

The Hindu

City

Plastic ban violators to face penalties, jail term: Gopal Rai (Page no. 2)

(GS Paper 3, Environmental Pollution)

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Friday said violating the ban on single-use plastic (SUP) items in the city will result in a jail term of up to five years or a fine of up to ₹1 lakh, or both, under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Mr. Rai added that warning notices will be issued to violators till July 10, after which, action will be taken against repeat offenders. A total of 19 SUP items — including plastic cups, cutlery, straws and plates, among other things — have been identified as part of the ban that came into effect on Friday.

Speaking at a three-day fair to promote alternatives to SUP items, Mr. Rai said the government's primary focus was to create awareness against the use of the banned items and to promote alternatives that people can use.

In August, last year, the Union Environment Ministry had issued the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, which prohibits the identified SUP commodities.

On one side we will have awareness programmes, while the enforcement programme will run simultaneously. However, our top priority lies at creating awareness and promoting alternatives.

To ensure effective enforcement of the ban, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has formed 15 teams and the Revenue Department has formed 33 teams.

A senior official at the Municipal Corporation of Delhi said the civic body has constituted a total of 125 teams to monitor and take action against violators in areas under its jurisdiction.

Editorial

Reset mode (Page no. 6)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council met over two days this week — its first 'regular' meeting after a nine-month break — with much on its plate, stemming from four ministerial groups' recommendations to fix various aspects of the indirect tax regime that remains a work in progress five years on.

It ratified three of the four reports, put off one for further deliberations based on concerns flagged by a State, with a commitment to reassemble and resolve the impasse holistically in little over a month.

A new ministerial panel is being tasked with figuring out the long-pending constitution of an appellate tribunal for GST disputes, to move ahead. Based on an 'interim' report of a panel to rationalise tax rates, exemptions have been scrapped on several items and rates altered for others to correct inverted duty structures.

This may translate into higher prices on many goods and services (and reductions for a few) from July 18, although their impact on inflation is difficult to ascertain.

However, a larger restructuring of the GST's multiple rates' structure, with an increase in levies to bolster revenues that have fallen short of expectations, partly due to rate cuts earlier effected as electoral tools, has been put off. With inflation expected to remain buoyant, that exercise may have to wait longer.

Apart from the fine print of the Council's decisions, which include tighter norms on the horizon for registering new firms and closing of tax evasion loopholes, there is a more critical takeaway.

That the deliberations were constructive and not combative, especially amid the brewing trust deficit between the Centre and States in the past few meetings and the prolonged pause since it last met, bodes well for the necessary next steps to make GST deliver on its original hopes.

News

Sedition law should go: Sinha (Page no. 9)

(GS Paper 3, Polity and Governance)

Opposition Presidential candidate Yashwant Sinha on Friday batted for repealing the colonial-era sedition law. Mr. Sinha, who was in the Chhattisgarh capital to campaign for the July 18 election, said that such a law had no place in the country.

To a question on the misuse of Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code [that defines sedition as bringing or attempting to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government and criminalises it, even attracting a life imprisonment for the violation it should go.

124A should go and I believe that most people would agree with me that it should no longer be a part of our legal system.

This is a colonial-era law that should be repealed. However, a President can only advise the government and can't repeal the law himself/herself.

There have been several instances of the alleged misuse of the said law. Successive governments in Chhattisgarh, irrespective of the political party in power, have faced allegations of slapping the law indiscriminately even for minor violations or any criticism of the government or its policies.

Among the more recent case is of Rajnandgaon resident Mangilal Agrawal, who was booked under IPC 124A in 2019 for a Facebook post criticising the State government for power cuts and that it was being done to push inverter sales.

Nearly a year before that, when the BJP was in power, Bastar-based journalist Kamal Shukla was booked under the same law for sharing a cartoon pertaining to the controversial death of CBI judge B.H. Loya on social media.

DRDO carries out test flight of autonomous UA (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 3, Defence)

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Friday successfully carried out the maiden test flight of a new Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), an autonomous Flying Wing Technology Demonstrator, from the Aeronautical Test Range, Chitradurga, Karnataka.

Operating in a fully autonomous mode, the aircraft exhibited a perfect flight, including take-off, way point navigation and a smooth touchdown.

This flight marks a major milestone in terms of proving critical technologies towards the development of future unmanned aircraft and is significant step towards self-reliance in such strategic defence technologies.

It is a reduced sized autonomous aircraft and is proving various technologies for autonomous aircraft to be built in future, a DRDO official explained.

The Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) is powered by a small turbofan engine. The airframe, undercarriage and entire flight control and avionics systems used for the aircraft were developed indigenously. The engine is Russian TRDD-50MT originally designed for cruise missiles.

Army to buy 800 combat vehicles (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 3, Defence)

The Army has initiated the process for the procurement of approximately 800 Light Armoured Multipurpose Vehicle (LAMV) for its mechanised infantry and armoured corps by issuing the Request For Information (RFI).

The LAMV will be employed by reconnaissance (Recce) and surveillance platoons of Mechanised Infantry and Recce Troops of Armoured Corps for recce and surveillance tasks.

Hence, the proposed LAMV must possess adequate mobility and provide protection for troops on board. In addition, it should be able to carry the battle loads to include weapons, ammunition, surveillance and communication equipment required to carry out mandated operational tasks.

The RFI is being issued with a view to finalise Services Qualitative Requirements (SQRs), decide procurement category and identify probable Indian vendors who are capable to undertake the said project and deliver the said LAMVs within a period of 36 months from date of award of contract at the rate of 300 LAMV per year.

LAMV will be employed for on road and cross country movement in the plain and desert terrain along the Western borders and in high altitude, up to 5,000 metres altitude, mountainous terrain including snow bound areas as occurring along Northern borders, including eastern Ladakh and North Sikkim, it stated.

Lakhs throng Puri for Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath (Page no. 10) (GS Paper 1, Art & Culture)

Lakhs of devotees thronged the coastal town of Puri town to witness the annual Rath Yatra with three decorated chariots of sibling deities Lord Balabhadra, Lord Jagannath and Devi Subhadra towed in front of the 12th century Shree Jagannath Temple.

For the first time in two years, devotees turned up for Rath Yatra at Puri as COVID-19 scare had forced the State government to organise the annual festival restricting participation below 500 people including priests in 2020 and 2021.

As not all devotees can enter the temple on normal days, three deities, it is said, are taken out once in a year to give darshan to all.

Ministry of Railways had announced that it will run over 200 special trains during the yatra for smooth travel and convenience of the pilgrims.

Business

Govt. hikes duty on gold to cushion rupee (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

In a bid to curb a surge in gold imports and check windfall profits being made by crude petroleum producers, the Government has raised the import duty on the yellow metal from 10.75% to 15% and levied fresh taxes on the export of petrol, fuel and ATF as well as the domestic sale of crude oil.

The higher gold import levies are expected to rein in India's rising current account deficit and ease the pressure on the Rupee.

As much as 107 tonnes of gold was imported in May and imports have been 'significant' in June as well, the Ministry said, stressing that the surge in gold imports is putting pressure on India's current account deficit.

As per foreign trade data, India's gold imports had shot up over 789% in May 2022 to cross \$6 billion, compared to \$677.7 million in May 2021.

A cess of ₹23,250 per tonne of petroleum crude has been levied in the face of the elevated global prices that were leading to windfall profits for domestic oil producers who sell their output at international parity prices even to domestic refineries.

This cess will not apply on imported crude and will have no adverse impact on domestic fuel prices.

A Special additional excise duty or Cess has also been imposed on exports of petroleum products at the rate of ₹6 per litre on Petrol and Aviation Turbine Fuel, and ₹13 per litre on diesel, as exports have become more attractive for more domestic refineries.

Exporters would now also be required to declare at the time of exports that 50% of the outbound quantity of fuel has been or will be supplied in the domestic market during the current financial year. "These measures will ensure domestic availability of the petroleum products," the Finance Ministry said.

PMI hints manufacturing slowed to a 9- month low (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

Price pressures dampened growth in India's manufacturing sector to the slowest pace in nine months, with the survey-based Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) sliding to 53.9 in June, from 54.6 in May. Worries about inflation also dragged business confidence sentiment down to a 27-month. "Factory orders and production rose for the twelfth straight month... but in both cases the rates of expansion eased to nine-month lows," S&P Global said in a note.

A reading of 50 on the PMI indicates no change in the level of activity from the previous month.

New export orders rose for the third successive month in June and employment rose for the fourth successive month, albeit at a slight pace.

While stronger client demand sustained order books, growth was curbed by acute inflationary pressures as per respondents' inputs in the PMI survey.

The manufacturing sector displayed encouraging resilience on the face of acute price pressures, rising interest rates, rupee depreciation and a challenging geopolitical landscape, said Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at S&P Global Market Intelligence Unit.

Govt. recasts Banks Board Bureau to FSIB (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

The government has transformed Banks Board Bureau (BBB), the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, into Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) by making some amendments.

Guidelines for selection of general managers and directors of public sector general insurance companies have been made part of FSIB, sources said.

The amendments were required as the Delhi High Court in its order last year said the BBB is not a competent body to select the general managers and directors of state-owned general insurers.

Subsequently, at least half a dozen newly-appointed directors of non-life insurers had to vacate their positions, sources said.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has asked the Department of Financial Services to carry out necessary modifications in the Nationalized Banks (Management and Miscellaneous Provisions) Scheme of 1970/1980 with the approval of Finance Minister, and then notify the government resolution for establishing FSIB as a single entity for making recommendations for appointments of whole time directors and non-executive chairman of banks and financial institutions.