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## POLITICS AND THE NATION

### PSLV-C16 ready to take-off on Wednesday

- The stage has been set for the launch of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C16) from the first launch pad at Sriharikota on April 20 at 10.12 a.m. **The PSLV-C16 will put in orbit three satellites – India's Resourcesat-2, an Indo-Russian satellite called Youthsat and a micro-satellite named X-Sat from the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore.**
- The Launch Authorisation Board (LAB), on Saturday cleared the rocket's lift-off.
- **Resourcesat-2, built by ISRO, is the primary satellite in this mission. It is an advanced remote-sensing satellite**, weighing 1,206 kg. An important feature of Resourcesat-2 is that it carries three cameras – with high, medium and coarse resolutions – on a single platform. *The images taken by the cameras will be useful for estimating the health of crops, locating ground water, keeping a surveillance on deforestation, and monitoring the level of water in reservoirs and lakes and the snow-melt in the Himalayas and the consequent receipt of water in the rivers.*
- The 92-kg **Youthsat** has been built by India and Russia, with one payload from Russia and two from ISRO. *The satellite will be used for stellar and atmospheric studies, including watching the activities in the sun and their effect on the earth's upper atmosphere.*
- *The 106-kg X-Sat will be used for imaging applications.*
- The ISRO would have a busy schedule ahead with PSLV launches in the coming months.
- A PSLV would put in orbit **GSAT-12** in June from Sriharikota. This would be followed by the launch of **Megha-Tropiques satellite**, another GSAT and **Radar Imaging Satellite (RISAT-1)**, all during this year, from Sriharikota.
- Another GSAT would be put in orbit in June 2011 from Kourou island, French Guiana, by an Ariane rocket from Arianespace.

## **Stockholm Convention will discuss global ban on endosulfan**

- The world will be watching India as the conference of parties to the **Stockholm Convention meet in Geneva from April 25 to 29 to discuss, among other things, a global ban on the pesticide endosulfan.**
- **India was the only member country to take a stand against the ban** at the Sixth Meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee to the Convention that recommended the ban last year.
- Domestic opposition to India's stand has been growing ever since. However, the Central government has not relented.
- **Already 81 countries have either banned or decided to phase out endosulfan, while 27 are still using the insecticide.** There is strident demand for its ban in countries such as the Philippines.
- As of now, 173 countries are parties to the Convention and about 20 chemicals have been approved for elimination, restriction or curtailing of unintentional production under the Convention with or without exemptions.
- **India exports about 50 per cent of its production of endosulfan and the manufacturers are pressing the Union government to oppose the move for a global ban. They say that the ban would deprive the farmers of a cheap and effective broad spectrum pesticide.**  
However, non-governmental organisations and individuals campaigning against the pesticide note that endosulfan caused more than 150 diseases and abnormalities, many of them severe in nature.
- Health surveys under expert supervision identified more than 4,000 victims in Kasaragod district of Kerala alone and their numbers are growing. More than 500 patients were bedridden, while about 2,000 needed assistance to move around.
- **A chemical has to be persistent, bio-accumulative and capable of endangering human health and long-range transport to attract ban under the Stockholm Convention which deals with persistent organic pollutants.**

### Libyan rebels push on Brega, Misrata bombarded

- Libyan rebels pushed toward the strategic oil port of **Brega** while Muammar Gaddafi's forces pounded besieged **Misrata** to the west with rockets and mortars.
- Rebels said Gaddafi's forces were ensconced in the centre of Brega, often inside houses, while insurgent fighters were more exposed.
- Gaddafi's forces have been bombing the road from Ajdabiyah, 80 km (50 miles) east of Brega, for several days, sometimes firing from a distance, sometimes approaching in cars.
- Six rebels were killed and 16 wounded when Gaddafi loyalists fired rockets at a group of insurgents driving along the exposed coastal highway westward from Ajdabiyah.
- **Ajdabiyah**, once a bustling city of 100,000, has become a ghost town, with most residents fleeing the fighting.
- **Sunday marks a month since the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution authorising force to protect civilians in Libya, leading to an international air campaign.**
- The United States, France and Britain said this week they will not stop bombing Gaddafi's forces until he leaves power, effectively revising the mission's aim to regime change.
- U.S. President Barack Obama acknowledged on Friday that the military situation on the ground had reached "stalemate", but said sanctions and air strikes had isolated Gaddafi and the leader would be ousted eventually.
- The air campaign has failed to alleviate the siege of **Misrata, the rebels' only major stronghold in the west of the country**, cut off by Gaddafi's forces for seven weeks, where hundreds of civilians are believed to have died.

### Syria: Assad vows to lift emergency law by next week

- **President Bashar al-Assad** said on Saturday **emergency law in place for almost 50 years in Syria would be lifted by next week but ignored**

**popular demands to curb the security apparatus and dismantle its authoritarian system.**

- Assad, facing unprecedented pressure for democratic reform, had earlier pledged to replace the repressive emergency law with anti-terrorism legislation, but opposition figures said this was likely to preserve tough restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly in **Syria, under monolithic Baath Party rule since 1963.**
- *"Next week is the maximum (time) limit for completion of these laws regarding the lifting of the state of emergency,"* Assad said in a speech to a new cabinet.
- **Emergency law bans public gatherings of more than five people and served to throttle any public dissent** until Syrians began taking to the streets a month ago, emboldened by popular uprisings that ousted autocratic leaders in Egypt and Tunisia.
- **Assad, 45, who took office in 2000 upon the death of his father Hafez al-Assad, who ruled for 30 years,** said stability remained his priority but reform was needed to "strengthen the internal front".
- But he did not mention the ***main demands of tens of thousands of protesters, namely to end the tight grip of security services on everyday life, release thousands of long serving political prisoners, most of whom have been held without trial, and do away with a clause in Syria's constitution that enshrines the Baath Party as "leader of the state and society".***
- Assad said corruption was a problem and a commission to address it should be set up, but announced no measures to end his own family's dominance over the Syrian economy.
- His cousin *Rami Makhlouf, a tycoon,* has expanded his businesses during Assad's rule and he has been widely cited by protesters in their calls for an end to public corruption.
- **Demonstrations in pursuit of democratisation have spread through the tightly controlled security state over the past month and around 200 people have been killed in attacks by security forces, according to rights campaigners.**

**Pro-democracy protest erupts in Syria's 2nd city**

- Several hundred people chanted "the people want freedom" at the grave of independence leader Ibrahim Hananu in **Syria's second city Aleppo** on Sunday.
- **Aleppo, a large trading and industrial hub, has been mostly free of protests** since mass pro-democracy demonstrations challenging President Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian rule erupted more than a month ago in southern Syria and spread to large parts in the country of 20 million people.
- **Syrians on Sunday celebrated evacuation day, marking 65 days since French troops left Syria, ending 26 years of colonial occupation.**

### **Yemen opposition to meet Gulf ministers in Riyadh**

- Yemen's opposition leaders were to meet Gulf Arab foreign ministers in Saudi Arabia on Sunday to lay out their conditions before entering formal talks over the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.
- After **three months of protests demanding an end to Saleh's 32-year rule**, Gulf Arab states stepped in earlier this month to offer to mediate a transition of power, but talks have dragged on over issues such as Saleh's immunity from prosecution and the timetable for a transition.
- The opposition, whose delegation is headed by former foreign minister Mohammed Basindwa, rejected a proposal by Gulf foreign ministers last week because it appeared to offer Saleh immunity from prosecution.
- The opposition had agreed to meet on condition that no Saleh representatives would be included.
- **More than 116 protesters have been killed in clashes with security forces since late January, fuelling fears that violence could spiral out of control in the poor and politically fragmented country where al Qaeda has been active.**
- **Saudi Arabia, which along with the United States has backed Saleh to keep al Qaeda at bay, has been hosting talks in its capital Riyadh.**
- Saleh had welcomed the Gulf plan, which suggested he would step down without providing a timetable. After initially offering to leave after his current term ends in 2013, Saleh said he would step down after holding elections, possibly this year.

- A political survivor who has described ruling Yemen as "dancing on the heads of snakes", Saleh has warned of civil war and the break-up of the country if he is forced out and insists on handing power over to what he calls "safe hands."
- **Even before the start of the protests, inspired by the toppling of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents, Saleh was struggling to quell a separatist rebellion in the south and cement a truce with Shi'ite Muslim rebels in the north.**
- **On Friday, hundreds of thousands protested against Saleh in Sanaa, Aden and Taiz.** Clerics and tribal leaders who once backed Saleh issued a statement calling for his immediate departure and that of his relatives in the military and security forces.

### **Egypt court dissolves Mubarak's former ruling party**

- An Egyptian court on Saturday ordered the dissolution of former President Hosni Mubarak's political party, meeting a demand of the pro-democracy movement whose protests ended his 30-year authoritarian rule.
- The disbanding of the *National Democratic Party (NDP)* was likely to further appease protesters who had called off fresh demonstrations after the military council that now rules Egypt earlier this week ordered Mubarak detained for questioning about corruption allegations.
- *The NDP had dominated Egyptian politics since it was founded by Mubarak's predecessor, Anwar Sadat, in 1978.* For many in Egypt, it epitomised the graft and abuse of power that helped ignite the protests which forced Mubarak to quit in February.
- The court also ordered the liquidation of NDP assets, with the funds to be returned to the state .
- Mubarak was admitted to a hospital in Sharm el-Sheikh on Tuesday, suffering from an unspecified ailment, shortly after he was questioned.

### **Japan Quake aftermath - TEPCO aims for shutdown of reactors**

Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO), the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant at the centre of Japan's crisis, said on Sunday it hopes to achieve a "cold shutdown" of its crippled plant within six to nine months.

The following summarises what TEPCO aims for and some of the challenges facing the operator as Japanese engineers scramble to deal with the worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl meltdown.

### **WHAT IS A COLD SHUTDOWN?**

- A cold shutdown is a state in which the water cooling the fuel rods is below 100 degrees Celsius and the reactors are considered stable. It means that the water used to cool the fuel rods is below boiling point.
- Of the Daiichi plant's six reactors hit by the earthquake and tsunami, two are seen as safe, but the other four are still volatile.
- Workers succeeded in halting the reactors after the quake hit, but they were unable to cool them in time before some of the fuel melted inside the reactor cores after the water cooling them evaporated.
- TEPCO then hopes to bring the reactors to the cold shutdown in another three to six months.

### **HOW DOES TEPCO INTEND TO ACHIEVE A COLD SHUTDOWN?**

- The operator said it wants to fill the reactors with enough water so the fuel rods can be cooled for a cold shutdown. At the same time it will work to restore the reactors' cooling system, which functions like a radiator on an automobile.

### **WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING TEPCO?**

- The aim to fill the reactors with enough water sounds simple but engineers have had to battle with a damaged cooling system since the earthquake.
- Until the cooling systems are fixed or other alternatives are online to continually cool the reactors, workers will be forced to keep injecting new water to cool the fuel and create a steady flow of contaminated water.



- Within its self-imposed time frame TEPCO said it will build storage tanks to store the contaminated water and attempt to treat some of it. It also aims to cover the reactors with large covers to prevent the spread of radioactive material into the atmosphere.
- TEPCO said constant aftershocks, high levels of radiation and the threat of hydrogen explosions were also some of the factors that could hamper its work.

### **Iran accuses Siemens over Stuxnet virus attack**

- An Iranian military commander has accused German engineering company Siemens of helping the United States and Israel launch a cyber attack on its nuclear facilities.
- The head of Iran's civilian defence, said the **Stuxnet virus** aimed at Iran's atomic programme was the work of its two biggest foes and that the German company must take some of the blame.
- Siemens declined to comment.
- *"The investigations show the source of the Stuxnet virus originated in America and the Zionist regime,"* Iranian official was quoted as saying.
- "Iran should hold Siemens responsible for the fact that its control systems used to operate complicated factory machinery -- known as **Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA)** -- **had been hit by the worm,**" the official added.
- The Siemens must be held accountable and explain how and why it provided the enemies with the information about the codes of SCADA software and paved the way for a cyber attack.
- Some foreign experts have described Stuxnet as a "guided cyber missile" aimed at Iran's atomic programme.
- Iran has given few details of the impact of the virus. It said in September that staff computers at the *Russian-built Bushehr nuclear power station* had been hit but that the plant itself was unharmed.
- **Bushehr -- Iran's first nuclear power station** -- is still not operational, having missed several start-up deadlines, prompting speculation that it too had been hit by Stuxnet, something Iran denies.

- Russia's ambassador to NATO said in January the virus had hit the computer system at Bushehr, posing the risk of a nuclear disaster on the scale of the 1986 Chernobyl incident in Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union.
- Some defence analysts say the main target was more likely to be Iran's *uranium enrichment -- the process which creates fuel for nuclear power plants or provide material for bombs if processed much further*. Western powers accuse Iran, a major oil producer, of seeking to develop nuclear weapons capability, something Tehran denies.
- U.S.-based think-tank, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), said that in late 2009 or early 2010 ***about 1,000 centrifuges -- machines used to refine uranium -- out of the 9,000 used at Iran's Natanz enrichment plant, had been knocked out by the virus*** -- not enough to seriously harm its operations.

### **Iran oil shipments stable, payment talks ongoing: India**

- India continues to receive normal shipments of oil from Iran and discussions between the two countries are ongoing over how India will pay for its crude imports, the country's oil minister S. Jaipal Reddy said on Sunday.
- India has been searching for a permanent method to make payments to Iran for crude oil imports since its central bank scrapped a clearinghouse system in December.
- India stopped making the payments earlier this month via a Hamburg-based bank handling international trade for Iranian companies.
- The use of the German bank had drawn strong disapproval from the United States, which suspects Iran is using its oil money to fund a nuclear weapons program denied by Iran claiming peaceful motive.
- Asked whether India may make its payments to Iran through banks in Turkey or the United Arab Emirates, Reddy said: "we are still in talks about how the payments will be made."

### **G20 turns spotlight on shortcomings of big economies**

- At least seven of the world's leading economies will undergo scrutiny of their economic policies under a new plan to help prevent future financial crises like the one of 2007-09.
- All Group of 20 countries will be judged on indicators such as debt and budget deficits as well as trade and investment flows, and may face reviews by the International Monetary Fund which could lead to suggestions for policy fixes.
- At least seven major economies will automatically go into the so-called second stage reviews, based on their size.
- Those nations are the United States, China, Japan, Germany, Britain, France and India, according to G20 officials.
- Any policy fixes suggested by the IMF will not be binding. Instead the group hopes that peer pressure will work to smooth out dangerous imbalances in the world economy.

Below are summaries of the policy challenges in the seven countries that will undergo automatic review.

## **UNITED STATES**

- The world's biggest economy's public debt has swelled to more than 60 percent of annual economic output. With a budget deficit of about 10 percent of output, it will grow further.
- The Obama administration is likely to respond to any G20 calls for fiscal discipline by pointing to its newly announced plans to hack \$4 trillion from the budget deficit over the next 12 years through spending cuts and tax hikes on the rich.
- The IMF has cast doubt about Washington's ability to meet a previous goal of halving its deficit by 2013, and his current goal announced this week is to reduce the deficit to 2.5 percent of gross domestic product by 2015.
- What Washington most wants from the G20 process is to get China to rely more on domestic consumption and less on exports, a move that would open up opportunities for U.S. business.

## **CHINA**

- China, now the world's No. 2 economy, this week reported its foreign-exchange reserves topped \$3 trillion. In the years leading up to the financial crisis, much of this cashpile was invested in Western markets and helped fuel excessive risk-taking by banks. That in turn led to the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.
- The United States claims China saves too much and spends too little because it keeps the yuan undervalued against the dollar, thus aggravating Washington's trade deficit.
- China has said repeatedly it will only let the yuan rise gradually -- it's up more than 4 percent against the dollar since mid-2010 -- and has expressed skepticism about the G20 guidelines, seeing them as one more form of Western pressure.

- The G20 communique said the new policy mechanism would take "due account" of exchange rates among other policies, appearing to give China room to keep the yuan off the table.

## **JAPAN**

- Japan will come under scrutiny for its huge current account surplus, which stands at around 3 percent of its total economy. Tokyo probably won't object to any peer review process as it can argue that the surplus will soon take care of itself. That's because an aging population will lead to a falling savings rate and reduce the amounts that Japanese investors have available to invest overseas. Japanese officials have said submitting to a review may also be helpful in nudging China into doing the same.

## **GERMANY**

- With all the focus on China, Germany often slips beneath the radar when talk turns to export-driven economies. The country ran a surplus on its current account, the broadest possible measure of trade and investment flows, of about 5.3 percent of output last year, though the IMF sees that dipping a bit this year.
- Subjecting Germany to an in-depth review may be complex as Europe's position is that the entire 17-country euro zone should be examined if any of its members are named.
- From that angle, Germany's situation will look more benign, as its surpluses and those of other northern European countries would offset deficits in countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Ireland, leaving the euro zone largely in balance and reducing the likelihood of any calls for policy fixes.

## **BRITAIN**

- Britain's biggest challenge is its budget deficit, which jumped above 9 percent of gross domestic product on an internationally comparable basis in the

2009/10 fiscal year. A rapidly rising debt-to-GDP ratio and high private sector indebtedness are also likely to spark concern.

- However, Britain's finance minister, George Osborne, welcomed the possibility of closer scrutiny by the IMF on Friday. Britain's coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, which came to power in May 2010, blames the previous Labour administration for the hefty deficit, and set out a five-year plan to largely eliminate the budget deficit in an emergency budget a month after taking office. The scale of the cuts is likely to provide London with a strong case to make to the rest of the G20 that it is dealing with its problems, even if they are unpopular among voters at home.

## **FRANCE**

- France, the euro zone's second-largest economy, has made curbing a ballooning debt one of its top priorities and is battling to bring down its budget deficit from 7 percent last year to a target of 5.7 percent in 2011. One of the world's most generous welfare systems has helped fuel a quadrupling of France's debt since the 1970s and the OECD forecasts it will stabilize at around 90 percent of GDP in the coming years. France will probably have to take tough measures to meet its medium-term deficit commitments, an unpalatable prospect with presidential elections due next year. High labor taxes and growth in real wages have also made French exports less competitive, leading to a widening trade deficit.

## **INDIA**

- With a current account deficit that the IMF projects will hit 3.7 percent of GDP this year, India stands out for the wrong reason: it has the largest deficit as a share of GDP among the seven countries the G20 will examine.
- Its 8.2 percent economic growth rate forecast for this year puts it up there with the best of the fast-growing "BRICS" economies, which have led the global economy out of recession. But India has not been able to match China's progress in pulling its population out of poverty.
- India, however, may score better than China when it comes to the G20's review of exchange rate flexibility. The rupee is partially convertible.

## Tennis - Nadal beats Ferrer for seventh Monte Carlo crown

- **Rafa Nadal continued his extraordinary love affair with the Monte Carlo Masters by sealing his seventh straight title on the Monaco clay after a 6-4 7-5 win over fellow Spaniard David Ferrer on Sunday.**
- The top seed, whose victory here **last year made him the first man in the professional era to triumph in the same tournament six times in a row**, showed few signs of letting his grip on the trophy loosen despite a generally scrappy display.
- **"King of Clay"** Nadal first broke in the third game when his compatriot netted but Ferrer struck back immediately with his own break of serve thanks to an exquisite drop shot in the final of the first claycourt event of the European season.
- However, Ferrer's joy was short-lived with Nadal breaking next game and winning the first set before seizing the initiative in the second with a superb passing shot only to be broken in the eighth game and then hitting back for 6-5.
- *"Injury might be the only hope of anyone taking Rafa Nadal's Monte Carlo Masters crown,"* said finalist David Ferrer.

### **"King of Clay"**

- **Nadal is also only 24 and has amassed a record 19 Masters titles.** His dominance on clay has put him on course to win every claycourt event he enters this year just like in 2010.
- Nadal sits so deep behind the baseline he can hit the ball at the top of the bounce, important in claycourt play, and then generate enormous top-spin with his forehand which means his opponent can do little but get it back over the net.
- No one slides to a ball like Nadal, meaning he always seems to get to any half decent shot, while his stamina in the long rallies associated with the surface is only currently being matched by Spaniards like Ferrer brought up on clay.

## Formula-1 - Hamilton halts Vettel's winning streak

- **McLaren's Lewis Hamilton** went from China crisis to champagne celebration on Sunday with a stirring victory that denied **Red Bull's Formula One world champion Sebastian Vettel** a fifth win in a row.
- Hamilton, who made it out of the Shanghai pit lane with only seconds to spare after frantic work on his car's engine before the race, hunted down his German rival remorselessly on better gripping tyres in the closing laps to win by 5.1 seconds.
- **Australian Mark Webber finished third for Red Bull** after starting 18th while **McLaren's Jenson Button was fourth** following a rare blunder that saw him pit in front of the Red Bull mechanics.
- Vettel now has 68 points after three races while Hamilton moved up to second overall with 47. Red Bull have 105 to McLaren's 85 and Ferrari's 50 in the constructors' standings.
- **Germany's Nico Rosberg** finished fifth, ahead of **Ferrari's Felipe Massa and Fernando Alonso** in sixth and seventh.
- **Seven times world champion Michael Schumacher** crossed the line in eighth place for Mercedes at the circuit where he had his last podium finish with Ferrari in 2006.

### Results

- RED BULL (Sebastian Vettel 2, Mark Webber 3)
- MCLAREN (Lewis Hamilton 1, Jenson Button 4)
- FERRARI (Felipe Massa 6, Fernando Alonso 7)
- RENAULT (Vitaly Petrov 9, Nick Heidfeld 12)
- MERCEDES (Nico Rosberg 5, Michael Schumacher 8)
- VIRGIN RACING (Jerome d'Ambrosio 20, Timo Glock 21)
- SAUBER (Kamui Kobayashi 10, Sergio Perez 17)
- TORO ROSSO (Sebastien Buemi 14, Jaime Alguersuari retired)
- FORCE INDIA (Paul Di Resta 11, Adrian Sutil 15)
- TEAM LOTUS (Heikki Kovalainen 16, Jarno Trulli 19)
- WILLIAMS (Rubens Barrichello 13, Pastor Maldonado 18)
- HRT (Vitantonio Liuzzi 22, Narain Karthikeyan 23)



## **Badminton - New skirt rule for female shuttlers debuts in Indian Super Series**

- Skirt selection could be as crucial as shot selection for the female shuttlers when they hit the court for this month's India Super Series in New Delhi.
- **Taking a cue from tennis, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) has introduced a new dress code, which comes into effect from May 1 and requires all female players to wear skirts or dresses in Grand Prix tournaments and above "to ensure attractive presentation of badminton".**
- Players may continue to wear shorts if they wish to but it has to be underneath a skirt, as some shuttlers already do.
- Those affected by the new regulation would include Saina Nehwal, top seed in the April 26-May 1 Indian Super Series, even though the world number three is not losing sleep over the issue. *"I think its okay. Playing in skirts is not an issue,"* Nehwal told.
- While the BWF hopes the move will bring more fans to the sport and rope in more sponsors, everybody is not convinced it's the right way forward.
- **Jwala Gutta**, Indian badminton's glamour girl and 2010 **Commonwealth Games gold medallist**, has no qualms about playing in a skirt but does not support the governing body's idea of making it compulsory. *"I have no problems because I wear skirts on and off the court. I think they are just trying to glamourise the sport,"* said the doubles specialist.
- The new dress code also met opposition from shuttlers in Indonesia where two-time mixed doubles world champion Lilyana Natsir said she wore skirts and dresses only on special occasions but never in tournaments. *"Skirts hamper my movement when I play,"* Natsir told.