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Pandav Nagar Complex,
Delhi - 110092Editor: **Dr. Sanjay****Think A While**

Old order changeth, yielding place to new. That's how the world is changing today. Or, seems to be changing. The fall of Aleppo and the election of Donald Trump have brought up a scenario where things are no more the way they were. People want a change everywhere for various reasons.

Aleppo has been devastated over the last four years. People have been rebelling against Bashar al-Assad's regime since 2011. It began with peaceful protests but today, with more than 400,000 people dead and millions driven abroad as refugees, Syria has become a wasteland and Aleppo the hub of this massacre.

Finally, with the help of Russian air power and Iranian military expertise, Assad has freed Aleppo of rebels. It is being touted as his greatest victory so far. But more than his victory, one has to take note of Russia. Vladimir Putin is behaving like the guardian of the world. He has marched into the space where the US and its allies fear to tread.

Two years back, when Putin made incursions into Ukraine and annexed Crimea, there had been some resistance from the West. Economic sanctions by some countries had shown that there was displeasure over his action. Today, even that seems to be missing and Russia seems to have the last laugh.

The US has been wary of military interventions after its failure in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama therefore appears to have decided to steer clear in the Syrian controversy. Europe, instead of addressing the root cause in Syria, found it more prudent to deal with the immediate refugee crisis it faced.

It would be interesting to note how the new President of the US handles things. His relationship with Putin is expected to be different. It is difficult not to read into how Russia played a role in vilifying Hillary Clinton in the email scandal. And now Rex Tillerson, who knows Putin and Russia thoroughly, has been nominated the new Secretary of State. Also, how would Trump behave with China? If he does not endorse "one China" policy, Xi Jinping won't take it lying down.

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Centre

Vittiya Saksharata Abhiyan

The Union minister for Human Resource Development **Prakash Javadekar** launched 'Vittiya Saksharata Abhiyan' in New Delhi. The govt is appealing to the faculty and especially young students to come forward and join the campaign to encourage, create awareness among and motivate all people around them to use a digitally enabled cashless economic system for transfer of funds. The technology can be leveraged to bring financial digital literacy and a step forward towards digital economy. The Union HRD Minister has appealed to higher education institutes to receive nothing in cash (fee/fines/deposits) and pay nothing in cash (wages/salaries/vendor payments) and develop a cashless campus (shops/canteens/services).

Govt updates Central OBC list

As many as **15 new castes** were included by the govt in the Central list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) as per the recommendation of the National Commission of Backward Classes (NCBC). NCBC had recommended a total of 28 changes for Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Out of these 28, 15 castes, including **Gadheri/Itafarosh in Bihar, Jhora in Jharkhand and Labana in Jammu & Kashmir**, were new entries, nine were synonyms or sub-castes of the castes which were already in the list and four were corrections. The move is expected to enable the persons belonging to these communities to avail the benefits of reservation in govt services and posts as well as in Central educational institutions as per the existing policy.

Recent Cabinet approvals

Creation of IEDS

The Cabinet has approved cadre review and formation of the **Indian**

Enterprise Development Service (IEDS) in the Office of the Development Commissioner, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. The creation of the new cadre and change in structure will not only strengthen the organisation but also help achieve the vision of Startup India, Stand-up India and Make in India.

India-UK MoU

The Govt on 7 Dec gave *ex post facto* approval to an MoU between India and the United Kingdom to support ease of doing business in India. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. The UK Govt has achieved phenomenal improvement in Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) rankings in recent years.

MoU with Afghanistan

The Union Cabinet on 7 Dec gave its *ex post facto* approval to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Afghanistan on cooperation in the **peaceful uses of outer space**. The MoU envisages cooperation between the two countries for application of space technologies in education, agriculture, weather forecasting, telecommunications, rural health, sanitation, urban development, resource mapping navigation, remote sensing and any other areas mutually agreed upon.

Indo-Thai agreement

The Union Cabinet on 7 Dec approved agreement between India and Thailand in controlling narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, their precursors and chemicals and drug abuse. The MoU is an effective framework to deal with all issues requiring mutual assistance and cooperation in the above areas. It will facilitate effective institutional interaction between India and Thailand.

Package for refugees from PoK

A ₹2,000-cr development package for displaced people of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) living in the country was approved by the govt on 30 Nov. The

Union Cabinet approved the Home Ministry's proposal to provide enhanced financial aid to 36,384 families, who are mostly living in Jammu region after their displacement from PoK post Independence. Each of these families will get around ₹5.5 lakh as aid.

Amending agreement with Tajikistan

The Union Cabinet on 14 Dec approved the protocol amending the agreement between India and Tajikistan for avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. The protocol, after it enters into force, will enable sharing of information exchanged under Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with other law enforcement agencies for non-tax purposes.

Lucky Grahak Yojana

In a move to promote digital payments, the Govt of India has announced a slew of measures. NITI Aayog CEO **Amitabh Kant** announced a Lucky Grahak Yojana, under which digital payments through **RuPay cards, UPI, AEPS and USSD between ₹50 and ₹3,000** will be eligible for awards. There will be different prizes for consumers and merchants.

Under the Lucky Grahak Yojana, 15,000 winners will be eligible daily for a prize worth ₹1,000 each for the next 100 days starting Dec 25. A weekly award for around 7,000 consumers eligible for a maximum prize of ₹1 lakh was also announced. Under the Digi-Dhan Vyaapari Yojana, every week, more than 7,000 merchants will be eligible for ₹50,000 prize.

Mega awards in both the categories will be declared on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar (14 Apr 2017). Under this mega award, consumers can win prizes worth ₹1 cr, ₹50 lakh and ₹25 lakh, while merchants can win prizes worth ₹50 lakh, ₹25 lakh, and ₹5 lakh.

NGT imposes ban on manja

The National Green Tribunal on 14 Dec imposed an interim nationwide ban on use of glass-coated '**manja**' for flying kites as the sharp string poses a danger to humans, animals and birds.

A bench headed by NGT chairperson **Swatanter Kumar** passed the order after noting that '**manja**', the string coated with glass and metal powder and used for flying kites, poses a threat to the environment.

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