



Current Affairs of the Day

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SC questions States on cases under 66A

The Supreme Court asked the States to respond to a petition that stated citizens continued to get booked and prosecuted under Section 66A of the Information Technology Act for expressing themselves freely on social media.

Highlights:

1. Section 66A was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in a judgment in 2015.
2. A Bench, led by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman, said the State governments, which controlled the police force, had to answer for the violation of the court judgment.
3. The judiciary could be reined in from wrongly charging under Section 66A, but the cooperation of the States was necessary to put the brakes on the police from registering FIRs under Section 66A. The court said it intended to pass a holistic order after hearing the States. It listed the case after four weeks.
4. Justice Nariman found it “distressing”, “shocking” and “terrible” that people were still booked and tried under Section 66A even six years after the court struck down the provision as unconstitutional and a violation of free speech.

Preventive detention only to forestall public disorder: SC

Preventive detention, the dreaded power of the State to restrain a person without trial, could be used only to prevent public disorder, the Supreme Court held in a judgment.

Highlights:

1. Preventive detention is a necessary evil only to prevent public disorder. The court must ensure that the facts brought before it directly and inevitably lead to harm, danger or alarm or feeling of insecurity among the general public or any section thereof at large a Bench, led by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman, observed.
2. The State should not arbitrarily resort to “preventive detention” to deal with all and sundry “law and order” problems, which could be dealt with by the ordinary laws of the country.



3. The court said two drunks fighting on a road was a law and order problem, and not a public disorder. The solution here was not preventive detention.
4. Preventive detention must fall within the four corners of Article 21 (due process of law) read with Article 22 (safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention) and the statute in question.
5. Mere contravention of law, such as indulging in cheating or criminal breach of trust, certainly affects 'law and order', but before it can be said to affect 'public order, it must affect the community or the public at large.

PM Modi launches digital payment solution e-RUPI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched e-RUPI, a person and purpose-specific cashless digital payment solution.

Highlights:

1. e-RUPI is a cashless and contactless instrument for digital payment, an official statement said, adding that it is a QR code or SMS string-based e-voucher, which is delivered to the mobile of the beneficiaries.
2. In addition to the government, if any organisation wanted to help someone with his or her treatment, education or for any other work, then they would be able to give an e-RUPI voucher instead of cash, he said. This will ensure that the money is being used for the purpose for which any help or any benefit is being provided.
3. He asserted how technology was bringing in transparency in transactions and creating new opportunities and making them available to the poor. For reaching today's unique product, the foundation was prepared over the years by creating the JAM system, which connected mobile and Aadhaar
4. The benefits of JAM took some time to be visible to people and we saw how we could help the needy during the lockdown period while other countries were struggling to help their people.



Experts warn against mandatory food fortification

In a push back against the Centre's plan to mandatorily fortify rice and edible oils with vitamins and minerals, a group of scientists and activists has written to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), warning of the adverse impacts on health and livelihoods. They cited multiple studies to show that dietary diversity and higher protein consumption are key to solving undernutrition in India, rather than adding a few synthetic micronutrients which could harm the health of consumers.

Highlights:

1. The letter to the FSSAI as well as to the Food, Agriculture and Health Ministries and the Ministry of Women and Child Development was signed by 170 individuals and organisations, including eminent nutritionists, economists, doctors and farmers groups.
2. Experts warned that "evidence supporting fortification is inconclusive and certainly not adequate before major national policies are rolled out".
3. The letter pointed to recent studies published in the medical journal Lancet and in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition which show that both anaemia and Vitamin A deficiencies are overdiagnosed, meaning that mandatory fortification could lead to hypervitaminosis.
4. It also noted that many of the studies which FSSAI relies upon to promote fortification were sponsored by food companies that would benefit from it, leading to conflicts of interest.

Chemical Fortification:

1. The letter explained that a major problem with the chemical fortification of foods is that nutrients don't work in isolation but need each other for optimal absorption.
2. Undernourishment in India is caused by monotonous cereal-based diets with low consumption of vegetables and animal protein.
3. Adding one or two synthetic chemical vitamins and minerals will not solve the larger problem, and in undernourished populations can lead to toxicity citing a 2010 study that showed iron fortification causing gut inflammation and pathogenic gut microbiota profile in undernourished children.



4. The letter also argued that mandatory fortification would harm the vast informal economy of Indian farmers and food processors, including local oil and rice mills, and instead benefit a small group of multinational corporations.

Dietary diversity was a healthier and more cost-effective way to fight malnutrition, it said. Once iron-fortified rice is sold as the remedy to anaemia, the value and the choice of naturally iron-rich foods like millets, varieties of green leafy vegetables and fresh foods will have been suppressed by a policy silence.

PMI hints at manufacturing recovery

India's manufacturing sector stopped shedding jobs for the first time in 16 months in July even as it rebounded from June's sharp contraction to post its best performance in three months, IHS Markit's Purchasing Managers' Index survey showed.

Highlights:

1. Manufacturing PMI, which had slipped into a contraction for the first time in 11 months at 48.1 in June, recovered to 55.3 with a marginal increase in employment last month, the research firm said, adding that it was, however, premature to call it a complete rebound in the manufacturing jobs market.
2. Although marginal, the rise in employment was the first since the onset of COVID-19.
3. "With firms' cost burdens continuing to rise, however, and signs of spare capacity still evident, it's too early to say that such trend will be sustained in coming months.
4. Output rose at a robust pace, with over one-third of companies noting a monthly expansion in production, amid a rebound in new business and the easing of some local COVID-19 restrictions.
5. Improving global demand helped bolster manufacturers' order books with IHS Markit noting that new export orders expanded markedly in July, following a moderate contraction in June.