

November 2nd news:

International:

Hamas cedes Gaza border crossings to Palestinian Authority

Hamas began ceding control of the Gaza Strip's border crossings with Israel and Egypt to U.S.-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on 1st November under an agreement brokered by Cairo to end a decade of internal schism.

The move marked the most concrete implementation of the Oct. 11 reconciliation deal that Palestinians hope will ease economic restrictions on Gaza and enable more fruitful negotiations on their goal of setting up an independent state.

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Al-Hamdallah said in a statement that taking charge of the crossings would help Mr. Abbas's Palestinian Authority (PA) fulfil its duty "to improve the living conditions of our people".

Israel and the United States have reservations about the intra-Palestinian pact, however, given refusals by Hamas — which has fought three wars with Israel since seizing control of Gaza in 2007 from forces loyal to Mr. Abbas — to relinquish its rockets and other arms.

National:

Goa safest for women, Delhi near the bottom

The safest state to be a woman in India is Goa, followed by Kerala, Mizoram, Sikkim and Manipur. States where women and girls are the most vulnerable are Bihar, Jharkhand, UP and, perhaps not so surprisingly, Delhi.

The findings of the first-ever gender vulnerability index (GVI) are expected to help identify the challenges women face with respect to four parameters — education, health, poverty and protection against violence — and assist policy makers mark out priorities.

The report was prepared by Plan India and released by the women and child development ministry on 1st November. The index puts Goa on top with a GVI of 0.656, more than the national average of 0.5314.

The index scores are on a scale of zero to one. The closer the score is to one, the better the performance. Goa also ranks first in protection, fifth in education, sixth in health and survival, and eighth in poverty. Kerala ranks second, with a GVI of 0.634, primarily for its achievements in the area of health.

At the bottom of the table is Bihar, with a GVI of 0.410, women and girls being the most vulnerable, less healthy and poorer among the 30 states. Education is also ranked among the lowest, and protection is unsatisfactory; 39% of girls got married before the legal age while 12.2% aged 15-19, when surveyed, were either mothers or pregnant.

Delhi ranks at 28, with a GVI score of 0.436, pulled down by its poor track record in education and protection, with the former ranked worst. Jharkhand ranks ahead of Delhi at 27 and Uttar Pradesh trails at 29 with GVIs of 0.450 and 0.434, respectively. The study's dataset was based on 170 indicators on which data is available across all states, including Census 2011

Nearly 29% of children in India are in the age group of 0-5 years. Yet, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) is at 919 and the sex ratio at birth is at 900.

What the index throws up clearly is that high achievement in one sector or dimension leads to stronger outcomes in others. There are of course outliers to this. For instance, both Sikkim (rank 4) and Punjab (8) exhibit high scores for all dimensions except poverty.

Supreme Court favours special courts to try politicians in national interest

The Supreme Court favoured on 1st November the creation of special courts to exclusively deal with criminal cases involving politicians and their speedy disposal, saying such a move would be in the "interest of the nation".

Directing the Centre to place before it a scheme in this regard, the top court asked it about the 1,581 cases involving MPs and MLAs, as declared by the politicians at the time of filing of their nominations during the 2014 elections, and the details of how many of them have been disposed of within one year as per its directions passed in 2014.

It sought details of how many of these 1,581 cases have ended in conviction or acquittal of the accused, the number of criminal cases lodged against politicians from 2014 till date as well as the data on disposal of these matters.

A bench comprising Justices Ranjan Gogoi and Navin Sinha made the remarks after the Centre said decriminalisation of politics has to be done and it was not averse to setting up of special courts to deal with cases involving politicians and expeditious disposal of these matters.

The bench asked the Centre to place before it a scheme for setting up of special courts and said it should also indicate the amount of funds that could be earmarked for it.

The top court was hearing petitions seeking to declare the provisions of the Representation of People (RP) Act, which bar convicted politician from contesting elections for six years after serving jail term, as ultra vires to the Constitution.

The bench also said the issue of appointment of judicial officers, public prosecutors, court staff and infrastructure for these special courts would be dealt with by it, if needed.

Economy:

Farmers' development scheme gets a three-year extension

In a bid to incentivise States to increase allocations for agriculture and allied sectors the, Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on 1st November approved the continuation of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) for three years — 2017-18 to 2019-20 —renaming it as Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana-Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied sector Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR).

The financial allocation of the scheme will be ₹15,722 crore with the objective of making farming a remunerative economic activity through strengthening the farmer's effort, risk mitigation and promoting agri-business entrepreneurship

The RKVY-RAFTAAR funds would be provided to States as 60:40 grants between Centre and States (90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States).

Under the revamped scheme, about 50 per cent of the annual outlay will be provided for setting up infrastructure and assets, 30 per cent for value addition-linked production projects and 20 per cent of the outlay will be flexi-funds.

In addition, about 20 per cent of the annual outlay would be provided for implementing special sub-schemes of national priorities under RKVY-RAFTAAR.

Also, 10 per cent of the annual outlay would be provided for innovation and agri-entrepreneur development through creating end-to-end solution, skill development and financial support for setting up the agri-enterprise.

Centre unveils draft norms for drones

With the civil aviation ministry planning to finalise the regulations for unmanned aircraft systems by December end, the country could soon see drones in the skies being used for civilian use, which would include commercial use cases such as delivery by e-commerce companies.

The draft civil aviation requirements floated by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on 1st November stipulate five categories of drones on the basis of their maximum take-off weight.

These range from nano (less than or equal to 250 g) to large (greater than 150 kg).

Based on these categories, there are different requirements for licensing and operations. The nano category, drones under which will be allowed to fly only up to 50 feet in uncontrolled airspace, is exempt of all registration and clearance requirements.

For drones that are less than 2 kg in size and are operating under 200 feet, once they are registered, one can use them for whatever purpose one wants. These set of norms should be able to balance the use of these drones-and there are many different purposes for which they can be used such as wildlife photography, for weddings, for making ad films, for supply of medical services, for e-commerce, inspection of pipelines, etc

In 2014, the DGCA had banned flying of civilian drones after a Mumbai-based restaurant delivered pizza using drones. Globally, under its Prime Air project, online retail firm Amazon has development centers for drone-based delivery in the US, the UK, Austria, France and Israel.

It is also conducting a private customer trial in the UK. Under the Amazon Prime Air service, the company plans to deliver packages up to five pounds in 30 minutes or less using small drones.

However, in India a number of restrictions have been proposed to ensure that drones are used only for valid purposes, and the government has defined certain "no drone zones". These include border areas, Vijay Chowk area in Delhi, strategic locations notified by home ministry, military installations, among others.

Sports:

Sidhu wins 10m air pistol gold

Heena Sidhu gave India a golden start in the Commonwealth Shooting Championship in Brisbane, with a dominant performance in women's air pistol, on 31st October. Heena beat Elena Galiabovitch of Australia by 2.3 points to clinch the gold after having topped qualification with an impressive score of 386, nine more than the Aussie

Awards:

M.K.Sanu: Renowned writer, critic and biographer Prof M K Sanu was on 1st November presented with the Mathrubhumi Literary Award for 2016 in recognition of his contribution to Malayalam literature.