who are pushing the boundaries of innovation.

India has 53 achievers on the list, second only to China which has 76 honorees.

What

1. **Karmakar, 23**, who became the first Indian female gymnast to ever compete in the Olympics during the last games held in Rio de Janeiro - and the first Indian gymnast to compete in 52 years.
2. Srikanth Bolla, 25, founder of Bollant Industries has been featured in the manufacturing and energy category.
3. Bhatt, 24, has acted in over 20 high-grossing Bollywood movies.
4. The list also features **Sharath Gayakwad, 25, India's first Paralympic swimmer, coach and Arjuna award winner** who has won 96 medals.
5. **Trisha Shetty, 26, is the founder of SheSays**, an Indian non-profit that empowers the country's women to act against sexual violence by providing education, legal, medical as well as psychological support.
6. On the list is **Ankit Kawatra, 25, who founded Feeding India**, which aims to solve the country's hunger problem by providing free meals through volunteers and donation centres. It operates a smartphone app where restaurants and individuals can sign up to donate food, which are then collected and distributed to people in need.
7. The list also features **29-year-old Kavin Bharti Mittal**, founder of hike, an instant messaging service designed to rival WhatsApp, 29-year-old Vaishnavi Murali, founder of Eikowa Art, an India-based online art gallery curating works from many of the country's contemporary artists.

India ranks in Global Threat countries

One out of 150 emails were malicious in India in 2016, compared with one out of 305 in 2015. According to **Symantec’s Internet Security Threat Report (ISTR)** released, India ranks No 4 in Global Threat Rank. **US is ranked No 1, followed by China and Brazil**, said Tarun Kaura, Director (Solution Product Management — Asia Pacific and Japan), Symantec. There was an alarming rise in targeted attacks aimed at politically-motivated sabotage and subversion.

What

1. Talking about malicious emails, Kaura said that they were the weapon of choice for a wide range of cyber attacks last year.
2. Malicious emails disguised as routine correspondence, such as invoices or delivery notifications, were the favoured means of spreading ransomware.
3. It is not just about ransomware and other threats, attacks on **IoT devices** are beginning to emerge, and also a growing reliance on cloud services has left organisations open to attacks.
4. **Symantec witnessed a two-fold increase in attempted attacks against IoT devices** last year, and the average IoT device was attacked once every two minutes.

India a bright spot despite disruptive reforms

India continues to remain an economic bright spot despite some bold but disruptive reforms, according to a recent survey. **The FICCI-PwC India Manufacturing Barometer (IMB) survey** stated that **about 63 per cent of respondents were "somewhat optimistic"** about the prospects of the Indian economy for the coming year, representing a significant jump over last year's 58 per cent.

What

1. **There is greater optimism about the Indian economy** compared to last year. The manufacturing industry is looking to focus on **new products/services, IT, and expanding its facilities in select sectors.**
2. **Lack of digital culture** and talent is a key internal challenge. As the industry prepares for immediate changes like **GST implementation**, the key expectation from the government continues to be the creation of a clear, stable policy environment that can facilitate long-term business and investment planning, he added.
3. **Around 25 per cent of those surveyed were very optimistic** about the future prospects of the India economy, while a large section believed growth would be in the range of 7-8 per cent. Conversely, 62 per cent respondents expressed uncertainty about the global economy, an 8 per cent increase from last year.
4. The survey covered companies in eight key sectors including automotive and auto components, cables and transformers, capital goods, cement, chemicals, downstream metals, packaging, and plastics and polymers.
5. **One critical action for the manufacturing industry is the adoption of Industry 4.0** or a new level of organisation and control over the entire value chain of the life cycle of products, geared towards increasingly individualised customer requirements.

Lack of law to curb torture: SC

The Supreme Court feels that India's reputation and its extradition requests suffer because it has not **ratified the UN convention against torture**. Besides this being an **Article 21(right to life) issue**, it is also an issue of international reputation," said a bench of CJI J S Khehar and Justice D Y Chandrachud on Monday , while dealing with a PIL by ex-law minister and Congress member Ashwani Kumar seeking a direction to the Centre to enact a stand-alone law to punish police and the armed forces for custodial torture.

What

1. **Amicus curiae Colin Gonsalves** said 161 countries had ratified the convention but India was among nine which were yet to.
2. The **SC reminded the Centre that the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** of human rights records of UN member-countries would get under way in Geneva on May 1. UPR will review India's track record on May 4.
3. What will be **India's stand at Geneva on the UN Convention Against Torture**, which it signed 20 years ago but has not yet ratified? According to amicus curiae, India's requests for extradition... get rejected often because we have neither ratified the convention nor enacted a law.
4. Better late than never **Indians finally realized there is no law exist in India to protect the victims**. Cops and Army are set free to follow their own laws driven by Hindutwa myth.
5. Solicitor general Ranjit Kumar said attorney general Mukul Rohatgi would lead the Indian delegation to Geneva, and that he would consult the AG and inform the court about India's stand on May 5.

Most attractive employer in India: Survey

Search engine giant Google India has been named as the country's most attractive employer brand, followed by Mercedes-Benz India at the second place, a survey says.

The sectoral specific winners for the most attractive employers this year are **Amazon India for e-commerce**, ITC Ltd for FMCG and Philips India for consumer and healthcare. According to **the Randstad Employer Brand Research 2017**, competitive salary and employee benefits continue to be the top priority among the Indian workforce while choosing an employer, followed by good work-life balance and job security.

What

1. According to the survey results, large and multinational corporations emerge as the preferred workplace for employees across all profiles.
2. IT professionals indicated that they would rather work in the dynamic start-up ecosystem over the SME sector. On the other hand, engineering talent prefer working in start-ups over the public sector companies, reveals the survey.
3. Sectorwise, Indian workforce prefers to work for companies operating in sectors like IT, **followed by BFSI and retail & FMCG**.
4. The **survey further noted that 31 per cent of employees**, said they are not loyal to any one industry or sector and are open to shift industries and compensation remains a key driver in determining employee loyalty to a sector.
5. **The Randstad Award, instituted globally by Randstad, is hosted each year** to encourage best practices for talent attraction and to identify the best 'Employer Brand' in the country based on perceived awareness and attractiveness of a company.
6. In India this year, the Randstad Employer Brand Research captured the views of around 3,500 respondents, who chose the nation's most attractive employer brand for 2017.

Time's influential people of 2017

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** and Paytm founder **Vijay Shekhar Sharma** were the only two Indians to make it to **an annual list of '100 most influential people in the world'** this year released by the Time magazine on 20 April 2017. The list features pioneers, **artists, titans, leaders and icons from around the world** honoured for "the power of their inventions, the scale of their ambitions, the genius of their solutions to problems that no one before them could solve.

What

1. The magazine has also included **US President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin** and **British Prime Minister Theresa May** in the new list of 100 most influential people.
2. The profile of Modi, 66, written by author Pankaj Mishra, said that in May 2014 - long before Trump seemed conceivable as a US president - Modi became the prime minister of the world's largest democracy.

World Heritage Day

World Heritage Day is observed every year on April 18. This year, the theme for the day is **sustainable tourism** as a connection to UN's International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

What

Background

1. The **proposal for World Heritage Day first came about as the International Day for Monuments and Sites in 1982**, and it was subsequently adopted by UNESCO the following year.
2. Every year, several activities are organised by government bodies to raise awareness around the need to protect, preserve and restore monuments and heritage sites, which include seminars to basic school-level competitions for kids.
3. **Every year on 18 April, ICOMOS celebrates the International Day for Monuments and Sites**, whose establishment was approved by the 22nd UNESCO General Conference in 1983.
4. In 2017, the theme is "**Cultural Heritage & Sustainable Tourism**", chosen in relation to the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. **India has a total of 35 world heritage sites** that have been recognised by UNESCO. From **Taj Mahal to Konark Temple and Elephanta Caves**, we have an abundance of ancestry memorials. To bring into everyone's eyes of how vulnerable these sites are, and to raise awareness about the effort it takes to preserve them, a special day is dedicated for it.
2. Interestingly in 2016, **three UNESCO heritage sites were added from India** — **Chandigarh's Capitol Complex, Sikkim's Khangchendzonga National Park** (home to the world's third highest peak Mount Khangchendzonga) and the **ruins of Nalanda University in Bihar**, which was a rare decision since this included all three proposals forwarded by the country for consideration.

Ends car beacon privilege for VIPs

Seeking to **end VIP culture**, the Union Cabinet decided that **beacon light will be removed from all vehicles**, including that of the Prime Minister, from May 1. In a historic decision, the Cabinet has decided that beacon lights will be removed from all vehicles, barring emergency service vehicles, from May 1.

What

1. It has been decided to do away with beacons of all kinds on top of all categories of vehicles in the country.
2. This government is a government of common masses and has decided to abolish VIP culture of beacon lights and sirens.
3. The government has taken the decision with a view to strengthening "healthy democratic values" in the country.
4. The government is of the considered opinion that beacons on vehicles are perceived symbols of VIP culture and have no place in a democratic country.

The Panama Papers are back

Pakistan Supreme Court on 20 April 2017 ordered further probe into **graft allegations leveled by the opposition parties**, especially cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's Tehreek-i-Insaf party, against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The court considers the existing evidence as insufficient. Based on the Panama Papers revelations, the opposition accuses Sharif of failing to explain the source of money in offshore companies owned by his children.

The key facts:

1. The case was launched on **3 November and the court held 35 hearings** before concluding the proceedings on 23 February. The case is about alleged money laundering by Sharif in 1990s when he twice served as Prime Minister to purchase assets in London. The assets surfaced when Panama papers last year showed that they were managed through offshore companies owned by Sharif's children.
2. The Panama Papers are an unprecedented leak of 11.5 million files from the database of **Mossack Fonseca, the world's fourth biggest offshore law firm**.
3. The records were first obtained from an anonymous source by the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung, which shared them with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which was later shared with multiple media organizations.
4. The documents reveal how the rich can exploit secretive offshore tax regimes. The papers point fingers at many politicians such as Pakistan's Sharif, Russian President Vladimir Putin, former Iraqi vice-president Ayad Allawi, Ukrainian president Peter Poroshenko and many others along with their families and close associates from around the world using offshore tax havens. Even British PM David Cameron's father's name was listed in the documents.
5. **Mossack Fonseca is a Panama-based law firm** whose services include incorporating companies in offshore jurisdictions such as the British Virgin Islands. It administers offshore firms for a yearly fee. Other services include wealth management.
6. The data leak related to the Panama Papers is considered to be one of the biggest ever, even larger than the US diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks in 2010 or

the secret intelligence dossier leaked by former US National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden in 2013.

Vinod Khanna passes away

Veteran actor and politician **Vinod Khanna has expired at the age of 70**. He was said to be suffering from cancer. Khanna is married twice and is survived by four children. Born on 6 October 1946, Khanna has featured in as many as 146 films. He was last seen in 2015 in Shah Rukh Khan's Dilwale. He made his debut in 1968 with Mann Ka Meet.

18th World Road Meeting

The **International Road federation (IRF)** has named India to be the host of the 18th World Road Meeting (WRM 2017). WRM 2017 will be held on November 13, 2017. The theme of this year's WRM is **'Safe Roads and Smart Mobility: The Engines of Economic Growth'**. India has been chosen to hold this event to reflect the growing importance of the country as a market for transport infrastructure and services.

What

1. The **World Road Meeting is the biggest global platform for road engineers, safety and transport experts** and companies engaged in road safety products to discuss issues pertaining to road infrastructure and mobility as well as to exhibit and showcase their products.
2. WRM is held once in every four years. WRM is globally an important event for discussing important issues facing the road, transport and mobility sectors.

Dadasaheb Phalke Award for 2016

Veteran filmmaker and actor **Kasinadhuni Viswanath** has been conferred Dadasaheb Phalke award for 2016 by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. The award consists of a Swarn Kamal (Golden Lotus), a cash prize of Rs. 10 lakhs and a shawl.

What

1. **Viswanath was born in February 1930 in Andhra Pradesh.**
2. In 1992, he received Padmashri Award for his contribution to film making.
3. He has also won 5 National Awards, 20 Nandi Awards of Andhra Pradesh government, 10 Filmfare Awards including Lifetime Achievement Award.

About International Road federation (IRF)

1. The International Road Federation is a global not-for-profit organization founded in 1948.
2. Its motto is **"Better Roads. Better World"**.
3. It is headquartered in Washington DC.
4. The IRF organizes seminars, workshops and events and seeks to promote the benefits of a sustainable road transport infrastructure across societies by providing world-class knowledge resources, advocacy services etc.
5. IRF is funded primarily through member fees.

About Dadasaheb Phalke Award

1. The award is conferred by the Union Government for outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian Cinema.
2. **The Award was established in 1969** to commemorate the birth centenary year of father of Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke.
3. It is the highest official recognition (award) in Indian cinema.
4. It is given on the basis of recommendations of a committee of eminent personalities set up by the government