

April 26th and 27th news:

National:

India's ranking in press freedom falls to 138

India's ranking in the Press Freedom Index has fallen two places to 138, a watchdog said in an annual report, blaming "physical violence" against journalists like Gauri Lankesh as the key reason behind the country's low ranking.

Norway topped the list of having the world's freest press for the second year in a row, the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said while North Korea remained the most repressive country followed by Eritrea, Turkmenistan, Syria and then China.

India's ranking has fallen two places to 138th position in a ranking of 180 countries. The report warned that hate crime is another issue plaguing India.

Second edition of Unnat Bharat Abhiyan launched

The Human Resource Development Ministry launched the second edition of the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan under which students from 750 higher educational institutions from across the country will adopt villages and visit them to get acquainted with lifestyle of people there and the problems faced by them.

The minister advised the students to involve local village people at every stage of problem identification and solving issues relating to health, cleanliness, waste management, plantation, financial inclusion, women and child development.

The mission involves students from colleges and universities will go to nearby villages to get acquainted with the life of village people and the problems faced by them in day-to-day life.

To cover the 45,000 villages of the country under this movement, we need the participation of 8,252 higher education institutions, he said. Under the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0, the institutions have been selected on a Challenge Mode and the scheme has been extended to 750 reputed Higher Educational Institutes (both public and private) of the country.

Also, scope for providing subject expert groups and regional coordinating institutes to handhold and guide the participating institutions has been strengthened.

IIT Delhi has been designated to function as the national coordinating institute for this programme and the ministry intends to extend the coverage to all the reputed higher educational institutes, in a phased manner.

Each selected institute would adopt a cluster of villages/panchayats and gradually expand the outreach over a period of time.

Bilateral:

Foreigners Can Now Travel To Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur Without Permit

The Home Ministry decided to relax the six-decade-old Protected Area Permit regime from Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur for five years. Foreign tourists, except those from Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, will now be allowed to visit some of the most pristine locations of the country which, so far, were out of bounds for them without a special permit.

Under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, all areas falling between the Inner line and the International Border of some states were declared as protected areas.

The protected areas currently include whole of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, besides parts of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir

India, Mongolia to enhance bilateral trade, investments

India and Mongolia on 25th April discussed economic cooperation in areas such as infrastructure development, energy, services and IT.

In a joint media briefing with Mongolian Foreign Minister D Tsogtbaatar, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said in Ulaanbaatar that the two countries agreed to explore ways to identify new areas of cooperation in all sectors of mutual interest and to enhance bilateral trade and investments. Mrs Swaraj, the first Indian foreign minister to visit Mongolia in 42 years

During the Indian-Mongolia Joint Committee meeting on Cooperation, the two sides discussed pressing global challenges, particularly the scourge of terrorism and agreed to collaborate bilaterally and in the international arena to thwart the designs of those who extend support to terrorist outfits.

Both the countries have also agreed to explore the possibility of launching direct air connectivity between New Delhi and the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar.

India agrees to send Buddhist relics for Vesak in Sri Lanka

India has agreed for the most revered Buddhist relics from Sarnath to be taken to Sri Lanka for public exposition on the occasion of Vesak festival.

This is the first time relics from Sarnath are being brought to Sri Lanka from India, and special arrangements have been made for this purpose. They will be on public display at Temple Trees in Colombo for four days from 28th April

Anagarika Dharmapala, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, played a key role in building Mulagandhakuti Vihara to restore the glory of Sarnath. The land and the Sacred Relics were gifted to the Maha Bodhi Society of India by the Government of India.

This is the second time that India has taken initiative to exhibit the sacred relics of Lord Buddha in Sri Lanka. The first time such initiative was the exhibition of the Kapilavastu Relics in 2012.

Cabinet approves MoU between India, African nation in medicinal plants sector

The government gave an ex-post facto approval for an agreement signed between India and an African island nation, Sao Tome and Principe, to increase cooperation in the field of medicinal Plants.

The memorandum of understanding was signed on March 14 this year, an official statement said. The decision was taken in the Union Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

The MoU assumes significance as there is global increase in traditional and alternative health care systems. It is resulting in world herbal trade which stands at USD 120 billion and is expected to reach USD 7 trillion by 2050, it said.

India is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of biodiversity, having 15 agro-climatic zones. Out of the 17,000-18,000 species of flowering plants, more than 7000 are estimated to have medicinal usage in folk and documented systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha & Homoeopathy.

About 1178 species of medicinal plants are estimated to be in trade of which 242 species have annual consumption levels in excess of 100 metric tonnes per year.

Medicinal plants are not only a major resource base for the traditional medicine and herbal industry but also provide livelihood and health security to a large segment of Indian population.

Economy:

CCEA approves increase in MSP for Raw Jute

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on 25th April approved the increase in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Raw Jute by 200 rupees for 2018-19 season.

The MSP for Fair Average Quality of Raw Jute has now been fixed at 3700 rupees per quintal. The MSP of Raw Jute is expected to ensure appropriate minimum prices to the farmers and step up investment in Jute cultivation and thereby production and productivity in the country.

The CCEA also gave nod to Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National Bamboo Mission, NBM, under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture during remaining period of Fourteenth Finance Commission. The Mission will ensure holistic development of the bamboo sector by addressing complete value chain and establishing effective linkage of producers with industry.

The committee also approved Empowerment of Executive Committee for formulation of guidelines of the NBM. An outlay of 1290 crore rupees is provisioned for implementation of the Mission during the remaining period of 14th Finance Commission.

NITI Aayog launches Atal New India Challenge

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), under the NITI Aayog, launched the Atal New India Challenge on 26th April. Under the challenge, grants of up to one crore rupees, and mentorship will be given to the winning ideas. According to the NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, Atal New India Challenge is very critical as

it involves innovating for the requirements of India. He said, the country needs tailor-made solutions for the 1.3 billion people of the country.

AIM will invite prospective innovators, MSMEs and start-ups to design market-ready products, using cutting-edge technologies or prototypes. The focus areas include climate-smart agriculture, smart mobility, predictive maintenance of rolling stock, and waste management.

Applicants showing capability, intent and potential to productize technologies will be awarded grants up to one crore rupees.

This grant will be further supplemented by mentoring, handholding, incubating and other support as needed at various stages of commercialisation, while generating wider deployment for the product.

Persons in news:

Asaram babu: Self-styled godman Asaram was awarded life in prison after a special trial court in Jodhpur found him guilty in the rape case of a minor girl. The incident took place in August 2013 at Asaram's Jodhpur ashram. Asaram has also been fined one lakh rupees.

The two other convicts, Shilpi and Sharad, have been sentenced to 20 years in jail. The sentence was announced by presiding officer Madhusudan Sharma of the special court set up inside the Jodhpur Central Jail amidst tight security. Police has taken precautionary measures to prevent any untoward incident

Indu Malhotra: The Supreme Court of India will have a new woman judge as the Centre has cleared the file of Senior Advocate Indu Malhotra for elevation as Supreme Court judge. Indu Malhotra is the first woman judge to be elevated to the Supreme Court from the bar. She is also the second woman lawyer to be designated a 'senior' at the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court Collegium had recommended the names of Indu Malhotra and Justice KM Joseph, current Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court, for appointment as Supreme Court judge in February

The Centre had earlier cited breach of "seniority" for holding recommendations to appoint KM Joseph as a Supreme Court judge. Despite open criticism of not forwarding the Collegium recommendations, the file of KM Joseph has not been cleared.