

INS Vikramaditya to join Navy by December

The Indian Navy will take charge of the much-awaited aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya (Admiral Gorshkov), by December 4, 2012, but it will be early 2013 by the time the warship reaches home. The induction of the Kiev-class aircraft carrier will allow the Navy to have two such platforms for a while; a third indigenous aircraft carrier is under construction at the Kochi shipyard. Vice- Admiral Ganesh Mahadevan, who led the team which renegotiated the aircraft carrier whose final price tag is \$2.34 billion, however, would not be in service to see the warship join the Navy as he retires by the end of this month after a 40-year career. Comptroller and Auditor-General objected to the steep rise in the price as well as the length of its service, Vice-Admiral Mahadevan said that when compared to the original contract, the revised figure was for a warship that was over 90 per cent new with an estimated life of 40 years.

Dr. Reddy elected WHF president

Dr. Srinath Reddy has been elected president of the World Heart Federation (WHF), an overarching, global, non-governmental organisation, and the only body dedicated to the global prevention of heart disease and stroke, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries. Dr. Srinath Reddy is the first Indian ever, to be conferred this honour. The election took place at the World Congress of Cardiology in Dubai. He succeeds Dr. Sydney Smith of USA, and will serve a two-year term, commencing in January 2013. Dr. Reddy is the president of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), and former Head of Cardiology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

IMO yet to get India's response on rights of armed guards on ships

Even as the authorities continue to grapple with the case of killing of two fishermen, allegedly by armed guards aboard Italy-flagged tanker 'Enrica Lexie' off the coast of Kerala, India appears to be dragging its feet on the position it should take on the rights of armed guards of merchant ships. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) elicited the views of 170 member-countries through a three-page questionnaire sent six months ago on certain issues that should be addressed in regard to the use of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) on board ships in the high-risk areas for protection against piracy. Although the questionnaire was issued in September 2011, India's response has not yet reached the London-based IMO that is scheduled to meet on May 16. The deadline for response was November 30.

DRDO plans to build reusable missiles

After the successful launch of Agni V Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile, India is all set to develop reusable rockets which will combine the technologies of both ballistic and cruise missiles. As part of plans to develop reusable ballistic missiles, the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) will test indigenously developed scram jet engine next year, DRDO chief V K Saraswat said.

India 7th nation with ICBM technology

Ballistic missiles are categorised according to their range, which is the maximum distance measured along the surface of the earth from the point of launch of a ballistic missile to the point of impact of the last element of its payload. In the US, they are divided into four classes: Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles or ICBM (over 5,500 km), Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile or IRBM (3,000 to 5,500 km), Medium-Range Ballistic Missile or MRBM (1,000 to 3,000 km) and Short-Range Ballistic Missile or SRBM (up to 1,000 km). The Russian system, on the other hand, classifies them as strategic (over 1,000 km), Operational-Strategic (500-1,000 km), Operational (300-500 km), Operational-Tactical (50-300 km) and Tactical (up to 50 km). Till now, the US, Russia, China, UK, France and Israel were the only countries with ICBM technology. Although Agni-V is a little short of the American definition, with its successful launch India has joined this elite club.

Pak-occupied Kashmir shown as 'Azad Kashmir' in class three text book

In a faux pas, an exercise book prescribed for class three students at an Army school in Srinagar has depicted Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) as "Azad Kashmir". It was found that the map practice exercise book for schools run by Army Education Welfare Society showed PoK as "Azad Kashmir". The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has, however, distanced itself from the controversy by maintaining that the exercise book in question was brought out by a private publisher and not of the NCERT which it prescribes for class one to class eight students. CBSE Chairman Vineet Joshi said the Board has "Nothing to do with it".

Off WHO list, India to help Pak fight polio menace

The war against polio virus in Pakistan will be now fought with help of India. A decision in this regard was taken at a recent meeting in New Delhi with the officials of the UNICEF, where concerns were raised regarding increase in polio cases in the neighbouring nation. According to the UNICEF, Pakistan registered 198 cases of polio in 2011, rising from 144 cases in 2010. Over the last few months, the country has reported nine cases of polio. This situation across the border is not healthy for India which, after registering a polio-free-year, has been recently taken off the list of polio-endemic countries by global health body World Health Organisation (WHO). India registered a no-polio year in February 2012. But as Pakistan remains in the grip of the crippling disease, it will be Herculean task for India to achieve the target.

In wait for ICJ

Justice Dalveer Bhandari of the Supreme Court cannot wait till the fateful day of April 27 when voting is to take place on choosing a judge for the International Court of Justice. Since his name was nominated by India for the coveted post, the judge has been keeping away from regular work in Court to devote his time persuading all member countries to vote for him. While the ICJ elections are unanimous by and large, the only worry for the judge could be a fresh nomination of a name by Philippines, which threatens to split his vote share. Good luck for the judge.

Syria hails UNSC's latest resolution

Syria has welcomed the United Nations Security Council's latest resolution and said the world body's observers have been able to access all the trouble spots that they wished to visit. In the first reaction from Damascus minutes after the UNSC resolution, Syria's Minister of Information Adnan Mahmoud said Syria welcomed all international observers, "whether from BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and all those who look objectively but wanted the West and their three Middle East allies Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia to stop using the armed groups as a "tool for executing their plans in the region." The Minister accepted the right of the U.N. Secretary General to approve "the mission and observers," a stand that conforms to the spirit of the UNSC resolution. Syria also had a word of appreciation for the Indian view at the UNSC. "The Indian stand was positive in support of Syria...by rejecting foreign interference and insisting on the sovereignty of Syria.

US, Afghanistan officials finalise strategic pact

Afghan and US officials finalised a long-awaited strategic partnership deal that is meant to set forth guidelines for US involvement in Afghanistan as forces draw down, the two Governments said. Afghan and US officials had said that they expected to sign the deal before a NATO summit in May but a series of disagreements had threatened to derail the partnership in recent months. Some of the most contentious issues were removed from the broader pact into separate memorandums of understanding. "The document provides a strong foundation for the security of Afghanistan, the region and the world and is a document for the development of the region," Afghan National Security Adviser Rangin Dadfar Spanta said.

Japan foregoes Myanmar's \$3.7-billion debt

Japan said it will forgive about 300 billion yen (\$3.7 billion) of Myanmar's debt and resume development aid as a way to support the country's democratic and economic reforms. The government made the announcement after a meeting between Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and Myanmar President Thein Sein following a summit with leaders from the five nations of the Mekong River region. Myanmar's military junta last year handed power to a nominally civilian government that has surprised the world with a series of sweeping political and economic reforms, including releasing prominent political prisoners and allowing democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi to contest recent parliamentary by-elections.

Etios racing series unveiled

Toyota Kirloskar Motor Private Limited has unveiled concept cars of Etios motor racing series along with motorsport activities such as racing simulators and remote controlled cars. The Etios racing platform will help talented young racers develop their skills and further train them to gain a competitive edge for future in motorsports.

Tea will be declared a national drink, says Montek

Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia said that tea would be declared a national drink by April 2013. "It would be accorded the national drink status by April 17 next year to coincide with the 212th birth anniversary of the first Assamese tea planter and Sepoy Mutiny leader Maniram Dewan," Mr.

Ahluwalia said. Maniram Dewan was not only the first indigenous tea planter but was also involved in the national movement. According to ORG-India Tea Consumption Study, 83 per cent households in India consume tea and is the cheapest beverage in the world after water.

India-Indonesia bilateral trade target revised to \$45 billion

Seeing bigger potential in the fast growing business between India and Indonesia, the bilateral trade target for 2015 has been revised from USD 25 billion to USD 45 billion, Indonesian Ambassador Andi M Ghalib said. Indonesia would also resume its plan of commencing air traffic to India June 2012.

India, BRICS nations hold back on new contributions to IMF

India and the other four BRICS nations have opted to hold back on their announcement of new contributions to the International Monetary Fund to enable it to create a firewall to protect the global economy from any worsening of the Euro-zone debt crisis. Although G-20 countries have collectively pledged to provide IMF \$430 billion in new resources, the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have refrained from announcing their individual quantum of funding for the 188-nation IMF's crisis-related operations.

Renjith qualifies for London Olympics

Triple jumper Renjith Maheswary joined the qualifiers' list for the London Olympic Games by reaching 16.85 metres on the opening day of the Federation Cup athletics championships in Patiala, Punjab. The qualification standard happened to be exactly what Renjith had jumped in the fifth round. He now joins nine other Indians among those who have made the Olympic grade. Barring Renjith's feat, performance levels remained ordinary in the men's section as athletes strained to put up a decent show even if they only had a very remote chance of reaching the requisite standards. In the women's category, Sahana Kumari reached a personal best 1.88m in high jump and found that she was still four centimetres short of the Olympic qualification mark.

Gibson fined

West Indies coach Ottis Gibson has been fined 20 per cent of his match fee after hitting out at the DRS review technology system during the drawn second Test against Australia. The incident took place when, during the post-third day's play media briefing, Gibson challenged the DRS and its implementation by the match officials.

Djokovic, Nadal set up final showdown

World No. 1 Novak Djokovic will try to deal Rafael Nadal another blow when the world's two top players clash in Monte Carlo Masters tennis final, where the Spaniard is chasing an eighth consecutive crown. Nadal recorded his 41st win in a row in the season's first big claycourt event as he defeated Frenchman Gilles Simon 6-3, 6-4 in semifinal, while the Serbian battled back from a set down to beat sixth-seeded Czech Tomas Berdych 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. Djokovic has won their last seven encounters, which were all finals in Grand Slam or Masters events, including at the Madrid and Rome claycourt tournaments year 2011.