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## Current Affairs of the Day

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## New Bill on powers of Delhi govt., L-G soon

### The National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2020:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is likely to introduce a legislation in the ongoing Parliament session to amend a 1991 Act pertaining to the powers and functions of the Delhi government and the Lieutenant-Governor.
- The National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to “bring ease in implementation of certain provisions of the Act”, is among more than 20 Bills proposed to be introduced in this Parliament session. The Bill is yet to get the Cabinet’s nod and it was not taken up at the Union Cabinet meeting on Tuesday.
- The Bill proposes to clearly spell out the functions of the Council of Ministers and the Lieutenant-Governor by giving more discretionary powers to the L-G.

### Proposed changes:

- According to changes proposed in the new Act, the L-G could act in his discretion on any matter that is beyond the purview of the powers of the Assembly of Delhi in matters related to the All India (Civil) Services and the Anti Corruption Branch (ACB). It will also give more teeth to the L-G, and the validity of any decision taken as per such discretion shall not be questioned.
- The apex court is still examining the services matter. In 2018, a five-judge Bench of the SC had unanimously held that the L-G was bound by the “aid and advice” of the Delhi government and both had to work harmoniously with each other.

### Background:

- The Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government is often at loggerheads with the Centre regarding administrative matters in the Capital. A clutch of petitions were filed in the Supreme Court against a 2015 notification by the MHA, which said that the Delhi government had no powers in services-related matters and the ACB could not register cases against any employee, officer or functionary of the Central government.



- The Union Territory of Delhi with a Legislative Assembly came into being in 1991 under Article 239AA inserted by the 'Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1991'. It said that the UT of Delhi shall be called the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and the administrator thereof appointed under Article 239 shall be designated as the Lieutenant-Governor. According to the existing Act, the Legislative Assembly of Delhi has the power to make laws in all matters except public order, police, and land.

## United States welcomes India's role in Afghan peace talks

- Three days after India took the plunge on engaging with the Taliban at the first Intra-Afghan Negotiations, U.S. Special Envoy on Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla during a brief four-hour visit to New Delhi.
- Mr. Khalilzad appreciated India's participation in the Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN) held in Doha on September 12. He briefed about the U.S. assessment of the IAN and shared the U.S. perspective on the Afghan peace process.
- The two sides discussed future steps and possible cooperation between India and the U.S. in furthering the Afghan peace process.

## Telangana govt. opposes Electricity Act amendment

- The Telangana government has resolved to present a strong case against the proposed amendment to the Electricity Act, 2003 by the Central government, terming it as a "unilateral decision and a blatant attempt against the federal spirit aimed at usurping the States' powers".
- The State Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution voicing its strong opposition to the proposed amendment, claiming it was aimed at centralisation of powers, and would impose a huge burden on States.



- The resolution demanded that the Centre immediately rescind its moves that were harmful to the interests of the people, farmers and underprivileged sections in particular.

### Criticism:

- Moving the resolution in the House on Tuesday, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao described the proposed amendment as “draconian and dangerous” and totally against the federal spirit of the Constitution.
- “If the dictatorial bill is passed, the States will lose their control over the energy sector,” he said, adding that the distributor sub-license method mentioned in the new Act would lead to backdoor entry for private companies.

### Concerns:

- Explaining the highlights of the draft Bill circulated to the States, he said meters would be fixed for every connection including more than 25 lakh pumpsets of farmers and bills should be paid every month without any exception.
- The regulatory commission to be set up at the Central level would decide the charges that should be paid by farmers and other consumers without subsidy, he said.
- The new Act would enable consumers to procure more power through open access system and this would adversely affect the distribution companies.
- For States like Telangana which are giving cross subsidies, this will be a very heavy burden,” he lamented. The State was providing subsidy in excess of ₹10,000 crore every year towards free power to the farm sector.

## New powers for aviation regulators

### The Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020:

- The Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which was passed by the Lok Sabha on March 17, was passed by Parliament on Tuesday after a heated discussion in Rajya Sabha over privatisation of airports. The Upper House passed the Bill by a voice vote.



## Key takeaways:

- The Bill gives statutory powers to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau.
- Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri said the changes were necessary for the growth of the sector. The Bill empowers the DGCA to levy enhanced penalties of upto ₹1 crore, from the existing ₹10 lakh, on airlines, airports and other aviation entities.
- The amendments also address several regulatory shortcomings that were highlighted by aviation watchdogs of the United Nations and the U.S. — the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the Federal Aviation Authority — during their audits on safety and security in the Indian aviation ecosystem.
- The changes include recognising regulatory bodies such as the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau, which were set up through various government notifications but did not have a defined role under the parent Act, as well as air navigation services.

## Reactions:

- During the discussion, Congress MP K.C. Venugopal hit out at the government over the privatisation of six airports that had been given to the Adani Group. He demanded an inquiry into the matter, saying it was “crony capitalism”. “Airports Authority of India has become AAA — Airports Authority of Adani,” Mr. Venugopal alleged. BJP MP G.V.L Narasimha Rao responded by saying the “real crony capitalism” was prevalent in the UPA government’s tenure in the 2G spectrum and coal block auctions.
- Trinamool Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi said as a former pilot he understood the problems facing the civil aviation sector. He said there was need to do away with the entire Aircraft Act, 1934. On the impending sale of Air India, Mr. Trivedi said: “If Air India was not there, the private sector wouldn’t be there. So please don't sell Air India”.
- Former Civil Aviation Minister and NCP MP Praful Patel said the Bill was important as the aviation sector grows, the regulations have to be in line with





international requirements. However, he said it was not clear how these regulators would be appointed. He also said there was a need to increase the number of airports in the country, citing the examples of the pending Jewar and Navi Mumbai airport projects that were approved in 2007 and 2005 respectively.

- On the issue of privatisation, Mr. Puri cited the example of Delhi and Mumbai airport being privatised in 2006, leading to the AAI getting ₹29,000 crore in revenue that helped in developing airports in the country. He said the six airports that were awarded in 2018 accounted for 9% of traffic, while Delhi and Mumbai accounted for 33% of traffic and earnings. He also said that for Air India, the choice was not between privatisation and non-privatisation, but between “privatisation and closing down”.

## Essential Commodities Bill passed

- The Lok Sabha passed the Essential Commodities Amendment Bill by a voice vote on Tuesday evening. The Bill proposes to deregulate the production, storage, movement and sale of several foodstuffs, including cereals, pulses, edible oils and onions, except in the case of extraordinary circumstances.
- With thousands of farmers rising up in protest against the Bill in Punjab, one of the allies of the ruling BJP, the Shiromani Akali Dal MP and president Sukhbir Singh Badal, expressed concerns and misgivings about the proposed legislation during the debate in the House.
- He questioned the manner in which the Bill was brought without consultation with farmers’ organisations. Punjab farmers were the worst affected, he said.
- The Bill is meant to replace an ordinance promulgated in June, in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown.
- It says stock limits can only be imposed if retail prices surge 50% above the average in the case of non-perishables and 100% in the case of perishables.



## Govt. refuses demands to restore MPLADS funds

### The Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020:

- The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which seeks to cut salaries of MPs by 30%.
- The debate however saw the entire Opposition uniting to ask for a concomitant restitution of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLADs) fund which the Centre froze for two financial years till 2022 as an austerity measure.
- Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Pralhad Joshi, steering the Bill, thanked MPs for the bipartisan support but kept mum on the question of restitution of MPLADS, despite almost every non-treasury bench speaker demanding it. Dean Kuriakose of the Congress moved a resolution before the debate on the Bill, stating his disapproval of the Bill without any restitution of MPLADs.

## Scheme for health sector extended

### Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package insurance scheme:

- The 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package insurance scheme for health workers fighting COVID-19' has now been extended for another 180 days.
- The scheme was announced on March 30 for 90 days and was extended for 90 days (up to September 25). This Central sector scheme provides an insurance cover of ₹50 lakh to healthcare providers who may have to be in direct contact and care of COVID-19 patients, and therefore is at risk of being infected.
- It covers private hospital staff/retired/volunteer/local urban bodies/contract/daily wage/ad-hoc/outsourced staff requisitioned by States/Central hospitals/autonomous hospitals of Central/States/UTs, AIIMS & INIs/hospitals of Central Ministries drafted for COVID-19 related responsibilities.



## UAE, Bahrain set to ink deals with Israel

- The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on Tuesday will become the latest Arab states to break a longstanding taboo when they sign agreements toward normalising relations with Israel in a strategic realignment of West Asian countries against Iran.
- U.S. President Donald Trump was due to host the White House ceremony around noon, capping a dramatic month when first the UAE and then Bahrain agreed to reverse decades of ill will without a resolution of Israel's decades-old dispute with the Palestinians.
- At the U.S.-brokered event, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will sign agreements with Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani.

### Significance:

- The deals make them the third and fourth Arab states to take such steps to normalise ties since Israel signed peace treaties with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.
- The back-to-back agreements, which have drawn bitter condemnation from the Palestinians, mark an improbable diplomatic victory for Mr. Trump. He has spent his presidency forecasting deals on such intractable problems as North Korea's nuclear programme only to find actual achievements elusive.

Bringing Israel, the UAE and Bahrain together reflects their shared concern about Iran's rising influence in the region and development of ballistic missiles. Iran has been critical of both deals.