

NATIONAL

India may miss international target of eliminating child labour by 2025

A parliamentary standing committee on labour, textiles and skill development in its 52nd report on 'National Policy on Child Labourer's has said that it was "practically not possible" to meet the international commitment to eliminating child labour by 2025. The panel took into account the current prevalence of child labour to reach its conclusion. The report was recently submitted in Parliament.

The committee has impressed upon the Ministry of Labour and Employment to take up the elimination of child labour in a mission mode by devising a systematic action plan-based policy to meet International commitments. The committee, chaired by Bhartruhari Mahtab, has stated in the report that the government should take effective measures to eradicate forced labour, human trafficking and the elimination of child labour by 2025. After wider consultations with state governments and other stakeholders, the committee has stated in the report that "despite a revision of penalties, there is no deterrence on the employer and as informed by NGOs, children after being rescued are again employed in the same jobs."

Alarmed at the recurrence, the committee has emphasized making laws more stringent for employers and violators. It suggested increasing at least 3-4 times the penalty with stricter punishment in the form of cancellations of license and attachment of property. It has also cited data collected from the Ministry based on the census 2011 that 1.01 crore children are working in various fields. The main children workers are those who have to work more than six months and those who work less than 6 months after being employed. They are called working children.

According to data, cited by the committee as per the 2001 census, 57,54,201 children are main workers in the age group of 5-14 years in agriculture, mining and 8 other industries.

(N.I.E.25/12)

NATIONAL

France's Macron accepts PM's invite, to be the chief guest on Republic Day

French President Emmanuel Macron will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations next January, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Friday. Mr. Macron has acknowledged India's invite and announced that he will be here on January 26 for the festivities.

“As Strategic Partners, India and France share a high degree of convergence on a range of regional and global issues. This year, we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership”, said the MEA in the announcement.

Accepting the invite from the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Macron said in a social media post, “Thank you for your invitation, my dear friend Narendra Modi. India, on your Republic Day, I'll be here to celebrate with you.”

France has emerged as one of the key defence partners of India in recent years and the two sides have maintained consistent high-level contacts. Mr. Modi was also the Guest of Honour at the Bastille Day parade in Paris on July 14.

(H.23/12)

National

Indian Railways withdraws cashless healthcare scheme for employees

The Indian Railways has withdrawn the Cashless Treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE), a medical facility which was benefiting a few lakh serving/retired employees and their dependent family members across the country. A pilot project for providing cashless treatment during emergencies in private railway-empanelled hospitals was initially launched in metro cities in 2016. Later the ambit of the scheme was expanded across the railway network facilitating serving/retired employees and their dependent family members to take treatment in private hospitals in case of any emergency.

The Railway Board reviewed the implementation of the scheme and after careful deliberation took a decision to withdraw the CTSE with immediate effect. It was also decided that no refund would be issued to CTSE card holder for the amount that was deposited for subscription of the scheme. While introducing the scheme, the railways said comprehensive healthcare facilities were being provided through railway network of hospitals to serving/retired employees along with their dependent family members. It was felt that a large number of retired beneficiaries lived in the newly developed suburbs of various cities throughout India. These parts of the city were often far away from the established Railway Health Institutions. In this scenario precious time got lost in travel to the railway hospital in the event of an emergency.

The CTSE was rolled out and empanelled private hospitals nominated to provide necessary treatment during emergencies and raise bills directly to the railways. The scheme designed to work seamlessly on a pan-India basis facilitated any retired employee settling in any city or moving from place to place to get emergency medical facility anywhere in the country without the need for any formal referral from the local railway medical authorities. A spokesperson of the Southern Railway said treatment to serving/retired employees and their dependent family members was still available but with the reference of the Railway Medical Officer.

(H.10/12)

NATIONAL

Garba dance of Gujarat makes it to UNESCO list

Gujarat's traditional dance form 'Garba' was on Wednesday included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The popular dance form is the 15th cultural item from India to make it to the UNESCO list. Kolkata's Durga Puja was the last one added two years ago.

The inclusion has been made under the provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The international cultural body described the 'Garba' as a ritualistic and devotional dance performed India.

(H.07/12)

NATIONAL

A Centralised website to track, recover your lost mobile faster

Citizens can now block, track down and recover their lost or stolen mobile phones easily if they promptly report such incidents on the right channel.

The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), a telecommunications technology development centre under the Department of Telecom claims that its citizen centric portal, Sanchar Saathi, has received impressive responses from those who lost their mobile devices since the portal's nation - wide launch in May.

According to data available on the portal (<https://sancharsaathi.gov.in/>), almost 11 lakh mobiles were blocked after citizens reported loss/theft, of which about half the mobiles were traced back and 55,160 phones have been recovered and handed over to the owners.

If someone lost a phone, the person must first obtain a duplicate SIM from the service provider, file a police complaint and enter details about the mobile, police complaint, address and an alternative call back number on the portal.

System alerts

Once the case is reported, the system alerts the concerned police/cybercrime station and telecom service provider, a C-DOT spokesperson said. The moment anyone uses the old SIM or mobile, the platform alerts everyone on the network making traceability faster.

Delhi reported the highest number of mobile phone thefts / lost cases at 4,40,618 followed by Karnataka with 1,68,296 cases.

(H.30/11)

NATIONAL

Women voters set to play key role in 50 of 90 seats in C'garh

CHHATTISGARH, besides known to have an impressive sex ratio compared to the national average, has also more women electorates than men. In the two-phase assembly polls, interestingly, the state witnessed participation of more women than men in exercising their right to franchise.

In as many as 50 assembly segments out of the ninety constituencies more women than men turned out to cast votes. They outnumbered men by over 60 thousand in voting.

It is speculated that the women-centric proposed schemes by the political parties may have made a difference that led to a rise in women showing up at polling booths. The encouraging participation by women who decided to vote also led to higher turnout in 74 assembly seats compared to the 2018 assembly elections.

As per the final count released by the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Chhattisgarh recorded an overall 76.31 percent turnout. Out of the 10,256, 865 women there were 7,812,631 who voted, giving an impression of awareness of their rights. And 7,748,612 men out of the 10,135,543 male electorates had participated in voting.

Chhattisgarh, since its creation as a separate state, has witnessed bipolar politics being a direct contest between the BJP and the Congress. This time the Congress has given tickets to 18 women while the BJP has fielded 15 in the fray in the midst of the aggressive campaigns when the women's reservation bill also emerged as a poll plank for the parties during the campaign. Recognising the women's strength and their role as influential voters in Chhattisgarh polls, the BJP and the Congress gave various assurances.

(I.E. 20/11)

1st India Art Biennale at Red Fort to begin on Dec 8, 150 works chosen

The Ministry of Culture has selected 150 art works to be displayed at the first India Art, Architecture and Design Biennale to be held at Red Fort. The week-long event will be inaugurated on December 8. The ministry has invited artists and curators to submit their work for the event. It has received 560 queries and 260 submissions so far. A student Biennale is also being organised at the Lalit Kala Akademi from December 9, which will serve as a platform for emerging talent to showcase creativity and imagination.

As part of the programme, exhibitions will be held, along with panel discussions, workshops and art bazaar. Keynote addresses by international artists, architects and designers, public art installations, art bazaar and cultural programmes are the major attractions of the Biennale. The pavilions will be on display till March 31.

"Building on the success of past events like the international museum Expo and Festival of Libraries, the Biennale seeks to create prominent global cultural event, comparable to those in Venice, Sao Paulo and Dubai. Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directive to establish five cultural spaces in India, including one at the Red Fort, this is an innovative initiative to highlight India's diverse art, architecture and design," said the ministry. Briefing about the programme on Friday, Minister of State for Culture Meenakshi Lekhi said that the biennale showcases a diverse range, including traditional artisans contemporary designers, curators and thought leaders.

"The Biennale is an innovative initiative to celebrate the rich tapestry of our country's artistic heritage, spanning ancient, modern, contemporary and tech-driven art, architecture and design." said the minister.

The week-long event is organised around daily themes, each aimed at showcasing different aspects of India's rich cultural heritage. Seven esteemed curators are involved ensuring a captivating experience that combines physical and digital exhibitions, interactive installations, sessions and panel discussions.

(I.E. 18/11)

Odd even Vehicle rotation scheme to return in Delhi

As air pollution in Delhi touched about 18 times the limit set by the World Health Organization on Monday, Environment Minister Gopal Rai announced that the government would implement an odd-even vehicle rotation scheme in the city from November 13 to 20 to reduce air pollution. Mr. Rai said that to prioritise the health of schoolchildren, the government had decided to suspend in-person classes in all schools, except for students of Classes 10 and 12. Schools in Delhi up to Class 5 were initially closed till November 10, and now it has been extended to include Classes 6 to 9 and 11. "Online classes can continue. There is no bar on Board exams for Class 10 and 12," he said.

The Minister said the odd-even system would be implemented anticipating a spike in air pollution after Deepavali. After studying the situation following the implementation, a decision would be taken on the future course of action, he added. The decisions were taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal earlier in the day. The odd-even scheme entails allowing vehicles whose registration number ends in even digits to ply on even dates and those with odd digits to ply only on odd dates. On odd days, only vehicles with licence plates ending in one, three, five, seven, and nine will be allowed, while on even days, vehicles with numbers ending with zero, two, four, six, and eight will be allowed to operate.

The scheme has been implemented multiple times in the past in Delhi to check rising air pollution, including in 2019. On Sunday, the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) directed that State governments may consider additional emergency measures such as an odd-even scheme. Criticising the move, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said the odd-even scheme had no scientific research basis or data to support its effectiveness. He said that by bringing in the odd-even scheme, the Kejriwal government was punishing Delhiites for its own failure to curb pollution causes such as crop residue burning and clearing dust and construction debris from roadside.

Air pollution rises in Delhi and many other parts of North India during winter, mainly due to meteorological factors but pollution from stubble burning adds to it. Meanwhile, air pollution in Delhi continued to be in the "severe" category on Monday, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. Delhi's 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 421 at 4 p.m. on Monday, down from 454 on Sunday, as per the CPCB's daily official bulletin. But by 8 p.m., the AQI rose to 414 ("severe" category). An AQI reading between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', 401 and 450 'severe, and 451 and 500 'severe plus'.

NATIONAL

NCERT to introduce electoral literacy content in textbooks

In a bid to address voter apathy among young Indians, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will introduce and update textbooks to include content on electoral literacy and will advise the State Education Boards to follow suit.

Beginning with Classes 6 to 12 in all schools, thus integration will also extend to the curricular framework for all colleges and Universities and it will be tailored to suit different disciplines and credited accordingly.

Long term vision:

The measures are part of a memorandum of understanding signed on Thursday between the Election Commission of India (EC) and the Education Ministry. It is aimed at extending the EC's flagship Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) in schools and colleges. The MoU aims to address issues such as voter apathy among urban and young Indians. A senior official in the EC said almost 297 million of the 910 million electors did not vote in the Lok Sabha election in 2019, causing concern.

"Therefore, this MoU is signed with the long-term vision of instilling electoral literacy in the young people through the educational institutions. This initiative is expected to help in the Election Commission's endeavour to address the urban and youth apathy, leading to better electoral participation in the next general elections, the official said.

The document also focuses on the orientation and training of teachers in effectively imparting electoral literacy in classrooms, establishing electoral literacy clubs (ELCs) in schools and colleges and encouraging various activities to promote voter awareness among students. It also seeks to evolve a robust mechanism to fulfill the aspirational goal of the EC to hand over the voter ID cards to every student immediately on attaining the age of 18.

(H.03/11)

WEEKLY NEWS (October 22- October 28)

NATIONAL

No-man's land at Nepal border being encroached upon

The no-man's land area at the India-Nepal international border at Khatima in Udham Singh Nagar district in Uttarakhand is in the grip of encroachment. Moreover, in several places, pillars are missing besides agricultural practices taking place. According to official sources, a meeting was held recently over the issue. "Taking cognizance of the matter in a recent meeting of the Lead Intelligence Agency (LIA), it has been decided that concrete action will be taken in the first week of November." "The initiative was taken by the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) which along with officials of the revenue, forest and irrigation department will conduct a joint survey of no-man's land of both the countries." Khatima Sub Divisional Magistrate Ravindra Singh Bisht told this newspaper. "Though the encroachments are temporary and people from Nepal are practicing farming, it cannot be denied that such encroachment in the border area is a serious issue as per international border security rules," Bisht said.

Nepal shares an international border of 1,751 km with five states-Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Sikkim. The border with Nepal in Uttarakhand extends from Dharchula in Pithoragarh district to the border of Pilibhit district of Uttar Pradesh for 275 km.

In 1950, the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty was signed for the free movement of citizens of both countries. With this the border became "unique" as people from both countries can cross it from any point, Narayan Bhatt, a litterateur based in Banbasa of Champawat district said. Banbasa Block Congress president Gajendra Samanta criticised the move by Nepalis to cultivate on the Indian side, but said, "Our families also have age-old ties with Nepali families".

According to locals, the land near the border at NagraTerai, Melaghat in Khatima villages and falling under Tarai east forest, is now being inhabited and encroached by Nepalis. Till a few years ago, this land was totally forested and remained uninhabited. Moreover, there were reports of some tensions between locals and Nepalis in Dharchula and Banbasa areas locals said.

(I.E.23/10)

NATIONAL

Centre eases import restrictions on PCs, laptops and tablets

THE Centre on Thursday eased the curbs on import of laptops as it announced a simpler, online authorisation system for the purchase of seven electronic items including laptops, tablets, and all-in-all personal computers from overseas markets.

Commerce ministry officials said the end-to-end online import management system, which will kick in on November 1, 2023, is aimed at monitoring shipments of laptops, tablets and PCs without hurting market supply or creating a cumbersome licensing regime. Importers will be able to bring in these electronic products after specifying the quantity and value, and obtaining the authorisation online. The authorisation will be valid till September 30, 2024. Importers can change the quantity of goods purchased even after the issuance of an import authorisation.

The government had announced a ban on import of laptops, tablets and personal computers in August 2023. Later, it clarified that there was no ban but electronic manufacturing firms would need to apply for licence to import these items from November 1, 2023. However, after protests from the industry and some trading partners including the US, the government has now watered down the restrictions. According to the commerce ministry, 59% (in value terms) of the seven restricted items are imported from China, 16% from Singapore, and 9% from Hong Kong.

(I.E. 20/10)

WEEKLY NEWS (October 8- October 14)

NATIONAL

Summit between PM Modi, Putin likely this year

Discussions are under way between Russia and India regarding a potential meet this year between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. According to Pavan Kapoor India's ambassador to Moscow, "There are high-level discussions going on." Recently, Putin praised India's growth under PM Modi's leadership, emphasising its population of over 1.5 billion and more than 7% economic growth. The two leaders last met at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in September 2022, where PM Modi urged Putin to end the conflict with Ukraine, stating that the current era is not conducive to war.

(T.I. 12/10)

WEEKLY NEWS (October 1- October 7)

NATIONAL

₹2000 notes exchange date extended

THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Saturday extended the deadline for exchange of ₹2,000 banknotes until October 7, 2023. The original deadline was set to expire on September 30. The decision to extend the exchange period was made after reviewing the withdrawal process, said RBI. "As the period specified for the withdrawal process has come to an end, and based on a review, It has been decided to extend the current arrangement for the deposit exchange of ₹2000 banknotes until October 7, 2023", RBI stated in a statement. RBI also informed that out of the total value of ₹ 3.56 lakh crore worth of Rs. 2,000 banknotes in circulation as of 19 May 2023, Rs.3.42 lakh crore has been returned. This means that only ₹ 0.14 lakh crore worth of ₹ 2,000 notes are currently in circulation. Thus 96% of the ₹ 2,000 banknotes in circulation as on May 19, 2023, has since been returned," it added. It also said that from October 8, 2023, banks will stop accepting ₹2000 banknotes for credit to accounts or exchange to other denomination banknotes. However, ₹.2000 banknotes will continue to be legal tender even after October 7. ₹2000 banknotes will continue to be allowed to be presented at the 19 Regional Offices of RBI having Issue Departments (RBI Issue offices) for credit to the bank accounts in India or exchange," the RBI said.

Charan Singh, chief executive officer (CEO) of EGROW Foundation, said, "It appears that the central bank is implementing a systematic and scientific withdrawal process for the ₹2,000 banknotes before completely phasing them out. Till October 7, individuals may feel compelled to exchange these notes at local banks, as they will only be accepted and deposited at the 19 regional RBI banks across the country from October 8 onwards." This approach aims to facilitate the exchange process and encourage people to complete the exchange within the specified timeframe, he added.

The RBI had announced the withdrawal of ₹2,000 denomination banknotes from circulation on 19 May this year.

(N.I.E. 01/10)

NATIONAL

Afghan Embassy in Delhi closes down

The Afghan Embassy in Delhi has closed down, due to lack of finances, infighting amongst diplomats with some seeking asylum in other countries. “Indian government is aware of the developments and have received a note verbal on the same – which they are said to be examining. The authenticity of the communication and its contents are being examined. This is in the context of the Ambassador being out of India for past many months, steady departure of diplomats to third countries reportedly after receiving asylum as well as reports of infighting amongst Embassy personnel,” according to a source. The Afghans are also sore with India for not issuing visas for their students (nearly 2500) who wanted to continue their studies in India. “We had written to the Indian government many times to enable Afghan students to continue their education in India, all in vain,” said Onib Dadgar, who represents the student body of Afghans. Meanwhile, though the Indian government hasn’t officially recognised the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan the embassy in Kabul is functional – which is referred to as a technical establishment which with the help of locals distributes humanitarian aid. Consular services are discontinued.

(N.I.E., 29/09)