

NATIONAL**Land acquisition law challenged in court**

The Supreme Court decided to examine a plea challenging the legality of amendments to the Land Acquisition Act brought in by Tamil Nadu and four other States. The present law allows authorities to bypass the need to take farmers' consent before their land is acquired for large infrastructure projects.

Problem with the Amendments

- A SC Bench had issued notice to the Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Jharkhand governments for amending their land acquisition laws.
- These states amended the laws to the extent that consent of farmers or land owners is not required before their land is acquired for projects like industrial corridors, expressways and highways.
- The petition filed states that the States allow land acquisition without participation of representative local bodies like gram sabha in social impact assessment studies.
- The States have removed the consent clause of PPP, paving the way for many private projects that are running under the garb of PPP.
- There are no provisions for expert appraisal processes, public hearings, objections, and safeguard provisions to ensure food security.
- The petition said the amendments violate the "core spirit" of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act of 2013.

LARR Act, 2013: It mandates that 70% of the affected land owners should consent to the acquisition of land for a public private participation project. The 2013 Act replaced its colonial predecessor of 1894 and was intended to uphold the farmers' right to dignity and life.

Winter Session in parliament: Opposition demands JPC probe into Rafale deal

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to his fellow MPs to strive for a constructive atmosphere during the winter session of Parliament, the Opposition sounded a confrontational note by asserting that it would press for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to probe the Rafale deal.

Other Discussions:

- Misuse of investigative agencies and the tension with institutions like Reserve Bank of India (RBI) were other issues cited by the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Ghulam Nabi Azad, at the all-party meeting.
- The meeting was convened by the newly appointed Parliamentary Affairs Minister Narendra Singh Tomar. Proceedings started with a two-minute homage to Ananth Kumar, his predecessor, who passed away last month.
- It is a prime responsibility for all of us to contribute to the service of the Nation and its people by ensuring smooth functioning of Parliament," a statement from the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs quoted Mr. Modi as saying.
- Mr. Tomar informed that the winter session would be from December 11 to January 8, 2019 and that the government has identified 46 bills, including three new ones. The key government bills include the one on Triple Talaq.

INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL**Regulatory Indicators for Sustainable Energy (RISE) 2018**

World Bank has released its report — Regulatory Indicators for Sustainable Energy (RISE) 2018 — charting global progress on sustainable energy policies. The report was released on the sidelines of the 24th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change(COP24).

Highlights of the report:

- Many of the world's largest energy-consuming countries significantly improved their renewable energy regulations since 2010.
- Progress was even more marked in energy efficiency, with the percentage of countries establishing advanced policy frameworks growing more than 10-fold between 2010 and 2017.

- Among countries with large populations living without electricity, 75 per cent had by 2017 put in place the policies and regulations needed to expand energy access. But there were still significant barriers to global progress on sustainable energy.
- While countries continue to be focused on clean energy policies for electricity, policies to decarbonize heating and transportation, which account for 80 per cent of global energy use, continued to be overlooked.
- This momentum was particularly marked in renewable energy. Among the countries covered by RISE, only 37 per cent had a national renewable energy target in 2010. By 2017, that had grown to 93 per cent.
- By last year, 84 per cent of countries had a legal framework in place to support renewable energy deployment, while 95 per cent allowed the private sector to own and operate renewable energy projects.
- Among the four SDG7 target areas — renewable energy, energy efficiency, electricity access and access to clean cooking — the last one continued to be the most overlooked and underfunded by policymakers.
- There has been little progress on standard-setting for cookstoves or on consumer and producer incentives to stimulate adoption of clean technologies.

Arrest of Huawei's Executive - US-China Tech Trade War – II

The recent arrest in Canada of the chief financial officer of Huawei has created a fresh flashpoint between the United States and China. It reveals that fresh attention is being paid to the mechanisms of, as well as the implications of, Chinese technological leadership.

Many of the five eyes countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and US) have imposed restrictions on Huawei and its compatriots in the same industry, such as ZTE. The Government of Japan has also moved to prevent these companies from dominating the fifth-generation telecom rollout domestically.

Lessons for India:

- India is a leading player in the consumption and use of new technology.
- The commercial rollout of 5G is expected to take place in India in 2020.
- The Indian government has invited Huawei to be a part of 5G trials in the country.
- Early this year, Huawei also conducted 5G trials in laboratory with Bharti Airtel in India.
- However, it is important for the government to ensure that there is transparency about national security as well as the commercial interests at stake in this and similar cases.
- The dangers of permitting state-linked companies such as Huawei to become the primary guarantors of the effectiveness of India's telecom backbone are real, and should be avoided.
- Also, India's protections against breaches in the high-tech, telecom and cyber domain need urgent review.
- It is far from clear that there is sufficient capacity or awareness about the degree to which Indian systems can be or have already been penetrated.
- Stress testing is used to test the stability & reliability of the system.
- This test mainly determines the system on its robustness and error handling under extremely heavy load conditions.
- It is not clear whether stress tests have been run or simulated to determine the stability of India's technological framework in the event of various geopolitical crises.

ECONOMY

RBI governor Urjit patel resigns citing personal reasons

- Reserve Bank Governor Urjit Patel has stepped down from his post citing personal reasons.
- In a statement, Dr. Patel said he is stepping down with immediate effect. He said it has been his privilege and honour to serve in the Reserve Bank of India in various capacities over the years.
- Dr. Patel succeeded Raghuram Rajan as the 24th Governor of RBI in September 2016. He had been appointed for a three-year term.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that under the leadership of Dr Urjit Patel, the Reserve Bank of India brought financial stability, steered the banking system from chaos to order and ensured discipline.
- In a tweet, Mr Modi said, Dr Patel is an economist of a very high calibre with a deep and insightful understanding of macro-economic issues and a thorough professional with impeccable integrity.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has tweeted, the government acknowledges with a deep sense of appreciation the services rendered by Dr. Urjit Patel both in his capacity as the Governor and the Deputy Governor of RBI.

Shaktikanta Das takes charge as New RBI Governor:

- India's former economic affairs secretary and current member of the Finance Commission Shaktikanta Das has been appointed as new RBI Governor. He became the 25th Governor of the apex bank of the country.
- Shaktikanta Das is a 1980 batch IAS officer of Tamil Nadu Cadre and a very prominent bureaucrat who served under both NDA and UPA governments. He served as economic affairs secretary from 2015 to 2017; and was key official in both big economic moves of the government viz. demonetization and implementation of GST. Appointment committee of cabinet approved Shaktikanta Das appointment as RBI governor. He will serve as governor for the term of three years. He is the first Odia to occupy the highest position in the Central Bank of the country.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft

NASA's Voyager 2 has entered interstellar space, leaving behind the solar system.

Accomplishments so far:

- Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys.
- It is the second man-made object to leave our planet. It is now 11 billion miles from Earth, following behind its sister spacecraft, Voyager 1, which is 6 years ahead of it. The probe is estimated to be travelling at 34,000 mph.
- Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune's mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa's ice shell, and ring features at every planet.

Interstellar space: Scientists use the heliopause (the solar system imaginary boundary) to mark where interstellar space begins, although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the Oort Cloud, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth's orbit.

DEFENCE

Agni-V India successfully test-fired nuclear-capable ballistic missile Agni-5, which has a strike range of 5,000 km, from Dr Abdul Kalam island off the Odisha coast recently.

Key features of the missile:

- Agni- 5 is the intercontinental surface-to-surface nuclear capable ballistic missile. It is the latest in India's "Agni" family of medium to intercontinental range missiles.
- Agni-5 has a range of over 5,000 km and can carry about a 1500-kg warhead. It can target almost all of Asia including Pakistan and China and Europe.
- The 17-metre long Agni-5 Missile weighs about 50 tonnes and is a very agile and modern weapon system.
- The surface-to-surface missile is a fire-and-forget system that cannot be easily detected as it follows a ballistic trajectory. India describes the Agni – 5 missile system as a 'weapon of peace'.
- India has already joined an elite club of nations that possess the ICBM launch capability when the maiden test-firing of Agni-V was successfully conducted in April, 2012. Only the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – China, France, Russia, the United States and Britain, along with Israel, have so far possessed such long-range missiles.