

National Current Affairs

Government notifies the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2017

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2017. The Amendment Act amended some provisions of Companies Act, 2013.

- Few provisions in the Amendment Act have important bearing on the working of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016. They will come into force on date as Government notify in Official Gazette.
- It aims to help in simplifying procedures, make compliance easy and take stringent action against defaulting companies.
- The Amendment Act allows companies to issue shares at discount to its creditors when its debt is converted into shares in pursuance of any statutory resolution plan such as resolution plan under IBC or debt restructuring scheme.
- The Amendment Act now requires company which has defaulted in payment of dues, prior approval of bank or public financial institution concerned or non-convertible debenture holders or other secured creditor.
- The Amendment Act now prohibits registered valuer to be appointment as valuer or three years after valuation of assets was conducted by him.

Supreme Court stays High Court verdict against 85% pictorial warning on tobacco

The Supreme Court has stayed Karnataka High Court order reducing size of pictorial warnings on packages of tobacco products to 40% of the package space from earlier 85%.

- The apex court took decision saying that health of citizen has primacy and emphasised on importance of public health and harmful effects of tobacco products.
- In December 2017, Karnataka High Court judgment had quashed MoHFW rules that mandated pictorial health warnings to cover 85% of tobacco product packaging space, holding that they violated Constitutional norms. However, it made it clear that 40% pictorial health warning rule, which existed prior to amendment rules, will remain in force.
- It had held that rules framed by MoHW in 2014 was violation of the Article 77 (Conduct of Business of Government of India) and Transaction of Business (ToB) rules framed under it as subject of tobacco control and legislation was not attached to one department or Ministry. Moreover, these rules are also contrary to Article 19(1)(g) (right to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business).

Government to launch new scheme for free treatment of Hepatitis C

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is going to roll out National Programme for Control of Viral Hepatitis, a new scheme free treatment of Hepatitis C from the 2018-19 financial year.

- Under the new scheme, the focus will be on anti-viral treatment of Hepatitis C which will be provided free at all government health set-ups.
- For this government has embarked budget of Rs 600 crore for the next three years.
- The Health Ministry is looking at screening vulnerable groups, including drug users and people who underwent surgeries/ blood transfusion before 2002, when the screening protocol was not robust.
- Moreover it is in informal talks with Indian companies which manufacture Sofosbuvir on behalf of American pharma giant Gilead, to negotiate the price for a national programme. Sofosbuvir is recommended under the new WHO treatment guidelines for Hepatitis C.

Government to raise Territorial Army battalion of ex-Armymen to clean Ganga

The Union Defence Ministry has sanctioned raising of Territorial Army (TA) battalion comprising ex-servicemen of Indian Army as part of its mission to clean the Ganga by 2020. It has been named as Composite Ecological Task Force (CETF) battalion of TA for National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), the nodal agency for cleaning Ganga.

- The CETF battalion will be raised in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh as a pilot project. For this government has allocated Rs 167 crore under NMCG.
- The battalion will work on book debit system with funding provided from budget of Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- The CETF TA battalion will be commanded by Colonel-rank officer. It will have 8 officers, 20 JCOs and around 500 other ranks on its roll.
- For the task, it will only enroll ex-servicemen, who will be embodied under TA rules.
- It will be responsible for monitoring ecological and environmental projects related to Ganga River, and also raise public awareness through campaigns.
- It will also patrol sensitive river areas for the protection of biodiversity, keep a tab on the river pollution levels, plant trees and check soil erosion.
- It will also assist government in enforcing pollution control measures, support local civil administration and police in managing the ghats, and provide support and assistance if and when there is flood or natural disaster in region.

Government completes 1st phase of BharatNet project

The Union Government has announced completion of first phase of BharatNet project after successfully laying optical fibre cables (OFC) in more than 1 lakh gram panchayats. As of December 2017, 2,54,895 km of OFC has been laid covering 1,09,926 GPs out of which 1,01,370 GPs have been made service ready.

- The second phase of the project was initiated in November 2017 for connecting the remaining 1.5 lakh gram panchayats. Government is expecting to preempt second phase's original target of March 2019 by concluding it ahead of schedule by December 2018.
- BharatNet project forms backbone for Digital India initiative. It aims to bring high speed broadband to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats (GPs) through optical fibre network.
- The objective flagship project is to provide affordable broadband services in rural and remote areas in partnership with states and the private sector.
- It is world's largest rural broadband connectivity programme using Optical fibre.

Railways to deploy drones to monitor projects

Indian Railways has announced that it will start using drone Cameras (UAV/NETRA) for various railway activities, especially project monitoring and maintenance of tracks and other railway infrastructure.

- Drone/ Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) is a kind of a flying robot which can be remotely handled through software-controlled flight plans embedded in its system. It works in conjunction with Global Positioning System (GPS).
- 'NETRA' is an Indian, light-weight, autonomous UAV jointly developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and IdeaForge, a Mumbai-based private firm.

Uttar Pradesh govt restricts use of loudspeakers at religious, public places

The Uttar Pradesh government has banned the unauthorised use of loudspeakers and public address systems at religious and public places across the state. Setting January 15 as the deadline for obtaining permission, the government has warned that all such loudspeakers will be removed by January 20.

- Each district will be categorised into industrial, commercial, residential and silence zones. Each area has separate maximum limits for permissible sound levels.
- The loudspeakers installed in public places cannot have sound level more than 10 decibels above ambient noise level at the periphery of a public place and 5 decibels above ambient noise level at the periphery of a private place
- All district officials have also been asked to ensure that the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 are followed during all processions and

marriage functions. The district magistrates have been told to give information on the action taken in case the rules are flouted.

State government of Bihar bans electronic cigarettes

The state government has banned electronic cigarettes in Bihar. The manufacturing, distribution, sale, purchase, display and advertisement of e-cigarettes have been banned as well. Online purchase of e-cigarettes has been prohibited, too.

- The notification was sent to all the assistant drug controllers (ADC) and drug inspectors for its strict enforcement in their areas.
- All the products not approved by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) and containing nicotine have already been banned in the state.
- Their manufacturing, sale, purchase, trade, advertisement, distribution, and display have been embargoed.
- Banning of e-cigarettes and other items containing nicotine has been done in order to prevent the youth from consuming nicotine.
- The centre has, moreover, put tobacco based products in the category of 'sinful goods', inducing higher goods and services tax (GST)
- Along with these products, e-hookah also remains banned, as the youth have hooked themselves to smoking it, too.

Delhi govt launches common card for bus, metro rides

On January 8, 2018, Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal launched a common card for rides on public buses and the metro.

- Delhi is thus the first city in India to have such common mobility card.
- This card can be used at on 200 Delhi transport Corporation (DTC) and 50 cluster buses running on different routes as well as on metro trains.
- The common card can also function like a debit card. It will be operational in all DTC and cluster buses from April 1, 2018.

International Current Affairs

Saudi Arabia allows India's plan to ferry Haj pilgrims via sea route

Saudi Arabia has approved India's plan to revive the option of ferrying Haj pilgrims via sea route to Jeddah. In this regard, both countries have signed bilateral annual Haj 2018 agreement.

- The agreement was signed by Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Haj and Umrah Minister of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Mohammad Saleh bin TaherBenten at Makkah.
- The practice of ferrying Haj pilgrims between Mumbai and Jeddah by waterways was stopped in 1995.
- Sending pilgrims through through sea route will help cut down travel expenses significantly.
- It will be a revolutionary, pro-poor, pilgrim-friendly decision.
- Moreover, ships now available are more modern and well-equipped to ferry 4000 to 5000 persons at time.
- They can cover 2300-odd nautical miles one-side distance between Mumbai and Jeddah within just 3-4 days. Earlier, old ships used to take 12 to 15 days.

Iran bans English from being taught in primary schools

Iran has banned teaching the English language in primary schools, calling the subject a "cultural invasion".

- The education ministry "envisages strengthening Persian language skills and Iranian Islamic culture of pupils at the primary school stage
- English is a foreign language option for many at secondary level, which begins at the age of 12, but its popularity has led to classes being offered by some schools much earlier.
- The ban does not affect foreign-language tuition at secondary school or popular private institutes which teach English outside the educational system.

Turkey extends state of emergency for a sixth time

On January 8, 2018, Turkish government announced plans to extend the ongoing state of emergency for the sixth time.

- State of emergency was first imposed in July 2016 after a failed coup to overthrow incumbent Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.
- Turkish authorities have extended the emergency to crackdown on individuals connected with the failed coup.
- Since the attempted coup, over 55000 people have been arrested and 140000 public sector workers have been suspended or sacked.

- The ongoing state of emergency is set to expire on January 19, 2018. The fresh extension will be for another three months.

Banking & Finance

PNB ties up with NSFDC for assisting SC families

Punjab National Bank (PNB) and National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) have tied up to provide financial assistance for economic empowerment of persons belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) families living below Double Poverty Line (DPL).

- A Memorandum of Agreement to this effect was signed by B.M.Padha, Corporate General Manager, Priority Sector & Financial Inclusion Division, PNB and Devanand, General Manager, NSFDC.
- Under this tie-up, PNB would act as a channelising agent for the loan schemes of NSFDC. Concessional finance and skill training grants would be provided to unemployed SC persons living below Double Poverty Line.

Awards & Recognition

Nitish Kumar receives 1st Mufti M Sayeed Award for Probity in Public Life

On 8th January 2018, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was awarded the first Mufti Mohammad Sayeed Award for Probity in Public Life at General Zorawar Singh Auditorium in Jammu.

- The function was organized by Jammu & Kashmir government. N N Vohra, Jammu and Kashmir Governor, presided over the function. He presented the 1st Mufti M Sayeed Award for Probity in Public Life to Nitish Kumar.
- The Mufti Mohammad Sayeed Award for Probity in Public Life award has been instituted by the Jammu and Kashmir government to mark the death anniversary of Mufti M Sayeed.
- Mufti M Sayeed was the founder of PDP (Peoples Democratic Party). He was the chief minister of Jammu & Kashmir twice. He died on 7 January 2016.

Actor Soumitra Chatterjee will receive Legion of Honour award from French culture minister in Kolkata

Having honoured acclaimed actor Soumitra Chatterjee with the "Legion of Honour" which is the highest order of merit in France, the French government will confer the award to the legendary actor at the 42nd Kolkata Book Fair on January 30.

- The award will be presented by French culture minister Françoise Nyssen, who would be accompanied by a delegation of 10 top writers and publishers from her country, as the theme country for the international book fair this year is France.

India's first all-women station in Mumbai enters Limca records

The first all-women station in India, Matunga on Central Railway (CR), manned by a staff of 41 women, has entered the Limca Book of Records.

- Matunga suburban station became the first railway station in India to be operated by an all-woman staff in July 2017.
- The Matunga suburban station is operated exclusively by women staff from July 2017. A total of 41 women staff are working at the station.
- This includes personnel from the RPF, commercial and operating departments. Station manager of Matunga suburban station is Mamta Kulkarni.

RS Puram police station is India's best

The RS Puram police station (B-2) in the city won the ministry of home affairs' trophy for the best police station in the country, in the category of Smart police stations.

- Director general of police TK Rajendran and station inspector T Jothi received the trophy from union home minister Rajnath Singh at the 'All India Conference of Director Generals/Inspector Generals of Police -2017' held at Takenpur in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh
- While Panjagutta police station in Telangana ranked in the second place, Gudumba police station in Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh nabbed the third place.

Appointments & Resigns

Dilip Asbe appointed MD & CEO of NPCI

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), an umbrella organisation for retail payment systems in India, has appointed Dilip Asbe as Managing Director and CEO of the organisation.

- Asbe was appointed CEO-in-charge in August last year. He had come in place of AP Hota, whose term as MD and CEO had ended on August 10 last year.
- Asbe has been in the NPCI since its inception and has played a pivotal role in designing, building, operationalising and managing large-scale payment processing platforms.

Karen Bradley named new Northern Ireland secretary

Karen Bradley has been appointed as the new secretary of state for Northern Ireland.

- Karen Bradley replaces James Brokenshire as Northern Ireland secretary. This appointment was made by Theresa May, UK Prime Minister, as a part of cabinet reshuffle.
- Mrs Bradley, 47, has been the MP for Staffordshire Moorlands since May 2010, and became a Home Office minister in 2014.

Science & Technology

SpaceX launches secretive Zuma mission

California-based Private spaceflight company SpaceX has launched secret Zuma Mission for US government.

- It was launched on board of SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, US.
- It is a secret mission in its nature or purpose and the agency behind it remains a mystery.
- It has been manufactured by Northrup Grumman, Virginia-based aerospace and defence company. It was delivered to low-Earth orbit (LEO).
- SpaceX (Space Exploration Technologies Corporation) is aerospace manufacturer and space transport services company headquartered in California, US.

Sports

Neel Joshi loses in the British Junior Open squash

On 7th January 2018, Neel Joshi lost in the finals of the British Junior Open squash in U-15 category at Birmingham, England.

- England's Sam Todd defeated India's Neel Joshi 8-11, 16-14, 11-0, 14-12 in the finals of the U-15 category of British Junior Open squash. Sam Todd won the U-15 British Junior Open squash title.
- Another Indian player Tushar Shahani lost to Egypt's Omar El Torkey in the semi-finals of U-17 category.

Aditya wins Kolkata Open Snooker meet

Asian Games medallist Aditya Mehta bounced back to down English pro Alfie Burden 5-4 in a thrilling final and clinch the Kolkata Open International Invitation Snooker Championship

- Aditya Mehta has won the Kolkata Open title for the third time. Earlier he defeated Laxman Rawat 5-2 and Brijesh Damani 5-4 in the semi-finals

BCCI bans all-rounder Yusuf Pathan for five months after failed dope test

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has suspended cricketer Yusuf Pathan for five months for failing a dope test.

- Yusuf Pathan has been charged with commission of an Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) under the BCCI Anti-Doping Rules (ADR) Article 2.1.
- The sample collected from him during a domestic T20 competition on 16 March 2017, in New Delhi, contained Terbutaline. Terbutaline is banned both in and out of Competition in the WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) Prohibited List of Substances.

Important Days

January 9: Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated every year on January 9 to mark the contribution of Overseas Indian community in the development of India. This year's PBD celebrated ASEAN-Indian partnership and was themed Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic ASEAN INDIA Partnership.

- This year marks 25 years of ASEAN-Indian Partnership which is based on centuries-old cultural, religious and human links, forged on an ancient route of commerce.
- The PBD was held in Singapore on 6 and 7th January 2017– which is considered as India's gateway to the East and also is the heart of ASEAN.
- The event aimed at generating outcomes that deepen diaspora's relations with India and play a key role in promoting closer ties between India and ASEAN.

Obituary

Senior sports journalist Shashikant Bhagwat passes away

On 8th January 2018, Shashikant Bhagwat, senior sports journalist, passed in Pune, Maharashtra.

- Shashikant Bhagwat worked with 'Sakal', a Marathi newspaper, and retired after several years of service.
- He was also the president of the Pune Shramik Patrakar Sangh and the Pune Patrakar Prathishthan.