

National Current Affairs

Parliament passes NABARD (Amendment) Bill, 2017

Parliament has passed the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Amendment) Bill, 2017 with the approval of Rajya Sabha. Lok Sabha already had passed the bill in August 2017. The Bill seeks to amend National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Act, 1981.

- The Act establishes NABARD for providing and regulating facilities like credit for agricultural and industrial development in the rural areas.
- The Bill allows Union Government to increase capital of NABARD from Rs. 5000 crore to Rs 30,000 crore.
- Further, it allows Union Government to increase the capital more than Rs 30,000 crore in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), if necessary.
- The Bill provides that Union Government alone must hold at least 51% capital share of NABARD.
- Further, it transfers share capital held by RBI valued at Rs. 20 crore to Union Government.
- Currently RBI holds 0.4% of paid-up capital of NABARD and remaining 99.6% is held by Union government and this causes conflict in RBI's role as banking regulator and shareholder in NABARD.
- The Bill replaces terms 'small-scale industry' and 'industry in tiny and decentralised sector' with terms 'micro enterprise', 'small enterprise' and 'medium enterprise' as defined in MSME Development Act, 2006.
- Further, it allows NABARD to provide financial assistance to banks if they provide loans to the MSMEs.
- The Bill substitutes references to provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 with references to the Companies Act, 2013.
- It includes provisions dealing with definition of a government company and qualifications of auditors.

Government launches NARI portal and e-Samvad portal

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) has launched online portal NARI (nari.nic.in) for the empowerment of women. It has been developed by the Ministry to provide easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women.

- The NARI portal will provide information to women on issues affecting their lives.

- The portal summarise over 350 government schemes and other important information. The schemes are divided into 7 different categories — health, education, housing and shelter, employment, addressing violence, decision making and social support.
- It elaborates how Government is focussed to economically empower women through schemes under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- It will also provide tips on good nutrition, suggestions for health check-ups, information on major diseases, tips for investment and savings advice, job search and interview, information on crimes and against women and reporting procedures, contacts of legal aid cells, simplified adoption procedures and much more.
- It will endow women with power of information to build their life skills and facilitates them in taking full advantage of services provided by Government for them. It also provides link to Ministries, Departments and autonomous bodies offering these schemes as well as easy access to online applications and grievance redressal.

Parliament passes Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Amendment Bill, 2017

Parliament has passed Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2017 after it was passed by both the houses.

- The Bill amends Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016, and replaces Ordinance promulgated in November 2017 to pave way for tightening loopholes in existing code and make resolution process more effective.
- The bill redefines resolution applicant mentioned in code as person who submits resolution plan after receiving invite by insolvency professional to do so.
- It amends provision related to eligibility in IBC to state that insolvency professional will only invite those resolution applicants to submit plan, who fulfil certain criteria laid down by him with approval of committee of creditors and other conditions which may be specified by Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board.
- It prohibits certain persons from submitting resolution plan in case of defaults. These include: (i) wilful defaulters, (ii) promoters or management of the company if it has outstanding non-performing debt for over year and (iii) disqualified directors, among others.
- The bill bars the sale of property of a defaulter to such persons who is ineligible to be a resolution applicant during liquidation.
- It inserts provision to specify that person contravening any provisions of IBC, for which no penalty has been specified, will be punishable with fine ranging between Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2 crore.

Karnataka receives approval for purchase of electric vehicles under FAME India scheme

The Department of Heavy Industries (DHI) of Union Government has given its approval to Karnataka government for purchase of electric vehicles (EVs) under FAME India subsidised scheme.

- The state will purchase 40 electric buses, 100 four wheelers and 500 three wheelers at maximum of 60% subsidy under the scheme.
- The subsidy support is also provided for setting up electricity charging infrastructure across state capital Bengaluru.
- The EVs will ply in city as public transport which will protect environment, save fossil fuel and ensure public health.
- The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles (FAME) India was launched in 2015 under the National Electric Mobility Mission (NEMM) aims at promoting eco-friendly vehicles in the country. It is being administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry.
- The objective of scheme is to provide fiscal and monetary incentives for adoption and market creation of both hybrid and electric technologies vehicles in the country. It also aims at incentivising all vehicle segments, including two-wheelers, three wheeler auto, passenger four-wheeler vehicle, light commercial vehicles and buses.
- The scheme covers hybrid and electric technologies like a strong hybrid, plug-in hybrid and battery electric vehicles.
- Its mandate is to support hybrid or electric vehicles market development and its manufacturing eco-system in country in order to achieve self-sustenance in stipulated period.

Core sectors' record 6.8% growth in November 2018

According to the data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry, the eight core sectors expanded at fastest pace in more than year at 6.8% in November 2017. These eight industries — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity — had witnessed a growth of 3.2 per cent in November 2016.

- These eight industries — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity — had witnessed a growth of 3.2 per cent in November 2016.
- The output growth in November 2017 is highest since October 2016, when these core sectors had witnessed 7.1% rise.
- The growth was recorded on account of robust performance in segments like refinery (rose by 8.2%), steel (16.6%) and cement (17.3%) on an annual basis in November 2017.
- Crude oil and natural gas output too registered positive growth in November 2017.
- But coal output growth rate recorded a negative growth. Cumulatively, the growth in the eight core sectors during April-November this fiscal slowed to 3.9% as against 5.3% in the same period last fiscal.

Health Ministry launches Allied and Health care Professional Database

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched Allied and Health care Professional Database portal to make data repository robust to ensure better systems and frameworks for healthcare workforce in country. The database will help government to track the number of professionals and streams of allied and health care professions in the country.

- The AHP portal has a capacity of capturing more than 10 lakh Allied and Healthcare Professionals' (AHP) data.
- It will be helpful in expediting envisaged processes viz. licensing of professionals, workforce policy planning, and bringing transparency in system by maintaining standards of educational and clinical practice etc. More than 3000 professionals have already registered on portal during the testing phase.
- The AHPs can visit portal on link mentioned above and provide basic personal, qualification and professional information.
- The portal will also send auto-generated email to registered email of candidate for verification and will provide enrolment reference number for further usage. The candidates subsequently can login to portal using credentials received in email and edit information, upload qualification degree among other details.

Gujarat govt bans bird care NGOs during Uttarayan festival

The Animal Husbandry department of the state government, in a verbal direction, has banned all voluntary animal care and non-government organisations working under the 'Karuna Abhiyan' to operate in residential areas during the Uttarayan festival this year.

- The practice of using abrasive thread for kite flying during the festival poses a threat to the birds. In Ahmedabad alone, more than 10,000 birds are injured every year, affecting sparrows, pigeons, parrots, vultures, peacocks and migratory birds. To curb these injuries, more than 40 organisations have been working for the treatment of birds, especially during Uttarayan. These organisations have been operating under the Ahmedabad forest department for the last one decade.
- This year, however, the government has restricted the activities of the organisations, citing the high bird flu incidence of January 2017 and a Gujarat High Court order last year.
- The organisations have claimed that the restrictions will lead to an unnecessary delay in the treatment of birds since residential areas are the epicentres of bird injuries. The organisations have submitted representations to the state government and plan to challenge the order in the higher court of law.

Nagaland declared as 'disturbed area' for 6 more months

The entire Nagaland has been declared as “disturbed area” for six more months, till June-end, under the controversial AFSPA, which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior notice.

- The decision to continue the declaration of Nagaland as “disturbed area” has been taken as killings, loot and extortion have been going in various parts of the state which necessitated the action for the convenience of the security forces operating there.
- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) has been in force in Nagaland for several decades. It has not been withdrawn even after a framework agreement was signed on August 3, 2015 by Naga insurgent group NSCN-IM general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and the government's interlocutor R N Ravi in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Assam publishes first draft of NRC with 1.9 crore names

The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was published on Jan 1st with the names of 1.9 crore people out of the 3.29 crore total applicants in Assam recognizing them as legal citizens of India.

- The rest of the names are under various stages of verification, Registrar General of India
- The application process started in May, 2015 and a total of 6.5 crore documents were received from 68.27 lakh families across Assam.
- People can check their names in the first draft at NRC sewa kendras across Assam from 8am. They can also check for information online and through SMS services.

Andhra CM declares 2018 as Telugu promotion year

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday declared 2018 as Telugu promotion year.

- He also recognised Vijayawada as the centre for Telugu magazines, newspapers, and literary publications.
- He made this announcement at 29th edition of Annual Book Exhibition of Vijayawada.
- The annual book festival is an initiative of Vijayawada Book Festival Society and is being supported this year by Andhra Pradesh government and NTR trust. (ANI)

International Current Affairs

California launches legal sale of cannabis for recreational use

California will launch the world's largest regulated commercial market for recreational marijuana on Monday, as dozens of newly licensed stores catering to adults who enjoy the drug for its psychoactive effects open for business up and down the state.

- It becomes the sixth U.S. state, and by far the most populous, venturing beyond legalized medical marijuana to permit the sale of cannabis products of all types to customers at least 21 years old.
- Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Nevada were the first to introduce recreational pot sales on a state-regulated, licensed and taxed basis. Massachusetts and Maine are on track to follow suit later this year.

Endangered 'bird language' enters UNESCO list

The unusual and very efficient whistle language used as a means of communication by villagers in remote northern Turkey entered the Unesco list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

- UNESCO has accepted the "bird language" of Black Sea villagers as an endangered part of world heritage in need of urgent protection
- Around 10,000 people, mostly in the district of Canakci in Giresun province, still use the highly-developed and high pitch system of whistling to communicate in the rugged terrain where most of the times they cannot see each other.
- This form of communication which dates to some 500 years ago, during the Ottoman Empire, was widespread across the Black Sea regions, but 50 years ago it suffered the impact of the progression of technology and nowadays the ever rapid growing of cellular mobile systems has put this cultural heritage under serious threat.

Banking & Finance

No charges on debit card transactions up to Rs 2,000: Finance Ministry

Customers will not have to pay any transaction charges for payments through debit card, BHIM app and other payment made for up to Rs 2,000 from Jan 1st onwards.

- Government will bear the merchant discount rate (MDR) charges on transactions up to Rs 2,000 made through debit cards, BHIM UPI or Aadhaar-enabled payment systems to promote digital transactions.
- The merchant discount rate (MDR) will be borne by the government for two years with effect from January 1, 2018 by reimbursing the same to banks.
- The move will have an impact of Rs 2,512 crore on the exchequer.

Appointments & Resigns

Government appoints Vijay Gokhale as new Foreign Secretary

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appointed senior diplomat Vijay Keshav Gokhale (58) as Foreign Secretary, highest post for a diplomat in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

- He will have a two-year term and shall succeed S Jaishankar, who completes his extended tenure in January 2018. Jaishankar was appointed foreign secretary in January 2015, for two years, just a few days before his retirement.
- He is considered an expert on China and is proficient in the use of Mandarin. Currently he is secretary (Economic Relations) in the Ministry of External Affairs. Earlier he was India's Ambassador to China from January 2016 to October 2017.

Devika Shah assumes office as Indian Clearing Corporation MD, CEO

Devika Shah has assumed office as the MD (Managing Director) and CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of ICCL with effect from January 1, 2018.

- During her tenure spanning over three decades at the BSE, Shah has headed various functions, in the areas of regulatory and business, including surveillance, investigation and inspection, trading operations, clearing and settlement, listing membership, investor protection fund, business development, accounts, legal and regulatory communications.

Sports

Salah named Arab football player of the year

Liverpool and Egypt striker Mohamed Salah was named Arab Player of the Year for 2017 on Monday in a panel of around 100 sports journalists from several Arab countries.

- Salah won the title after collecting 582 points. Syria's winger Omar Khribin, who plays for Al-Hilal in Saudi Arabia, came second with 198 points. In third place, came another Syrian star, as striker Omar Al-Soma, who plays for Saudi side Al Ahli, scored 144 points.
- Salah, 25, rose to fame after joining Liverpool FC, following his short stint at Serie A's AS Roma; the striker has managed to net 17 Premier League goals since the start of the season, alongside a hefty 23 goals in all competitions.
- He also helped Egypt qualify for this year's World Cup finals in Russia.

Environment

Schistura Larketensis: New species of blind fish discovered inside Meghalaya cave

Scientists have discovered a new species of blind fish named Schistura larketensis inside a cave in East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya.

- The fish has been named after Larket village, where the cave has been found to encourage local people to take up biodiversity conservation.
- Schistura larketensis has lost its sight during its living evolution in perpetual darkness inside the cave.
- It has also lost its pigments too while adapting to its habitat in the dark waters.
- The orbital diameter of fish decreases gradually as it matures with eyes completely absent in older individuals.
- Small and faintly blackish spot-like depressions are seen in place of eyes, indicating evolutionary and morphological adaptations.