Monthly Policy Review

January 2018

Highlights of this Issue

Winter Session 2017 of Parliament ends; 11 Bills passed (p. 2)
The GST (Compensation to States) Amendment Bill, 2017, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2017, and the IIM Bill, 2017 were among the Bills passed.

Budget Session 2018 of Parliament begins; 32 Bills for consideration and passage (p. 2)
These include the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017.

Economic Survey 2017-18 tabled in Parliament (p.2)
The economy is expected to grow at 6.5% in 2017-18 as compared to 7% in 2016-17. The survey discusses the impact of GST, ease of doing business, and investment and savings.

President's address highlights agenda on the economy, defence, among others. (p.2)
Other focus areas included financial inclusion, transport, energy, health, and considering simultaneous conduct of elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

GDP estimated to grow at 6.5% in 2017-18, compared to 7.1% in 2016-17 (p.3)
The growth in agriculture is expected to decrease from 4.9% to 2.1%. Manufacturing sector growth is also expected to decelerate from 7.9% to 4.6%. Growth in the construction and services sector is expected to pick-up.

Cap on Foreign Direct Investment increased in few sectors (p.4)
The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion amended the Foreign Direct Investment Policy to increase FDI in sectors such as single brand product trading, civil aviation and real estate broking services.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill passed by Parliament (p.4)
The Bill amends the 2016 Code to prohibit certain categories of persons from submitting a resolution plan. It also prohibits the sale of any property during liquidation, to any of these ineligible persons.

Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 introduced in Lok Sabha (p.6)
The Bill outlines consumer rights, sets up consumer courts and a Consumer Protection Authority, prescribes penalties for misleading advertisements, and provides for complaints in cases of product liability.

Scheme of electoral bonds notified (p.5)
Electoral bonds may be used to make donations to political parties, without disclosing the name of the donor. They can be purchased through payment from a bank account complying with KYC norms.

Standing Committee submits report on the National Sports University Bill, 2017 (p.7)
The Standing Committee gave several recommendations, including setting up regional centres of the University, ensuring accessibility, resources and fund availability, and autonomy.

Standing Committees submit reports on airlines, tourism, and coal production (p.7, 8, 12)
The Committees looked at issues around promotion of tourism and development of pilgrimage, improving customer satisfaction of airlines and their services, and the production of coal, and reducing imports of coal.

Nine new smart cities announced (p.11)
Nine new smart cities have been announced in the fourth round of the National Smart Cities Challenge, taking the total number of smart cities to 99.

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Parliament

Winter session of Parliament ends; budget session begins

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The Winter Session of Parliament ended on January 5, 2018.[1] During the session, Parliament passed 11 Bills including the Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Amendment Bill, 2017, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2017, the Indian Institute of Petroleum and Energy Bill, 2017, and the Indian Institutes of Management Bill, 2017.

Bills passed by one House and currently pending in the other House include the Central Road Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2017, the Requisitioning and Acquisition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill, 2017, and the State Banks (Repeal and Amendment) Bill, 2017.

Bills introduced during the session include the Consumer Protection Bill, 2018, the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017, and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017. The National Medical Commission Bill, 2017 has been referred to a Parliamentary Committee for detailed examination.

The Budget Session of Parliament is to be held between January 29 and April 6, 2018.[2] It will have a total of 31 sittings, with a recess from March 4, 2017. The agenda for legislation includes 32 Bills for consideration and passing. Nine Bills are listed for introduction, consideration and passing. These include the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018, and the Use and Regulation of DNA based Technology in Civil and Criminal Proceedings Identification of Missing Persons and Human Remains Bill, 2018. The Union Budget will be presented on February 1, 2018.

For more details on the legislative business taken up during the Winter Session 2017, see here. For details on the functioning of Parliament during the session, see here. For a full list of the legislative agenda of the Budget Session 2018, see here.

President addresses joint sitting of Parliament; highlights key priorities

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The Budget Session of Parliament opened with President Ram Nath Kovind, addressing a joint sitting of both Houses on January 29, 2018.[3] He outlined the major policy priorities of the government in his address.

- **Macroeconomy:** During the first quarter of 2016-17, the economy witnessed a temporary slowdown in GDP growth. The second quarter of 2017-18 has seen a reversal of this trend.
- The rate of inflation, current account deficit and fiscal deficit have shown a decline. Foreign exchange reserves in 2017-18 were more than USD 410 billion. FDI increased from USD 36 billion to USD 60 billion in the last three years.
- **Financial inclusion:** Since 2014, about 31 crore Jan Dhan accounts have been opened. Under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, loans amounting to over four lakh crore rupees have been provided through 10 crore sanctioned loans.
- **Defence:** Under One Rank One Pension, more than Rs 10,000 crore has been released to over 20 lakh ex-servicemen.
- **Police:** The government sanctioned a scheme of more than Rs 18,000 crore for the modernisation of police forces.
- **Electoral reforms:** Frequent elections not only impose a huge burden on human resources but also impede development. Therefore, simultaneous conduct of elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies should be considered.
- **Health:** To ensure quality and transparency in medical education, the National Medical Commission Bill has been introduced.
- **Transport:** The Bharatmala scheme has been approved and a provision of Rs 5.3 lakh crore has been made towards it. Under the project, about 53,000 km of National Highways have been identified.

For more details on the President's address, please see here. To check the status of implementation of the announcements made in the 2017 address, please see here.

Macroeconomic development

Economic Survey 2017-18 presented

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The Finance Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley tabled the Economic Survey 2017-18.[4] Some highlights of the survey are:

- **Macroeconomy:** The Central Statistics Office has estimated the GDP growth to be 6.5% in 2017-18 as compared to 7% in 2016-17. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation was 3.3% in 2017-18 (April-December). The average food inflation was 1.2% for the same period.
- **Goods and Services Tax (GST):** Under GST, the number of unique indirect taxpayers increased by over 50% (3.4 million taxpayers). 13% of the estimated 71 million non-agriculture enterprises were registered under the GST network. GST data has also shown that India's formal sector non-farm payroll is greater than current perception.
- **Fiscal federalism:** In comparison to developed countries, India collects a lower share of direct taxes in total taxes. Local governments rely heavily on devolved funds from central and state governments. These devolved funds are largely tied in nature, and therefore constrain the ability of local governments to spend on local public goods as per their own priorities.
- **Ease of doing business:** Although the government has taken steps to improve contract enforcement, economic activity is getting affected by high pendency and delays across the legal system. The government and the judiciary must coordinate to introduce reforms to facilitate ease of doing business. Judicial capacity should be strengthened in the lower courts to reduce the burden on higher courts.
- **Investment and saving:** India saw high levels of investment and saving rates in the mid 2000s followed by a gradual decline, and returning back to normal levels. A fall in both private investment, and household and government savings have contributed to such decline between 2007 and 2017. There needs to be a focus on revival of investment. Easing the cost of doing business, and creating a transparent, stable tax and regulatory environment will help revive private investment.

For more details on the Economic Survey 2017-18, please see here.

GDP estimated to grow at 6.5% in 2017-18, decline from 7.1% in 2016-17

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The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country is estimated to grow at 6.5% in 2017-18.[5] GDP growth across economic sectors is measured in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA). GVA of the country is estimated to grow at 6.1% in 2017-18, as compared to 6.6% in 2016-17 and 7.9% in 2015-16.[6] Table 1 shows the growth in GVA across sectors.

Table 1: Gross Value Added across sectors (% growth year-on-year)

Sector	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Agriculture	0.7%	4.9%	2.1%
Mining	10.5%	1.8%	2.9%
Manufacturing	10.8%	7.9%	4.6%
Electricity	5.0%	7.2%	7.5%
Construction	5.0%	1.7%	3.6%
Services	9.7%	7.7%	8.3%
GVA	**7.9%**	**6.6%**	**6.1%**

Note: Data for 2016-17 is provisional estimates and for 2017-18 is first advance estimates. GVA is measured at basic prices (2011-12).
Sources: Central Statistics Office; MOSPI; PRS.

The growth in agriculture sector is expected to substantially decrease from 4.9% in 2016-17 to 2.1% in 2017-18. Manufacturing sector growth is also expected to slow down. Growth in the construction, mining, and services sector is expected to pick-up in 2017-18 in comparison to the previous year.

Retail inflation increased to 5.2% in the third quarter of 2017-18

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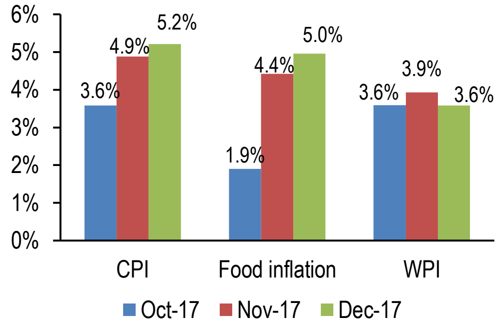
The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation (base year 2011-12) increased from 3.6% in October 2017 to 5.2% in December 2017 year-on-year.[7] This was mainly a result of the rise in fuel prices and food items such as pulses and vegetables. During this period, food inflation also increased from 1.9% to 5.0% year-on-year.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation (base year 2011-12) ranged between 3.6% to 3.9 year-on-year in the third quarter of 2017-18 (October to December).[8]

Trends in inflation during the third quarter of 2017-18 are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Inflation trends in Q3 of 2017-18 (% change year on year)



Sources: Ministry of Commerce and Industry; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; PRS

Industry

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Cap on Foreign Direct Investment increased in few sectors

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) released certain changes in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Policy.[9] The changes include:

- **Single brand product retail trading:** Single brand retail stores are those that carry products sold only under one brand. 100% FDI will be automatically allowed for such retail trading. In cases where the FDI exceeds 51%, 30% of the value of goods purchased must be from India. Such mandatory sourcing requirements, must be met as an average, in the initial five years. After the initial five years, the requirement must be met on an annual basis.
- **Civil Aviation:** FDI in Air India will be allowed up to 49%. Substantial ownership and effective control of Air India must continue to be with Indian nationals.
- **Construction development:** 100% FDI will be allowed automatically under real-estate broking service.
- **Proposals from countries of concern:** The DIPP will examine investment applications under sectors with automatic route when they are from countries of concern which require certain security clearances. Similarly, respective administrative ministries and departments will examine cases pertaining to sectors which require government approval for foreign investment.

Corporate Affairs

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Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill passed by Parliament

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2017 was passed by Parliament. The Bill amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 and replaces an Ordinance promulgated in November 2017.[10,11,12] The Code provides a time-bound process for resolving insolvency of companies and individuals. Insolvency is a situation where a company is unable to repay its outstanding debt. Key features of the Bill include:

- **Resolution applicant:** The Code defines a resolution applicant as a person who submits a resolution plan to an insolvency professional. A resolution plan specifies the details of how the debt of a defaulting debtor can be restructured. The Bill amends this provision to define an applicant as a person who submits a resolution plan after receiving an invitation by the insolvency professional to do so.
- **Ineligibility to be a resolution applicant:** The Bill inserts a provision prohibiting certain persons from submitting a resolution plan. These include: (i) undischarged insolvents (individuals unable to repay their debt), (ii) wilful defaulters, (iii) a person whose account has been classified as a non-performing asset for more than a year and he has not repaid the outstanding amount before submitting a plan, (iv) a person convicted of an offence punishable with two or more years of imprisonment, (v) a person disqualified as a director under the Companies Act, 2013, or (vi) anyone connected to a person mentioned above (including promoters, management, or any related person).
- **Liquidation:** The Bill prohibits the insolvency professional from selling the property of the defaulter to any such ineligible persons during liquidation.

For an analysis of the Bill, please see here.

Finance

ONGC acquires 51% equity shareholding in HPCL

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The government of India sold its 51.11% shareholding of Hindustan Petroleum Company Limited (HPCL) to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) for a total price of Rs 36,915 crore.[13]

The Negotiable Instruments (Amendment) Bill, 2017 introduced

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The Negotiable Instruments (Amendment) Bill, 2017 was introduced in Lok Sabha.[14] It seeks to amend the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881. The Act defines promissory notes, bills of exchange, and cheques. It also specifies penalties for bouncing of cheques, and other violations with respect to such negotiable instruments. Key features of the Bill include:

- **Interim compensation:** The Bill seeks to make changes related to trial of cheque bounce cases. It allows a court trying such an offence to direct the drawer (person who writes the cheque) to pay interim compensation to the complainant. The interim compensation will not exceed 20% of the cheque amount. The amount must be paid by the drawer within 60 days of the trial court's order.
- **Deposit in case of appeal:** The Bill inserts a provision related to appeal cases filed by a drawer who has been convicted in a cheque bouncing case. It specifies that the appellate court may direct such a drawer to deposit a minimum of 20% of the fine or the compensation awarded by the trial court during conviction. This amount will be in addition to any interim compensation paid by the drawer during the earlier trial proceedings. This amount will have to be paid within 60 days.
- **Returning the interim compensation:** In case the drawer is acquitted, the court will direct the complainant to return the interim compensation (or deposit in case of an appeal case), along with an interest. This amount will be repaid within 60 days of the court's order.

For more details on the Bill, see here.

Standing Committee submits report on digital economy

The Standing Committee on Finance (Chair: Dr. M. Veerappa Moily) submitted a report on 'Transformation towards a Digital Economy'.[15] The report makes recommendations on transforming the Indian economy by increasing digital transactions, and improving cyber security, among others. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Objective under demonetisation:** The Committee observed that digitisation was added as a supplementary objective of demonetisation (of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes in November 2016). It noted that promotion of digital transactions has the capacity to transform India's economy through formalisation of payments. Further, this can: (i) accelerate financial inclusion, (ii) open new business models and markets, (iii) curb tax leakages, and (iv) reduce cash related costs and inconvenience.
- **Pace of digitisation:** The Committee noted that the pace of digitisation has been slower than envisaged. While digital transactions had peaked after demonetisation, they tapered with greater availability of cash. The Committee noted some roadblocks in the path of rapid digitisation, which include unreasonable costs on digital transactions, and issues with telecom coverage. It recommended that the government should rationalise digital transaction costs and incentivise people to opt for digital payments for lower value transactions.
- **Data protection:** The Committee observed that it is necessary to have a sound consumer privacy and data protection law in India to ensure security of public and private data. It urged the government to bring a legislation to Parliament at the earliest.
- **Mobile-based payments:** The Committee noted that the Unified Payments Interface and the BHIM app have become important mobile based payment platforms. It suggested that the government should further popularise these platforms with the common man and merchant establishments.

For a PRS Report Summary, see here.

Scheme of electoral bonds notified

The Ministry of Finance notified the scheme of electoral bonds.[16,17] The scheme had been announced as part of the Union Budget 2017-18. Under the scheme, a new instrument called an electoral bond will be issued to make donations to political parties. Key features include:

- **Eligible buyers:** Any Indian citizen or an incorporated body (such as a company) will be eligible to purchase an electoral bond. The purchaser will have to make the payment from his bank account, and comply with the Know Your Customer norms of the bank. The bonds will not carry the name of the purchaser.
- **Denomination of bonds:** These bonds will be issued by certain branches of the State Bank of India in multiples of: (i) Rs 1,000, (ii) Rs 10,000, (iii) Rs one lakh, (iv) Rs ten lakh, and (v) Rs one crore.
- **Eligible parties:** Electoral bonds may only be used to make donations to registered political parties which secured at least 1% of the votes in the last Lok Sabha or state assembly election. These bonds can be encashed by parties only through a designated account with an authorised bank.

- **Issue date:** Electoral bonds will be available for 10 days each in January, April, July and October. Bonds will be available for purchase for another 30 days in the year of the Lok Sabha elections. The bonds will have to be encashed within 15 days of issue, and will not be eligible for trading.

Consumer Affairs

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Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 introduced in Lok Sabha

The Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan.[18] The Bill replaces the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Key features of the 2018 Bill include:

- **Rights of consumers:** Consumer rights include the right to: (i) be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property; (ii) be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services; (iii) be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices; and (iv) seek redressal against unfair trade practices.
- **Central Consumer Protection Authority:** The central government will set up a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers. It will regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements.
- **Penalties for misleading advertisement:** The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to to Rs 10 lakh for a false or misleading advertisement. In case of a subsequent offence, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh. The manufacturer can also be punished with imprisonment of up to two years, extendable to five years for every subsequent offence.
- **Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions:** Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (CDRCs) will be set up at the district, state, and national levels. A consumer can file a complaint with CDRCs in relation to: (i) unfair or restrictive trade practices; (ii) defective goods or services; (iii) overcharging or deceptive charging; and (iv) the offering of goods or services for sale which may be hazardous to life and safety. Complaints against an unfair contract can be filed with only the State and National CDRCs. Appeals from a District CDRC will be heard by the State CDRC. Appeals from the State CDRC will be heard by the National CDRC. Final appeal will lie before the Supreme Court.
- **Product liability:** Product liability means the liability of a product manufacturer, service provider or seller to compensate a consumer for any harm or injury caused by a defective good or deficient service. To claim compensation, a consumer has to prove any one of the conditions for defect or deficiency, as specified in the Bill.

A PRS Summary of the Bill is available here.

Law and Justice

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Bill to establish new International Arbitration Centre introduced

The New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill, 2018 was introduced in Lok Sabha.[19] The Bill seeks to establish an independent institution for conducting arbitration, mediation and conciliation in India. Arbitration, mediation and conciliation are alternative methods to resolve disputes. Key features of the Bill include:

- **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC):** The Bill seeks to establish the NDIAC to conduct arbitration, mediation, and conciliation proceedings. The Bill declares the NDIAC as an institution of national importance. The NDIAC will consist of seven members including a Chairperson and a Chief Executive Officer.

  The NDIAC will: (i) facilitate conduct of arbitration and conciliation in a professional, timely and cost-effective manner; and (ii) promote studies in the field of alternative dispute resolution, among others.
- **Objectives of the NDIAC:** Objectives of the NDIAC include: (i) promoting research, providing training, and organising conferences on alternative dispute resolution matters; (ii) providing facilities and administrative assistance for arbitration, mediation and conciliation proceedings; (iii) maintaining a panel of accredited professionals to conduct arbitration, mediation and conciliation proceedings.

- **International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR):** Currently, the ICADR is responsible for promoting the resolution of disputes through alternative dispute resolution methods (such as arbitration and mediation). The Bill seeks to subsume the ICADR under the NDIAC.

For more details on the Bill, please see here.

Bill to amend salaries, allowances and pension of higher court judges passed in Lok Sabha

The High Court and the Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2018 was passed by Lok Sabha.[20] The Bill amends the High Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1954 and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1958. The two Acts regulate the salaries and conditions of service of the judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court.

Key features of the Bill include:

- **Salary:** The two Acts specify the salaries of judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts. The Bill seeks to revise their salaries with effect from January 1, 2016:

Table 2: Salary of judges (per month)

Designation	Present (Rs)	Proposed (Rs)
Chief Justice of India	1,00,000	2,80,000
Other Judges of the Supreme Court	90,000	2,50,000
Chief Justice of High Court	90,000	2,50,000
Other Judges of High Court	80,000	2,25,000

Sources: The High Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1954; The Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1958; The High Court and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2017; PRS.

The Bill also amends the provisions related to housing allowance and pension.

For more details on the Bill, please see here.

Education

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Standing Committee submits report on the National Sports University Bill, 2017

The Standing Committee on Human Resource Development (Chairperson: Dr. Satyanarayan Jatiya) submitted its report on the National Sports University Bill, 2017.[21] The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on August 10, 2017 and subsequently referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resource Development. It seeks to establish and incorporate a National Sports University in Manipur to promote sports education in the areas of (i) sports sciences, (ii) sports technology, (iii) sports management, and (iv) sports coaching. It will also function as the national training centre for select sports. Key observations and recommendations of the committee are as follows:

- **Location considerations:** The headquarters of the National Sports University will be in Manipur. However, it may establish or maintain outlying campuses, colleges and regional centres at other locations in India. The Committee endorsed the concept of setting up of outlying campuses of the University in different parts of the country and also abroad.
- The Committee noted that since the University is proposed in north-eastern India, with regard to travel, it must be ensured that any locational disadvantage to students and sportspersons must be reduced.
- **Resource requirements:** As per the Department of Sports, resources and funds will be arranged for meeting the increased scope and reach of the National Sports University and outlying campuses in the future. In this context, the Committee expressed concerns about the resources that the University needs and the availability of adequate funds. The Committee recommended that it be ensured that the funds are rightfully utilised. Further, the Committee is also of the view that the University should be able to generate its own resources to meet or supplement its requirements. It also suggested that the University should also explore other resources through corporate social responsibility from the corporate sector.

For a PRS Report Summary, please see here.

Transport

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Standing Committee submits report on tourism promotion and pilgrimage circuit

The Standing Committee on Railways (Chair: Mr. Sudip Bandyopadhyay) submitted a report on 'Tourism Promotion and Pilgrimage Circuit'.[22] Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Railways' role in tourism:** The Committee observed that the foreign exchange earnings from tourism were around USD 21 billion during 2015 and contributed to about 6-7% of the GDP. However, much of the potential for tourism in India remains unexplored. Railways can play a crucial role in promoting tourism in the country because of its wide reach. It also provides an economic and eco-friendly means of transport across the country. The committee recommended that there should be representation for tourism in the Railway Board which would help them frame tourism related policies.
- **Financial overview:** The Committee observed that the budget earmarked by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) for tourism promotion during the years 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 was Rs 6 crore, Rs 4.2 crore, Rs 4 crore and Rs 3.7 crore respectively. Such budget allocation for a major head is grossly inadequate and shows a declining trend. Further, IRCTC's utilisation of these funds has ranged between 55% to 90%. It recommended that the budget allocation to IRCTC for tourism should be increased immediately, and a separate fund be created for the promotion of tourism and pilgrimage in India.
- **Tourism promotion and pilgrimage circuit:** The Committee noted that states with a high potential for tourism such as Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, northern part of Kerala and north eastern states witness minimal presence of Railways. It suggested that Railways must focus on those areas which possess touristic/ historic/ religious importance, and are not connected by rail.
- The Committee also noted that Ministry does not have any specific guidelines for categorising a particular station as a touristic and pilgrimage place. The tourism and pilgrimage sector could be an important source of revenue for the Railways. It recommended that the Ministry of Railways should collaborate with the Ministry of Tourism to share tourism data.

For a PRS summary of the report, see here.

Standing Committee submits report on issues related to improving consumers' satisfaction of airlines

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. Derek O' Brien) submitted a report on 'Issues Related to Improving Consumers' Satisfaction of Airlines'.[23] Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Pricing of air tickets:** The Committee observed that the domestic airline pricing runs in multiple levels (or buckets) which is in line with global practices. The lower fare in the fare bucket is available for advance booking. As the date of journey approaches closer, the fare in the higher bucket is made available as per the respective airline policy. The Committee noted that the pricing mechanisms applicable in developed countries may not be suitable for India. Further, even after a 50% reduction of the prices of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), airlines have not passed on the benefit of such reduction in prices to the consumers.
- The Committee noted that around festivals and for bookings made closer to the travel dates, some airlines charge more than ten times of the advance booking fare, which is arbitrary. It recommended that the Ministry of Civil Aviation should consider fixing an upper limit for air tickets for every sector.
- **Behaviour of airline staff:** The Committee observed that recently there have been several incidents of manhandling, and misbehaviour by airline staff (both ground staff and cabin crew). Such problems within airlines are institutional and not personal. It recommended that airlines should relook their employee behaviour.
- **Training of airline staff:** The Committee recommended soft skills training and functionality training for all employees across airlines. The employees must be trained to effectively manage situations such as delay in flight take-off, delay in landing, and diversion of flights. They should also be trained to be sensitive towards the needs of persons with disability. The government should come up with a training programme for airlines, suitable to Indian conditions, at the earliest. The training must be standardised across all airlines.

For a PRS report summary, see here.

Cabinet approves revised Model Concession Agreement for Major Ports

The Union Cabinet approved a revised Model Concession Agreement (MCA) for PPP projects in Major Ports.[24,25] The amendments seek to make port projects more investor-friendly, and similar to provisions in the highway sector. Key changes include:

- **Dispute resolution mechanism:** All disputes will be referred to the Society for Affordable Redressal of Disputes - Ports (SAROD-Ports). The dispute will be dealt with as per the terms of Rules of SAROD-Ports and provisions of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.
- **Exit route:** Developers can exit a project by way of divesting their equity up to 100% after completion of two years from the Commercial Operation Date (COD). COD is the date on which the concessionaire receives the project completion certificate.
- **Commencement of projects:** Certain projects can start operating before the COD. This would help with better utilisation of port assets.
- **Land rent:** With regard to additional land given to the concessionaire, the land rent has been reduced from 200% to 120%.
- **Royalty:** Currently, royalty is charged from the concessionaries as a percentage of gross revenue quoted during bidding, and is calculated on the basis of tariff ceiling as prescribed by the Tariff Authority for Major Ports. The amendments provide that the concessionaire would pay royalty on the basis of amount of cargo handled, which would be indexed to the variations in the Wholesale Price Index annually.
- **Compensation in case of change in law:** The concessionaire will be compensated in case the viability of the project gets affected due to imposition of new taxes, and duties. However, this will not apply in case of an imposition or increase of a direct tax.

Social Justice

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Standing Committee submits report on educational schemes for tribals

The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (Chairperson: Mr. Ramesh Bais) submitted its report on 'Educational Schemes for Tribals'.[26] Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Performance of existing schemes:** The Committee noted that despite many educational schemes for tribals in the country, the literacy rate of tribals (59%) is far below the national literacy rate (74%). Reasons for it include: (i) poverty and poor economic conditions of Scheduled Tribes (ST), (ii) considerable distance between home and school (especially for secondary education and above), and (iii) lack of awareness and understanding of the long-term value of formal education. The Committee observed that efforts made by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs through Ashram Schools, Pre-Matric Scholarships, and Post-Matric Scholarships for ST students have not yielded the desired results in improving their education status. It noted that the schemes being implemented lack conviction, dedication, and supervision. The Committee recommended a more committed approach by the Ministry for the implementation of the schemes.
- **Development of bilingual primers:** Bilingual primers are meant to contain text in regional and tribal languages to facilitate learning (reading and writing) in schools in tribal areas. The Committee observed the slow development of bilingual primers and recommended that the Ministry must pursue the matter with states.
- **Status of hostels:** The Committee observed that there are 1,470 hostels in the country for ST students which are functional. Such hostels seek to provide accommodation to ST students who would otherwise have been unable to continue their education due to economic reasons. The Committee noted that these hostels have poor building structure and sub-standard quality of food. It also noted that since substantial amount of the Ministry's money has gone into building these hostels and other infrastructure, they must be properly monitored.

For a PRS Summary of the Report, see here.

Skill Development

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Standing Committee submits report on Industrial Training Institutes and Skill Development Initiative Scheme

The Standing Committee on Labour (Chairperson: Dr. Kirit Somaiya) submitted its report on 'Industrial Training Institutes and Skill Development Initiative Scheme'.[27] Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) impart skills in various vocational trades to meet the skilled manpower requirements of the country. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Accreditation process:** The Committee noted that in 2012, the Quality Council of

India (QCI) was assigned the task of scrutinising, verifying, and accrediting the ITIs. Further, QCI grants accreditation to the institutes on the basis of fulfilling all the criteria agreed upon between the National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT) and the QCI. The NCVT is the central agency to advise the government in framing the training policy and for coordinating vocational training across India. The adherence to NCVT norms with respect to the accredited applications is checked by the Directorate General of Training (DGT) prior affiliation of the ITIs.

- The Committee highlighted that the QCI had compromised the quality of accreditation and affiliation process. It had not followed the prescribed NCVT norms in respect of building infrastructure, machinery, equipment, and faculty including general safety norms. The Committee also noted the failure on the part of DGT for allowing this to continue without any checks. In this context, the Committee recommended that appropriate action be taken immediately by the DGT against the QCI.
- **Pendency of applications and complaints:** The Committee noted that QCI has not processed the cases of accreditation on a timely basis and there was a huge pendency of applications from 2013 to 2016. It also noted that between 2014-16, there were numerous public grievances regarding accreditation of ITIs by QCI. In this context, the Committee recommended that apart from examining the 263 complaint cases, a compulsory review of all 6,729 cases which the QCI had forwarded for accreditation must be conducted.
- The Committee also recommended providing the Craftsmen Training Scheme with legal powers to strengthen its regulation and monitoring powers.

For a PRS Summary of the Report, see here.

Health

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Cabinet approves setting up of new AIIMS in Bilaspur

The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of a new AIIMS in Bilaspur, (Himachal Pradesh) under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY).[28] Under PMSSY, the government sets up new AIIMS in selected states and upgrades certain existing state government medical colleges. Under this scheme, AIIMS have been established in Bhubaneshwar, Bhopal, Raipur, Jodhpur, Rishikesh and Patna. Further, additional six approvals have been given for new AIIMS since 2015.

Committee on Estimates releases report on medical education and healthcare'

The Committee on Estimates (Chairperson: Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi) submitted its report on 'Medical Education and Healthcare in the country'.[29] Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Overall expenditure on health:** The Committee observed that private doctors are the most important source of treatment in both the rural and urban areas. Further, among the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) economies, India has emerged as the country with the largest out of pocket expenditure on health which leads to the impoverishment of poorer sections of society. The Committee has noted an increase in spending by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare over the years. However, it also noted underutilisation of funds and overall fund releases below the total allocations to states.
- The Committee also highlighted that out of Rs 2,539 crore allocated to 15 states as recommended by the 13th Finance Commission, only Rs 1,757 crore were released to these states. The Committee also stated that the stoppage of central grants to states by the 14th Finance Commission will further deteriorate the delivery of proper health care facility in the poor and backward region of the country. The Committee recommended enhancing not just the allocations for health care, but also enhancing the capacities for utilisation of funds by various schemes implemented by the union and state governments.
- **Shortage of medical practitioners:** The Committee noted shortages of doctors across different states. It also noted that the Ministry has not conducted any study in this regard. For example, about one-third of the posts of doctors in government hospitals are vacant. The Committee stated that because of a rise in number of patients, there is an urgent need to increase the number of post graduate seats in various colleges without compromising the quality of education.
- The Committee also noted an acute shortage of nurses and recommended opening more

nursing colleges in the country. It also recommended broadening the syllabus of nursing so as to train them to prescribe certain drugs, anesthesia, etc.

For a PRS Summary of the Report, see here.

Women and Child Development

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Committee on Empowerment of Women submits report on women's healthcare

The Committee on Empowerment of Women (Chairperson: Ms. Bijoya Chakravarty) submitted its report on Women's Healthcare: Policy Options.[30] Key observations and recommendations of the committee include:

- **Synergy between the central and state policies:** The Committee noted that synergy between the centre and states' policies will help bring changes in women's healthcare. For example, the Committee observed that transportation of expectant mothers to the nearest delivery points still remains an arduous task in view of (i) difficult geographical terrains: (ii) lack of transportation facilities, (iii) natural calamities, (iv) security threats, curfews, hartals, among others.
- In this regard, the Committee recommended that the central government must discuss with states to build 'pre-delivery hubs', preferably very close to the delivery points to take care of such transportation issues. Further, it observed that such hubs would help reduce the out-of-pocket expenses of poor and marginalised families and also reduce maternal deaths.
- **Demand for Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA):** ASHA workers provide support in tracking the health of pregnant women, help them avail benefits (such as Janani Suraksha Yojana entitlements), and aid the grassroot implementation of health programmes. The Committee noted that ASHA workers across the country do not have fixed wages and that they have demanded a fixed wage component within their remuneration in many states.
- In this context, the Committee recommended a proposal for assured monthly wages for ASHA workers, not less than Rs 3,000. The Committee also highlighted other issues regarding the training of ASHAs such as dearth of competent trainers, infrastructure, and equipment.

For a PRS Summary of the Report, see here.

Urban Development

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Nine new smart cities announced

Nine new smart cities have been announced in the fourth round of the national Smart Cities Challenge, bringing the total to 99.[31] Under the challenge, cities are selected on the basis of their smart city proposals. The following table shows the new nine smart cities.

Table 3: List of the new nine smart cities

State/ UT	Cities
Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar
Bihar	Biharsharif
Dadar and Nagar Haveli	Silvassa
Daman and Diu	Diu
Lakshwadeep	Kavaratti
Tamil Nadu	Erode
Uttar Pradesh	Bareilly, Moradabad, Saharanpur

Sources: Press Information Bureau; PRS

The nine cities have proposed an investment of Rs 12,824 crore. With the addition of these new cities, the total proposed investment in the Smart City Mission would be Rs 2,03,979 crore.

Swachh Bharat Mission- Urban launches a star rating protocol for garbage free cities

A protocol for star rating of garbage free cities was launched under Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban.[32] The star rating provides a framework to achieve a garbage free status.

- **Basis of the rating:** The star rating is based on 12 parameters including door to door collection of waste, segregation of waste at source, and, scientific waste processing among others. Cities can be rated 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 based on their compliance with the criteria (Note: 1 is the lowest, 7 is the highest, and, there is no 6-star rating). In order to be rated 3 or higher, a city must be certified as open defecation free.
- **Verification and validity of rating:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs will conduct third party verification of cities rated 3 or higher. The ratings will be valid for one

year. Following this period of one year, cities will have to get recertified.

Rural Development

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Committee submits report on human resource management in panchayats

An Expert Committee (Chair: Mr. Sumit Bose) submitted its report on 'Performance Based Payments for Better Outcomes in Rural Development Programmes' in January 2017. The Committee was constituted in December 2016 to look into human resources available with panchayats and suggest means by which these resources could be augmented and organised for better delivery of programmes. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Human resources in panchayats:** At the gram panchayat level, the Committee noted several deficiencies such as: (i) insufficiency of staff; (ii) inadequacy of qualifications; (iii) lack of rigor in recruitment; (iv) poor terms and conditions of service; (v) low incentives for performance; (vi) and lack of adequate training. Majority of the manpower in panchayats function in silos related to schemes and are mostly accountable to the programme supervisors, not panchayats.
- The Committee recommended that every panchayat should have a full time secretary, who will perform both general administration and development functions. It should also have a technical assistant, who will carry out engineering functions. The existing Gram Rozgar Sevaks should be formally trained to carry out essential engineering functions, such as those related to water supply and sanitation.
- **Social accountability:** To increase the social accountability of gram panchayats, the Committee suggested holding regular gram sabha meetings, as per the provisions in the State Panchayat Raj Act (such as minimum of four meetings in a year) and on the request of voters under special circumstances. To enable a serious, effective, and an all-inclusive meeting, the meeting notice must reach the people at least seven days in advance.
- The Committee also recommended implementing measures, such as: (i) participatory planning and budgeting; (ii) preparation of status studies for effective utilisation of earmarked budget; (iii) participatory expenditure tracking; (iv) social audit of panchayats, among others.

A PRS summary of the report is available here.

Coal and Mining

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Standing Committee submits report on production and distribution of coal

The Standing Committee on Coal and Steel (Chair: Mr. Rakesh Singh) submitted a report on 'Production, Marketing and Distribution of Coal'.[33] Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Demand and supply:** The Committee noted that the coal demand-supply gap has increased from 15.5 MT in 2015-16 to 55.3 MT in 2016-17. The increase in this gap was due to subdued demand for coal from various sectors such as power and cement. The increased gap between the demand and supply during 2016-17 was primarily due to coal stock already piled up at thermal power stations. Further, supply of coal by Coal India Limited (CIL) has consistently shown a rising trend since 2014-15. The Committee recommended that the demand projections for coal be revised to reflect the actual demand across sectors.
- **Supply of coal to the unregulated sector:** The Committee noted that there has been a steady decline in the supply of coal to the non-regulated sectors like steel, cement, and sponge iron. Through the coal linkage auction policy (buying coal from a mine closer to the plant) the supply of coal to these sectors had improved through periodic auctions. It recommended that the periodicity of these linkage auctions should be increased. Further, more non-regulated sectors should be brought under the linkage auction policy to ensure that they also have a regular supply of coal.
- **Coal production:** During 2015-16 and 2016-17, though CIL enhanced its production by 9% and 3% respectively, it missed its production targets. However, the Committee noted that CIL fixes higher targets to improve efficiency, and non-achievement of targets has not affected the supply of coal to any consumers. It also noted that the major impediments for CIL in implementing its projects are land

acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement, delays in forest and environmental clearances, and law and order issues. It suggested that the government should address these issues urgently in consultation with all stakeholders.

- **Coal imports:** The import of coal has decreased from 174 MT during 2014-15 to 149 MT during 2016-17. The Committee noted that the Ministry of Coal and CIL have been trying to substitute the imported coal with domestic coal options, which has led to decreasing imports. recommended that the import of coking coal may be reduced by augmenting domestic production, or by acquiring coking coal mines abroad.

For a PRS report summary, see here.

Defence

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'Make' procedure under Defence Procurement Procedure 2016 amended

The Defence Acquisition Council (Chair: Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman) cleared an amendment to the Defence Procurement Procedure 2016, related to the 'Make' procedure. Projects under this procedure should be indigenously designed and developed with a minimum of 40% indigenous content.[34] The amendment, known as 'Make-II', seeks to simplify the procedure for indigenous manufacture and development of defence equipment.[35,36] Salient features of the 'Make-II' procedure include:

- Industry, start-ups and individuals can suggest projects and proposals under the 'Make' procedure. The respective Service Headquarters (SHQ) (Army, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard) will also list out a series of projects which can be undertaken.
- Projects under 'Make-II' will be approved by a collegiate comprising Defence Research and Development Organisation, Headquarter Integrated Defence Staff, and Department of Defence (under a committee chaired by Secretary, Defence Production).
- Earlier, only two vendors were shortlisted to develop prototype equipment. No limit will be set on the number of responses to an expression of interest for development of a prototype that meets the minimum qualification criteria. Design and development time of 12 to 30 weeks will be granted to industry to offer prototypes.
- After receiving responses, a Request for Proposal will be issued. Whoever wins the bid will be issued an order. SHQ will constitute a Project Facilitation Team for facilitating this process. These teams will provide technical inputs, trial infrastructure and other facilities required by the vendor.
- 'Make-II' procedure seeks to reduce the total time from in-principle approval to placing of order by 50%. The estimated time to finish the whole process will come down to between 69 and 103 weeks.

Tribal Affairs

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Public Accounts Committee submits report on Tribal Sub-Plan

The Public Accounts Committee (Chair: Mr. Mallikarjun Kharge) submitted its report on 'Tribal Sub-Plan' on December 18, 2017. The Committee looked at the implementation of TSP in three ministries: (i) Human Resource Development; (ii) Health and Family Welfare; and (iii) Ayush. The Committee noted several discrepancies in the implementation of the TSP, including: (i) non-adoption of specific norms for release of funds, (ii) weak programme management, (iii) deficient monitoring system, (iv) and non-implementation of information programmes. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are:

- **Financial management:** The Committee noted that there has been no segregation of TSP funds under a separate head at the state, district or block level. Funds under TSP are required to be put into a separate head of account, to strengthen administrative arrangements for proper utilisation and monitoring of TSP funds. The Committee recommended that strict adherence to earmarking of funds into a separate head at every level should be made mandatory for release of funds. It also suggested that a more proactive approach should be taken to keep track of monitoring, fund utilisation, and implementation of schemes.
- **Central nodal unit for overview:** The Committee noted that guidelines detailing the process for an oversight had not been put out by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The basic objective of TSP is to channelize the flow of outlays from central ministries by earmarking funds for the development of STs in states (in proportion to their

population). The Committee reasoned that to oversee this implementation of fund flow, a central unit of oversight should be set up. It recommended that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs should create a central nodal unit for oversight which will facilitate better co-ordination and efficient implementation of TSP through an online monitoring system.

A PRS summary of the report is available here.

Telecom

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TRAI releases Telecommunication Interconnection Regulations, 2018

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) released the Telecommunication Interconnection Regulations, 2018.[37] Interconnection refers to an arrangement under which a service provider connects their network and services to let their customers access customers of other service providers. Key features of the regulations are:

- **Interconnection agreement:** A service provider who intends to enter into an interconnection agreement with another service provider must make a request for the same. The service provider receiving such request must enter into an interconnection agreement within thirty days, following procedures as per the regulations.
- **Interconnection charges:** Interconnection charges such as set-up charges and infrastructure charges can be mutually negotiated between the service providers. These are subject to regulations or directions issued by TRAI.
- **Point of interconnection (POI):** POI is a point where traffic is exchanged between service providers as decided by them. The service provider seeking the agreement can request the other service provider for ports at such POIs for a period of three months.
- **Penalty:** If any service provider violates the regulations, it will be liable to pay an amount upto one lakh per day per a licensed service area.

TRAI releases recommendations on in-flight connectivity

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) released recommendations on in-flight connectivity (IFC).[38] IFC includes voice, data and video services over Indian airspace for domestic, international and overflying flights in Indian airspace. Key observations and recommendations made by TRAI include:

- **In-flight connectivity:** TRAI recommended that Internet services, and mobile communication on aircraft (MCA) services should be permitted as in-flight connectivity in the Indian airspace.
- Internet services can be provided through Wi-Fi on-board only on devices which can be used in airplane mode. Mobile services will be permitted with a minimum height restriction of 3,000 meters in the Indian airspace without interfering with terrestrial mobile networks.
- **IFC service provider:** TRAI recommended that a separate category of IFC service provider should be created to permit IFC services in airlines registered in India. An IFC service provider must register with the Department of Telecommunications.
- An IFC service provider should partner with a Unified Licensee with authorisation for internet services or access services. To promote IFC services, TRAI recommended that an IFC service provider will be required to pay a flat annual licence fee of one rupee. However, it also noted that the same may be reviewed and amended later, if necessary.
- **Foreign airlines:** TRAI recommended that the regulatory requirements should be same for both Indian registered and foreign registered airlines for offering IFC services in Indian airspace. Further, charges to be levied for domestic and foreign airlines in Indian Airspace should be different.
- **Satellite bands of operation:** Connectivity services are provided using certain satellite frequency bands (ex: Ka-band: 27-40 Ghz). TRAI recommended that a spectrum neutral approach must be adopted instead of limiting IFC service to certain bands.

External Affairs

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Prime Ministers of Israel and Cambodia visit India

The Prime Ministers of Israel and the Kingdom of Cambodia visited India.[39,40] Key agreements signed with the countries are mentioned below:

Israel: India and Israel signed nine agreements in various sectors including: (i) cyber security, (ii) oil and gas (including collaboration in upstream sector activities, research and development, and technology), (iii) air transport, (iv) space research, (v) homeopathic medicine, (vi) film production, and (vii) investment (including exchange of information on investment opportunities).[41]

Cambodia: India and Cambodia signed four agreements in various sectors including: (i) cultural exchange, (ii) mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, and (iii) cooperation for prevention of human trafficking.[42]

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