Monthly Policy Review

March 2018

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Cabinet approves North-East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) 2017 (p. 12)
The Union Cabinet approved the North Eastern Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) 2017 with an outlay of Rs 3,000 crore till March 2020.

April 2, 2018

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Macroeconomic Development

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Current Account Deficit at 2% of GDP in Q3 of 2017-18

India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) in the third quarter (Oct-Dec) of 2017-18 increased to USD 13.5 billion (2% of GDP) from USD eight billion (1.4% of GDP) in the corresponding quarter of 2016-17.[1] CAD in the second quarter (July- Sept) of 2017-18 was USD 7.2 billion (1.1% of GDP).

The year-on-year increase of the CAD was largely on account of a higher trade deficit (difference between the country's imports and exports) of USD 44.1 billion (compared to USD 32.8 billion in second quarter of 2017-18).

Net foreign direct investment reduced by USD 5.4 billion from the corresponding quarter in the previous year. Portfolio investment recorded net inflow of USD 5.3 billion in third quarter of 2017-18, as against an outflow of USD 11.3 billion in corresponding quarter last year. Net receipts on account of non-resident deposits amounted to USD 3.1 billion in third quarter of 2017-18, as against net repayments of USD 18.5 billion a year ago. Foreign exchange reserves increased by USD 9.4 billion, compared with a decrease of USD 1.2 billion in the third quarter of 2016-17.

Table 1 shows the balance of payments in the third quarter of 2017-18.

Table 1: Balance of Payments in Q3 of 2017-18 (USD billion)

	Q3 2016-17	Q2 2017-18	Q3 2017-18
Current Account	-8.0	-7.2	-13.5
Capital Account	6.1	16.4	22.0
Errors and Omissions	0.7	0.4	0.8
Change in reserves	-1.2	9.6	9.4

Sources: Reserve Bank of India; PRS.

Transport

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Preliminary Information Memorandum for disinvestment of Air India released

The Ministry of Civil Aviation released a Preliminary Information Memorandum for the strategic disinvestment of Air India Limited.[2] The disinvestment is proposed to be done by way of transfer of management control and sale of 76% equity share capital of Air India held by the central government.

The Memorandum includes proprietary information on the company, for the limited purpose of providing certain information to the bidders to make an assessment prior to submitting an initial proposal. The government may later change the procedures for pursuing the proposed disinvestment. The memorandum provides information including: (i) an overview of the airline and ground handling industries, (ii) details of Air India Limited and Air India Express (subsidiary under Air India), (iii) proposed reallocation of the companies' debt and liabilities, (iv) process of the proposed disinvestment, and (v) instructions for submission of expression of interest by bidders.

Government guarantee for Indian Railway Finance Corporation bonds approved

The Ministry of Finance has approved a government guarantee of Rs 5,000 crore for Indian Railway Finance Corporation **(**IRFC) bonds to be subscribed by Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), in the current financial year.[3] This guarantee is expected to help LIC subscribe to IRFC bonds beyond the exposure limits set by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA). Exposure limits are set on the basis of assets that a borrower has, to be able to repay its debt, or in other words how much one should borrow.

The Ministry of Railways had entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with LIC in March 2015. Under the MoU, LIC was to provide a financial assistance of Rs 1,50,000 crore for identified Railway projects from 2015 to 2019. IRFC had been raising funds from LIC by issuing bonds with a term of 30 years. However due to the exposure limits as per IRDA guidelines; LIC had not been able to subscribe to IRFC bonds beyond the prescribed limit.

Finance

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Finance Bill 2018 passed by Lok Sabha

The Finance Bill, 2018 was passed in Lok Sabha.[4] It was introduced in Lok Sabha alongside the presentation of the Union Budget. At the stage of passage, the government moved some amendments to the Bill. Key features of the Bill include:

- **Income tax:** For salaried individuals, a standard tax deduction of Rs 40,000 has been introduced. The deduction for transport allowance and medical expenses has been removed.
- **Education cess:** The 3% Education Cess has been replaced by a 4% Health and Education Cess for non-resident persons, including foreign companies.
- **Corporate tax:** Currently, companies with turnover less than Rs 50 crore pay corporate tax at the rate of 25%. This threshold has been increased to Rs 250 crore.
- **Deductions for farm producer companies:** Tax deduction of 100% has been introduced for farm producer companies with a total turnover up to Rs 100 crores. The benefit will be available for a period of five years starting from 2018-19.
- **Long-term capital gains:** Currently, long term capital gains from transfer of equity instruments or a unit of business trust is exempt from payment of income tax. These transfers will now be taxed at 10%, if the profit from the transaction exceeds one lakh rupees. For computing gains, the purchase price would be considered as the higher of the actual purchase price or the price as on January 31, 2018.
- **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 (FRBM Act):** The FRBM Act is being amended based on the recommendations of the Fiscal Reform and Budget Management Committee (Chair: Mr. N. K. Singh). The amendments include bringing down the central government's debt to GDP ratio to 40% and setting an operational target for the fiscal deficit at 3% by 2021. This target for debt to GDP ratio will have to be achieved by 2025. Further, the deadline for achieving the operational target for fiscal deficit has been extended from 2018 to 2021.
- **Salaries and pensions:** The Bill amends five laws to make changes related to the emoluments of the President of India, the Vice President, Governors of states, and Members of Parliament (MPs). The emoluments of: (i) the President have been increased from Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs five lakh per month, (ii) the Vice-president from Rs 1.25 lakh to Rs four lakh per month, (iii) the Governors from Rs 1,10,000 to Rs 3,50,000 per month, and (iv) MPs from Rs 50,000 to Rs one lakh. Emoluments of MPs will be indexed to inflation, and will be revised every five years.

A PRS summary of the FRBM Committee Report is available here.

The Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 introduced in Lok Sabha

The Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 was introduced in Lok Sabha.[5] The Bill seeks to confiscate properties of economic offenders who have left the country to avoid facing criminal prosecution. Key features of the Bill include:

- **Fugitive economic offender:** A fugitive economic offender has been defined as a person against whom an arrest warrant has been issued for committing any of the offences listed in the schedule. Further the person has: (i) left the country to avoid facing prosecution, or (ii) refuses to return to face prosecution. Some of the offences listed in the schedule are: (i) counterfeiting government stamps or currency, (ii) cheque dishonour for insufficiency of funds, (iii) money laundering, and (iv) transactions defrauding creditors. The Bill allows the central government to amend the schedule through a notification.
- **Attachment of property:** The director or deputy director (appointed under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002) may attach any property mentioned in the application with the permission of a special court (designated under the 2002 Act). Further, these authorities may provisionally attach any property without the prior permission of the special court, provided that they file an application before the court within 30 days. The attachment will continue for 180 days, unless extended by the special court.
- **Declaration as fugitive economic offender:** The special court may declare an individual as a fugitive economic offender. It may confiscate properties which are: (i) proceeds of crime, (ii) benami properties in India or abroad, and (iii) any other properties in India or abroad. Upon confiscation, all rights and titles of the property will vest in the central government, without any encumbrances.

For a PRS Bill Summary, please see here.

The Chit Funds (Amendment) Bill, 2018 introduced in Lok Sabha

The Chit Funds (Amendment) Bill, 2018 was introduced in Lok Sabha.[6] It amends the Chit Funds Act, 1982.[7] The 1982 Act regulates chit funds, and prohibits a fund from being created without the prior sanction of the state government. Under a chit fund, people agree to pay a certain amount from to time into a fund. Periodically, one of the subscribers is chosen by drawing a chit to receive the prize amount from the fund.

Key features of the Bill include:

- **Fraternity fund:** The Act specifies various names which may be used to refer to a chit fund. These include chit, chit fund, and kuri. The Bill adds 'fraternity fund' to this list.
- **Presence of subscribers through video-conferencing:** The Act specifies that a chit will be drawn in the presence of at least two subscribers. The Bill seeks to allow these subscribers to join via video-conferencing.
- **Foreman's commission:** Under the Act, the 'foreman' is responsible for managing the chit fund. He is entitled to a maximum commission of 5% of the chit amount. The Bill increases the commission to 7%.

For a PRS Bill Summary, please see here.

RBI discontinues letters of undertaking for trade credit

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) discontinued the practice of issuing letters of understanding and letters of comfort from March 13, 2018 onwards.[8] These letters were issued by banks as trade credit for financing imports into India.[9] The RBI specified that the issuance of these letters would be allowed for certain purposes, such as for bank guarantees.

Labour and Employment

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The Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2018 passed in Parliament

The Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2017 was passed in Parliament.[10] The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on December 18, 2018.[11] The Bill amends the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972. The Act applies to any establishment, factory, mine, oilfield, plantation, port, railway, company, or shop employing 10 or more workers. The Act requires employees to be paid gratuity if they have had more than five years of service. Key features of the Bill are:

- The Bill empowers the central government to (i) notify the period of maternity leave eligible for qualifying as continuous service; and (ii) determine the amount of gratuity available to employees.
- The maximum maternity leave, for the purpose of calculating continuous service under the Act, was based on the maternity leave provided under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. The maternity leave entitlement under the 1961 Act was changed from 12 weeks to 26 weeks by the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017.[12] The Bill removes the reference to 12 weeks in the 1972 Act and empowers the central government to notify the maximum maternity leave for the purpose of gratuity.
- Under the Act, the maximum amount of gratuity payable to an employee cannot exceed Rs 10 lakh. The Bill removes the ceiling and states that the ceiling may be notified by the central government.

For more details on the Bill, see here.

New central rules on Industrial Employment notified

The central government notified Rules amending the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Central Rules, 1946.[13] The 1946 Rules were notified under the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946. The Act applies to every industrial establishment which employs 100 or more workmen. The Act requires employers in industrial establishments to formally define conditions of employment in the form of "standing orders" and to submit such standing orders to certifying authorities. The Rules introduce certain amendments in respect of fixed term employment workmen.

Currently, fixed term workmen are only allowed in the apparel industry. The new Rules allow companies to hire workers on contract on a fixed term basis. However, no employer can convert the posts of permanent workmen into fixed-term employment workmen. A fixed term employment workman is a workman who has been engaged on the basis of a written employment contract for a fixed period.

The new Rules state that fixed employment workmen will be assured of hours of work, pay benefits and other statutory benefits as applicable to permanent workmen. These benefits will be proportionate to the period of service rendered by them. However, fixed term workmen will not be entitled to any notice or pay in its lieu, once their contract expires.

Law and Justice

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Bill to amend the Specific Relief Act, 1963 passed by Lok Sabha

The Specific Relief (Amendment) Bill, 2017 was passed in Lok Sabha.[14] It amends the Specific Relief Act, 1963. The Act provides for the following remedies to a party whose contract has not been performed: (i) the aggrieved party may ask the court to require performance of the contract (known as specific performance); or (ii) it may seek monetary compensation. Key features of the Bill include:

- **Specific performance**: Under the Act, specific performance may be granted by the court, at its discretion, in the following circumstances: (i) when monetary compensation is inadequate; or (ii) when monetary compensation cannot be easily ascertained. The Bill seeks to remove these conditions and permit specific performance by courts as a general rule.
- **Substituted performance**: The Bill inserts a provision allowing an aggrieved party (i.e., party whose contract has not been performed) with the option of arranging for performance of the contract by a third party or through his own agency. The aggrieved party has to give a written notice to the non-performing party of at least 30 days before obtaining substituted performance.
- **Injunctions**: Under the Act, courts can grant injunctions to aggrieved parties. The Act provides circumstances in which the injunction cannot be given, for example, to stop a party from filing a complaint in a criminal matter. The Bill seeks to prohibit courts from granting injunctions in certain infrastructure project contracts, if such an injunction would hinder or delay the completion of the project. The Bill provides a list of project categories under certain infrastructure sectors and their sub-sectors.
- **Special courts**: The Bill provides that certain civil courts may be designated as special courts by the state government, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the respective High Court. These special courts will deal with cases related to infrastructure projects. Such cases must be disposed of within 12 months.

For more details on the Bill, see here.

Cabinet approves introduction of the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018

The Union Cabinet approved the introduction of the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018 in Parliament.[15] It seeks to amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

In 2015, certain amendments were made to the 1996 Act. These related to: (i) time period of arbitral awards; and (ii) applicability of certain provisions to international commercial arbitration. A High Level Committee (Chair: Justice B.N. Srikrishna) was constituted by the central government to remove difficulties in the implementation of the 2015 amendment Act as well as to boost institutional arbitration. The Committee submitted its report on July 30, 2017. The proposed amendments in the 2018 Bill are as per the recommendation of the Committee. Key features of the Bill approved by the Cabinet are:

- **Arbitration Council of India**: The Bill seeks to establish an independent body called the Arbitration Council of India (ACI) for the promotion of arbitration, mediation, conciliation and other alternative dispute redressal (ADR) mechanisms. Its functions include: (i) grading arbitral institutions and accrediting (i.e. granting recognition standards to) arbitrators; and (ii) making policies for the establishment, operation and maintenance of uniform professional standards for all ADR matters.
- **Composition of the ACI:** The ACI will consist of a Chairperson who is either: (i) a Judge of the Supreme Court; or (ii) a Judge of a High Court; or (iii) Chief Justice of a High Court; or (iv) an eminent person. Other members will include eminent academicians and government appointees.
- **Speedy appointment of arbitrators**: The Bill seeks to facilitate appointment of arbitrators without approaching the court. The parties may instead approach arbitration institutions designated by the Supreme Court or the High Court.
- **Relaxation of time limits:** Currently, arbitral tribunals are required to make their award within a period of 12 months for all arbitration proceedings. The Bill proposes to remove the time restriction for international arbitrations.
- **Confidentiality of proceedings:** All details of arbitration proceedings shall be kept confidential except for the details of the arbitral award.

For more details on the report of the High Level Committee, please the PRS Monthly Policy Review for August 2017, here.

Cabinet approves introduction of the Commercial Courts (Amendment) Bill

The Union Cabinet approved the introduction of the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Division of High Courts (Amendment) Bill, 2018 in Parliament.[16] The Bill seeks to amend the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Division of High Courts, 2015. The Act enables the creation of commercial divisions and commercial appellate divisions in high courts, and commercial courts at the district level. These courts will adjudicate commercial disputes (e.g., disputes related to transactions between merchants and traders). Key features of the Bill approved by the Cabinet are:

- **Reduction in Pecuniary limits**: Presently, commercial courts can decide disputes with a value of at least Rs one crore. The Bill reduces this limit to Rs three lakh.
- **Establishment of commercial courts**: Commercial courts may be set up (at district court level) in those territories where high courts exercise ordinary original civil jurisdiction, that is, the High Courts of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Himachal Pradesh. Further, certain commercial appellate courts are proposed to be established at the district judge level.
- **Pre-institutional mediation:** A provision for mediation is proposed in those cases where no urgent relief is being sought by the parties to the dispute.

Supreme Court permits passive euthanasia; living wills

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court declared passive euthanasia permissible. Further, it recognized the right of terminally ill persons and persons in permanent vegetative state to give directives in advance.[17] Passive euthanasia refers to the withdrawal of life support or withholding of treatment. An advance directive refers to a document in which the patient can specify conditions under which the life support should be stopped. The Court laid down guidelines for giving effect to passive euthanasia in both circumstances, i.e., where there are advance directives and where there are no advance directives.

The Court held that the fundamental right to life with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution includes smoothening the process of dying for terminally ill patients and for persons in permanent vegetative state.

Corporate Affairs

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National Financial Reporting Authority established; Rules notified

The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA).[18] The NFRA is established as an independent regulator for auditors. Its powers to investigate chartered accountants and their firms will extend to listed companies, and large unlisted companies (threshold will be notified). The central government may refer any other entity for investigation to the NFRA.

The establishment of the NFRA is pursuant to the provision for an auditing regulator in the Companies Act, 2013. Rules have been notified in relation to the appointment and other conditions of service of the members of the NFRA.[19] As per the Rules, the NFRA will consist of a Chairperson (who will be an eminent person), three full-time members and nine part-time members.

Health

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Cabinet approves the National Health Protection Mission

The Union Cabinet approved the launch of Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission.[20] The Scheme aims to provide a cover of Rs five lakh per family per year to about 10.7 crore families (no cap on family size and age) belonging to poor and vulnerable population. The scheme will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme. States would need to have State Health Agency (in the form of a trust, society, or not for profit company) to implement the scheme. Key features of the scheme are as follows:

- **Benefits:** The scheme aims to provide insurance coverage for secondary and tertiary health care. This will include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses. A defined transport allowance per hospitalisation will also be paid to the beneficiary. A beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

- **Eligibility:** The entitlement under the scheme will be decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the Socio-Economic Caste Census database. The different categories in rural areas include: (i) families having only one room with kucha walls and kucha roof, (ii) families having no adult member between age 16 to 59 years, and (iii) female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59 years, among others. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled for the benefits under the scheme.
- **Financing:** The payments for treatment will be done on package rate (to be defined by the government in advance) basis. The package rates will include all the costs associated with treatment. States/ UTs will have the flexibility to modify these rates within a limited bandwidth. For coordination between the centre and states, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council chaired by the Union Health and Family Welfare Minister. The expenditure incurred in premium payment will be shared between central and state governments in specified ratio as per Ministry of Finance guidelines.

Cabinet approves moving official amendments in the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016

The Union Cabinet approved moving official amendments in the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016.[21] The details of these amendments are not available in the public domain.

The Bill was introduced by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare in Lok Sabha on November 21, 2016.[22] The Bill defines surrogacy as a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple and agrees to hand over the child to them after the birth. It prohibits commercial surrogacy, but allows altruistic surrogacy. The Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare (Chairperson: Prof. Ram Gopal Yadav) submitted its report on the Bill in August, 2017.[23] The Committee recommended a surrogacy model based on compensation rather than altruistic surrogacy. The compensation must take care of several things including the wages lost during the pregnancy, psychological counselling, and post-delivery care.

More information on the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016 is available here.

Standing Committee submits report on National Medical Commission Bill, 2017

The Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare (Chairperson: Prof. Ram Gopal Yadav) submitted its report on the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017.[24] The Bill seeks to repeal the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956 and provide for a medical education system which ensures: (i) availability of adequate and high quality medical professionals, (ii) adoption of the latest medical research by medical professionals, (iii) periodic assessment of medical institutions, and (iv) an effective grievance redressal mechanism. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are summarised below:

- **Composition of the National Medical Commission (NMC):** The Committee observed that the strength of the NMC and the representation from states as proposed in the Bill must be increased for its effective functioning. It also noted the lack of proper representation of elected medical professionals in the composition of the NMC as 80% of them are nominated. The Committee recommended that the total strength of the NMC be increased from 25 members to 29 members. These 29 members will include the Chairperson, 6 ex-officio members, 9 elected registered medical practitioners (part-time), 10 members who are nominees of states/UTs (part-time), and 3 other part-time members.
- **Appellate jurisdiction:** The central government has the appellate jurisdiction over the decisions taken by the NMC. In this regard, the Committee stated that giving the appellate jurisdiction to the central government does not fit into the constitutional provision for separation of powers. It recommended constitution of a Medical Appellate Tribunal comprising of a Chairperson, who should be a sitting or retired Judge of the Supreme Court or a Chief Justice of a High Court, and two other members (with special knowledge in the medical profession and education, and health administration). This Tribunal will have an appellate jurisdiction over the decisions taken by the NMC instead of the central government.
- **Licentiate examination:** Under the Bill, the National Licentiate Examination (NLE) is compulsory for any MBBS doctor to make him eligible to practice medicine. The Committee observed that unless the NLE is carefully designed, there is apprehension that a

number of MBBS doctors who have passed their university level examinations, may be debarred from practice on disqualifying the NLE. In this context, the Committee recommended that the NLE be integrated with the final year MBBS examination and be conducted at the state level.

For a PRS Summary of the Report, click here.

Cabinet approves official amendments to National Medical Commission Bill, 2017

The Union Cabinet approved some amendments to the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017.[25] These amendments include:

- Final MBBS examination to be held as a common exam across the country and would serve as an exit test called the National Exit Test (NEXT). Students would not have to appear in a separate exam after MBBS to get license to practice as proposed in the Bill.
- Removal of the provision of a Bridge course for AYUSH practitioners to practice modern medicine as proposed in the Bill.
- Fee regulation for 50% seats in private medical institutions and deemed universities, which is an increase from the maximum limit of 40% seats in the Bill.
- Nominees of states and UTs in the NMC increased from three to six. The NMC will comprise of 25 members of which at least 21 will be doctors.
- Monetary penalty for a medical college non-compliant with the norms replaced with provision for different penalty options for different offences.
- The punishment for any unauthorised practice of medicine is imprisonment of up to one year along with a fine extending up to Rs five lakh.

Comments invited on Draft Digital Information Security in Healthcare Bill

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has invited comments invited on the Draft Digital Information Security in Healthcare Bill until April 21, 2018.[26] The Bill aims to to provide for electronic health data privacy and for establishment of National and State eHealth Authorities and Health Information Exchanges. The Health Information Exchanges facilitate the exchange of health data as per the norms specified by the National Electronic Health Authority. Key features of the Draft Bill are:

- **Meaning of 'Digital Health Data':** Digital health data refers to an electronic record of health related information about an individual which includes information: (i) concerning the individual's physical or mental health, (ii) concerning any health service provided to the individual, and (iii) derived from the testing or examination of a body part or bodily substance of the individual.
- **Functions of the National Electronic Health Authority:** The National Electronic Health Authority of India will be set up under the Bill to ensure confidentiality and privacy of digital health data. Its powers and functions include: (i) formulating standards and guidelines for the generation, collection, storage, and transmission of digital health data, (ii) ensuring data protection and preventing the breach or theft of digital health data, and (iii) conducting periodical investigations to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Bill.
- State Electronic Health Authorities will be set up at the state level to ensure that the clinical establishments and other entities in the state collect, store, transmit, and use digital health data as per the provisions of the Bill.
- **Ownership of digital health data:** The digital health data generated, collected, stored or transmitted is owned by the individual whose health data has been digitised. A clinical establishment will hold such digital health data in trust for the owner. Further, any other entity who is in custody of any digital health data will remain the custodian of such data, and will be duty bound to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and security of such data. The digital health data may be accessed by a clinical establishment, on a need to know basis, in such form and manner as may be prescribed under the Bill.
- **Penalties for breach of health data:** The Bill specifies penalties for breach of health data and serious breach of health data. For the breach of such data, the person will be liable to pay damages by way of compensation to the owner of the digital healthcare data. For serious breach, the person will be punished with imprisonment of three to five years, or a fine not be less than Rs five lakh.

Draft Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2017 released

The Department of Health Research released the Draft Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) (Regulation) Bill, 2017.[27] The Bill seeks to regulate and supervise the practice of ART services. ART refers to all techniques that attempt to obtain a pregnancy by handling the sperm or the egg outside the human body and transferring the gamete or the embryo into the reproductive tract of a woman. Key features of the Draft Bill include:

- **National Board for assisted reproductive technology:** A National Board for ART will be set up. Its functions include: (i) advising the central government on policy matters relating to ART, (ii) reviewing and monitoring the implementation of the Bill, and (iii) laying down the code of conduct to be observed by persons working at ART clinics, (iv) setting the minimum standards of physical infrastructure, laboratory and diagnostic equipment, and expert manpower to be employed by ART clinics and banks, and (v) overseeing the performance of various bodies constituted under the Bill.
- Every state and Union Territory government will establish a State Board for ART to exercise the jurisdiction and discharge the functions outlined in the Bill.
- **Setting up a National Registry**: A National Registry will be created of all ART Clinics and Banks in India. The functions of the Registry include: (i) registering all the ART clinics and banks in India and issuing a unique registration number to them, (ii) cancelling the registration of any of the ART clinics and banks, if the data obtained from them periodically do not satisfy the provisions of the Bill, and (iii) assisting in accreditation, supervision, and regulation of the ART clinics and banks.
- **Duties of ART clinics and banks:** The duties of ART clinics and banks include: (i) ART clinics will obtain donor gametes from ART banks that have ensured that the donor has been medically tested for certain diseases, (ii) providing professional counselling to commissioning couples about all the implications and chances of success of ART procedures, and (iii) maintaining a grievance cell for matters relating to such clinics and banks.
- **Offences and penalties:** Offences under the Bill include: (i) abandoning or disowning a child born through ART, (ii) trading of human embryo or gametes, and (iii) using any intermediates to obtain gamete donors. The penalty will be between Rs five lakh to Rs ten lakh for the first instance of offence. Subsequent offences will be punishable with imprisonment for a maximum term of 10 years and a fine between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 20 lakh.

Education

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Cabinet approves continuation of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the continuation of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) from April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2020.[28] RUSA aims to improve access, equity, and accessibility of higher education and increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (student enrolment as a proportion of the corresponding eligible age group in a given year) to 30% by 2020. Further, it seeks to increase the spending on higher education by the state governments. Between 2017-18 to 2019-20, Rs 9,604 crore has been estimated as the total cost of the scheme.

The costs under RUSA are shared between the central government and state governments in the ratio of 90:10 for North-Eastern States, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, 60:40 for other states and UTs with legislature, and 100:0 for UTs without legislature.

HRD Ministry invites suggestions on rationalising curriculum for class 1 to 12

The Ministry of Human Resource Development invited suggestions on rationalising the curriculum for class 1 to 12.[29] The objective of seeking suggestions is to make the content more balanced in various subjects offered from class 1 to class 12 as prescribed by National Council of Educational Research and Training and the Central Board of Secondary Education. The suggestions can be made from March 5, 2018 to April 6, 2018.

Cabinet approves formulation of a new Integrated Scheme for School Education

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the Integrated Scheme on School Education. The Scheme subsumes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020.[30] These are all individual schemes under the Ministry of Human Resource Development focussed on elementary, secondary, and teacher education respectively. An estimated allocation of Rs 75,000 crore over the period has been approved. The Scheme aims to give flexibility to the states/UTs to plan and prioritise their interventions according to their needs.

The objectives of the Scheme include: (i) ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education, (ii) supporting states in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, and (iii) strengthening and upgradation of State Councils for Educational Research and Training and State Institutes of Education and District Institutes for Education and Training as nodal agencies for teacher training.

Cabinet approves continuation of two education loan related schemes

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the continuation of Credit Guarantee Fund for Education Loans Scheme, and continuation and modification of Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme.[31] The financial outlay for the continuation is estimated to be Rs 6,600 crore for period from 2017-18 to 2019-20 and aims to provide education loans to 10 lakh students during this period.

Under the Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme, full interest subsidy is provided for the education loans under the Model Education Loan Scheme of Indian Banks' Association. This is made available for all the professional/technical courses in India for students with annual gross parental income up to Rs 4.5 lakh.

Credit Guarantee Fund for Education Loans Scheme provides guarantee for the education loans under the Model Education Loan Scheme of Indian Banks' Association. The loans are disbursed by the banks without seeking any collateral security and third-party guarantee, for a maximum loan amount of Rs 7.5 Lakhs.

The Cabinet approval also included certain modifications to the schemes such as: (i) ceiling on the loan amount has been fixed at Rs 7.5 lakh, (ii) covering loans for pursuing professional/technical courses from National Assessment and Accreditation Council/National Board of Accreditation accredited institutions/programmes or Institutions of National Importance or Central Funded Technical Institutions, and (iii) a dashboard for better monitoring of the schemes.

Energy

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Committee on Energy Mix in Power Generation on Medium and Long Term Basis submits report

The Committee on Optimal Energy Mix in Power Generation on Medium and Long Term Basis (Chair: Chairperson, Central Electricity Authority) submitted its report.[32] The Committee was constituted by the Ministries of Power, and New and Renewable Energy in October 2017. Power is generated through various sources of energy such as coal, hydro, natural gas, and renewables (solar, wind). An optimal energy mix uses a mix of these sources in the most efficient manner.

The terms and references of the Committee included: (i) formulating the mission statement for aiming at clean, affordable, reliable and sustainable power for all, (ii) formulating the optimal generation mix for the next 15 years, considering India’s targets under the Paris Climate Agreement, economic growth, and environmental concerns, (iii) developing scenarios to integrate renewables at various energy generation mixes, and (iv) suggesting the road map to reduce the dependence on import of fuel for power generation.

Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Optimal generation mix:** As per the National Electricity Plan, for the period 2017 to 2022, the committed capacity addition for various energy sources is: (i) hydro - 6.,823 MW, (ii) gas - 406 MW, (iii) nuclear - 3,300 MW, (iv) renewables - 1,17,756 MW, and (v) coal – 47,855 MW (with a retirement of 22,716 MW of coal based capacity). The Committee noted that only 6,445 MW of additional coal based capacity would be required during 2017-2022, as compared to the 47,855 MW that is currently at various stages of construction.
- The Committee noted that considering all these factors such as: (i) existing and under construction power projects, (ii) targets for renewable energy generation, (iii) energy requirement in 2021-22, and (iv) the availability of domestic gas, there is not much scope in optimizing the generation mix by the year 2021-22.
- **Integration of renewable energy:** The Committee noted that, to accommodate the variability in renewable generation, the conventional generating plants (coal based)

will need to be flexible (provide energy when the renewable plants are unable to). This will help with balancing and ramping up of grid (when more capacity is required).

For a PRS report summary, see here.

Standing Committee submits report on Stressed Assets in Electricity Sector

The Standing Committee on Energy (Chair: Dr. Kambhampati Haribabu) submitted its report on 'Stressed/ Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in Electricity Sector'.[33] As per RBI, an asset whose interest on loan has not been paid for 90 days is classified as an NPA. Stressed assets include NPAs as well as those projects which have the potential to become NPAs. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Stressed assets in power sector:** As of June 2017, NPAs in the electricity sector amounted to Rs 37,941 crore. The Committee looked at 34 thermal power projects, with a capacity of 40 GW, that have turned into stressed assets. Reasons for financial stress in these projects include: (i) non-availability of fuel (coal), (ii) inability of the promoter to infuse equity and working capital in the project, (iii) tariff related disputes, and (iv) issues related to banks.
- The Committee noted that currently in the power sector, delays in fulfilment of debt obligation even by a day leads to the asset (power project) being de-rated. As the rating goes down, banks start charging penal interest instead of supporting the asset. The Committee recommended that to classify assets as NPAs and consequent action, banks should consider factors that are responsible for an asset becoming an NPA and help it not become an NPA.
- The Committee also noted that banks have not observed due prudence while considering loans for power projects. It recommended that the process of grant of loan, supervisory mechanism and its subsequent monitoring should be revisited. Further, RBI should advise all commercial banks to follow the credit rating system proposed by the government to assess the credit risk of infrastructure companies and prescribe risk weight accordingly.
- **Availability of coal:** The Committee noted that coal availability is critical in several plants of the National Thermal Power Corporation. Under the new coal linkage allocation policy, SHAKTI, coal linkages are awarded on auction basis. Eligibility for such auction is determined on the basis of Letters of Assurance (LOAs) recommended by the Ministry of Power. The Committee noted that in the case of the 34 stressed assets, despite allocation of the coal linkage, LOAs have not been issued even after three months, delaying the availability of coal to eligible promoters. It recommended that Coal India Limited should ensure that every promoter is provided with the coal required in a time-bound manner.

For a PRS report summary, see here.

Environment

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Draft National Forest Policy, 2018 released for consultation

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change released the draft National Forest Policy, 2018.[34] The Ministry has noted that there is a need to revise the existing National Forest Policy, 1988 through integrating: (i) sustainable forest management, (ii) climate change mitigation strategies, and (iii) an evaluation mechanism to oversee participation of multiple stakeholders in forests. Key features of the draft Policy include:

- **Eco-security:** The country should aim to have a minimum of one-third of the total land area under forest and tree cover. In hilly and mountainous regions, the aim will be to maintain two-third of the area under forest and tree cover. This would help prevent soil erosion and land degradation.
- **Forest plantations:** Productivity of forest plantations will be increased through scientific and technological interventions in order to encourage usage of timber. This will also reduce the dependency on other high carbon footprint wood substitutes.
- **Afforestation activities through PPP:** Public Private Participation (PPP) models will be developed for undertaking afforestation and reforestation activities in: (i) degraded forest areas, (ii) forest areas available with Forest Development Corporations, and (iii) outside forests.
- **Participatory Forest Management:** A National Community Forest Management mission will be launched to strengthen participatory forest management. Under the Mission, effort will be made to ensure synergy between gram sabhas & Joint Forest Management Committee in the state for

ensuring successful community participation in forest management.

- **Financial support:** The budget of the forestry sector of the states will be enhanced proportionately to the allocation of central resources devolved, based on the Finance Commission weightage on forest resources of the states.
- **Institutional framework:** A National Board of Forestry headed by the central minister in-charge of forests and State Boards of Forestry headed by state minister in-charge of forests will be established. These Boards will ensure inter-sectoral convergence, simplification of procedures, conflict resolution, and periodic review.

The Ministry is seeking comments on the draft Policy till April 14, 2018.

Commerce and Industry

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Draft Agriculture Export Policy released

The Department of Commerce released a draft Agriculture Export Policy 2018.[35] The draft Policy seeks to double farmers' income and increase the share of agricultural exports from around 30 billion USD currently to more than 60 billion USD by 2022. Key recommendations of the draft policy include:

- **Stable trade policy:** The draft Policy aims to provide assurance that processed agricultural products and organic products will not brought under export restrictions, such as export duty, and export ban.
- **Involvement of state governments:** A nodal state department or agency will be identified for promotion of agriculture export. Such nodal body will be responsible for addressing issues faced by exporters, identifying infrastructure and logistic bottlenecks, among others. Further, agricultural exports must be included in the state export policy.
- **Cluster development based on products:** State governments can identify clusters with high export potential and monitor development through a cluster facilitation framework led by a district collector. Under the draft Policy, 50 district clusters have been identified for export promotion based on horticultural products.
- **Value added exports:** As per the draft Policy, focus should be on the promotion of value added indigenous and tribal products and organic products.
- **Platform for stakeholders:** Under the draft Policy, a mechanism will be established to link self help groups, farmer producer organisations, cooperatives, private processors and traders. This can include development of an e-commerce platform for providing farmers direct linkage to exports.
- **Agri-startup fund:** Entrepreneurs will be supported in starting a new venture in agri-based products exports.

Suggestions on the draft Policy are invited till April 5, 2018.

Cabinet approves North-East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) 2017

The Union Cabinet approved the North Eastern Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) 2017 with an outlay of Rs 3,000 crore till March 2020.[36] Under the scheme, eligible industrial units will be provided incentives to promote industrialisation. The incentives include:

- **Central Capital Investment Incentive for Access to credit:** Incentive of 30% of the investment (maximum five crore rupees) in plant and machinery per industrial unit.
- **Central Comprehensive Insurance Incentive:** Reimbursement of 100% insurance premium on insurance of the building, and plant and machinery for a period of five years.
- **Goods Service Tax (GST) reimbursement:** Reimbursement of central government's share of Central GST and Integrated GST for a period of five years.
- **Income tax reimbursement:** Reimbursement of the central government's share of income tax collected for a period of five years.

Task Force on Artificial Intelligence submits report

The Task Force on Artificial Intelligence (AI), (Chaiperperson: Dr. V. Kamakoti) constituted under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, submitted its report.[37] The Task Force was constituted in August, 2017.[38] Terms of reference of the Task Force include: (i) identifying areas of application for AI technology and make recommendations for faster adoption of AI in private and public areas, (ii) deliberate and suggest ways to address concerns regarding AI such as data privacy and employability, and (iii) make recommendations regarding policy and legal framework to enable use of AI. Key recommendations of the Task Force include:

- **National Artificial Intelligence Mission:** The Task Force recommended that an Inter-Ministerial National Artificial Intelligence Mission must be funded with an allocation of Rs 1,200 crore for a period of five years. The Mission will include: (i) establishment and seed funding of six Centres of Excellence, (ii) setting up of a generic AI test bed which can be a validation platform for AI based technology developers, and (iii) creation of an interdisciplinary large data centre to aggregate and interpret data.
- **Digital data banks:** Digital data banks, marketplaces and exchanges should be set up to ensure availability data across industries, with requisite sharing regulations.
- **Standard setting:** Standards required for the design, development and deployment of AI based systems must be developed by the central government. For example, data storage and privacy standards, and communication standards for autonomous systems such as cars.
- **Enabling policies:** Policies to encourage, develop and deploy AI based products need to be developed by the central government. Two major recommendations in this regard are: (i) developing a data policy including ownership, sharing rights, and usage policies, and (ii) providing tax incentives for income generated due to the adoption of AI technologies and applications for socially relevant projects.

CCEA approves removal of prohibition on export of edible oils

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the removal of prohibition on export of all varieties of edible oils, except mustard oil.[39] Mustard oil will continue to be exported only in consumer packs up to five kg and with a minimum export price of USD 900 per tonne.

Agriculture

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Cabinet approves promotion of agricultural mechanisation for in-situ management of crop residue

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved a scheme for promotion of agricultural mechanisation for in-situ management of crop residue in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and NCT Delhi.[40] Rs 1,152 crore will be allocated for this purpose for two years (2018-19 and 2019-20). Components of the scheme include:

- **Farm machinery banks:** Farm machinery banks will be established for hiring in-situ crop residue management machinery. Financial assistance of 80% of the project cost will be provided for this purpose. Eligible groups to get the assistance include farmer cooperatives, self-help groups, and private entrepreneurs.
- **Procurement of agriculture machinery:** Financial assistance of 50% of the machinery will be provided to individual farmers for crop residue management.
- **Awareness on in-situ crop residue management:** Financial assistance will be provided to state governments, central government institutes and public-sector undertakings for activities undertaken towards information, education and communication for awareness on crop residue management.

Fertilisers

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Cabinet approves revision of energy norms under the New Urea Policy

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved changes in energy norms under the New Urea Policy.[41] Currently, 25 gas-based urea plants are classified into three categories based on certain energy consumption norms for the year 2018-19. These plants are eligible for concessions based on these energy consumption norms fixed for each group. The changes approved by the Committee are as follows:

- The target energy norms as per the Policy will be continued from April 1, 2020 for a period of five years.

- The target energy norms under the Policy for 11 urea units will be implemented from April 1, 2018.
- For another 14 urea manufacturing units, which failed to meet the target energy norms, the present energy norms with token penalties are extended for a further period of two years.
- Further, three Naphtha based urea units will be allowed to operate based on current energy norms for another two years or till gas pipeline connectivity.

Cabinet approves continuation of ongoing urea subsidy scheme till 2019-20

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the continuation of the Urea Subsidy Scheme from 2017-18 to 2019-20.[42] This is estimated to cost Rs 1,64,935 crore. The scheme seeks to promote indigenous production of urea in the country. Under the scheme, subsidy is provided to fertiliser manufacturers and importers on the sale of urea. It also includes freight subsidy on the movement of urea.

CCEA approves continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy and City Compost Scheme till 2019-20

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the continuation of the Nutrient Based Subsidy and the City Compost Scheme till 2019-20.[43] This is estimated to cost Rs 61,972 crore (for both the schemes). Under the Nutrient Subsidy Scheme, subsidy is provided to fertiliser manufacturers and importers for sale of Potassium and Phosphorous based fertilisers. Under the City Compost Scheme, assistance is provided to fertiliser companies for the marketing and promotion of city compost.

Telecom

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Cabinet approves recommendations related to spectrum auction and holding

The Union Cabinet approved certain recommendations made by the Inter-Ministerial Group on stressed assets in telecom sector.[44] These include:

- **Restructuring deferred payment liabilities of spectrum auction:** Telecom service providers can pay the liabilities of spectrum auction in 16 instalments as compared to the 10 instalments currently allowed.
- **Cap on spectrum holding:** The overall spectrum cap (maximum spectrum that can be held by a telecom service provider) is revised from 25% to 35%. Further, there is a cap of 50% on combined spectrum holding in sub-1 GHz bands (such as 700 MHz). There would be no cap for individual or combined spectrum holding in bands above 1 GHz subject to the overall limit.

Textiles

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Cabinet approves 'Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry'

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry for a period of three years (2017-18 to 2019-20).[45] Rs 2,162 crore has been allocated for this purpose. The scheme seeks to develop sericulture and the silk industry. It includes four components: (i) research and development, (ii) seed organisations, (iii) coordination and market development, and (iv) quality certification systems, export brand promotion and technology upgradation. The scheme will be implemented though the Central Silk Board.

Skill development

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Cabinet approves re-structuring of NSDF and NSDC

The Union Cabinet approved the restructuring of National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) for the purpose of strengthening (i) governance, (ii) implementation, and (iii) monitoring framework.[46] The Cabinet approval will lead to the restructuring of the composition of the Boards of NSDF and the NSDC.

NSDC and NSDF were set up by the Ministry of Finance in 2008 and 2009 respectively for implementing coordinated action for skill development. NSDF trust was incorporated to act as a receptacle for financial contributions from governmental and other sources. Its main objective is to develop the skills of the youth by various sector specific programmes.

NSDF entered into an agreement with NSDC for utilisation of its corpus to meet the objectives of National Skill Development Mission and encourage skill development in India. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship had launched the National Skill Development Mission in 2015 with the aim to provide a strong institutional framework at the centre and in states for implementation of skilling activities. The Mission aims to train/skill approximately 40 crore people across the country by 2022.[47]

Urban Development

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Incentive to be provided to urban local bodies to issue municipal bonds

The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has launched a scheme to incentivise Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) covered under the AMRUT mission to issue municipal bonds.[48] The mission aims to provide basic services (such as water supply, sewerage, and urban transport) in 500 cities.[49] Municipal bonds are marketable debt instruments issued by ULBs. The funds raised through them may be used for (i) capital projects, (ii) refinancing of existing loans, and (iii) meeting working capital requirements.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India regulations (2015) regarding municipal bonds provide that, to issue such bonds, municipalities must fulfil certain criteria related to fiscal performance:[50] (i) not have negative net worth in any of the three preceding financial years, and (ii) not have defaulted in any loan repayments in the last one year.

In order to incentivise ULBs to raise their own resources through issuance of municipal bonds, the Ministry will provide Rs 13 crore for every Rs 100 crore of bonds issued. Bonds issued up to Rs 200 crore will be eligible for the incentive amount provided by the Ministry. The Ministry will incentivise ten ULBs on a first come first serve basis. ULBs that issued bonds during 2017-18 will also be eligible to claim the incentive amount under the scheme.

Home Affairs

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Estimates Committee submits report on Central Armed Police Forces

The Committee on Estimates (Chairperson: Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi) submitted its report on 'Central Armed Police Forces and Internal Security Challenges – Evaluation and Response Mechanism' on March 16, 2018.[51] Key recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Deployment of CAPFs:** The Committee observed that there was heavy dependence of states on central armed police forces (CAPFs), even for everyday law and order issues. This was likely to affect the anti-insurgency and border guarding operations, besides curtailing the training needs of these forces. The Committee recommended that states must develop their own systems, and augment police forces by providing adequate training and equipment. The central government should supplement the efforts of state governments by providing financial assistance and other help needed by states for capacity building of their forces.
- **Training of CAPFs:** The Committee noted that there is an urgent need to update the curriculum and infrastructure in training institutes for CAPFs. It recommended that while purchasing state-of-the-art equipment, government should ensure that training needs are taken care of and if needed, it may be included in the purchase agreement itself. Further, it recommended that the training should be a mix of conventional matters and latest technology like IT, cyber security, and cyber crime.
- **Modernization of CAPFs:** The Modernization Plan II (2012-17), approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security, aims at providing financial support to CAPFs for modernizing arms, clothing, and equipment. However, the Committee observed that the procurement process under the Plan was cumbersome and time consuming. It recommended that bottlenecks in procurement should be identified and corrective action taken. Further, the Ministry of Home Affairs and CAPFs should hold negotiations with ordnance factories and manufacturers in public or private sector to ensure uninterrupted supply of equipment and other infrastructure.

For a PRS Summary, please see **here**.

Cabinet approves amendments to regulations for municipalities in Union Territories

The Union Cabinet approved amendments to: (i) the Daman and Diu Municipalities (Amendment) Regulation, 2018, (ii) the Dadra and Nagar Haveli Municipal Council (Amendment) Regulation, 2018, and (iii) the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Municipal (Amendment) Regulation, 2018.[52] These seek to amend: (i) the Daman and Diu Municipalities Regulation, 1968, (ii) the Dadra and Nagar Haveli Municipal Council Regulation, 2004, and (iii) the Andaman and Nicobar Island Municipal Regulation, 1994, respectively. The proposed amendments provide for provisions relating to anti-defection, constructive no-confidence motion, and establishment of ombudsman, among others.

Cabinet approves continuation of Swatantra Sainik Samman Yojana

The Union Cabinet approved the continuation of the Swatantra Sainik Samman Yojana (SSSY) during 2017-2020.[53] The scheme provides for a monthly Samman Pension to freedom fighters, and on their demise, their spouses, and thereafter, unmarried and unemployed daughters and dependent parents. The financial implications for continuing SSSY during 2017-2020 would be Rs 2,553 crore.

External Affairs

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Heads of state of Jordan, Vietnam, and France visit India

The King of Jordan, and Presidents of Vietnam and France visited India.[54,55,56] Key agreements signed with these countries are mentioned below:

Jordan: Jordan and India signed 12 agreements in various sectors including: (i) defence (cooperation in areas such as training, counter terrorism, military studies, and cyber security), (ii) cultural exchange (including exchange in areas of theatre, archaeology, and literature), (iii) contractual employment of Indian nationals in Jordan, (iv) health and medicine (including cooperation in health research, treatment of TB, and regulation of pharmaceuticals and devices, and (v) exchange of information regarding customs duties, taxes, and other charges.[57]

Vietnam: Vietnam and India signed three agreements in the areas of: (i) establishing framework for enhancing economic and trade cooperation, (ii) promoting technology in the field of agriculture, and (iii) cooperation in the field of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.[58]

France: France and India signed 14 agreements in various sectors including: (i) combating illicit trafficking and consumption of drugs, (ii) mutual recognition of education qualifications, (iii) technical cooperation in railways (including high speed rail, station renovation, and modernisation of infrastructure), (iv) exchange of information in fields of environment and climate change, (v) urban development (including exchange of information on smart city development, and urban transportation systems), (vi) cooperation in hydrography, nautical documentation, and maritime safety.[59]

President visits Madagascar

President Ram Nath Kovind visited Madagascar and signed two agreements for cooperation in the fields of: (i) defence, and (ii) cooperative marketing arrangements.[60]

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