

**“Everything is hard before it is easy” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

**INTERNATIONAL NAD BILATERAL**

**INDIA TO PROVIDE TARIFF CONCESSIONS ON 3,142 ITEMS TO APTA MEMBERS**

India has agreed to provide tariff concessions on 3,142 products to Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) members, including Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, from July 1

These duty concessions will be more for least developed countries (LDCs) and less for developing nations

**Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA):**

APTA is an initiative under the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) for trade expansion through exchange of tariff concessions among developing country members of the Asia Pacific Region

It is a preferential trade agreement (PTA), under which the basket of items, as well as extent of tariff concessions, are enlarged during the trade negotiating rounds which are launched from time to time.

The six member countries are Bangladesh, China, India, Laos, Korea and Sri Lanka.

**NATIONAL**

**GOVT ACCEPTS 5-POINT PLAN TO RESOLVE NPAS, RULES OUT BAD BANK**

The government agreed to a five-pronged strategy to resolve toxic loans, with the larger ones among them going to an asset management company (AMC) or an alternative investment fund (AIF).

**I. Project SASHAKT to resolve NPA crisis**

Finance minister accepted the report by a committee of bankers set up in this regard, that the strategy, called Project SASHAKT.

It will help retain the value of the asset through an operational turnaround.

**II. No Bad Banks**

There is no proposal to create a bad bank, and Project Sashakt does not require any regulatory forbearance.

A bad bank is a new company created to buy poorly-performing assets from another bank.

**III. Project Sashakt outlines the resolution of bad loans depending on their size**

Bad loans of up to Rs. 50 crore will be managed by a focused vertical to be set up at the bank level itself, which will ensure the loan is resolved within 90 days.

For bad loans of Rs. 50-500 crore, banks will enter into an inter-creditor agreement, authorizing the lead bank to implement a resolution plan within 180 days, which includes appointing turnaround specialists. If the lead bank does not complete the process in time, the asset would be referred to National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

For loans above Rs. 500 crore, the committee has recommended setting up an independent AMC supported by institutional funding in stressed assets or an AIF.

**IV. AMCs to consolidate stressed Assets**

The idea is to help consolidate stressed assets under the AMC model for better and faster decision making.

There can be more than one AMC, completely market-driven with small equity required.

No capital is required from the government. Investors can come and invest. It would be an open process.

**V. New role for NCLT**

Bigger loans which cannot be resolved through any of the above methods will be transferred to the NCLT for resolution under the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

The committee also recommended an asset trading platform for both performing and non-performing assets.

Sunil Mehta Committee – deals with faster resolution of stressed assets.

The committee has recommended the creation of an asset management company for the resolution of stressed loans worth more than Rs. 500 crore.

The committee had also laid out a plan to resolve SME loans within 90 days.

#### 2021 CENSUS DATA TO BE STORED ELECTRONICALLY

The data collected during the 2021 Census will be stored electronically, the first time since the decennial exercise was conducted in 1951 in Independent India.

According to an amended rule notified by the Registrar General of India (RGI), "The schedules and other connected papers shall be disposed of totally or in part by the Director of Census Operations, after creating an electronic record of such documents."

Till now the "schedules" (a tabular form containing details of individuals), carried by enumerators to households, were being stored in a physical form at the government's storehouse in Delhi.

It is based on these schedules that the relevant statistical information on population, language, and occupation are sorted and published.

The records running into crores of pages were occupying space in the government office and it has now been decided that they will be stored in an electronic format.

Any tampering with the data will invite punishment under the **Information Technology Act, 2000**.

Enumerators will start "house listing" in 2020 and the headcount will begin from February 2021 onwards.

An individual's household data is not published by the RGI. They are published in the form of tables on the Census website. The data is preserved for 10 years and then it is destroyed.

#### ECI TO HOLD A NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON ACCESSIBLE ELECTIONS

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has organized **"National Consultation on Accessible Elections,"**

The event is a part of the ECI's pursuit of its mission 'leave no voter behind' with special focus on **"Persons with Disabilities" (PwD)**.

During the inaugural session, a dedicated portal for the ECI's 'Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation' (SVEEP) initiative was also be launched.

They are aimed at identifying the barriers or gaps in the inclusion of PwD's in the electoral process, to assess the existing accessibility initiatives and to find solutions for the challenges being faced by the PwD's.

The whole exercise is to enhance their participation in the forthcoming state and Lok Sabha elections.

The theme of "Inclusion of PwDs" has been given a special focus in the ECI's Strategic Plan 2016-2025.

Besides, "Accessible Elections" has been adopted as its central theme for this year's National Voters' Day celebrations (25th Jan)

#### Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP):

SVEEP is a programme of multi interventions through different modes and media designed to educate citizens, electors and voters about the electoral process in order to increase their awareness and participation in the electoral processes

SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof

Now it includes enhanced interaction with the citizens through social media, online contests and voters' festivals; awareness about new initiatives of linking EPIC with AADHAAR and National Voters' Service Portal and a regularized yearly plan of activities

In addition to target groups of women, youth, urban voters and the marginalized sections, the inclusion of groups like service voters, NRIs, persons with disabilities, prospective voters/ students is of primary focus.

**CHINA AIMS TO OUTSTRIP NASA WITH SUPER-POWERFUL ROCKET**

China is working on a super-powerful rocket that would be capable of delivering heavier payloads into low orbit than NASA.

By 2030, the Long March-9 rocket under development will be able to carry 140 tonnes into low-Earth orbit

This compares to the 20 tonnes deliverable by Europe's Ariane 5 rocket or the 64 tonnes of Elon Musk's Falcon Heavy.

It would also outstrip the 130 tonnes of NASA's Space Launch System, which is due to become operational in 2020.

**Long March-9:**

China's Long March-9 would have a core stage measuring 10 metres in diameter and boast four powerful boosters, each with a diameter of five metres.

The rocket could be used in manner lunar landings, deep space exploration or constructing a space-based solar power plant.

China is also working on a reusable space rocket, which is expected to make its maiden flight in 2021.

China is also planning to build a base on the moon.

**SC REJECTS PLEA TO SHUT KUDANKULAM POWER PLANT**

The Supreme Court extended time period for creating away-from reactor (AFR) facility.

The apex court allows the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) an extension of time till April 30, 2022, to build AFR facility to store spent nuclear fuel from the Kudankulam power plant.

The decision was taken by three judge bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra.

The court rejected the demands by advocate Prashant Bhushan to shut down the plant till the facility was ready.

Mr Bhutan said that continued operation of the plant without "deep underground repository" to store radioactive spent fuel can lead to catastrophe.

The bench, however, made it clear that **no further extension of time shall be granted to the corporation for setting up of the AFR at the nuclear plant in Tamil Nadu.**

The apex court had earlier allowed the Centre to operationalize the nuclear plant subject to compliance of various safety measures including the safe storage of the spent nuclear fuel.

In 2013, the court granted five years to NPCIL, till July 2018, to build the storage unit.

**CAUVERY AUTHORITY DIRECTS KARNATAKA TO RELEASE WATER**

The Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) directed Karnataka to release water to Tamil Nadu and other states.

The decision was taken in CWMA's first meeting held in New Delhi, with representatives from Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

The meeting was held because Karnataka decided to appeal in the Supreme Court against the formation of Cauvery Water Management Authority. Karnataka has been asked to release 31 tmcft water to Tamil Nadu in July.

Karnataka had released an extra of 3 tmcft of water from Cauvery in June owing to the heavy rainfall in the river's catchment areas.

However, the meeting did not discuss Karnataka's decision to challenge the Constitution of the CWMA in the Supreme Court.

Karnataka decided to appeal in the Supreme Court against the formation of CWMA.

Karnataka raised objections about the distribution of water and is wary of "outside" interference in the distribution.

In case of Puducherry, the authority directed that the existing arrangement for the supply of water to Puducherry by Tamil Nadu will continue.

### **Constitutional Provisions and Legislations:**

The Constitutional Provision for Interstate water dispute has been laid down in Article 262.

The Article 262 provides for a specific law enacted by Parliament to adjudicate water disputes. It also bars jurisdiction of all courts, including the Supreme Court, on the same.

The Cauvery River originates in Karnataka's Kodagu district, flows into Tamil Nadu, and reaches the Bay of Bengal at Poompuhar.

The river's upper hilly catchment lies in Karnataka and Kerala. Its lower part lies in the plains of Tamil Nadu.

Karnataka is the upper riparian state where the river originates; Tamil Nadu is a lower riparian state.

#### **"CVIGIL" MOBILE APP**

Election Commission of India launches "cVIGIL" Mobile App. "cVIGIL" is a user-friendly and easy to operate Android application to report MCC violations during elections.

Upon successful completion of the trial that is underway, the application will be made available for general use by all, right from the forthcoming Assembly elections in the States of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Rajasthan.

The practical use of the app during these Assembly polls will serve as pilot initiative before it is put to extensive use during the 2019 General Elections.

cVIGIL will allow anyone in the election-bound state to report violations of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) that comes into effect from the date of announcement of elections and goes on till a day after the polls.

By using this app, citizens can immediately report on incidents of misconduct within minutes of having witnessed them and without having to rush to the office of the returning officer to lodge a complaint.

After its successful submission through the app, the vigilant citizen gets a Unique ID to

track and receive the follow-up updates on her or his mobile.

A citizen can report many incidents in this manner and will get a unique id for each report for follow up updates. The identity of the complainant will be kept confidential.

Once the complaint is lodged, the information beeps in the District Control Room from where it is assigned to a Field Unit.

A field unit consists of Flying Squads, Static Surveillance Teams, Reserve teams etc.

Each Field Unit will have a GIS-based mobile application called 'cVIGIL Dispatcher', which allows the unit to directly reach the location through navigation technology and take action.

If the incident is found correct, the information is sent to the National Grievance Portal of the Election Commission of India for further action and the vigilant citizen is informed about the action taken within a hundred minutes.

The app will not facilitate the saving of the photos or videos recorded using the 'cVIGIL' app into the phone gallery either.

Further, the application will be active only in States where elections have been announced. The moment a citizen exits an election-bound State, the app will become inactive.

So far, the complaints about violations of Model Code of Conduct often could not be followed instantly, leading to the violators escaping detection from the action squads.

Also, the lack of any documented evidence in the form of pictures or videos was seen as a hurdle in verifying a complaint.

Further, the absence of a robust response system to quickly and accurately identify the scene of occurrence of violations with the help of geographical location details hampered election officers' ability to apprehend the violators.

The new app is expected to fill in all these gaps and create a fast-track complaint reception and redressal system.

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