

Canada will not support separatists, says Trudeau

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asserted that his country believed in a united India and assured the Punjab government that it would not support any separatist movement in India.

- I took up the issue pertaining to Khalistan as it is a matter of primary concern to us. He (Mr. Trudeau) is aware of it and has assured us that he is going to look into the matter,” said Punjab CM Capt. Singh after the meeting.
- During the meeting, Capt. Singh sought the Canadian Prime Minister’s cooperation in cracking down on separatism and hate crime by a fringe element, constituting a minuscule percentage of Canada’s population.
- Mr. Trudeau assured Capt. Singh that “his country did not support any separatist movement in India or elsewhere.

India dismayed at Male’s move

Expressing its disappointment over the Maldives government’s decision to extend the state of Emergency for another month despite India’s objections, New Delhi issued statement, calling the move unconstitutional.

- “We are deeply dismayed that the government of Maldives has extended the state of Emergency for a further 30 days. The manner in which the extension of the state of Emergency was approved by the Majlis in contravention of the Constitution of Maldives is also a matter of concern,” the External Affairs Ministry said , referring to the passage of the Emergency extension resolution in Parliament despite there not being the requisite quorum of 43 members.

The Maldivian Ambassador to India, Mohamed Ahmed, denied the accusation that the move was unconstitutional.

- “Their [Ministry’s] interpretation is incorrect,” Mr. Ahmed . “In this case, the President [Yameen] declared a state of Emergency, Parliament extended it. And to check whether there are any issues with the extension of Emergency, it has been referred to the Supreme Court.” Later the Supreme Court reportedly cleared the validity of the Emergency extension as well.

Centre opposes PIL plea in PNB case, says probe on

The Centre opposed a PIL petition in the Supreme Court for an investigation into the alleged Rs 11,500-crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) banking fraud, saying cases had already been registered and the probe has begun.

- The petition asked the court to also direct the government to bring back diamond merchant Nirav Modi, at the centre of the fraud, in two months.
- But Vineet Dhanda, petitioner and advocate, said the issue was of utmost urgency as a “few influential and connected businessmen have decamped with thousands of crores of public money from right under the nose of the government”.
- The petitioner called for guidelines to be framed by the Finance Ministry for loans of over Rs 10 crore. Mr. Dhanda also sought a list of borrowers whose bank loans are worth over Rs 500 crore.

Centre reboots eNAM to draw more farmers

- In a bid to engage more farmers on the electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM) platform, the government unveiled mobile payment facility BHIM, and other features in regional languages as well.
- The eNAM website is now available in Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Odia besides Hindi and English, while the eNAM trading facility is available in six languages.

Enhanced features

- The eNAM has been strengthened with features like MIS dashboard, BHIM and other mobile payment facilities, enhanced features on mobile app such as gate entry and payment via mobiles.

Blockchain tech could help prevent frauds like at PNB

- The adoption of blockchain by India's banks could help avert frauds such as the one at Punjab National Bank.
- The disaggregated and transparent nature of the technology updates information across all users simultaneously.

- It would have ensured that various officials would have instantly been alerted to the creation of the letters of undertaking (LoUs), according to bankers and blockchain specialists.

‘Immediate notification’

- Transaction reconciliation systems at present do not result in immediate notification.
- Using blockchain, all parties on the chain will be immediately notified about a transaction.
- Blockchain, a distributed ledger technology was originally developed as an accounting system for the cryptocurrency Bitcoin.
- It is being researched across the banking and financial services industries for the potential benefits it may offer in an increasingly digitised business environment.
- Central banks including the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Reserve Bank of India have been examining the technology to understand the regulatory challenges it may pose.
- Blockchain potentially has far-reaching implications for the financial sector, and this is prompting more and more banks, insurers and other financial institutions to invest in research into potential applications of this technology.
- Market participants in other securities markets are also exploring the usage of blockchain or distributed database technology to provide various services such as clearing and settlement, trading.

Implementation at SBI

- SBI had already implemented it in its reconciliation systems and in several cross-country payment gateways.
- In blockchain, from the source system it will try to match the transactions, so one can immediately verify any transaction using blockchain.
- Blockchains are immutable and distributed ledgers, which means that anything recorded on them cannot be changed or deleted, and is instantly uploaded to all users on that blockchain.

- However, simply depending on technology to prevent frauds is fraught, since they take place at the human level, where an official with the correct authentication can misuse the system.
- Still, blockchain's technology is such that even human error can be greatly mitigated. Blockchain can fix this by having everything linked to the same database.

Bangladesh fears exodus of Bengalis from Assam

- The ongoing process of compiling the National Register of Citizens in Assam may trigger an exodus of Bengalis. And it may create one more Rohingya-like refugee crisis for Bangladesh, fears Bangladesh.
- The process in Assam is threatening India-Bangladesh ties and will be exploited by anti-India elements and Islamic fundamentalists who are challenging the Awami League rule.
- Citizenship issue will be another disappointment after the setback on the sharing of water of the river Teesta.
- India should think of its friendship with Bangladesh before going ahead with the full implementation of the citizens register in Assam, sources in the country opine.
- Bangladeshi policymakers are unanimous that the failure to conclude the Teesta water sharing agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka has been a disappointment and that the ongoing process in Assam will complicate the situation further.
- These observations have gained significance as a section of the ruling Awami League believes that India has not reciprocated Ms. Hasina's support on counterinsurgency in the northeastern States.

Pak. claims reprieve over terror financing

- Pakistan claimed victory in the ongoing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting as a preliminary discussion in the International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG) failed to build a consensus on putting it again on the terror 'watch-list'.
- However, U.S. and Indian officials said a final decision is still to come.
- Pakistan Foreign Minister said that Pakistan had won a reprieve of three months to convince the UN body not to put it on a 'grey-list' of countries where terror financing and money laundering needed scrutiny.
- Pakistan was on the FATF watch-list from 2012 to 2015.
- According to reports in Pakistani newspapers, countries including China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not back the resolution, which was originally supported by the U.S., Germany, the U.K. and France.

Canada court upholds ban on 'kirpan'

- A Canadian court has upheld the right of Quebec's National Assembly to prohibit people from entering the building with a kirpan, an article of faith for the Sikhs.
- Two members of the World Sikh Organisation of Canada were challenging a motion adopted in the Assembly in February 2011.

STATE-TELANGANA

EPTRI for regulation of groundwater exploitation

There is an urgent need to enact a Groundwater Regulation and Control Act in Telangana on the lines of a Central Model Bill. Such a law would help regulate groundwater extraction and prevent ruthless drilling of earth for pumping groundwater.

- The 'TS State of Environment Report', a draft prepared by the Environment, Protection, Training and Research Institute (EPTRI) and recently presented to the government, emphasised that the State has to promote the idea of conjunctive use of water from surface and rainwater harvesting, among others, to wean off excessive pressure on groundwater sources.
- Prepared with support of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the draft report indicated the dire current state of ecology and gave a series of

recommendations to be followed in various sectors to lower pollution levels, and improve farm production and conditions for flora and fauna to thrive.

Deep water levels of over 20 metres have been observed in most parts of Medak, Mahabubnagar, Ranga Reddy, Nizamabad, Nalgonda and parts of Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam and Adilabad districts.

- It also stated that the government has been sanctioning Reverse Osmosis plants in quality/fluoride affected habitations, but the impact of such plants is that the water-rejection rate is around 25% to 45%.
- Although RO plants provide an immediate solution to get over water quality related problems, they were unsustainable in the longer run because of the high pressure it exerted on groundwater.
- The report called for an empirical investigation to ascertain the impact of such plants on groundwater and on water governance.
- Groundwater safety clearance should be made mandatory before according clearance to mines whether they are major or minor. Abandoned mines or quarries could be utilised for installing solar panels for generating solar energy, while mine quarry pits could be used for water storage.

TS Biodiversity Board should be strengthened with diverse experts working on bio-resources to manage and assess multiple implications of its depletion.

- Both botanical and zoological surveys should work in coordination with the Board to provide authentic information on biodiversity wealth and to take appropriate decisions, the report said.
- Telangana has 17 species of amphibians, 65 species of reptiles and 103 species of mammals are assessed for threatened status by Species Specialist Group of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The species in IUCN red list constitute only 30% and rest of are either not assessed or data is insufficient.
- The species of birds in the State are estimated to be around 275-300.
- The information on invertebrate groups is limited to a few groups and explorations.

Over 50% of all vulnerable species occur in at least one or the other protected area in Telangana and there are 2,800 taxa belonging to 1,051 genera under 185 families.

All students in Telangana to get health cards

The State government has decided to conduct health tests for over 30 lakh students across the State and issue health cards to them from the next academic year.

- Accordingly, the Health Department officials had been directed to start comprehensive health check-ups for students from July and complete the process within six months. This would be followed by issue of health cards to the students.
- In addition, the government will distribute health and hygiene kits to close to eight lakh students enrolled in the SC/ST/BC/minority residential educational institutions, KGBVs, government high schools and other institutions.
- The officials concerned had also been directed to conduct awareness programmes for students studying seventh to tenth standards on the likely health complications they could face and the precautionary measures to be taken.

Centre defers meeting on AP Reorganisation Act

An important meeting of the chief secretaries of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh convened by the Union Home Ministry to take stock of the assurances given to the two successor States in Schedule 13 of the AP Reorganisation Act 2014 has been deferred.

- The Union Ministry sent a communication to the two States about its decision to postpone the meeting assuring that fresh dates of the meeting would be communicated soon.
- The communication came at a time when the governments of the two Telugu States were preparing information relating to the assurances that had been incorporated in the Reorganisation Act but had not been implemented so far.

Some of the assurances in the Schedule 13 included

- setting up of steel plants in Khammam and YSR Kadapa district,
- 4,000 MW power plant in Telangana by NTPC, rail coach factory in Telangana,
- measures for establishing rapid rail and road connectivity from the AP capital to Hyderabad and other important cities of Telangana and
- upgradation of Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada and Tirupati airports as international airports etc.,

Senior officials said the meeting assumed significance as it is expected to be chaired by the Union Home Secretary and secretaries of several Union Ministries had been invited to participate in the deliberations about the status of implementation of the assurances given to the two States.

- The last meeting chaired by the Union Home Secretary was held in May 2015. The sub-committees constituted by the Union Ministry had been holding discussions ever since.

STATE – AP

Conference on women empowerment on March 1

A national conference on “Women empowerment and gender equality: Planet 50-50 by 2030” is being held in Guntur on March 1 in collaboration with United Nation Information Centre, New Delhi and British Deputy High Commission, Hyderabad.

Guntur based DEEDS organisation, and Yes We Can, Visakhapatnam based organisation are hosting the conference.

Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner is the chief guest at the conference.

The conference is being held as a precursor to International Women’s Day celebrated on March 8.

It will focus on the research problems in the gender equality and women empowerment and further give a platform for people from different fields to discuss on the issues.