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INDIA DIGEST

A Newsletter from Embassy of India, Paramaribo



Jaitley presents a growth-oriented Budget

Falling just short of big bang reforms called for by his own economic survey, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on February 28 presented a Rs.17.78 lakh crore (nearly \$300 billion) national budget for the next fiscal year April 2015 – March 2016, that seeks to put more money in the hands of the average citizen, tackle the menace of black money more effectively and end an era of “scam, scandal and corruption”.

In his 93-minute budget speech in the Lok Sabha, the finance Minister said a new law on black money stashed abroad will call for an imprisonment of up to 10 years on its perpetrators with a penalty of 300 percent, while another proposed legislation will clamp down on benami property in India with both confiscation and prosecution.



This apart, the 62-year old lawyer-politician also proposed a new public procurement law for the consideration of the house that can encourage transparency in the way Government buys goods and services while removing the reluctance in decision-making among the bureaucracy due to the fear of being questioned later by probe agencies.

Industry, too, welcomed the proposals and said it will encourage investment with a better environment for doing business. The emphasis on infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing and rural economy was particularly welcomed.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Progressive budget which delivers on growth: Prime Minister Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 28 hailed the Union budget as progressive and practical which delivers on job creation, equity and growth.

“Union budget 2015 is a budget with a clear vision. It is a budget that is progressive, positive, practical, pragmatic and prudent,” Modi tweeted.



“Budget 2015 has a distinct focus on farmers, youth, poor, neo-middle class and the *Aam Nagrik* (common man). It delivers on growth, equity and job creation,” he said.

“From housing for all, jobs, health, education and total electrification, FM (finance Minister) laid down goals to be achieved by 2022, India’s Amrut Mahotsav.”

“Budget is investment friendly and removes all doubts on tax issues. It assures investors that we have a stable, predictable and fair tax system,” Modi said.

“I congratulate FM for doing an excellent job in respecting aspirations of the states and at the same time delivering on national priorities,” Modi added.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Consolidated Budget Highlights

Highlights of the budget for 2015-16 presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the Lok Sabha on February 28:

- * Personal income tax rates unchanged
- * Increase in limit of deduction in health insurance from Rs.15,000 (US\$ 241.00) to Rs.25,000 (US\$ 502)
- * For senior citizens, this limit to be increased from Rs.30,000 (US\$ 482.00) from present Rs.10,000 (US\$ 160)
- * Deduction limit of Rs.60,000 (US\$ 965.00) on account of serious diseases to be enhanced to Rs.80,000 (US\$ 1286.00) for senior citizens
- * Exemption on contributions to Pension Fund hiked from Rs.1 lakh (US\$ 1600.00) to Rs.1.5 lakh (US\$ 2412.00) per year
- * All investment payments in ‘Sukanya Scheme’ will be fully exempted from tax
- * Transport allowance exemption raised from Rs.800 (US\$ 13.00) to Rs.1,600 (US\$ 26.00) per month
- * Universal social security system for all Indians, especially poor and disadvantaged sections
- * Atal Pension Yojna for economically disadvantaged
- * PPF and EPF corpus to be utilised for senior citizens’ welfare fund
- * Physical aids and assisting devices for physically challenged senior citizens
- * Wealth Tax to be abolished and additional two percent tax on super rich to yield Rs.9,000 crore (US\$ 1.44 billion) annually
- * GDP growth at 7.4 percent in 2014-15 and at 8-8.5 percent in 2015-16; double-digit growth feasible
- * Non-Plan expenditure in 2015-16 estimated at Rs.1,312,200 crore (US\$ 211 billion); Plan expenditure estimated at Rs.465,277 crore (US\$ 74.91 billion)
- * Tax collection in 2015-16 estimated at Rs.1,449,490 crore (US\$ 233 billion)

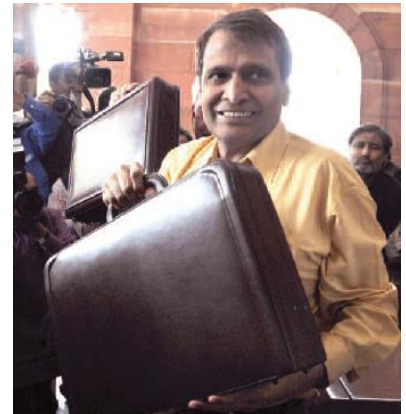
- * Adequate provision for defence with Rs.246,727 crore (US\$ 39.72 billion) earmarked for 2015-16
- * Investment on infrastructure to go up by Rs.70,000 crore (US\$ 11.27 billion) in 2015-16 over 2014-15
- * Education sector allocated Rs.68,968 crore (US\$ 11.10 billion); rural development gets Rs.79,526 crore (US\$ 12.80 billion)
- * Nirbhaya Fund gets another Rs.1000 crore (US\$ 161 million) in 2015-16
- * Facilities at eight World Heritage Sites to be restored
- * Government to soon launch National Skills Mission
- * During 2015-16 AIIMS-like institutes to be set up in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh; Bihar to get second AIIMS-like institution
- * Karnataka to get an IIT; Indian School of Mines in Dhanbad to be upgraded to IIT
- * Fully IT-based student-help facility for needy students
- * Corporate tax to be reduced to 25 percent from 30 percent in four years
- * Tax exemption for contributions to 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' and 'Clean Ganga Fund' by corporates as part of CSR
- * In last nine months several steps taken to effectively deal with problem of black money
- * Comprehensive new law to be brought against black money
- * Rigorous imprisonment of up to 10 years for concealing income
- * Prevention of Money Laundering Act to be amended to provide for forfeiture of property in India if the one abroad cannot be attached
- * Law against Benami property in fight against black money
- * Quoting PAN essential in property transactions
- * Forwards Markets Commission to be Merged with Sebi
- * Splitting of transaction not to be permitted
- * Changes in excise on tobacco items, including cigarettes, *Paan Masala* and *Gutkha*
- * Excise duty on footwear with leather uppers to be reduced to six percent
- * Service tax and education levy to be consolidated from 12.36 percent to 14 percent
- * Swachh Bharat cess of two percent, if necessary
- * Tax regime to be rationalised
- * Applicability of General Avoidance Rules (GAR) to be deferred by two years in view of problems faced in its implementation
- * New structure to be put in place in banking sector for seamless integration of data
- * Eastern states to be given opportunity to develop faster. Special boost to Bihar and West Bengal as in the case of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
- * Good progress in DMIC corridor and other infra-projects. Rs.1,200 crore (US\$ 193 million) earmarked and additional funds if pace of work picks up on ongoing projects
- * Procurement law to be drawn up to ensure transparency and remove corruption
- * Centenary of Deen Dayal Upadhyay to be celebrated; committee for this to be set up soon
- * Good progress being made on Digital India
- * To discourage transactions in cash, Rupee debit card to incentivise credit transactions
- * In line with 'Act East Policy', steps to catalyse investment in this sector through a project development company to oversee investments in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam

- * Tourism has increased after Visa on Arrival introduced for 43 countries. This facility to be increased to 150 countries in different stages
- * Public Debt Management Agency to be created to strengthen the bond market
- * Gold Monetisation Scheme to be introduced; sovereign gold bonds to be introduced; working on developing Indian gold coin with Ashok Chakra on face
- * Vision of making India cashless society
- * Foreign Investment in alternative investment funds to be permitted
- * Ports in public sector to be encouraged to utilise land under their control
- * Make India investment-destination by streamlining permission procedures
- * Five ultra-mega power projects each of 4,000 MW to be set up; Second unit of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Station will be commissioned in 2015-16
- * Self Employment and Talent Utilisation (SETU) to be Established
- * Integrated education and livelihood scheme to be launched
- * National investment and infrastructure fund to be launched with corpus of Rs.20,000 crore (US\$ 3.2 billion) to generate more funds
- * Innovation initiative to be launched in NITI Aayog in the name of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee
- * Government committed to increasing access of people to the banking system
- * Postal network across the country to be used for increasing access to formal financial system
- * Main challenges: increasing agricultural production; increasing investment in infrastructure; with manufacturing declining, Make in India will create jobs; cooperative federalism
- * Agriculture credit targetted at Rs.8.5 lakh crore (US\$ 136 billion)
- * Rural jobs scheme to get Rs.34,699 crore (US\$ 5.5 billion) ; Allocation to be enhanced by Rs.5,000 crore (US\$ 805 million) if additional funds available; Every poor to get a job
- * To work with NITI Aayog for creating a National Agricultural Market
- * Need well-targeted system for subsidies.
- * Direct transfer of subsidy to LPG consumers
- * Appeal to well-off consumers to surrender subsidised LPG connections
- * Organic farm schemes of agriculture Ministry to be supported
- * 'Per drop More crop' scheme for better irrigation
- * Three achievements - Jan Dhan Yojna, coal auctions, Swachh Bharat
- * Two more gamechanging reforms: Goods and Services Tax, JAM trinity (Jan Dhan Yojna, Aadhar, Mobile number) to ensure transparency
- * Our achievement to conquer inflation, CPI inflation at five percent by year-end
- * We are in an economic environment far more positive than in the recent past
- * Undertaken several significant steps to energise the Indian economy in last nine months
- * India's chance to fly
- * Budget proposals lay down roadmap for economic growth.
- * "The Everlasting Flame" exhibition on Parsis to be launched

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Passengers spared, freight rates hiked in India's rail budget

Sparing a passenger fare hike but raising freight rates again, Minister Suresh Prabhu presented his maiden budget for Indian Railways on February 26, with a slew of measures to improve service quality, safety and reach and a 52-percent jump in plan outlay for 2015-16 at Rs.100,011 crore (\$16.7 billion).



Raising some passenger train speeds by 50 percent on nine key routes, faster freight trains, user-friendly ladders to mount upper berths, Wi-Fi in 400 stations, more money for escalators, easier norms for unreserved tickets, 17,000 bio-toilets in trains, better connectivity in north-east and cameras for safety of women travelers are among the other highlights of the budget.

“There will be no hike in passenger fares. We will focus on improving passenger amenities, including cleanliness,” Railway Minister Prabhu said in a 66-minute speech in the Lok Sabha, watched keenly by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had handpicked him for the job.

Even though Prabhu made no mention of any revision in freight tariff in his speech, as has been the norm in the past, the Minister, nevertheless, revised it upward between 2.1 percent and 10 percent, not sparing even commodities like grain, pulses, urea and coal.

Indian industry, by and large, welcomed the proposals notably the substantial hike in the plan outlay and the emphasis on private-public partnerships for big-ticket projects. But some captains of industry felt the freight hike could have been avoided.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Economic Survey says double-digit growth possible, inflation easing

India's Economic Survey has projected growth at over 8 percent for the next fiscal and said inflation was easing while setting the agenda for “big-bang” reforms to further drive expansion, prune wasteful expenditure and promote investments in a green way. Tabled in parliament on February 27 by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and authored by a team led by Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian, the annual report card on the state of the economy said the growth should now rise further and double digit expansion was a possibility.



But it also had a caveat. “The growth estimates of over 8 percent for the year is on expectations that the monsoon will be favourable, as it was forecast to be normal, compared to last year,” it said, adding that such an expansion was necessary to address poverty.

It said Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2012-13 was 5.1 percent, which increased to 6.9 percent in 2013-14 and was now expected to further increase to 7.4 percent in 2014-15, as per advance estimates available with the Government.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

E-visa gives fillip to tourism sector: Economic Survey

Easing of the Indian tourism visa regime through the expansion of Visa on Arrival enabled by Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) will give a fillip to foreign tourist arrivals in the country, the Economic Survey for 2014-15 said here on February 27.



“There was an increase in growth on both foreign tourist arrivals at 7.1 percent and foreign exchange earnings at 6.6 percent in the year 2014,” the survey, which was tabled by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the Lok Sabha, said.

“However, India’s share of world tourism is a paltry 0.6 percent of international tourist arrivals compared to 7.8 percent in France and 6.4 percent in the US,” it added.

India now allows e-visa for 42 countries.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Singapore firm commissions first power project in India

Singapore firm Sembcorp Industries’s first power project in India has commenced commercial operation.

The firm announced completion of the first 660-megawatt unit of the Thermal Powertech Corporation India (TPCIL) plant in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh.

The 1,320 MW coal-fired power plant in the coastal town of Krishnapatnam comprises two units of 660 MW each, with the second unit expected to begin commercial operation in the third quarter of 2015.

The approximately \$1.5 billion power plant utilises supercritical technology, which allows for enhanced efficiency and reduced emissions compared to other conventional coal-fired power plants, the company said in a statement.



Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India, Japan to carry out gas hydrate survey

India and Japan will be carrying out joint survey for gas hydrates using a Japanese drilling ship in the Indian Ocean next week, as part of a collaborative operation between India's National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) and the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth and Science Technology (Jamstec).

The announcement was made at the India-Japan Science Summit, where the two agencies signed a memorandum of understanding for joint collaborations in ocean research.



"As part of our collaboration in the field of geophysics, we are looking particularly at exploration of gas hydrates energy reserves. The Japanese drilling ship Chikyu is coming to our waters next week and will carry out a survey and explore jointly for gas hydrates," said S.W.A. Naqvi, director, NIO.

Source: Mint

Core industries grew at 3.9 percent in January

India's eight core industries such as coal, electricity, crude oil, cement and steel, grew at 3.9 percent in January 2015 compared to a growth of 6.5 percent during the corresponding month of last year, official data showed on March 2.

The index of eight core industries with a combined weightage of 37.90 percent in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) stood at 174.8 in the month under review, the Ministry of commerce and industry said in a statement.



Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India's central bank cuts keys rates, stock indices hit historic highs

In a surprise development that sent stock markets soaring, India's central bank cut its key lending rates by 25 basis points on March 4, expecting inflation to soften in the coming fiscal even as it expressed concern over the postponement of fiscal consolidation by a year.

Getting some positive cues from the national budget tabled last week, and sensing an economic recovery, the repurchase (repo) rate has been cut to 7.5 percent from 7.75 percent, while the reverse repo rate has been adjusted to 6.5 percent from 6.75 percent.



Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India Inc welcomes cut in key lending rates

India Inc on March 4 welcomed the central bank's surprise decision to reduce key lending rates by 25 basis points.

"Coming on the back of a growth-oriented budget, the unexpected cut in headline interest rate by the RBI sends a huge positive signal that the central bank and the Government are working in tandem to provide a robust scaffolding to growth," said Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).



Banerjee concluded that the overall sound macroeconomic management and the clearly spelt out targets for fiscal deficit should allow the international rating agencies to take a positive view of investment climate in India.

Another business body PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that Wednesday's rate cut will benefit the common man with softening of EMIs on loans and the ripple effect will also improve market sentiment and enable businesses to raise equity.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India's forex reserves up \$4.26 bn

India's foreign exchange reserves increased by \$4.26 billion to \$339.99 billion for the week ended March 20, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data showed.



Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Govt sets 2-6 percent inflation target, RBI gets free hand to fix repo

The finance Ministry and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have agreed on sweeping changes in deciding interest rates with the central bank governor being handed out the exclusive mandate to decide on the issue to meet the Government-fixed inflation targets. To begin with, an agreement between the RBI and the Ministry has pegged the inflation target at under 6 percent by January 2016, with the goal for 2016-17 onwards set at 4 percent. Inflation has to stay within the 2-6 percent band from 2016-17 and any deviation for three consecutive quarters will have to be explained by the RBI as it would be treated as a "failure" by the central bank to target inflation.



Source: The Times of India

Murdoch's News Corp to buy Screen, media firm VCCircle

Adopting a 'string of pearls' strategy to strengthen its presence in India, Rupert Murdoch-led News Corp on March 9 announced back-to-back acquisitions of film magazine 'Screen' and financial information provider VCCircle.



Source: The Times of India

Afghan gas pipeline may become a reality: Dharmendra Pradhan

Trans-Afghanistan gas pipeline connecting Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India may become a reality soon as negotiation for the ambitious project is at the final stage, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in Lok Sabha on March 9.



Pradhan said discussions over installing a pipeline to bring gas from Turkmenistan to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan were at the final stage and when the project becomes a reality, the country would be free from being dependant on Gulf countries on natural gas. Replying to a question, the Minister said Government will also take a decision on a project to bring natural gas from Iran through a pipeline passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He said India has been procuring crude oil from 25 countries and it was not correct to say that the country was over-dependent on the Middle-East for crude supplies.

Source: PTI

Task forces set up to make three cities smart

Union Urban Development Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu has set up three task forces to develop Ajmer in Rajasthan, Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh as smart cities in collaboration with the US.



"The task forces will have representatives from the Urban Development Ministry, External Affairs Ministry, respective State Governments and cities and the US Trade Development Agency (USTDA)," the Ministry said in a statement on March 4.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

46 infrastructure projects in 33 cities underway: Venkaiah Naidu

To augment urban infrastructure in 33 cities across India, 46 projects were at various stages of implementation under the public-private partnership, Union Urban Development Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu said on March 4.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service



CCEA approves Rs12,646 crore (US\$ 2.03 billion) for six highway projects

The cabinet committee on economic affairs (CCEA) on March 5 approved six highway projects totaling 712km with an investment of Rs.12,646 crore (US\$ 2.03 billion).

These projects, to be awarded under the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) model, are divided into 10 packages under the national highways development project in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal, the Government said in a statement.

Under the EPC model, the Government pays a contractor to build a project awarded through competitive bidding.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service



Defence sector to be opened soon for lobbyists, agents

For greater transparency in defence deals, the Government will soon open up the sector for lobbyists/agents, with the rider that companies will be heavily penalised if they violate stringent conditions, including disclosure of consultancy fee paid to their agents.

Inter-Ministerial consultations are on to finalise a revamped defence procurement policy by April, and the norms on defence lobbyists/agents /middlemen are expected to be part of this policy, official sources told FE.

However, the Government has decided that blacklisting of firms will be reserved only for the rarest of rare cases. This was because the UPA Government had blacklisted as many as 12 firms, severely restricting the options of defence forces to source equipment and spare parts.

Source: The Financial Express



HRD Ministry increases fellowship grants by 55 percent

The Government on March 3 increased fellowship grants to researchers at science and technology institutes by up to 55 percent, a move that will incur an additional expenditure of Rs.1,300 crore a year (US\$ 209.30 million).

With this, the centre has not only increased the monthly grants to researchers but also has done away with differential grant slabs. For example, all junior research fellows will get Rs.25,000 (US\$ 402.00) per month, up from Rs.16,000 (US\$ 257.00) per month in their first two years and Rs.18,000 (US\$ 289.00) in the next three years.

Similarly, senior research fellows will get Rs.28,000 (US\$ 405.00) instead of Rs.18,000 (US\$ 289.00) in the first two years and Rs.20,000 (US\$ 321.00) in the next two years, according to a Ministry circular, a copy of which has been reviewed by Mint.

At the Masters in Technology (M.Tech) and Masters in Engineering (ME) level, the research grants have been increased to Rs.12,400 (US\$ 200.00) from Rs.8,000 (US\$ 128.00) earlier.

An official with the human resources development (HRD) Ministry said this will improve the research environment in India and encourage students to pursue a career in research instead of taking up jobs directly after bachelor's degrees. It will benefit more than 75,000 researchers per year, the HRD Ministry estimates.

Source: Mint

Modi visits Jaffna, hands over houses to Tamils

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 14 visited Jaffna, becoming the first Indian premier to set foot in the war-ravaged town in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated Northern Province, where he handed over homes built with Indian assistance to displaced local Tamils.



Modi also laid the foundation stone of a cultural centre in Jaffna. He is the second foreign leader to visit the town, about 400 km north of Colombo, after British Prime Minister David Cameron in November 2013.

He also visited the North Central Province's capital city of Anuradhapura where he, along with Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena, offered prayers at the sacred Mahabodhi tree.

After this, Modi flagged off a train service in the town of Talaimannar and also unveiled a plaque inaugurating the local railway station.

The Jaffna housing project, built with Indian assistance, will provide shelter to 27,000 families.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Ease of Doing Business: Only 3 documents needed for imports, exports

As part of efforts to improve its ranking on 'Ease of Doing Business', India today reduced the number of mandatory documents required for import and export of goods to three in each case.

The move will also lead to reduction in transaction cost and time. Currently, around 10 documents are needed to fulfill the official obligations.



The notification, issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, will take effect from April 1.

Source: Press Trust of India

Budget focuses on reining-in fiscal deficit: Jayant Sinha, MoS, Finance

The Government said on March 13 its budget for 2015-16 focuses on reining-in the fiscal deficit and returning investor confidence in the economy.

Initiating the debate on the budget in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Finance Jayant Sinha said the Government's intentions on the economy have been made amply clear in the document.



The Government had been able to rein-in the fiscal deficit from 4.4 percent of the GDP to 4.1 percent during its 8-9 month tenure, adding this was important as the expenditure was way above the revenue collections.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Gamesa tops wind energy installations in India

Spanish wind energy turbine maker Gamesa has retained top position for a second year in row for the highest number of grid-connected installations in India. Suzlon and Wind World India took the second and third spot respectively. The rankings were released by Danish firm Make Consulting, which analyses the wind energy market globally.



In 2014, about 2,300 Mw of wind energy was added in India a growth of 27 per cent over 2013, when 1,800 Mw was added. Gamesa accounted for a quarter of all grid-connected installations with a market share of 25 per cent in 2014. Suzlon and Wind World India achieved 21 and 15 per cent, respectively.

Source: Business Standard

53 nations to get nod for e-visa soon

Around 53 countries are being shortlisted by the tourism Ministry for a second round of approvals for tourist visas on arrival. Canada, France, the UK, Spain, China, Greece, Iran, Turkey and Kuwait are likely to be on this list. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced in the Budget that 150 countries would be offered the visa on arrival facility in phases. This is in addition to 43 countries which received approval last year.



“The focus from our side is tourist arrivals. The 53 countries proposed in the next list include the ones with the highest number of foreign tourist arrivals in the previous years,” a tourism Ministry official said.

Source: Business Standard

Wipro recognised as world's most ethical firm

Software major Wipro Ltd. on March 9 said it has been recognised as the world's most ethical company by US-based Ethisphere Institute for the fourth consecutive year.

“We have been named as the world's most ethical company by the Ethisphere for our commitment to ethical leadership,” the company said in a statement here.

The Institute, which advances standards of ethical business practices, assesses global organisations having material impact on the way business is conducted by fostering a culture of ethics and transparency at every level.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Rail Ministry receives Rs 10,000 crore (US\$ 1.61 billion) investment commitment from private sector

The railways Ministry has received investment commitments to the tune of Rs 10,000 crore (US\$ 1.61 billion) from private sector companies for development of 19 projects under participative models of domestic and foreign direct investment (FDI), Minister of state for railways Manoj Sinha told Parliament on March 10.

However, there has been no specific investment proposal since the opening of FDI in rail transport last year, Sinha added. An investors' meet was organised on December 5 and discussions with potential investors were held to attract private investments, Sinha said.



The Ministry had issued sectoral guidelines for domestic and foreign direct investment in November 2014, identifying various areas for private participation. This includes suburban corridors through public private partnership, high-speed rail, dedicated freight lines, rolling stock including train sets and locomotive manufacturing facilities and railway electrification.

Source: Business Standard

India's platinum demand to rise 25% in 2015

Platinum demand in India is likely to rise 25 per cent in 2014 on the back of growing consumers' interest in bridal jewellery and other innovative collections. In its latest quarterly analysis, London-based World Platinum Investment Council (WPIC) has pegged India's platinum demand at 125,000 ounce (oz) in 2015, compared with 100,000 oz in 2014.

"There has been a growing focus on emission norms in India. With this, there is a great upside in platinum use as a catalyst in diesel cars going forward. We estimate India's platinum demand from automotive sector to rise to 165,000 oz," said Paul Wilson, CEO, WPIC.



Platinum demand is steadily rising in India with the introduction of innovative designs of jewellery and wedding sets. The Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) estimates India's platinum import during April-October 2014 at \$11.99 million against \$6.81 million imported in the year-ago period.

Source: Business Standard

India's billionaire population to double in the next decade

India will have the fastest growth in the number of dollar billionaires, compared to the rest of the world, in the coming decade.

By 2024, the country will have 136 people with a net worth over Rs 6,270 crore (US\$ 1.009 billion), as opposed to 68 at present. This will catapult India among four nations with the largest billionaire population. It currently ranks seventh.



Similarly, ultra high net worth individuals (UHNWIs), those with net assets over \$30 million, will reach 3,371 from the current 1,652, according to the ninth edition of Wealth Report, issued by real estate advisory firm Knight Frank.

Source: Business Standard

Centre expects record wheat output this year

The current bout of unseasonal rain has not done much damage to the standing wheat crop and the Government is confident wheat production in 2015-16 will surpass last year's record output of 95.85 million tonnes.

"Damage to the crop is limited to a few areas. The current low temperature will further boost productivity. My assessment is that wheat production this year is going to be very good, maybe more than last year," agriculture secretary Siraj Hussain told reporters here on Tuesday.

Source: Business Standard



India among top 20 realty investment destinations in world

India at the 20th rank recorded the third highest growth in investments, with an increase of over 140 per cent in total investment volumes in 2014 at USD 5,050 million against USD 2,100 million in the previous year.

Investments in Indian real estate last year jumped more than two-fold to over USD 5 billion, helping the country figure in the list of world's top 20 property destinations, according to consultant Cushman & Wakefield.



"India is amongst the top 20 real estate investment destinations for 2014 with total of USD 5,000 million," global property consultant Cushman & Wakefield said in a statement.

India at the 20th rank recorded the third highest growth in investments, with an increase of over 140 per cent in total investment volumes in 2014 at USD 5,050 million against USD 2,100 million in the previous year.

Of the total investment volume, the domestic investments were recorded at USD 3,120 million (62 per cent) and foreign at USD 1,930 million (38 per cent).

Source: Press Trust of India

Gandhi gets most central position in London's Parliament Square

A statue of Mahatma Gandhi has been extended the most central position in London's Parliament Square directly facing Britain's Palace of Westminster or Houses of Parliament.



In a park where there are statues of Sir Winston Churchill and Nelson Mandela in two corners, it is highly significant that arguably the most prestigious location has been given to Gandhi.

The statue was unveiled by Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the presence of British Prime Minister David Cameron on a glorious sunny, albeit cold morning in London in the presence of a hundreds of members of the public.

Prime Minister Cameron said the sculpture is a “magnificent tribute” to one of the “most towering figures” in history, Sky News reported.

The nine feet high bronze sculpture has been created by leading British sculptor, Philip Jackson, renowned for statues of Queen Elizabeth and Bomber Command. Jackson started work on the statue in July.

The sculpture is inspired by photographs of the civil rights leader outside 10, Downing Street in 1931.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India poised as world's fastest growing economy: IMF chief Lagarde

International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde on March 16 said India was on its path to becoming the world's fastest growing economy, as she began her two-day visit to the country.



“Wonderful to be back in vibrant India — poised to become world's fastest growing large economy,” Lagarde tweeted, as the multilateral funding institution predicted a 7.25 percent growth for the country this fiscal, rising to around 7.5 percent the next year.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Hope India continues on high growth path: IMF head to Modi

Calling India a “bright” spot on the global economic horizon, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde on March 16 told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India would continue on the growth path that had recently picked up.

“India's growth rate has crossed 7.5 percent, she (Lagarde) said, adding that it is the bright spot in the global economy. She expressed hope that India would continue on this growth path,” the Prime Minister's Office said in a release here.



"India is the bright spot in the global economy at the moment," she said, echoing Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's budget speech last month when he said that at a time other economies were facing serious challenges, India was about to take off on a faster growth trajectory.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India's GDP growth will be 7.5 per cent this year: FM Arun Jaitley

Noting that India is emerging as one of the fastest growing economies, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has said that this year the GDP growth rate will be 7.5 per cent and next year hopefully it would be higher.

Launching the Union Bank of India (UK), a subsidiary of the Union Bank of India, Jaitley on March 13 night said that since the new Government came to power the economy has regained.



Source: Press Trust of India

Current account deficit to be below 1% of GDP in 2015-16: Jaitley

India's current account deficit will "hopefully" be less than 1% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the fiscal year that begins in April, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said at the Lok Sabha on March 17.

The deficit narrowed to 1.6% in the October-December quarter from 2% a quarter earlier on the back of slumping oil prices. Analysts said it should move into surplus in early 2015 for the first time in eight years.



Source: Business Standard

India overtakes US as 3rd biggest steel producer

India has overtaken the US to become the third-largest steel producer in the world with a production of 14.56 million tonnes (MT) in first two months of the year.



India has been the fourth-largest steel producer for the past five years, behind China, Japan and the US.

Data compiled by World Steel Association (WSA) showed that the country's production growth was the highest during the January-February period at 7.6 per cent as compared to the global average of just 0.6 per cent at 127.6 MT.

Source: Press Trust of India

Cochin Shipyard in pact with Samsung Heavy Industries

After several months of talks, state-owned Cochin Shipyard Ltd has succeeded in getting South Korea's Samsung Heavy Industries Co. Ltd to share technology for building liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers at its yard in Kochi.

The move prepares Cochin Shipyard to make itself eligible to bid for a tender to be issued by GAIL (India) Ltd in early April, at least two people briefed on the plan said.

GAIL needs nine LNG carriers to haul natural gas from the US to India beginning December 2017. "Cochin Shipyard has signed an agreement with Samsung Heavy Industries to collaborate on building LNG ships,"

Source: Mint



'HAL to explore Goa as helicopter manufacturing hub'

Bengaluru-based Hindustan Aeronautics Limited has been asked to examine the feasibility of making Goa a hub for manufacturing helicopters, said Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar.

The Public Sector Undertaking has been asked to put together a tentative business plan for the Goa project to examine the feasibility of Goa as a second hub for manufacturing of helicopters.



Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Modi, Merkel to inaugurate Germany's Hanover Fair 2015

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will jointly inaugurate the Hannover Messe 2015 fair on April 12, where India is a partner country, said a commerce ministry statement here on March 23.

"By adopting the theme of Make in India, the country is branding strongly in the forthcoming fair in Germany during April 2015," Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters here on March 23.



"Large scale participation is being made by India in Hannover Messe 2015, by branding the Make in India slogan of the government in a widespread manner in Germany and other neighbouring European countries," she added.

The Hannover Fair, which attracts nearly 200,000 global leaders in business, technology, industrial scientists and policy makers, will be held April 13-17, the statement said.

In a Make in India networking event last week in Frankfurt with the German corporate sector, the Indian consul general invited companies to visit and do business with India.

Germany is the eighth largest foreign direct investor in India. German FDI in India during the period 1991-2014 was valued at \$7.57 billion.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Three-nation tour focused on economy: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on March 28 his visit to France, Germany and Canada is centred around supporting India's economic agenda and creating jobs.

"France, Germany and Canada visit is centred around supporting India's economic agenda and creating jobs for our youth," Modi said in a tweet.



"Will discuss strengthening India-France economic cooperation and visit some high-tech industrial units outside Paris. In Germany, Chancellor Merkel and I will jointly inaugurate Hannover Messe where India is a partner country," the prime minister said.

"Looking forward to enhancing ties with Canada and interacting with leaders, captains of industry and diaspora in Canada," Modi said in another tweet.

Modi will first travel to France on April 9 and from there he will leave for Germany on April 12.

On the third and final leg of the tour, he will visit Canada from April 14-16.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India launches fourth navigation satellite

India successfully put into orbit its fourth navigation satellite with its own rocket on March 28 evening in copybook style.

Exactly at 5.19 p.m., the rocket - Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle - (PSLV-C27) standing about 44 metres tall and weighing around 320 tonnes, roared into the bright blue clear evening sky trailing an orange plume.



The expendable rocket had a single but important piece of luggage: the 1,425 kg IRNSS-1D. The rocket blasted off from the second launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre here, around 80 km from Chennai.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

Modi bats for 'greater cooperation' with Cuba

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 23 batted for "greater cooperation" between India and Cuba in areas like trade and investment, health and renewable energy.

"The prime minister expressed support for greater cooperation, including in the areas of trade and investment, health, biotechnology, renewable energy, sports and human resource development between the two countries," a statement said, after Modi held talks here with Cuba's First Vice President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez Mario.



Modi also accepted an invitation from President Raul Castro to visit Cuba.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India to lead Asia's economic growth: Asian Development Bank

The Asian Development Outlook 2015 projected Emerging Asian economies to clock average 6.3 per cent growth in both 2015-16 and 2016-17 fiscal, as in the current financial year.

The growth would be supported by a strengthening recovery in the major industrial economies and soft global commodity prices.

The ADB has forecast that India's growth will improve from 7.4 per cent in current fiscal to 7.8 per cent in 2015-16 and further to 8.2 per cent in 2016-17.



Source: Press Trust of India

Resurgent India driving Asian growth story: US official

With India-US relations stronger than ever since the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two countries have become drivers of growth across the region and around the world, according to a senior US official



"If there is one overarching positive trend that is driving the energy and optimism across South Asia, it is the resurgence of India," Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, told a Congressional panel on March 24.

This was "evidenced by their vibrant election last year, which was the largest such democratic exercise in history, she said testifying on "The US Rebalance in South Asia: Foreign Aid and Development Priorities."

Asserting that less than one year after Modi's election as Prime Minister US "relations with India are stronger than ever," Biswal said President Barack Obama's historic Republic Day visit was critical beyond its symbolism. She listed "important outcomes in four key areas - advancing our strategic partnership, deepening our security cooperation, revitalizing the economic partnership, and advancing critical clean energy and environmental goals.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

France promises \$5 billion for insurance sector in India

With Parliament recently giving its nod for raising the cap on foreign direct investment in the insurance sector from 26% to 49%, India can look forward to \$5 billion in investment from France in the sector, French ambassador to India Francois Richier said on March 23.

On Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France next month, Richier said he was sure that Modi would "carry a message so that it encourages companies to enjoy the ease of doing business in India".



In his comments, Amitabh Kant, secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion noted that there was a "new vibrancy and dynamism in India" with the Narendra Modi-led government "determined to ease the process of doing business in India".

Source: Mint

Honda to invest Rs965 cr (US\$ 155.37 million) to expand capacity for cars, bikes

Japanese auto manufacturer Honda Motor Co. will invest Rs.965 crore (US\$ 155.37 million) in its two-wheeler and car businesses in India as it looks to increase production capacity.

The plan is to increase manufacturing capacity by 600,000 units for two-wheelers and by 60,000 units for cars by 2016, Honda's local units said in two separate statements.



While Honda Motorcycles & Scooters India (HMSI) will invest Rs.585 crore (US\$ 94.18 million) in its third two-wheeler production plant in the Narsapura area near Bengaluru, Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL) will invest Rs.380 crore in its Tapukara plant in Rajasthan.

The expansion of the second plant will increase HCIL's overall annual production capacity from the current 240,000 units to 300,000 units including the 120,000-unit capacity of its first plant in Greater Noida on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Source: Mint

Ford opens Sanand plant to triple exports from India

Detroit-headquartered Ford Motor Company's Indian arm on March 26 inaugurated its second factory in this country at Sanand, 30 kilometres from Ahmedabad.



Source: Business Standard

Make in India in focus during Qatar Emir's visit

The Narendra Modi government's 'Make in India' would be in focus during the visit of Qatar's Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani to India, during which India would also seek to invest in major infrastructure projects in the Gulf country which is hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

The Emir will meet President Pranab Mukherjee, who will host a state banquet for him, while Vice President Hamid Ansari will call on him. He will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and also meet External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.



The talks are to focus on investment opportunities from Qatar to India, especially in the light of the unveiling of the Make in India programme in India as well as possible Indian opportunities - for engineering, procurement, construction opportunities, in Qatar in the light of major infrastructure projects that they are undertaking keeping in mind the World Cup in 2022.

Around 600,000 Indian nationals work in Qatar, comprising the largest expatriate community in the country. Qatar is also the largest source of India's LNG imports, at 86 percent.

Bilateral trade stands at \$16 billion, heavily weighted in favour of Qatar due to the LNG imports.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India, Qatar ink six agreements during Emir's visit

India and Qatar inked six agreements, including one on transfer of sentenced prisoners, as visiting Emir of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on march 25.

The Emir, who is here on a two-day visit, was in the morning accorded a ceremonial reception at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj called on him, after which he held talks with Prime Minister Modi at Hyderabad House.



The six agreements, besides transfer of sentenced prisoners, are: an MoU for Cooperation in the field of Information and Communication Technology; an MoU between the ministry of earth sciences and Qatar Meteorological Department for Scientific and Technical cooperation; an MoU between Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar and Foreign Service Institute of the ministry of external affairs; an MoU for cooperation in the field of Radio and Television; and an agreement for Mutual Cooperation and Exchange of News.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service

India ready to resume talks on free trade pact with EU: Sitharaman

India was "ready to talk" with the European Union (EU) on the proposed bilateral free trade agreement, Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on March 23.

"I have assured the EU ambassador and ambassadors of individual EU countries that we are ready to talk with the European community. They have been our traditional trading partners," Sitharaman told reporters here.



Negotiations on the FTA, officially dubbed the Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) between India and the EU, were launched in June 2007 but have been facing hurdles with both sides having differences on crucial issues.

Source: Indo-Asian News Service