

## Some Key Current Info-Bits at Random (December 11- December 20)

- On December 11, 2013 Army Chief **Gen Bikram Singh** was honoured with a US military award - the Legion of Merit
  - Gen Singh received the award from US Army Chief **Gen Raymond Odierno**
  - The honour has already been bestowed upon four Indian service chiefs –
    - Field Marshal KM Cariappa,
    - Gen Rajendra Sinhji,
    - Gen SM Srinagesh and
    - Admiral JL Cursetji.
- Lt Gen **Aniruddha Chakravarty** has been appointed Director General of the National Cadet Corps (NCC).
  - He succeeded Lt Gen PS Bhalla, who retired on November 30.
  - The NCC comprises nearly **15 lakh cadets** from schools and colleges across the country.
- On December 12, 2013 Eastern Army Commander Lt Gen **Dalbir Singh Suhag** was appointed Vice-Chief of Indian Army, setting him in line to take over as next chief of the 1.4 million-strong force when General Bikram Singh retires on July 31 next year.
- Pakistan Punjab province CM **Shahbaz Sharif**, younger brother of Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif, recently visited India as a guest of his Punjab counterpart Parkash Singh Badal to witness the World Kabaddi final in Ludhiana.
  - CM also visited his ancestral village **Jatti Umra** in Tarn Taran district.
- On December 12, 2013 **Indian women defeated New Zealand** and won the 4th World Cup Kabaddi at the Guru Gobind Singh Stadium in Jalandhar
- On December 14, 2013 at Ludhiana, **Indian kabaddi players** defeated Pakistan (48-39) in the final of the fourth edition of the World Cup Kabaddi tournament at the Guru Nanak Stadium
- On December 11, 2013 Supreme Court restored the Constitutional validity of **Section 377 of the IPC**, under which homosexual acts are a criminal offence punishable with life term.
  - Parliament had chosen to retain it despite amending the IPC as many as 30 times since 1950.
  - The Delhi High Court had, on July 2, 2009, de-criminalised such acts by reading down Section 377 and ruling that criminalising consensual sexual acts of adults in private was against Articles 21, 14 and 15.
- On December 19, 2013 **Religious leaders welcomed the Supreme Court** verdict on Article 377 of the Constitution saying it was in line with the tradition of the country, moral values and religious teachings.

- At a joint press conference of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian religious leaders, president of the Jamat-e-Islami Hind, Maulana Syed Jalaluddin Umari, welcomed the Supreme Court verdict on Article 377
- The five-month application period in the first round of the **Mars One Astronaut Selection Programme** has closed.
  - The mission will send four men and women on a one-way trip to Mars in 2023 to establish a permanent space colony
- Over 2,00,000 people, including more than 20,000 Indians, have applied for the private mission
  - Applicants come from 140 countries; largest from the US (24 per cent), India (10 per cent), China (6 per cent), Brazil (5 per cent), UK, Canada, Russia and Mexico (4 per cent), Philippines, Spain, Colombia and Argentina (2 per cent)
- On December 11, 2013 in Pakistan, assertive and controversial **Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry** bid farewell to his office after six years, the longest term at the helm of the Supreme Court in history.
- On December 12, 2013 Union Cabinet cleared an **all-new disability law**, raising the reservation for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) from three to five per cent.
  - Titled "The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2013," the new law will replace the archaic PWD Bill of 1995.
  - This is in consonance with the **UN Convention** on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which India signed in 2007
    - The disabled will get the benefit at all government educational institutions and jobs.
  - Till now, the reservation for the disabled was only 3 per cent in the ratio of 1 per cent each for the physically, visually and hearing-impaired.
  - The new **law extends the quota by 2 per cent**, covering two new categories — mentally disabled and people with multiple disabilities.
  - The **new law provides 19 categories** of disabilities as against seven in the 1995 law.
    - Sickle cell disease, thalassemia and muscular dystrophy have been included as new disabilities in a total list of 19.
  - For the first time, the law will define the meaning of disability, preventing harassment that PWDs had to face while getting disability certificates made.
  - **Anyone suffering 40 per cent disability** or more will continue to be defined as a PWD.
  - All rights of accessibility, health and employment guaranteed by the new law will be justifiable and can be contested in special disability courts that will be set up.
    - Anyone **violating the law** will face six months or five years in prison and/or Rs 10,000 fine.
  - The law also provides for the establishment of the **National Commission** for Persons with Disabilities, which will have statutory powers.

- On December 12, 2013 **India and the UAE signed** a Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA), which is expected to substantially boost the Gulf nations investment in India.
  - While UAE and India are each others' largest trading partners with a total bilateral trade to the tune of about \$75 billion, investments have not kept pace.
  - UAE investments in India have been hovering just over the \$3 billion mark.
- Indigenously developed **light combat aircraft Tejas** has officially replace the MiG-21 FL fighter jet
  - Being limited in number, the **MiG-21 had a minor role in the 1965 Indo-Pak war**, but was a crucial war-fighting element in the 1971 Indo-Pak war.
  - In the first-ever supersonic air combat over the sub-continent, an IAF Mig-21 FL claimed a **Pakistani F-104 Starfighter**.
    - By the end of the hostilities, the MiGs had claimed four Pakistani F-104s, two F-6s, one F-86 Sabre and a Lockheed C-130 Hercules.
  - MiG-21 FL which was phased out after 50-years of service, at a function at **Kalaikunda Air base** in West Bengal.
  - Defence Minister AK Antony officially handed over initiation of acceptance of the Tejas into the force **at its birthplace in Bengaluru** on December 20.
- On December 13, 2013 for the second time in 50 years, the Union Cabinet amended the **Code of Conduct** that governs the political Executive.
  - It has laid down norms that will supposedly prevent the misuse of bureaucrats by ministers for political purposes.
- On December 16, 2013 Supreme Court asked Punjab, Haryana, HP and JK, besides the Centre and the **Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB)**, to sit together and "make an endeavour" to narrow down their differences over their rights in river projects.
  - Haryana has framed as many as 10 issues for adjudication by the SC, followed by Punjab and JK(eight each), Himachal Pradesh (two) and BBMB (one).
  - Additional Solicitor General Mohan Jain had informed the court that the **Centre would take a neutral stand** on the issue and just ensure implementation of the SC verdict.
  - Questioning the maintainability of **Haryana's suit under Article 131** of the Constitution, Punjab has maintained that it has the exclusive legal right to undertake any project in its territory for producing hydro power by non-consumptive use of water.
- On December 16, 2013 Supreme Court asked the Law Commission to give its views before February-end on a plea to **debar candidates who were either chargesheeted or had filed false affidavits** with their nomination papers, from contesting elections.
  - Further, under **Section 125 (A) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA)**, the EC was in a position only to file criminal cases against the candidates filing false affidavits.
  - The EC should be empowered to disqualify such candidates.

- Recently Supreme Court has ruled that:
  - the trial in any dowry death case would not be affected even if the woman had committed suicide **seven years after the marriage**.
  - the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) need to give reasons for its ruling in every case to facilitate consideration of the appeals.
- A total of 500 athletes have been found to have violated **Anti Doping Rules** from Jan 2009 till July 2013 by NADA and a total of 423 athletes were slapped with sanctions by Anti Doping Disciplinary Panel (ADDP).
  - NADA came into effect from January 2009
  - **India has the second highest number of dope** cheats (43) in the world just behind Russia, 44 of whose athletes are on the suspended list.
  - The other sports disciplines featuring high number of drug cheats include kabaddi (58), bodybuilding (51), powerlifting (42), wrestling (41), boxing (36) and judo (9).
- On December 15, 2013 in South Africa, first black President Nelson Mandela was laid to rest with full state honours in his childhood **village Qunu**.
- On December 15, 2013 at New Delhi, **Atsedu Tsegay of** Ethiopia registered a new course record to win the men race while Kenyan Florence Kiplagat won the women title at the \$210,000 Delhi Half Marathon.
- On December 15, 2013 at Kuala Lumpur, World top players **Lee Chong Wei and Li Xuerui** were crowned the winners at the Badminton World Federation Superseries Finals in the men and women categories after their comprehensive victories
- On December 16, 2013 **Communal Violence Prevention Bill**, "Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2013" was cleared by Union Cabinet after removal of certain provisions, reducing the role of the legislation in handling of riots and making it neutral between communities.
- On December 16, 2013 Mahesh Mangaonkar became the **first Indian squash player** to win the IMET Open, the PSA World Tour Challenger 5 event, in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava.
- On December 16, 2013 "Unbreakable", autobiography of Olympic medallist **MC Mary Kom** was unveiled by former Miss Universe and actor Sushmita Sen at IIT, Guwahati
- On December 15, 2013 Wimbledon champion **Andy Murray**, the first British winner of the mens title for 77 years, was named BBC Sports Personality of the Year
- Recently, Indian Scientists launched first indigenous **thalassaemia detection kit**.
  - It will test an individual for all eight major thalassaemia mutations which account for 90 per cent of the molecular defects in Indians.
  - Set to cost Rs 400 against the imported technology that currently costs Rs 20,000 at private hospitals and Rs 4,000 at government-run tertiary facilities such as AIIMS in Delhi.

- The kit will predict **six common beta** thalassaemia mutations and two mutations that are identified with sickle cell disease.
  - The kit has been **developed by** the Indian Council of Medical Research in association with the National Institute of Immunohaematology (NIIH), Mumbai.
  - It will help reduce the annual birth **of nearly 12,000 babies with thalassaemia** major syndrome that can only be cured by a bone-marrow transplant.
    - Babies born with the syndrome require monthly blood transfusion and adequate iron intake that cost not less than Rs 1.5 lakh per year.
  - India has **five million thalassaemia carriers** and the carrier rate is 1 to 3 per cent.
  - Nearly 15,000 babies are born with sickle cell disease in the country annually.
    - Babies of couples who are thalassaemia gene carriers are most likely to be diagnosed with thalassaemia major.
  - Percentage of thalassaemia major gene carriers in India is 3-4% — as high as **15% in Punjabis, Sindhis, Jains and Muslims.**
  - In India, seven common mutations have been associated with thalassaemia risk. The new kit tests all of them in one go.
- On December 17, 2013 Citing nine reasons, a parliamentary panel endorsed the move of GoI to exclude **political parties from the ambit of Right to Information Act**, by amending the Act.
    - In its report, the **31-member parliamentary Standing Committee** of the Law Ministry said that “specifically excluding” the political parties from the RTI Act through an amendment was the right way to resolve the confusion once and for all.
    - **The panel has said** that various provisions in other existing laws would ensure transparency in the financial matters of political parties and their candidates.
    - Under the Representation of the **People Act 1951**, parties were required to declare all contributions in excess of Rs 20,000
    - The Election Commission collects the accounts of political parties:
      - within 90 days of the Lok Sabha election and
      - 75 days of Assembly elections, it explained.
    - There were about **1,450 political parties in the country**, including 52 national and state parties.
  - On December 17, 2013 the Rajya Sabha passed by voice vote a Bill for setting up a **Lokpal** with vast powers to look into complaints against even PM.
    - On December 18, 2013 Anna Hazare broke his nine-day fast shortly after Lok Sabha passed the Lokpal Bill.
  - On December 17, 2013 **Angela Merkel** was overwhelmingly elected as German chancellor for a rare third term.

- On December 18, 2013 after making accreditation of all higher educational institutions mandatory earlier this year, **UGC set the deadline of June 1, 2014**, for completion of all formalities by universities and colleges.
  - UGC has warned the institutions that those not complying with accreditation norms will not be eligible for its grants.
  - The **accreditation was voluntary before 2013**. Currently, less than 10 per cent of all colleges in India are accredited.
  - The government made it compulsory in the wake of poor response from institutions.
  - A large number of universities and colleges depend on UGC funds for their day-to-day functioning, including for paying staffers' salaries.
  - 133 universities were eligible for accreditation, of which 88 were state universities, while seven were central ones.
  - **As per rules**, all higher educational institutions should get accredited after the passing out of two batches of students or completion of six years, whichever is earlier.
  - Under the present rules, accreditation is valid for five years.
- On December 18, 2013 **Kohli joined Sehwag and Amre** in scoring 100s in their first Test innings in South Africa.
- Novak Djokovic has included tennis great **Boris Becker**, a six-time Grand Slam champion, as his coaching staff for next season.
- On December 18, 2013 **Djokovic and Serena Williams** were adjudged the International Tennis Federation's world champions for 2013.
- On December 18, 2013 BCCI announced **Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement** award for 2013 for the first World Cup winning captain of India Kapil Dev.
- On December 18, 2013 Infosys co-founder and Unique Identification Authority of India chairman **Nandan Nilekani** and his wife Rohini gifted Rs 50 crore (\$8.1 million) to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).
  - This is said to be one of the largest private gifts in India's history to an independent research body.
- On December 19, 2013 Gol asked the National **Commission for Backward Classes** (NCBC) to give its recommendation on including the Jat community in nine states, including Haryana and HP
  - Himachal Pradesh, in the Central list of other backward classes (OBCs) for quota in Central government jobs and higher education, at the earliest.
- On December 19, 2013 in Germany, Bavarian town stripped **Adolf Hitler** of honorary citizenship bestowed upon the Nazi leader 80-years ago after a public outcry.
- On December 19, 2013 **Asian Development Bank** (ADB) shared plans to lend \$176 million to extend the **first metro train line in Jaipur** and draw up plans to build a second line, reducing congestion and pollution in the fast-growing heritage city.
  - Jaipur is the 10th largest city in India with a population of 3.1 million in 2011.

- On December 19, 2013 indigenously developed **Pinaka rockets** were successfully test-fired from a multi-barrel rocket launcher from a base at Chandipur-on-sea.
- On December 20, 2013 at Mumbai, International **auction house Christie's** made debut in India by putting under the hammer 79 art works at over Rs 102 cr.
  - It included Rs 23.7 cr for a **Vasudeo Gaitonde** painting, a record price for a work of an Indian artist.
- On December 20, 2013 two Indian Army soldiers were killed and another one injured after an attack by armed militia on a UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (**UNMISS**) camp.
  - Attackers from the '**Lou Neur**' ethnic group had targeted 36 civilians of the 'Dinka' ethnicity who had sought refuge at the UN temporary operating base at Akobo.
- On December 20, 2013 Hafed bagged the **India Pride Award** for the best performing state PSU in the agriculture and associate category for the year 2013-14.
- On December 20, 2013 in Pakistan, President Mamnoon Hussain conferred the **Nishan-e-Imtiaz**, highest honour, on new army chief Gen Raheel Sharif and Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee chairman Gen Rashad Mehmood.
- On December 20, 2013 **Shahbaaz Ajay**, exercise of the 36 Reorganised Army Plains Division (RAPID), concluded in the western deserts of Rajasthan.
  - As many as 15,000 troops of the division participated in the exercise, which included more than 100 armoured class vehicles among other advanced artillery and air defence equipment.
- On December 20, 2013 **Mampi Das** won gold to become the national champion in the women 10m air rifle, at the ongoing 57th National Shooting Championship 2013 being held at Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, in New Delhi.
- On December 16, 2013 Bangladeshi volunteers formed the **worlds largest national flag** as the country commemorated its **Victory Day**. .. a total of 27,117 volunteers stood at the National Parade Ground.
  - **Army's 63 Cavalry**, which was part of a five-pronged simultaneous armoured attack on East-Pakistan in 1971, culminated its two-day celebrations and reunion to mark the 42nd Battle Honour Day.
  - The regiment has the distinction of **earning battle honour of 'Bogra'** and Theatre Honour 'East Pakistan' in 1971.
    - The regiment with its five-pronged attack was referred by the Pakistanis as the "**Ghost Regiment**".
  - To commemorate the Battle Honour awarded to it for the Battle of Bogra in the eastern sector during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, 63 Cavalry undertook a **motorcycle rally from Sikkim to Punjab**... A "Tresath Seema Sampark Motor Cycle Rally".

- On December 20, 2013 **International Court of Arbitration (ICA)** upheld India's right to divert water from the Kishenganga river for power generation in JK
  - In its final award announced at The Hague, the seven-member court, headed by **Stephen M Schwebel**, unanimously decided that India must also release a minimum of 9 cumecs of water into the Kishenganga river below the Kishenganga Hydro Electric Project (KHEP) at all times to maintain the environment downstream.
- The construction of the **Kishenganga project began in 2007** and is expected to be completed by 2016.
- The construction of the dam was halted by the ICA in October 2011 due to Pakistan's protest of its effect on the flow of Kishenganga.

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