

March 15th news:

International:

Britain expels 23 Russian diplomats over chemical attack on ex-spy

Britain will expel 23 Russian diplomats in response to a nerve toxin attack on a Russian ex-spy in southern England, Prime Minister Theresa May said on 14th March, describing the attack as an unlawful use of force by Russia against the United Kingdom.

May said Britain would also introduce new measures to strengthen defences against hostile state activities, freeze Russian state assets wherever there was evidence of a threat and downgrade its attendance at the soccer World Cup in Russia this summer.

Russia, which denies any involvement in the attack, called the measures announced by May "unacceptable, unjustified and shortsighted" and warned Britain to expect retaliation.

Unlike when the United States and European Union imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its annexation of Crimea and other actions in Ukraine, May did not name Russian individuals or companies that would be specifically targeted by sanctions.

Former double agent Sergei Skripal, 66, and his daughter Yulia, 33, were found unconscious on a bench in the genteel city of Salisbury on March 4 and remain in hospital in a critical condition. A police officer was also harmed and remains in a serious condition.

Skripal betrayed dozens of Russian agents to Britain before being arrested in Moscow and later jailed in 2006. He was freed under a spy swap deal in 2010 and took refuge in Britain.

May has said the Skripals were attacked with Novichok, a Soviet-era military-grade nerve agent. She had asked Moscow to explain whether it was responsible for the attack or had lost control of stocks of the highly dangerous substance.

National:

Home Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurates Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of IACP

Home Minister Rajnath Singh on 14th March inaugurated the two-day Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, IACP in New Delhi.

The theme of the conference is "Challenges to Policing in 2020 - How is Cyber Space shaping our approach to Cybercrime and Terrorism, how do we perform within it and take advantage of it".

According to the Home Minister Social Media has brought a big challenge for Law enforcement agencies. He said Radicalization through Internet is a matter of concern huge and there is a need to stop this.

The Conference is mainly focused on holding discussions about the growing interest of various terrorist or organized groups and radical elements in exploiting the Cyberspace and its advanced technologies for their various heinous crimes and nefarious designs.

The IACP is the world's largest organization of Police and law enforcement executives that is highly regarded for its role in identifying and responding to changing needs of the law enforcement community

Strength of women judges be raised to 50%, recommends parliamentary panel

A parliamentary panel has recommended that the strength of women judges be raised to 50 per cent of the total strength of judges.

The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances and Law and Justice headed by Bhupender Yadav presented its report in Parliament to this effect on 13th March

It called up the Centre to request the State Governments to introduce quota for women in law universities and subordinate judiciary.

The Committee desired that all Benches of the higher judiciary should be reflective of the country's social diversity.

The Committee underlines that in States, such as Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana, Assam, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand have introduced up to 35 percent reservations for women in the subordinate judiciary.

Bilateral:

India, Madagascar sign agreement in defence

India and Madagascar have signed an umbrella agreement in the field of defence. Under the agreement, both the countries will explore various ways of co-operation in the field of defence. An amended air service agreement was also signed to support efforts towards improving connectivity between the two countries.

Both the countries will have a co-sharing agreement with Air Seychelles through Air India and Air Madagascar.

The President said, India has offered a Line of Credit worth 80.7 million dollars for agriculture development and farm mechanization. He also expressed happiness that India is offering more favourable category one terms and conditions for this concessional loan to Madagascar.

He said, India recognises the importance of agriculture in Madagascar's national development of the plan and is ready to assist in this key sector. Mr Kovind announced a donation of 1000 tonnes of rice and a cash grant of 2 million dollars towards multiple calamities relief in Madagascar. He said, education and training are other important areas of cooperation with Madagascar.

Economy:

Indian economy to grow at 7.3% in FY19 and 7.5% in FY20: World Bank

Keeping its previous estimate of India's GDP growth in 2017-18 unchanged at 6.7 per cent, the World Bank has signalled that the economic slowdown has bottomed out, and maintained its growth forecast for 2018-19 at 7.3 per cent and 7.5 per cent for 2019-20.

The government's Central Statistics Office, in its second advance estimate, had pegged the gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 6.6 per cent, marginally above 6.5 per cent in the first advance estimate.

However, the pleasing growth projections come with the assumption that investments will grow at 6.7 per cent in 2019-20. The investment rate, as represented by the gross fixed capital formation, stood at 7.6 per cent in 2017-18, growing from a low of 1.6 per cent in 2013-14.

Terming the Indian economy as "steady, stable, diversified and resilient", World Bank's country director for India, Junaid Ahmad, stressed on the role of robust infrastructure institutions to drive the ease of doing business and accelerate trade.

The update analyses India's growth trajectory over the past few decades and provides a long-term growth outlook, while centering the debate over a sustained 8 per cent growth in the coming decades, which will make India a 'middle-class' economy.

India is currently a lower-middle income economy, which is defined as a country with gross national income per capita between \$1,006 and \$3,955, by the World Bank.

The range of GNI per capita to be termed as an upper-middle income country is \$3,956-\$12,235. Creating infrastructure linkages — waterways, road and rail — from ports via distribution points to manufacturing hubs, and developing infrastructure institutions for urban transportation were key to the investment and trade revival, Ahmad said while answering queries.

CCEA nod for Urea subsidy scheme till 2020

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approves continuation of Urea Subsidy scheme till 2020 at a cost of 1 lakh 65 thousand crore rupees; Cabinet nod also given for direct benefit transfer for disbursement of fertiliser subsidy.

For sustained agricultural growth, the availability of fertilizers to farmers at affordable prices is an absolute must. With urea being the only controlled fertilizer, it is sold at statutory notified uniform sale price.

In another move that reiterates the firm commitment of the Narendra Modi government to farmers' welfare, centre has decided to continue with the urea subsidy upto 2020. The decision will cost the exchequer a sum of Rs 164935 crores. A crucial aspect of the scheme is that the subsidy is transferred directly to the bank accounts of the Fertilizer companies under the Direct Benefit Transfer.

This saves the burden on the farmers to first buy costly urea upfront and then have subsidy transferred to his account.

The impact will be felt far and wide as the continuation of the urea subsidy scheme will ensure that adequate quantity of urea is made available to the farmers at statutory controlled price.

The implementation of DBT in Fertilizer sector will reduce diversion and plug the leakages.

Urea Subsidy is a part of Central Sector Scheme of Department of Fertilizers and is wholly financed by the Centre. The continuation of Urea Subsidy Scheme will ensure timely payment of subsidy to the urea manufacturers resulting in timely availability of urea to farmers.

Obituary

Stephen Hawking: Stephen Hawking, the British physicist and black-hole theorist who brought science to a mass audience with the best-selling book *A Brief History of Time*, has died.

Diagnosed at age 21, he was one of the world's longest survivors of ALS. A Cambridge University professor, Hawking redefined cosmology by proposing that black holes emit radiation and later evaporate.

He also showed that the universe had a beginning by describing how Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity eventually breaks down when time and space are traced back to the Big Bang about 13.7 billion years ago.

Stephen's remarkable combination of boldness, vision, insight and courage have enabled him to produce ideas that have transformed our understanding of space and time, black holes and the origin of the universe

Bestseller *A Brief History of Time*, first published in 1988, earned its author worldwide acclaim, selling at least 10 million copies in 40 languages and staying on the best-seller list of the U. K.'s Sunday Times newspaper for a record 237 weeks.

Persons in news

Angela Merkel: Germany's Parliament elected Angela Merkel for her fourth term as chancellor on 14th March. Lawmakers voted 364-315 to re-elect Merkel, Germany's leader since 2005, who ran unopposed. The coalition of Merkel's conservative Christian Democratic Union, its Bavaria-only sister party, the Christian Social Union and the centre-left Social Democrats has 399 of the 709 seats in parliament. Parliamentary vote came 171 days after the election, nearly double the previous record.