

March 1st and 2nd news:

National:

Cabinet approves Trafficking of Persons Bill

The Cabinet on 28th March approved Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 for introduction in Parliament. The Bill broadly addresses the issue of trafficking from the point of view of prevention, rescue and rehabilitation.

In order to break the organized nexus, both at the national and international level, the Bill provides for the attachment and forfeiture of property and also the proceeds for the crime.

The Bill has provision for time-bound trial and repatriation of the victims within a period of one year from taking into cognizance. It also focuses on immediate protection of rescued victims and their rehabilitation.

A rehabilitation fund has been created for the first time which will be used for the physical, psychological and social well-being of the victim including education, skill development, health care, psychological support, legal aid, safe accommodation etc.

Designated courts in each district will be established for the speedy trial of the cases. The Bill creates dedicated institutional mechanisms at District, State and Central Level.

These will be responsible for prevention, protection, investigation and rehabilitation work related to trafficking.

National Investigation Agency will perform the tasks of Anti-Trafficking Bureau at the national level present under the Home Ministry. The Bill comprehensively addresses the transnational nature of the crime. The National Anti-Trafficking Bureau will perform the functions of international coordination with authorities in foreign countries and international organizations.

The Bill has the provision of punishment for promoting or facilitating trafficking of a person which includes producing, printing, issuing or distributing unissued, tampered or fake certificates, registration or stickers as proof of compliance with Government requirements, or commits fraud for procuring or facilitating the acquisition of clearances and necessary documents from Government agencies. The punishment ranges from rigorous minimum 10 years to life and fine not less than 1 lakh rupees.

Centre approves Rs 2900 crore: Women and Child Development Ministry has approved projects worth over Rs 2,900 crore under the Nirbhaya fund for eight major cities to make them safer for women. These cities are Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Lucknow. The decision was taken after a meeting of Empowered Committee, which is headed by Women and Child Development Secretary

Bilateral:

India, Jordan sign 12 MoUs to boost cooperation in defence, health sectors

India and Jordan signed 12 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to boost cooperation in the defence and health sectors, along with allowing India long-term access to organic fertiliser from the West Asian nation. Jordanian Monarch Abdullah II met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 1st March, as part of his three-day trip to India.

The present deal covers the training and commercial aspects in defence, besides counter-terrorism and cyber security. Another deal was on universal health coverage and services.

An MoU was also signed to promote best practices in the administration of contract employment of Indian nationals in Jordan. The government also hopes to secure a steady supply of organic fertiliser through an MoU on mining, with a long-term agreement for 100 per cent off-take to India. Apart from beneficiation of rock phosphate, the agreement aims to set up a production facility in Jordan for phosphoric acid-based fertiliser.

An agreement to establish cooperation between the Indian Institute of Mass Communication and the Jordan Media Institute was also signed.

Bilateral trade with Jordan has reduced consistently for third year. It was \$1.35 billion in 2016-17.

A customs mutual assistance agreement was signed. This could ensure smoother exchange of information regarding Custom duties, taxes, fees and other charges.

Economy:

Continuation of PMEGP approved

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on 28th March approved the continuation of Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme beyond 12th Plan for three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20 with a total outlay of Five Thousand Five Hundred crore rupees. The Scheme will create sustainable estimated employment opportunities for 15 lakh persons in three financial years.

Union Cabinet approves Action Plan for Champion Sectors in Services

The Union Cabinet approved the proposal of Ministry of Commerce and Industry to give focused attention to 12 identified Champion Services Sectors (CSS) for promoting their development and realizing their potential. 12 identified CSS are Information Technology & Information Technology Enabled Services (IT & ITeS), Medical Value Travel, Transport and Logistics Services, Tourism and Hospitals. The respective Ministries/Departments will finalize Action Plans and implementation timelines along with monitoring mechanism to monitor implementation of Scheme. It will enhance the competitiveness of country's service sectors through implementation of focused and monitored Action Plans.

Fugitive Bill gets Cabinet nod

The Cabinet on 1st March approved a crucial Bill to confiscate assets of fugitive economic offenders and also decided to tighten the scrutiny of auditing firms by setting up an “oversight body”, effectively stripping the Institute of Chartered Accounts of India (ICAI) of some of its precious regulatory functions. The government will now place the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill (FEOB), 2017, which was cleared by the Cabinet, in Parliament as soon as the Budget session reconvenes.

Once cleared by Parliament, the law will make it easier to attach all the assets of economic offenders fleeing India to escape the reach of law, even without a conviction.

Offences with a value of Rs 100 crore or more will be covered by this law. While the existing Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) has provisions for the confiscation of an offender’s assets, it can happen only after his conviction, and the confiscation is also limited to the proceeds of the relevant crime. However, the new Bill provides for the attachment of all the assets of offenders, irrespective of whether these are the proceeds of crime or not

The Cabinet’s clearance to the National Financial Reporting Authority (NAFRA), as envisaged in the Companies Act, 2013, will see the body working as a regulator for auditors of all listed and large unlisted firms above a certain threshold.

The ICAI, the apex body of chartered accountants that currently functions as a self regulator, will continue to be the watchdog of other smaller unlisted firms.

Moreover, ICAI’s other functions, including conducting examinations for CAs, will continue to be vested with it. NAFRA will comprise a chairman and a maximum of 15 members.

According to the Bill, a fugitive economic offender is one who has an arrest warrant issued in relation to a scheduled offence and who leaves or has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution. The offences covered under the Bill include wilful loan defaults, cheating and forgery, and non-repayment of deposits, among others.

Sports:

Japan unveils Tokyo 2020 Olympics superhero mascots

The mascots for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games were announced. Students from more than 200,000 classes from around 16,000 schools in Japan and overseas were able to vote on three different mascots for the games.

The winning duo -- there's a a Olympic mascot and a Paralympic mascot -- are a pair of animated non-descript creatures.

The Olympic mascot "is a character that embodies both old tradition and new innovation," according to a statement from the organizers of Tokyo 2020.

According to Tokyo 2020, the two mascots "have opposite personalities. However, they respect each other and they are very good friends. They both have a great spirit of hospitality. They always try their best to cheer and encourage everyone."

In describing the Paralympic mascot, the statement reads that it is "a cool character with cherry tactile sense and supernatural power. The Mascot is usually calm, however, it gets very powerful when needed."

Persons in news:

Shankaracharya: Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi, the 69th pontiff of the Kanchi Mutt, passed away on 28th March in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. Born as Sri Subramaniam on July 18, 1935, at Irul neeki in Tiruvarur, Jayendra Saraswathi was the head of the Kanchi Mutt established by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century.

He became the younger pontiff on March 22, 1954 and became elder pontiff in 1994. Jayendrar wanted to solve the Ayodhya issue in a peaceful manner. He will be succeeded by the 70th Shankaracharya of Kamakoti Peetam traditionally referred to as Kamakshi. The Kanchipuram mutt is a pilgrimage for Hindus all around the world and particularly in south India.