

March 16th news:

National:

26 districts in Telangana have below-average literacy rates

Among the 31 districts of Telangana, 26 have literacy rates below the State average of 66.54 percent. According to the 'Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook 2018' report released by the government on 15th March, Hyderabad tops in literacy rate with 83.2 per cent, while Jogulamba Gadwal district stands at the bottom with 49.9 per cent literacy.

The literacy levels in the districts of Hyderabad, Medchal-Malkajgiri, Warangal Urban, Ranga Reddy and Karimnagar are above the State average.

Based on the 2011 Census, the literacy rates were mapped as per the newly reorganised 584 mandals in the State. Sixty-three mandals out of the 584 have higher literacy rates than the national average of 72.98 per cent. A total of 112 mandals have higher literacy rates than the State average. About 72.45 lakh literates were added through schools from 2011-12 to 2017-18.

In 2016-17, 58.66 lakh children were enrolled into schools in the State. Out of them, 51 per cent were enrolled into private schools and the rest into government schools including those run by local bodies, private-aided schools and central government schools. Private schools currently cater to more than half the children in Telangana who join schools.

Science, environment agencies fail to spend 12% of funds: CAG

Scientific and environmental departments of the Central government have failed to spend funds allocated to them in 2016-17 and they returned ₹7,378 crore — nearly 12 per cent of their total budgetary allocation, the CAG report said.

While the various science and environment agencies of the Government of India received a total budgetary allocation of ₹62,935 crore in 2016-17, their total spending was only ₹55,557 crore.

The maximum unspent funds were reported by the Ministry of Water Resources and Ganga Rejuvenation, which returned ₹2,388.2 crore (27 per cent of its total annual budget), followed by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) which left ₹2,244 crore unspent, the report said.

The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) could not utilise 9.29 per cent of its budgetary allocation amounting to ₹1,867 crore, in the same year.

MNRE was also pulled up by the official auditor for not meeting its annual targets for most of the financial years since 2012-13, barring 2014-15. The shortfall in achievement of target was highest in 2016-17 at 58 per cent, it said. Even though the Ministry subsequently revised the target from 250 MW to 150 MW, its achievement still fell short by 29 per cent, the CAG said.

The auditor also castigated the Heavy Water Board, which is under DAE for incurring a wasteful expenditure of nearly ₹68 crore for delays in closing down its heavy water plants in Baroda in Gujarat and Talchar in Odisha. It also said there were delays in execution of 29 out of 33 projects undertaken by the Board during this period.

It also wondered why the Department of Space has not been able to operationalise the indigenous satellite-based navigation system, Navik, despite spending ₹1,284 crore so far. The home-grown navigation system, approved in May 2006, was not yet ready due to delays in execution of contracts, deficient monitoring of the programme and inadequate follow-up, the CAG said.

Economy:

Trade deficit up 26% during February

India's trade deficit for February 2018 was estimated at \$11,979.21 million, 25.8 per cent higher than the \$9,521.73-million deficit reported during February 2017, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Exports from the country rose 4.48 per cent in dollar terms during February this year compared to the same month of the last fiscal. But, in rupee terms, export growth was flat with a mere 0.27 per cent rise, reflecting a dip in value of the Indian currency.

The growth is on the back of higher exports of petroleum products, organic and inorganic chemicals, drugs and pharmaceuticals, rice and electronic goods.

Exports during February 2018 stood at \$25,834.36 million compared to \$24,726.71 million during February 2017. However, in rupee terms, exports were valued at ₹1,66,305.72 crore, compared to ₹1,65,855.64 crore during February 2017.

Imports rose during the month under consideration and were 10.41 per cent higher (in dollar terms). There was an increase in imports of petroleum, crude & products, electronic goods, machinery, electrical & non-electrical, pearls, precious & semi-precious stones and coal, coke & briquettes among others.

Imports during February 2018 were pegged at \$37,813.57 million, compared to \$34,248.44 million in February 2017.

Ringing the alarm bells at the increasing deficit and weakened Indian currency, EEPIC India said that the decline of close to 2 per cent in dollar terms and near 6 per cent in rupee terms in engineering exports even as the pace of overall exports has slowed down in February 2018 is distressing.

India's crude oil import bill during February 2018 stood at \$10,194.33 million, 32.05 per cent higher than the import bill of February 2017 on the back of a recovery in crude prices.

An official statement said global Brent crude oil prices have increased 17.90 per cent in February 2018 compared to February 2017 according to World Bank commodity price data.

Telangana Govt presents ₹ 1,74,453 cr Budget

Telangana Finance Minister Eatala Rajender has presented a ₹1,74,453-crore Budget for the financial year 2018-19 against ₹1,49,000 crore in 2017-18.

He said the financial condition has been improved significantly in the last four years after the formation of the State. As against the growth rate of 4.2 per cent during 2013-14, the growth rate of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in 2014-15 had gone up to 6.8 per cent. GSDP for 2018-19 is pegged at 10.4 per cent.

The Finance Minister said the State could achieve a higher growth rate because of increased focus on power and irrigation. Despite rough weather due to the note ban and initial hurdles in the implementation of the GST, the State could achieve a growth rate of 7.6 per cent in the manufacturing sector in 2017-18, he said.

Agri and allied sectors have witnessed a growth rate of 6.9 per cent in 2017-18. The State Budget has allocated Rs 1,469 crore for purchasing land which will be distributed to Dalits.

The proceedings of the Lok Sabha were paralysed for the ninth consecutive day today as several parties, including NDA constituent TDP, continued their noisy protests over various issues, including the PNB scam and special status for Andhra Pradesh. However, the government passed two bills without any debate amid the din.

The government pushed two bills - The Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill and The Specific Relief (Amendment) Bill - for passage as the House passed them with a voice vote without debate.

The Specific Relief (Amendment) Bill proposes to grant a party the right to seek damages from the other side in case of a breach of a business contract and to reduce discretion of courts in such matters.

Persons in news:

Gina Haspel: Gina Haspel, the newly nominated first-ever female director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), is a career intelligence officer with more than 30 years' experience.

Ms. Haspel, has extensive overseas experience and has served as chief of the station on several postings. Her leadership positions in Washington include deputy director of the National Clandestine Service - the CIA agent that co-ordinates clandestine operations - and chief of staff for the director of the National Clandestine Service.