

1. New Telecom Policy seeks to abolish roaming charges

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Telecom Policy (NTP) 2012. Originally intended to be NTP 2011, the draft policy was released for public comments only in October 2011, forcing it to be rechristened NTP 2012. The actual timelines for the implementation of individual announcements within the new telecom policy are yet to be spelled out. With the new policy in place, consumers who use national roaming can now expect to pay local call charges though it is unclear when 'free roaming' will be initiated. At present, consumers pay local call charges and a premium when travelling outside their service area. The NTP 2012 expects to take India's presently 39% rural teledensity to 70% in the next 5 years with the target that every single Indian will have a phone by 2020. The policy also gets a formal approval on the new unified licensing regime which allows companies to provide ISP, fixed line, international long distance, national long distance, and a few other services through a single licence, whose cost has been proposed by the DoT at Rs. 10 crore. Director-General of telecom industry body COAI Rajan Mathews told that there was concern among existing players over the commercial, technical, legal and security aspects of migration to the unified licence.

2. PM forms panel to revisit PSCs in hydrocarbon exploration

With the aim of reviewing its system of awarding concessions for oil and gas exploration and production, being followed since the last 15 years under the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), Government has decided to constitute a six-member panel led by Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (PMEAC) Chairman C Rangarajan. The panel has been formed at the request of the Petroleum Ministry, which felt the need for doing so as it wanted to look into how the policy design has impacted oil and gas exploration and production. Subsequently Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has approved the constitution of the committee to review the Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) in Hydrocarbon exploration. Other members of the panel are Planning Commission member B K Chaturvedi, former Supreme Court judge Jagannadha Rao, Ramprasad Sengupta, former bureaucrat J M Mauskar, and Managing Director of ONGC Videsh Ltd Joeman Thomas.

3. Kudankulam trial run to begin on June 10

The much-awaited power generation from the Rs.14,000-crore Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant is likely to begin in June. The trial run of the first unit (1,000 MW), after loading the reactor with fuel (enriched uranium), will begin on June 10.

4. India, Pakistan plan homes for prisoners

India and Pakistan are planning to set up homes for prisoners on either side of the international borders to house those who have completed their jail term but were yet to be repatriated. They will be run by non-governmental organisations. Home Secretary R.K. Singh, who headed the Indian delegation at the second round of Home/Interior Secretary-level bilateral dialogue in Islamabad, said this issue was discussed at the meeting and it was decided to rope in NGOs to carry out this job. The two sides also reached an agreement on the release of fishermen who have completed their sentences, along with their boats, while an agreement has also been reached on transfer of prisoners. Significantly, in March, the Supreme Court asked the Centre to ensure that Pakistani nationals languishing in jails even after completing their sentences were not deprived of their dignity and rights.

5. Gates praises India's success in polio eradication

India's success in polio eradication has infused positive energy into the global campaign against the disease, Bill Gates, founder-chairperson of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, said. He expressed the hope that Asia would be polio-free, with Pakistan and Afghanistan making efforts to eradicate the disease. After successfully completing the AVAHAN Project on HIV/AIDS, the Foundation was concentrating on vaccinating children against such infectious diseases as diarrhoea, pneumonia, polio and malaria. It was collaborating with Indian pharmaceutical companies and the government on new drugs for these diseases. Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare Ghulam Nabi Azad and Bill Gates discussed issues relating to the immunisation programme, pentavalent vaccine, HIV/AIDS and infectious and non-communicable diseases. Mr. Gates was particularly appreciative of India's achievement in containing AIDS, polio management, reproductive health initiatives, and also the recent steps for tuberculosis management.

6. Disabled Rights Group quits civil aviation panel

The Disabled Rights Group disassociated itself from the Civil Aviation Ministry's committee that is looking into the problems faced by the differently-abled or persons with reduced mobility, saying it did not agree with the process the panel was following. The committee was set up to review guidelines for differently-abled flyers and offer suggestions for improving facilities to make their travel convenient. The DRG said the Ministry failed to take action against the erring airline operators which are also part of the panel that had violated guidelines repeatedly.

7. His ultimate dream – low-cost toilets

Microsoft founder Bill Gates' "ultimate dream" is low-cost toilets. And to achieve this, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will host the world's best scientists and engineers in Seattle in the United States in August to design cheap, dry toilets. This public health innovation is his "ultimate dream" though it is "not the only one." "The ultimate dream is that of a toilet design," Mr. Gates said. In India alone, 46.9 per cent of the total 246.6 million households have toilets at home. Of the rest, 3.2 per cent use public toilets. If that was less, 49.8 per cent use open space for defecation.

8. Jarawa region to have buffer zone

After two British newspapers released a controversial video film showing scantily clad Jarawa tribal women dancing for tourists in return for food and money, the government finally acted. The Union Cabinet approved the promulgation of a law that brings into effect a buffer zone in the 5 km radius around the Jarawa tribal settlements in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and provides for imprisonment up to seven years for those violating government norms for this area. Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal tribes) Amendment Regulation 2012 has been taken under Article 240 of the Constitution, which empowers the President to take such measures in case of Union Territories. This regulation will cover the entire Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Tourist establishments will be prohibited and other commercial establishments will be regulated in the buffer zone, which will protect the aboriginal tribes from undesirable outside influences. The law provides for tough penal provisions to deter unauthorised entry, photography, videography, hunting, use of alcohol, inflammable material or biological germs, or even advertisements to attract tourists in the buffer zone. Any violation can attract a prison sentence of three to seven years and a fine up to Rs. 10,000.

9. Effort to stem Somalia's 'descent into chaos'

Somalia needs a global reconstruction effort to back up ongoing stabilisation efforts and stop the Horn of Africa's 20-year descent into chaos. Representatives from 54 countries gathered in Istanbul in Turkey to find a path towards a better future for the country for which the term "failed state" was coined two decades ago. The capital Mogadishu where pro-government forces have largely driven out Islamist insurgents was now open for business, he said as he called for a broad international reconstruction effort. The conference will turn its attention to the political dimension of aid to Somalia, with the participation of U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon, Somali President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as British Foreign Secretary William Hague. One major objective of the conference will be to outline the future of Somalia by setting goals for 2015.

10. Putin meets chess king Anand

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has met with world chess champion Viswanathan Anand and runner-up Boris Gelfand over a cup of tea in his residence. Mr. Putin lauded both players for "an outstanding game". Mr. Anand beat Mr. Gelfand of Israel 2.5-1.5 in the rapid tiebreaker that followed a 6-6 draw played at the Tretyakov Gallery, one of Russia's finest museums. Mr. Gelfand, who was born in the Soviet Union and emigrated from Belarus to Israel in 1998, was cheered throughout the match as if he were a home player.

11. Zuckerberg out of top 40 rich list

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has fallen out of the billionaire big-league less than two weeks after taking the social network public. The 28-year-old has seen more than \$4 billion wiped off his fortune since the company went public, dropping him off the list of the top 40 billionaires measured by Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

12. US warns of non-UN action on Syria

The US envoy to the United Nations has warned that UN Security Council members may have to act alone to end the violence in Syria if the crisis worsens and the Council remains divided. US Ambassador Susan Rice's remarks marked a rhetorical escalation after a massacre blamed on a militia loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad dealt a major blow to an already fragile UN peace plan. Rice said if the Syrian government did not adhere to special envoy Kofi Annan's plan, then the UN Security Council had to "assume its responsibilities" and step up pressure on Damascus.

13. Ex-Liberia dictator gets 50 years' jail for war crimes

Judges at an international war crimes court sentenced former Liberian President Charles Taylor to 50 years in prison, saying he was responsible for "some of the most heinous and brutal crimes recorded in human history". The 64-year-old warlord turned-president is the first former head of state convicted by an international war crimes court since World War II and judges said they had no precedent when deciding his sentence. Taylor will serve his sentence in a British jail. His lawyers, however, are expected to appeal his convictions and that will likely keep him in a jail in The Hague, Netherlands, for months.

14. Dragon leaves space station for journey home

The privately funded SpaceX Dragon capsule left the International Space Station and aimed for a Pacific splashdown to end its historic flight. Astronauts set the world's first commercial supply ship loose after a five-day visit, releasing the vessel with the space station's robot arm. The Dragon slowly backed away from the 400-km-high outpost, on track for a midday return to Earth. The targeted splashdown zone is 900 km west of Baja California, Mexico. SpaceX became the first private company to send a cargo ship to the International Space Station. And it was on the verge of becoming the only supplier to return major items. The capsule was set to parachute down in the style of NASA's old Mercury, Gemini and Apollo spacecraft. A Dragon has returned from orbit once before, on a solo mission in December 2010. SpaceX's billionaire founder, Elon Musk of PayPal fame, expects to have astronauts riding his Dragons in three or four years.

15. India, Bahrain sign pact to boost ties

India and Bahrain, announced the signing of a Tax Information Exchange Agreement to promote economic cooperation and joint investment between the two countries aimed at boosting bilateral trade that stands at \$1.7 billion. The agreement was signed by the Bahrain delegation led by Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, the Crown Prince of Bahrain and chairman of the Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB) and representatives from Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). The formation of the India-Bahrain Business Council, with the objective of developing economic, trade and technical relations between India and Bahrain, was also announced. An MoU between Bahrain and India to undertake a sustained effort to boost joint ventures and initiatives in ICT, including measures on e-commerce, e-government and information security was also signed.

16. Shell, RPower and KSPL in tie up for floating LNG terminal

Royal Dutch Shell, Reliance Power and Kakinada Sea Ports Limited (KSPL) have joined hands to set up a 5 million-tonne per annum floating liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminal off the coast of Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh by 2014. GAIL (India) has already roped in French utility GDF Suez and signed a pact with the Andhra Pradesh Government for a 3.5 million-tonne floating LNG receipt facility at the same port. "After the success of Shell's Hazira terminal in Gujarat, Shell is keen to set up an LNG receiving terminal in Andhra Pradesh," Royal Dutch Shell's Global Head of LNG. At present, GAIL is doing a detailed feasibility report for

the floating import facility. Petronet LNG Ltd., the largest importer of LNG, too, is building a 5 million-tonne facility at Gangavaram in Andhra Pradesh. Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), too, is doing a front-end engineering and design (FEED) study for a terminal at Ennore in Tamil Nadu.

17. Samsung eyes 60% share with Galaxy S III

Samsung said it is aiming for 60% market share in Indian smartphone market by the end of this year. Ranjit Yadav, head of Samsung's mobile & IT business in India, said that the company's flagship smartphone Galaxy S III, would help it widen the lead over competitors. Galaxy S III runs on Android operating software and is a direct competitor to iPhone 4S in India. Both Apple and Samsung are engaged in a fierce fight to carve out a lion's share in the fast-growing smartphone market.

18. Pawan Hans plans to connect NCR townships

Pawan Hans Helicopter Limited (PHHL) has drawn up plans to connect Delhi with neighbouring cities such as Agra, Mathura and Vrindavan through chopper services to tap the huge tourism and medical potential in the National Capital Region (NCR). PHHL is planning to provide seamless air connectivity between Delhi and neighbouring towns, not only to promote tourism, but also facilitate carriage of critical patients to multi-speciality hospitals in the New Delhi.

19. Rodgers new Liverpool manager

Liverpool has signed ex-Swansea boss Brendan Rodgers as the club's new manager after he agreed to a three-year deal with the Merseyside club.

20. New Zealand reach Sultan Azlan Shah final

New Zealand booked their first ever appearance in the final of the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup with a crushing 4-1 win over hosts Malaysia, while India defeated rivals Pakistan 2-1.