

National Current Affairs

Cabinet approves amendments to FDI Policy

The Union Cabinet has approved number of amendments to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Policy. The purpose of amendments is to simplify and liberalise FDI policy in India to provide ease of doing business in country.

- The liberalized policy will lead to larger FDI inflows contributing to growth of investment, employment and income.
- Key amendments approved:
 - 100% FDI for Single Brand Retail Trading (SBRT) under automatic route.
 - 100% FDI under automatic route in Construction Development.
 - Foreign airlines allowed investing up to 49% in Air India under government approval route.
 - FIIs/FPIs allowed investing in Power Exchanges through primary market.
 - Definition of 'medical devices' amended in FDI Policy.

Cabinet approves fixed term for chairperson and members of National Trust

The Union Cabinet has decided to fix three-year term of chairperson and the members of the board of the National Trust, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

- In this regard, it has approved proposal to amend National Trust for Welfare of Person with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (NTA), 1999.
- At present, Section 4 (1) of NTA, 1999 provides that chairperson or member of board of National Trust will continue in office beyond prescribed term of 3 years until his successor is appointed by government.
- In case of resignation of chairperson, section 5(1) of act provides for him to continue in office until his successor is appointed by government.
- The wording of above provisions of NT Act in its present form has resulted in continuation of chairman for indefinite period as no suitable successor could be found eligible for appointment.
- The proposed amendments to National Trust Act will avoid such situation and thus eliminate any chance of prolonged continuation in the same post by any incumbent.

CABE sub-committee recommends free education for girls up to PG level

The sub-committee of Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) looking into issues of girl's education has recommended free and compulsory education for girls up to post-graduate level across the country.

- The sub-committee is likely to submit an interim report to Union Human Resource Development Ministry during CABE meeting on January 15, 2018.
- The sub-committee of CABE will also recommended establishing of exclusive residential degree colleges for SC/ST women besides provision of providing health and hygiene kits to girls.
- The committee also wants schools to maintain academic atmosphere, besides providing basic amenities like toilets, maintenance, running water, safety measures and power supply and also appoint a counsellor for adolescent girls.

Cabinet approves implementation of CCEA decision on closure of Tungabhadra Steel Products Limited

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the implementation of the CCEA decision on closure of Tungabhadra Steel Products Limited (TSPL) regarding disposal of its immovable assets.

- It also provides for getting the name of the company struck off from the Registrar of Companies after setting balance liabilities of TSPL.
- Cabinet also approved selling 82.37 acres of land of the Company at Hospet to Karnataka Government for use of the Karnataka State Housing Board.

Committee of Governors submits report to President

The Committee of Governors submitted its report 'Rajyapal –VikasKeRajdoot: Catalytic Role of Governors as Agents for Change in Society' to President Ram Nath Kovind at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

- The Committee was constituted by President during 48th Conference of Governors in October 2017 to examine role of Governors in taking forward the developmental process.
- Committee of Governors in its report has described an action-outcome framework to be adopted by Raj Bhavans in their role as change agents and lists out potential priorities.
- It also emphasizes identifying priority areas along with activities that can help realise objectives of SarvShrest Bharat (paramount India). It suggests that Governors can play mentoring role in overall implementation of developmental schemes in their states.

UIDAI introduces 'Virtual ID' for Aadhaar to address privacy concerns

On 10th January 2018, the UIDAI launched 'Virtual ID', which an Aadhaar-card holder can generate from UIDAI website.

- Virtual ID has been introduced to reduce privacy issues. This virtual ID that can be generated from UIDAI website can be used for purposes like SIM verification, instead of sharing the actual 12-digit biometric ID.
- The Virtual ID will be a random 16-digit number. Along with biometrics of the user, it will furnish limited details like name, address and photograph, required for verification to authorised agencies like mobile companies.
- Users can generate any number of Virtual IDs they want. The older ID gets automatically cancelled once a new ID is developed.
- UIDAI will accept Virtual ID from 1 March, 2018. From 1 June 2018 it will be made mandatory for all agencies that perform authentication to accept Virtual ID for verification.
- The virtual ID will be valid for a particular period of time, or till the user generates a new one.

Government restricts use of national flag made of plastic

The central government urged everyone not to use a national flag made of plastic and asked the states and union territories to ensure strict compliance of the Flag Code in view of the Republic Day celebration ahead.

- As per Section 2 of The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, whoever in any public place or in any other place within public view burns, mutilates, defaces, defiles, disfigures, destroys, tramples upon or otherwise shows disrespect to or brings into contempt (whether by words, either spoken or written, or by acts) the Indian National Flag or any part thereof, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.
- The advisory said that on important national, cultural and sports events, flags made of paper only are to be used by public in terms of the provisions of the Flag Code of India, 2002 and such paper flags are not to be discarded or thrown on the ground after the event.
- Such flags are to be disposed of, in private, consistent with the dignity of the flag. Wide publicity for not using the national flag made of plastic should be made along with its advertisement in the electronic and print media.

India misses 2017 deadline for Kala Azar elimination

India has missed December 2017 deadline announced for elimination of Kala Azar (black fever) in 2017-18 Budget by the Union Government.

- Elimination in this case is defined as reducing annual incidence of disease to less than 1 case per 10,000 people at the sub-district level.
- In recent times endemic blocks have increased from 61 to 68 in 17 districts of Bihar and Jharkhand.
- The active case findings rather than actual increase in disease are main reason for increase in number of endemic blocks.
- Moreover, little-known skin condition called Post Kala Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL) — a red flag for transmission of Kala Azar—also has been growing steadily over the past few years.
- For elimination of Kala Azar, its vector needs to be eliminated first. But it is very difficult to eliminate vector as it dwells in wooden structure and escapes various measures to kill it. The majority of houses in endemic blocks are made from wood. Hence, to stop infection transmission, pucca houses need to be built.

World Bank Report projects 7.3% growth for India in 2018

The 2018 Global Economics Prospect (GEP) released by the World Bank has projected India's growth rate to 7.3% in 2018 and 7.5 for the next two years i.e. 2019 and 2020.

- According to report, India, despite initial setbacks from demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST), is estimated to have grown at 6.7% in 2017, higher than 6.5% estimated by Government.
- India has enormous growth potential compared to other emerging economies with implementation of comprehensive reforms. In all likelihood, India is going to register higher growth rate than other major emerging market economies in next decade.
- China grew at 6.8% in 2017, 0.1% more than that of India, while in 2018, its growth rate is projected at 6.4%.
- To materialise its potential, India needed to take steps to boost investment prospects. On productivity side, India has enormous potential with respect to secondary education completion rate. India is also undertaking measures in terms of non-performing loans and productivity.
- India's prospects will further improve with improved labour market reforms, education and health reforms as well as relaxing investment bottleneck.

Ministry of Road Transport & Highways signs MoU with Transport for London

On January 10, 2018, Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with 'Transport for London' (TFL) in New Delhi.

Under this MoU, expertise of TFL will be used to revamp the public transport system in India.

- TFL is a statutory agency that manages the transport system for Greater London. It has been responsible for creating a strong and dependable public transport system in the city.
- The MoU will focus on capacity augmentation, improving customer services, conducting scientific data analysis, promoting digital transactions in ticketing and implementing effective IT systems in Indian transport sector.
- Emphasis will also be laid on use of electric vehicles in public transport and adopting public-private partnership (PPP) models for operations.

West Bengal government launches water ATM Project in city and suburbs

On 10th January 2018, West Bengal Panchayat and Rural Development and Public Health Engineering minister Subrata Mukherjee announced the launch of water ATM project to ensure bacteria-free drinking water in schools.

- Water ATMs are being set up in the city and suburbs of West Bengal. The machines are made in Germany.
- Pilot projects have been launched in some parts of Kolkata already. Nearly 50 water ATMs are to be set up in Kolkata.
- Mainly, schools and hospitals will be covered under this project. This project is carried out with the help of Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

5th Bilateral Meeting between India and Malaysia held in New Delhi

On 10th January 2018, the 5th Bilateral Technical Meeting on cooperation in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine between Government of India and Malaysia was conducted at New Delhi.

- 5th Bilateral Meeting between India and Malaysia was presided by Pramod Kumar Pathak, Joint Secretary, Ministry of AYUSH, India and Deputy Director General Health (Medical), Ministry of Health from Malaysia.
- The Meeting had discussed the following agenda:-
 - Establishment of Ayurveda Chair in University of UTAR, Malaysia
 - Professional training in Panchakarma therapy for Malaysian experts in India
 - The evaluation of safety and efficacy of combination Ayurvedic/ traditional products for clinical trials.
 - Safety evaluation of Ayurvedic products based on Good Laboratory Practices (GLP)

- Bilateral MoU between National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), Ministry of AYUSH and Malaysia for Cooperation in the field of Medicinal Plants.
- Registration of Homeopathic Practitioner and their capacity building module in Malaysia.

International Current Affairs

UN Environment, WHO to jointly curb environmental health risks

UN Environment and WHO today agreed to a new collaboration to accelerate action to curb environmental health risks that cause an estimated 12 million deaths a year, mostly in developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

- The agreement will step up joint actions to combat air pollution, climate change and anti-microbial resistance, as well as improve coordination on waste and chemicals management, water quality, and food and nutrition issues.
- The collaboration also includes joint management of the BreatheLife advocacy campaign to reduce air pollution for multiple climate, environment and health benefits.
- The priority areas of cooperation between WHO and UN Environment include more effective air quality monitoring, including guidance to countries on standard operating procedures, more accurate environment and health assessments, including economic assessment among others.
- On the climate front, it would give priority to tackling vector-borne disease and other climate-related health risks.

Shanghai installs first 3D printed bus stops

Shanghai has installed the world's first 3D-printed bus stops in an ancient town which is part of the city.

- The bus shelters have a unique closed loop design, and two-round stools are set inside the grey rectangle frame.
- The original print marks still remain, allowing observers to see how the structure was made layer-by-layer.
- The grey coloured raw materials are environmentally friendly and renewable materials recycled from demolished buildings. They were chosen to naturally fit the style of the ancient town of Fengjing, Shanghai.

Banking & Finance

IndusInd Bank to introduce India's First Battery-Powered Interactive Payment Card

On January 10, 2018, IndusInd Bank and Dynamics Inc announced plans to introduce the first battery-powered, interactive payment cards in the Indian market in 2018. Dynamics Inc, is a Pennsylvania-based company which designs and manufactures intelligent, battery-powered payment cards.

- The new IndusInd bank card will have multiple buttons which will allow consumers to pay in multiple ways viz. through credit points or monthly instalments. Each selected option will activate a different colour light.
- IndusInd Bank has stated that introduction of these cards will not require any changes in existing payment infrastructure or merchant systems.

IFC to provide \$440 mn debt to Rewa solar park developers

International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member institution of the World Bank Group will provide \$440 million debt to Mahindra Renewables Pvt. Ltd, Acme Group and global private equity fund Actis Llp to build the Rewa solar park in Madhya Pradesh.

- Earlier, Rewa Ultra Mega Power Ltd had invited bids for the solar projects. Based on the bidding, three 250MW projects were awarded to Acme Solar Holdings Pvt. Ltd, Mahindra Renewables Pvt. Ltd and Actis LLP's Solenergi Power Pvt. Ltd.
- Rewa Ultra Mega Power Ltd, is a joint venture of Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd (MPUVNL) and Solar Energy Corp. of India Ltd (SECI).
- Rewa Solar project is to be commissioned in December 2018.

Business

Government divests 2.52 % of paid-up capital in NMDC

Government has successfully divested 2.52 % of paid-up capital in National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) for an amount of Rs. 1200 crore approx. (Rs. 980.05 crore from non-retail investors and Rs. 232 crore approx. from retail investors) through Offer for sale (OFS) mechanism.

- Originally, the disinvestment in NMDC OFS was pegged at basic issue size of 1.5% of paid-up capital at floor price of Rs.153.50 per share. The issue got over-subscribed by three times the base issue size.
- To encourage retail participation, a discount of 5% on the cut off price was offered to retail investors. The retail portion has been over-subscribed by 439.64%.
- The issue has attracted investments from foreign investors and Domestic institutional investors and mutual funds.

Appointments & Resigns

Lt. Gen. Y V K Mohan takes over as Commander of 9 Corps

On 10th January 2018, Lieutenant General Yenduru Venkata Krishna Mohan took charge as the 13th Corps Commander of the Rising Star Corps.

- Lieutenant General Yenduru Venkata Krishna Mohan replaced Lt Gen S K Saini as Corps Commander of the Rising Star Corps (9 corps).
- He had commanded an Infantry Brigade in High-Altitude Area and a Mountain Division along the India-China border.

Harjinder Singh appointed as Chef De Mission for Winter Olympics Games 2018

- On 10th January 2018, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) appointed Harjinder Singh as the Chef De Mission for the 23rd Winter Olympic Games to be held in Pyeongchang, in February 2018. Harjinder Singh is at present the General Secretary in the Ice Hockey Association of India.

JK Tyre appoints Rajiv Prasad as President of India Operations

- On 10th January 2018, JK Tyre & Industries appointed Rajiv Prasad as president of India Operations. Rajiv Prasad has a vast experience in managing large businesses. His career spans over 30 years.

Retired Justice Shiv Narayan Dhingra to supervise probe into reopened anti-Sikh riot cases

Retired Justice Shiv Narayan Dhingra has been appointed as head of a new committee to re-investigate 186 closed cases related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

- Other two members of the committee are retired IAS officer Rajdeep Singh and IPS officer Avishek Dullar. The committee would submit an interim report in two months to the Supreme Court.
- On 10th January 2018, the Supreme Court ordered re-investigation of 186 cases that were earlier closed by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Science & Technology

Charlie-435: Indian Coast Guard commissions patrol vessel

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has commissioned Charlie-435, a state-of-the-art patrol vessel at Karaikal in the Union Territory of Puducherry.

- It was commissioned by Puducherry Chief Minister V Narayanasamy. With commissioning of Charlie-435, the Coast Guard station at Karaikal now has five vessels.
- The patrol vessel 'Charlie-435' is equipped with modern navigation and communication system.
- The vessel will strengthen coastal security between Chennai and Kanyakumari in the Eastern Coastal region.
- It will be also of great help in rescuing fishermen who go adrift in sea due to bad weather.

IIT's first food testing lab unveiled in IIT Kharagpur

The Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) has established its first food testing lab at its Kharagpur campus.

- The agricultural and food engineering department's Analytical Food Testing Laboratory received the National Accreditation Board for Calibration and Testing Laboratories (NABL) accreditation, which empowered the IIT Kharagpur to certify food items for their nutritional value and also check for adulteration.
- After getting the accreditation, the IIT has already started the process of certification for some Kolkata-based company for fish items and neem oil.