



Current Affairs of the Day

Air Quality Commission Bill for National Capital Region cleared

The Lok Sabha passed the Bill to formalise the Commission for Air Quality Management For National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas. The body has a full-time chairperson and a range of members consisting of both representatives from several Ministries as well as independent experts and will have the final say on evolving policy and issuing directions to address air pollution in Delhi and the adjoining regions.

Highlights:

1. The Centre, facing flak earlier this year from farmers protesting the farm laws, had committed to removing a clause in the Air Commission Bill that would penalise farmers for burning stubble, an important contributor to noxious air quality. The text of the Bill does away with this clause.
2. The Centre had said the new organisation would be a 'permanent' body to address pollution in the National Capital Region Delhi and address sources of pollution in Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.
3. The all-powerful body assumed several powers to coordinate action among States, levy fines — ranging up to ₹1 crore or five years of prison — to address air pollution.
4. While the Central Pollution Control Board and its State branches have the powers to implement provisions of the Environment Protection Act for air, water and land pollution, in case of dispute or a clash of jurisdictions, the Commission's writ would prevail specifically to matters concerning air pollution.

'EC proposal to link electoral roll with Aadhaar under study'

The proposal of the Election Commission of India to link the electoral roll with the Aadhaar ecosystem in order to check multiple enrolments of the same person is under consideration of the government.



Highlights:

1. Responding to a question on electoral reforms in a written reply, said the Law Commission in its 244th and 255th reports had extensively dealt with the subject.
2. The Election Commission of India has proposed to link the electoral roll with the Aadhaar ecosystem with a view to curbing the menace of multiple enrolments of the same person at different places. The matter is under consideration of the government.
3. The Minister also answered separate questions on the pendency of cases and the advice given to government departments that are engaged in a number of litigations.
4. Talking about the pendency of cases, the Minister said according to the information available on National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), over 3.93 crore cases were pending in the lower and subordinate courts as of July 30 this year.

‘Twitter violated the principle of natural justice’

The government said that the labelling of tweets as “manipulated media” by Twitter does not come under the purview of the new IT Rules. However, the U.S.-headquartered microblogging platform has been told that doing so violates “the principle of natural justice”.

Toolkit and manipulated media:

In May this year, the government had asked Twitter to remove the “manipulated media” tag from certain tweets by some Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, including the party’s national spokesperson Sambit Patra, related to a “Congress toolkit” allegedly used to defame the government’s efforts related to COVID-19.

Fairness and equity

1. The government had reasoned that “the tags affixed prejudicially” should be removed in the interests of fairness and equity, and that investigation by law enforcement agencies would determine the veracity of the content.



2. Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha: The issue of labelling of user tweets as manipulated media does not come under the purview of the above said Rules.
3. Further, on the issue of manipulated media, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has pointed out to Twitter that they are violating the principle of natural justice and urged Twitter to be transparent and equitable in applying the criteria.

In about one hour, RS passes 3 Bills

The Rajya Sabha passed three Bills in about one hour, while the Opposition continued its protest against the government on the Pegasus spyware issue and demanded the repeal of the three farm laws.

Highlights:

1. The Bills were introduced, discussed and passed amid the din. The House was also adjourned for 15 minutes in that time. Asked to speak on the Bills, many of the Opposition MPs chose to raise the issues they have been protesting over, leading to the chair cutting them short.
2. The Limited Liability Partnership (Amendment) Bill 2021, which seeks to encourage the start-up ecosystem and further boost ease of doing business, was cleared. The Bill was passed in 20 minutes with neither the speeches of the members nor the reply by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman clearly audible.
3. Demands for a division were ignored as Deputy Chairman Harivansh said the House was not in order.

Govt. establishing a new normal: Chowdhury

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury accused the government of establishing a “new normal” with regard to passage of Bills. The Bills that were passed with a voice vote include the Commission for the Management of Air Quality in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas, 2021 and the Coconut Development Board Amendment Bill, 2021.



50% funds allotted for ongoing MPLADS projects lapse

Virtually half of the belated ₹2,200 crores allotted for completing the ongoing MPLADS projects in 2020-21 simply lapsed, as the Finance Ministry granted “barely a week” to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) to release the funds — inviting the ire of the Standing Committee on Finance.

Highlights:

1. The resultant funding crunch would have hit several local area development projects under implementation across the country, especially in the five states that went to polls this year as no funds were released for these States and constituencies citing the model code of conduct (MCC).
2. Spending under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) had already halved before the government suspended the scheme for two years in April last year and diverted the funds for managing the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Each MP is granted ₹5 crores under the scheme, adding up to ₹3,950 crores a year for 790 MPs, to undertake development projects in their respective constituencies.
4. After the scheme’s suspension, several MPs and parliamentary committees, including the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), had asked the government to release MPLADS funds due from previous years for projects already sanctioned.
5. An SCF report on the Statistics Ministry’s demands for grants pointed out that many MPLADS projects that began earlier were “left unfinished midway despite the sanction letters being issued and funds for the same were withheld”, citing the suspension of the scheme.
6. The panel had sought the release of funds for these projects so that MPs could fulfil their promises to the public.
7. The Committee are unable to comprehend the reason why ₹2,200 crores were allotted to MoSPI barely one week before the end of FY 2020-2. This constitutes a serious lapse in fiscal management with negative consequences for communities across India.



‘Tighten norms’

1. The Finance Ministry also asked the Statistics Ministry to further tighten the scheme’s guidelines by September this year, so that “if a work sanctioned by an MP is not used for five years, it will automatically lapse even if there is a committed liability for the work to be completed”.
2. Currently, funds released to district authorities under MPLADS is not lapsable, while funds not released by the government in a particular year are carried forward.

RTE entitlements to be paid through cash transfers

The Centre plans to pay students their Right to Education (RTE) entitlements in the form of cash transfers as part of a revamp and extension of its flagship school education scheme that was approved by the Cabinet.

Highlights:

1. The Samagra Shiksha scheme, which has been extended till March 2026, will have a financial outlay of ₹2.94 lakh crore, including a Central share of ₹1.85 lakh crore, and several new initiatives on early childhood education, foundational literacy, and numeracy and language education.
2. Samagra Shiksha is an integrated scheme for 11.6 lakh government and aided schools with over 15 crore students and 57 lakh teachers. It involves a 60:40 split in funding between the Centre and most States.
3. In order to enhance the direct outreach of the scheme, all child-centric interventions will be provided directly to the students through DBT [or direct benefit transfer] mode on an IT-based platform over a period of time.
4. This DBT would include RTE entitlements such as textbooks, uniforms and transport allowance, although it is not clear whether the tuition fees for students in the economically weaker section quota in private schools would also be paid directly to students as a cash transfer.
5. The stipend for children with special needs will be paid in this mode, officials said.
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Service sector contracts for a third straight month: PMI

India's service sector contracted for the third straight month in July, with job losses extending to an eighth successive month, as per IHS Markit's Purchasing Managers' Index. The PMI stood at 45.4, marginally better than the 41.2 recorded in June.

Highlights:

1. A score above 50 indicates an expansion. For the first time in a year, services firms were pessimistic about the outlook for the 12-month period on worries about the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation and profit margins.
2. Consumer services were the worst-affected during July, indicating that the unlocking across States had failed to lift confidence in the resumption of contact-sensitive activity, while transport and storage was the only subsector to see higher sales in the past month.
3. The service sector's performance in July is in contrast to the manufacturing sector which logged its highest PMI in three months and saw a pause in job losses for the first time since the pandemic's onset last March.

CERT-In tracks 6.07 lakh cybersecurity incidents

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) observed more than 6.07 lakh cybersecurity incidents in the first six months of 2021, of which about 12,000 were related to government organisations, the government informed Lok Sabha.

Highlights:

According to the logs analysed and made available to CERT-In, the IP addresses of the computers from where the attacks appeared to originate belonged to various countries including Algeria, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the Netherlands, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, U.S.A. and Vietnam.