

RAO'S COACHING CENTRE

CURRENT AFFAIRS

APRIL 2018

Persons in News

Ms. Debjani Ghosh - Former Intel Sr. Executive appointed as President of NASSCOM.

Miguel Diaz-Canel - The Cuban Parliament elected Vice President Michael Diaz-Canel to succeed Raul Castro as the new President of Cuba. After nearly 70 years, a non-Castro family member will head Cuba (Fidel Castro & his brother Raul from 1950 to 2018). Mr. Raul Castro is stepping down due to age factor but will likely retain a degree of power as senior leader of the Communist Party.

Places in News

China – (i) Tiangong – I China's first space station launched in 2011 burned out on reentry over South Pacific. It spun out of control on reentry.

(ii) Imposed 25% additional tariff on US goods mostly agricultural products in response to US tariffs steel/aluminum imports. China's Commerce Ministry listed 106 US products, which will be subjected to a 25% tariff, in relation to Washington's intent to impose fresh tariffs on Chinese products worth \$50 Billion. The items include soya beans, cars, chemicals and aircraft, triggering fears that the world's top two economies may be locking horns in a major and escalating trade war. The Chinese move was announced soon after the US listed nearly 1,300 Chinese products worth \$50 Billion for additional duties.

Sweden – Became the first country to levy an aviation tax on passengers as a part of tackling/dealing with air pollution.

Hungary – Extremes Rights wing party, Fidesz Party led by Hungarian PM Viktor Orban swept the parliamentary elections. The party is opposed to immigration, press freedom and civil society etc. Mr. Orban is now into his 4th term.

MP – Became the first State to set up a Department to promote Happiness. AP followed.

Algeria – More than 250 people were killed when a military plane crashed in a field near Algeria's capital. The flight had just taken off from the Boufarik military base, 30 kilometres (20 miles) South West of the capital Algiers, for a military base in Bechar in South West Algeria. The Soviet-designed II-76 military transport plane crashed in a farm field.

Kohima, Nagaland – The State Govt named Indira Gandhi Stadium in the capital after Talinneran Ao, who captained the Indian Football Team in 1948 London Olympics (he was also the first doctor from Nagaland).

Sikkim – The historic Gurudongman Gurudvara (according to legend, Guru Nanak visited Sikkim in 1516 and performed a miracle to keep the Gurudongman lake ice free (the lake is named after the Guru); however, it has now been converted into Buddhist Shrine.

Delhi – Archeological Survey of India is restoring Mughul period paintings on the roofs/walls of Chatta Bazar in Red Fort.

Bilateral Relations

India-Nepal – Nepal PM KG Sharma Oli visited India: Highlights

- (a) A new electrified rail connecting Raxaul (India) to Kathmandu to be built with India's financial support
- (b) Development of inland water ways in Nepal for Cargo
- (c) South Asia's first transnational petroleum pipeline to supply fuel from India to Nepal : 69 Km pipeline from Motihari, Bihar to Amlekhaganj in Nepal.

India – Sweden – Agreed upon a joint action plan (JAP) for both countries to take forward a wide range of initiatives in defence, trade and investment, counterterrorism, renewable energy, smart cities, women's skill development, space and science and healthcare. Innovation was front and centre in the bilateral summit, with a separate discussion focused entirely on this area and the outcome being a joint declaration on a Sweden-India Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future, which built upon the joint statement between the two Prime Ministers in Mumbai in 2016. The Swedish Government will support innovation Partnership by providing upto 50 Million Swedish Kronor (over \$59 Million) for innovation cooperation in the field of smart cities and sustainability.

India – UK – Decided to build on the recommendations of a joint trade review to reduce barriers. Two sides also signed a statement of shared values, emphasizing support for a “global outlook and commitment of rules-based inter-national system”. Agreed to forge a new India-UK. Trade Partnership, building on the trade review carried out over the past year, focusing on life sciences, IT, food and beverages. A UK-India Tech Partnership and research partnership was also agreed upon (Sri. Modi met British PM Ms. Theresa May on the sidelines of CHOGM summit).

India – China - Indian PM Narendra Modi and Chinese President XiJinping met at Wuhan in Central China's Hubei province for an informal summit. No formal communiqué or a joint statement was issued. The two leaders decided to issue strategic instructions to their military commanders to ease tension across the border including setting up a hotline. India and China decided to jointly take up economic development projects in Afghanistan.

Obituaries

Ms. Winnie Mandela – Wife of Late Nelson Mandela and anti-apartheid activist; At one time she was hailed as mother of new South Africa; she was a controversial figure.

Ms. Anna Chern Chenaues – A Chinese origin lady settled in US; she was most well known as an informal diplomat and contributed to promoting US-China ties.

Milos Foreman – Oscar winning American director; his most were known films were one flew over the Cuckoo's Nest & Amadeus.

Ram Kumar – One of India's most well known abstract art painter and artist; his greatest work was The Boats.

S. Nihal Singh – Veteran Journalist; former editor of Statesman & Indian Express and India Post.

Bhim Sain Khurana – Well known Hindi film maker (short films, documentaries and Hindi films); one of his most well known film was Gharounda which was about housing problem in Mumbai.

Tim Bergling, Sweden – One of music world's most successful DJ; he was found dead at Muscat at the young age at 28

National Developments

1. India has become the second largest mobile phone producer in the World after China, as per data shared by Indian Cellular Association.
2. Gir in Gujarat, the last abode of Asiatic lions in Asia, has lost an alarmingly large number of them in two years. As many as 32 died of “unnatural causes” like falling into wells or getting run over by trains in the same period at the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary. The dead included cubs too. There are 27 open wells in Amreli district near the sanctuary and the government has promised to build parapet walls “as soon as possible.” As per the 2015 census, there were 523 lions in and around the Gir sanctuary. Unfortunately, though the total population of Asiatic lions increased from 359 in 2005 to 523 in 2015, no new protected habitat was approved by the State Government since 2008. The Gir Protected Area includes the Gir, Girnar, Paniya and Mitiyala sanctuaries and the Gir National Park.
3. The Southern States are unhappy about the terms of the reference of 15th Finance Commission headed by NK Singh. The terms of the 15th FC, apart from what are mentioned in the Constitution, laid down by GOI are:
 - (i) Use 2011 population data in tax distribution formula
 - (ii) Review so-called increased tax devolution under 14th Finance Commission
 - (iii) Efforts on tax net under GST
 - (iv) Factor in performance-based incentives to states on
 - (v) Review need for revenue deficit grants
 - (vi) Efforts made in moving towards replacement rate of population
 - (vii) Implementation of Centre's flagship schemes
 - (viii) Increasing public expenditure, eliminating losses in power sector

- (ix) Degree of populist measures (negative measure)

Southern States argue:

- (i) They performed better in controlling population growth than Northern States
- (ii) May get lesser share in taxes
- (iii) Being “punished for investments in education, health schemes to reduce fertility rate.

The centre says that 14th FC also used 2011 Census rate and that 15th FC has been asked to provide for incentives to States that do well in population control.

4. The Government of India, Government of Maharashtra and the World Bank have signed a \$420 million project to help small and marginal farmers in the Marathwada and Vidarbha regions of Maharashtra. The Maharashtra Project for Climate Resilient Agriculture will be implemented in rural areas largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture.
5. The Supreme Court held that the Chief Justice of India has the exclusive prerogative to allocate cases and constitute benches and there cannot be a presumption of mistrust in a high constitutional functionary. The court further said that seniority in terms of appointment has no bearing in assigning cases to a judge and that every judge appointed to the apex court is invested with the equal duty of adjudicating cases. (Supreme Court Rules, 2013, was notified after Presidential approval under Article 145 of Constitution. It says CJI is to nominate judges who would constitute a bench to hear a case, appeal or other matters.
6. The Government has withdrawn a ban on the sale of animals for slaughter in livestock markets across the country, in draft rules pertaining to prevention of cruelty to animals. Once the new rules are notified after consultation with stakeholders, cattle, including cows, can be sold in animal markets, even for slaughter wherever it is legal.
7. Boeing announced a partnership with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) and Mahindra Defence Systems (MDS) for manufacturing the F 18 Super Hornet in India. The Super Hornet ‘Make in India’ proposal is to build an entirely new and state-of-the-art production facility that can be utilized for other programmes like India’s Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme.
8. Prime Minister inaugurated one half of the NDA Government’s flagship programme, Ayushman Bharat, by inaugurating the first health and wellness centre at Chhattisgarh’s Bijapur. The Centre plans to convert 1.5 Lakh sub centres in the countryside into health and wellness centres that would provide 12 types of healthcare services and offer common tests, such as those for blood sugar and blood pressure, as non-communicable diseases are on the rise in the country. The health services to be offered at these sub-centres relate to contraception, reproductive health, management of communicable disease, screening of non-communicable diseases, basic dental care and basic geriatric

health care. They would also dispense a few drugs and carryout some diagnostics. “Everyone above 30 will be screened for diabetes, hypertension and breast, oral and cervical cancer as the toll due to non-communicable diseases is on the rise,” said a source. However, the other half of the Ayushman Bharat Scheme – offering Rs. 5 Lakh family health insurance cover –is not yet ready and may take a few more months before the scheme is ready for launch.

9. The Government announced plan to attract 200,000 foreign students to India, more than four times the current number. The target part of a “Study in India” scheme launched jointly by for ministries – human resource development, external affairs, home and commerce. As part of the move, India will target students from countries in South, South-East and West Asia, Africa and Commonwealth of Independent States that were part of the former Soviet Union. Admission to happen via a central online platform.
10. 74 MPS of Rajya Sabha gave a notice to chairman proposing to impeach the Chief Justice of Supreme Court Justice Dipak Mishra. Their charges are – (i) Justice Mishra has peculiarly connections/gains from a coaching institutions/educational institution in Orissa (ii) land grab (iii) selectively allocating sensitive cases to judges of his choice and nor going by seniority etc. The removal of Judges of HC & SC is governed by Judges Enquiry Act under which the procedure is as follows:
 - (i) Either 50 members of Rajya Sabha or 100 member of Lok Sabha should first give notice to Chairman, RS/Speaker LS impeachment/removal indicating the grounds.
 - (ii) The ChairmanRS/Speaker LS as the case may be shall send the notice/charges to the Supreme Court which will set up a three member committee consisting of a SC Judge, HC Judge and an eminent Jurist to enquire into the charges.
 - (iii) The Parliament can take up the removal motion only after the committee finds prima facie substance in the charges leveled against the concerned Judge.
 - (iv) The Judge stands removed only after both Houses voting separately pass the impeachment/removal motion by special majority (so far no judge has been impeached in India; Justice Soumitra Sen of Kolkata HC was impeached by Rajya Sabha but before the motion could taken up in Lok Sabha he resigned; The Parliament was adjourned in between; Many years back, an impeachment motion was taken up against Justice Ramaswamy of Haryana & Punjab HC and later SC but the motion fell through in Lok Sabha for want of numbers).

The Chairman, Rajya Sabha rejected the move to impeach CJI on the following grounds:

- (i) The MPs who petitioned are unsure of their own case
- (ii) Phrases used by MPs themselves indicate a mere suspicion, a conjecture or an assumption
- (iii) Conversations between third parties with dubious credentials, which have been extensively relied upon, cannot themselves constitute any material evidence against the CJI

- (iv) Master of Roster issue is an internal matter of Supreme Court it is neither tenable nor admissible
- (v) Allegations have a serious tendency of undermining the independence of judiciary
- (vi) That all facts stated in the motion do not make out a case which can lead any reasonable mind to conclude the CJI can ever be held guilty of misbehavior.

11. The President signed the following ordinances:

- (i) Amendments to IPC; CrPC & POSCO Act – Punish a perpetrator of rape of girl below 12 years of age with maximum penalty of death sentence. The minimum prescribed sentence for rape of a woman is also proposed to be raised from seven to 10 years. In a comprehensive measure, it has also been proposed to complete the investigation and trial in all rape cases on fast track basis. A period of two months each has been fixed for investigation and trial, while there would be no provision for anticipatory bail in case of rape of a girl below 16 years of age. Stringent punishment for rape of girl under 12 years has been provided – minimum 20 years’ imprisonment or imprisonment for rest of life and maximum with death sentence. In case of gang rape of a girl below 12 years, minimum punishment will be imprisonment for rest of life and the maximum death sentence, the official sources said. The minimum punishment in case of rape of woman has been increased from rigorous imprisonment of seven years to 10 years, extendable upto life imprisonment.
- (ii) Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance 2018.

Main Points

Who are covered?

- (a) Economic offenders who refuse to return
- (b) Against whom arrest warrant has been issued
- (c) Loan defaulter with outstanding of over Rs. 100 Crore

What it allows?

- (a) Confiscate assets even without conviction
- (b) Paying off lenders by selling off fugitive’s properties
- (c) Offenders will be tried under PMLA

12. In a significant defence reform, a new integrated institutional mechanism called the Defence Planning Committee has been set up under the chairmanship of the national security adviser. It is tasked with preparing a national military and security strategy, assessing external security risks and defining security priorities. It will have on board the principal secretary to the prime minister, chairman chiefs of staff committee, service chiefs, defence secretary, foreign secretary and secretary (expenditure) in the finance ministry. Functionally, the committee will be aided by sub-committees and policy and

strategy, plans and capability development, defence diplomacy and defence manufacturing ecosystem.

13. The second stage of the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan – a scheme of the Centre aimed at making higher education institutions provide solutions for problems of villages – is set to take off with a much wider spread than its first stage. Unnat Abhiyan is expected to be a two-way learning process, where institutions share their knowledge with villages and also learn from the wisdom and commonsense of rural folk. The key points include helping villages achieve 100% school results, creating 25 jobs each in four sectors in each village where work would take place, increasing rural incomes, providing drinking water and sanitation to villages, disposal village garbage, among other things.
14. The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has developed a next-generation bullet proof jacket that is not only cheaper also much lighter. Named Bhabha Kavach, named after Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, the jacket was developed at BARC's Trombay Centre in Mumbai in response to request from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Ministry of Home Affairs.
15. Adopt a Heritage (Apni Dhरोhar, Apni Pencham) (Preserve the Past for the Future) Project was launched by Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture & Archeological Survey of India for development and maintenance of basic and advanced amenities and provide employment to locals in the process. Under this select monuments heritage sites & other tourist sites including natural sites will be awarded to private sector, public sector companies and individuals for development of amenities. Under the scheme Red Ford was awarded to Dalmia Cements. The parties who are given the responsibility for development of amenities are called monument mitras.
16. Prime Minister launched Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan at Mandla, MP on the occasion of Panchayat Raj Day on 24th April. The Abhiyan aims at promoting social harmony, spread awareness about Govt schemes in rural areas and obtain feedback on seven GOI Programmes (Jan Dhan Yojana, Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Suraksha Bima Yojana, Soubhagya (power connexion to BPL households), Unnat Jyoti – by Affordable LED for all Yojana (Ujwala), Mission Indira Danush (Vaccination). The Abhiyan will last from 14th April to 5th May 2018.
17. GOI announced that India had achieved 100% electrification of all villages (85% connected to grid 15% connected to power packs off grid). Government definition says that a village is 'electrified' if it has the basic electrical infrastructure and 10% of its households and public places have power (public institutions like schools, dispensaries, health centres and panchayat offices to have electricity. Presence of basic infrastructure like distribution transformer and distribution line). 'Electrified' implies that a village has been connected to the grid, it does not imply that all households have access to electricity. It is on the basis of these minimal house-hold level connections in each village that India has now achieved total electrification. But nearly one-fifth of India's rural house-holds

still do not have access to electricity (Leasang in Manipur became the last village to be electrified).

International Developments

1. The UN Security Council's updated list of terrorists and militant groups has 139 entries from Pakistan alone, including Lakshkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Hafiz Saeed is listed as a person also wanted by Interpol for his involvement in terrorist activities. The list also includes Dawood Ibrahim, who according to the UN, has held several Pakistani passports issued in Rawalpindi and Karachi.
2. **Gaza** – More than 20 Palestinians were killed in Israeli Security Forces firing at the Gaza-Israel border. Thousands of Palestinians were mobilized by Hamas which controls Gaza on a six week protest called “The Great March of Return” Israel claims that Hamas used the civilians as human shield to fire on its forces and the agitation was not peaceful. Gaza is virtually blockaded by Israel and it controls water supply and movement of Palestinians in and out of Gaza.
3. **Brazil** – Former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of the workers party was convicted in a corruption case and given a 12 year jail term. His party was in power for 13 years (2003-16); he was President for the first eight years and after that his successor and the first lady President Ms. Dilma Rouseff was in power; even she had to quit over allegations of budget fraud. The workers' party has a strong mass base in Brazil. Mr. Lula da Silva's conviction, many say, is not based on strong evidence. Brazil faces an uncertain future as far as democracy is concerned.
4. **Syria** – The Syrian Govt is accused by the rebels and aid groups of using chemical/poisonous gas against civilians/anti-govt forces in the town of Douma. 49 people died in the rebel held town in the attack. The Syrian Govt has regained control of Eastern Ghoutia including Douma. US & UK rained missiles on suspected chemical weapon manufacturing sites in Syria in retaliation.
5. **Afghanistan** – The China Pakistan economic corridor is being extended to Afghanistan.
6. **North Korea** – Announced it would halt nuclear tests & intercontinental ballistic missile launches; it also said that the missile test site & atomic test site at Pyongyang will be shut down. The US is seeking complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the North, while Pyongyang wants security guarantees.
7. **Nicaragua** – Thousands of students protested and forced the President Daniel Ortega to release detained political prisoners, allow TV back on air and withdraw social security and pension cutbacks. The Govt tried to suppress the protests; dozens were killed in police firing.

8. **Myanmar** – Hundreds of Kachin tribals (Christians) fled their province in the Myanmar – China border following Govt forces action (Kachin rebels vs. Govt).
9. **Australia** – Pledged 379 Million Dollars to restore and protect the Great Barrier Reef which is under threat from (a) coral eating starfish (b) bleaching due to global warming (sea temperatures rising) (c) sea pollution etc.
10. South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean President Kim Jong-un met at Panmunjon (on the border) on 27th April 2018 for a historic summit. They issued the Panmunjon Declaration, the highlights of which are:
 - (i) The two Koreas agree to fully implement all existing agreements and declarations adopted between the two sides
 - (ii) To establish joint liaison office with resident representatives of both sides in the Kaesong industrial zone on their border
 - (iii) To encourage more active cooperation, exchanges, visits and contacts
 - (iv) To jointly participate in international sports events
 - (v) To endeavour to swiftly resolve the humanitarian issues that resulted from the nation's division
 - (vi) To completely cease all hostile acts against each other in every domain including land, sea and air
 - (vii) To transform the Demilitarized Zone into a peace zone as of May 1 by halting all hostile acts
 - (viii) To devise a practical scheme to transform the current Northern Limit Line in the West Sea into a maritime peace zone
 - (ix) To hold frequent defence ministerial and working-level meetings in a bid to immediately discuss and solve military issues, with the first military talks to be held in May at the rank of generals
 - (x) To strictly adhere to a non-aggression pact that precludes the use of force against each other
 - (xi) To carry out disarmament in a phased manner, as military tension is alleviated and substantial progress is made in military confidence-building
 - (xii) To pursue trilateral meetings involving the US or quadrilateral meetings involving the US and China with a view to declaring an end to the War
 - (xiii) Pursue the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free peninsula.

Background - Korea was ruled by Japan till 1945; following its defeat in the IInd World War, Korea became free but due to Cold War, was divided into a Communist controlled North and a Western supported free market South Korea. In 1950, North Korea invaded South but a UN sponsored multinational force led by USA forced North Korea back. In 1953, a formal armistice (cessation of hostilities) was signed. The border was drawn at the 38th parallel at Panmunjon (a demilitarized zone). There has always been tension in the Korean peninsula. In 2000 and 2007, the two Koreas held summits; though they promised much, nothing much

came out of these. Observers believe that China may have nudged North Korea into talks; another view is that North Korea desperately needs economic aid and therefore chose to suspend missile and nuclear tests and pursue peace. North Korea said it would shut its nuclear sites by May 2018 (some say, the site has collapsed).

Indian Economy

1. Nationwide electronic or e-way bill system for the inter-state movement of goods was rolled out from 1st April. Business and transporters have to produce before a GST inspector e-way bill for moving good worth over 50,000 from one state to another. The e-way bill is fundamentally an electronic document generated using a digital interface. The document contains all details required for movement of goods including details of supplier, recipient, description of goods, value of goods, taxes applicable, details of transportation etc. Generation of an e-way bill is compulsory, where the value of a consignment is more than Rs. 50,000 and where movement is beyond 10 km. The Govt claims its as an anti-evasion measure that would help boost tax collections by clamping down on the trade that currently happens on a cash basis. The system has been designed and developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
2. Consumers who took home loans before April 1, 2016, will pay lower interest rates. This is because of commercial banks shifting to a new methodology of setting interest rates, based on the directives of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Under the new system, interest rates on all floating rate loans will be reset in tandem with the change in repo rate by the RBI. Also, they will be reviewed every month instead of three months under the old system. The MCLR based lending rate is closely linked with the repo rate. It ensures better transmission of the RBI's rate cut to the borrowers.
3. The Reserve Bank day switched back to the gross domestic product (GDP) – based measure to offer its growth estimates from the gross value added (GVA) methodology, citing global best practices. The Government had started analyzing growth estimates using GVA methodology from January 2015 and had also changed the base year to 2018 from January. Demand Perspective while GVA gives a picture of the state of economic activity from the producers' side or supply side, the GDP model gives the picture from the consumers' side or demand perspective.
4. The RBI asked banks NBFCs and payment service providers to disassociate themselves from entities dealing with virtual currencies (VCs), including bitcoins, with immediate effect. The RBI has repeatedly cautioned users, holders and traders of virtual currencies, including bitcoins.
5. European Union has introduced a new regulation the General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR with effect from 25 May 2018 which envisages strict rules for handling personal data of users; flowing GDPR invites heavy penalties. Indian companies dealing with EU will have to adhere to GDPR.

6. Cambridge Analytica, a London based political strategy consultancy group that advises political parties (communication, voter contact, election strategy etc.,) was in the news. It is believed that Cambridge Analytica used million of Facebook users data. Even the Congress & BJP are alleged to have used the services of the company. The alleged data leak came to light due to whistle blower working for Analytica, Christopher Wylie (Facebook apologized for data leaks).
7. Rishad Premji – Chief Strategy Officer, WIPRO appointed Chairman NASSCOM
8. Google has filed an appeal at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) against a judgment from India’s competition watchdog that found it guilty of “search bias”. In February, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) had imposed a Rs. 1.36 Billion (\$20.95 million) fine on Google, saying it was abusing its dominance in online web search and online search advertising markets.
9. The Top 10 Job-generators sector wise in India are (RBI)
 - (i) Construction
 - (ii) Trade
 - (iii) Miscellaneous Services (including real estate brokerage)
 - (iv) Transport and storage
 - (v) Education
 - (vi) Business Services
 - (vii) Hotels and Restaurants
 - (viii) Gems, jewellery and miscellaneous manufacturing
 - (ix) Food products, beverages and tobacco
 - (x) Financial Services
 - (xi) Health and Social Work
10. According to official data, FDI inflows into India-top 10 sectors are:
 - (i) Telecommunications
 - (ii) Computer Software & Hardware
 - (iii) Services (Finance, Banking, Insurance etc.)
 - (iv) Construction Activities
 - (v) Trading
 - (vi) Automobile Industry
 - (vii) Power
 - (viii) Chemicals, excl Fertilizers
 - (ix) Non-Conventional Energy
 - (x) Drugs & Pharmaceuticals
11. Saudi Arabia’s Aramco signed an initial deal with a consortium of Indian refiners to build a \$44 Billion refinery and petrochemicals project on India’s West Coast. Top executives of Aramco and India’s Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals – a joint venture

of Indian Oil Corp., Hindustan Petroleum Corp., - signed a memorandum of understanding to take equal stakes in the project in Maharashtra State.

12. The Government reconstituted the Bank Board Bureau, appointing former bureaucrat Bhanu Pratap Sharma as its new chairman. Sharma took over from the former Controller and Auditor General Vinod Rai, whose term ended on March 31. The Government also appointed Vedika Bhandarkar, former head of India investment banking at Credit Suisse, P Pradeep Kumar, former managing director of State Bank of India and Pradip Shah, founder of ratings agency CRISIL and Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) as members of RBB. RBB was set up in February 2016 as an autonomous body with Rai as its first chairman.
13. India has called for expression of interest (EoI) for the first offshore wind energy project in the country being set up in the Gulf of Khambhat, off the coast of Gujarat. The National Institute of Wind Energy (NIWE), an autonomous body under the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), has called for 'Expression of Interest'.
14. India & China have decided to take up the issue of Asian Premium being emerged by OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) on crude oil exports to India, China, South Korea & Japan which are the four largest oil consumers in the World. OPEC is charging these countries almost double the prices at which it is supplying crude to Europe per barrel.
15. The US Treasury Department added India to the list of countries it considers as potential currency manipulations (others – China, Japan, Germany, South Korea & Switzerland). US has put India in the watch list for its foreign exchange & macroeconomic policies. This may reduce RBI's ability to intervene in the forex market and prevent strengthening of rupee vis-à-vis the dollar. According to currency dealers, external volatility, with rise in US bonds yields, oil prices, geopolitical concerns and a threat of trade war has led to the dollar strengthening and the rupee weakening. Slowing inflows into local financial markets and the widening current account deficit have also contributed to the weaker rupee. So far this year the rupee has weakened 2%.
16. Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme
 - (i) The Government has announced this fiscal's first tranche of sovereign gold bond
 - (ii) The Sovereign gold bond 2018-19, Series-I, will be sold through banks, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), designated post offices and recognized stock exchanges namely the NSE and BSE.
 - (iii) Under the scheme, the bonds are denominated in units of one gram of gold and multiples thereof. Minimum investment in the bonds is one gram with a maximum limit of subscription of 500 grams per person per fiscal year (April-March). The maximum limit of subscription would be 4 kg for individual and HUF and 20 kg

for trusts and similar entities per fiscal (April-March) notified by the Government from time to time, it said.

- (iv) The investors will be compensated at a fixed rate of 2.50% per annum payable semi-annually on the nominal value, it said.
- (v) Price of bond will be fixed in rupees on the basis of simple average of closing price of gold of 999 purity published by the Indian Billion and Jewelers Association Limited for the last 3 working days of the week preceding the subscription period. The bonds can be used as collateral for loans.

17. Highlights of IMF World Economic Outlook Report:

- (i) India is expected to grow at 7.4% in 2018 and 7.8% in 2019, leaving its nearest rival China behind respectively at 6.6% and 6.4% in the two years.
- (ii) India, in 2018 and 2019, would re-emerge as one of the faster growing major economies.
- (iii) Two major economic reforms – demonetization and goods and services tax (GST) – resulted in a slight lower growth rate of 6.7% in 2017.
- (iv) India has made progress on structural reforms in the recent past, including through the implementation of the GST, which will help reduce internal barriers to trade, increase efficiency and improve tax compliance.
- (v) The medium-term growth outlook for India is strong, an important challenge is to enhance inclusiveness”, the report said.
- (vi) India’s high public debt and recent failure to achieve the budget’s deficit target, calls for continued fiscal consolidation into the medium term to further strengthen fiscal policy credibility.
- (vii) The main priorities for lifting constraints on job creation and ensuring that the demographic dividend is not wasted are to ease labour market rigidities, reduce infrastructure bottlenecks and improve educational outcomes.

18. All equity mutual fund schemes are now supposed to benchmark their performances against TRI. In a TRI, the dividends of the underlying companies of the index are added back into their share prices, which is why it is called the “total return” since the return from a company’s share doesn’t just come from the share price movement, but also from dividends. In many developed markets abroad, mutual funds are benchmarked against various TRIs. The Indian Mutual Fund Industry has not recently moved towards it.

19. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) will bring out norms to tackle the menace of “call muting” and measure quality of service for voice calls on Long Term Evolution (LTE) or VoLTE networks.

In August, 2017 Trai had announced norms to curb dropped calls and put in place graded penalty clause for erring operators, under which if an operator fails to meet the call drop benchmark in a quarter, it may be liable to pay upto Rs. 5 Lakh. Under these norms, the regulator will now measure the dropped call rate at the mobile tower level instead of at

the telecom circle level. However, in January, incumbent operators urged the regulator to factor in the issue of “call muting”, which is a phenomenon where the call is not disconnected but users are unable to hear each other’s voice for a few seconds. Call muting occurs only on VoLTE networks.

20. RBI liberalized external commercial borrowing allowing Indian companies to access funds in overseas markets; now they will be allowed to raise ECB, seven times their equity base (7:1) (earlier it was 4:1) subject to a ceiling of 5 Million Dollars.
21. Japanese External Trade Organisation (Jetro) in association with NASSCOM & IIM, Bangalore formally launched the Indo-Japan startup hub in Bangalore.
22. Bolivia has one fourth of World’s lithium deposits (along with Argentina & Chile it forms the so called lithium triangle). The demand for lithium has gone up suddenly due to electrical vehicles, laptops old smart phones (used in batteries).
23. SEBI streamlined algorithmic trading (automated trading in stock exchanges by computers which are programmed to take certain actions in response to market data (price, volumes, time etc..) and collocation (placing computer systems just close to stock exchanges’ servers/matching engines by some traders (usually big traders) so that they can get information about stock movements a few seconds earlier (that can make a difference). SEBI says it is discriminatory (colocation) and has now introduced managed colocation even for small and medium players.

S & T

1. Researchers at North Carolina University, US made a breakthrough in the treatment of diabetes. They successfully synthesized ABC (artificial beta cells) which are effective in keeping glucose/sugar levels normal. The discovery of a single dose of Artificial Beta Cells (ABCs), which can maintain steady blood glucose levels for as long as five days, is a major breakthrough in the treatment of diabetes. The ABC injection obviates the need for daily insulin injections.
2. NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope has discovered the farthest individual star ever seen- an enormous blue stellar body nicknamed Icarus located over halfway across the Universe. The star, located in a very distant spiral galaxy, is so far away that its light has taken nine billion years to reach Earth. Its official name is MACSJ1149+2223 Lensed Star 1.
3. Scientists have successfully grown the first batch of lettuce, cucumbers and radishes in a lab in Antarctica, taking the possibility of producing food in space closer to reality. A shipping container-size greenhouse, called EDEISS, was installed in near the Neumayer Station III, a German research facility in Antarctica. The lab is providing fresh vegetables for the scientists during long missions in Antarctica.

4. Indian weather-scientists are set to undertake a two-year long experiment to find out the best way to do cloud seeding – an artificial way of rain-making. Scientists have set up the infrastructure like a C-band radar at Solapur in Maharashtra and hired two aircraft for seeding. The aircraft expected by May end and the experiment will start in June after the onset of the Southwest monsoon. Solapur is chosen because it falls in a rain-shadow area. Also the town is close to Pune where the lead centre, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, is located. The aircraft will operate from the Pune aircraft.
5. An Indian – origin scientist in Australia Veena Sahajwala has launched the World’s first micro factory that can transform the components from electronic waste items such as smart-phones and laptops into valuable materials for re-use.
6. The Centre has begun a move to map the available scientific equipment and research facilities at the country’s higher education institutions for their optimal utilization by the scientists and researchers. The plan is to establish “an online national network” that lists of all scientific research equipment and facilities procured and created with the funds provided by the Central Government or its agencies so that scientists and researchers can access them in order to work on their projects.
7. Domestic drug firms have come out strongly against a Government proposal to regulate the controversial but life-saving growth drug oxytocin. Companies manufacturing oxytocin say the availability of the drug will be severely hit if the Government restricts its manufacture to only one company in its drive to curb the misuse in its drive to curb the misuse of the drug by dairy owners and farmers, who use it to boost milk production and increase the size of vegetables. Oxytocin is prescribed for the initiation of uterine contractions and induction of labour in women. It is also used to help abort the fetus in cases of incomplete abortion or miscarriage and control bleeding after childbirth. But it is controversial because it is used widely in the dairy industry, agriculture and horticulture. Authorities are also concerned that the misuse of the growth booster is reported among trafficked children, injected to accelerate puberty among girls.
8. In a first, NASA is conducting a study of the World’s largest phytoplankton bloom in the North Atlantic to see how the tiny sea critters influence the climate in every season. The North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) mission began its fourth and final deployment, which will study how phyto-planktons give rise to small organic particles that leave the ocean and end up in the atmosphere, ultimately influencing clouds and climate.
9. Plant varieties and seeds cannot be patented under Indian law by companies like Monsanto Inc., and royalties on genetically modified (GM) technology will be decided by a specialized agency of the agriculture ministry, the Delhi high court ruled. As a result, the patent held by Monsanto, through its Indian arm Mahyco-Monsanto Biotech Ltd (MMBL) over its Bollgar-II Bt cotton seed technology, a genetically modified variant which resists the bollworm pest, was decreed to be unenforceable in India.

10. Navigation satellite IRNSS-II was flown into space from Sriharikota space pad. The 1,425-kg satellite will shortly become the seventh satellite to join the NavIC constellation of Indian regional navigation satellites. IRNSSII was put into space to replace IRNSS-H which was unsuccessful. The launch completes the first phase of the constellation. NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), dubbed India's own GPS, has been designed to provide precise information on position, navigation and time related to objects to people. The eight satellites have a civilian and restricted military/security application to aid security application to aid security and disaster management and fleet monitoring on land, air and sea. IRNSS-II is expected to be ready for work in about a months time. Its life is for 10 years. The Indian regional navigation satellite system will cover 1500 Km radius from India's borders. However, IRNSS is yet to become operational and there are problems regarding atomic clock in the satellites.
11. The Zoological Society of London put the Australian Mary River Turtle in its EDGE of existence list (evolutionary distinct & globally endangered). The EDGE of existence is also a research & conservation programme of zoological society of London to focus on conservation of threatened/endangered species of animals. (It lives only in the Mary River, Queensland from which it takes its name. The species is known to scientists as *Elusor macrurus*. It can breathe underwater through specialized glands in the cloaca-orifices through which the turtle excretes urine and waste and lay eggs).
12. Rainfall is likely to be normal during the June-to-September South-West monsoon seasons. According to IMD, for the third consecutive year, India will have a normal monsoon. There is very less probability of experiencing a deficit monsoon. Rainfall will be 97% of the 50 year average, with a 54% probability that rains will be normal-to-above normal, the IMD said in its first-stage long-range forecast. The probability that rainfall will be deficient-that is, less than 90% of the 50-year average is – 14%, it added. India is likely to get 97% rainfall, defined as between 96% and 104% of the Long Period Average of 89 cm it typically gets between June and September. But these prediction of a “normal” monsoon, based on an estimate of the total volume of rain expected to fall on the Indian landmass, to hide more than they reveal. Between 1948 and 2015, the total quantum of rain that falls on the Indian landmass in the 122-day span of the monsoon has been a small decline. Yet the number of days of extreme rain (over 150 mm a day) has increased significantly, particularly over central India, where it jumped three-fold. The unevenness of the Indian monsoon is a near certainty. There is now substantial scientific evidence to show that the Indian monsoon is changing the fundamental ways.
13. Not all species are adjusting to global warming at the same rate and as a result, some are falling out of step. Global warming is changing the music, with spring now arriving several weeks earlier in parts of the world than it did a few decades ago. Not all species are adjusting to this warming at the same rate and as a result, some are falling out of step. Scientists who study the changes in plants and animals triggered by seasons have a term for this – phenological mismatch.

14. Researchers in the US and Britain have accidentally engineered an enzyme which eats plastic and may eventually help. Scientists at the University of Portsmouth and the US Energy Department’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory decided to focus on naturally occurring bacterium discovered in Japan a few years ago. Known as Ideonella sakaiensis, it appears to feed exclusively on a type of plastic known as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), used widely in plastic bottles. The researchers’ goal was to understand how one of its enzymes – called PETase – worked.

15. The Centre came out with new set of rules on coastal zones (given below):

Old Rules	New Rules
Coastal Zone Rules, 2011	Coastal Zone Rules, 2018
No development in CRZ-1, the most ecologically sensitive zone, except for defence, strategic purposes	Eco-tourism activities such as mangrove walks, tree huts and nature trails, among others, in identified stretches, subject to permissions
The 500-metre CRZ is apportioned into 4 subdivisions	There are now further subdivisions within these 4 regions. For instance, the CRZ-1, is split into CRZ-1a and CRZ-1b and CRZ-3 has 3a and 3b
Coastal Regulation Zone shall apply to the land between high tide line to 100 metres on landward side of creeks, estuaries, rivers	CRZ shall apply to the land area between high tide line to 50 mts on the landward side of creeks, estuaries, backwaters and rivers
States have no discretion	50-metre-limit after approval of State

16. Highlights of State of Global Air Report, 2018 (prepared by Health Effects, Massachusetts, Institute of Health Metrics, University of Washington with inputs from University of British Columbia, Canada.

- (i) It (air pollution) was the sixth leading cause of death worldwide.
- (ii) Close to 9 out of 10 people around the world live in regions where PM_{2.5} concentrations exceed the World Health Organisation’s air quality guideline of 10 µG/M³. About 6 out of 10 people live in areas where PM_{2.5} levels exceed even the least stringent WHO interim air quality target of 35 µG/M³.
- (iii) China’s pollution levels are on the decline while those in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India have seen the steepest increases since 2010. The chart plots trends in population – weighted annual average PM_{2.5} levels in the 10 most populous countries.
- (iv) Those using solid fuels are exposed to PM_{2.5} levels about 20 times higher than the WHO guideline. While the proportion of population using solid fuels has dropped worldwide, the decline was steepest in China. In developed nations (including the US), this proportion was negligible.

17. In view of the likely decline of fossil fuels from conventional sources (oil wells), some experts suggest shale gas & oil as source of energy supplies. Shale gas and oil are unconventional natural resources found at 2,500-5,000 m below the earth's surface, as compared to conventional crude oil found at 1,500 m. The process of extracting shale oil and gas requires deep vertical drilling followed by horizontal drilling. The most common way to extract shale gas is "hydraulic fracturing" (fracking), where high volumes of water mixed with certain chemicals are pushed down to break the rocks and release the trapped energy minerals.

Because of its benefits, shale gas is being perceived by some as a boon. Fracking seems attractive. To gain such benefits, the Government introduced a policy on shale gas and oil in 2013, permitting national oil companies to engage in fracking. Under the first phase, shale gas blocks were identified in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. However, environmental groups have strongly criticized this move, which they say will have adverse environmental impact. Countries like Germany and France and Scotland have banned fracking.

In the US, where shale gas has been commercially exploited for two decades, the prices of fuel and electricity have dropped. Recent negotiations between the Secretary of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and American Shale producers to control oil production and prices show that the US has gained significant political advantage. Similarly, if India commercially exploits shale deposits, it could meet its ever-increasing energy demand, decrease oil and gas imports and improve the balance of payments. While this paints a possible bright future, fracking is bound to have a detrimental impact on local communities and the environment. As fracking consumes large amounts of water (average 15,000 m³/well) and relatively larger surface area, it is bound to impact irrigation and the local requirements. Also, some chemicals and gases released during fracking are carcinogenic and toxic.

18. Synthetic fertilizers used in farming can trigger diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, Government scientists have found. The scientists, from the nanoscience and water research unit of the Central Government's department of science and technology, found a close link between toxic heavy metals used in fertilizers and the prevalence of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases among farmers. The Government funded research was carried out in a village in Tamil Nadu on around 900 people whose urine samples were tested.
19. India is trying up with the United States and Finland to develop a pollution-forecast system that will help anticipate particulate matter (PM) levels at least two days in advance and at a greater resolution than what is possible now. The Ministry of Earth Sciences will be coordinating this exercise and the plan is to have a system in place by winter.

Currently, the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), run out of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, serves as the apex forecaster of pollution trends in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Ahmadabad. It generates a likely air quality profile, a day in advance, for these cities. IITM is an organization under the MoES.

The new system, to be jointly developed with expertise from the Finnish Meteorological Institute and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will use a different modeling approach as well as computational techniques from that employed in the SAFAR model.

20. European Space Agency launched the seventh of its Sentinel Earth observation satellites as part of its multi-billion-euro Copernicus programme to help predict weather phenomena such as El Niño and track the progress of global warming. The Sentinel-3B satellite, part of a system of satellites that is to monitor Earth, blasted off on board a Rockot rocket from the Plesetsk cosmodrome in Russia's North Western Arkhangelsk region. It will join its twin Sentinel-3A, which has been in orbit since 2016, to collect data on sea surface temperature and height that will contribute to more precise weather forecasts and help forecast the impact of rising temperatures.
21. UN Climate Change (platform of UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Climate Deal under one umbrella) came out with its first annual climate change report -2017 towards end of April (in 2017, UNFCCC started the Talanoa dialogue (Fijian term for transparent exchange of views)) on environment, climate change among member countries)

Summits

25th CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Govt Meet) Summit, London 19-20, London – was shifted from Vanuatu, Pacific to London after the impact of cyclone palm. Theme – towards a common future; Goals – prosperity, security, fairness and sustainability.

Queen Elizabeth inaugurated; Prince Charles, her son, will now succeed as head of the commonwealth. The leaders adopted a declaration called towards a common future; They also issued a commonwealth Blue Charter on ocean conservation/governance. The Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (Srilanka, Ghana, UK, Vanuatu, New Zealand) was set up to cleanse oceans of plastics. Another declaration on connectivity Agenda was issued for Trade & Investment. The British PM Ms. Theresa May expressed her apologies to the Caribbean nations for the hardship caused to the children of immigrants from their countries who came between 1948 and 1971 (called the windrush generation named after the ship Windrush that brought them).

First India – Nordic Summit, 17th April, Stockholm, Sweden (Finland, Norway, Iceland, Sweden & Denmark PMs attended) – hosted by India & Sweden to promote trade, investments.

Sports

Leander Paes – The Indian Tennis player set a World record for maximum number of Davis cup wins (43) when he along with Bopanna beat China in doubles at Tianjin.

21st Commonwealth games, Gold Coast, (Carrara Stadium)

Queensland, Australia (4-15 April) – Motto – Share the Dream – Mascot – Blue Koala named Yugarbha (local indigeneous tribal name); Koalas are marsupials (mammals born incompletely developed and carried and suckled in a special pouch on the mother's belly; marsupials; Koals are found in Eastern & Southern Australia). 275 events in 19 sports (equal number of medals for men & women participants). This is the 5th time Australia is hosting CWG; The Games were inaugurated by Prince of Wales, Charles. The next CWG will be at Birmingham, UK in 2022.

Medals Tally – (top 10) Australia, England, India (26 Gold, 20 Silver + 20 Bronze), Canada, Newzealand, South Africa, Wales, Scotland, Nigeria and Cyprus. Most of India's medals were in shooting, wrestling, boxing & weight lifting in that order. Anish Bhanwala, at the age of 15, became the youngest Indian medal winner (Gold in 25 mt rapid fire pistol event).

Awards

65 National Film Awards

Best Actor (Female) – Sridevi, Mom

Dadasaheb Phalke Award – Vinod Khanna

Best Actor (Male) – Riddhi Sen, Nagar Kirtan

Best Film – Village Rockstars (Assamese)

Best Direction – Jayaraj, Bhayanakam

Best Supporting Actor (Male) – Fahad Fazil Thondimutholum Driksakshiyum

Best Support Actor (Female) – Divya Dutta, Irada

Best Original Screenplay – Sanjeev Pazhoor, Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum

Best Adapted Screenplay – Jayaraj, Bhayanakam

Best Popular Film providing wholesome entertainment – Baahubali – The Conclusion

Best Music Direction – A. R. Rehman, Kaatru Veliyidai

Best Background Score – A. R. Rehman, Mom

Best Male Playback Singer – K. J. Yesudas, 'Poy Maranja Kalam' in Viswaspoorvam Mansoor

Best Female Playback Singer – Shashaa Tirupati, ‘Vaan’ in Kaatru Veliyidai

Best Lyrics – Prahlad, Muthu Ratnada Pyate

Best Debut Film of Director – Pampally, Sinjar

Best Film on Environmental Conservation – Irada

Best Children’s Film – Mhorkya

Pulitzer Prizes given by Colombia University US and instituted by Joseph Pulitzer, publisher & Philanthropha & music for Journalism, literature, novel etc.

- (i) Newyork Times & the Newyorker for reporting on sexual harassment of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.
- (ii) International Reporting Prize – Reuters (new agency) – for report on Philippines war on drugs.
- (iii) Fiction – Andrew Sean Green for less About Growing Older.

Dorex Margaret Master Award (contribution to agriculture)

Ms. Mamta Sharma – Plant Pathology – She also established the Center of Excellence on Climate Change Research for Plant Protection to address effects of climate change on insect-pests and diseases.

Ms. Pooja Bhatnagar – Biotechnology

UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize – Abu Zaid, Egypt (now imprisoned)

C K Nayudu lifetime achievement – (to Cricket given by BCCI)