

24.11.17**1. MORE SEATS FOR SIKKIM ASSEMBLY**

The Home Ministry has proposed an increase in the number of seats in the Sikkim Assembly from 32 to 40. The expansion will be the first since the State merged with India in 1975.

- ✚ The seats are being increased to accommodate people from the Limboo and Tamang communities, notified as the Scheduled Tribes .Of the eight seats proposed to be increased; five will be reserved for Limboo and Tamangs. Now, Sikkim has 12 seats reserved for Bhutias and Lepchas, two for the Scheduled Castes, one seat for the Sanghas and 17 general seats. As per constitutional provisions, the total number of seats for STs should be in proportion to the population.
- ✚ The seats for Bhutia and Lepchas are reserved not on the basis of them being a Scheduled Tribe, but as a sequel to a political agreement in 1973 between the Government of India, ex-Chogyal (King) of Sikkim and political parties.
- ✚ A petition was moved in the Supreme Court that Limboo and Tamangs were not adequately represented in the Assembly and the apex court on January 4, 2016 directed the Home Ministry to take necessary action, a proposal has been sent to the Ministry of Law and Justice to amend the Representation of the People Act (RPA) for the purpose. As per the Delimitation Act, 2002, the number of seats in an Assembly of any State can only be readjusted on the basis of the first census conducted after 2026.
- ✚ The Law ministry also said that the final order made by the Delimitation Commission could not have been challenged by any court but the special constitutional provision to Sikkim allows them to make the changes.

2. NEELAKURINJI RESERVE SET TO BE REDRAWN

The Kerala government has decided to redraw the boundaries of the **Neelakurinji reserve** in Munnar factoring in the presence of habitations, various institutions, and places of worship in the area.

A high-level meeting convened by Chief Minister decided to go in for urgent measures to rework the boundaries of the area to be reserved for Neelakurinji, which has a **12-year flowering cycle**.

3. CAN A HEALTHY DIET KEEP TUBERCULOSIS AT BAY?

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) will monitor 2000 TB patients in Jharkhand and additionally ensure that they are well fed to determine the extent to which a good diet can influence tuberculosis treatment.

- ✚ While the link between a healthy diet and effectiveness of drugs used to treat TB may appear obvious, previous attempts at supplementing patients' diets with micronutrients alone have not led to significant health improvements. Given the infectious nature of tuberculosis, the study is also designed to test if — beyond the patients under scrutiny — the villages where they reside also show a decline in disease incidence.
- ✚ The outcomes of the study, which is expected to last over a year, will influence an ongoing government proposal to provide cash assistance to tuberculosis patients to help them with adequate nutrition.

4.INDIA TO HELP MAURITIUS ON DIGITAL LOCKER

The Government of India will assist Mauritius to develop and set up digital locker services.

The government will offer technical support and advisory services to Mauritius.

5. BAMBOO CEASES TO BE A TREE, FREED OF FOREST ACT

After 90 years, the bamboo has legally ceased to be a tree with the government, amending the Indian Forest Act and axing the bamboo — taxonomically a grass — from a list of plants that also included palms, brush-wood and canes.

- ✚ In doing so the government hoped to promote cultivation of bamboo in non-forest areas to achieve the “twin objectives” of increasing the income of farmers and also increasing the green cover of the country. Bamboo grown in the forest areas would continue to be governed by the provisions of the Indian Forest Act.
- ✚ For several years now, the classification of the bamboo — with its multifarious uses as an edible item, furniture and construction — as a tree meant that it couldn’t be easily ferried across State borders. It also required permits from village councils and couldn’t be cultivated in non-forest areas.
- ✚ The current demand of bamboo in India is estimated at 28 million tonnes. Though the country has 19% share of the world’s area under bamboo cultivation, its market share in the sector is only 6%. At present, it imports timber and allied products, such as pulp, paper, and furniture. The amendment will help in addressing some of these issues, besides meeting the demand from domestic production.
- ✚ The amendment was cleared as an ordinance and is therefore yet to get parliamentary backing. However experts welcomed it saying that it removed ambiguity on the status of bamboo and also brought it in harmony with the related Forest Rights Act.

6. BC PANEL BILL TO RETURN TO HOUSE

The Union government will reintroduce the Constitution (123rd) Amendment Bill, 2017, in the winter session of Parliament, which seeks to accord constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).

- ✚ The decision comes after Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha managed to clear amendments to the Bill, making that version different from the one cleared by the Lok Sabha in the monsoon session.
- ✚ The reintroduction of the Bill is significant not just because it will give constitutional status to the NCBC. The President may specify the socially and educationally backward classes in the various States and Union Territories, in consultation with the Governors, and a law of Parliament will be required for amending the list of backward classes.

7. IS PROPAGANDA MEDIA GOES OFFLINE FOR A DAY

The Islamic State's online propaganda channels went mysteriously quiet for more than a full day. IS, which uses messaging application Telegram to broadcast daily updates on military operations and claims of attacks, published nothing for a day.

IS's Telegram channels usually post more than a dozen messages each day, ranging from multilingual radio broadcasts on battlefield achievements to pictures of civilian life in the group's self-styled "caliphate."

8. PSU OIL M&AS EXEMPT FROM CCI NOD

Combinations including mergers, acquisitions and amalgamations involving Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) operating in the **oil and gas sector**, have been exempted from seeking the nod of the Competition Commission of India (**CCI**) for five years from now.

9. SC DUMPS PMLA CLAUSE DENYING BAIL

The Supreme Court struck down a provision which can deny a person bail even if there is reasonable ground to believe that he or she did not commit the offence of money laundering.

- ✚ Noting that the history of bail practices traces back to the Magna Carta, the apex court declared Section 45(1) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) of 2002 violative of the fundamental rights to equality, life and personal liberty guaranteed under the Constitution.
- ✚ A Bench passed a general direction to courts to take up thousands of cases of under trials who have been languishing in prisons, unable to get bail, because they did not satisfy the twin conditions under Section 45(1) of the PMLA.
- ✚ Under Section 45(1), the accused is worthy of bail only if the prosecutor is allowed a chance to oppose it. Secondly, the court should reasonably believe that he is not guilty of the “predicate” offence for which he received the laundered money as proceeds of the crime.
- ✚ Predicate offences include a range of crimes from 26 different laws from waging war against the Government of India to offences under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, the Indian Penal Code to Wildlife Protection Act, Prevention of Corruption Act, child labour law, etc.

10. ROHINGYA REPATRIATION DEAL SIGNED

Bangladesh and Myanmar have signed a memorandum of understanding on the return of Rohingya people who fled the Rakhine state in the wake of a military crackdown.

- ✚ Under the deal, the repatriation process is expected to begin in two months.
- ✚ The two countries agreed to form a joint working group at the Foreign Secretary-level to start the repatriation process.

11. PRESIDENT SIGNS BANKRUPTCY ORDINANCE

President gave his assent to the ordinance approved by the Union Cabinet to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) to strengthen the regime.

- ✚ The ordinance aims at putting in place safeguards by prohibiting wilful defaulters, those associated with non-performing assets (NPAs), and the habitually non-compliant, from regaining control of the defaulting company or stressed assets through the back door in the garb of being a 'resolution applicant'. The amendments provide for fine ranging from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2 crore for those violating these norms.
- ✚ A new section has been introduced in the IBC that makes certain persons ineligible to be a 'resolution applicant'. Those being made ineligible include wilful defaulters, those who have their accounts classified as NPAs for one year or more and are unable to settle their overdue amounts including interest thereon.
- ✚ The ineligible persons also include those who have executed an enforceable guarantee in favour of a creditor, in respect of a corporate debtor undergoing a Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process or liquidation process under the IBC.
- ✚ Also ineligible are those who are promoters or in management of control of the resolution applicant, or will be promoters or in management of control of corporate debtor during the implementation of the resolution plan, the holding company, subsidiary company, associate company or related party of the above referred persons.
- ✚ The ordinance aims at putting in place safeguards to prevent unscrupulous, undesirable persons from misusing the IBC.. Actions against defaulting companies to prevent misuse of corporate structures for diversion of funds, as well as weeding out of unscrupulous elements from the resolution process would help strengthen the formal economy and encourage honest businesses and budding entrepreneurs to work in a trustworthy, predictable regulatory environment.

✚ In addition to putting in place restrictions for such persons to participate in the resolution or liquidation process, the amendment also provides such check by specifying that the Committee of Creditors (CoC) should ensure the viability and feasibility of the resolution plan before approving it. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has also been given additional powers.

12. RBI RELAXES 26% CAP FOR ARCS

In a major boost to asset reconstruction companies (ARCs), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has relaxed norms capping their shareholdings at 26% in the borrower firm under reconstruction, provided their net-owned funds are maintained at Rs.100 crore, but the regulator did not specify the new sharing limit post-debt conversion.

13. CENTRE SETS FLOOR PRICE FOR EXPORT OF ONIONS

The Centre imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of \$850 per metric tonne on onion till the end of 2017, in a bid to boost domestic supplies and prevent an increase in the price of the widely used vegetable.

MEP is the minimum rate below which export of an item is not permitted.