

“To have what you have never had, you have to do what you have never done.”

Roy T. Bennett

INTERNATIONAL&BILATERAL

INDIA WINS ELECTIONS TO KEY U.N. SUBSIDIARY BODIES

India has won an election to a crucial non-governmental organization committee in the United Nations.

It also got elected by acclamation to other subsidiary bodies in five separate polls.

The U.N.'s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) held elections to a number of its subsidiary bodies in United Nations.

The Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations is a standing committee of ECOSOC. Its main tasks include consideration of applications for consultative status and requests for reclassification submitted by NGOs and consideration of quadrennial reports submitted by NGOs in General and Special categories.

India was also elected by acclamation to the Commission on Population and Development for a term beginning April 16, 2018, and expiring in 2021.

Under its terms of reference, the Commission is to assist the Council by arranging for studies and advising the Council on population issues and trends, integrating population and development strategies and population and related development policies and programmes.

The Council elected India and Kuwait (Asia-Pacific States) by acclamation to the Commission for Social Development, filling outstanding seats for a four-year term.

The Commission's purpose was to advise ECOSOC on social policies of a general character and, in particular, on all matters in the social field not covered by the specialized inter-governmental agencies.

India was among the 17 members elected by acclamation to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. The Commission acts as the principal policymaking body of the U.N. in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice.

Its mandate includes improving international action to combat national and transnational crime and the efficiency and fairness of criminal justice administration systems.

India was among 14 nations elected by acclamation by the Council to the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

For the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Council elected by acclamation 16 members, including India.

INDIA AND SWEDEN AGREED UPON JOINT ACTION PLAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Swedish counterpart has agreed upon a joint action plan (JAP) for both countries to take forward a wide range of initiatives in defence, trade and investment, counterterrorism, renewable energy, smart cities, women's skill development, space and science and healthcare.

Characterizing the JAP as a “win-win partnership” for New Delhi and Stockholm, Mr. Modi underscored the critical role of the defence sector and security initiatives as a pillar of the bilateral relationship.

On counterterrorism, Mr. Modi and Mr. Löfven emphasised that the global counterterrorism legal framework should be regularly updated to address the changing threat of terrorism with strength.

Under the Sweden-India Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future, the Swedish government will kick start Innovation Partnership by providing up to 50 million Swedish kronor (over \$59 million) for innovation cooperation in the field of smart cities and sustainability.

KALADAN MULTI-MODAL PROJECT

After years of delay, India has finally kicked off the construction of the 109-km road project that connects Paletwa river terminal to

Zorinpui on the Mizoram border in Myanmar, as part of the \$484-million Kaladan Multimodal project.

The Rs. 1,600-crore road project passes through dense forests and hilly areas.

On completion, the project will help connect Mizoram with the Sittwe Port in Rakhine State of Myanmar.

India has already completed the rest of the Kaladan project work in Myanmar.

This includes the construction of the Sittwe Port on Lakadan river mouth in Rakhine, construction of a river terminal 158 upstream at Paletwa and dredging of the Kaladan river.

On the Indian side, work is on to extend the Aizawl-Saiha National Highway to the international border at Zorinpui.

Also, a Rs. 6,000-crore project is under way for four-laning the 300-km highway from Myanmar border to Aizawl to ensure the faster movement of goods.

Completion of the Paletwa-Zorinpui road holds the key to operationalise the Kaladan multi-modal project.

INDIA AND US ANNOUNCED FORMATION OF A TASK FORCE ON NATURAL GAS

India and the US has announced the formation of a task force on natural gas aimed at increasing the share of gas in India's primary energy mix.

Under the US-India Energy Partnership, the US and India will pursue four primary pillars of cooperation. These are oil and gas, power and energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable growth, and coal.

The newly set up task force will have a team of US and Indian industry experts with a mandate to propose, develop, and convey, innovative policy recommendations to Government of India in support of its vision for natural gas in the economy of India.

The work of the task force is expected to advance the strategic and economic interests of both the nations.

INDIA RAISED ISSUE OF US IMPOSING HIGHER TARIFFS ON STEEL

India has raised the issue of US imposing higher tariffs on certain steel items at the committee of safeguards of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) seeking consultation.

The move came after failing to get an exemption on tariff hikes by the Donald Trump administration.

On 8 March, the United States issued a presidential proclamation indicating that steel articles are being imported into US in such quantities as to threaten to impair its national security.

To address this situation, the US imposed a 25% tariff on certain steel articles with effect from 23 March.

India can only "name and shame" the US by raising the matter in the safeguards committee as the panel does not have any adjudicating power.

The US may also claim that its move is not a safeguard measure as it has imposed the higher tariffs on steel and aluminum invoking national security provision.

For seeking compensation of business loss, India needs to drag the US to the dispute settlement mechanism.

WTO dispute settlement mechanism:

Dispute settlement is regarded by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the central pillar of the multilateral trading system, and as the organization's "unique contribution to the stability of the global economy".

The operation of the WTO dispute settlement process involves the parties and third parties to a case and may also involve the DSB panels, the Appellate Body, the WTO Secretariat, arbitrators, independent experts, and several specialized institutions.

The General Council discharges its responsibilities under the DSU through the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB).

Like the General Council, the DSB is composed of representatives of all WTO Members.

NATIONAL
LAW COMMISSION RECOMMENDED FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS TO LOK SABHA AND STATE ASSEMBLIES

Law Commission of India has recommended holding of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, possibly in 2019. It suggests amending the Constitution to realise this objective.

Key recommendations made by NITI Aayog:

Simultaneous elections in the country may be restored in the nation by amending the Constitution, Representation of the People Act of 1951 and the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies.

The leader of the majority party be elected as PM or the CM by the entire house for stability.

In case a government falls midterm, the term of the new government would be for the remaining period only.

A no-confidence motion against the government should be followed by a confidence motion. No-confidence motion and premature dissolution of House are major roadblocks to simultaneous elections. Parties which introduce the no-confidence motion should simultaneously give a suggestion for an alternative government.

The "rigours" of the anti-defection law in the Tenth Schedule should be relaxed to prevent a stalemate in the Lok Sabha or Assemblies in case of a hung Parliament or Assembly.

PROS:

This will help save public money. It will be a big relief for political parties that are always in campaign mode. It will allow political parties to focus more on policy and governance.

Need:

- To reduce unnecessary expenditures.
- To reduce the unnecessary use of manpower

The time is ripe for a constructive debate on electoral reforms and a return to the practice of the early decades after Independence when elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies were held simultaneously. It is for the Election Commission to take this exercise forward in consultation with political parties.

LAW COMMISSION:

Law Commission of India is an executive body established by an order of the Government of India.

Its major function is to work for legal reform. Its membership primarily comprises legal experts, who are entrusted a mandate by the Government.

The Commission is established for a fixed tenure and works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan, a former judge of the Supreme Court was appointed Chairman of the 21st Law Commission on 10 March.

The first Law Commission was established during the British Raj era in 1834 by the Charter Act of 1833.

ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY COME OUT WITH DRAFT NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE AIR POLLUTION

The Environment Ministry has come out with a draft national action plan proposing multiple strategies to reduce air pollution.

- To augment and evolve an effective and a proficient ambient air quality monitoring network across the country to ensure comprehensive and reliable database.
- To have efficient data dissemination and a public outreach mechanism for timely measures for prevention and mitigation of air pollution.
- To have a feasible management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.

Plans proposed:

Under the NCAP, the ministry plans to take a host of measures to bring down air pollution.

These include augmenting the air quality monitoring network, identification of alternative technology for real-time monitoring, setting up of 10 city super network, indoor air pollution monitoring and management and air pollution health impact studies.

Other measures include air quality forecasting system, issuance of notification on dust

management, a three-tier mechanism for review, assessment and inspection for implementation and a national emission inventory.

The draft has received mixed response. Activists claimed that the draft lacked its earlier set target of bringing down air pollution by 50% in five years. It is being said that the absence of these targets and sectoral based targets is limiting and feeble.

'INDIA EXPECTED TO GROW AT 7.4% IN 2018': IMF

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in the latest World Economic Outlook (WEO), has projected India to grow at 7.4% in 2018 and 7.8% in 2019.

The latest IMF growth rate projection remains unchanged since the last one in October.

Inclusiveness challenge:

An important challenge for India is to enhance inclusiveness.

India's high public debt and recent failure to achieve the budget's deficit target, calls for continued fiscal consolidation into the medium term to further strengthen fiscal policy credibility.

The main priorities for lifting constraints on job creation and ensuring that the demographic dividend is not wasted are to ease labour market rigidities, reduce infrastructure bottlenecks, and improve educational outcomes.

10,000-CRORE FOLLOW ON FUND OFFER OF THE BHARAT-22 EXCHANGE TRADED FUND (ETF)

The Finance Ministry may come out with a ₹10,000-crore follow-on fund offer of the Bharat-22 exchange traded fund (ETF).

The government, in November, introduced Bharat-22 ETF comprising shares of 22 firms, including PSUs, public sector banks, ITC, Axis Bank and L&T.

Exchange traded fund (ETF):

Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) are mutual funds listed and traded on stock exchanges like shares.

In an ETF, one can buy and sell units at a prevailing market price on a real-time basis during market hours.

The Bharat 22 ETF to be offered now allows the Government to park its holdings in selected PSUs in an ETF and raise disinvestment money from investors at one go.

It tracks the specially made S&P BSE Bharat 22 Index, managed by Asia Index Private Limited.

MAHANADI WATER DISPUTES TRIBUNAL

Central Government recently handed over reference of Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal under Section 5 (1) of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act (ISRWD), 1956 to Chairman of the tribunal and Supreme Court Judge, Justice A M Khanwilkar.

The Tribunal has been constituted following orders of the Supreme Court. The Government of Odisha had sought to refer the water dispute regarding the inter-state river Mahanadi and its river valley to a Tribunal for adjudication under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.

The tribunal will be formed according to the provisions of the Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD), 1956.

It will have a chairperson and two other members nominated by the Chief Justice of India from among the judges of the apex court or high courts.

As per provisions of the ISRWD Act, 1956 the Tribunal is required to submit its report and decision within a period of 3 years which can be extended to a further period not exceeding 2 years due to unavoidable reasons.

Odisha and Chhattisgarh are locked in a dispute over the Mahanadi waters since the mid-80s. Odisha claimed that Chhattisgarh government has been constructing dams in the upper reaches of the Mahanadi, depriving its farmers who are heavily dependent on the rivers waters.
