

“It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.” Franklin D. Roosevelt

LOK SABHA PASSES FINANCE BILL WITHOUT DISCUSSION

The Lok Sabha passed the Finance Bill 2018 with 21 amendments. The Finance Bill was passed without discussion amid much ruckus.

Regarding the long-term capital gains tax (LTCG) one of the major amendments was made during the session.

The exempting of gains till January 31, 2018, will now be incorporated in the computation of LTCG itself, rather than for the purposes of computing tax at the rate of 10%.

This resolves the ambiguity contained in the language of the Finance Bill 2018 on the need for a duplicated computation.

There would have been computing first for LTCG without exempting and then for applying 10% tax rate with exempting.

Other important provisions

Finance Bill 2018 clears the air on the valuation of securities held as inventory by scheduled banks and public financial institutions.

The amended Finance Act also made changes to the rules regarding how start-ups can avail of tax deductions on profits.

THE NEUTRINO OBSERVATORY PROJECT GOT CLEARANCE NOD

The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) project has got a fresh lease of life. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has taken it up as a special case and granted it environmental clearance to set up the lab in Bodi West Hills.

MoEF's Expert Appraisal Committee (Infra 2), after detailed deliberations on the proposal and submissions by the project proponent, recommended this at its meeting on March 5.

The previous EC granted in 2011 was quashed by the courts.

Biodiversity and pollution concerns: The Mathikettan Shola National Park in Idukki district, Kerala, is situated within five km from the project site.

The panel was informed that there was no scope for radioactivity and leaching of water. Studies showed there would be no impact of blasting on any habitation in the vicinity.

The consent to establish and operate needs to be obtained from the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB).

Also, the INO team has to obtain the necessary forest and National Board for Wild Life clearances as per law.

MoEF's Expert Appraisal Committee (Infra 2)

The Expert Appraisal Committee Infra 2 of the Ministry of Environment and Forests deals with projects related to all ship breaking yard including ship breaking unit, airport, common hazardous waste treatment, storage and disposal facilities, ports and harbours, aerial ropeways, Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETP), common municipal solid waste management facility, building/construction projects, townships and area development projects

India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)

India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) is a particle physics research project under construction to primarily study atmospheric neutrinos in a 1,300 meters (4,300 ft) deep cave near Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

This project is notable in that it is anticipated to provide a precise measurement of neutrino mixing parameters

The project is a multi-institute collaboration and one of the biggest experimental particle physics projects undertaken in India

When completed, the main magnetized iron calorimeter (ICAL) experiment will include the world's largest magnet, four times larger than the 12,500-tonne magnet in the Compact Muon Solenoid detector at CERN in Geneva, Switzerland

Neutrinos are fundamental particles belonging to the lepton family. They come in three flavors; one associated with electrons and the others with their heavier cousins the muon and the Tau

Recent experiments indicate that these charge-neutral fundamental particles have finite but small mass which is unknown

LAQSHYA

- LaQshya program will benefit every pregnant woman and newborn delivering in public health institutions
- 'Aims at achieving tangible results within 18 months'

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has recently announced the launch of program 'LaQshya', aimed at improving quality of care in labour room and maternity Operation Theatre (OT).

The Program will improve quality of care for pregnant women in labour room, maternity Operation Theatre and Obstetrics Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and High Dependency Units (HDUs). The LaQshya program is being implemented at all **Medical College Hospitals, District Hospitals and First Referral Unit (FRU), and Community Health Center (CHCs) and will benefit every pregnant woman and new-born delivering in public health institutions.**

'LaQshya' will reduce maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, improve quality of care during delivery and immediate postpartum period and enhance satisfaction of beneficiaries and provide Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) to all pregnant women attending public health facilities.

The Program aims at implementing 'fast-track' interventions for achieving tangible results within 18 months. Under the initiative, a multi-pronged strategy has been adopted such as improving infrastructure up-gradation, ensuring availability of essential equipment, providing adequate human resources, capacity building of health care workers and improving quality processes in the labour room.

To strengthen critical care in Obstetrics, dedicated Obstetric ICUs at Medical College Hospital level and Obstetric HDUs at District

Hospital are operationalised under LaQshya program.

The Quality Improvement in labour room and maternity OT will be assessed through NQAS (National Quality Assurance Standards). Every facility achieving 70% score on NQAS will be certified as LaQshya certified facility. Furthermore, branding of LaQshya certified facilities will be done as per the NQAS score. Facilities scoring more than 90%, 80% and 70% will be given Platinum, Gold and Silver badge accordingly. Facilities achieving NQAS certification, defined quality indicators and 80% satisfied beneficiaries will be provided incentive of Rs 6 lakh, Rs 3 lakh and Rs 2 lakh for Medical College Hospital, District Hospital and FRUs respectively.

India has come a long way in improving maternal survival as Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has reduced from 301 maternal deaths in 2001-03 to 167 in year 2011-13, an impressive decline of 45% in a decade. India is further committed to ensuring safe motherhood to every pregnant woman in the country.

A transformational improvement in the quality of care around child-birth- relating to intra partum and immediate postpartum care shall dramatically improve maternal and new-born outcomes.

ACTION TO REDUCE POLLUTION IN YAMUNA RIVER

The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation is supplementing the efforts of states for checking the rising level of pollution of river Yamuna, by providing financial assistance to states of Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in a phased manner since 1993 under the Yamuna Action Plan (YAP).

At present, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) assisted YAP Phase-III project is under implementation at an estimated cost of Rs 1656 crore in Delhi for rehabilitation and up-gradation of existing Sewage Treatment Plants (950 Million Litres Per Day) and Trunk sewers (43 kms) in Delhi. Delhi Jal Board (DJB) is the implementing agency.

The duration of YAP-III project is 7 years. As part of the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal (NGT)'s Maily Se Nirmal Yamuna Revitalization Plan 2017 various steps has been taken to curb the pollution.

In addition to these, following projects have been undertaken by the State Govt. of Delhi for addressing the problem of pollution of river Yamuna:

- I. Construction of Waste Water Treatment Plants.
- II. Construction of Sewage Treatment Plants.
- III. Construction of decentralized Waste Water Treatment Plants.
- IV. Laying of Sewer lines in unauthorized colonies.
- V. Rehabilitation of Peripheral Sewer lines.

Delhi has 28 Approved Industrial Areas (Planned Industrial Areas) and 22 Redevelopment Areas (Redevelopment of Clusters of Industrial Concentration in Non Conforming Areas).

To curb water pollution control from the industries in Delhi, for the treatment of the waste water generated from industrial areas, 13 Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) have been established.

Out of 13 CETPs, 10 are being operated by the CETP Societies of the Industrial Areas and 3 are being operated by the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC). For proper Operation and Maintenance of these CETPs, Operators of CETP have been asked to install Online Monitoring System.

Besides CETPs there are about 2000 Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) installed by the individual units operating in Delhi including Industries, Hotels, Restaurants etc. Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) monitors the Sewage Treatment Plants of Delhi Jal Board and 13 Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) and takes action to ensure compliance as per the provision of different legislation.

GOVERNMENT PRESENTED CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF E-OFFICE

The government has presented the Certificates of Appreciation to 34 Ministries/departments for implementation of e-office programme in their respective ministries/departments.

The awards have been given by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India.

E- Office programme:

E-Office is one of the Mission Mode Projects under Digital India Programme.

The e-Office solution enables core operations of the Government at all levels to be performed in a virtual 'paper-less' environment. This application is, thus, a major step in realizing the objective of an open and responsive Government.

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG) is the nodal Department for implementation of e-Office project. National Informatics Centre (NIC) is the technical partner in this project.

The objectives:

1. To improve efficiency, consistency and effectiveness of government responses.
2. To reduce turnaround time and to meet the demands of the citizens charter.
3. To provide for effective resource management to improve the quality of administration.
4. To reduce processing delays.
5. To establish transparency and accountability.

ANNUAL SURVEY OF INDIA'S CITY-SYSTEMS (ASICS) RANKED INDIAN CITIES

The fifth edition of the Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) by Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy has been released.

The objective of the survey was to measure the preparedness of cities to deliver high

quality infrastructure and services in the long term by evaluating “city systems”.

The survey spans 23 Indian cities and factors in answers to 89 questions. The cities were scored based on the quality of laws, policies; institutions and institutional processes that together help govern them.

ASICS groups questions into four categories: urban planning & design; urban capacities & resources; transparency, accountability & participation; and empowered & legitimate political representation.

Pune, Kolkata and Thiruvananthapuram top the country in terms of urban governance.

Delhi and Mumbai figure in the sixth and ninth positions respectively.

A majority of its cities “grossly underprepared” to deliver a high quality of life in the long term. And many surveyed cities are far behind cities such as London, New York and Johannesburg, which topped global benchmarks with 8.8, 8.8 and 7.6 points respectively.

The cities assessed in the study are found to be generating only 39% of the funds they spend on an average, with Patna raising just 17% on its own. Only Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune generate over 50% of the amount they spend from their own revenue.

The survey also found urban capacities across cities suffering from rampant staff vacancies, inadequate domain experience of senior municipal officers, and powerless mayors and councils. Commissioners were found to have only have 2.7 years of experience in urban management on an average. Average staff vacancy stood at 35%, with Guwahati bottoming out at 60%.

The mayor and councils in our cities are toothless. They don't have full decision-making authority over critical functions such as planning, housing, water, environment, fire and emergency services.

No city in India has effective policies to deter plan violations, a deficiency that leads to the mushrooming of slums and unauthorized colonies. While all its 23 cities scored zero on

this parameter, London, New York and Johannesburg notched a perfect 10 out of 10.

Moreover, most of the country's town and country planning acts date back to the previous century. It has one planner per four lakh citizens (as opposed to 48 in the United States and 148 in the United Kingdom).

Lack of legislative imagination and political will has resulted in state governments not fixing city governance. The need now is to fix city governance on a war footing. There will be no change unless the state government empowers municipalities.

UNION CABINET APPROVED AN AGREEMENT FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION WITH IRAN

The Union Cabinet has approved an Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on income between India and Iran.

The Agreement will stimulate flow of investment, technology and personnel from India to Iran & vice versa, and will prevent double taxation. The Agreement will provide for exchange of information between the two Contracting Parties as per latest international standards. It will thus improve transparency in tax matters and will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.

The Agreement is on similar lines as entered into by India with other countries. The proposed Agreement also meets treaty related minimum standards under G-20 OECD Base Erosion & Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project, in which India participated on an equal footing.

In so far as India is concerned, the Central Government is authorized under Section 90 of the Income Tax Act, 1961 to enter into an Agreement with a foreign country or specified territory for avoidance of double taxation of income for exchange of information for the prevention of evasion or avoidance of income-tax chargeable under the Income-tax Act, 1961.
