

December 2013 Current Affairs Study Material

INTERNATIONAL

Asian Countries Top OECD's PISA survey of Global Education

According to the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) latest survey report, which evaluates the knowledge and skills of the world's 15-year-olds in 65 countries and has been released on 3 December. The OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2012 tested more than 510,000 students in 65 countries and economies on maths, reading and science. The main focus was on maths.

Highlights of the Survey Report :-

- * Asian nations cemented their top positions in an eagerly awaited report on global education, as their students continued to outshine western counterparts in maths, science and reading.
- * Shanghai again ranked first in maths, science and reading.
- * Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea rounded out the top five in maths skills.
- * Already strong performers in 2009, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore continued to improve their performances in the three categories.
- * The report highlighted Italy, Poland and Portugal for showing improvements in maths skills since the last survey, but noted drops in Sweden and Finland.
- * Peru ranked at the bottom of the list in all three categories.
- * 23 per cent of students in OECD countries, and 32 per cent overall, failed to master the simplest maths problems. Boys performed better than girls in maths. They scored higher in 37 out of the 65 countries and economies, while girls outperformed boys in 5 countries.
- * Across OECD countries, 8.4% of students are top performers in reading. Shanghai-China has the largest proportion of top performers – 25.1%. Over 15% of students in Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore are top performers in reading, as are more than 10% of students in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Ireland, Korea, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway and Chinese Taipei.

Thailand's PM Yingluck Shinawatra Dissolves Parliament

Thailand's Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra on 9 December formally dissolved the country's parliament and called for new elections. The new elections are scheduled to take place on 2 February 2014. The members of the opposition party (Democrat Party) of Thailand resigned en masse from the Parliament on 8 December 2013 to protest a Government claimed by them as illegitimate. The opposition party of Thailand can't work in the legislature anymore because the government is no longer accepted by the people. This will bring in a political crisis in the country. The opposition party has aligned with the anti-government protesters, who have staged the biggest rally of the country in the years. These demonstrations began in November 2013 and aims to oust Prime Minister of Thailand, Yingluck Shinawatra from the office. Yingluck Shinawatra won the elections in 2011. The opposition party Democrats has not won an election, since 1992. Democrat Party has won most of the seats on the Parliament in 1948, 1976 and 1992 but has never won an outright Parliamentary majority.

Michelle Bachelet Elected as Chilean President

Socialist Michelle Bachelet has been elected as Chile's president on 15 December for a second time by a wide margin. Bachelet, a moderate socialist, got 62 percent votes against 38 percent votes for Evelyn Matthei, a former minister from the governing centre-right coalition. Michelle Bachelet, candidate for a centre-left coalition of parties known as Nueva Mayoria, she first served from 2006 to 2010, but under Chile's constitution she could not stand for a second consecutive term. She was the first woman President of Chile. She begins her second turn in the office next year. The term of the president is for four years. Michelle Bachelet will succeed the present president Sebastian Pinera.

Saudi Arabia Passed Anti-Terror Law

Saudi Arabia's Cabinet has approved a new anti-terrorism draft law on 16 December that criminalizes acts that disturb public order, defame the reputation of the state or threaten the kingdom's unity, raising concerns by activists it could be used to quash political dissent.

Mexico's President Signed Energy Reform Law

Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto on 20 December signed into law a sweeping reform that will allow private companies to drill for oil and gas, and end a seven-decade-long monopoly held by the state oil company. Mexico President called the energy bill a fundamental, historic reform needed for Mexico to speed up the lagging pace of its economic growth. The bill was approved by both houses of Congress and it has also received the approval from majority of Mexico's states legislatures, which was required for any constitutional changes.

INDIA & WORLD

'Brahmaputra Cruises' Among World Top 10 Adventurous Cruises

'Brahmaputra Cruises' by Assam Bengal Navigation Company has been recognised by CNN International as one of the top 10 Most Adventurous Cruises in the World for 2013. The 'Brahmaputra Cruises (Jungle Book Tour/India)' has been ranked sixth on 3 December among the cruises including the Amazon, the Antarctica, the North Pole, Australia and Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Recalling that Assam Bengal Navigation Company, an Indo-British joint venture, had pioneered long-distance river cruising in India in 2003. Assam Bengal Navigation Company managing director Ashish Phookan announced the company had pioneered long-distance river cruising in India in 2003 and has completed ten years of cruising on Brahmaputra river on the 'ABN Charaidew' this year.

Ten Indian Universities In Developing Nations' Top 100 List

Indian universities have grabbed 10 of the top 100 slots in the first-ever rankings of higher education institutions from emerging economies across the globe, a list dominated by Chinese universities. The Times Higher Education magazine, known for its definitive educational rankings, published on 5 December the world's first ranking for universities in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and 17 other emerging economies. Pakistan was included in the analysis, but none of its institutions make the tables. Indian representation is led by Panjab University, which comes in joint 13th with China's Renmin University. The alma mater of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is followed by Indian institutes of Technology (IITs) including Kharagpur (30th), Kanpur (34th), Delhi and Roorkee (joint 37th), Guwahati (46) and Madras, which shares 47th place with Jadavpur University. India remains conspicuously absent from the top 10, which is largely dominated by Chinese institutions with Peking and Tsinghua University coming in at No 1 and 2. The latest annual tables, a subsidiary of the prestigious Times Higher Education World University Rankings, are based on the same range of 13 rigorous performance indicators used to create the annual world university rankings including teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook.

India 2nd Largest Supplier Of Overseas Students For Australia

According to the latest data released on 9 December, India has emerged as the 2nd largest supplier of higher education students for Australian universities. The number of Indian students to undertake higher education in Australia has witnessed growth this year (2013) with total enrolments reaching over 15,800 during the period of January-October as compared to 12,062 last year (2012). The data indicated that even if the total enrolments dropped, India emerged as the second top supplier of international students for Australia. Vocational Education and Training (VET) was the sector that saw an overall drop in total enrolments from India as well as China, the topmost supplier of overseas students for Australia. The top five source countries for students studying in Australia are China (29.7 per cent), India (9.2), Korea (5.3), Vietnam (4.8) and Malaysia (4.7).

Mauritius-India Agreed To Limitation Of Benefits Clause In Revised Tax Treaty

Mauritius has agreed to include a limitation of benefits (LOB) clause in its revised tax treaty with India. This was revealed by the Mauritius Financial Services Commission (FSC) Chairman Marc Hein on 9 December. While details of this clause in the India-Mauritius tax treaty are being worked out, LoB clauses aim to prevent treaty shopping or inappropriate use of tax agreements by

third-country investors. Treaty benefits are limited by this clause to those who meet certain conditions, including those concerned with business, residency and investment commitments of anyone seeking benefit of a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).

India and Nepal Agreed To Check illegal Border Trade

India and Nepal on 22 December agreed to address each other's concerns on commerce and transit, including reduction of tariff barriers and checking illegal trade along the border. The decision was made during the two-day Inter-Governmental Committee meeting that concluded in Kathmandu. The delegations of the two sides were led by the Commerce Secretaries of the two countries namely SR Rao of India and Madhav Prasad Regmi of Nepal.

NATIONAL

Department of Posts Launched 'Express Parcel' and 'Business Parcel' Services

The Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications & IT, on 2 December launched an Express Parcel service and Business Parcel Services for speedy delivery of parcels across the country. The services were launched by Smt. P. Gopinath, Secretary, Department of Posts, at a function organized at New Delhi G.P.O. These two new parcel services aim to promote the e-commerce market in India by offering reliable and cost efficient delivery solutions. Whereas 'Express Parcel' is an air mail service providing guaranteed time bound delivery of parcels, 'Business Parcel' will provide fast, secure and cost efficient transmission of parcels through surface. These services will have 'Cash on Delivery' facility which has become a pre-requisite today for e-commerce parcels.

Supreme Court Judgement On Homosexuality

India's Supreme Court on 11 December upheld the constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code making gay sex an offence punishable with upto life imprisonment. A bench of justices G S Singhvi and S J Mukhopadhaya set aside the Delhi High Court's verdict which had in 2009 decriminalised gay sex among consenting adults in private. The Supreme Court bench allowed the appeals filed by various social and religious organisations challenging the Delhi high court verdict on the ground that gay sex is against the cultural and religious values of the country. With the apex court verdict, the operation of penal provision against gay sex has come into force. The Delhi High Court had on 2 July 2009 decriminalised gay sex as provided in Section 377 of the IPC and had ruled that sex between two consenting adults in private would not be an offence.

Cabinet Approved The Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2013

The Union Cabinet on 16 December approved the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2013. The bill aimed to prevent and tackle the communal violence in the country and punish the perpetrators of the violence. The Bill has been named as The Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2013. The Bill has the provision of creating an institutional arrangement for speedy investigation, disposal of cases and for providing relief and rehabilitation to victims of communal violence. It also seeks imposition of enhanced punishment on persons involved in communal violence.

Prime Minister Released Postage Stamp On Former Punjab CM Beant Singh

Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on 17 December released a postage stamp in honour of former Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Beant Singh. He was an Indian National Congress politician and the Chief Minister of Punjab from 1992 to 1995. He was killed by suspected Khalistani separatists in a car bombing.

Lok Sabha Passed The Lokpal and Lokayukta Bill, 2011

The Lok Sabha on 18 December approved the Lokpal and Lokayukta Bill, 2011. The bill was already passed by the Lok Sabha in December 2011 but it came to the house again as it underwent amendments before being approved by the Rajya Sabha on 17 December 2013. The bill will now go to President Pranab Mukherjee for his approval before it becomes law. The Bill seeks to establish an anti-corruption watchdog that will have in its purview even the Prime Minister Office (PMO). The Lokpal consists of a Chairperson and a maximum of eight members of which 50% shall be judicial members. The Lokpal Chairperson or member shall

not be connected with any political party and one member will be an eminent jurist nominated by the President. The Bill lays down clear time lines for Preliminary enquiry & investigation and trial and towards this end, the Bill provides for setting up of Special Courts.

STATES

Bihar Govt. Announced New Surrender and Rehabilitation Policy For Maoists

The Bihar Government's Principal Secretary for the Cabinet Coordination Committee, Brajesh Mehrotra, has on 3 December approved a new surrender and rehabilitation policy for Maoists in the state. The policy was approved in a Cabinet meeting presided over by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The new surrender policy aimed to convince the Naxals to put down arms and lead a normal life and bring youths to the mainstream of society. The move comes after seven policemen were killed in a land mine blast by the Maoists in Aurangabad district of the state on 3 December 2013. According to the new policy 2.5 lakh rupees would be given for state, regional, central committees and to politbureau members of Maoists who surrender under the new policy.

Maharashtra Cabinet Approved Sets Up Sugarcane Control Board

The Maharashtra state cabinet has on 4 December approved the setting up of a Sugarcane Control Board in the state. The decision came in the wake of the recent violent agitation by farmers, demanding increased price for sugarcane. The board would function on the lines of state electricity regulatory commission. The cabinet also approved the draft Maharashtra Sugarcane (Purchase and Supply) Bill 2013, expected to be tabled in the winter session of the state legislature. Maharashtra has 202 registered co-operative sugar factories and over 65 private ones.

Karnataka Assembly Passed Essential Services Maintenance (ESMA) Bill 2013

The Karnataka state assembly on 4 December passed the Karnataka Essential Services Maintenance (ESMA) Bill 2013. According to the new bill, striking work will be a non-bailable offence and police can arrest a striking employee without warrant. The Bill, popularly known as ESMA, is to put an end to employees working in water, power, health, transport and service sectors going on strikes, inconveniencing people. As per the ESMA Bill 2013, the definition of essential services includes any service connected with the production, generation, storage, transmission, supply or distribution of water or electricity and any transportation service for the carriage of passengers or goods by motor vehicles.

Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Passed Anti-Superstition Bill

Maharashtra Assembly on 13 December passed the much-awaited Anti-Superstition Bill. The Bill seeks to curb black magic and other inhuman practices arising out of superstition. It came after four months of the murder of the noted rationalist Dr. Narendra Dabholkar on 20 August 2013 in Pune, who fought for such a law for more than for one and a half decade. Earlier, the State Government of Maharashtra on 21 August 2013 adopted an Anti-Black Magic and Superstition Ordinance.

CONFERENCES

8th Asia Gas Partnership Summit Held In New Delhi

The 8th Asia Gas Partnership Summit (AGPS) was held from 3 – 4 December 2013 at New Delhi, India. The 8th AGPS was organized by GAIL (India) Limited and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The theme of the conference is "Asian Gas Market : Challenges and Opportunities in the Changing Paradigm ". Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on 3 December inaugurated the summit. During the summit Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh dedicated GAIL India Ltd's 1000 km Dabhol-Bangalore natural gas pipeline to the Nation. The Dabhol – Bangaluru pipeline connects South India to the national gas grid for the first time. Pipeline has been constructed at an investment of 4500 crore rupees with a design capacity of 16 MMSCMD of

natural gas which can produce 3000 MW of clean energy. The pipeline starts at Dabhol in Maharashtra and passes through Belgaum, Dharwad, Gadag, Bellary, Devanagere, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Ramanagaram, Bengaluru Rural and Bengaluru Urban districts.

AWARDS & HONOURS

Indian Origin Doctor Jaswinder S Bamrah Gets Britain Excellence Award

Indian-origin doctor Jaswinder S Bamrah, consultant psychiatrist in Manchester, has on 1 December received Asian Lite Professional Excellence Award for his contribution to the medical field in the UK. He is a dedicated medical professional conducting a large number of lectures nationally to psychiatrists, general practitioners, to other disciplines and voluntary organisations such as Alzheimer's Disease Society and PACE on a variety of topics, such as the role of carers in the community, dementia, which antidepressant to choose, suicides and treatment of major depression in the Asian community.

Indian-American Author Manil Suri Won Literary Award In Britain

Indian-American mathematician and author Manil Suri has won this year's "Bad Sex in Fiction" Award by Britain's Literary Review magazine for his book "The City of Devi". The book was published in 2013. The prize was presented by British actress, author and columnist Joan Collins on December 3 in London. Suri, who lives in US and works as a professor of mathematics at the University of Maryland, was, however, unable to accept the prize in person. "The City of Devi" is the third novel by the author. His other two novels are "The Death of Vishnu" and "The Age of Shiva". Suri has been long listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2001 and shortlisted for the Pen/Faulkner Award. He won the Barnes & Noble Discover Prize in 2002. The annual award was introduced by the magazine in 1993.

ONGC's Vasudeva Won 'SCOPE' Leadership Excellence Award

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) chairman Sudhir Vasudeva and Engineers India Ltd head A K Purwaha have been adjudged the best leaders in public sector companies. Vasudeva won the SCOPE Excellence Award for Individual Leadership in the Maharatna/Navaratna public sector enterprises category, while A K Purwaha got the same award in the Miniratna PSE category. The award winners were chosen by the eminent jury. The jury met on 12 December and selected the winners of the SCOPE Excellence Awards 2011-12, SCOPE. The SCOPE Excellence Awards — Individual Leadership Category—III (Other Profit Making PSEs) went to A A Naqvi, managing director, National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation.

GHIAL Awarded British Safety Council's 'Sword of Honour'

Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA), operated by GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd (GHIAL), has been awarded the 'Sword of Honour' for safety management. The award was in recognition of its effective implementation of occupational health and safety management systems from the British Safety Council for health and safety works at the airport. The 'Sword of Honour' is considered to be the Oscar of the Safety World. RGIA is the first Indian airport to receive this honour in the world. In the month of December the award was presented to CEO-GHIAL in a glittering ceremony held at the famous Goldsmiths' hall at London.

Vijayan Pillai Gets Karshakasree Award – 2014

J Vijayan Pillai, native of Chavara, Kollam (Kerala), has been selected on 21 December for the Karshakasree award 2014, instituted by Malayalam Manorama to honour the best farmer in the state. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 2 lakh, gold medal and a memento. Pillai is the 12th recipient of the award. He was chosen for his efforts to manage a dairy farm which consists of 100 cows along with paddy, plantain, vegetables farming and aqua farming.

SPORTS & GAMES

India To Host Under-17 FIFA World Cup In 2017

India have won the right to host the 2017 Under-17 FIFA World Cup in 2017 by the FIFA executive committee in its meeting at Salvador de Bahia in Brazil on 5 December . By virtue of being the host country, India will take part in the 24-nation tournament for the first time in its history. This will be the biggest ever football tournament in the country as this is the first FIFA event in the country's history. India has hosted Asian Football Confederation's Youth Championships (Under-20) in 2006 and then the AFC Challenge Cup in 2008 but never has hosted any FIFA tournament. United Arab Emirates hosted the tournament this year while Chile will be the host country for the 2015 edition.

Chitra Won Bronze at IBSF World Snooker Championships

India's Chitra Magimairajan had to settle for a bronze at the International Billiards & Snooker Federation (IBSF) World Snooker Championship held at Daugvapils, Latvia. She lost to Wendy Jans of Belgium in the semifinals. In the final, Wendy Jans successfully defended her title by defeating Chunxia Shi of China. The next edition of the IBSF World Snooker Championship will be held at Bangalore in November 2014. The last edition was held at Sofia, Bulgaria in 2012.

India Won Women's Kabaddi World Cup 2013

India on 12 December won the women's Kabaddi World Cup championship for the third time in a row, defeating New Zealand 49-21 in the summit clash in Jalandhar, Punjab. The Indian women's team led their New Zealand counterparts for most part of the match and held out a strong challenge by the visitors in the second half, on course to a resounding win. The Indian team took home a first-place prize of 1 crore rupees. Anu Rani was adjudged the best stopper while Ram Bateri was declared the best raider. Both received a Maruti Alto car each. Indian women's team has won 2011, 2012, and 2013 editions of World cups.

Cheteshwar Pujara is ICC's Emerging Cricketer of the Year

The Indian cricketer and a Rising Test batsman, Cheteshwar Pujara has bagged the Emerging Cricketer of the Year award. The annual International Cricket Council (ICC) awards were announced in Dubai on 13 December. This is the first ever ICC Award for Pujara. He became the second fastest Indian to score 1000 Test runs during the course of his double hundred against Australia on March at Hyderabad. He put on the board 370-run record second wicket partnership with Murali Vijay. Pujara, the 25 year old cricketer has scored 1310 runs in 15 tests with an average of 65.50. Clarke was earlier named in the ICC Test and ODI Teams of the Year in Mumbai on 3 December 2013. In the same event, India captain Dhoni was revealed as the People's Choice award winner. Australian captain Michael Clarke was the winner of the Sir Garfield Sobers trophy for ICC Cricketer of the Year and was also named as the ICC Test Cricketer of the Year. In total, there were eleven individual awards. **The full list of winners is :-**

- * **ICC Cricketer of the Year (Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy)** — Michael Clarke (Australia)
- * **ICC Test Cricketer of the Year** — Michael Clarke (Australia)
- * **ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year** — Suzie Bates (New Zealand)
- * **ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year** — Kumar Sangakkara (Sri Lanka)
- * **ICC Emerging Cricketer of the Year** — Cheteshwar Pujara (India)
- * **ICC Associate and Affiliate Cricketer of the Year** — Kevin O'Brien (Ireland)
- * **ICC Twenty20 International Performance of the Year** — Umar Gul (Pakistan)
- * **ICC T20I Women's Cricketer of the Year** — Sarah Taylor (England)
- * **ICC Spirit of Cricket Award** — Mahela Jayawardena (Sri Lanka)
- * **ICC Umpire of the Year (winning the David Shepherd Trophy)** — Richard Kettleborough
- * **LG People's Choice Award** — MS Dhoni

Sunil Chhetri Named 2013 AIFF Player of the Year

Indian football captain Sunil Chhetri was on 20 December named the 2013 AIFF Player of the Year. The announcement was made by All India Football Federation (AIFF) at the annual general meeting held at the Football House in the Capital. Chhetri, with 43 goals, is presently India's highest scorer in international matches. He had earlier won the award in 2007 and 2011 and joins IM Vijayan, who too had won the award on three occasions. Oinam Bembem Devi was adjudged the 2013 AIFF Women's Player of the Year.

ECONOMY

Microsoft Co-founder Paul Allen Named World's Wealthiest Bachelor

According to the Wealth-X, a global wealth intelligence and prospecting company latest report released on 4 December, with an estimated personal fortune of \$15.3 billion, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen is the world's wealthiest bachelor, followed by Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani, who has a net worth of \$10.9 billion. Mikhail Prokhorov, owner of an American basketball team, Brooklyn Nets is the world's third wealthiest bachelor.

Health Insurance Premium To Cross Rs 32K crore Mark By 2016-17

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) Economic Research Bureau (AERB) latest study report titled 'Health Insurance in India-A review' released on 8 December. According to the report, Growing at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of about 20 per cent, India's total health insurance premium is likely to reach Rs 32,038 crore by 2016-17 from the level of about Rs 13,092 crore recorded as of 2011-12 owing to rising income levels together with growing health insurance premium. The ASSOCHAM projection is based on average of the compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of about 6.7% for income levels of people during 2004-05 and 2011-12 together with 32.5 per cent CAGR of health insurance premium during 2006-07 and 2011-12.

Indian Oil Corporation Tops Fortune India 500 List

The business magazine Fortune's Indian edition released its annual list of Fortune 500 Indian companies for 2013, on 10 December. According to the list, State-run Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has emerged as the country's biggest company in terms of annual revenue of Rs 4,75,867 crore, followed by Mukesh Ambani-led private sector giant Reliance Industries (annual revenue of Rs 4,09,883 crore) at the second place. Both IOC and RIL have retained their top-two ranks from the previous (2012) year. In this (2013) year's list, the two are followed by Bharat Petroleum (Rs 2,44,822 crore) at the third place and Hindustan Petroleum (Rs 2,17,771 crore) at fourth. Besides, there are a total of six state-run companies in the top-ten positions, as against four from the private sector.

Indians Most Optimistic About Growth Prospects

According to a global survey conducted by research firm Ipsos, India has emerged as the most optimistic country globally with respect to growth prospects in the coming time. More than half (53 per cent) of the people in India are confident about the country's future and are hoping that in next one year the economy will revive. India is followed by Canada and Australia in the second and third place respectively with 47 per cent of their citizens confident about their country's growth in next 12 months. Besides, China (4th), Sweden (5th), Argentina (6th), Brazil (7th), Germany (8th) and Russia (9th) and South Africa (10th) figured in the top 10 list out of 20 countries. The survey was conducted across 20 countries and included over 16,000 respondents.

United Nations Lower's India Growth Forecast To 4.8% For 2013

United Nations has on 19 December lowered India's economic growth forecast for 2013 to 4.8 percent while warning that emerging markets should be prepared to deal with the impact of US Federal Reserve's quantitative easing programme. According to the UN's World Economic Situation and Prospects 2014 report, India's economy is forecast to grow at 4.8 percent in 2013, down 1.3 percent from its earlier projection. Similarly, it has lowered the growth projection for 2014 to 5.3 percent, down 1.2 percent from earlier forecast. The UN sees India to grow by 5.7 percent in 2015.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

SpaceX Rocket Successfully Launches Its First Commercial Satellite

An unmanned Falcon 9 rocket developed by Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX, blasted off on 3 December to put its first commercial satellite known as 'SES - 8' into orbit. The rocket lifted off from its seaside launch pad at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. Perched on top of the rocket was a 7,000-pound (3,175 kg) communications satellite owned by Luxembourg-based SES SA, which operates a 54-satellite fleet, the world's second-largest. About 30 minutes after liftoff, the satellite and worth more than \$100 million, was in an elliptical orbit that reached more than 50,000 miles (80,000 km) from Earth, about a quarter of the way to the moon. From there, SES-8 will manoeuvre itself down to a circular, 22,369-mile (36,000-km) high orbit to provide television, broadband and other communications services to customers in India, China, Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia. SES-8 is the first commercial communications satellite to be launched from Cape Canaveral in four years. Previous SES satellites were launched primarily aboard Russian Proton and European Ariane rockets, which cost far more than the approximately \$55 million the company paid for its ride on SpaceX's Falcon booster.

Greece Tests Russian-Made S-300 Missile System for First Time

Greek armed forces test-fired a Russian-made S-300 air defense system on 13 December, for the first time since it was bought 14 years ago. Greece is the only NATO member that has an S-300 in service. The system was initially purchased by Cyprus in the mid-1990s, and was later transferred to the Greek island of Crete following objections from Turkey. The launch was carried out as part of the White Eagle 2013 military exercise and was described as successful.

Iran Sent Second Monkey into Space For Second Time

Iran has on 14 December successfully launched its second monkey named 'Fargam' into the space and back, the country's latest step toward sending humans into orbit. The monkey was flown on Iran's liquid-fueled 'Pajohesh' (research) rocket for a 15-minute mission that took him approximately 72 miles into space. This process will help the Iranian Scientists in developing Iran's Space Research works with necessary information, which would enrich their space technology knowhow. The first rocket carrying a monkey named Pishgam (pioneer) in the space was launched by Iran on 28 January 2013.

First Human Artificial Heart Implanted In France

The first human artificial heart implantation performed in Georges Pompidou Hospital, Paris on 18 December was successful. The artificial heart designed by the French biomedical firm Carmat and developed by the Dutch based European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS). The artificial heart can give patients up to five years of extra life, which replaces the real heart. The previous heart assistance devices are created mainly for temporary use. The artificial heart weighs as little as less than a kilogram (900grams), almost three times heavier than an average healthy human heart.

India Successfully Test Fires Nuclear Capable Agni-III Missile

India on 23 December successfully test-fired its nuclear-capable Agni-III ballistic missile with a strike range of more than 3,000 km as part of a user trial by the Army from Wheeler Island off Odisha coast. The test fire of the surface-to-surface missile was conducted by Strategic Forces Command (SFC) of the Indian Army with the logistic support from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The Agni-III missile is powered by a two-stage solid propellant system. It has a length of 17 metres, 2 metres diameter and launch weight is around 50 tonnes. It can carry a warhead of 1.5 tonne, which is protected by carbon all composite heat shield. Though the first developmental trial of Agni-III carried out on July 9, 2006 could not provide desired result, subsequent tests on April 12, 2007, May 7, 2008 and February 7, 2010 as well as the first user trial on September 21, 2012 from the same base were all successful.

PERSONS IN NEWS

A) APPOINTMENTS

Justice D.P Buch Sworn In As Gujarat Lokayukta

Justice (retired) D.P Buch, a retired judge of the Gujarat High Court, was administered the oath of Lokayukta by Governor Kamla Beniwal at Raj Bhavan in the presence of Chief Minister Narendra Modi on 11 December. Justice Buch is Gujarat's fourth Lokayukta. The post had been lying vacant since the last incumbent, Justice RM Soni's term expired in December 2003.

Raman Singh Sworn In As Chhattisgarh CM for Third Consecutive Term

Raman Singh was sworn in as Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh for the third consecutive term on 12 December. Raman Singh retained his Rajnandgaon Assembly constituency by defeating Congress' candidate Alka Mudliyar, the wife of former Congress MLA Uday Mudliyar who was killed in the Darbha naxal attack in May this year, by a margin of 35,866 votes. Raman Singh, the three-term Chief Minister who had an uninterrupted 10-year rule in Chhattisgarh-the tribal-dominated state, earned the 'Chawal Wale Baba' nickname for the popularity of his unique pro-welfare schemes including distribution of rice at one rupee and two rupees per kg to families belonging to extremely poor and below poverty lines categories respectively. Raman Singh is the fourth chief minister of Chhattisgarh state.

Harsh Bhanwala is new NABARD Chairman

Harsh Kumar Bhanwala has been appointed as the Chairman of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on 15 December. Bhanwala succeeds Prakash Bakshi, who retired as Nabard chairman in September 2013. At present, Snehlata Shrivastava, Additional Secretary in the Department of Financial Services in the Ministry of Finance, holds additional charge of the chairman's post. Bhanwala is currently Executive Director at India Infrastructure Finance Company (IIFCL). He was earlier chief general manager, looking after corporate planning, human resource development and credit enhancement at IIFCL.

Sushma Singh Sworn In As New CIC

The President Pranab Mukherjee on 19 December administered the oath of office to former IAS officer Sushma Singh as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Sushma Singh, who is the fifth Chief Information Commissioner of CIC, is the second woman to be appointed to the post after Deepak Sandhu, whose term ended on 18 December. She had joined the CIC as Information Commissioner on 23 September 2009. Prior to joining the CIC, Sushma Singh served as Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministries of Information & Broadcasting, Panchyati Raj and the Development of the North East Region (DONER).

Arup Raha Takes Over As 24th IAF chief

Air Marshal Arup Raha on 31 December took over as the 24th chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF) succeeding Air Chief Marshal N.A.K Browne. He is expected to have tenure of three years as IAF chief.

B) RESIGNS

Sudan's Vice President Ali Osman Taha Resigned

Sudan's Vice-President Ali Osman Taha, a key figure behind the Islamist-backed coup 24 years ago, has resigned to pave the way for a new government. His resignation was announced by the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir in Khartoum on 7 December. He resigned and vacated his office at the presidency ahead of his cabinet reshuffle. Taha has been the first Vice President of Sudan, the second highest political party.

C) DEATHS

Former South African President Nelson Mandela Died

Former South African President Nelson Mandela, who served 27 years in prison for anti-apartheid activities and led his continent into a new era, has died in Johannesburg on 5 December. He was 95 years old. He was also known as 'Madiba' in South Africa. He was the first black South African to hold the office of President from 1994 to 1999, and the first elected in a fully representative multiracial election. He was born on 1918 in Eastern Cape. He joined the African National Congress in 1943. In 1962, he was arrested

and was convicted of incitement and leaving country without a passport. He was sentenced to five years in prison. In 1964, he was charged with sabotage, sentenced to life. He was freed from the prison in 1990. In 1999, he stepped down as leader. Mandela has received more than two hundred and fifty awards over four decades. He was the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. In 1990 he was conferred with the Bharat Ratna. He was the recipient of Mahatma Gandhi peace award in 2001.

Union Labour Minister Sis Ram Ola Died

Union labour and employment minister Sis Ram Ola has died on 15 December in Gurgaon, Haryana. Sis Ram Ola was a member of the 15th Lok Sabha of India. He represented the Jhunjhunu constituency of Rajasthan and was a member of the Indian National Congress. He was a member of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 1990, and from 1980 to 1990 he was a cabinet minister in the Government of Rajasthan. A recipient of the Padma Shri award in 1968, Ola started girls education in a remote area in rural Rajasthan with three girls in the school known as Indira Gandhi Balika Niketan Ardawata in 1952. He took over as the Labour Minister in June 2013 after Mallikarjun Kharge was shifted to Railways. In 1968, he became a recipient of Padma Shri award for social work.

D)VISITORS

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai Visited India

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai visited India from 12 – 15 December 2013. During this four day visit, Hamid Karzai met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi and discussed strengthening of bilateral cooperation in areas of security and defence. The two leaders also agreed on deepening defence and security cooperation, including through enhancement in training and meeting the equipment and infrastructure needs of Afghanistan National Security and Defence Forces that would increase their operational capabilities and mobility. India has provided more than \$2 billion in aid towards Afghanistan's reconstruction and is providing military training to Afghan troops.

E)MISCELLANEOUS

Edward Snowden Is The Guardian's ' Person Of The Year '

The Guardian newspaper has on 9 December named U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden its person of the (2013) year. It's the second consecutive year a whistleblower receives such a title. Last year (2012) Chelsea Manning became a person of the year. As the Guardian reports, Edward Snowden leaked an estimated 200,000 files that exposed the extensive and intrusive nature of telephone and internet surveillance and intelligence gathering by the US and its western allies.

Pope Francis is Time's Person of the Year – 2013

Pope Francis has been named Time magazine's ' Person of the Year for 2013 ' on 11 December. He was named the Person of the Year for changing the perception of the Catholic Church within nine months. The former Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected in March as the first pope from Latin America and the first Jesuit. It was the third time a Catholic pope had been Time's selection. John Paul II was selected in 1994 and John XXIII was chosen in 1962. Edward Snowden the person who leaked the secret documents about NSA surveillance activities was selected at the second position in the list.

PLACES IN NEWS

1400-year-old Buddhist Temple Discovered In China

In the month of December 2013, A 1,400-year-old Buddhist temple, built during the Northern Qi Dynasty, has been discovered in north China's Shanxi Province. The shrine, enclosed by walls carved with Buddha niches, is part of the Tongzi Temple complex secluded on a mountain near the city of Taiyuan- the capital of Shanxi. The researchers from Institute of Archaeology of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (IA CASS) explained that structure was built in 556 AD during the rule of Northern Qi Dynasty (550-557 AD), a booming period for Buddhism. The structure is the only one of its kind ever found in China and it sheds light on early Buddha carvings. Though destroyed in a war in 1,117 AD, the temple has yielded a batch of well-preserved statues. One of its walls was carved with a Buddha figure of over 20 meters in height. It was unrecognisable, but the archaeologists unearthed some remnants that suggested its original look. The structure also houses a 2.6-meter mural dating from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), which archaeologists believe is of great value.

ABBREVIATIONS

ICC	- International Cricket Council
DSIM	- Department of Statistics and Information Management
EBT	- Electronic Benefit Transfer
IIFCL	- India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited
IPCC	- Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change
NABARD	- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
SEBI	- Securities and Exchange Board of India
SIDBI	- Small Industries Development Bank of India
OECD	- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

BOOKS IN NEWS

Mary Kom's Biography 'Unbreakable' Released

Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan unveiled Olympic medal-winning boxer M.C. Mary Kom's autobiography, titled 'Unbreakable', on 9 December in Mumbai. Mary Kom is a boxer, a World Champion five times over and winner of an Olympic bronze in 2012 – the first time that women's boxing was part of the Olympic Games. The book was published by Harper Collins.

COMMITTEES

Justice Sodhi Committee On Insider Trading Regulations Submits Report To SEBI

The High Level Committee to Review the SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 1992 constituted under the Chairmanship of Justice N.K. Sodhi, former chief justice of Karnataka and Kerala High Courts and former presiding officer of the Securities Appellate Tribunal, submitted its report to SEBI Chairman, Shri U.K. Sinha, on 7 December. The Committee has made a range of recommendations to the legal framework for prohibition of insider trading in India and has focused on making this area of

regulation more predictable, precise and clear by suggesting a combination of principles-based regulations and rules that are backed by principles. The Committee has also suggested that each regulatory provision may be backed by a note on legislative intent.

IMPORTANT DAYS AND DATES

World AIDS Day Observed on 1 December

World AIDS Day was observed on 1 December 2013 across the globe to raise awareness about the HIV/ AIDS. The theme for the year 2013 is: Getting to Zero. HIV/AIDS remains a major global issue, having claimed more than 36 million lives so far since the discovery of the virus more than 20 years ago. According to the World Health Organisation, there were approximately 35.3 million people living with HIV in 2012. Since the inception of World AIDS Day in 1988, it has been observed on 1st December every year with different themes. The theme for this year is "Getting to Zero"- means zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.

December 9th Observed As A International Anti-Corruption Day

International Anti-Corruption Day is observed on 9th December across the world to raise awareness about the menace of Corruption and what people can do to fight it. The theme for the year 2013 is "Act against Corruption Today". The day is observed on 9th December each year to raise awareness about the corruption. The UN General Assembly by resolution of 58/4 of 31 October 2003 designated 9 December as International Anti-Corruption Day. This decision aimed to raise people's awareness of corruption and of the role of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in combating and preventing it.