

National Current Affairs

Cabinet approves the Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018

The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018 for better protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

- The Amendment will strengthen the Human Rights Institutions of India further for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities.
- Moreover, the amended Act will be in perfect sync with the agreed global standards and benchmarks towards ensuring the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual in the country.
- Salient Features:
 - It proposes to include “National Commission for Protection of Child Rights” as deemed Member of the Commission;
 - It proposes to add a woman Member in the composition of the Commission;
 - It proposes to enlarge the scope of eligibility and scope of selection of Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission as well as the State Human Rights Commission; and
 - It proposes to incorporate a mechanism to look after the cases of human rights violation in the Union Territories.
 - It proposes to amend the term of office of Chairperson and Members of National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commission to make it in consonance with the terms of Chairperson and Members of other Commissions.

Cabinet approves rightsizing the Competition Commission of India

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for rightsizing the Competition Commission of India (CCI) from One Chairperson and Six Members (totalling seven) to One Chairperson and Three Members (totalling four) by not filling the existing vacancies of two Members and one more additional vacancy, which is expected in September, 2018 when one of the present incumbents will complete his term.

- The proposal is expected to result in reduction of three Posts of Members of the Commission in pursuance of the Governments objective of "Minimum Government - Maximum Governance".
- As part of the Governments objective of easing the mergers and amalgamation process in the country, the Ministry had revised de minimis levels in 2017, which have been made applicable for all forms of combinations and the methodology for computing assets and turnover of the target involved in such combinations, has been spelt out.

- This has led to reduction in the notices that enterprises are mandated to submit to the Commission, while entering into combinations, thereby reducing the load on the Commission.
- The faster turnaround in hearings is expected to result in speedier approvals, thereby stimulating the business processes of corporates and resulting in greater employment opportunities in the country.
- The proposal is expected to result in reduction of three Posts of Members of the Commission in pursuance of the Governments objective of "Minimum Government - Maximum Governance".

Cabinet approves closure of loss making Burn Standard Company Limited

The Union Cabinet has approved the closure of Burn Standard Company Ltd (BSCL) - a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under Ministry of Railways.

- This decision has been taken in view of the continuous poor physical and financial performance of the company for more than 10 years despite financial assistance and other support provided by government, and low probability of its revival in the future.
- This measure will save public funds, which are currently being used for loss making BSCL, and can be used for other developmental work.
- Government will provide one-time grant of Rs. 417.10 crore towards severance package and for clearing the current liabilities of the company.
- In addition, outstanding loan of Rs. 35 crore given to the company by Government of India (Ministry of Railways) shall be written off.
- 508 employees of BSCL will benefit from Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS).

HP health minister launches programme to promote breastfeeding

With an aim to promote breastfeeding, Himachal Pradesh Health Minister Vipin Parmar launched Mother's Absolute Affection (MAA) programme in the state.

- The aim of the programme was to make people aware about the importance of breastfeeding.
- The main components of the programme were community awareness generation, strengthening inter-personal communication through ASHA workers, skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points in public health facilities and work places.
- The state government intends to reach out to every facility, every newborn and every mother through this programme.
- The minister directed the chief medical officers to monitor the implementation and impact of the programme to achieve goal that every children in the state are healthy.

Uttarakhand CM launches drive to transform public schools

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat launched a transformation campaign to improve the standard of education in the government schools of Uttarakhand.

- The main purpose of this campaign is to start smart classes in government schools and provide them with all basic facilities required by students like safe buildings, clean drinking water, furniture, fans, heaters, sports material and computers.
- One model school will be opened in Kumaon and another in Garhwal region to offer quality education to the poor and underprivileged children in classes 6 to 12.
- In Kumaon circle the model school will be opened in Almora.

International Current Affairs

Cabinet apprised of MoU between India and United Arab Emirates on Technical Cooperation in Rail Sector

The Union Cabinet has been apprised of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the Federal Transport Authority - Land & Maritime of the United Arab Emirates on Technical Cooperation in Rail Sector. The MoU was signed on 10th February, 2018.

- The MoU will provide a platform to Indian Railways to interact and share the latest developments and knowledge in the railway sector.
- The MoU will facilitate exchange of information, expert meetings, seminars technical visits and implementation of jointly agreed cooperation projects.
- The MoU will enable technical cooperation in the following areas:
 - Regulation, safety and technical investigation of accidents;
 - Station redevelopment;
 - Locomotives, coaches and wagons; and
 - Any other area jointly identified by the Participants.

Cabinet approves cooperation arrangement between India and Afghanistan

The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of a Cooperation Arrangement between Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW) and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation & Livestock (MAIL), Afghanistan for cooperation in the field of Food Safety and related areas.

- The cooperation arrangement will facilitate information sharing training and capacity building measure and learning from each other's best practice to improve food safety ecosystem.
- The areas of cooperation include the following:
 - Establishment of a mechanism of information exchange and communication;
 - Facilitating technical exchange on identified topics of interest especially about import procedures, quality control operations, sampling, testing, packaging and labelling;
 - Facilitating/organization of joint seminars, workshops, visits, lectures, training programme, etc;
 - Other areas of interest to the participants within their responsibilities as they may mutually determine.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Iran on the establishment of an expert group on trade remedy measures

The Union Cabinet has given its ex post facto approval to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Iran on the establishment of an expert group on trade remedy measures to promote cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

- The MoU was signed on 17th February, 2018 during the visit of the President of Iran.
- The MoU will promote cooperation between the two countries in area of trade remedies such as exchange of information, capacity building activities, cooperation in investigations related to anti-dumping and countervailing duty, etc.

India-Japan-US Trilateral meeting

India, Japan and the United States held the 9th Trilateral Meeting at Joint Secretary/Director General/Assistant Secretary level in New Delhi on 4 April 2018 to hold consultations on regional and global issues of mutual interest.

- In accordance with the directions received from their Foreign Ministers, who met in New York on 18 September 2017 on the margins of UNGA, the officials explored practical steps to enhance cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development; counter-proliferation; counter-terrorism; maritime security, maritime domain awareness and HA-DR.
- The officials reviewed the outcomes of the Trilateral Infrastructure Working Group that met in Washington in February and agreed to continue to collaborate to promote increased connectivity in the Indo-Pacific.
- All sides agreed to remain engaged and strengthen cooperation in support for a free, open, prosperous, peaceful and inclusive Indo-Pacific region through partnership with countries in the region.

Business

IndusInd Bank gets RBI nod to acquire IL&FS arm

Private sector lender IndusInd Bank has received RBI's approval to buy the securities services arm of IL&FS.

- In March 2017, the bank entered an agreement with Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services, the promoter shareholder of IL&FS Securities Services Ltd (ISSL), to acquire 100 per cent stake in ISSL.
- IndusInd Bank stock was trading 1.84 per cent down at Rs 1796.30 on BSE.

India third most vulnerable country to cyber threats

India emerged as the third most vulnerable country in terms of risk of cyber threats, such as malware, spam and ransomware, in 2017, moving up one place over previous year, according to a report by security solutions provider Symantec.

- In 2017, 5.09% of global threats detected were in India, slightly less than 5.11% in 2016.
- The U.S. (26.61%) was most vulnerable to such attacks, followed by China (10.95%), according to 'Internet Security Threat Report'.
- The global threat ranking is based on eight metrics — malware, spam, phishing, bots, network attacks, web attacks, ransomware and cryptominers.
- As per the report, India continues to be second most impacted by spam and bots, third most impacted by network attacks, and fourth most impacted by ransomware.
- The report also pointed out that with the threat landscape becoming more diverse, attackers are working harder to discover new avenues of attack and cover their tracks while doing so.

Turkey hosts critical summit on Syria with Russia, Iran

On 4th April 2018, the presidents of Iran, Turkey and Russia met for their tripartite summit, aimed at speeding up the peace process for Syria and establishing their influence in Syria.

- The tripartite summit was hosted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at his presidential palace in Ankara, Turkey.
- It was attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

- This is the second such tripartite summit. The first tripartite summit was hosted by Vladimir Putin in November 2017 in Sochi, Russia.
- Iran, Turkey and Russia have supported peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. They believe that it is a parallel process to support UN-supported discussions in Geneva.

Appointments & Resigns

Debjani Ghosh assumes charge as Nasscom President

Nasscom has said that former Intel executive Debjani Ghosh has taken over as the President of the IT industry association.

- She succeeds R Chandrashekhar, who is leaving office upon the completion of his term
- Ghosh takes office at a time when the Indian IT-BPM industry, currently a USD 167 billion sector, is playing a leading role in digital transformation of various industries across countries.

Himanta Biswa Sarma Elected BAI President

Assam Health and Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was unanimously elected the Badminton Association of India (BAI) President during its annual general body meeting in Goa.

- Sarma had taken over as the interim BAI President last year after the demise of Akhilesh Das Gupta. He will serve for four years
- Ajay Kumar Singhania was elected the Secretary General while former Tamil Nadu Badminton Association president and former Union minister Anbumani Ramadoss was elected treasurer. Both were elected unanimously.

Myntra hires PepsiCo India's Mithun Sundar as chief revenue officer

Flipkart-owned online fashion retailer Myntra has appointed PepsiCo India's Head of Strategy Mithun Sundar as its chief revenue officer.

- He will take up the position at the online retailer in June and report directly to Chief Executive Officer Ananth Narayanan.

- Sundar brings 13 years of experience in sales, marketing and strategy. Prior to his two and a half year stint at PepsiCo, he worked with management consulting firm McKinsey, before which he was a marketing and sales manager at Unilever.

Environment

Rare dinosaur footprints found on Scotland's Isle of Skye

University researchers have been analysing dozens of 170-million-year-old tracks, found off the north-east coast of the Isle of Skye.

- They found footprints belonging to theropods and sauropods from the Middle Jurassic period.
- The discovery has been described as being "globally important", as evidence from the Middle Jurassic period is rare and few fossil sites have been found around the world.
- Dinosaur prints have been found on Skye for several years, but the latest set of 50 prints were found in a much older rock formation.
- Skye was the only place in Scotland where dinosaurs could be found, Dr Steve Brusatte from the University of Edinburgh's School of GeoSciences said.
- The footprints, made in a muddy lagoon, are helping researchers build a more accurate picture of dinosaurs during the Middle Jurassic period.

Science & Technology

Nasa's Hubble telescope captures image of Icarus, farthest star ever seen

Nasa's Hubble Space Telescope has discovered the farthest individual star ever seen - an enormous blue stellar body nicknamed Icarus located over halfway across the universe.

- The star, harboured in a very distant spiral galaxy, is so far away that its light has taken nine billion years to reach Earth. It appears to us as it did when the universe was about 30 per cent of its current age.
- Normally, the star would be too faint to view, even with the world's largest telescopes.
- However, through a phenomenon called gravitational lensing that tremendously amplifies the star's feeble glow, astronomers were able to pinpoint this faraway star and set a new distance record.

Sports

21st edition of the Commonwealth Games commences in Gold Coast, Australia in Carrara Stadium

On 4th April 2018, the 21st edition of the Commonwealth Games started at Carrara Stadium in Gold Coast, Australia.

- The Commonwealth Games 2018 will see participation from more than 4,500 athletes from 71 countries.
- 275 gold medals in 23 events are in store for the competitors. The Commonwealth Games 2018 will be held till 15 April 2018.
- For the first time in the Commonwealth Games there will be equal number of men's and women's medal events.
- The Indian contingent consists of 227 athletes. PV Sindhu is the flag-bearer for India at the opening ceremony.
- The Indian team consists of star players like Sushil Kumar, Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal and Gagan Narang.
- The Commonwealth Games is hosted by Australia for the fifth time. This will be the most expensive Commonwealth Games ever with estimated cost around AUS\$2billion.

ICC Test Rankings: Virat Kohli retains second spot

Virat Kohli has retained the second position in the latest ICC Test Player Rankings that was released on 4th April 2018.

- Virat Kohli has secured 912 points and obtained the second spot. Australian former captain Steve Smith has secured the top spot with 929 points.
- India's Cheteshwar Pujara also retained his seventh position with 810 points. Also India's Ajinkya Rahane and Lokesh Rahul have secured 18th and 11th spots respectively.
- Indian test spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has obtained fifth position with 803 points in the bowlers ranking. Ravindra Jadeja has obtained second position in the all-rounders ranking.
- South Africa's Aiden Markram has secured ninth position in the batsmen ranking. New Zealand has surpassed Australia and secured third place in the ICC Test Team Rankings.

Obituary

Ex-England midfielder Ray Wilkins passes away

Ray Wilkins, ex-England midfielder, passed away on 4th April 2018.

- He had played 84 times for England from 1976 to 1986. He also served as a captain for 10 games.
- His nickname was “Butch.” He played for teams like Manchester United, Chelsea and AC Milan.
- He won the FA Cup in 1983 and the Scottish league title in 1989. He ended his club career in 1997. Later, he served as a commentator on British TV and radio.

Important Days

National maritime Day – 5 April

National maritime Day is celebrated on 5th April every year since 1964.

- On 5th April 1919, SS Loyalty, the first ship of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company Ltd started from Mumbai to the United Kingdom.
- This is a very important day in the history of Indian maritime sector. The theme for National maritime Day 2018 is: ‘Indian Shipping – An Ocean of opportunity’.
- On the National maritime Day, awareness on supporting safe and environmentally strong commerce between continents is highlighted.
- ‘Varuna’ award is conferred to outstanding contributors of Indian maritime sector on this day. Also, outstanding achievers in the field of education and training are awarded on this day.