

CRPF to guard Indian embassy in Baghdad

In a first, the government is planning to send Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) commandos to provide security to the Indian embassy in Baghdad.

- The embassy in 2014 issued an advisory asking Indians living in Iraq to leave the country owing to the “precarious security situation.”
- The Iraqi government is locked in an armed conflict with the terrorist outfit Islamic State.

Considering the high-level threat in Iraq, it was decided to secure the premises of the embassy with own security personnel.

- The CRPF has agreed, in principle, to provide 45 personnel. The contingent will be deployed for three years and it will provide security to the Indian embassy premises and officials when they move outside.

Cannot annul marriage between adults: SC

Courts cannot annul marriages between two consenting adults or resort to a “roving enquiry” on whether the married relationship between a man and a woman is based on consent, the Supreme Court.

The court defined the limits of the court’s jurisdiction in the Hadiya case. Ms. Hadiya, a 26-year-old homoeopathy student, had converted to Islam and then married a Muslim.

SC against disclosure of IAS prelims marks

The Supreme Court has held that details of marks — raw and scaled — scored in the Civil Services Exam cannot be “mechanically” disclosed under Right to Information.

- The court observed that the need for transparency and accountability championed by the Right to Information Act should be balanced by the requirement of confidentiality of sensitive information.

The decision came on an appeal filed by the Union Public Service Commission against a Delhi High Court order to divulge the marks on the basis of a petition filed by unsuccessful candidates of the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, 2010 (CSP).

- The petitioners had sought the disclosure of marks (raw and scaled) awarded to them in the CSP 2010. They wanted information on cut-off marks for each subject, scaling methodology, model answers and the results of all candidates.

“Weighing the need for transparency and accountability and requirement of optimum use of fiscal resources and confidentiality of sensitive information, we are of the view that information sought with regard to marks in Civil Services Exam cannot be directed to be furnished mechanically.” the court said.

Biometric data in State hubs destroyed: UIDAI

A statement was made in the Supreme Court on the instructions of the UIDAI chief that all biometrics stored in State Resident Data Hubs have been “destroyed”.

- UIDAI submitted that biometrics were now stored in the Aadhaar central database or the Central ID Repository.
- The Aadhaar Act of 2016 does not allow biometrics to be stored with State-level authorities.

India, Canada hold strategic dialogue

Ahead of India-Canada bilateral summit, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland held a strategic dialogue covering a wide range of bilateral issues.

- the two leaders had wide-ranging discussions on strengthening relations in trade and investment, security and cyber security, energy, people-to-people contacts and other relevant bilateral and regional issues.

Ties between New Delhi and Ottawa have been frosty in recent times as Canada is being seen as offering a platform to separatists demanding an independent Khalistan.

Bilateral trade must benefit poor: Trudeau

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said while the focus of his relations with India has shifted from aid in the 1950s to trade today, it was important to ensure that greater bilateral trade and investment benefits all, especially the poor.

- Terming democracy and diversity as common factors for India and Canada, he said, “If you want to progress as a community, you should not just tolerate diversity but champion it.”

- adding that diversity opens societies to new ways of thinking and spurs innovation.
- Canada and India need to capitalise on people-to-people ties, and leverage business and knowledge networks.
- To improve business ties, he also referred to the benefits of Canada's 'startup visa program' to start businesses in Canada, and its 'global skills strategy' to help firms recruit and bring talent to Canada at short notice.

India is ignoring facts, says Maldives

India's public statements regarding the suspension of democracy in the Maldives have ignored facts and ground realities, the government of President Abdulla Yameen said.

- The statement, which came a day after India's sharp comments against the extension of emergency rule in the country, urged cooperation from the international community.
- "The public statements issued by the Government of India.. ignore the facts and ground realities with regard to the ongoing political developments in the Maldives. The assertion by India that the extension of the state of Emergency by the People's Majlis was unconstitutional is a clear distortion of facts which ignore the Constitution and Laws of the Maldives," stated a press release from Male.
- The Government of Maldives said the declaration of Emergency was backed by Article 253 of the Constitution, which empowers the President of the nation to protect national security with suspension of democracy.
- "The Supreme Court had cleared the validity of the Emergency," said the statement.

DoT's plan to spur synergy among 7 PSUs

- The government unveiled a 'strategic plan' to enable seven state-owned companies under the Department of Telecom (DoT) to work closely.
- This is with an aim of promoting greater operational synergy among them, including pooling in of resources and effective utilisation of human resources as well as land and buildings.
- The action plan covers MTNL, BSNL, Indian Telephone Industries (ITI), Centre for Development of Telematics (CDOT), Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. (TCIL), Testing and Certification of Telecom Equipments (TEC) and BharatNet (BBNL).

- A core committee of senior officers formed to look into the whole issue of synergy in totality and prepare a comprehensive plan covering various issues affecting the functioning of different organisations.
- The strategic plan entails effective utilisation of human resources, optimum use of vacant space and promoting 'Make in India', among other things.
- **Training manpower**
- Some units have excess manpower whereas others face a shortage. Under the plan, the Centre intended to train and redeploy manpower.
- The strategic roadmap will also cover other areas such as standards and certification, and preparing to tap opportunities in areas like 5G and Internet of Things.

STATE-TELANGANA

TS vows to boost life sciences sector

BioAsia 2018, a part of the prestigious, annual series focused on life sciences sector, got underway, with Telangana government reaffirming its commitment to growth of the sector with multiple initiatives, including expansion of Genome Valley, setting up an incubator focused on vaccine development and activating an infrastructure fund.

- With 800 companies, the life sciences ecosystem is valued at \$50 billion in the State. "Our aim is to double the figure to \$100 billion in the next 10 years," Industries and IT Minister said, inaugurating the 3-day event.
- the State's vision, is to leverage existing strength in Life science sector and make it an economic growth engine to create 4 lakh jobs, with most of them in manufacturing.
- A new Life Sciences policy, with the framework encouraging established companies to partner with incubatees and help create an innovation exchange, is also on the anvil.

On the Genome Valley Cluster, located on city outskirts and among the largest such in Asia, he said the government would strengthen its dominant position.

- It would immediately initiate formulation of an integrated master plan for the cluster's expansion, "marking the beginning of Genome Valley 2.0."

- Noting that the State produced about 33% of global vaccines dosages, he said the government is also committed to see at least one new vaccine being launched from companies in the State every year.
- To support this, “we are contemplating various initiatives and support infrastructure, including a first of its kind incubator focused on vaccine development in Genome Valley.”

TS to float a not-for-profit entity for farmers

The State Government has decided to create a new corporation — Telangana State Farmers’ Coordination Committee (TSFCC).

- The proposed corporation is aimed at taking the measures initiated by the government for the welfare and development of farmers to the grassroots levels. The new body would be incorporated as a non-profit corporation and the funds allocated to it would be utilised towards achieving its objectives.

The corporation would be headed by the Agriculture department Principal Secretary as chairman and would have agriculture and horticulture commissioners, vice-chairman of the Telangana Rythu Vedika and a nominee from the Finance department in addition to farmers as directors.

- The corporation was necessitated in view of the declining prices of agricultural produce whenever the seasonal conditions were favourable and the need for government’s intervention arose.
- The corporation would look into the finer aspects of crop scheduling and crop colonies to ensure that the farmer secured remunerative returns for the produce.
- The development is part of the government’s efforts to constitute farmers’ coordination committees at district and State levels. Farmers’ coordination committees had already been constituted at the mandal level and the government convened a conference of these coordination bodies on to explain to the members their roles and responsibilities.
- The government had decided to ensure that at least 51% of these FCCs had members from weaker sections and women.
- The government had decided to put in place platforms — one for every 5,000 acres — enabling farmers to hold meetings to discuss the issues and exchange ideas.