

Lok Sabha passes triple talaq Bill

Lok Sabha passed by voice vote The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2017 that makes instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat a criminal offence, with a jail term of up to three years.

- The proposed law would be applicable to the entire country, except in Jammu and Kashmir.
- It would make instant talaq punishable and would be a cognisable, non-bailable offence.

Calling it a historic step, Union Law Minister said the Bill will act as a deterrent since there have been 100 cases of triple talaq even after the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court delivered in August this year.

WHO to classify 'gaming disorder' as mental health condition

With more and more youngsters getting hooked to video games, both online and offline, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is set to classify gaming disorder as a mental health condition.

- In the beta draft of its forthcoming 11th International Classification of Diseases, WHO has included gaming disorder in its list of mental health conditions.
- Mental health experts and psychiatrists said this is the need of the hour as nearly 7% of population studied for gaming and internet addiction exhibited depressive symptoms, anxiety and somatisation, including behavioural changes and sleep disturbances.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders -V, a diagnostic bible for mental health professionals published by the American Psychiatric Association, has already classified gaming disorder as a mental health condition.

Interceptor missile successfully tested

India successfully test-fired an Advanced Air Defence (AAD) interceptor missile, capable of destroying enemy ballistic missiles at low altitude, from a test range in Odisha.

- The missile is being developed as part the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system and it was the third successful test this year.
- The endo-atmospheric interceptor made a direct hit with the incoming missile at an altitude of 15 km, completely destroying it. This version has been tested several times, proving its reliability.

Shooting down an incoming missile at lower altitudes is more complicated than shooting at higher altitudes due to the higher velocity of the missile.

India leads in global milk production

During the past three years, India has outpaced the global milk production with an annual growth rate of 5.53% compared with the 2.09% achieved globally.

- India has been the largest producer of milk in the world for the past 15 years.

Milk production, which was around 17-22 million tonnes in the 1960s, has increased to 163.7 million tonnes in 2016-17.

- Similarly, per capita availability of milk has increased to 351 grams in the year 2016-17.
- The income of dairy farmers increased by 23.77% in 2014-17 compared to 2011-14.

The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) has initiated a number of schemes with the objective of doubling the dairy farmers' income.

- In this direction, dairy farmers income is being raised in two ways – one by raising milk production and productivity and by increasing the price of raw milk per kg.

DAHDF is working on a National Action Plan Vision 2022, where along with enhancing the outreach of dairy cooperatives to additional villages and milk producers, suitable provisions are being made to build additional milk processing infrastructure for processing additional volume of milk expected on account of higher milk production and meeting the increased demand for value-added products.

More scientists coming back now

The number of Indian-origin scientists working internationally and returning to India between 2012 and 2017 has jumped 70% from that from 2007 to 2012, show figures from the Department of Science and Technology.

- This is primarily due to schemes such as the Ramanujan Fellowship Scheme and the Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) Faculty Scheme and the Ramalingaswami re-entry fellowship scheme coordinated by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
- These schemes allow “high-calibre” Indian researchers working abroad to relocate to Indian institutes and universities of their respective interest and domain.

However, not all researchers who return get absorbed as full-time faculty in institutions. Of the 373 scientists, who got these scholarships between 2014 and 2016, only 125 were absorbed into their host institutions.

Long plagued by “brain drain”, India has over the last decade ramped up schemes to attract Indian- origin scientists.

- India does not yet attract the upper echelon of Indian-origin scientists to set up labs and move their research here.

SEBI tightens rating agency, MF norms

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has tightened the norms for credit rating agencies (CRAs) and mutual funds (MFs) to reduce instances of conflict of interest.

The SEBI board, increased the net worth requirement for rating agencies to Rs 25 crore from the current Rs 5 crore.

- It also decided that the promoter entity would have to maintain at least 25% stake in the rating agency for a period of three years.
- CRAs have also been barred from holding more than 10% in a peer rating agency.
- SEBI also said that CRAs would have to segregate their non-core activities into a separate legal entity to avoid any conflict of interest.

In the case of MFs, SEBI said a sponsor of a particular MF cannot hold more than 10% in any other MF entity.

Among other important decisions, SEBI gave its nod for existing bourses to introduce equity or commodity trading facilities as they deem fit.

- In other words, BSE and NSE can now unveil commodity trading while Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) can start offering equity trading facilities.
- The integration, however, would come into effect from October 1, 2018.

BSE believes this decision will help participants in various markets a highly regulated, safer, more transparent trading, clearing and settlement framework when implemented fully.

Govt. giving finishing touches to ‘Clean Authority

The stage is being set for the introduction of an exclusive authority to deal with solid waste, waste water and polluted air in urban areas across Telangana.

- The government is finalising modalities for establishing the ‘Clean Authority of Telangana’ — an apex body that will ensure enforcement of measures aimed at containing the harm caused through solid waste, waste water and polluted air to human health.
- The authority is to be modelled on the lines of a similar body in Japan.
- Preparations are on to introduce a Bill constituting the authority in the coming Budget session of the legislature.

An eventful year for the seed sector in Telangana

The year 2017 has been the most eventful for the seed sector of Telangana since it has seen the State taking the leadership role at the national level and also making a mark at the international level with export of seed under the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) programme.

- Setting the house in order first, the State government ensured timely availability of seed before the commencement of every agriculture season for the last three years.
- To deal with the spurious seed issue/offenders, the State government amended an existing law bringing the subject under the purview of Prevention of Dangerous Activities Act.
 - “A good beginning has been made this year by making two seed companies pay compensation to chilli farmers in Gadwal, Khammam and Warangal (Rural) districts after they suffered crop loss due to inferior quality seed.

On the other hand, the Telangana government hosted stakeholders’ conferences on OECD seed certification twice and national meeting of public sector seed entities towards improving the quality of seed to international standards.

- It was decided to promote inter-State sale of seed by public sector entities to make them affordable to the farming community.

After becoming the nodal agency for OECD seed certification for four States, Telangana State Seed and Organic Certification Agency (TSSOCA) has achieved the distinction of exporting sorghum and paddy seed for the first time to Sudan, Philippines, Vietnam and Egypt.

- “About 17,000 quintals seed raised with international standards in 2,271 acres in Telangana has been exported to those countries and we have plans to increase it to 50,000 quintals this year from over 6,000 acres,” Director of TSSOCA K. Keshavulu explained.

One more recognition that has come to the Telangana State seed sector this year is selection of Mr. Keshavulu as the chairman of the advisory council of the International Seed Testing Association to coordinate the international seed agencies and the seed industry. The Union Agriculture Ministry has already appointed him as the nodal officer for taking up a field-level study for the country’s membership in the Europe Equivalence.

Panel defers decision on Zaheerabad investment zone

An Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) under the Union Ministry of Environment has deferred its decision on preparing the terms of reference (ToR) for the proposed Zaheerabad National Investment and Manufacturing Zone (NIMZ) in Sangareddy district by the Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation Limited (TSIIC).

- The EAC put off its decision as it felt that the proposed land where the NIMZ was expected to come up had 13 reserve forests around it.
- The committee also sought detailed information about types of industries or activities proposed along with the use of raw materials and chemicals and processing details for precise assessment of the environmental impact.

The project is proposed on about 12,635 acres (5,113 ha) of land in pursuit of the National Manufacturing Policy of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

- The Centre accorded final approval for the Zaheerabad NIMZ in January, 2016.
- The total cost of the project is Rs 4,704.90 crore and an additional Rs 6,500 crore would be spent on external linkage of the project, including upgradation of NH-65 from Zaheerabad to last-mile connectivity to western ports.
- It is estimated to bring around Rs 37,740 crore of total investments by manufacturing industries at the ultimate phase with Rs 96,778 crore of estimated industrial output by 2040, as per the EAC.
- It is likely to generate direct and indirect employment potential of about 2.44 lakh.