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Reasons of East Africa Drought 2011

- Weather conditions over the Pacific, **including an unusually strong La Niña**, have interrupted seasonal rains for two consecutive seasons.
- The rains failed in 2011 in Kenya and Ethiopia, and for the previous two years in Somalia. In many areas, the precipitation rate during the main rainy season from April to June, the primary season, was less than 30% of the average of 1995–2010.
- The lack of rain led to crop failure and widespread loss of livestock, as high as 40%–60% in some areas, which decreased milk production as well as exacerbating a poor harvest. As a result, cereal prices rose to record levels while livestock prices and wages fell, reducing purchasing power across the region. Rains were also not expected to return until September of the year. (wiki)

Reasons of drought of 2011 in Tuvalu

There was a severe drought in Tuvalu, a South Pacific island country of approximately 10,500 people, throughout the latter half of 2011.

- Tuvalu experiences the effects of El Niño & La Niña that flow from changes in ocean temperatures in equatorial and central Pacific.
- El Niño effects increase the chances of tropical cyclones; while La Niña effects increase the chances of drought conditions in Tuvalu.
- Tuvalu relies primarily on rainfall for the majority of its drinking water, which is collected and stored in storage tanks.



- Tuvalu was hit was a prolonged period of dry weather in 2011, which has been attributed to the La Niña that results in the cooling of the surface temperature of the sea around Tuvalu which resulted in reduced rainfall.
- In October 2011, the Tuvalu Red Cross reported that the country had not received normal rainfall in six months, leading to shortages. The capital, Funafuti, and several of the outer atolls have been particularly affected by the drought. Nukulaelae and Nanumaga are the most seriously affected outer islands.

The government declared a state of emergency on September 28, 2011, due to severe water shortages in the capital atoll, Funafuti. The drought conditions resulted in water being rationed on the islands of Funafuti and Nukulaelae as water reserves ran low.

Expedition 30

- Expedition 30 was the 30th long-duration mission to the International Space Station (ISS). The expedition's first three crew members – Dan Burbank, Anton Shkaplerov and Anatoli Ivanishin – arrived on the ISS aboard Soyuz TMA-22 on 16 November 2011, during the last phase of Expedition 29.
- Expedition 30 formally began on 21 November 2011, with the departure from the ISS of the Soyuz TMA-02M spacecraft.
- The expedition ended on 27 April 2012, as Burbank, Shkaplerov and Ivanishin departed from the ISS aboard Soyuz TMA-22, marking the beginning of Expedition 31.

How do cats survive falls from great heights?

- Cats are evolutionarily adapted to live in trees - luxury living with humans is a recent development. A cat in the US city of Boston survived a fall from a 19-storey window and only bruised her chest. How do cats survive falls from such great heights?
- Cats have relatively large surface areas in proportion to their weight, so fall at a slower rate over a great height than larger mammals.
- Their bodies have evolved to allow them to survive falls from trees, their natural homes. Given the time, they twist to land on their feet.
- Their legs are long, muscular and extend under the body rather than straight down, allowing them to absorb the shock. But many cats who fall from heights are nevertheless severely injured and some die. (BBC Science News)

Azawad

- Recently, the Tuareg separatists had proclaimed independence for what they call the state of Azawad in northern Mali. After capturing the region's key towns, the rebels controlled an area larger than France, Mali's former colonial power.
- Much of the land is the Sahara desert at its most inhospitable: rock, sand dunes and dust scored by shifting tracks.

At present, *Azawad is an unrecognised state unilaterally declared by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in 2012* after a Tuareg rebellion drove the Malian Army from the territory. Azawad, as claimed by the MNLA, comprises the Malian regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, as well as a part of Mopti region, encompassing about 60 percent of Mali's total land area.

- Gao has been proclaimed as its capital.

Timbuktu is the second largest city, and intended to be the permanent capital. The Economic Community of West African States, which refused to recognise Azawad and called the declaration of its independence "null and void", has said it may send troops into the disputed region in support of the Malian claim. The African Union and France have rejected the declaration of independence. Mali's neighbours fear the precedent of allowing such a secession as well as the danger of a widening area of instability.

The MNLA, or National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, is the fourth in a series of rebellions by the nomadic Tuareg in Mali since independence over 50 years ago. Estimates of numbers for the force vary from anything between 1,000 to 3,000 men. Most prominent amongst Islamist groups in the rebel push is Ansar Dine, which wants sharia law across Mali. It is led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a leader during past Tuareg rebellions who was sent to Saudi Arabia as a Malian diplomat under a peace deal.

Facts about Timbuktu

- Timbuktu, a place that has become shorthand in English for anywhere far away. While some people will be familiar with the Tuareg people, almost everyone will recognise the place name Timbuktu, even if they think it's mythical.
- Once spelt as Timbuctoo, the city in northern Mali has come to represent a place far away, at the end of the world. It has been, and still is, relatively inaccessible. Its immense wealth in the Middle Ages made it famous.
- But for hundreds of years it remained out of reach to European explorers. The word itself sounds very exotic to native English speakers, as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, "the most distant place imaginable" .
- Located on the southern edge of the Sahara, and just north of the River Niger, Timbuktu is nearly 1,000 years old. Famous writers have contributed to its mythical status.
- The Moorish author, Leo Africanus, described how the king of Timbuktu was so rich that some of his golden objects weighed hundreds of kilos. The town made its fortune through trade, where salt brought in from the Sahara was worth its weight in gold. Slaves and ivory were also traded. With its distinctive mud mosques rising from the sand, the town is a centre for Islamic scholarship.

- About 700,000 ancient manuscripts are held in the town's approximately 60 libraries. But the Timbuktu of today is very different from the golden age. It is poor and parts of it are sinking under the encroaching desert sands. It has until recently attracted tourists but they have been put off by a spate of kidnappings by a group with links to al-Qaeda. (© Thomson Reuters 2012)

Azores High : Linked with droughts in UK

- The Azores High (also known as *North Atlantic (Subtropical) High*/Anticyclone or for short, NASH, the Bermuda-Azores High, or the Bermuda High/Anticyclone in the United States) is a large subtropical semi-permanent centre of high atmospheric pressure typically found south of the Azores in the Atlantic Ocean, at the Horse latitudes.
- It forms one pole of the North Atlantic oscillation, the other being the Icelandic Low. The system influences the weather and climatic patterns of vast areas of North Africa and Europe, and to a lesser extent, eastern North America. The aridity of the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Basin is due to the subsidence of air in the system.
- The main cause for a long spell of dry weather in the UK is usually Azores high system that forces other low pressure systems around it, usually to the northwest. This can happen any time of year, but brings hot sunny weather in summer and dry, cold and foggy weather in winter. This is why in dry spells the northwest of the UK actually often receives above average rainfall, as depressions and associated fronts are pushed towards the north. (from wikipedia)

Status of Independence of Kosovo

- Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia was enacted on Sunday, 17 February 2008 by a unanimous vote of the Assembly of Kosovo.
- As of 25 April 2012, the Republic of Kosovo has received 92 diplomatic recognitions as an independent state. Notably, 90 out of 193 (46.6%) United Nations (UN) member states, 22 out of 27 (81%) European Union (EU) member states, 24 out of 28 (86%) NATO member states, and 29 out of 57 (51%) Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states have recognised Kosovo.
- Serbia refuses to recognise it. To date, no country to have recognised Kosovo has withdrawn its recognition, in contrast with other non-UN member states such as Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and the Republic of China. India has consistently refused to recognise the independence of Kosovo.

Some projects of India in Afghanistan

India and Afghanistan signed a historic Agreement on Strategic Partnership during the visit of President Karzai in October 2011; the first such agreement signed by Afghanistan with any country. Some Indian projects in Afghanistan are:

- Construction of a 218 km highway from Zaranj to Delaram for facilitating the movement of goods and services to the Iranian border (the project has been completed and handed over to Government of Afghanistan)

- Construction of 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 kV sub-station at Chimtala to bring power from the northern border countries to Kabul (completed and handed over)
- Reconstruction of Salma Dam powercum-irrigation project in Herat province (ongoing)
- Construction of Afghan Parliament (ongoing)
- Construction of two electric sub-stations in Doshi and Charikar (construction to commence shortly)
- Setting up of five toiletcum-public sanitation complexes in Kabul (completed and handed over)
- Upgradation of telephone exchanges in 11 provinces (completed and handed over)
- Expansion of national TV network by providing an uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all 34 provincial capitals for greater integration of the country (completed and handed over).
- A fresh commitment of US\$ 100 million for the third phase of India's programme of Small Development Projects.
- Donation of 1,000 buses for Kabul and other municipalities with provision for maintenance support, training and infrastructure.
- professional upgradation of the National Malaria and Leishmaniasis Centre of Afghanistan; and the upgradation of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health, including the neo-natal and maternal care unit (The list is not exhaustive)

Tin Bigha, Dahargam, Angorpota

- India facilitated 24-hour unfettered access to Bangladesh nationals through the Tin Bigha Area to Dahagram and Angorpota Enclaves, and permitted duty free import of 46 textile items (subsequently expanded to all items, except 25) in response to the request of Bangladesh.

Some Projects of India in Bhutan

- India continues to be Bhutan's largest trade and development partner. During the India-Bhutan bilateral Trade Talks held in New Delhi in August 2011, India agreed to Bhutan's request for use of Dalu and Ghasupara land custom stations for Bhutanese cargo and notification of four additional entry/exit points. India is providing assistance for the implementation of 68 projects in key socioeconomic sectors, such as agriculture, information and communications technology (ICT), media, health, education, capacity-building, energy, culture and infrastructure.
- Under the Small Development Projects (SDPs), India is providing a grant to Bhutan for implementation of 1,900 projects in the country's 20 districts and 205 blocks. The construction of the Punatsangchhu-I Hydro-Electric Project (HEP) is in full swing and the implementation of Punatsangchhu-II and Mangdechhu HEPs are also progressing well, bringing both countries closer to the target of jointly developing nearly 10,000 MW of hydropower in Bhutan by 2020 for export to India
- Apart from the highly successful and mutually beneficial cooperation in the hydropower sector, the Government of India has committed assistance worth Rs 3,400 crore for Bhutan's 10th Five-Year Plan. This includes project-tied assistance of Rs 2,000 crore for 68 projects in key socio-economic

sectors, such as agriculture, ICT, media, health, education, capacity-building, energy, culture, and infrastructure.

Year of India-China Exchanges

- The year 2010 marked the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China.
- The year 2011 was designated as the Year of India-China Exchanges and it saw increased exchanges between the two countries, particularly at the state/provincial level. The two countries also maintained the momentum of regular high-level political contacts.

India is Nepal's largest assistance provider

- India is Nepal's largest assistance provider in terms of scope and extent of development assistance and the largest source of foreign investment and tourist arrivals. Over 400 projects were completed or are under various stages of implementation in almost all the districts of Nepal.
- India is also assisting Nepal to develop its infrastructure in the border areas adjoining India through the development of integrated check posts, cross-border rail links and feeder and lateral roads in the Terai area of Nepal to facilitate development and connectivity.

On India-ASEAN relations

- India and ASEAN are marking 2012 as a Commemorative Year of 20 years of dialogue relations and 10 years of Summit Partnership. India will be hosting the Commemorative Summit in December 2012 in New Delhi on the theme 'India and ASEAN: Partners in Progress and Prosperity'.
- Economic relations with South East Asian countries represent a major focus of our growing ties. Making the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement fully operational and discussions to include free trade in services and investments to make it a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement are at an advanced stage.
- Apart from the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with ASEAN, India has operationalised bilateral CECA with several ASEAN countries, (the latest being with Malaysia in July 2011) while it is negotiating similar agreements with Indonesia and Thailand.
- Bilateral trade with ASEAN in 2010-11 reached US\$ 57 billion, showing an increase of nearly 30 per cent over the previous year, with India's exports growing by over 50 per cent at over US\$ 27 billion.
- The target set by the Prime Minister for bilateral trade of US\$ 70 billion by 2012 should thus be successfully met. India continued to provide project related developmental assistance to the countries of the ASEAN region in terms of grant-in-aid and line of credit.
- India is also putting up an e-network project for tele-medicine and tele-education for CLMV nations (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) on the lines of the highly successful Pan-Africa e-network project. India continued to extend assistance for human resource development and capacity building programmes through the ITEC programme and the Colombo Plans.

Major Projects supported by Japan

- India sent 46 members NDRF for relief works after March 2011 Tsunami.
- Japanese side renewed its commitment to the implementation of flagship infrastructure projects, namely, the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor project and the Dedicated Freight Corridor West Project and expressed support for the new Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor project.

India's Programmes in Africa

- Following the first India-Africa Forum Summit in 2008, nearly US\$ 6 billion in new funds were committed for economic engagement with Africa, of which a significant proportion was committed to capacity building and human resource development.
- These commitments include the establishment of four Pan-African institutions, viz. India Africa Institute of Foreign Trade, India Africa Diamond Institute, India Africa Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, and India Africa Institute of Information Technology.
- Other institutions to be established are 10 vocational training centres, five human settlement institutes to support low-cost housing technologies and two coal institutions. A large number of scholarships and fellowships were introduced.
- An important aspect of the capacity building programmes is the offer of 300 scholarships in the field of agricultural education and research over four years. One of the most significant contributions that India made was the Pan- African e-Network Project which 47 African countries have agreed to implement.
- The network already covers 42- countries and the remaining are being progressively brought within its scope. This visionary project creates networks among African countries and provides linkages in telemedicine and tele-education with Indian hospitals and universities.
- This project complements the close relationship that India has always had with Africa for human resource development and capacity building.

Addis Ababa Declaration

- In May 2011, the second Africa India Forum Summit (AIFSII) was organised in Addis Ababa. This summit built upon the foundations of the historical relationship that exists between India and Africa, and contributed to the designing of a structure for enhanced engagement between India and its African partners in the 21st century.
- Two documents, the Addis Ababa Declaration and the Africa India Framework for Enhanced Cooperation, adopted at the end of the Summit, will guide our systematic enhanced engagement with Africa in the coming years.
- *The Addis Ababa Declaration is a political document that covers issues of bilateral, regional and international interest to India and Africa, including our common position on UN reforms, climate change, WTO, international terrorism, etc.*

12th India-EU Summit

- The 12th India-EU Summit was held in New Delhi in February 2012. The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, led the Indian side to the Summit while the President of the European Council, Mr Herman Van Rompuy, and the President of the European Commission, Mr Jose Manuel Barroso, represented the European Union.
- *This was the first Summit in India following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty.*

India in UN Committees

- On 1 January, 2011, India started its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. As part of its membership of the Council, India was appointed as chair of two Committees and a Working Group. These were the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Committee concerning Somalia and Eritrea, and the Working Group concerning threat to international peace and security by terrorist acts.

India in UN Counter-Terrorism Committee

- Under India's leadership, the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee adopted an outcome document on 28 September, 2011, that called for 'zero tolerance' of terrorism and of terrorist actions. In view of the serious threat posed to international maritime trade and security by piracy off the coast of Somalia, India stressed the need for concerted international cooperation.
- At India's initiative, the Security Council mandated international cooperation for release of hostages taken by pirates as well as for prosecution of those taking hostages and those aiding and abetting the acts of hostage-taking.
- India also participated actively in the deliberations of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) dealing with coordination of international counter-piracy efforts.

India & UN Peacekeeping Missions

- India maintained its leadership role in UN peacekeeping operations, including through substantial contribution of personnel and force enablers.
- India was the **third largest troop contributor**, with over 8,000 troops deployed across the world in 10 peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Golan Heights, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, East Timor, Haiti, Abyei and South Sudan.
- During its presidency of the Security Council in August 2011, India organised a thematic debate on UN peacekeeping that highlighted the critical importance of consulting troop contributing countries in decisions related to mandates of peacekeeping missions.

More in UN Peace Keeping Missions

Countries contributing uniformed personnel are 117. *Largest Contributor Bangladesh* (10,245) , followed by Pakistan (9,401), Followed by India (8,134). The missions are as follows:

- United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) → In Western Sahara since April 1991
- United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) → In Haiti since June 2004

- United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) → In Democratic Republic of the Congo since July 2010
- African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) → In Darfur since July 2007
- United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) → In Syria since June 1974
- United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) → In Cyprus since March 1964
- United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) → In Lebanon since March 1978
- United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) → In Abyei, Sudan since June 2011
- United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) → In South Sudan since July 2011
- United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) → In Côte d'Ivoire since April 2004
- United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) → In Kosovo since June 1999
- United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) → In Liberia since September 2003
- United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) → In Timor-Leste since August 2006
- United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) → In India and Pakistan since January 1949
- United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) → In Middle East since May 1948

Election of Indian Candidates in various UN Organizations

- India notched significant successes in the elections held in the UN during 2011.
- These included elections for the membership of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In addition, India's candidates were elected to the International Law Commission, the Joint Inspection Unit and were re-elected to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

India and CEPEA

- India has been supportive of a regional architecture which is open, inclusive and transparent and which facilitates further consolidation of effort in the five core areas of cooperation amongst EAS (East Asia Summit) members in the areas of finance, education, energy, disaster management and pandemics as well as the two areas of Connectivity and CEPEA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership for East Asia).

Development Partnership Administration (DPA)

- In January 2012, a Development Partnership Administration (DPA) was set up in the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) with the principal responsibility of ensuring speedy and efficient implementation of India's external economic assistance programme in close cooperation with developing countries for capacity-building.
- The DPA will also be responsible for projects being executed under Indian grant assistance or lines of credit through the stages of concept, launch, execution and completion.

13th amendment

- The Government of Sri Lanka had conveyed its assurance that political proposals building on the 13th Amendment to the Constitution will be discussed with the Tamil leadership.
- The provisions for setting up of a Provincial Council for each Province; establishment of a High Court for each Province; and making Tamil an official language and English the link language was to be achieved via the 13th amendment of the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

- India also consistently advocated the need for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to be resettled in their original habitations as early as possible. In order to assist in this process, India has committed sufficient resources in the areas of housing, agriculture, health, education, culture, etc., in northern Sri Lanka.
- It also includes building 50 Thousand houses for Tamils.

Current Political Situation: Rwanda

- Rwanda's President Paul Kagame is accused by critics of being authoritarian and of trampling on media and political freedoms. However, he has been praised for progress since the 1994 genocide in his bid to transform Rwanda into a middle-income country by 2020. Kagame was re-elected with a landslide in 2010 for a final term that expires in 2017.

Trial of Ingabire in Rwanda

- Victoire Ingabire Umuhuza (born 3 October 1968) is the Chairperson of the Unified Democratic Forces (UDF); a coalition of Rwandan opposition parties with a large base of active members in Rwanda, Europe, United States of America and in Canada. She was a party candidate for Rwanda's August 2010 elections, but was ultimately barred from running.
- She is currently under arrest in Rwanda on charges of terrorism and threatening national security. The trial of Ingabire is a major test of the independence of Rwanda's judiciary. Her British lawyer says the laws under which she is being tried were not enacted when the crimes were alleged to have been committed, or they lie outside the jurisdiction of the court.
- Ingabire denies funding Hutu FDLR rebels based in Democratic Republic of Congo and says her detention is politically motivated. The verdict is due June 29, 2012.

Current Political Situation : Guinea

- In recent times, Guinea is struggling to complete its transition to civilian rule after a December 2008 coup as the final step in the process - parliamentary elections - is repeatedly delayed amid rows between rival political camps.
- The political instability is fuelled by tensions between **President Alpha Conde's** supporters and those of his rivals. The rivals are questioning Conde's will to hold genuinely free elections. Guinea had moved to a civilian rule in late 2010 - after its first free polls since independence from France - was seen as a powerful model for the region after years of military leadership. But the failure to hold

parliamentary polls is both symptom and cause of the political and ethnic tensions simmering in the West African country.

- Some more points:
 - Guinea, which relies on minerals for more than 70 percent of exports, is planning to review all mining contracts to "clean up the business environment" and ensure they comply with a recently revised mining code. It is unclear how the review of existing contracts and the planned revision of the new mining code will go down with investors. RUSAL has already stated existing contracts can not be altered unilaterally.
 - 2, Guinea is world's biggest shipper of bauxite, the feedstock ore for aluminium. RUSAL, with its Friguia complex, has a capacity for 640,000 tonnes of alumina a year which it ships around the world for further refining into aluminium.

Current Political Situation: Gulf of Guinea

- The Gulf of Guinea runs from Guinea on Africa's northwestern tip to Angola in the south and includes Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon.
- Gulf of Guinea is a growing source of oil, cocoa and metals - spans more than a dozen West African countries, many ravaged by civil wars and coups.
- The region faces increasing piracy threats, drug smuggling and political uncertainty. The Gulf of Guinea is the north easternmost part of the tropical Atlantic Ocean between Cape Lopez in Gabon, north and west to Cape Palmas in Liberia.
- The intersection of the Equator and Prime Meridian (zero degrees latitude and longitude) is in the gulf.
- Among the many rivers that drain into the Gulf of Guinea are the Niger and the Volta. The coastline on the gulf includes the Bight of Benin and the Bight of Bonny.



This region is being touted as new energy frontier.

- The nations around Gulf of Guinea produce more than 3 million barrels of oil a day - about 4 percent of global output - mostly for European and American markets, the bulk coming from OPEC member Nigeria (2.2 million bpd). Smaller producers are Equatorial Guinea (200,000 bpd), Congo Republic (340,000 bpd), Gabon (230,000 bpd), Ghana (80,000 bpd), Cameroon (59,000 bpd) and Ivory Coast (40,000 bpd).
- Apart from that, more than three-quarters of the world's cocoa comes from Gulf of Guinea nations, most of that from No. 1 global producer Ivory Coast, the rest from Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and others. Cocoa output from the four producers hit new records in the 2010-11 season of more than 3.2 million tonnes due to ideal weather and improved husbandry techniques, contributing to a slide in global futures prices.

- Gulf of Guinea nations - already home to top bauxite exporter Guinea and major gold producer Ghana - have attracted billions of dollars of investment from resource firms eager to dig up its vast unexploited iron ore reserves. The region could eventually produce nearly 10 percent of the world's iron ore, up from less than 1 percent last year, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.
- Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is not on the scale of that off Somalia, but analysts say an increase in scope and number of attacks in a region ill-equipped to counter the threat could affect shipping and investment. Benin in particular is seeing an increase in activity off its coast. The U.N. Security Council has said it is concerned about the increase in piracy, maritime armed robbery and reports of hostage-taking in the Gulf of Guinea and its damaging impact on security, trade and economic activity. West African drug trafficking is also having an impact on the region's economies. The United Nations estimates that \$1 billion worth of cocaine, destined for Europe from Latin America, passed through West Africa in 2008. Guinea Bissau, which has become West Africa's main cocaine transit point due to its weak government, is facing considerable risks following a coup in April. (Inputs : © Thomson Reuters 2012)

Kenya: ICC prosecution of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto

- Kenya is the biggest economy of East Africa. At present, the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) is considering an appeal by four Kenyan suspects, among them Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, former ministers, who are challenging for the presidency in elections due by March 2013. At least 1,220 people were killed and more than 300,000 were driven from their homes in the worst inter-community fighting in Kenya's history, which followed a contentious election in 2007. The bloodshed is at the heart of the ICC charges against Kenyatta and three other prominent leaders.
- The four suspects' only hope to avoid trial is if the ICC grants their appeal, which seeks to bar the war crimes court from prosecuting their cases on the grounds that it has no jurisdiction. Kenya has failed in two previous attempts to have the ICC disqualify itself from hearing the cases. The charges on these two ministers is of directing the mobs to commit violence that sent Kenya to the brink of civil war. The government at Kenya says that it will cooperate with the ICC, and the suspects have also said they will comply with the court.
- Out of the four convicts, two viz. Kenyatta and Ruto have joined forces against Prime Minister Raila Odinga, who leads opinion polls in the presidential race, followed by Kenyatta.

Current Political Situation: Zimbabwe

- The president of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe is now 88 years old and the natural fall out of this aging leader's obstinancy seems to be a war of succession within its ZANU-PF party as potential successors mobilise grassroots support. ZANU-PF officials fear that, if Mugabe dies in office without settling the succession battle, the party could implode and destabilise the country.
- Mugabe has been for 32 years in power, despite his advanced age, he says that he will contest another election to advance his black economic empowerment policies. However, other leaders of his party say that Mugabe is a liability and should hand over power to a younger leader. Critics say

years of his mismanagement have turned a once-promising economy into a basket case with 80 percent unemployment.

Elections in Egypt 2012

- In May 2012, the Egyptians get their first chance to choose their leader and 13 candidates ranging from Islamists to hardline leftists and former ministers of deposed leader Hosni Mubarak are competing for their votes.
- The elections on May 23-24 will be Egypt's first democratic election to choose a new president after Hosni Mubarak was swept from office last year in a popular uprising. The presidential elections are the last step before the ruling generals, who took charge after Mubarak was ousted, hand power by July 1 to the new president.
- Egypt has already held a parliamentary vote in which Islamists swept a majority of seats. Yet, even with these elected institutions in place, analysts say the army will hold a big sway over Egypt's politics for years, long after the formal power transfer.
- None of the 13 presidential candidates is expected to win outright in the first round of the presidential vote, setting the stage for a second round run-off in June. Former Arab League chief Amr Moussa and Islamist candidate Abdel Moneim Abol Fotouh are viewed as the two front-runners.
- The Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Mursi has trailed in polls, but could still prove a serious challenger with the Islamist group's network of supporters behind him. Abol Fotouh emerged as the leading Islamist candidate after ultra-conservative Salafis backed him.

Some prominent candidates are as follows:

Amr Mousa:

- The 75-year-old who was once Mubarak's foreign minister has positioned himself between the old regime and the new order, touting his government experience while seeking to show how he often defied his former boss.
- His years heading the Arab League support his pitch as the only experienced statesman among the front runners, but opinion polls that put him in the lead also suggest a swathe of voters are still undecided. Islamists paint Moussa as a cigar-smoking bon vivant whose wealth renders him out of touch with the people.
- Moussa casts himself as a liberal nationalist best able to revive a moribund economy and cut poverty, dismissing his Islamist rivals as religious ideologues.

ABDEL MONEIM ABOL FOTOUH

- A figure long-respected for his defiance of authority during decades of autocratic rule, Abol Fotouh, 60, was ejected from the Muslim Brotherhood last year for running for president against its wishes. He may benefit from any popular disaffection with the Brotherhood, which has struggled to influence government policy despite dominating parliament and faced criticism for reneging on a pledge not to seek the country's highest office.

- But some people are puzzled at what Abol Fotouh stands for after he tried to lure the moderate vote with a defence of civil freedoms but then won the backing of Salafi leaders, whose strict Islamic views are anathema to liberals.

MOHAMED MURSI

- Pushed to the front of the race by the disqualification of the Brotherhood's first choice for presidential candidate, Mursi is struggling to dispel a reputation as the movement's uncharismatic Plan B.
- The 60-year-old engineer has positioned himself as a staunch Brotherhood loyalist and struck a conservative tone at campaign rallies in an apparent attempt to discredit rival Islamist contender Abdel Moneim Abol Fotouh, who was ejected from the influential movement last year.
- Mursi suffered a blow when ultraconservative Salafi leaders said they would back Abol Fotouh, but swathes of Mursi banners unfurled over roads and buildings across Egypt show a Brotherhood campaign in full swing and a late surge by Mursi would come as no surprise.

United States: Some military robot systems in development

CARGO UNMANNED GROUND VEHICLE (Cargo UGV)

- Cargo UGV would enable a single driver to control several trucks at the same time, reducing the number of people in jeopardy on roads in a war zone. It uses a broad range of high-tech sensors to give the vehicle's computer a picture of the world around it.
- The chief sensor is a three-dimensional LIDAR, or light detection and ranging system, a technology similar to radar that lets the system develop a picture of the world around it. A global positioning system coupled with detailed maps of the route helps the system navigate and keep itself on the road.

SQUAD MISSION SUPPORT SYSTEM (SMSS)

- Squad Mission Support System (SMSS) is currently being tested with troops in Afghanistan. Lockheed Martin touts this 2200 kg system as the largest autonomous ground vehicle ever deployed with the infantry.
- The mission of the SMSS is to carry the gear of foot soldiers who often find themselves toting packs weighing 100 pounds (45 kg) or more, which contributes to high levels of back injury. It can carry some 1,200 pounds (544 kg) of gear.
- It can be driven, or allowed to drive by itself using points on an electronic map, or even programmed to follow behind a soldier at a fixed distance, regardless of whether the person is walking or running. Four SMSS vehicles were deployed to Afghanistan at the end of 2011 and arrived at a forward operating base in January.

LEGGED SQUAD SUPPORT SYSTEM (LS3) also known as Alpha Dog

- The LS3 is a robot being developed by Boston Dynamics. In addition to navigating its environment, the Legged Squad Support System, or LS3, must be able to maintain its balance on four limbs while

carrying a load. Like the SMSS, the LS3 - dubbed the Alpha Dog - is designed to carry gear for a squad of ground troops.

IMF funding of USD 430 Billion

Recently, the International Monetary Fund has secured public commitments of over \$430 billion in funding to help the IMF safeguard economies from the debt crisis in Europe. IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde said she had firm commitments from large emerging economies China, Russia, India and Brazil to contribute money. They will announce the exact sums of money at a G20 leaders' summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, in June. Russia has already said it will commit \$10 billion. The commitments made are as follows:

- Euro zone 150 billion euros (about \$200 billion)
- Japan - \$60 billion
- Saudi Arabia - \$15 billion
- Sweden - \$10 billion to be increased to \$14.7 billion
- Norway - \$9.3 billion
- Poland - \$8 billion
- Denmark - \$5.3 billion euros (about \$7 billion)
- Switzerland - \$10 billion
- South Korea - \$15 billion
- Britain - \$15 billion
- Australia - \$7 billion
- Singapore - \$4 billion
- Czech Republic - 1.5 billion euros (about \$2 billion)

The conflict over Heglig oilfield: Sudan and South Sudan

- Recently, the clashes over a disputed oil-producing border region edged South Sudan and Sudan ever closer to full-blown war.
- The region is Heglig oilfield, both the sides have been trading claims and counterclaims over the Heglig oil field and it was bombed and damaged during fighting in May 2012. Heglig produced about half of Sudan's 115,000 barrel-per-day (bpd) output.
- The fighting has been fuelled by quarrels between the two countries over issues including the exact position of their shared border, control of disputed areas, the status of citizens in one another's territories and oil payments.
- Sudan lost three quarters of its oil output when South Sudan seceded in July 2011. The former civil war foes have since wrangled over how much the landlocked new nation should pay to export crude via the north to a Red Sea terminal at Port Sudan. In January 2012, South Sudan shut down its entire output of 350,000 bpd to stop Khartoum from taking oil to make up for what it calls unpaid fees for transit and use of its facilities.

Some points on Heglig Oil Field:

- Heglig is a large oilfield controlled by Sudan until it was seized by South Sudan recently. For Sudan, the Heglig was very important economically as the country has been already reeling from the loss of oil revenues after the South split off.
- Production at Heglig - known as the Greater Nile Oil Project - began in 1996 with the development of the Heglig and Unity fields, which are now the largest in the area. The oilfields within the blocks straddle both countries.
- While the Unity field is fully located in the South, parts of the border area around the Heglig field in Block 2 are still in dispute. To back its claim to the field, Khartoum has cited a 2009 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague that said Heglig was not part of the disputed Abyei territory.

Shale Gas: Some important bits on environmental issues on its extraction

- The development of shale gas extraction could change world energy markets, offering potentially ample supplies that would otherwise tighten in coming years. But shale gas extraction requires large amounts of water and chemicals, and environmental concerns have led some governments to ban its use or put moratoriums in place.
- World's biggest three reserves of Shale Gas are in China, US and Argentina.
- The Argentina Government has launched its Gas Plus programme, which promises to give a price guarantee for newly discovered gas.
- Australia has 396 tcf of technically recoverable shale gas resources, equivalent to about 46 percent of U.S. reserves. Due to environmental fears, Australia has put moratorium on shale gas extraction in eastern New South Wales State.
- In January 2012, China has approved the legal status of Shale Gas as an independent mining resource, this status may allow more Chinese firms to develop the unconventional energy source.
- France Government has banned the use of hydraulic fracturing last year in the face of concerns about potential environmental damage.
- In United States, Shale gas drilling in the United States is mostly regulated on a state-by-state basis. The Environmental Protection Agency is currently studying fracking and its impact on drinking water, with a preliminary report expected this year. The final analysis will be released in 2014.
- In India, a survey by a global oilfield services company named Schlumberger had revealed the total Shale Gas deposits in India are approximately between 300-2100 Trillion Cubic Feet, which can be 300 times than that in KG D6. As per this report, Shale Gas is in abundance in India and Gangetic Plain, Assam as well as Gujarat are its richest sources.

Abu Qatada

- Abu Katada is a Jordanian citizen, known for his alleged links with terrorism, imprisonment without trial in Britain. He is a Palestinian Muslim of Jordanian citizenship. He is under worldwide embargo by the United Nations Security Council Committee 1267 for his alleged affiliation with al-Qaeda.

- Repeatedly imprisoned in Britain since he was first detained under anti-terrorism laws in 2002, he has not been prosecuted there for any criminal or conspiracy offences. He was recently making news for his winning the long legal appeal against being deported to his native Jordan to face prosecution on charges of terrorism after the European court of human rights ruled that if he was sent back he was likely to be tortured on the basis of evidence obtained under torture.
- The Algerian government has described Abu Qatada as being involved with Islamists in London and possibly elsewhere. After initially barring the United Kingdom from deporting Qatada to Jordan, in May 2012 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that he could be deported on the basis of assurances from Jordan that he will not be tortured.

Some comparisons of Fukushima Daiichi and Chernobyl nuclear accidents

- Fukushima Daiichi occurred on March 11, 2011, Chernobyl occurred on April 26, 1986
- Before accident, Fukushima had operated for 40 years, Chernobyl had operated for merely 9 years.
- The output of Fukushima was 4.7GW, the output of Chernobyl was 4 GW
- Type of reactor at Fukushima was Boiling water with containment vessel, Type of Reactor at Chernobyl was Graphite moderated without containment
- At the time of accident, Fukushima had 1600 tons nuclear fuel, while Chernobyl had 180 tons.
- Cause of accident at Fukushima was Loss of cooling system due to tsunami destroying power lines and backup generators, leading to meltdown, Cause of accident at Chernobyl was Faulty design leading to instability at low power (positive void coefficient), leading to prompt criticality and steam explosion during a safety test.
- At Fukushima, cold shutdown was declared on 16 December 2011, but decommissioning will take 30-40 years. At Chernobyl, All reactors were shut down by 2000. The damaged reactor is encased in concrete. A New Safe Confinement structure is expected to be completed in 2015.

Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner of Austria

- Gerlinde kaltenbrunner of Austria became the first woman in the world to climb all fourteen 8000m peaks without the use of supplementary oxygen after she reached the summit of the 8611 meters world's 2nd highest peak K2.

ChREBP Gene

- Scientists have identified a gene in body's fat cells, which they claim could protect one against diabetes, a finding that independent experts say may pave the way for effective treatments for the ailment. In fact, a team, led by Harvard Medical School in the US, has found that contrary to popular perception, body fat can actually be of benefit, boosting body's ability to regulate blood sugar.
- *In their research, the scientists found that the gene — called ChREBP — resists type 2 diabetes by converting glucose sugar into fatty acids and boosting sensitivity to insulin, which regulates the blood sugar, the 'Daily Express' reported. Type 2 diabetes normally develops during middle age from obesity or an unhealthy lifestyle. "The general concept that all fat is bad is not true. (© PTI/TOI)*

Encyclopaedia Britannica signs off print media

- In yet another sign of the growing dominance of the digital publishing market, the oldest English-language encyclopaedia still in print is moving solely into the digital age. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, which has been in continuous print since it was first published in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1768, said on Wednesday it will end publication of its printed editions and continue with digital versions available online.
- The flagship, 32-volume printed edition, available every two years, was sold for \$1400. An online subscription costs around \$70 per year and the company recently launched a set of apps ranging between \$1.99 and \$4.99 per month

100th anniversary of Charles Addams

- January 7 marked 100th birth anniversary of Charles Addams. Charles Addams (January 7, 1912 – September 29, 1988) was an American cartoonist known for his darkly humorous and macabre characters.
- Some of the recurring characters, who became known as the Addams Family, became the basis for two live-action television series, two animated TV series, three motion pictures and a Broadway musical. (Google Doodle 2012)

Nicolas Steno's 374th Birthday: January 1, 2012

- Nicolas Steno was pioneer in both anatomy and geology. He gave the idea that fossils grew in the ground and explanations of rock formation.
- His investigations and his subsequent conclusions on fossils and rock formation have led scholars to consider him one of the founders of modern stratigraphy and modern geology. (Google Doodle 2012)

Taiwan Election 2012

The election for the 13th-term President and Vice-President of the Republic of China was held in the Free Area of the Republic of China (ROC) on 14 January 2012. Incumbent Ma Ying-jeou was re-elected as President with 51.6% of the vote. DPP challenger Tsai Ing-wen resigned her post as chairperson of the DPP following her election defeat.

In just-concluded elections in Taiwan, incumbent president Ma Ying-jeou triumphed with 51.5% of votes cast – while his party, the Kuomintang, also won a majority in simultaneous legislative polls.

- The most significant legacy of Ma's first term is his China policy. Ma effected a reconciliation with China, ending a ban on air, sea and postal links that had been in place since Taiwan's foundation.
- He also signed a quasi-free trade deal with China. The results have been dramatic. Currently there are 550 flights weekly connecting Taiwan and the mainland, while 1.3 million Chinese tourists poured into Taiwan in 2010.
- Trade between Taiwan and China has shot up to \$150 billion.
- Ma was born in Hong Kong on July 13, 1950, to parents from Hunan province in central China. He grew up in Taipei and studied there before getting degrees at New York University and Harvard University Law School.

- After a brief stint on Wall Street, Ma rose quickly through the ranks of the Nationalist Party (KMT), which once ruled all of China before losing to Mao Zedong's Communists in the Chinese civil war and fleeing to Taiwan in 1949.
- In 1998, Ma was elected Taipei mayor, unseating the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)'s Chen Shui-bian, who later served two terms as president from 2000-2008. Re-elected mayor in 2002, Ma became KMT vice-chairman in 2003 and chairman in 2005.
- In August 2007, Ma was cleared of corruption charges filed against him, a case which prompted his resignation as party chairman. Prosecutors accused Ma of misusing T\$11 million (US\$342,000) in government funds while Taipei mayor.
- Following Chen, an anti-China firebrand who repeatedly angered Beijing with pro-independence rhetoric, Ma has forged closer trade ties with the island's giant neighbor, which has claimed Taiwan as its territory since 1949.
- Ma faced his biggest crisis as president after a typhoon in August triggered the worst storm in 50 years and killed more than 700 people, unleashing a wave of public protest and forcing Ma to reshuffle his cabinet in September.
- Ma took back the KMT party chairman's job on October 17, fuelling speculation he may meet Chinese leaders in his less formal KMT capacity rather than as president. (Source: Reuters, Ma Ying-jeou's Web Site, Times of India)

Havoc in Heaven

- Havoc in Heaven was a Chinese animated feature film directed by Wan Laiming and produced by all four of the Wan brothers, at the height of the Chinese animation industry in the 1960s, and received numerous awards.
- It earned the brothers domestic and international recognition. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Omar Rayo

- Omar Rayo was a Colombian painter, sculptor, caricaturist and plastic artist. Rayo worked with abstract geometry primarily employing black, white and red.
- He was part of the Op Art movement. Rayo's work shows that geometric art is as much a part of the past as it is of the future. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Federico Fellini

- Federico Fellini was an Italian film director and scriptwriter. Known for a distinct style that blends fantasy and baroque images, he is considered one of the most influential filmmakers of the 20th century, and is widely revered.
- He won five Academy Awards and was nominated for 12 in a career that spanned over forty years. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Vladimir Semyonovich Vysotsky

- Vladimir Semyonovich Vysotsky (25 January 1938 – 25 July 1980) was a Soviet singer, songwriter, poet, and actor whose career had an immense and enduring effect on Russian culture.

- He became widely known for his unique singing style and for his lyrics, which featured social and political commentary in often humorous street jargon. He was also a prominent stage and screen actor. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Iguazu Falls

- Iguazu Falls are waterfalls of the Iguazu River located on the border of the Brazilian State of Paraná and the Argentine Province of Misiones.
- The falls divide the river into the upper and lower Iguazu. The Iguazu River flows through Brazil for most of its course.
- *Below its confluence with the San Antonio River, the Iguazu River forms the boundary between Brazil and Argentina.* The first European to find the falls was the Spanish conquistador Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in 1541. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Lantern Festival

- The Lantern Festival (also known as the Yuanxiao Festival or Shangyuan Festival in China; Chap Goh Meh Festival in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore; Yuen Siu Festival in Hong Kong, and "Tết Thượng Nguyên" or "Tết Nguyên Tiêu" in Vietnam); is a festival celebrated on the fifteenth day of the first month in the lunisolar year in the Chinese calendar, the last day of the lunisolar Chinese New Year celebration. It is not to be confused with the Mid-Autumn Festival, which is sometimes also known as the "Lantern Festival" in locations such as Singapore and Malaysia. During the Lantern Festival, children go out at night to temples carrying paper lanterns and solve riddles on the lanterns. It officially ends the Chinese New Year celebrations. (From Google Doodles 2012)

May Ziade

- May Ziade (February 11, 1886.[1][2] – 1941), was a Lebanese-Palestinian poet, essayist and translator. A writer for the Arabic newspapers and periodicals, Ziade also wrote a number of poems and books.
- She was a key figure of the Nahda in the early 20th century Arab literary scene, and is known for being an "early Palestinian feminist" and a "pioneer of Oriental feminism. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Mies van der Rohe

- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (March 27, 1886, Aachen – August 17, 1969, Chicago) was a German-American architect. Along with Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, he is widely regarded as one of the pioneering masters of modern architecture.
- He strived towards an architecture with a minimal framework of structural order balanced against the implied freedom of free-flowing open space. He called his buildings "skin and bones" architecture. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Songkran Festival

Songkran is a term derived from the Sanskrit saṅkrānti (or, more specifically, meṣa saṅkrānti). It may refer to the traditional New Year celebrated in several Southeast Asian countries:

- Cambodian New Year
- Lao New Year
- Songkran (Thailand)
- Thingyan, in Myanmar

It can also refer to the traditional New Year celebrated by the Dai people of Yunnan, China, and by the Tai Dam people of Northern Vietnam. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Gideon Sundback

- Gideon Sundback (April 24, 1880 – June 21, 1954) was a Swedish-American electrical engineer. Gideon Sundback is most commonly associated with his work in the development of the zipper. (From Google Doodles 2012)

Koninginnedag

- Koninginnedag or Queen's Day is a national holiday in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Celebrated generally on 30 April, Koninginnedag is Queen Beatrix's official celebration day. Though Queen Beatrix was born on 31 January, the holiday is observed on 30 April as it was the birthday of her mother and predecessor, Juliana.

French Election 2012

A presidential election was held in France on 22 April 2012 (or 21 April in some overseas departments and territories), with a second round run-off held on 6 May (or 5 May for those same territories) to elect the President of France (who is also ex officio one of the two joint heads of state of Andorra, a sovereign state). The incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy was running for a second successive and, under the terms of the constitution, final term in the election. François Hollande received 51.62% of the votes, while Nicholas Sarkozy got 48.38% of the votes in the second round. Sarkozy became the first one-term president since Valéry Giscard d'Estaing lost to François Mitterrand in 1981. The presidential election will be followed by a legislative election in June.

Greek Elections 2012

A legislative election was a general election held on 6 May, 2012 in Greece to elect all 300 members to the legislature. Under the constitution, it was due to be held in late 2013, four years after the previous election; however, early elections were agreed under the November 2011 agreement to form a coalition government, formed with a remit to ratify and implement decisions taken with other Eurozone countries and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) a month earlier.

Top 3 parties are as follows:

- New Democracy (ND) → Led by : Antonis Samaras
- Coalition of the Radical Left – Unitary Social Movement (SYRIZA) → Led by : Alexis Tsipras
- Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) → Led By: Evangelos Venizelos

Mahmoud Mokhtar

- Mahmoud Mokhtar (May 10, 1891 - March 28, 1934) was an Egyptian sculptor. Despite his early death, his impact on contemporary Egyptian art has been colossal. He is considered the father of modern Egyptian sculpture.