

# Brain Tree

## Current Events



**01<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> January - 2019**

1. The President has given his assent to the **103<sup>rd</sup> constitution amendment Act**, which provides 10% reservation for economically backward sections.

The criteria to be eligible for the reservation are

- Annual income below 8lakh
- Agricultural land less than 5 Hectares
- Residential property less than 1000 sq. ft
- Residential plot less than 109 yards in notified municipality and 209 yards in non-notified municipality

The bill amended **Article 15** and **Article 16** of the constitution. Articles 15(3) and 15(4) are the foundation for reservations in education and employment in the country. Article 15(3) empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children; Article 15(4) empowers the state to make special provisions for advancement of socially and educationally backwards, and SC/STs. Article 16(4) provides “for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens. It also makes a note of the Article 46, which asks the government to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society.

The major hurdle for the implementation of the recent Act is the legal scrutiny. The Supreme Court has ruled multiple times against exceeding its 1992 formula of a maximum of 50 per cent reservation (Indira Sawhney v. Union of India (Mandal Commission) Case). Further it had held that economic criterion may be a consideration or basis along with, and in addition to, social backwardness, but it can never be the sole criterion.

### **Constitutional Amendment**

Part XX of the Constitution deals with amendment. Under **Article 368(2)**, Parliament can amend the Constitution by passing a Bill in “each House by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting”. Thereafter, the Bill is presented to the President.

However, if the amendment seeks to make a change in certain specific provisions, including Articles 54, 55, 73, Chapter IV of Part V, Chapter V of Part VI, or Chapter I of Part XI, or any of the Lists in the Seventh Schedule, or the representation of States in Parliament, etc., the amendment has to be ratified by the Legislatures of not less than one-half of the States.

However, Parliament cannot amend those provisions which form the “basic structure of the Constitution”, according to the Supreme Court ruling in the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati case.

2. Lok Sabha passes **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill**

The bill seeks to provide citizenship to six communities — Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

However, Assam and other northeastern States fear that it would pave the way for granting citizenship mostly to illegal Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, who came after

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March 1971. Nearly 40 lakh people were excluded from the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam that was published on July 30 last year. The new Bill seeks to negate the NRC (a process that is the fallout of the Assam Accord), as it would grant citizenship to all Hindus who came to Assam from Bangladesh even after the NRC cut off date of March 1971.

According to the Citizenship Act (1955), an illegal immigrant is defined as a person who enters India without a valid passport or stays in the country after the expiry of the visa permit. Also, the immigrant who uses false documents for the immigration process. The Citizenship Act, 1995 prescribes five ways of acquiring citizenship 1) Birth 2) Descent 3) Registration 4) Naturalization 5) Incorporation of the territory.

### 3. The Lok Sabha has passed the **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill**

It proposes to establish an international arbitration centre at New Delhi, replacing the International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution set-up in the year 1995, which is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act. The proposed New Delhi International Arbitration Centre will be a **statutory body**, consisting of a Chairperson, two eminent persons having substantial knowledge in international and domestic arbitration, one representative of a recognized body of commerce, Secretary to the Ministry of Law & Justice, Finance Advisor and a Chief Executive Officer. The Chairperson should have been a judge of the Supreme Court or High Court, or an eminent person having special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration, appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India. The two eminent persons and the representative of commerce body are to be appointed by the Central Government.

The objects of the Centre are—

- to bring targeted reforms to develop itself as a flagship institution for conducting international and domestic arbitration;
- to promote research and study, providing teaching and training, and organising conferences and seminars in arbitration, conciliation, mediation and other alternative dispute resolution matters;
- to provide facilities and administrative assistance for conciliation, mediation and arbitral proceedings; to maintain panels of accredited arbitrators, conciliators and mediators both at national and international level or specialists such as surveyors and investigators;
- to collaborate with other national and international institutions and organisations for ensuring credibility of the Centre as a specialised institution in arbitration and conciliation; to set-up facilities in India and abroad to promote the activities of the Centre;
- to lay down parameters for different modes of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms being adopted by the Centre

4. The **Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018** has been passed by the Lok Sabha.

The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018 seeks to amend the Aadhaar **(Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002.**

The Supreme Court had struck down Section 57 and Section 33(2) of the Aadhaar Act 2016 citing privacy concerns.

The amendment bill makes it clear that an individual unwilling to share Aadhaar information cannot be denied services, such as opening a bank account or obtaining a mobile phone SIM card. An individual can submit other government documents like Passport, Voter ID, PAN Card or driving licence for authentication.

The amendment bill also proposes to penalise third-party firms for violating Aadhaar authentication rules. A civil penalty of up to Rs 1 crore can be imposed on entities that violate provisions related to authenticating customers using Aadhaar without consent. If non-compliance continues after the initial penalty, a fine of Rs 10 lakh can be charged per day from a company.

5. The Lok Sabha has passed the **Personal Laws (Amendment Bill), 2018**

Personal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018, seeks **to end the discrimination against leprosy** persons in various central laws such as the Divorce Act, 1869; the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939; the Special Marriage Act, 1954 etc. The amendments introduced in the Bill omit the provisions which stigmatise and discriminate against leprosy-affected persons.

The Bill is meant to provide for the integration of leprosy patients into the mainstream. It is in line with the **UN General Assembly Resolution of 2010 on the 'Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members'**.

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by **Mycobacterium leprae**. The disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes. Leprosy is known to occur at all ages ranging from early infancy to very old age. Leprosy is curable and early treatment averts most disabilities. The exact mechanism of transmission of leprosy is not known.

Leprosy is curable with a combination of drugs known as multidrug therapy (MDT) WHO recommends a combination of rifampicin, clofazimine and dapsone.

6. The Lok Sabha has passed the **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018**

The main objective behind the enactment of the bill is **to expand the application of DNA-based forensic technologies** to support and strengthen the justice delivery system of the country.

As per the Bill, national and regional **DNA data banks** will be set up for maintaining a national database for identification of victims, suspects in cases, undertrials, missing

persons and unidentified human remains.

The bill states that those leaking the DNA profile information to people or entities who are not entitled to have it, will be punished with a jail term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs. 1 lakh. Similar, punishment has also been provided for those who seek the information on DNA profiles illegally.

The bill's provisions will enable the cross-matching between persons who have been reported missing on the one hand and unidentified dead bodies found in various parts of the country on the other, and also for establishing the identity of victims in mass disasters.

The Bill plans to establish a **DNA Regulatory Board** to accredit the DNA laboratories that analyse DNA samples to establish the identity of an individual.

7. The Indian Parliament has passed the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2018** that seeks to do away with the no-detention policy in schools.

The Bill seeks to amend the Right to Education (RTE) Act to **abolish the “no-detention” policy in schools**. Under the current provisions of the Act, no student can be detained up to class VIII. This provision of no-detention was created because examinations are often used for eliminating children who obtain poor marks, which compels children either to repeat the same grade or leave the school altogether. It was felt that compelling a child to repeat a class is both de-motivating and discouraging.

However in recent years many states have asked that the provision be removed. This Bill has been analyzed by a Parliamentary standing committee, which also recommended bringing back the concept of detention in schools. As per the amendment, it would be left to the states to decide whether to continue the no-detention policy.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (the Act) provides for free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years.

8. The Indian Parliament passed the **National Council for Teacher Education (Amendment) Bill, 2018**,

The bill aims to grant **retrospective recognition** to Central and State institutions which had conducted teacher education courses without approval by the Council. This will ensure that the future of about 17 thousand students having degrees from such institutions is secured.

The **National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)** Act, 1993 came into force on 1 July 1995 and is applicable throughout the country, except the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The Act establishes the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). The NCTE plans and co-ordinates the development of the teacher education system throughout the country. It also ensures the maintenance of norms and standards in the teacher education system.

In order to achieve the objectives of the Act, separate provisions have been made in the Act for recognising teacher education courses and to lay down guidelines for compliance by recognised Institutions/Universities.

9. A private bill to make **marital rape a crime** has been introduced in the Lok Sabha

A private bill titled the **Women's Sexual, Reproductive and Menstrual Rights Bill 2018** has been introduced in the Lok Sabha. The bill proposes to make marital rape a crime and gives more decisional autonomy to women in termination of pregnancy.

The bill proposes the deletion of exception 2 to Section 375 of Indian Penal Code, which states that sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not rape. The bill also adds a provision to explanation 2 that "the women's ethnicity, religion, caste, education, profession, clothing preference, entertainment preference, social circle, personal opinion, past sexual conduct or any other related grounds shall not be a reason to presume her consent to the sexual activity.

The bill proposes amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971. The bill proposes renaming of the act to 'Legal Termination of Pregnancy Act'. The bill grants women an absolute right to termination of pregnancy where they may terminate pregnancy merely by request until the 12th week of pregnancy. The bill also grants women the conditional right to terminate their pregnancy until the 20th week.

The bill further proposes an amendment to Right to Education Act to make provision for free distribution of sanitary napkins by schools. It also mandates that all public authorities should ensure the availability of sanitary napkins, free of cost, at offices.

10. **Right to Disconnect Bill 2018**, a Private Member's Bill has been introduced in the Lok Sabha.

The Right to Disconnect Bill aims at reducing stress and ease tension between an employee's personal and professional life. The Bill gives employees the right to not respond to calls or any kind of communications from the employers after office hours. The Bill requires the setting up of an Employee Welfare Authority, which will publish reports related to the impact employees have from prolonged use of digital tools beyond office hours and it will also create a charter defining employee-employer negotiation. According to the Bill, Companies with more than 10 employees would periodically negotiate specific terms with their workers, publish their own charter, and create an Employee Welfare Committee consisting of representatives of the company's workforce.

Countries like France and Germany have already adopted the right to disconnect laws, with the French government setting the example first in 2004, when it clarified that an employee unreachable on a smartphone outside of work hours will not be tagged for misconduct. The European Union had voted in 2015 to regard the time spent in commute (to and from work) as work.

11. President Ram Nath Kovind has nominated Justice AK Sikri as Executive Chairman of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

The **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)** has been constituted under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society and to organize **Lok Adalats** for amicable settlement of disputes. NALSA is located at New Delhi. In every State, State Legal Services Authority has been constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of the NALSA and to give free legal services to

the people and conduct Lok Adalats in the State. The State Legal Services Authority is headed by the Chief Justice of the respective High Court. In every District, District Legal Services Authority has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District. It is headed by the District Judge of the respective district.

**Article 39A** of the Constitution of India provides that State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disability. **Articles 14 and 22(1)** also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before law and a legal system which promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity to all. Legal aid strives to ensure that constitutional pledge is fulfilled in its letter and spirit and equal justice is made available to the poor, downtrodden and weaker sections of the society.

**12. India and Pakistan exchange list of nuclear installations**

The two countries, through diplomatic channels simultaneously at New Delhi and Islamabad, exchanged the list of nuclear installations and facilities covered under the **Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear installations between India and Pakistan.**

The agreement was signed on December 31, 1988. This is the twenty eighth consecutive exchange of such list between the two countries, the first one having taken place on January 1, 1992.

**13. U.S. President Donald J. Trump has signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) into law.**

Though not India Centric, the law recalls, reaffirms and endorses ongoing India-US cooperation under all existing instruments, such as the “New Framework for the United States-India Defense Relationship” of 2005 to the designating of India as a Major Defense Partner by a 2017 law, and calls for the strengthening and broadening of diplomatic, economic, and security ties between the United States and India.

The law also recognises US’s growing engagement with India, Australia and Japan under the framework of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (popularly called the Quad). The law also recognized the importance of cooperation with India in the context of the wider US engagement with ASEAN, along with the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan.

**14. The Government has launched the “Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environmental benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes” in association with Global Environment Facility (GEF).**

The Green-Ag project seeks to integrate biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture. The project aims to catalyze a transformative change of India’s agricultural sector to support the achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.

The project supports harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments to realize the national and global environmental benefits without compromising on India's ability to strengthen rural livelihoods and meet its food and nutrition security.

The project would be implemented in collaboration with the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** in high-conservation-value landscapes of five States namely, (i) Madhya Pradesh: **Chambal Landscape**, (ii) Mizoram: **Dampa Landscape**, (iii) Odisha: **Similipal Landscape**, (iv) Rajasthan: **Desert National Park Landscape** and v) Uttarakhand: **Corbett-Rajaji Landscape**.

15. 106th **Indian Science Congress (ISC)** session is being held at Jalandhar, Punjab with theme "**Future India: Science and Technology**."

Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) is a premier scientific organisation of India with headquarters at Kolkata, West Bengal. The association started in the year 1914 in Kolkata and it meets annually in the first week of January. It has a membership of more than 30,000 scientists. The Association was formed with the following objectives :

- i. To advance and promote the cause of science in India;
- ii. To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India;
- iii. To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable;
- iv. To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science including the rights of disposing of or selling all or any portion of the properties of the Association;
- v. To do and perform any or all other acts, matters and things as are conducive to, or incidental to, or necessary for, the above objects.

16. **Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)** has been released.

The Climate Change Performance Index is **an instrument to enhance transparency in international climate politics**. Its aim is to encourage political and social pressure on those countries which have, up to now, failed to take ambitious actions on climate protection as well as to highlight countries with best-practice climate policies. On the basis of standardized criteria, the index evaluates and compares the climate protection performance of 56 countries and the EU that are, together, responsible for nearly 90 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. 80 percent of the evaluation is based on objective indicators of emissions, renewable energy and energy use. 20 percent of the index results are built upon national and international climate policy assessments by about 300 experts from the respective countries.

Sweden and Morocco were the leading countries, with the latter making significant expansion of renewable energy. Eight of the G20-countries performed very low, the report said, adding that the US and Saudi Arabia were at the bottom of the Climate Change Performance Index 2019.

India ranks 11th in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition. Most notably India improved its performance in the renewable

energy category, joining the group of medium performers. Comparatively low levels of per capita GHG emissions and a relatively ambitious mitigation target for 2030 give India an overall high rating in the emissions category. Global carbon dioxide emissions are rising again but India's ranking has improved by three points, a Germanwatch report said.

17. A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has recommended that the Centre accord statutory status to the Staff Selection Commission (SSC)

The SSC was created to ease the burden of the UPSC by taking over the recruitment for posts below the Group 'A' level. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and all State Public Service Commissions either have constitutional or legal status. Over the years the work load of the commission has increased exponentially, from processing from 9.94 lakh candidates in 2008-09 to over 2 crore in 2016-17. However, it has remained an "attached body" under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), and has to depend entirely on the government for all its needs.

According statutory status to the SSC would contribute to greater functional autonomy, faster decision-making and efficiency in the overall performance of the commission.

18. The United Nations observed the first official **World Braille Day** on 4th January to create awareness about the importance of Braille.

January 4<sup>th</sup> was chosen to honour Louis Braille, who is credited for inventing the Braille script.

Braille, universally accepted system of writing used by and for the visually challenged. Braille characters are embossed in lines on paper and read by passing the fingers lightly over the manuscript.

19. The government has launched a 70 point **Performance Grading Index (PGI)**

The Ministry of **Human Resource Development (HRD)** has introduced a 70-point grading index **to assess the quality of school education** offered by states. The states will be marked out of 1,000 scores on 70 parameters. The 70 indicators will grade state schooling systems on areas like number of existing teacher vacancies, number of direct entry recruitments especially at leadership positions, school infrastructure etc. The index is aimed at helping states understand where they may be lagging behind and prioritise areas for intervention to ensure that the school education system is robust at every level.

20. India has proposed to remove rosewood (*Dalbergia sissoo*) from Appendix II of **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)** of Wild Fauna and Flora

CITES is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

Dalbergia sissoo species is currently part of Appendix II of CITES that has species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival.

The species grows at a very fast rate and has the capacity to become naturalised outside its native range, it is also known to be invasive in some parts of the world. The regulation of trade in the species is necessary to avoid it becoming eligible for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future and the harvest of specimens from the wild is not reducing the wild population to a level at which its survival might be threatened by continued harvesting or other influences.

21. The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions has initiated an inter-ministerial consultation note to rename the Indian Forest Service as **Indian Forest and Tribal Service**.

The proposal has been made according to the recommendations made by the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** in its annual report. The commission highlights the close ties between tribals, the forest and forest ecosystem as a resource base. Further, it argues that merging forest and tribal welfare administration will further the participation of tribals in forest management. Also, the reported stated that renaming will engender greater sensitivity on the forest department's part towards the needs of the tribal communities.

The erstwhile Imperial Forest Service was constituted in 1867 recognising the need to have a premier forest service to manage the varied natural resources of India and to organize the affairs of the Imperial Forest Department. After the subject of Forestry was moved to the "Provincial list" by the Government of India Act, 1935, the recruitment to the Imperial Forest Service was discontinued. In the year 1966, the government of India constituted Indian Forest Service as one of the three All India services under the All India Services Act 1951. The Indian Forest Service was provided with the mandate of implementation of the National Forest Policy which envisages scientific management of forests and sustainable use of forest produce.

22. Sikkim is set to become the first state in India to roll out **Universal Basic Income (UBI)**

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a model for providing all citizens of a country or geographic area with a given sum of money, regardless of their income, resources or employment status. The purpose of the UBI is to prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality among citizens.

Currently the government funds various services and welfare subsidies. A shift to universal basic income would mean moving away from service delivery towards providing people with the money to access those services. And through UBI the government would be able to empower the citizen to choose what is most important to them. However, there are those who argue that UBI would erode the benefits through inflation. Further, there are those who argue that would create a disinvestment to work.

23. The world's largest religious and cultural human congregation, '**Kumbh 2019**' began at Prayagraj (erstwhile Allahabad), Uttar Pradesh on January 15, 2019 and will go on till March 4, 2019.

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The 7-week event began with the holy dip at Sangam, the confluence of three rivers - Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati. Kumbh Mela is held in Allahabad (Prayagraj), Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik in every four years by rotation and is attended by millions of people.

The Mela was included in the list of ("Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO in 2017).

24. The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted a five-year action plan for addressing the problem of drug and substance abuse in the country

The **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)**, 2018 to 2023, aims to employ a multi-pronged strategy to address the issue of drug abuse. It involves **education, de-addiction and rehabilitation** of affected individuals and their families. The key objective of the action plan is to **create awareness** and educate people about the ill-effects of drugs abuse on the individual, family, workplace and the society at large in order to integrate them back into the society.

The plan also includes identification of vulnerable areas based on survey, skill development, vocational training and livelihood support of ex-drug addicts through National Backward Classes Finance and other Development Corporations and continuous research on drug use pattern. The ministry, in collaboration with the **National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC)** under the AIIMS, is also conducting a national survey on the extent and pattern of substance abuse.

25. Women and Child Development Ministry launches '#www: Web Wonder Women' Campaign

The Ministry partnered with the Breakthrough and Twitter India for '#www: Web Wonder Women' campaign. The Campaign aims **to discover and celebrate the exceptional achievements of women**, who have been driving positive agenda of social change through the social media. The Ministry and the Campaign's Partners aim to recognise the strength of Indian women stalwarts from across the globe who have used the power of social media to run positive campaigns to steer a change in society.

26. The Union Cabinet on January 2, 2019 approved the restructuring of existing National Health Agency as "**National Health Authority**" for better implementation of the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)**.

The composition of the new Governing Board is broad based with due representations from the Government, domain experts, etc. The National Health Authority will have full accountability, authority and mandate to implement the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) through an efficient, effective and transparent decision-making process.

27. The first India-Central Asia Dialogue was recently conducted. The five Central Asia nations are Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

The Dialogue was attended by the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan. The Indian side was represented by Union External Affairs Minister.

The Ministers welcomed the participation of Afghanistan as an important land link in the regional cooperation and expressed their support and commitment to peace, security and stability of Afghanistan. The leaders pledged to assist in economic reconstruction of Afghanistan through the implementation of joint infrastructure, transit and transport, energy projects including regional cooperation and investment projects.

They discussed areas of cooperation in promoting mutual trade, attracting investments, innovations and technologies in key spheres of industry, energy, information technologies, pharmaceuticals and agriculture, education and training.

**28. Democracy Index 2018** has been released by The Economist

The Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of world democracy for 165 independent states and two territories. The Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Based on their scores on 60 indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: full democracy; flawed democracy; hybrid regime; and authoritarian regime.

**India** is ranked at **41** – a notch above last year. It is still classified as a **‘flawed democracy’** according to the index. India achieved a score of 7.23 on the index to maintain its position – the same it did last year. This is the lowest ever score attributed to India in the index ever since its publication.

The report defines a flawed democracy as nations that “have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.”

**29.** The government has announced the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**.

This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target. **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** will execute this nation-wide programme in consonance with the section 162 (b) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1986. The plan includes 102 non-attainment cities, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015. Non-attainment cities are those which have been consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These include Delhi, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kolkata, Noida, Muzaffarpur, and Mumbai.

The NCAP plans to achieve a national-level target of 20-30% reduction of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> concentration by between 2017 and 2024. The programme has been launched with an initial budget of Rs. 300 crore for the first two years. As part of the programme, the Centre also plans to scale up the air quality monitoring network across India. At least 4,000 monitors are needed across the country, instead of the existing 101 real-time air quality (AQ) monitors, according to an analysis.

The plan proposes a three-tier system, including real-time physical data collection, data

archiving, and an action trigger system in all 102 cities, besides extensive plantation plans, research on clean-technologies, landscaping of major arterial roads, and stringent industrial standards. It also proposes state-level plans of e-mobility in the two-wheeler sector, rapid augmentation of charging infrastructure, stringent implementation of BS-VI norms, boosting public transportation system, and adoption of third-party audits for polluting industries.

The national plan has proposed setting up an apex committee under environment minister, a steering committee under-secretary (environment) and a monitoring committee under a joint secretary. There would be project monitoring committees at the state-level with scientists and trained personnel.

30. A Committee constituted to review and suggest modifications and changes in the provisions of the Section 126 and other sections of the Representation of Peoples Act 1951 and provisions of Model Code of Conduct has submitted its report. The panel was headed by senior deputy election commissioner Umesh Sinha.

The committee was tasked to study the present provisions of the Section 126 and other related sections of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and identify critical gaps to regulate the violation of the Act, particularly during the prohibitory period of 48 hours before the completion of the polls. It also examined difficulties in regulating new media platforms during multiphase elections when prohibitory period of 48 hours is in force, and studied provisions of **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** related to these issues.

The panel has also suggested that the provision of “election silence” be extended to cover print and social media, internet, cable channels and online version of print media. And that social media agencies be asked to label political advertisements to separate them from other content, and maintain an account of expenditure incurred by political parties and candidates for advertising on their platforms.

#### **DISCLAIMER**

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