



CURRENT AFFAIRS RELATED TO KARNATAKA

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“Karnataka mobile one” m-governance model wins gold medal at World government summit

The initiative makes Karnataka the first state in India to launch a unified mobile platform for the delivery of citizens' services, both from government and the private sector through an open platform, which can accept any service and is thus future-proof.

Karnataka's flagship mobile-one governance application has won gold medal at the fourth World Government Summit in Dubai, UAE in the m-governance awards category.

Karnataka Mobile One m-governance model:

- This model is country's and world's largest multimode mobile governance platform launched in December 2014 by President Pranab Mukherjee.
- It offers 4,500 services including G2C, B2C and G2B services onto single integrated platform that can be accessed on smartphones, a web portal or through SMS and IVRS.
- Through this initiative, citizens of Karnataka can now pay utility bills, property tax, book railway and bus tickets, file income tax, m-passport, driving licenses and do many more citizen related activities with their smartphones. It provides services like bill payments, issue redressal, agriculture etc from both the government and private sector to citizens.

South Western Railways Zone introduces Biodiesel for trains

The South Western Railways (SWR) Zone with headquarters in Hubli, Karnataka has introduced biodiesel for trains, operating under its zone. In this regard, SWR's first train Hubballi-Bengaluru Janshatabdi Express powered by five per cent biodiesel blended with High Speed Diesel was flagged off from Hubli. The main aim of the initiative is to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) emission and carbon footprint and also to make fuel consumption more efficient. To meet its biodiesel demand, SWR zone has set up Biodiesel filling centres at Hubli, Bengaluru and Hospet. In next one year all the 13 railway depots within the zone will have their own filling units and the biodiesel blending will be gradually increased to ten percent. Biodiesel is a green fuel that provides quasi-renewable energy for cleaner alternatives as sustainable fuel for diesel locomotives and reduces dependency on fossil fuel especially diesel. It is commonly obtained from crops such as sugarcane, cassava, corn, potato, beetroot and recently from grapes, banana and dates etc.

South Indian states to constitute Inter-State Coordination Council to resolve forest-related issues

- South Indian states have decided to constitute 'Southern Forest Ministers' Interstate Coordination Council (ISCC) to improve concerted collective efforts for protection of forests and wildlife of the region.
- Decision in this regard was taken in a conference of forest ministers of southern states held in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.
- The council will have full-time secretariat which will function in the respective Forest Departments of member states for ensuring ecological, socio-economic and livelihood security of the region.
- Member states of this council will consists of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Puducherry and Karnataka.
- After its establishment Kerala Minister for Forests Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan will be its President for the first year.
- Southern Forest Ministers' Conference: In this conference member states agreed to address issues related elephant poaching and smuggling of forest wealth especially smuggling of sandalwood and red sanders in the region. These southern states also are planning to

establish a regional wildlife crime control bureau in the line with the National Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

ESA demarcation process in Western Ghats

Union Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MoEFCC) held a meeting with 6 states in New Delhi to review the progress of demarcation of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) along the Western Ghats region. The crucial meeting discussed the progress made by states to physically demarcate ESA in this region in order to decide the further course of action in the ambit of recommendations made by Kasturirangan Committee report (2013). The meeting was chaired by Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar and was attended by environment Ministers of six States viz. Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Key facts of meeting:

Focus: To set policy guidelines to conserve the biodiversity of the Western Ghats region. Provide adequate opportunities for livelihood security to the local people in the broad paradigm of ESA.

Positive promotion of environment friendly and socially inclusive development in this region. Earlier, MoEFCC on the request of these six States had allowed them to the demarcation of ESA within their jurisdiction by physical verification in the Western Ghats region. States were asked to submit their proposals to the Ministry by 30 June 2015. However, Kerala is only state which had undertaken such an exercise and submitted its report. It should be noted that only in those areas demarcated as ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) in ESA, commercial mining and polluting industries will be completely banned.

Kasturirangan committee had recommended that about 37 per cent areas in the Western Ghats to be declared as an ESA, surpassing the recommendation of Madhav Gadgil report (2010). Madhav Gadgil report had recommended declaration of entire Western Ghats region as an ESA.

Tipu sultan's Birth anniversary controversy (protest against the celebration of 18th century Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan's 265th birth anniversary by the state government)

- The BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal opposed celebrating Tipu's birth anniversary, as the Muslim ruler was not a freedom fighter but a 'religious bigot' who forcibly converted thousands of Hindus into Muslims during his reign.
- Eldest son of Sultan Hyder Ali, Tipu (1750-1799) was also known as the 'Tiger of Mysore', as he fought against the British East India Company and Hindu kingdoms in the Deccan region to protect and enlarge his kingdom.
- Tipu was killed in a battle with the British army in 1799 while defending his fort at Srirangapatna near Mysore, about 120km from Bengaluru.
- Protests were also held at Mysuru, Puttur and Mangaluru against the state government for celebrating Tipu's birth anniversary

Petition to Supreme Court on disadvantaged position of Kannada

A Bengaluru-based activist sought direction from the Supreme Court to Karnataka government and the Centre to ensure use of Kannada language in 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan', railway tickets and competitive examination booklets for Central government services.

In a writ petition, H Satish Halappa, through his representative Prof M M Kini, submitted before a three-judge bench presided over by Chief Justice T S Thakur that the Kannada language is losing its primacy in the State due to dominant use of languages like Hindi and English.

According to provisions of Article 345 read with Article 210(2) of the Constitution, every state has power to adopt any one or more languages in use, while the Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963, has declared Kannada as official language of the State.

Prof Kini submitted that despite the provisions, several competitive examinations being organised by the Central government in the State, required answers to be given in Hindi or English, leaving local candidates at disadvantage position. Even the huge money, manpower and time invested by the Central government on 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' in advertisements go waste because of non-use of Kannada language. The petitioner submitted that railway tickets sold across stations in Karnataka carried information only in English and Hindi, making it difficult for people in the State to comprehend it, whereas in Tamil Nadu, the Tamil language is used for the purpose.

The bench, also comprising Justices R Banumathi and U U Lalit, asked the petitioner to approach the Karnataka HC, telling him his grievances could be addressed over there.

Anti Corruption Bureau by Karnataka

The Karnataka government has set up an Anti-Corruption Bureau to provide a transparent and efficient administration.

Details:

The ACB will be a statutory authority to investigate graft offences. It has been placed under the direct supervision of the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR) where a vigilance wing, headed by a secretary-level officer will be in charge of the new body and will report to the chief minister through the chief secretary.

- However, the ACB will have no power to initiate a probe on decisions taken or recommendations made by public servants, without prior permission from the appointing authority.
- An Inspector General of Police (IGP) rank officer will head the vigilance cell within ACB and will report to the newly created Vigilance Advisory Board, headed by the chief secretary.
- ACB will be headed by an Additional Director General of Police-rank officer. It will have an IGP rank officer, 10 superintendents of police and a 322-member force.

Background:

Though Karnataka was the first state to set up an anti-corruption watchdog – the Lokayukta (ombudsman) in 1984 under the Karnataka Lokayukta Act (KLA), there is also the Prevention of Corruption Act empowers police to investigate graft charge against officials.

- The KLA and PC Act are different legislations, as the former empowers the quasi-judicial Lokayukta to only inquire into complaints against public servants but does not allow criminal investigation against them and others accused of seeking or taking bribe.
- Though the state government entrusted the investigation powers into corruption charges to the police wing of the state Lokayukta, the Supreme Court in the Rangaswamaiah versus Karnataka Lokayukta case in 1988 held that police officers probing cases under the PC Act were autonomous.
- The Karnataka High Court had also held that the Lokayukta did not have the jurisdiction to supervise criminal investigation under the PC Act through its police wing on the basis of the top court's Rangaswamaiah judgement.
- The state government has therefore decided to separate the two roles by forming the Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) on the lines of the central government.

The creation of new body, however, is not free from criticisms. Activists argue that the effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), now invested with powers to probe corruption cases against public servants, will eventually depend on the whims and fancies of the State government, which will be directly overseeing these probes.

- The agency can also be selectively used to target or safeguard those accused of corruption, they argue.
- Not just that. All the cases registered by the Lokayukta police under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 will now be transferred to the ACB.
- The Lokayukta police wing will now be reduced to assisting the Lokayukta in their probes, under the Karnataka Lokayukta Act, 1988, which even the former Lokayuktas agree is toothless in fighting corruption.

‘Karnataka On Demand Transportation Technology Aggregators Rules, 2016’

Police verification mandatory

Aggregators will have to ensure that all their taxis display a board showing the permit and details of the driver, such as photo, name, licence and badge number along with an ID card issued by the police. Each cab must have a panic button, which can be used by the passenger without any interference by the driver.

In a bid to regulate the men at the wheel, the rules state that no driver can have a drunk driving violation or any other cognisable offence under the Criminal Procedure Code for a period of seven years before joining the aggregator.

Knowledge of Kannada essential

Drivers will need a minimum experience of two years. In addition, they will have to prove that they have been staying in the State for a minimum of five years and can speak Kannada and another language, preferably English.

No surge pricing?

While government officials had previously stated their opposition to the ‘surge pricing’ model adopted by aggregators, the rules simply state that the fare collected shall be as per the digital meter and cannot be more than the fares fixed by the government. Currently, the city taxi rules permit cab operators to charge up to Rs. 19.5 per km for an air-conditioned taxi. This means that for some aggregators, who charge up to Rs 9.75 per km, surge pricing is possible.

“Currently, the rates are the same as the existing rates as the rules are new. In the future, the rate may change,” a senior official in the Transport Department said.

Other rules

Aggregators will have to maintain exhaustive records for a period of one year of trips operated. This will include customer details and complaints, which will have to be made accessible to authorities, if necessary. A grievance redressal officer will have to be appointed for dealing with customer complaints.

The pricing story

For passengers, the new rules mean that rates will be regulated to some extent. Under the current rates fixed by the government, surge pricing, which pushes the rates to more than Rs. 19.5/km will not be possible. Under the new rules, the fare cannot cross the fare fixed by the government. Driver details will have to be displayed in the taxi after approval by police authorities.

However, official sources said that the government will mostly relook the existing rates once the 30-day time period for filing of objections ends. This leaves the matter of surge pricing in ambiguity.

The rules insist on drivers living in the State for a minimum of five years and a ban on drivers convicted of offences like drunk driving, fraud, sexual offences.

Aggregators will have to immediately suspend the access of a driver to the platform on receipt of a complaint that the driver was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The suspension cannot be lifted till an enquiry into the matter is completed by the aggregator.

Taxi aggregator Uber, in a statement, said they it will respond or comment only after studying the rules.

Other highlights

- Cabs will be fitted with a yellow-colour display board with the word 'Taxi' visible both from the front and the rear
- Vehicles have to be less than 6 years old at the time a driver signs up with an aggregator
- Fare shall be charged only from the point of boarding to the point of exit.
- No passenger shall be charged for dead mileage
- Permit holder can operate with multiple aggregators simultaneously
- Aggregator to send photo of driver along with vehicle registration number and other details to customer's mobile before boarding
- Aggregator must publish policy on taxi fare, registration of taxis and drivers on its platform or app
- Aggregator must publicise grievance redressal mechanism

After ban on Jallikattu, AWBI pushes for ban on Kambala races in Karnataka

- Amid raging debate over the ban on Jallikattu, the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) has written a letter to the Karnataka government requesting it not to allow the Kambala races in the state, which uses buffaloes.
- AWBI cited the recent Supreme Court judgment to ban Jallikattu and similar races that uses animals in the country.
- Kambala is a traditional buffalo race held at many places in Coastal Karnataka, especially in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts. The AWBI has asked that immediate steps be taken to stop the Kambala events that are planned to be held in the state as per the Kambala calender.

The AWBI pointed out that the Supreme Court of India has stayed the notification of Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF &CC) issued recently, permitting use of bulls in Jallikattu, bullock cart races and similar events. But, it was stayed through an order dated January 12, 2016 and it refused to revoke the stay through an order dated January 13, 2016.

The state government may face contempt of court if it allows Kambala, which is violation of law and also of the Supreme Court order.

The copies of the letter were also sent to the state police chief, officials of Animal Husbandry department, superintendents of Udupi and Dakshina Kannada district and other officials concerned.
