

August 7th and 8th news:

International:

Saudi Arabia Freezes Trade Ties With Canada

Saudi Arabia has announced that it is freezing all new trade and investment with Canada over its interference in its internal affairs. The Saudi foreign ministry expelled the Canadian ambassador and recalled its own envoy in Canada.

Pacific Endeavor-2018 Under MCIP Starts in Kathmandu

Pacific Endeavor-2018, a communication exercise under the Multinational Communications Interoperability Program (MCIP) started in Kathmandu, Nepal. The basic objective of 12 day exercise is to develop common communications operating procedures to enable military forces in the Asia Pacific region to collectively work in the wake of disaster. Around 270 personnel from 20 Asia-Pacific Countries are participating in the exercise, which is jointly organized by the Nepali Army and United States Pacific Command

National:

Parliament Passes Bill To Grant Constitutional Status To NCBC

The 123rd Constitutional Amendment Bill giving constitutional status to the *National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)* has got Parliamentary assent. It will give the institution all powers to safeguard the rights of the socially and educationally backward classes and fulfils a long pending commitment of the central govt to the OBCs.

It seeks to establish the NCBC under the constitution with authority to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding OBCs. NCBC will have a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and 3 other members of which at least one will be a woman. The provision for mandatory woman member will be made during framing of rules. NCBC will work as an autonomous institution with powers of a civil court.

Bilateral:

'Maitree 2018' Begins in Thailand

Exercise 'Maitree' is a joint military exercise between the Indian Army and Royal Thai Army which is running on in Thailand. It is a platoon level exercise which comprises of infantry component. The exercise will emphasize to hone the tactical and technical skills in joint counter insurgency and counter-terrorist operations in the rural and urban scenario under UN mandate.

Economy:

Centre sets up GoM headed by Suresh Prabhu to decide on RCEP talks

The government has set up a four-member group of ministers (GoM) headed by trade minister Suresh Prabhu to advise prime minister Narendra Modi on whether to continue with or withdraw from the 16-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations.

The GoM will find a way forward from the current deadlock. The industry, as well as most departments, are not willing to yield anything more to RCEP countries.

The GoM also includes finance and power minister Piyush Goyal, defence minister Nirmla Sitharaman and housing and urban affairs minister Hardeep Puri. The GoM will also help India fine tune its strategy for the upcoming RCEP ministerial meet on 30 and 31 August in Singapore.

Several countries in the grouping wanted India to open up its market for 92% of traded goods, while they remained reluctant to allow Indian skilled professionals greater access to their markets. India is ready to offer access for up to 85% of items, with deviations for countries such as China, Australia and New Zealand, with whom it does not have a free-trade agreements.

In recent times, there has been a growing clamor from the industry, as well as from within the government, to exit the RCEP.

NITI Aayog Identified 117 Districts as Aspirational Districts For RUSA Scheme

NITI Aayog has identified 117 districts as 'Aspirational Districts'. These districts have been selected on the basis of composite index which includes published data of deprivation enumerated under Socio-Economic Caste Census, Health & Nutrition, Education and Basic Infrastructure.

During the second phase of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), central assistance is provided for opening of new Model Degree Colleges (MDCs) in 'Aspirational Districts' identified by NITI Aayog and in unserved & underserved districts in North Eastern and the Himalayan States. Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.

Revised MoA signed for Funding of Central Share of 99 Prioritized Irrigation Projects

A revised Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been signed on 6th August amongst Govt. of India, NABARD and National Water Development Agency (NWDA) for funding of central share of 99 prioritized irrigation projects under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) through Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF). It will enable this Ministry to release Central Assistance to prioritized projects under PMKSY as per the requirements from time to time.

During 2015-16 PMKSY was launched by the Central Government with an overarching vision to ensure access to some means of protective irrigation for all agricultural farms in the country, and to produce 'per drop more crop', thus bringing much desired rural prosperity.

Under PMKSY, 99 ongoing irrigation projects were identified for completion in mission mode by December, 2019. Total requirement of funds for completion of these projects was estimated at Rs. 77,595 crore (Rs. 48,546 crore for project works and Rs. 29,049 crore for Command Area Development works) with Central Assistance of Rs. 31,342 crore.

Subsequently, a tripartite Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed on 06 September 2016, amongst Govt. of India (through MoWR, RD & GR), NABARD and NWDA for funding of Central Assistance in respect of these 99 irrigation projects through LTIF.

During 2016-17 and 2017-18, cumulative loan amount of Rs. 7863.60 crore has been availed from LTIF for funding these projects.

Now, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance has modified certain existing mechanism of funding of these 99 projects under LTIF, with reference to source of funds, liability towards servicing of coupon on bonds, repayment pattern of loan and rate of interest on loan, etc. which has necessitated some revision in the earlier signed MoA.

Environment:

NGT Forms Panel to Monitor Rejuvenation Project Of Ganga

The National Green Tribunal constituted a committee, to be headed by a former Allahabad High Court judge, for monitoring the rejuvenation project of Ganga from Haridwar to Unnao in Uttar Pradesh. Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court will nominate a former judge of Allahabad High Court to head the committee.

Sports:

India Women Wins Blitz Gold

The Indian women chess team at the Asian Nations Cup 2018 clinched the gold in the Blitz event held in Iran. It's India's first gold-medal finish at the event since 2014. They also won silver and bronze in the Rapid and Classical categories, respectively. While India (1st) finished with 21.5 points, Vietnam (2nd) settled for silver with 18.5 and China (3rd) bagged bronze with 17.5

Persons in news:

Ajay Datta: The nominating committee of Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has selected Ajay Datta, Founder & CEO of Data X Gen Plus and a global leader in email linguistic services, as a new council member of Country Code Names Supporting Organisation (ccNSO). Ajay Datta is the first Indian to have been selected as a member of ccNSO and will be representing India at a global level. He will be the custodian of Asia, Australia and Pacific Islands as a member of ccNSO

Gopa Kumar: Public sector non-life insurance firm United India Insurance Company announced the appointment of S Gopakumar as its Director and General Manager with immediate effect. Prior to taking up the new role, Gopakumar was serving GIC Housing Finance Ltd as its Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer.

Obituary:

Karunanidhi: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) chief and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi passed away in Chennai. He was the 94-year-old veteran leader of Tamil Nadu. He started as a screenwriter in Tamil film industry and was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for five-terms.

Karunanidhi began his career as a screenwriter in the Tamil film industry. His first movie as screen writer was Rajakumari

During this period he and M. G. Ramachandran, then an upcoming actor and later day founder of AIADMK party started a long friendship eventually turning into rivals in later years politics.

His most notable movie was *Parasakthi*, a turning point in Tamil cinema, as it espoused the ideologies of the Dravidian movement and also introduced two prominent actors of Tamil filmdom, Sivaji Ganesan and S. S. Rajendran.

The movie was initially marred with controversies and faced censorship troubles, but was eventually released in 1952. becoming a huge box office hit. The movie was opposed by orthodox Hindus since it contained elements that criticized Brahmanism.