

NATIONAL**Triple Talaq Bill 2018 passed in Lok Sabha:**

The Lok Sabha has passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018, also known as, Triple Talaq Bill. The Bill makes instant triple talaq void and illegal. It seeks to make the practice of instant triple talaq a punishable offence with imprisonment of up to three years. On August 22 this year, the Supreme Court had set aside the old practice of instant triple talaq saying it was violative of Article 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.

The Bill:

In September, the government had proposed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill in the Parliament and sought to make triple talaq a punishable offence under the law. At first, the Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha but it failed to secure a majority in the Rajya Sabha. The Bill was postponed till the winter session of Parliament. Following this, an ordinance was issued by the government after the bill failed to get cleared in Rajya Sabha amid protests by the Opposition.

Key provisions of the Bill:

- The Bill makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and illegal.
- Definition: It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- Offence and penalty: The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.) The offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by: (i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage.
- The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused. The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.
- The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate upon the request of the woman (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.
- Allowance: A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.
- Custody: A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate.

Significance: Time has come to put an end to the suffering of Muslim women who have been at the receiving end of instant talaq for several years. More than 20 Islamic countries have already banned the practice.

Children's Science Congress

26th National Children's Science Congress (NCSC) is being held in Odisha with the theme of "Science, Technology and Innovation for a Clean, Green and Healthy Nation."

National Children's Science Congress (NCSC): National Children's Science Congress (NCSC) is a nationwide Science Communication programme started in the year 1993. It is a programme of National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi.

It is a forum children of the age-group of 10-17 years, both from formal school system as well as from out of school, to exhibit their creativity and innovativeness and more particularly their ability to solve a societal problem experienced locally using by method of science.

Dwijing Festival, Assam:

Dwijing Festival, an annual river festival, has begun on the bank of River Aie in Assam. Dwijing Festival is an annual river festival celebrated in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) region of Assam. The festival provides a platform of earning for the people in the region by putting in to focus the business activities for the better economy generation through rural tourism. The festival also aims to provide help to the flood victim families through charity generation and distribution.

River Aie: River Aie originates from the Himalayan Mountains of Bhutan and flows through the Chirang and Bongaigaon districts of Assam before joining the river Brahmaputra.

ECONOMY**India's Fiscal Deficit Hits Around 115% of FY19 Target**

India's fiscal deficit in the first eight months of FY2018-19 rose to Rs 7.17 lakh crore, hitting around 115% of the budgeted target for the current financial year, breaching the target of Rs 6.24 lakh crore set by the government for the financial year 2018-19.

Revenue of the Government

The Government of India had received Rs.8,96,583 crore (49.32% of corresponding BE 18-19 of Total Receipts) up to November 2018. It comprised of Rs. 7,31,669 crore Tax Revenue (Net to Centre), Rs. 1,38,637 crore of Non-Tax Revenue and Rs. 26,277 crore of Non-Debt Capital Receipts. The Non-Debt Capital Receipts consists of Recovery of Loans (Rs.10,467 crore) and Disinvestment of PSUs (Rs. 15,810 crore).

Expenditure of the Government

The expenditure of the government of India was Rs.16,13,208 crore (66.06% of corresponding BE 18-19), out of which Rs.14,21,778 crore is on Revenue Account and Rs.1,91,430 crore is on Capital Account. Rs.3,48,233 crore accounted for Interest Payments and Rs.2,19,046 crore accounted for major Subsidies under revenue account.

Fiscal Deficit: Fiscal Deficit is the difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government. The borrowings are not included while calculating the total revenue. Fiscal Deficit gives an indication about the total borrowings required.

New norms for FDI in e-commerce

The new norms for the Foreign Direct investment (FDI) in e-commerce, bars e-commerce firms from selling products of entities in which they have an equity stake. The new norms are brought in by the government to plug-in some loopholes like:

- To bypass the rules which restricted large sellers on platforms such as Flipkart and Amazon from contributing more than a quarter of sales, online retailers had set up structures to get around those loopholes by mandating other sellers to buy from those large sellers and then, in turn, sell those products on e-marketplaces.
- Large sellers formed multiple entities, which sold their products separately on online marketplaces.
- The small traders were complaining that deep discounts offered by the likes of Amazon and Flipkart are driving them out of business.
- The new norms aim to tackle the anti-competitive behaviour by e-commerce entities and to ensure that there is no wrong subsidization and the marketplace remains neutral to all vendors.

The impacts of the new norms are:

- The e-commerce companies like Amazon and Flipkart would be adversely affected because Amazon has several such joint ventures, including Cloudfair and Appario. Even Flipkart has exclusive partnerships with top smartphone brands such as Xiaomi and Oppo. The new norms will adversely impact their business models.
- The critics blame that the new norms are not in sync with the spirit of competition and free market economy because Only those exclusive arrangements that have an appreciable adverse effect on competition are prohibited under the Competition Act.

The new norms are welcomed by stating that the new norms will enable a level- playing field for all sellers especially MSMEs and help them leverage the reach of e-commerce.

ENVIRONMENT

River Dolphins go missing in Sunderbans as water salinity rises

Rise in salinity in the water system that makes the Indian Sunderbans has resulted in the decrease of population of the Ganges River Dolphins (GRDs) in the region. A recent study covering 100 km of rivers and channels around the Sunderbans have revealed that the national aquatic animal is no longer sighted in the central and eastern parts of the archipelago. Only in the western part of Sunderbans, where the salinity is lower, could researchers find some evidence of the species. The hyper-saline zone in the central part of the Sunderbans, which includes areas such as Raidighi and Patharpratima has lost connectivity with the upstream freshwater flow. Though there is some fresh water connectivity and flow in the eastern part, salinity levels were still high and thus there was no evidence of the species.

Implications

- The study is indicative of how natural changes including the phenomenon of climate change and human interventions in the Indian Sunderbans are having an adverse impact on the habitat of the species.
- Because of its unique body shape, it becomes difficult for the dolphin to remain submerged in waters with high salinity.
- Hence freshwater flow to the Sunderbans is crucial for the subsistence of these species.

Impact of Sea-Level Rise

- The rise in sea level, triggered by climate change, is one of the reasons for the increase in salinity of waters of rivers and channels.
- Hydrological modifications like water diversion and commission of large barrages upstream have had a great impact on the salinity profile of the rivers downstream in the Sunderbans.