

Plea seeks protection for ECs from sacking

The Supreme Court asked the Centre and the Election Commission of India to file their responses on a plea pointing out the vagueness in the procedure for the removal of two Election Commissioners.

The petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay said the ambiguity on the removal procedure of the Election Commissioners might affect the functional independence of the EC.

- The CEC and the Election Commissioners have a tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier, and enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to apex court judges.
- “The CEC and the Election Commissioners enjoy the same decision-making powers... However, Article 324(5) does not provide similar protection to the Election Commissioners,” the plea said.
- The petition argued that the proviso to Article 324 (5) of the Constitution safeguards the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) from arbitrary removal. The CEC can be removed from office only by the order of the President, just like a judge of the Supreme Court. However, the same constitutional provision is silent about the procedure for removal of the two Election Commissioners. It only provides that they cannot be removed from office except on the recommendation of the CEC.

The petition, in short, seeks to provide Election Commissioners with the same protection against arbitrary removal as the CEC. The plea also sought direction to the Centre to provide an independent secretariat to the Election Commission.

Khalistan casts shadow over Trudeau visit

The Khalistan issue, which kept India-Canada ties on ice through three decades from 1980, has resurfaced, taking away much of the warmth expected during the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to India.

- The Canadian government has repeatedly failed to take into account the sensitivities in India over the past when Sikh terror groups received support from elements in that country.
- A major breaking point came last April when Mr. Trudeau attended a “Khalsa Day” parade organised by one of the more radical gurdwaras in Toronto.
 - the parade depicted Sikh militant leaders Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Amreek Singh and former General Shahbeg Singh — who were killed in the siege of the Golden Temple and Operation Bluestar in June 1984 — as heroes.

Among other disturbing issues was the felicitation at the parade of a politician responsible for a resolution in the Ontario Assembly that accused India of “genocide” during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, a vote that India had also protested strongly.

Issues over the growth of Sikh extremist groups, especially those seeking a “Referendum 2020” for the worldwide Sikh diaspora to vote on an “independent Khalistan”, have been raised several times in the past few years.

To add to the tensions, 16 Canadian gurdwaras announced a “ban” last month on the entry of Indian elected officials, consular officials, RSS and Shiv Sena members. The Trudeau government took no action in response to the decision. When asked, officials cited “freedom of expression” issues.

Another sore point on the current visit has been Mr. Trudeau’s insistence on including in his Cabinet those accused of sympathising with the Khalistan movement — Mr. Sajjan and Navdeep Singh Bains — on his visit to Amritsar.

Firms from four nations keen on DMIC

The Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), a mega infrastructure project with an estimated investment of \$100 billion, has attracted interest from companies based out of Canada, the U.S., Singapore and Taiwan.

- Representatives of Canadian Commercial Corporation, GIC Singapore, Taiwanese securities industry major Yuanta Securities, as well as executives of some American firms, held talks separately with officials of the DMIC Development Corporation.
- The DMIC Development Corporation is a special purpose company incorporated for the development of the DMIC project.

Canadian Commercial Corporation is a Canada government corporation that aims to boost Canadian trade by helping exporters from that country access government procurement markets in other nations via government-to-government contracting, while GIC Singapore is the Singapore government’s sovereign wealth fund with assets of around \$360 billion.

- The focus areas included defence as well as Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO). Discussions also revolved around proposals to set up units to manufacture aerospace and defence equipment in DMIC smart cities.
- It is learnt that Singapore-based water companies are keen on participating in the DMIC project and one such firm had even held discussions on taking up a feasibility study regarding water supply in the Manesar-Bawal Investment Region (MBIR).

The first phase of the DMIC Project will cover five Investment Regions (or IR — ‘specifically delineated industrial region with a minimum area of more than 200 square kilometres) and three Industrial Areas (or IA — developed with a minimum area of more than 100 square kilometres).

- As per the government, the Investment Regions include
 - Ahmedabad–Dholera Special IR in Gujarat (903 sq.km, with likely employment for 8 lakh people),
 - Dadri-Noida-Ghaziabad IR in Uttar Pradesh (218 sq.km, likely employment for 12 lakh people),
 - MBIR in Haryana (402 sq.km, estimated employment for 16 lakh people),
 - Khushkhera-Bhiwadi-Neemrana IR in Rajasthan (160 sq.km, likely employment for 5.2 lakh people) and
 - Pitampur-Dhar-Mhow IR in Madhya Pradesh (372 sq.km, estimated employment for 4.5 lakh people).
- The IAs include:
 - Shendra-Bidkin IA in Maharashtra (84 sq. km, with an estimated employment for 7.5 lakh people),
 - Dighi Port IA in Maharashtra (253 sq. km, likely employment for 3.2 lakh people) and
 - Jodhpur-Pali-Marwar IA in Rajasthan (155 sq. km, likely employment for 3.2 lakh people).

South Korean industrial conglomerate Hyosung Corporation is reportedly set to invest about ₹3,400 crore to establish a textile manufacturing facility in the Shendra-Bidkin IA.

- Besides, talks are on to develop the Ahmedabad–Dholera Special IR into an MRO hub for aerospace and defence firms.

PM calls for re-skilling existing workforce

The World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT 2018) or the ‘Olympics of IT’, coming to India for the first time, got under way with Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasising on re-skilling of existing workforce in the backdrop of emergence of new technologies.

- Skilling citizens for the workplace of the future is important. We also need to ensure that our existing workforce is able to re-skill as new technologies emerge,” PM said, inaugurating the event held in Hyderabad, through video-conferencing.
- We need to reflect on changing nature of jobs in the emerging age of intelligent automation,” he said, pointing to how disruptive technologies such as Blockchain and

IoT(Internet of Things) would have “deep impact in the way we live and work. They will require rapid adaptation in our workplaces., the PM said.

Earlier, the Prime Minister unveiled FutureSkills platform, a Nasscom initiative to upskill 2 million technology professionals in India.

S&T

Sheep embryos with human cells grown

In a breakthrough, scientists have successfully grown sheep embryos containing human cells, bringing the ability to grow human organs inside other animals closer to reality.

- Growing human organs inside animals may not only increase supply, but also offer the possibility of genetically tailoring of the organs to be compatible with the immune system of receiver.
- Researchers had recently been able to introduce human stem cells into early pig embryos, producing embryos for which about one in every 1,00,000 cells were human.

The team has now achieved a similar feat with sheep embryos, with an even higher ratio of human to animal cells.

- About one in 10,000 cells in these sheep embryos are human,” said researchers from University of California.

Vaccine can prevent TB infections in adolescents

A clinical trial has provided encouraging new evidence that TB vaccines can prevent sustained infections in high-risk adolescents. The results will be announced at the 5th Global Forum on TB Vaccines in New Delhi.

- In the Phase 2 trial conducted in South Africa, revaccination with the BacilleCalmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine significantly reduced sustained TB infections in adolescents.

- An experimental vaccine candidate, H4:IC31, also reduced sustained infections, although not at statistically significant levels.
- However, the trend observed for H4:IC31 is the first time a subunit vaccine has shown any indication of ability to protect against TB infection.

The study was conducted to evaluate the safety and immunogenicity of the vaccine regimens, as well as their ability to prevent initial and sustained TB infections among healthy adolescents in the Western Cape Province of South Africa.

According to the World Health Organisation, about one-third of the world's population has latent TB infection, which means people have been infected by TB bacteria but are not (yet) ill with the disease and cannot transmit the disease.

- People infected with TB bacteria have a lifetime risk of falling ill with TB of 10%.
- People ill with TB can infect 10-15 other people through close contact over the course of a year.
- Without proper treatment, 45% of HIV-negative people with TB on average and nearly all HIV-positive people with TB will die.

STATE-TELANGANA

Telangana showcases T-Fiber at World IT Congress

A Technology Demonstration Network (TDN) of Telangana government's ambitious broadband connectivity project for all 10 million households was inaugurated by Union Minister of Electronics and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad, at the World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT 2018) in the city.

- The TDN is established in four villages within the Maheshwarammandal. A few houses, a school, a primary health centre and gram panchayat offices in Mansanpally, Thummaloor, Sirigipuram and Maheshwaram villages are connected to the Secretariat, the Raj Bhavan, CM's Camp Office and State Data Centre.
- Speeds of up to 1 gbps for households are provided under the project that will serve as the backbone for extending a range of services such as e-panchayat, telemedicine, e-education, video conferencing and government-to-citizen services such as MeeSeva, IPTV and IP-Phone.
- The project would help deliver government to citizen and government to government services very effectively in the areas of e-governance, education, healthcare.

The T-Fiber programme, which piggybacks on the State government Mission Bhagiratha protected drinking water for households project, was earlier showcased at the World Economic Forum in Davos.