

November 27th and 28th news:

National:

President Inaugurates International Gita Mahotsav in Haryana

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the International Gita Mahotsav 2017 in Kurukshetra, Haryana. The main objective behind Mahotsav is to spread the message of Gita to the world. Mauritius was partner country and Uttar Pradesh was partner state of the event. President Ram Nath Kovind also inaugurated an international seminar on Gita at the Kurukshetra University campus.

Srikrishna panel moots data privacy authority

The Justice B N Srikrishna Committee, formed to draft a data protection and privacy Bill, in a white paper on 26th November suggested setting up a data protection authority, data audit, registration of data collectors, enacting provisions for protecting children's personal data, defining penalties and compensation in the case of a data breach.

The committee, which studied the privacy and data protection laws of many countries, including the US, Singapore, Australia and the EU, has released an over 200-page document inviting comments from the public on various issues such as the definition of personal data and proposed penalties for misuse of data. The deadline for sending feedback is December 31, implying the government is unlikely to table a data protection Bill in the winter session of Parliament.

The Srikrishna Committee was set up on July 31 following a government decision to make Aadhaar compulsory for all its services. The government gave the panel three months to suggest a draft Bill.

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has issued a 12-digit unique identification number called Aadhaar to over 1 billion people after collecting their personal and biometric data. The Aadhaar number is now used by both the government and private entities for the purpose of authentication and financial transactions. Though the UIDAI has various in-built data protection mechanisms, it is not bound to inform an individual in cases of misuse or theft of his or her data.

The Committee, which has met thrice since its formation, is of the opinion that both the government and the private entities be brought under the ambit of the proposed law. At present only private or corporate entities are governed by the Reasonable Security Practices and Sensitive Personal Data or Information Rules under the Information Technology Act.

The Committee appears to be taking a middle path between the EU privacy law, where protection of personal data is equated with protecting the fundamental right to privacy, and the US law, which focuses on protecting the individual from excessive state regulation.

The Committee has divided the white paper into three substantive parts, including scope and exemptions; grounds for processing, obligation on entities and individual rights; and regulation and enforcement.

Bilateral:

Anti terror pact inked

India and Russia on 27th November entered an agreement to help each other in combating terrorism. The agreement between the two countries for cooperation in tackling all forms of terrorism was signed by Home Minister Rajnath Singh and Russia's Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev in Moscow after they held wide-ranging talks. Indian and Russian representatives also signed a joint action plan for countering the threat posed by narcotics. This agreement will provide legal framework for bilateral cooperation in this field.

India, Greece sign Air Services Agreement

India and Greece on 27th November signed Air Services Agreement and MoU on Cooperation in the field of New and Renewable Energy in New Delhi. The pacts were inked after talks between External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and visiting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece Nikos Kotzias, who arrived in New Delhi on 25th November is on a three-day visit to India.

Economy:

Former Planning Commission member N K Singh to head 15th Finance Commission

The government has announced the 15th Finance Commission and it will be chaired by former parliamentarian and revenue and expenditure secretary N K Singh. Its tenure will be till October 30, 2019, by when it will have to give its final report on distributing divisible funds between the Centre and the states for a five-year period starting April 1, 2020.

The Union Cabinet had approved the setting up of the panel earlier this month. Apart from recommending the division between the Centre and states, the panel has additional terms of reference. These include recommending on a fiscal consolidation road map for the Central and state governments, studying the impact of the goods and services tax (GST) on the divisible pool, and proposing performance-based incentives for states, based on fixed parameters.

It should be noted that another panel headed by N K Singh, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) committee, has already recommended a fiscal road map till 2022-23. That report is being examined by the government.

Additionally, the 15th Finance Commission will be the first such panel to use the 2011 population census. Till the 14th commission, the 1971 census was used, though it recommended distribution of grants to states for local bodies using the 2011 census.

Apart from Singh, other members include former economic affairs secretary Shaktikanta Das, former chief economic advisor Ashok Lahiri, NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand, and Georgetown University professor Anoop Singh.

Usually, someone from the erstwhile Planning Commission was named to the panel. In the 14th one, this was Abhijit Sen, a position Ramesh Chand will play in the new body.

Finance Commission:

The Finance Commission was established by the President of India in 1951 under *Article 280* of the Indian Constitution. It was formed to define the financial relations between the central government of India and the individual state governments. The Finance Commission (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 1951 additionally defines the terms of qualification, appointment and disqualification, the term, eligibility and powers of the Finance Commission. As per the Constitution, the Commission is appointed every five years and consists of a chairman and four other members..

Since the institution of the first Finance Commission, stark changes in the macroeconomic situation of the Indian economy have led to major changes in the Finance Commission's recommendations over the years.

People on the new panel

N K Singh: N K Singh was a Rajya Sabha MP from 2008-2014, he has served as secretary of revenue and expenditure departments in the finance ministry and was an officer on special duty in the Prime Minister's Office under Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He was also a member of the erstwhile Planning Commission. Singh also headed the FRBM panel, which has recommended the fiscal road map for the Central government till FY23. Its report is still being examined by the Centre.

Shaktikanta Das: A veteran economic policymaker and former economic affairs secretary, Shaktikanta Das has helped shape eight Union Budgets — 2017-18 was his last. A 1980 batch Indian Administrative Service Officer from the Tamil Nadu cadre

Ashok Lahiri: Ashok Lahiri served as chief economic advisor in the finance ministry, serving both the National Democratic Alliance and the United Progressive Alliance-1 governments from 2002 to 2007. His tenure saw one of the fastest economic growth rates in India. Later, he served as the executive director, representing India in Asian Development Bank till 2013.

Ramesh Chand: Ramesh Chand, member of NITI Aayog, has been involved in policy formulation for the agriculture sector for the past 15 years. Prior to joining NITI Aayog, he was director at National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research, New Delhi. He is also member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on the Future of Food Security and Agriculture.

Anoop Singh: Anoop Singh was managing director and head of regulatory affairs, Asia Pacific, for JP Morgan during 2014-2015. Before that, at the International Monetary Fund, he was director of the Asia and Pacific Department (2008-13) and director of the Western Hemisphere Department (2002-08).

Sports:

Honours for sport personalities

Shuttler Kidambi Srikanth bagged the Sportsman of the Year award at the inaugural edition of Indian Sports Honours held in Mumbai. Olympic silver medallist PV Sindhu was the Sportswoman of the Year award in the individual sport category.

Ravichandran Ashwin, who became the fastest bowler to reach 'Club 300' in Test cricket was awarded Sportsman of the Year award while women's cricket team skipper Mithali Raj was awarded Sportswoman of the Year award in the Team Sport category.

The Indian Women's Cricket Team, which ended as runners-up in the ICC Women's World Cup, were named as the Team of the Year.

While star tennis player Sania Mirza was awarded the Inspirational Honour by the jury, country's first Olympic gold medallist Abhinav Bindra was honoured with the Transformational Contribution to Sport award. Indian Sports Honours is an initiative partnered by India skipper Virat Kohli and Sanjiv Goenka, in line with their vision to support the development of Indian sports.

Persons in news:

Nel-Peters: Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters, who recently earned a business management degree crowned during the event at The AXIS theatre at Planet Hollywood casino-resort on the Las Vegas Strip. The runner-up was Miss Colombia Laura Gonzalez, while the second runner-up was Miss Jamaica, Davina Bennett.

Ninety-two women from around the world participated in the decades-old competition. This year's edition had the most contestants ever, including the first-ever representatives of Cambodia, Laos and Nepal.