

“Change course, but don’t give up.” Roy T. Bennett

GOVERNMENT ISSUES DUST DEADLINE: MARCH 31 OR FACE SUSPENSION

The Environment Ministry has asked major infrastructure agencies, including the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), to implement measures for dust mitigation by March 31 or face suspension of construction work.

The ministry has cited recent rule amendments that make it mandatory for projects needing environment clearance to ensure mitigation of dust.

No building or infrastructure project requiring environmental clearance shall be implemented without approved Environmental Management Plan inclusive of dust mitigation measures.

The rules are applicable in all cities where particulate matter, PM 10 and PM 2.5, exceeds limits prescribed in the National Ambient Air Quality standards.

Environmental Performance Index

India was ranked the fourth worst country in the world in terms of curbing environmental pollution.

India ranked 177 out of 180 countries on Environmental Performance Index. The EPI rankings were published on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

National Ambient Air Quality standards

National Ambient Air Quality Standards are the standards for ambient air quality set by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) that is applicable nationwide

The CPCB has been conferred this power by the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981 was enacted by the Central Government with the objective of arresting the deterioration of air quality.

The current National Ambient Air Quality Standards were notified on 18 November 2009 by the Central Pollution Control Board

FESTIVAL OF INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP INAUGURATED BY PRESIDENT

The Festival of Innovation and Entrepreneurship was recently inaugurated by President Ram Nath Kovind. It is being organized by Rashtrapati Bhavan in association with the Department of Science and Technology and the National Innovation Foundation-India.

Festival of Innovation and Entrepreneurship:

It is a celebration of country’s Innovation potential, particularly those ideas which stem from grassroots level including the citizen at the last mile and also a reflection of power of children’s creativity. It is an initiative to recognize, respect, showcase and reward innovations and to foster a supportive ecosystem for innovators.

FINE would provide an excellent platform to the innovators for building the linkages with potential stakeholders whose support can improve their prospects in coming years for the larger social good.

It will also help in promoting lateral learning and linkages among the innovators to enrich the ecosystem for new India.

It would also be a great opportunity to create awareness about the importance of various Ministries of Government of India attaches to their effort and participation in the FINE.

ARMY TO BUY AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM

After several retrials and delays, the Army is set to begin contract negotiations in the multi-billion dollar deal for the very short-range air defence system or VSHORAD.

The activities relating to the Contract Negotiation Committee for the deal started in mid- February. The bids will be opened shortly to select the lowest bidder so as to begin cost negotiations.

Before the bids are opened, a benchmark price will be set based on various factors, and the bids will be checked with it.

The request for proposal was first issued in 2010 for over 5,000 missiles, 258 single launchers and 258 multi-launchers, estimated to cost Rs. 6,400 crore.

Since then, there have been trials and retrials because of the deviations in the products. In the earlier cases, the Army tried to avoid the situation of only one vendor left in the field, with others eliminated for non-compliance, because this would result in the cancellation of the tender under the Defence Procurement Procedure.

The request for information was issued in 2010 and the trials started in 2012 of the five who responded, MBDA of France; Rosoboronexport of Russia; and SAAB of Sweden made it.

Expectations of the army

The air defence system should have a maximum range of 6 km and an altitude of 3 km, besides all-weather capability

ICGS C-437

It is the Indian Coast Guard ship commissioned recently at Porbandar.

The boat is capable of undertaking multifarious task such as surveillance, interdiction, search and rescue and rendering assistance to boats and craft in distress at sea. The boat has advanced navigational and communication equipment with capability to respond to any maritime situation.

FLOATING LABORATORY INTRODUCED IN LOKTAK LAKE

A floating laboratory has been introduced to save the Loktak lake. Researchers in a custom motorboat monitor levels of pollution in the 300 sq km water body.

Rising urbanization and land-use change over the years has seen the Loktak Lake, the largest in the northeast, become a dump-yard for the city's municipal waste, ranging from plastic refuse to chemical runoff from farming. This worsens during years of floods.

Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India.

Located on this phumdi, Keibul Lamjao National Park is the only floating national park in the world. The park is the last natural refuge of the endangered Sangai deer (state animal).

INDEXES FOR MEASUREMENT OF MANUFACTURING PMI & IIP

There are two key parameters that the government and private sector analysts use to gauge the level of activity in the manufacturing sector — the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and the Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI):

- There are two main points of difference between the PMI and the IIP:

The first is that the PMI is a private sector survey while the IIP is gauged by the government.

While the IIP is a measure of output, PMI as the name suggests, measures activity at the purchasing or input stage.

Together the two indices provide composite and reasonably comprehensive information about the formal manufacturing sector.

Lacunae: As with the IIP, the PMI suffers from the lacuna of not measuring informal sector activity.

Both the PMI and the IIP are based on surveys and hence, represent only a sample of the entire formal manufacturing sector. In addition, as with all surveys, the two are also susceptible to sampling errors, errors in assigning weights to various indicators and errors.

The Manufacturing PMI for India has been gradually declining from December when it was 54.7, the highest it has been in more than a year. Since then, it has declined to 52.4 in January and to 52.1 in February.

Growth in the manufacturing component of the IIP accelerated in January compared with the level in the previous month. Overall, the

last three months have witnessed manufacturing growing at a rate faster than what has been recorded in about two years.

One important advantage the PMI has over the IIP is how quickly the data for any reporting period comes out.

The manufacturing PMI report for any given month comes out either on the last day of that month or on the first day of the next month.

So, for example, the next data release will be for March 2018 and will come out either on March 31 or April 1.

The IIP, however, comes out after considerable delay. The data for a given month comes out almost one and a half months later the next release will be for February 2018 and will come out on April 12.

GOVT. TO TAKE SPIRITUAL ROUTE TO SPUR TOURISM

In a bid to spur domestic travel, the government plans to promote religious tourism in the country.

Plans are also afoot to popularize yoga and Ayurveda among millennials, as part of efforts to reach out to people across the globe and get “millions of more people to India.”

Bulk of domestic tourism is really religious tourism. According to our estimates, close to 60% of domestic tourism in India is religious-based.

The government is now investing in creating infrastructure around religious places.

The number of domestic tourist visits in 2017 stood at about 1.8 billion, up about 12% from the over 1.6 billion in the previous year.

The government has already approved two projects **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**, wherein infrastructure will be built around places of tourist interest under the umbrella of 15 themes such as Buddhist Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Ramayana Circuit and Heritage Circuit; and **Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive or PRASAD** scheme focuses on the development and

beautification of identified pilgrimage destinations.

The government has approved allocation of about Rs. 7,000 crore for about 90 projects under the two schemes. Almost all the projects under both schemes will be inaugurated by December this year.

The Tourism Ministry recently launched ‘Yogi of the Racetrack’, a minute-long advertisement on yoga, that received more than 11.5 million hits in a week. With this ad, we are addressing a completely new group of people. Earlier, it was thought that yoga is just for people over 40 and Ayurveda too is for older people.

Six more similar advertisements on topics, including Ayurveda, will be released soon. The whole idea is to storm the world with what the true essence of India is.

Foreign tourist arrivals in 2017 stood at over 10 million, a growth of 15.6% over 8.8 million such arrivals in 2016. This resulted in foreign exchange earnings of \$ 27.6 billion last year. a growth of 20.8% over 2016.

ACT ON FOREIGN FUNDS TO PARTIES (FCRA) AMENDED

The Lok Sabha passed a bill that will exempt political parties from scrutiny of funds they have received from abroad since 1976.

Amid chaotic protests by the opposition parties the Lok Sabha passed 21 amendments to the Finance Bill 2018.

One of them was an amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 that bans overseas corporations from funding political parties.

The Representation of People’s Act, which lays down the rules for elections, bars political parties from accepting foreign funds.

Through Finance Bill 2016 passed earlier, the government had amended the FCRA to make it easier for parties to accept foreign funds. Now it has amended it further to do away with the scope for scrutiny of a political parties funding since 1976.

The retrospective amendment will help BJP and Congress escapes the fallout of a 2014 Delhi High Court judgment that held both guilty of violating the FCRA.

It defined a company Indian or foreign registered abroad or with subsidiaries abroad as a foreign firm. It was later repealed and replaced with the FCRA, 2010.

Change of Definition: The government, through the Finance Act, 2016, had also changed the definition of a foreign company by saying a firm with less than 50% of share capital held by a foreign entity would no longer be a foreign source any more.

This amendment also came into effect retrospectively from September 2010.

Before the change approved last week, foreign funds received by a political party before September 26, 2010, when the FCRA was enacted, were open to scrutiny.

Once **Clause 233 in the Finance Act 2016** was passed BJP and Congress simultaneously withdrew appeals in the Supreme Court against a Delhi High Court verdict that held them in violation of the law on foreign funding.

ICN 2018

India is hosting the 17th Annual Conference of International Competition Network 2018 (ICN2018) in New Delhi.

The ICN holds an Annual Conference which is hosted by a member competition agency. The last such Conference was hosted by Portuguese Competition Authority in 2017 at Porto, Portugal.

This is the first time India is hosting the ICN2018 Annual Conference since it joined International Competition Network (ICN) in 2009.

The conference will provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and strategies for effective enforcement of competition law and for strengthening cooperation amongst the competition authorities as they strive to promote and sustain competition in rapidly changing markets.

ICN:

ICN is an international body comprising 132 members from 120 competition jurisdictions exclusively devoted to international competition enforcement. The ICN's main goal is to improve and advocate for sound competition policy and its enforcement across the global antitrust community.

The ICN is a voluntary, consensus-based organization. The ICN is not a rule-making organization and its work products are not legally binding instruments.

ICN provides competition authorities with a specialized yet informal platform for addressing practical competition concerns, sharing experiences and adopting international best practices.

Members: Its members are national competition authorities and NGA (Non-governmental Advisers) which include reputed law firms, eminent persons, and think tanks of international repute.

Agencies need to cooperate with each other on cross-border cases in order to reduce the risk of: (i) sub-optimal enforcement if an agency only has a partial picture of the situation; and (ii) inconsistent outcomes if different jurisdictions reach different conclusions about the same practice. The ICN helps facilitate cooperation and convergence, where appropriate. This is good for competition agencies, governments, businesses, and ultimately consumers.
