

RISAT-1 likely to be launched on April 20

RISAT-1, India's indigenous radar imaging satellite that can take images of the earth during day and night and in cloudy conditions, is likely to be launched on April 20.

Bagta piece sells big at Bonham auction

An unrecorded portrait by 18th century Indian artist Bagta, who was involved with the Maharanas of Udaipur and the Rawats of Devgarh in Rajasthan, sold for six times the estimated price at \$302,500 at an auction in New York. The remarkable work and cover lot to Bonhams' Indian, Himalayan & Southeast Asian Art sale last month dates back to 1808 and measures 16x22 inches. According to the auction house, this work is a rare representation of the larger scale depiction of Bagta (1761-1814). It had a pre-sale estimate of \$30,000-\$50,000. Bagta is currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 'Wonder of the Age, Master Painters of India, 1100-1900' .

New Central scheme to supply free generic drugs

Moving towards major reforms, the Centre is in the process of rolling out a universal health coverage package in at least one district in each State on an experimental basis. These recommendations had been made by the High Level Expert Group (HLEG) in its report on universal health coverage. The panel had also recommended against any insurance scheme as a mechanism for health coverage. The HLEG had been set up by the Planning Commission and it submitted its report in November 2011. The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry will soon write to the States asking them to put in place a professional and transparent mechanism for providing free generic drugs. L.C. Goyal, Additional Secretary in the Ministry, said the scheme will be included as a new initiative under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) at a cost of Rs. 30,000 crore for the next five years. The scheme will be implemented from sub-centres to district hospitals, but not in medical college hospitals.

At 101, Fauja prepares for London Marathon

As he turned a memorable 101-years-old, Sikh marathoner Fauja Singh did not have his birthday celebrations on his mind at his London home. Instead, the oldest athlete on earth is busy preparing for his next event the London Marathon on April 22. Even at 101, what is top-most on his mind is the preparation for the London Marathon for which he is already training and not his birthday cake. Last year, Fauja Singh had become, perhaps the only man in the world to have lived a 100 years to see his biography being released at that age. The biography 'Turbaned Tornado' written by Khushwant Singh was released in London in July 2011. An illiterate person who converses only in Punjabi, Fauja had told IANS, how, he yearned that he could have read his biography. As Fauja Singh prepares for the London marathon, no insurance company in Britain is ready to issue him a policy for the event.

Indian envoy in South Sudan on oil mission

Responding to the ongoing conflict between Sudan and South Sudan, India has appointed a special envoy to broker peace between the two countries that hold the key to India's pursuit of oil and other hydrocarbon resources in Africa. The foreign ministry's decision to send a special envoy to these countries last week came three months after China, with whom New Delhi is locked in a fierce geopolitical battle to tap energy resources in Africa, sent its own special envoy to handle the crisis and protect Beijing's oil interests. Amarendra Khatua, who handles the passport division, is on a visit to both Juba and Khartoum as India's special envoy to help promote peace and protect India's interests in other African nations as well. The escalating conflict between the two nations, which has led Juba to suspend production and shipment altogether, is threatening to imperil ONGC Videsh Limited's (OVL) investments of close to \$3 billion into the undivided country. South Sudan has the largest oil reserve in Africa after Angola. It walked away with 75% of the oil fields of the undivided country after South Sudan was carved out last year. However, in the absence of any processing infrastructure, its authorities are seeking help from OVL to build pipelines, oil stores and refineries.

Flood-hit Fiji declares state of emergency

Flood-ravaged Fiji declared a state of emergency and warned tourists to stay away for the time being, as heavy rain and high winds continued to pound the South Pacific nation. Officials said they could not guarantee visitors' safety in the wake of flash floods that have killed at least two people and forced more than 5,000 to take shelter in evacuation centres. Tourism Minister Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum said. The request is believed to be unprecedented for tourist-dependent Fiji. National carrier Air Pacific said it had cancelled all inbound flights scheduled for today and was operating only limited outbound flights for passengers who had

already checked in at Nadi airport. Airports Fiji Limited chief executive Tony Gollin said hundreds of international passengers were at the airport awaiting departure.

Chavez in Cuba for more radiation treatment

Venezuelan Cuban President Raul Castro has received his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez, who arrived for a second round of radiation therapy as part of his back- and-forth cancer treatment in Havana. The Venezuelan president was accompanied by his foreign minister, Nicolas Maduro, according to Juventud Rebelde newspaper. Chavez is also accompanied on this trip by his daughter Maria Virginia and one of his grandchildren, Venezuelan television reported. Chavez, 57, who is facing a tough re-election fight this year, is expected to complete five weeks of radiation treatment in Havana, but return home for brief periods during that time.

Tighter sanctions sought against Syria

Dozens of countries sought to set conditions for a new Syria, pushing for tighter sanctions and diplomatic pressure to further isolate President Bashar Assad, while urging the opposition to offer a democratic alternative to his regime. Yet the show of solidarity at the "Friends of the Syrian People" conference in Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, was marred by the absence of China, Russia and Iran key supporters of Assad who disagree with Western and Arab allies over how to stop the bloodshed. A peace plan by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan has so far failed to take hold amid fresh reports of deadly violence. Erdogan also indicated military options might have to be considered, if Syria does not cooperate with Annan's plan and the U.N. Security Council fails to unite in opposition to Assad. He referred to the vetoes of UN censure of Assad by Russia and China, which fear the measures could lead to foreign military intervention.

Third party liability premium goes up

Owners of cars, commercial vehicles and two-wheelers will have to pay more towards insurance with enhanced motor insurance rates coming into effect from April 1. The premium rates for third party motor insurance in certain cases will go up by as much as 40 per cent from April 1, 2012, as per the notification of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA). The IRDA had earlier announced that the new rates of third party motor insurance premium would be revised at the end of every fiscal year. Third-party insurance cover protects the vehicle owner from any financial liability, in case of damage to life or property in an accident to the third person. As per the new rates, private car owners would have to pay premium depending on the size of the vehicles. The hike would be in the range of 6-40 per cent. Owners of cars up to 1,000 cc engine capacity will have to shell out a third party premium of Rs 784. It would be Rs 925 for cars with engine capacity of above 1,000 cc and up to 1,500 cc. For cars exceeding 1,500 cc, the premium rate will be Rs 2,853 per year.

Walmart to source more from India

The world's largest retailer Walmart is looking to source more farm produce from India for international operations through its Indian joint venture apart from expanding product basket. The company's 50:50 joint venture with Bharti Enterprises -- Bharti Walmart Pvt Ltd is looking to engage 25,000 farmers in India by 2015 up from the present 4,000. ASDA Walmart is a chain of 500 stores that sell food, grocery and other essential items across UK. He said there are opportunities to export a range of items from India like musk melon, pomegranate and rice. As a pilot, the company has started sourcing grapes from farmers in Maharashtra for supplying to ASDA Walmart.

RIM looks at CDMA devices to boost India sales

BlackBerry maker Research in Motion (RIM) is now looking at CDMA devices to boost its sales in the country and is re-launching its Curve 8530 model at about 12 per cent lower price of Rs 11,990. Curve 8530, which was earlier available at Rs 13,500, is the CDMA version of BlackBerry's most popular GSM device -- Curve 8520. This will not only help users who are looking at more smartphone options for CDMA, but will also ensure that more CDMA users can move to smartphones. GSM and CDMA are two mobile telephony technologies, of which GSM is dominant in India with telecom operators like Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India and Idea Cellular offering services across India. On the other hand, CDMA operators in the country include Sistema Shyam Teleservices, Tata Teleservices and Reliance Communications, though the last two also offer GSM services.

Paes reaches a milestone

Indian tennis veteran Leander Paes became only the 24th player in the ATP World Tour history to win 50 doubles titles after he and his Czech partner Radek Stepanek clinched the Sony Ericsson Open, their second team trophy of the season. Paes and Stepanek, who were seeded seventh, rallied to upstage second seeds Max Mirnyi and Daniel Nestor 3-6, 6-1, 10-8. After dropping the first set, the Australian Open champions broke Mirnyi and Nestor twice in the second set to force a match tie-break.

Geeta makes cut for Olympics

Geeta created history by becoming the first Indian female wrestler to have qualified for the Olympics after she won a gold medal in the Asian Qualifying Tournament in Astana, Kazakhstan. Geeta defeated Ji-Eun Um of Korea 5-0 on technical points in the summit clash of the 55kg female wrestling category to not only pocket a gold, but also a place in the upcoming London Olympics. Both the gold and silver medallists from the Asian qualifying event, which ended today, will get a ticket to the London Games. This is the first time an Indian female grappler has qualified for the Olympics since women's wrestling was introduced in the quadrennial extravaganza in 2004. Geeta had earlier defeated Gulina Kubatbek Kyzy of Kyrgyzstan in her opening bout getting the better of Thai grappler Wilaiwan Thongkam in the next. The Indian's next victim was Aiyim Abdildina of Kazakhstan which gave her ticket to the final round and also a place in the London Games.

Monterosso wins Dubai World Cup

Monterosso led home a Godolphin one-two in the Dubai World Cup over 2,000m at Meydan racecourse when he swept past his stablemate, Capponi, to win the world's richest race. The five-year-old, ridden by Mickael Barzalona, advanced from a prominent position to win a race in which he finished third year 2011.

Indian paddlers finish 27th

The Indian paddlers improved their performances to finish 27th in the men's and women's categories at the World Team Table Tennis Championships in Dortmund, Germany. Men: India bt Brazil 3-2, Women :India bt Italy 3-1.