

March 31st news:

International:

Multiple H-1B applications leads to rejection: US

The Federal American agency, USCIS, has warned foreign workers that multiple H-1B applications will lead to rejection of their petitions. The warning comes ahead of the initiation of filing process from 2nd April for the fiscal year 2019 for the non-immigrant visa, popular among Indian techies.

Meanwhile, the American Immigration Council in its report has said, the Trump administration's proposal to withdraw the provision of giving work permits to the spouses of the H-1B visa workers will make the country less attractive for foreign talent.

Since 2015, the spouses of H-1B workers, who are in the process for becoming permanent residents, have been allowed to work in US. However, the Trump administration is considering rescinding this policy of the previous Obama administration.

National:

All Kerala, Mizoram households are open defecation free

Kerala and Mizoram top the list of States, with 100% of households which do not practise open defecation, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are at the bottom of the rankings, with less than 44% of such households, according to the analysis of the raw data generated by a government-commissioned survey finds.

Sixty eight per cent of rural households in India say that all their members use the toilet when required, meaning they do not practise open defecation at all, the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2017-18 revealed.

NARSS announced its results, three and a half years after the launch of the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan. The provisional summary report of the survey found that 77% of all rural households now have access to toilets, and that 93.4% of those who had access to toilets used them regularly. NARSS protocol says that “a household will be considered as practising open defecation unless all the members of that household use the toilet 100% of the time.”

The analysis shows that 68% of households across the country now meet this criteria.

The survey was conducted by a third party agency Kantar Public, as a requirement by the World Bank to begin payout on its \$1.5 billion loan to the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan-Gramin, according to the survey report. It involved a survey of 92,040 households in 6,136 villages across the country between mid-November 2017 and mid-March 2018.

Now that the first survey is complete, the World Bank has disbursed \$147.5 million as the first tranche of the loan, two years after the deal was signed

The analysis from the NARSS will also set the baseline values for the three progress indicators against which the World Bank will release or disburse funds in the future,” said the spokesperson, adding that each State will receive incentive-grants based on its progress in achieving and sustaining sanitation outcomes, including the open defecation free(ODF) status.

The NARSS will now be conducted every year.

The survey’s findings confirmed the government’s data on ODF villages, with 95.6% of the villages declared ODF confirmed to be so, said the Ministry. “This shows that there is a close congruence between the data available with us and the situation on the ground,” it said. While only 20% of villages are declared ODF so far, “many of the remaining 80% villages were also found to have 100% access and usage of toilets during the survey”, it said.

For communities, ODF status is defined by “no visible faeces found in the environment/village; and every household as well as public/community institutions using a safe technology option for disposal of faeces.”

Access to toilets is defined as “households having access to a toilet that they own, or having access to a shared toilet which can be used by multiple families, or have access to a community toilet.

First US shale gas reaches India

India’s first liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo from America landed at the Dabhol regasification terminal in Maharashtra on on 30th March. This is part of a \$32-billion supply deal for 20 years that GAIL signed with the Dominion Energy Cove Point project in Maryland and Cheniere Energy Inc’s Sabine Pass Project in Louisiana.

India’s trade with America is expected to see large-scale import of LNG and crude oil in the coming years. Total bilateral trade (goods and services) between India and the US increased at a compound annual rate of 11.4 per cent from \$20 billion in 2000 to \$126.1 billion in 2017. GAIL alone would be procuring around \$2 billion worth of LNG per annum from USA from 2018-19.

GAIL’s first charter-hired vessel, MV Meridian Spirit, arrived after a 25-day voyage and docked for unloading in the presence of petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan, GAIL chief B C tripathi and US diplomatic officials. Pradhan said a shift towards a gas-based economy would require augmenting domestic production and import. Investment in natural gas infrastructure, including pipelines, LNG import terminals and city gas distribution networks was a focus area.

GAIL's first Chartered LNG Vessel carrying long term US LNG arrives at Dabhol GAIL’s first Chartered LNG Vessel carrying long-term US LNG arrives at Dabhol

GAIL was an early mover to contract for LNG from America. It will get around 90 cargoes annually from the Sabine Pass and Cove Point terminals. It had signed a sale and purchase agreement with Cheniere Energy in December 2011; the latter will sell about 3.5 million tonnes of LNG a year to GAIL.

The arrival of this LNG vessel comes soon after the formation of Konkan LNG, a subsidiary of GAIL.

MP raises retirement age of employees

Madhya Pradesh government has raised the retirement age of state government employees from 60 to 62 years. This was announced by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Bhopal on 30th March. He said the move will provide the opportunity to those who did not get promotions due to various reasons.

Gauhati HC sets fast track court for rape & murder of women & minor

The Gauhati High Court will set up exclusive Fast Track courts for day-to-day trial of cases of rape and murder of children and women for early disposal and punishment of culprits. The decision was taken after Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal wrote a letter to the Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court urging him to consider setting up such courts.

Economy:

Manufacturing jobs grow 2.1%, total employment falls 0.1%, says RBI study

Total employment in the economy shrank by 0.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent in 2015-16 and 2014-15, respectively, according to the latest KLEMS India database, released by the Reserve Bank of India.

Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing continues to be the sector with most number of people employed, despite consistent drops in the numbers over the past decade. Since 2013, employment in agriculture and such sectors declined by 6.8 per cent, from 217.6 million people in 2013-14 to 202.6 million in 2015-16.

The database measures the productivity performance of the economy at an industry level, for 27 industries during the period 1980-81 to 2015-16. There were 198 million people employed in the 'agriculture and others' sector, and by 2007-08 employment grew to 244.3 million.

The 'electrical and optical equipment' sector added 589,000 employees since 2013, and another 294,000 employed between 2014 and 2015. Growth in the sector has been on the high side since 2011, and 2014 and 2015 employment rose by 9.1 per cent, which is the highest this year

Persons in news:

Bhushan Kumar: Senior bureaucrat Chandra Bhushan Kumar has been appointed as Deputy Election Commissioner as part of a major bureaucratic reshuffle affected on 30th March by the government.

A total of 13 officers have been appointed as joint secretaries in different central government departments. Chandra Bhushan, a 1995 batch IAS officer of union territories cadre, has been appointed to the post for five years, an order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said.