

MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS: JULY 2018

1. Government sets up panel to resolve issues of stressed thermal power assets

The Union Government has decided to set up a High-Level Empowered Committee headed by Cabinet Secretary to address the issue of stressed thermal power assets. Headed by Cabinet Secretary, the panel will comprise representatives from the ministries of railways, finance, power, coal and the lenders having major exposure to the power sector.

The committee will look into the various issues with a view to resolve them and maximise the efficiency of investment including changes required to be made in Fuel allocation policy, Regulatory framework, Mechanisms to facilitate sale of power, ensure timely payments, Provisioning norms/ Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and Asset Restructuring Company (ARC) Regulations

2. Pakistan Elections Results 2018: Imran Khan's party PTI emerges as single largest party

According to the Pakistan Elections results 2018 announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan on July 29, Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) with a total of 116 seats has emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly.

While, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) bagged 64 seats and former President Asif Ali Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) got 43 seats. Though PTI has emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly, the party is still short of numbers to form the government on its own.

3. Fact Box: Assam's National Register of Citizens' final draft

The Assam government released the second and final draft of the state's National Register of Citizens (NRC) on July 30, 2018. The list incorporates names of 2.89 crore people out of 3.29 crore applicants.

However, the names of 40.07 lakh people have been left out. Their claims and objections will be taken up from August 30 to September 28.

The first draft of NRC was published on December 31, 2017, and it incorporated the names of 1.9 crore people out of the total 3.29 crore applicants.

4. BRICS Summit 2018: Johannesburg Declaration adopted

The heads of state and government of all five BRICS nations including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa convened for the 10th BRICS Summit from July 25-27, 2018 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The summit saw the BRICS leaders come together and discuss various international and regional issues of common concern and adopted the 'Johannesburg Declaration' by consensus. The declaration reaffirms principles of democracy, inclusiveness and agrees to fight unilateralism and protectionism.

5. Vodafone-Idea merger gets final Government approval

The Department of Telecom (DoT) on July 26, 2018 gave the final approval to the merger of Vodafone India and Idea Cellular. The approval for Vodafone-Idea merger came days after Idea Cellular and Vodafone India jointly paid Rs. 7,268.78 crore 'under protest' to the DoT.

With this approval, both the entities will now approach Registrar of Companies (RoC) for stipulated filings for approval, completing the last leg of formalities. The merged identity will be known as 'Vodafone Idea' that will create India's largest mobile-phone company. Kumar Mangalam Birla, Chairman of Aditya Birla Group, will be the Non-Executive Chairman of Vodafone Idea while Balesh Sharma, Chief Operating Officer of Vodafone India, will be the CEO.

6. Government sets up High Level Committee to check mob lynching

Considering the increasing incidents of mob lynching, the Union Government on July 23, 2018 constituted a High Level Committee chaired by the Union Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba to deliberate in the matter and make recommendations.

The Union Government also constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by the Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh to consider the recommendations of the High Level Committee.

7. NASA to launch Parker Solar Probe to touch the Sun

The US space agency NASA on July 20, 2018 announced to launch the Parker Solar Probe, a robotic car-size spacecraft, to study the Sun and reveal multiple mysteries behind the star. The spacecraft will be launched in August 2018 on the United Launch Alliance Delta IV Heavy from Cape Canaveral in Florida.

Parker Solar Probe is part of NASA's Living with a Star Program to explore aspects of the Sun-Earth system that directly affect life and society. The spacecraft has been designed to endure wicked heat while zooming through the solar corona to study the outermost part of the stellar atmosphere that gives rise to the solar wind.

8. Tokyo 2020 committee officially launches Olympic mascots

The Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee on July 22, 2018 officially launched its Olympic mascots Miraitowa and Someity at a ceremony attended by Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike and Committee's President Yoshiro Mori.

The name of the blue-checked Olympic mascot 'Miraitowa' is derived from a combination of the Japanese words for future and eternity and seeks to "promote a future full of eternal hope in the hearts of people all over the world". The pink-checked Paralympic mascot Someity owes its name to a type of cherry tree blossom and exhibits enormous mental and physical strength.

9. "When a man can enter, a woman can also go": SC on Sabarimala ban

The Supreme Court on July 18, 2018 observed that banning the entry of women in Kerala's Sabarimala temple by the temple authorities is unconstitutional and questioned the authorities regarding the same.

The court stated that women have the right to enter and pray like men at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala as the fundamental right of freedom to practice religion is provided to all persons by the Constitution. The observation was made by a five-judge constitution bench, headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra.

The bench also comprised Justices R F Nariman, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra.

10. Helsinki Summit: Trump, Putin hold first one-on-one talks

US President Donald Trump held first-ever one-to-one talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 16, 2018 in Helsinki, Finland. The historic summit opened with Donald Trump promising an 'extraordinary relationship' and Vladimir Putin saying it was high time to thrash out disputes around the world.

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the Cold War was a thing of the past and today both Russia and the United States face a whole new set of challenges. US President Donald Trump, on the other hand, said the US relationship with Russia had "never been worse" than it was "until four hours ago," just before the two spoke.

11. France crowned World Champions after 20 years, Croatia's Luka Modric wins Golden Ball

France on July 15, 2018 clinched their second FIFA World Cup title, beating Croatia 4-2 in the highest-scoring final since 1996. The win comes for France, 20 years after they claimed their first FIFA title- in 1998.

This was the first time that Croatia made it to the finals of the football World Cup. It is also the smallest country to reach the final in the modern era. The team's previous best performance was in 1998, when again they had lost to France in the semi-finals. The team then failed to get past the group stage in 2002, 2006 and 2014 World Cup and did not qualify in 2010.

12. India becomes Regional Head of Asia Pacific Region in WCO

India has become the Vice Chair of the Asia Pacific Region of World Customs Organisation (WCO) for a period of two years, from July 2018 to June 2020.

The WCO has divided its membership into six Regions, among which each of the six regions is represented by a regionally elected Vice-Chairperson to the WCO Council. The position of Vice Chair of the Asia Pacific Region of WCO will enable India to take on the leadership role in the organisation.

Currently, WCO represents 182 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98 per cent of world trade.

13. Once criminality under section 377 goes, discrimination against LGBTQ will go: SC

The Supreme Court of India on July 12, 2018 stated that the social stigma and discrimination attached to the LGBTQ community would go if the criminality of consensual gay sex is done away with.

The SC bench rejected a proposal of the lawyers, seeking retention of section 377, that public opinion should be elicited on the matter, saying it did not want a referendum but would go by constitutional morality. The bench stated that once the criminality under section 377 goes, then the stigma and discrimination will also go.

14. Telecom Commission of India approves Net Neutrality

The Telecom Commission on July 11, 2018 approved the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) net neutrality recommendations that bar service providers from discriminating against internet content and services by blocking, throttling or granting them higher speed access.

The decision that aims to ensure open and free Internet in the country was taken at a meeting of the Commission, the highest decision-making body in the Department of Telecommunication in New Delhi. In its recommendations, the regulatory body asserted that there should be no intrusion of equal internet access to everyone, based on just the content.

15. India becomes 69th shareholder of European development bank

India on July 11, 2018 formally became the 69th shareholder of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), paving the way for more joint investment with Indian companies across the bank's regions of operation.

India was selected as a member after all the existing EBRD shareholders, who also form its board of governors, voted unanimously in favour of the country's application in March 2018. The membership process was fully completed this week.

The Indian government had applied for EBRD membership in December 2017. Though now, India has become a shareholder of the EBRD, it will not be a recipient of the bank's financing.

16. Project Sashakt: Sunil Mehta Committee's 5-pronged strategy to tackle NPAs approved

Union Finance Minister Piyush Goyal on July 2, 2018 approved the Sunil Mehta Committee's suggestions of a 5-pronged strategy to tackle the Non-Performing Assets (NPA).

The committee led by Punjab National Bank Chairman Sunil Mehta has submitted its draft report titled 'Sashakt' to the Finance Ministry with a strategy to tackle stress in the banking sector. However, there is no proposal or recommendation to create a bad bank. The 'Sashakt' Report highlights nine guiding principles aimed at the operational turnaround of the banking sector in a manner that will create jobs and enhance the value of public sector banks.

17. Explained: One year of GST: Achievements and Challenges

India on July 1, 2018 observed the 1st Goods and Services Tax (GST) Day to commemorate the first year of the unprecedented reform of Indian taxation.

The celebrations were presided by the Union Minister for Railways, Coal and Finance Piyush Goyal as the Chief Guest and Minister of State for Finance Shiv Pratap Shukla was the Guest of Honour.

Earlier on June 30, 2018, the Union Finance Ministry announced to observe July 1, 2018 as the 'GST Day'. The GST is a single indirect tax that subsumes most of the Central and State taxes such as the Value Added Tax (VAT), excise duty, service tax, central sales tax, additional customs duty and special additional duty of customs.

18. Samsung opens world's largest mobile factory in India

Samsung has opened the world's largest mobile factory in Noida, India. The factory will be officially inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting South Korean President Moon Jae-in on July 9, 2018.

The Electronics facility will be inaugurated on a factory plot measuring 35-acre at Sector 81 in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. The factory inauguration marks the first-ever state visit of South Korean President Moon Jae-in. The South Korean President will be accompanied by first lady Kim Jung-sook, senior cabinet members, officials as well as industry captains.

19. CJI is Master of Roster, has authority to allocate cases: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court on July 5, 2018 ruled that the Chief Justice of India is the 'Master of Roster' who has the authority to decide on allocation of cases.

The ruling was given by a bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices AM Khanwilkar and DY Chandrachud.

The Bench heard the petition despite two separate judgments by the Supreme Court in November 2017 and April 2018, upholding the CJI's complete administrative authority to allocate cases and constitute Benches. Both these judgments were pronounced by Benches led by CJI Dipak Misra.

20. Language Census 2011: Surge in Hindi and English speakers; Tribal language speakers decline

The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India on June 26, 2018 released the 2011 Census data on Language and Mother Tongue. The Language Census 2011 represents an updated linguistic scenario.

As per the 2011 Census data, there is a rise in number of Hindi speakers, however, speakers of South Indian languages and Urdu dropped down.

The census data reveals that 43.63 percent of Indians speak Hindi as their mother tongue. Bengali, with 8.03 percent speakers, is second in the list, followed by Marathi at 3rd with 6.86 percent speakers, Telugu at 4th with 6.7 percent speakers and Tamil at 5th with 5.7 percent speakers.