

March 30th news:

National:

Cabinet approves education reforms

Minister of Human Resource Development Prakash Javadekar on 29th March announced that the Cabinet has approved a slew of reforms for school education in the country, in what could be considered as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan-2 project.

The SSA, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and teacher training would be integrated into a single scheme from Classes 1 to 12.

The integrated scheme will be in place from April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2020, with an estimated allocation of Rs. 75,000 crore over the period, a 20% increase over the current allocation.

It aims to support the States in universalising access to school education from pre-nursery to Class 12 across the country. Mr. Javadekar said the government would focus on educationally backward districts, disabled students and women.

There would be a shift to digital blackboards from Class 9 to college education in the next five years. The government will provide a 20% incentive to the States for a learning-outcome based education.

Mr. Javadekar said that skill courses — which are now functional from Class 9 to Class 12 — would begin from Class 6 in future. This was aimed at enhancing the employability of students.

The Centre has also approved an increase in the outlay for making educational loans interest-free for students with modest financial means for studying in universities and colleges charging high fees. The interest subsidy will last till one year of their passing out of college.

Mr. Javadekar said that while this was a 2009 scheme, the allocation of Rs. 6, 600-crore over the next three years marked nearly a three-fold jump over the allocations made from 2009 to 2014.

Bilateral:

Sushma Swaraj attends 9th India-Japan Strategic Dialogue in Tokyo

India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj attended the 9th India-Japan Strategic Dialogue in Tokyo. After holding the strategic dialogue Sushma Swaraj said that Japan is welcome to join hands in India's flagship projects like smart cities. India and Japan concluded a Special Strategic and Global Partnership during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Japan in 2014.

According to official figures, Japanese FDI in India during 2016-17 was 4.7 billion US dollars, an increase of 80 per cent over the last year. In 2016-17, India-Japan trade reached USD 13.61 billion, showing a decrease of 6.21 per cent over 2015-16, when the total bilateral trade was USD 14.51 billion.

India's export to Japan for 2016-17 was USD 3.86 billion, whereas India's import from the East Asian country for 2016-17 was USD 9.76 billion.

Economy:

NITI Aayog Launches Baseline Ranking Of 115 Aspirational Districts

The NITI Aayog launched the baseline ranking for 115 aspirational districts based on 49 indicators across five sectors that include health and nutrition, education, agriculture and water resources, financial inclusion and skill development, and basic infrastructure. This would be followed by delta ranking of these districts from May 2018 based on their incremental progress.

Telangana is revenue-deficit State: CAG

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has said that Telangana State overstated its revenue surplus due to irregular accounting.

The CAG Report on State Finances tabled for the year ended March 2017 said that the State registered revenue surplus of Rs. 1,386 crore.

The revenue surplus was overstated by Rs. 6,778 crore due to irregular accounting while it had revenue deficit of Rs. 5,392 crore during 2016-17.

The government later, in revised estimates for 2016-17, had indicated a revenue surplus of Rs. 199.4 crore but the CAG report now made it clear that the State was not revenue surplus at all.

Picking holes in Telangana government's claims based on audit of the Appropriation Accounts, it pointed out that the State also exceeded the ratio of fiscal deficit to GSDP ceiling of 3.5% under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

Even in the recent budget presented for 2018-19, the government repeatedly asserted that its fiscal deficit was well within the norms of FRBM Act every year so far. But the CAG report categorically disproved that claim.

The ratio of fiscal deficit to GSDP excluding amount transferred under Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) scheme (Rs. 7,500 crore) was 4.3%. The government, against Rs. 8,931 crore borrowed through UDAY bonds during the year, released an amount of Rs. 7,500 crore only to Discoms by end of the year.

The report also said that the entire amount transferred to Discoms had been shown under capital expenditure as equity. About Rs. 3,750 crore, 50% of Rs. 7,500 crore released to Discoms was shown as equity instead of grant. This had resulted in overstatement of revenue surplus to that extent, it said.

The capital expenditure showed at Rs. 33,371 crore for the year 2016-17 was more than the Budget Estimates of Rs. 29,313 crore and its ratio to total expenditure stood at 28.2% which was way higher than the average of general category States at 19.7%. The capital expenditure of the State was only Rs. 25,871 crore excluding the Rs. 7,500 crore transferred to Discoms under UDAY, it said.

About 69% of revenue expenditure was on consumption and only 31% was for investment in infrastructure and asset creation. But the increase in return on investments was negligible at Rs. 1 crore, indicative of non-performing investments. The State has to repay 49% of debt amounting to Rs. 56,388 crore within the next seven years. The repayment of debt as percentage of tax revenue increased from 7.12 during 2015-16 to 32.16 during 2016-17.

Cabinet approves Rs 4,500 crore to boost development projects in North-East

Cabinet has approved Schemes of North Eastern Council (NEC) including continuation of existing Schemes. It will boost the development projects in North-East. Four thousand 500 crore rupees have been approved for the scheme for three years upto March, 2020. The Scheme of NEC - Special Development Project will be changed to be a Central Sector Scheme with 100 per cent grant.

Science and Technology:

India launches GSAT-6A communication satellite

India on 29th March successfully launched GSAT-6A communication satellite from Sathish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota, about 110 kilometres from Chennai. The purpose of the satellite is to provide mobile communication applications in S-band in five spot beams and C-band in one beam during its 10-year lifespan. This is also the first GSLV rocket launch after Director Sivan took over as Chairman of ISRO. The 49.1-metre tall rocket weighing 415.6 ton soared into the sky with red and orange flames pushing it from behind. GSAT 6 A was injected into the intended orbit 17.46 minutes into its flight.

Sports:

ISSF Junior World Cup: Muskan Bhanwala wins gold

Indian shooter Muskan clinched the gold medal in women's 25m pistol event at the ISSF Junior World Cup in Sydney on 29th March. The 16-year-old Muskan bested China's Qin Sihang and Thailand's Kanyakorn Hirunphoem.

The team gold was won by Muskan, Manu Bhaker and Devanshi Rana, adding to India's rich medal haul. India thus upstaged China with 22 medals, including nine gold. India have also five silver and eight bronze medals.

Muskan's medal was India's fourth individual gold in the prestigious tournament. Indian trio of Anantjeet Singh Naruka, Ayush Rudraraju and Gurnilal Singh Garcha bagged the team silver in men's junior skeet with a total of 348. Naruka finished fifth in the individual skeet final.

Persons in news:

Indu Bhushan: Indu Bhushan was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Union Government's ambitious Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission (ABNHPM). Bhushan, the Director General of East Asia Department, Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Manila, Philippines appointed to the post for a period of two years.

