

# **NEWS ALERT**

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**COMPILED BY**  
**HEMANT KHARE**



**Indian Institute of Public Administration I.P. Estate, Ring  
Road, New Delhi-110002**

## **LIST OF NEWSPAPERS COVERED**

**BUSINESS LINE**

**DECCAN HERALD**

**ECONOMIC TIMES**

**HINDU**

**HINDUSTAN TIMES**

**INDIAN EXPRESS**

**PIONEER**

**STATESMAN**

**TELEGRAPH**

**TIMES OF INDIA**

**TRIBUNE**



## **CONTENTS**

<b>AADHAAR</b>	<b>6-9</b>
<b>AGRICULTURE</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>BANKING AND FINANCE</b>	<b>13-20</b>
<b>CITIZENSHIP</b>	<b>21-22</b>
<b>CIVIL SERVICE</b>	<b>23-24</b>
<b>CORRUPTION</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>26-27</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>28-31</b>
<b>INFORMATION SERVICES</b>	<b>32-33</b>
<b>INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</b>	<b>34-36</b>
<b>POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT-NAGALAND</b>	<b>37-38</b>

<b>RESEARCH</b>	<b>39-41</b>
<b>RURAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>42-43</b>
<b>SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY</b>	<b>44-47</b>
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b>	<b>48-49</b>
<b>TERRORISM</b>	<b>50-51</b>
<b>URBAN DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>52-53</b>
<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>54-57</b>

# AADHAAR

**PIONEER, JAN 4, 2019**

## **Govt tables bill to allow voluntary use of Aadhaar for SIMs, bank a/c**



The government Wednesday introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha that will allow individuals to voluntarily offer biometric ID Aadhaar as a means of identity verification for obtaining services like opening a bank account and getting a mobile phone connection.

The bill, which seeks to amend three separate laws governing Aadhaar, telecom sector, and banking regulation, also gives a minor an option to opt out of the 12-digit identity scheme on attaining the age of 18 years.

It also provides for stiff penalties for violation of norms set for the use of Aadhaar.

The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill 2018, moved by Law and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad in the Lok Sabha, bans storing of core biometric information as well as Aadhaar number by service providers in cases of individuals who have voluntarily offered the national ID as a means of authentication.

It also makes it clear that anyone not offering Aadhaar cannot be denied any service, be it a bank account or a SIM card.

The bill 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 legislation proposes telecom service providers, apart from using Aadhaar for authentication, can also leverage offline verification, use of passport, or any other officially valid document or modes of identification as notified by the central Government.

The amendments, according to the objects and reasons for the Bill, will "provide for 12-digit Aadhaar number and its alternate numbers to be generated" in a manner so as to conceal the actual Aadhaar number.

It would also "permit the entities performing authentication only when they are compliant with the standards of privacy and security," it said. The Bill also seeks to lay down the procedure for offline verification of an Aadhaar number holder, and confers enhanced regulator-like power



on Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to give directions as it may consider necessary to any entity in the Aadhaar ecosystem.

It says that every requesting entity to whom an authentication request is made, will inform the Aadhaar number holder of alternate and viable means of identification and shall not deny any service to them for refusing to, or being unable to undergo authentication.

Mandatory authentication of an Aadhaar holder for the provision of any service will take place if such authentication is required by a law made by Parliament.

The bill proposes a civil penalty of up to Rs 1 crore on entities that violate the provisions of the Aadhaar Act, with an additional fine of up to Rs 10 lakh per day in case of continuous non-compliance.

Unauthorised use of identity information by a requesting entity or offline verification seeking entity would be punishable with imprisonment of up to three years with a fine that may extend to Rs 10,000 or in case of a company with a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh.

Punishment for unauthorised access to the Central Identities Data Repository as well as data tampering is proposed to be extended to 10 years each from the current three years. The bill also seeks to omit Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act relating to the use of Aadhaar by private entities.

There will be a provision to file an appeal before the TDSAT (Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal), and against the orders of TDSAT an appeal can be made in the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court, in a landmark verdict in September last year, had upheld the constitutional validity of 'Aadhaar' but limited the scope of the controversial biometric identity project, ruling it is not mandatory for bank accounts, mobile connections or school admissions.

Holding there was nothing in the Aadhaar Act that violates right to privacy of an individual, the SC had cleared the use of Aadhaar (world's largest biometric ID programme) for welfare schemes. The court had held that Aadhaar will remain mandatory for filing of Income Tax (IT) returns and allotment of Permanent Account Number (PAN) but struck down Section 57 of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 that permitted private entities like telecom companies or other corporate to avail of the biometric Aadhaar data.

Following this, the Cabinet last month approved amendments to Aadhaar Act, the Indian Telegraph Act and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The bill says that "every Aadhaar number holder to establish his identity, may voluntarily use his Aadhaar number in physical or electronic form by way of authentication or offline verification or in such other form as may be notified..."

It also says offline verification can be performed only with the consent of Aadhaar number holder.

# AGRICULTURE

**HINDU, JAN 6, 2019**

## **Nurturing innovation in the agriculture sector**



As many as 24 teams of entrepreneurs, all in the agriculture start-up space, visited some of the coconut farms in Pollachi recently. They were there to meet the farmers, know first hand the challenges faced by the coconut growers, learn more about the irrigation systems used and see if their innovative solutions can be used in the farms.

After a two-day visit to Coimbatore and Pollachi and gaining better insight into the coconut crop, some of these teams have started

submitting proposals to Marico Innovation Foundation to try out their technologies in the farms.

The visit was organised by the foundation, which is a non-profit organisation of Marico, as part of its “Innovate2Cultivate” programme.

This is a programme that connects start-ups with farmers of specific crops so that innovations are nurtured and taken to the farms.

Priya Kapadia, head of the Marico Innovation Foundation, explains that this is the first sector-specific project of “Innovate2Cultivate” and has the Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship as its knowledge partner.

The foundation invited start-ups to take part by listing out some of the broad challenges faced by the coconut growers and received nearly 100 applications.

Of these, 37 were short-listed as cohort members and all of them are working in the agriculture sector.

### **Working on alternatives**

The start-ups have developed or are working on technologies and solutions such as organic micro nutrients and alternatives to pest management and soil management. But these are for specific crops. “The project gives them an exposure to a new crop, potential customers and business,” she says. Kshitij Thakur, co-founder of Mumbai-based Occipital Tech, was part of the team of entrepreneurs who came to Pollachi.

His company builds grading and sorting solutions for fruits and vegetables. “Grading and sorting is mostly done manually now and is not standardised. We use computer vision. Cameras are placed on the conveyor belts and the software sorts the produce based on shape, colour, and size, according to the requirements of the customer. We are targeting food processing companies and exporters,” he says. Through the visit, he got an exposure to coconut. “Availability of manual labour is becoming scarce. So farmers will need technology. Coconut is grown in the southern States. We have opportunity here. Our product needs some customisation for coconut as it is a different crop. We are working on a proposal,” he says.

Ms. Kapadia says that of the 37 start-ups, teams from 24 came on a visit to Coimbatore and Pollachi. They interacted with experts from NABARD, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, etc., visited farms, and met the farmers. About 16 of these start-ups have innovations that can be immediately experimented in the coconut fields. The rest will have to work on their products to be suitable for the coconut crop. The progressive farmers are using some technologies. So the solutions given to them should be far superior. “We are waiting for proposals from the entrepreneurs. We will take it to the field, do experiments, and research. The whole process can take anywhere from three months to two years. But, we will know the impact in a year. Then we can take the programme to other crops,” she says. The farmers were also happy to meet the entrepreneurs and discuss the challenges.

## **BANKING AND FINANCE**

**PIONEER, JAN 4, 2019**

### **Dena Bank, Vijaya Bank tumble on share-swap ratio announcement**

Shares of Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank on Thursday tumbled up to 20 per cent after the Cabinet approved their amalgamation with Bank of Baroda.

The scrip of Dena Bank plunged 19.78 per cent to settle at Rs 14.40 on BSE.

Vijaya Bank tanked 6.76 per cent to end at Rs 47.60. Intra-day, it tumbled 8.12 per cent to Rs 46.90.

The scrip of Bank of Baroda closed unchanged at Rs 119.40.

“As per January 2 closing price and based on announced swap ratios, Vijaya Bank’s 1,000 shares value stands at Rs 51,050 against which its shareholders have been awarded Bank of Baroda’s shares worth Rs 47,939, translating into a loss of 6 per cent.

“Likewise, in case of Dena Bank, 1,000 shares of the bank, value stands at Rs 17,900, and on swap, they receive BoB’s shares worth Rs 13,118, translating into a loss of 27 per cent,” Elara Securities Research said in a report.

Paving the way for the first ever three-way merger of public sector lenders, the Cabinet Wednesday approved amalgamation of Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank with Bank of Baroda (BoB), a move that would create the country's third largest lender.

The boards of the three banks have also cleared the share-swap ratio for the proposed amalgamation.

As per the Scheme of Amalgamation announced by BoB, shareholders of Vijaya Bank would get 402 equity shares of BoB for every 1,000 shares held in the bank.

In case of Dena Bank, the shareholders would get 110 shares of BoB for every 1,000 shares owned in the bank.

## **PIONEER, JAN 1, 2019**

### **Banks recover Rs 40,400 cr from defaulters: RBI report**

Banks have seen a significant improvement in recovery of stressed assets helped by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and amendments in the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interests (SARFAESI) Act, during FY18, according to the RBI data.

In the fiscal ended March 2018, banks recovered Rs 40,400 crore worth of bad loans as against Rs 38,500 crore recovered in FY17.

The various channels through which lenders recovered their bad loans include the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), SARFAESI Act, debt recovery tribunals (DRTs) and Lok Adalats.

While banks recovered Rs 4,900 crore of bad loans through the IBC, the amount recovered through SARFAESI was Rs 26,500 crore in FY18, the RBI said in its annual report on Trends and Progress of Banking in 2017-18, released to over the weekend.

“Apart from vigorous efforts by banks for speedier recovery, amending the SARFAESI Act to bring in a provision of three months’ imprisonment in case the borrower does not provide asset details and for the lender to get possession of the mortgaged property within 30 days, may have contributed to better recovery,” the report highlighted.

During the year, recovery through Lok Adalats and DRTs declined alongside the number of cases referred, partly indicative of the growing clout of the IBC mechanism for resolution of stressed assets, the monetary authority noted.

The average recovery through IBC is greater than other mechanisms (SARFAESI, DRTs and Lok Adalats) and is also improving gradually, pointing to the need and efficiency of such a channel, the report said.

“Strengthening the infrastructure of the insolvency resolution process, including the proposed increase in the number of benches of the National Company Law Tribunals (NCLTs), should help reduce the overall time currently being taken for resolution under the IBC,” the RBI said.



Besides recovery through various resolution mechanisms, banks are also cleaning up their balance sheets through sale of doubtful/ loss assets to assets reconstruction companies (ARCs) and other banks/NBFCs/financial institutions by taking haircuts, the report said.

During 2017-18, the acquisition cost of ARCs as a proportion to the book value of assets, has gone up, indicating better realisations by banks on sale of stressed assets.

While private sector banks have been most aggressive on asset sales, State-run lenders lagged, mainly owing to large haircuts and various management issues, the report said.

## **Banks get a breather on bad loans**

### **HINDU, JAN 6, 2019**

*RBI's latest financial stability report indicates that Indian banks' bad loan crisis could be peaking out*

In the last five years, investors and depositors in India have become accustomed to banks springing unpleasant surprises on them every time they thought the worst was over on the bad loan crisis.

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) half-yearly Financial Stability Reports, which take stock of the strength and stability of Indian banks,

had turned into chronicles of gloom tracing the steady worsening of the crisis.

But the RBI's latest report for December 2018 breaks away from the trend to offer glimmers of hope to these stakeholders. Here are the takeaways from this report.

## **Dip in proportion**

For the first time since the bad loan saga began to play out six years ago, Indian banks have reported a decline in the proportion of **loans** gone bad for the half-year ended September 2018.

Their aggregate Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) ratio dipped from 11.5% in March 2018 to 10.8% in September 2018. The GNPA ratio captures the proportion of loans in a bank's books on which borrowers haven't repaid dues for more than 90 days. The trend started tamely enough, with banks reporting a GNPA ratio of 3.4% in March 2013. But more skeletons began tumbling out of the closet after RBI initiated an asset quality review of individual banks to ferret out their problematic accounts in March 2015. The GNPA ratio more than doubled over the next three years to peak at 11.5% by March 2018.

Even now, the fact that well over a tenth of all loans given out by Indian banks have gone bad is not cause for cheer. But, for banks and their stakeholders, the recent flattening out of the GNPA ratio is to be welcomed because they can finally have a fix on the size of the problem that they're dealing with, instead of chasing a moving target.

The bulk of bad loans remains concentrated with public sector banks (GNPA ratio of 14.8%), while private sector banks are much better off (3.8%). Of the 55 banks, 23 had ratios below 5% as of September 2018, 10 featured GNPA's in the 5-10% bracket and 21 banks sat on over-the-top GNPA's of 10% to 30%.

## **Better accounting**

If the peaking of GNPA's is good news, even better news is the proportion of restructured advances lurking in bank books falling to 0.5% by September 2018. This shows that most of the doubtful loans in bank books are now accounted for.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the ongoing bad loan saga was that GNPA's officially recognised by the banks were only the tip of the iceberg. In 2013, for every bad loan that banks had recognised as NPA, there was another dicey one hidden from public view because of a cosy arrangement with the borrower to restructure the loan.

In March 2015, while banks reported a GNPA ratio of 4.6%, their restructured advances were far larger at 6.5%. Today, the GNPA ratio is at 10.8%, but restructured loans are down to 0.5%.

Again, it is RBI's asset quality reviews and its February 2018 circular asking banks to wind up all their restructuring schemes that have hastened this recognition.

The total proportion of ‘stressed’ loans on bank books (NPAs plus restructured loans) peaked at 12.3% in September 2016 and has steadily declined to 11.3% now.

## **Pending provisions**

The spring cleaning of banks’ books seems to be almost over when it comes to recognising NPAs. But the pain for investors and depositors will be at an end only when the banks have provided for (set aside their profits) all their irrecoverable loans.

On this score, we are just over the halfway mark. The provision coverage ratio for all banks stood at 52.4% at the end of September 2018.

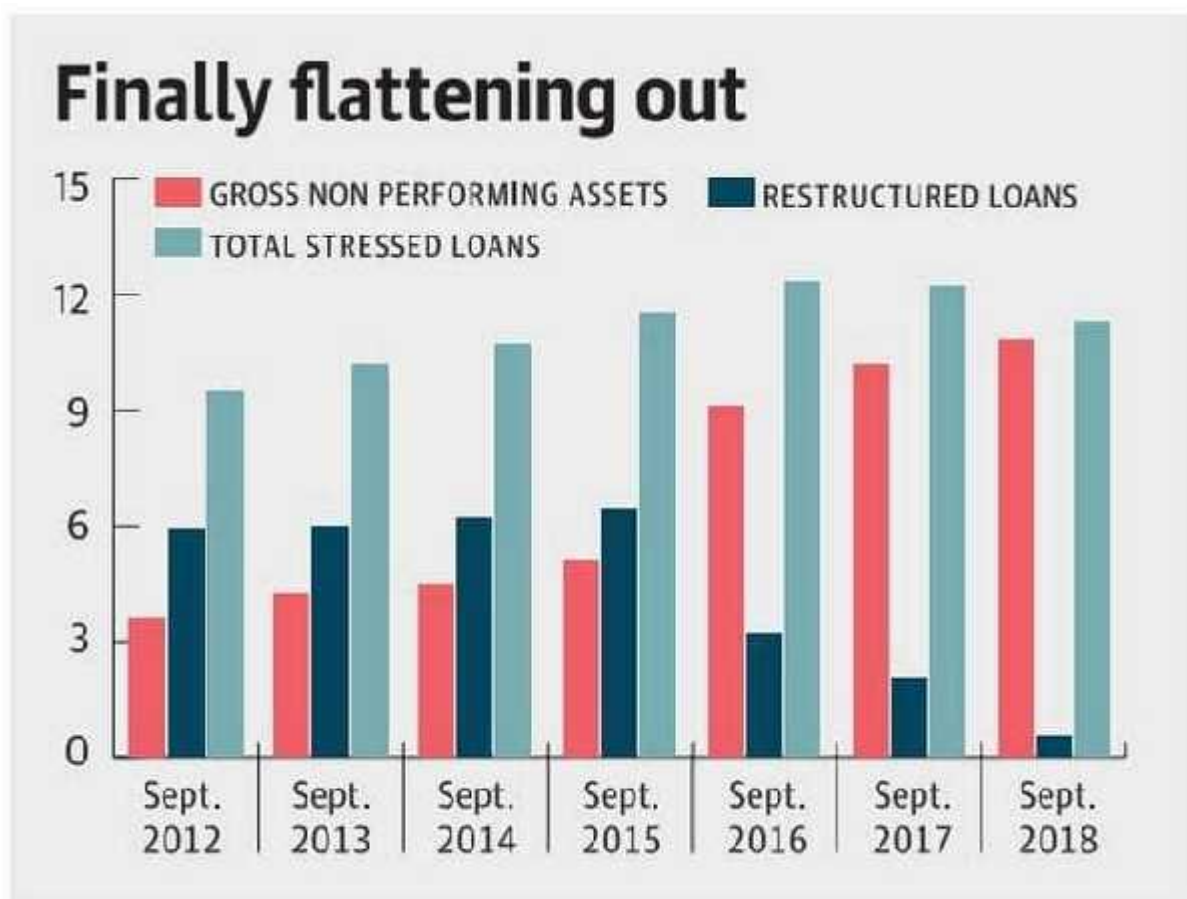
This suggests that the dent to bank profitability from bad loan provisions will continue over the next many quarters. But public sector banks with a provision coverage of 51.4% have much more pain ahead of them, than private sector banks (56.2%) or foreign banks (87.1%).

Rising provisions were the reason why even as their overall bad loan position improved, five banks saw their capital positions dip below RBI-mandated levels of 9% in the half year ended September 2018, compared to just one bank in March.

The average capital adequacy ratio for all banks was at a comfortable 13.4% as of September 2018.

RBI's stress testing shows that 9 of these banks could fall short of the critical 9% mark by March 2019, even with best-case assumptions on GDP growth, deficits, lending rates and inflation.

Therefore, demands from the distressed public sector banks for capital infusions from the government may continue to tax the fisc and taxpayers in the coming quarters.



Source: For scheduled commercial banks as per RBI's Financial stability reports

## CITIZENSHIP

PIONEER, JAN 3, 2019

### **Panel to recommend how to safeguard Assamese identity**

The Centre on Wednesday decided to set up a high-level committee to recommend how to provide constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to the indigenous people of Assam promised in the Assam Accord of 1985, including by reserving seats in the State Assembly.

Detailing the Cabinet decision, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that a decision was also taken to implement the cultural heritage as promised in the Bodo Accord in 2003.

“The committee will hold discussions with all stakeholders and assess the required quantum of reservation of seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly and local bodies for Assamese people,” he said, while addressing the media along with Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba.

The Home Minister said the panel will also assess the requirement of measures to be taken to protect Assamese and other indigenous languages of the state, quantum of reservation in employment under the Government of Assam and other measures to protect, preserve and promote cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people.

“It was a very significant decision for the promotion and protection of cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people,” he said, adding that the terms of reference and composition of the committee will be announced within the next few days.

“The composition and terms of reference of the committee will be issued separately by the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is expected that the setting up of the committee will pave the way for the implementation of the Assam Accord in letter and spirit and will help fulfil the longstanding expectations of the Assamese people,” Singh said.

The Union Cabinet also approved a number of measures to fulfil the outstanding issues related to the Bodo community that include establishment of a Bodo museum-cum-language and cultural study centre, modernisation of existing All India Radio station and Doordarshan kendra at Kokrajhar and naming a superfast train passing through Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts (BTAD) as ARONAI Express. The Home Minister said relevant Central Ministries will take the required actions to implement these decision

# **CIVIL SERVICE**

**HINDU, JAN 7, 2019**

## **MPs' panel proposes legal status for SSC**

*Says its work comparable to UPSC's*

A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has recommended that the Centre accord statutory status to the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), one of the largest recruitment agencies in the country.

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and all State Public Service Commissions either have constitutional or legal status. The SSC is the only such organisation that performs similar functions on a much larger scale, but does not enjoy statutory status.

### **Rising workload**

The SSC was created to ease the burden of the UPSC by taking over the recruitment for posts below the Group 'A' level. There has been a phenomenal increase in the workload of the SSC, from 9.94 lakh candidates in 2008-09 to over 2 crore in 2016-17.

While the workload and responsibilities of the SSC have increased exponentially over the years, 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, with no autonomy.



The Committee, headed by BJP lawmaker Bhupender Yadav, said that according statutory status to the SSC would contribute to greater functional autonomy, faster decision-making and efficiency in the overall performance and delivery of results by the SSC in the recruitment process.

An expert group constituted by the government in 2014, for reviewing the examination system in the SSC, had recommended according statutory status to the Commission.

At present, the SSC has a sanctioned staff strength of 481 officers but is functioning with 75% of its sanctioned strength.

The DoPT further stated that the SSC would be conducting the Common Eligibility Test at three levels — Matriculation, Higher Secondary and Graduation — and would attract around 5 crore candidates, making it the largest examination in the world. The SSC has submitted three proposals to the government for provision of additional manpower. The committee has said that it was imperative for the government to accede to the SSC proposals, taking into consideration the serious mismatch between tasks and resources.

## **CORRUPTION**

PIONEER, JAN 4, 2019

### **IT raids at 28 places in UP**

Sleuths of the Income Tax Department reportedly raided 28 places, including shops, offices and residential premises, including that of the owner of Lucknow's most popular sweet shop.

The raids started on Thursday morning and were continuing at the time of going to the press.

Sources said that on intelligence inputs of tax evasion of several crore rupees, separate teams of the Income Tax Department raided shops, residential premises and establishments of traders at 28 places in Lucknow, Kanpur, Unnao and other places in Uttar Pradesh.

In Lucknow, the IT sleuths raided the shop and residential premises of a famous sweet shop in Sadar Bazaar area.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**PIONEER, JAN 2, 2019**

**Indian economy on track to maintain high growth rate: FinMin**



The Indian economy is projected to be the fastest-growing major economy in the current and upcoming fiscal 2019-20, the finance ministry said Wednesday while emphasising that the government has taken several steps to boost investors' confidence.

According to a recent World Bank report, India has improved its ranking in the Ease of Doing Business to 77th in 2018.

The average growth of the Indian economy between 2014-15 and 2017-18 was 7.3 per cent, fastest among the major economies in the world, the ministry said in Year End Review 2018.

"Indian economy is projected to be the fastest-growing major economy in 2018-19 and 2019-20 (International Monetary Fund October 2018 database). This is borne by GDP growth of 7.6 per cent in the first half of 2018-19," it said.

The Indian economy is on track to maintain a high growth rate in the current global environment, it added.

Highlighting various initiatives taken to improve the confidence and boost the growth of the Indian economy, it said there were measures to boost manufacturing, comprehensive reforms in the foreign direct investment policy, special package for the textile industry, push to infrastructure development by giving infrastructure status to affordable housing and focus on coastal connectivity.

The success of the government policies is further reaffirmed and underscored when the international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF recognise India as the fastest-growing emerging economy in the world and applaud the resilient and stable growth India has witnessed, it said.

On inflation, it said the country witnessed moderation during 2017-18 and this progress is a result of a number of initiatives and reforms undertaken by the government which follows in the subsequent pages.

Consumer Price Index-based headline inflation averaged 3.3 per cent during the period which is the lowest in the last six financial years.

This has been stated in the Economic Survey 2017-18 placed in Parliament by Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Arun Jaitley.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

PIONEER, JAN 5, 2019

### **MPs, MLAs write to PM over MNREGA funds shortage**

Members of Parliament and State Assemblies from Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar besides activists have alleged that fund shortage under MNREGA is causing a grave situation of rural distress in the country. In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, they urged him to renew his Government's political commitment to the rural job flagship scheme.

On Friday, MPs including Karan Singh Yadav, Rajeev Gowda and K Raju, MLAs like Jignesh Mewani and Prithiviraj Chavan and members of the Peoples' Action for Employment Guarantee, NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, Samruddha Bharat Foundation and prominent economists and activists like Jayati Ghosh, Prabhat Patnaik, Aruna Roy and Harsh Mandar shared with media persons their concerns and measures needed for strengthening MGNREGA as a concrete response to the grave situation of rural distress in the country.

They pointed out that as per the Management Information System (MIS), 99 per cent of this year's allocation is already exhausted and no additional funds have been approved. With the lean agricultural season

beginning, demand for work will increase but the programme is starved of funds.

Deepender Singh Hooda, Lok Sabha MP from Haryana, pointed to the severe decline in the scale of work as a consequence of fund shortage while K Raju from the Congress party said that the scheme will be implemented in a mission mode in the States headed by his party. Hooda said, “The decline in MGNREGA work is astronomical. This year, only 26 households got work of 100 days”.

According to the Government’s own estimates, the allocation of MGNREGA as a percentage of GDP has declined from 0.51 per cent in 2010-11 to 0.38 per cent in 2017-18. Rajeev Gowda, Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka dwelled on payment of wages saying that the State government is yet to get the central fund Rs 1,500 crore to be paid to lakhs of workers.

Contrary to the government's claims of more than 90 per cent of wages paid within 15 days, a recent study has found that only 21 per cent of payments in 2016, and 32 per cent of payments in the first half of 2017 were made within 15 days, the members said.

“If there were adequate funds and payments were made on time, lakhs of more workers would demand employment. In fact, FIRs are being filed against us to discourage workers from demanding work under the programme,” alleged Sanjay Sahni, an activist from Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

**PIONEER, JAN 4, 2019**

## **India's services sector activity moderates in Dec; employment rises**

The country's services sector activity slowed slightly in December, as new work orders and business activity moderated from November's recent high, while job creation saw a significant uptick, a monthly survey said Friday.

The seasonally adjusted Nikkei India Services Business Activity Index fell to 53.2 in December, from 53.7 in November, amid softer growth of activity and new business.

Despite easing marginally, the services PMI was in the expansion territory for the seventh straight month. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below that denotes contraction.

"India's service sector continued to enjoy positive levels of activity in December, with new business and employment remaining on an upward path. However, except for jobs, rates of expansion slowed slightly to form a somewhat disappointing end to 2018," said Pollyanna De Lima, Principal Economist at IHS Markit, and author of the report.

The survey further noted that business sentiment rose to a three-month high in December.

Factors like advertising efforts, new service offerings and predictions of an improvement in market conditions after the elections, all boosted business sentiment regarding the 12-month outlook.

"With business sentiment improving for the second successive month, the service sector looks set to sustain growth in 2019 despite predictions of some sluggishness prior to the elections," Lima said.

Meanwhile, the seasonally adjusted Nikkei India Composite PMI Output Index, that maps both the manufacturing as well as services sector activity, was down from a 25-month high of 54.5 in November to 53.6 at December.

On the prices front, cost inflation at services firms softened for the third straight month to the weakest since May 2017.

"Subdued inflationary pressures and cooling economic growth add some support for a rate cut early next year," Lima said.

The next meeting of RBI's Monetary Policy Committee is scheduled between 5th and 7th February.



## INFORMATION SERVICES

HINDU, JAN 7, 2019

**Central Information Commission vacancies: A job ad without pay or tenure information**



*Centre's notice for four vacancies at Information panel.*

The Centre's new advertisement for the remaining four vacancies at the Central Information Commission (CIC) still does not contain details of the tenure and salary of the position.

This is in accordance with the government's plans to amend the RTI Act to give itself the power to set the tenure and salaries of Central and State Information Commissioners, in a move that critics warn will undermine the autonomy of these institutions.

The advertisement issued on Friday by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) simply says, "The salary, allowances and other terms and conditions of service of the Information Commissioner shall be as may be specified at the time of appointment of the selected candidate."

The Centre has previously defended such vague language in a Supreme Court hearing by saying that it planned to amend the RTI Act. Following push-back from Opposition parties and RTI activists, the government withdrew its stated plans to introduce the amendment Bill in Parliament during the monsoon session.

"Which person of eminence will apply for the position without any firm details on the terms of employment," asked National Campaign for People's Right to Information co-convener Anjali Bhardwaj. "Only pliable candidates can be expected to apply," she said. She is a petitioner in a Supreme Court case on vacancies in Central and State Information Commissions. Ms. Bhardwaj noted that despite appointing four new Commissioners and a CIC chief, the DoPT has still not released details on their selection process, despite Supreme Court orders to do so.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

HINDU, JAN 7, 2019

### Data protection law finalised: Ravi Shankar Prasad

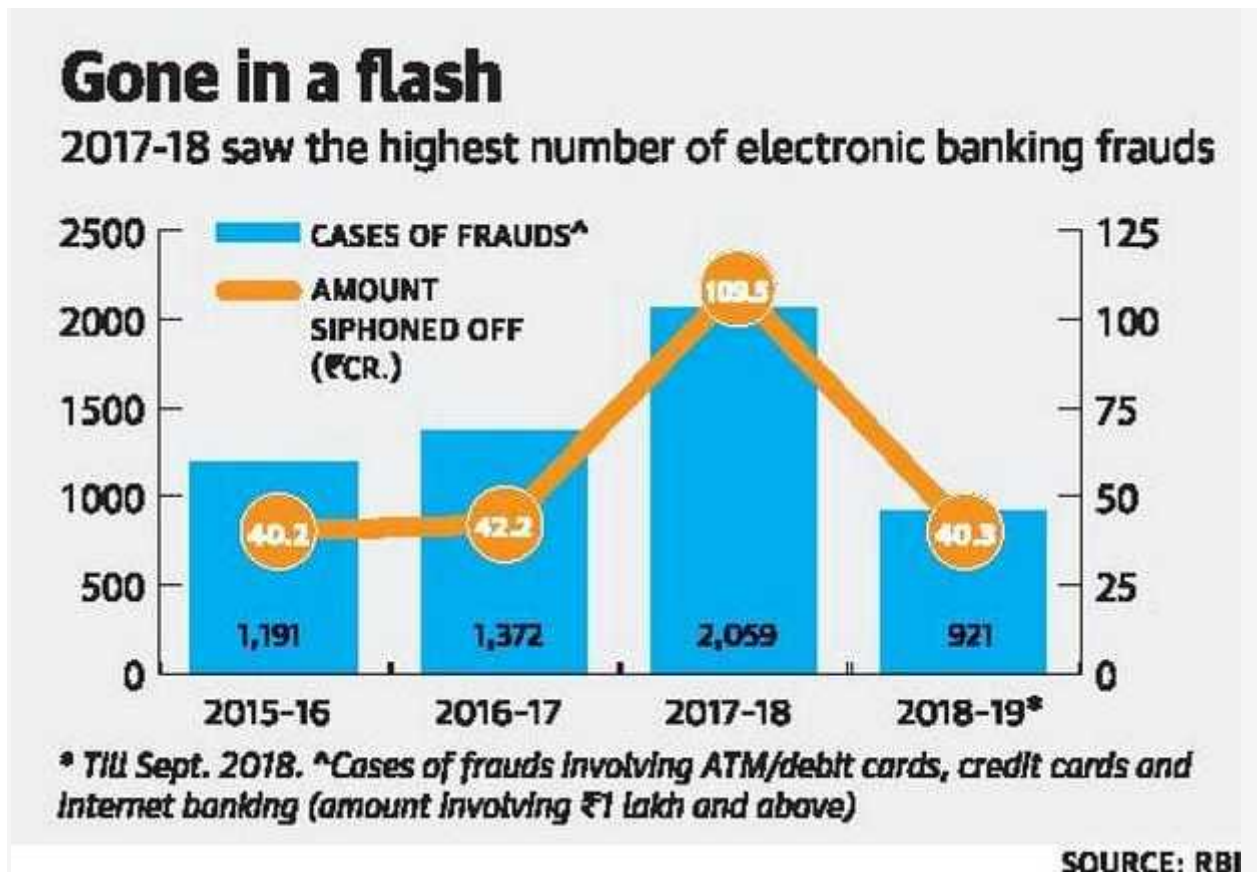


*Government will soon introduce it in Parliament, says Union IT Minister*

Union Minister for Electronics and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad told the Rajya Sabha on Friday that the government had finalised the data protection law and it would soon be introduced in Parliament.

Mr. Prasad said the government was in the process of finalising guidelines for social media intermediaries such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Google and WhatsApp.

The draft bill, which was released last year, had proposed that critical personal data of Indian citizens be processed in centres located within the country. It had also proposed financial penalties for data processor for violations of the data protection law. Likening Google to the East India Company, BJP MP Rakesh Sinha said that companies in the West have collected data related to all aspects of the lives of Indians and this was a step in the direction of “neo-imperialism.”



Responding to this, Mr. Prasad said, “irrespective of how big the company was, if they tried to manipulate the data of Indians, strict action would be initiated.”

While responding to a question on hacking of data, Mr. Prasad said as per the information provided by the Reserve Bank of India, a total of 1191, 1372, 2059 and 921 cases of frauds involving ATM/debit cards, credit cards and Internet banking frauds (amount involving 1 lakh and above) were reported during the years 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 (Up to Sept. 30, 2018) respectively. “In comparison to the number of transactions, the number of fraud or data manipulation was miniscule,” he said.

## **POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT - NAGALAND**

PIONEER, JAN 3, 2019

### **Entire Nagaland declared 'disturbed' for six more months under AFSPA**

The entire State of Nagaland has been declared "disturbed area" for six more months, till June-end, under the controversial AFSPA, which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior notice.

In a notification, the Home Ministry said the Central Government is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole of State of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civilian power is necessary.

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (No. 28 of 1958), the central government hereby declares that whole of the said State to be a 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from 30th December, 2018, for the purpose of that Act," the notification said.

A Home Ministry official said the decision to continue the declaration of Nagaland as "disturbed area" has been taken as killings, loot and extortion have been going on in various parts of the State which

necessitated the action for the convenience of the security forces operating there.

There have been demands from various organisations in the Northeast as well as in Jammu & Kashmir for repealing the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which, they say, gives "sweeping powers" to security forces.

## RESEARCH

PIONEER, JAN 4, 2019

### **PM adds 'Jai Anusandhan' in Jai Jawan slogan**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday may have added Jai Anusandhan (scientific research) to former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's famous slogan of Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan and Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Jai Vigyan at an event at the 106th Indian Science Congress in Jalandhar, but a Parliamentary panel in its report has slammed the government for poor investment in research and development (R&D) sector in the country.

In a report highlighting the functioning of the Department of the Scientific and Industrial Research under the Science and Technology Ministry, the panel headed by Rajya Sabha MP Anand Sharma pointed out that the country's investment in R&D is dismal at 0.6 per cent of GDP, just a fraction when compared to investment made by US (2.8), China (2.1), Israel (4.3), and Korea (4.2) in the sector.

Referring to the Economic Survey 2017-18, the committee said that in most countries, the private sector carries out the bulk of R&D even though the Government play an important role in the area. "However, in India, the Government is not just the primary source of R&D but also



the primary user of the funds, thus Government expenditure on R&D is undertaken almost entirely by the Centre.

"Private investments in research have lagged in India," said the panel. According to an analysis (Forbes, 2017) there are 26 Indian companies in the list of the top 2,500 global R&D spenders compared to 301 Chinese companies.

Nineteen of these 26 firms are in just three sectors: pharmaceuticals, automobiles and software. India has no firms in five of the top ten R&D sectors as compared to China that has a presence in each of them, said the report which was tabled in Parliament recently.

The Committee stressed upon the Central Government to substantially enhance the investment in R&D in the country.

"The Committee feels that Department must evolve some institutional mechanism to involve private companies/ industries for investing towards R&D by providing them some kind of incentives like tax benefits etc," as per the report.

Regarding the functioning of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), it said that the premier research agency has not been able to translate its good work done in the form of research papers into sustainable technologies for use of the masses.

Addressing the 106th Indian Science Congress at Jalandhar, the Prime Minister had said that through science, India was transforming its present and working to secure its future.

He also said the country's strengths in research and development are built on the backbone of its national laboratories, central universities, IIT, Indian Institute of Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research & Indian Institute of Science Education and Research.

However, noting that over 95 per cent of the country's students go to state universities and colleges, he called upon for developing a strong research ecosystem in these institutions.

## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

PIONEER, JAN 7, 2019

### **Rural economy to get a big boost due to elections: Mistry**

Top industrialist Keki Mistry, who has become the first person to hold a board position at listed Indian firms having market value of over Rs 17.5 lakh crore, believes the upcoming national elections would give a big boost to the rural economy.

Mistry, vice chairman and CEO at financial sector conglomerate HDFC Ltd, also said a host of reforms initiated in India over the past decade would lead to positive outcomes over the next years for the economy.

“Historic trends have shown that union elections spur up rural economies and help local entrepreneurs. The upcoming elections are expected to help rural demand,” Mistry told on his expectations about opportunities before the Indian economy in 2019 and beyond.

The general elections are due in the next few months and there have been apprehensions in some quarters that the performance of the Indian economy and the markets may get impacted due to the uncertainties generally associated with the poll season.

Mistry also said the thrust on housing by the government, the demand for housing finance and the visible benefits of reforms, such as those

from the new regulatory regime of RERA (Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act), would be positive for the real estate sector, particularly affordable housing.

Besides HDFC Ltd, 64-year-old Mistry is also on the board of four other group firms — HDFC Bank, HDFC Asset Management Company Ltd, HDFC Standard Life Insurance Company Ltd and Gruh Finance Ltd.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PIONEER, JAN 5, 2019

### **Science Congress: Three Nobel laureates bury time capsule at LPU**

A time capsule with 100 items representing a cross-section of today's technology and India's scientific prowess was buried on Friday at Lovely Professional University (LPU) here by three Nobel laureates on the occasion of the on-going 106th Indian Science Congress.

The time capsule is a container storing a selection of objects chosen as being typical of the present time, buried for discovery in the future, a varsity release said.

The capsule will remain buried for the next 100 years.

It contained items like replicas of Mangalyaan, Brahmos missile, KalamSat and Tejas fighter jet which represent India's scientific achievements.

The selection represents day-to-day technologies used in today's India like landline telephone, smart phone, laptop, weighing machine, water pump, stop watch, headphones, handy-cam, drone, VR glasses and pen drive.

Several scientific equipments like rheostat, refractorscope and double microscope are also part of the capsule.

It also included solar cell and a hard disk with latest documentaries and movies, the release said.

The objective is to capture today's technological essence for the future generations, the varsity said.

The capsule was buried at a depth of 10 feet by three distinguished Nobel laureates- Hungary-born Israeli biochemist Avram Hershko, British-born American physicist F Duncan M Haldane and German-American biochemist Thomas Christian Sudhof.

The capsule was made by Lovely Professional University on the occasion of the Indian Science Congress being hosted on its campus, the release said.

LPU Chancellor Ashok Mittal lauded the move.

The Indian Science Congress was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday.

**HINDU, JAN 7, 2019**

**‘Varsities in States must do research,’ says PM Modi at Indian Science Congress**



***“95% of our students go to State universities and colleges”***

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday that it was time for research to expand beyond the Central institutes of national importance — such as the IITs and the IISERs — and branch out into the numerous State universities.

Observing that “95% of our students go to State universities and colleges,” he said: “We must have a strong research ecosystem in these places.”

Mr. Modi, who was addressing an audience of students, researchers and Nobel laureates at the 106th edition of the Indian Science Congress here, called on the Prime Minister’s Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council to formulate a plan to implement such a scheme.

The Prime Minister, whose arrival was delayed by two hours owing to fog, urged scientists to work on ways to boost productivity for small farmers, most of whom had inadequate-sized landholdings.

“The majority of farmers possess less than 2 hectares of land, we need more technology to improve their productivity,” he added.

The Prime Minister said 2018 had been a “good year” for science in India. “We are among the top 5 countries in terms of research publications, according to SCOPUS [an international database of research papers],” he said.

“Building on Lal Bahadur Shastri’s motto of ‘Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan’ the late PM A.B. Vajpayee added ‘Jai Vigyan.’ Today, we can add ‘Jai Anusandhan’ [research],” Mr. Modi remarked.

India must also focus on innovation and start-ups, the Prime Minister said. Noting that the government had introduced the Atal Innovation Mission to promote innovation among the country’s scientists, he asserted that more technology business incubators had been established in the last four years than in the preceding 40 years.

The key achievements of Indian science this year, he said, were: the production of aviation grade biofuel; Divya Nayan — a reading machine for the visually impaired; devices for the diagnosis of cervical cancer, TB and dengue; and a real-time landslide warning system in the Sikkim-Darjeeling region.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

PIONEER, JAN 7, 2019

### *Fake news menace can only be contained by people through self-restraint: Rathore*

Union Information & Broadcasting Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore said on Sunday the menace of fake news on social media can only be contained by self-restraint and regulation.

Speaking at a function here, the Minister said like electronic media controls itself through self-regulation, the people of the country should also self-regulate themselves and check the spread of fake news.

“People on social media has the capacity to kill any fake news which is generated on social media or on a contemporary media. Fake news is not only generated from outside the country but from inside also, just to weaken a nation which is growing gradually and we should fight it,” Rathore said.

He said the media in India follows self-regulation, firstly a media organisation regulates itself and then for entertainment through the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC), for news through the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) do the self-regulation and if they are not able to do then the Government’s inter-ministerial committee does.

“But this is a fact, we have to learn self-regulation, also we have to learn to control and not participate in any news which is a fake news,” Rathore said in an event called India Dialogues held at a hotel here.

He said people and media of other nation when it comes to their country’s stake, they all unite and say that they are ready to reform but would not let their country be undermined.

“It is important to understand that when we try to undermine our nation then does it not affect our economy or our culture or traditions. Media houses and on social media we should take care to ascertain how much truth is in the news and if there is no truth then it is necessary to highlight that it is fake news,” he said.

# TERRORISM

PIONEER, JAN 3, 2019

## **2018 successful year: J&K DGP**

The police authorities in Jammu & Kashmir have described year 2018 as a successful period against terrorism recording killing of over 250 terrorists and 45 security personnel.

Talking to mediapersons, Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh said that year 2018 was a mixed bag of good and bad happenings.

Singh said that around 93 encounters with terrorists occurred during the year 2018 where 87 of them were concluded without any collateral damage. He said 252 terrorists (including Pakistanis) were killed during the previous year which is success to the counter terrorism grid.

Statistics compiled suggest that 106 civilians were killed in year 2018 that includes those youth who were part of protests near gunfight sites trying to disrupt counter-terrorist operations, at various places in south and other areas in Kashmir.

“The sad part is we lost around 90 security personnel also, half of them killed by terrorists brutally and they made these killings public through videos on social media,” Singh said. He said 45 personnel of J&K police, 09 CRPF and 30 Army personnel were killed.

Dilbagh said that 44 civilians were also killed by terrorists. In reply to a question, DGP said that cross border infiltration was still going on as

major infiltration attempts were made in year 2018. He said all possible measures were being taken to stop infiltration of terrorists from across the border.

He acknowledged that a large number of youths joined terrorists. He said that most of them were killed during encounters.

In reply to a question, DGP said that there is no substantial presence of ISIS in Kashmir. He, however, said that attempts were being made to radicalise Kashmiri Muslim youths to tread extreme path leading to extremism.

## **URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

PIONEER, JAN 5, 2019

### **Govt kicks off Swachchh Survekshan 2019**

In a move to encourage large-scale citizen participation, ensure sustainability of initiatives taken towards garbage free and open defecation free cities, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA) on Friday launched the ‘Swachchh Survekshan (Cleanliness survey) 2019’, the fourth edition of the annual nationwide cleanliness survey of urban India. The survey will cover 40 crore people across over 4,237 towns and cities between January 4 and January 28.

To make the data more authentic, inspection will be conducted without giving any prior information to the concerned official for real-time check and survey will be based on people’s feedback by an independent third party. In the last three years, Mysuru and Indore had been ranked as the “No. 1” city in Swachchh Survekshan 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively. The Swachchh Bharat Mission (SBM) is one of the flagship programme of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Launching the survey, Union HUA Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said that people may contribute to their city’s Swachchhata scores by segregating their waste at source, adopting home composting and coming up with innovative solutions for waste management and creating

short videos and jingles to support their respective Urban Local Bodies in Swachchh Survekshan 2019.

The cleanliness survey aims to evaluate the achievements in the cleanliness level in urban areas of the country. Expected to be larger than the previous cleanliness surveys, survey 2019, completely digital and paperless survey, will be completed in a record time of 28 days.

Puri claimed that 83 percent of wards in the country are covered by door-to-door collection while 53 per cent wards are practicing source segregation and 46 per cent of the waste generated is now being scientifically processed.

“If claims of a city Government about any parameter are found to be incorrect by independent assessors, it will get zero marks for that parameters. Also, it will attract 33 per cent negative marking on the total obtained marks,” said officials.

## **WOMEN**

**PIONEER, JAN 5, 2019**

### **RS women MPs urge Govt to ensure passage of women's quota Bill in LS**

Cutting across party lines, women MPs in the Rajya Sabha on Friday urged the Government to ensure passing of the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha to provide women adequate representation in legislative bodies and decision making. The Bill was passed by the Upper House in 2010.

Participating in a brief debate on the issue, almost all the women MPs urged the BJP-led Government to use its majority in the Lower House to pass the Bill. The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill is commonly known as the Women's Reservation Bill and is awaiting nod of the Lok Sabha.

Initiating the discussion, Jaya Bachchan (SP) said her party was not against the Bill but favoured sub-reservation for other backward classes (OBC) and Dalits. Terming the present Bill as "cosmetic," she also said it caters to only to the privileged section of women. The SP member said political parties should be given right to choose the seats or constituencies from where they wish to field 33 per cent women, she said.

Jharna Das Baidya (CPM) said the BJP has absolute majority in the Lok Sabha but has not got the Bill passed. V Thota Seetharama Lakshmi

(TDP) said her party supports the legislation and appealed to the Government to ensure its passage in the Lower House.

Shanta Chhetri (TMC) said her party gave one-third of tickets to women in the 2014 Lok Sabha election and West Bengal has already provided 50 per cent reservation to women in local bodies.

Vijila Sathyananth (AIADMK) urged the Government to bring the Bill and ensure its passage in Lok Sabha. “You have enormous majority” to pass the legislation, she said.

Kanimozhi (DMK) said the Right, Left and Centre are supporting the bill, yet it has not been passed in Lok Sabha for nine years. “It is very sad that women have to put up with decisions made by men throughout their lives. Even here men are making decision for women,” she said, asking the government to bring the Women’s Reservation Bill in Lok Sabha.

Backing the Bill, Sonal Mansingh (nominated) said the rotational provision in the bill needs attention and detailing adding women in legislatures will bring “grace, wisdom and harmony.” However, the Bill should not be a hand down by males and they should do it with grace.

Congress member Viplove Thakur said there cannot be women empowerment until they become decision-makers. She said the ruling BJP had promised reservation for women in Parliament and now the Lok Sabha should pass the bill already cleared by the Upper House.

Asserting that her party favours the Bill, Kahkashan Parween (JD-U) said Bihar has already implemented women reservation in local bodies.



She said several women are heading Zila Parishads and are also mayors. BJP member Sampatya Uikey said her party is empowering women.

**HINDU, JAN 5, 2019**

## **No move to introduce quota for women judges: Law Ministry**



*Constitution does not allow it, says Law Ministry.*

The Law Ministry on Thursday said there was no proposal to introduce reservation for women in the appointment of judges in the higher judiciary. The Ministry's response came on an observation of a

Parliamentary Standing Committee that only six women judges have been appointed in the Supreme Court till date.

In the report tabled in Parliament, the Committee recommended that the Ministry should make suitable measures to include more women judges in both higher and subordinate judiciary.

The Committee reiterated its recommendation in its 'Eighty-fourth Report on Demand for Grants' that the strength of women judges should be around 50% of the total strength of judges.

The Ministry said judges were appointed in the Supreme Court and High Courts as per Articles 125 and 217 of the Constitution, which did not provide for reservation for any caste, class or gender.

“The government has, however, been requesting the Chief Justices of the High Courts that while sending proposals for the appointment of judges, due consideration be given to suitable candidates belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minorities and women,” the Ministry said. While such requests have been made to ensure a fair representation for different sections of society in the higher judiciary, the Ministry said: “There is no proposal for amendment to Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution”.

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