

March 29th news:

National:

Centre against excluding 'creamy layer' of SC/ST

The Centre on 28th March told the Supreme Court it was against the idea of excluding the "creamy layer" of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from the benefits of reservation

The "creamy layer" refers to the relatively wealthy and better educated members of Other Backward Classes, who are not eligible for reservations, and SC/ST communities.

A 2006 ruling had restricted the exclusion of the creamy layer only to the Other Backward Classes. In November, the Supreme Court had agreed to hear a petition that has demanded the same exclusion for the "creamy layer" of SC/ST communities, as well.

Insect Museum Opened in Tamil Nadu

A Rs 5 crore insect museum with the state-of-the-art amenities was unveiled by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswamy at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. The museum, established at a 6,691 sqft area, is fully dedicated to insects and is first of its kind in the country. It would display insects preserved as specimens as also live ones depicting their different developmental stages, images, videos and models of their unique behavior, habits, and habitats.

Bilateral:

India, China agree to draw roadmap to address trade deficit

India and China on 27th March agreed to draw up a medium- and long-term roadmap with action points and timelines to address the \$51 billion trade deficit between them. Minutes of the meeting were signed at the commerce minister Suresh Prabhu's residence over breakfast

It came a day after the 11th joint economic group meeting headed by Prabhu and his Chinese counterpart Zhong Shan ended with the two sides failing to issue a joint statement.

The Chinese side reaffirmed their commitment to quickly accelerating market access for Indian non-basmati rice, rapeseed meals, soya meals, pomegranate, okra, banana and other fruits and vegetables and bovine meat. On the non-tariff barriers faced by Indian pharma companies in China, the minutes said both sides reaffirmed their aim to find a resolution to the matter.

Without mentioning the trade war unleashed by US President Donald Trump, the two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in the World Trade Organisation and other multilateral and regional frameworks, to maintain their common interests. "Both the sides reiterated their commitment to rules based multilateral global trade

The minutes did not mention the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership where both countries are members or the Belt and Road initiative that China is pushing India to join.

India has received \$1.78 billion foreign direct investment from China from April 2000 to December 2017. India's trade deficit with China stood at \$36.73 billion during the April-October period of the current fiscal.

The trade deficit had marginally dipped to \$51 billion in 2016-17 from \$52.69 billion in the previous fiscal. The bilateral trade between the countries increased to \$71.42 billion in 2016-17 from \$70.17 billion in the previous fiscal.

Economy:

Jual Oram Launches Tribes India E-Commerce Portal And M-Commerce App

The Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Jual Oram launched 'e-Tribes: Tribes India'. It is an initiative for digital commerce at Tribes India Outlet in New Delhi. It included the launch of e-commerce portal of TRIFED, and M-commerce, android app 'Tribes India'.

The Minister also launched the Tribes India banner on Snapdeal, Amazon, Paytm and GeM for marketing of Tribal Products through these e-commerce portals. With this, more than 55 thousand tribal artisans connected to TRIFED will get access to local as well as International markets

Ministry Of Power Joins Hands With Skill India To Support Saubhagya Scheme

Ministry of Power partnered with the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship to train the manpower in six states (Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh) for speedy implementation of its SAUBHAGYA scheme. SAUBHAGYA (Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojna) aims to achieve universal household electrification in all parts of the country in a time-bound manner. Around 4 crore households are expected to get electricity connections under the scheme. A special project under the PMKVY has also been launched in these Six States.

Cabinet allows foreign airlines to buy up to 49% stake in national carrier

In a move designed to expedite the strategic divestment in Air India, the Cabinet on 28th March decided to open up the national carrier for foreign direct investment (FDI) up to 49 percent under the approval route.

The present rules allow foreign airlines to invest under the government approval route in the capital of Indian airline companies up to the limit of 49 percent of their paid-up capital, which is, however, not applicable to Air India.

Currently, a ministerial group -- Air India-specific Alternative Mechanism -- headed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is looking into the modalities to divest loss-making Air India.

The group has been mandated to decide on key issues such as treatment of Air India's debt and hiving-off of its assets. Last month, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha had announced that British consulting multinational EY has been appointed as transaction advisors to aid the government in the strategic divestment of Air India.

The airline, which is under a massive debt burden of Rs 50,000 crore, had posted an operating profit of Rs 105 crore in 2015-16, and is expected to report an improved operating profit margin for the last fiscal. The national carrier got a new lease of life in April 2012, when the then UPA government approved a Rs 30,000-crore turnaround and financial restructuring package spanning up to 2021.

Environment:

Surat Becomes 1st District To Have 100% Solar Powered Health Centres

Gujarat's Surat district become the first district in the country to have 100 percent solar powered Primary Health Centers (PHC). There are a total of 52 PHCs in the district and all of them are now powered by the solar system. This initiative will not only bring down the electricity bill by 40 percent but also help fight global warming.

Sports:

Smith, Warner banned for 1 year

Steve Smith and David Warner were slapped with a one-year international ban and ousted from this year's IPL, while Cameron Bancroft was suspended for nine months as Cricket Australia cracked the whip on the errant trio on March 28th for its role in the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa.

The three players were also banned from Australia's domestic cricket. The lengthy bans on the trio effectively rule them out of the November-December series against India. Virat Kohli's men are scheduled to tour Australia to play four Tests, three One Day Internationals and three Twenty20 International matches.

Persons in news:

Vijay Raghavan: Krishnaswamy Vijay Raghavan was appointed the principal scientific adviser to the government of India. Vijay Raghavan will succeed physicist Rajagopala Chidambaram who has been in the position for more than 16 years. Vijay Raghavan, a former director of National Centre for Biological Sciences, was appointed Secretary of Department of Biotechnology in 2013.

Win Myint: Myanmar's Parliament has elected Win Myint as the country's next President. Htin Kyaw resigned as President last week, amid growing health concerns. Parliament then had seven days to choose a successor, and voted from a short-list of the three vice-presidents on 28th March. Earlier last week, Win Myint, had been made a Vice-President, a further sign he was likely to assume the Presidency.