



News Analysis (27 Jul, 2019)

 drishtiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/27-07-2019/print

Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019

The Lok Sabha has passed the Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019, recently. The legislation is **aimed at tightening the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) compliance and reducing the load of cases before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).**

Salient Features of the Bill

- The bill aims to ensure greater **accountability and a better enforcement** of the corporate governance norms.
- A key change in the Bill is related to **CSR spending**, wherein companies would have to mandatorily keep unspent money into a special account.
 - The companies will have one year to firm up the CSR proposal and another three years to spend funds. In case money remains unspent for one plus three years, the money will have to be moved to an **escrow account, could even be the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.**

Corporate Social Responsibility

- Corporate Social Responsibility is a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders.
- CSR is generally understood as being the way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives (Triple-Bottom-Line-Approach), while at the same time addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.
- India has become the first country to make CSR spending mandatory through a law, i.e. through Section 135 of the **Companies Act, 2013**. The salient features of CSR provision are as follows:
 - Companies earning profit of over Rs 5 crore, turnover of Rs 1000 crore or networth of more than Rs 500 crore are required to shell out at least two

- percent of their three-year annual average net profit towards CSR activities.
 - Each such company is required to constitute a CSR committee of the Board
 - The Board of each such company is required to have the company's CSR policy formulated and monitor its implementation;
 - Companies may implement their CSR Policy through trusts or societies or Section 8 companies etc.
- The Bill seeks to **empower the Registrar of Companies** to initiate action for the removal of the name of a company from the Register of Companies if it is not carrying on any business or operation in accordance with the Company Law.
 - The legislation envisages a **re-categorisation of 16 minor offences** as purely civil defaults.
 - It also provides for transferring of functions with regard to dealing with applications for change of financial year to Central government and **shifting of powers** for conversion from public to private companies from NCLT to the central government.
 - The bill provided more clarity with respect to certain powers of the **National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)**.

Source: IE

Conference on Digital & Cashless Economy

Recently, the Conference on **Digital & Cashless Economy** was held in New Delhi with the theme of '**The Future of India's Digital Payments**'.

The west transitioned from Paper currency to Plastic card currency. India will transition from Paper currency to Digital currency, much faster and with more volume anywhere in the world. In this direction government has taken various initiatives:

To ensure digital literacy in every house-hold, government has initiated the **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** to make 60 million adults digitally literate in rural India of which more than 10 million people have already been trained.

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan

- Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan is the scheme to make six crore persons in rural areas, across States/UTs, digitally literate, reaching to around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household till 31st March, 2019.
- The Scheme aims to bridge the digital divide, specifically targeting the rural population including the marginalised sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC) / Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities, Below Poverty Line (BPL), women and differently-abled persons

and minorities.

- The **Reserve Bank of India** has released the '**Payment And Settlement Systems In India: Vision – 2019-2021**' which aims to transform India into a cash-lite economy and ensure that the country has a '**state-of-the-art**' payment and settlement systems that are safe and secure.
- The launch of **Digital India and Digital Payments** is to ensure more people can benefit from technology, especially in rural areas.
- Government has ensured that the advantages of technology are not restricted to a select few but are there for all sections of society.
- By applying **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and Aadhaar-linked Payments (ALP)**, the government has **reduced delays in the payment of wages, curbed corruption and plugged up any leakages** in the system.

With these disruptive transformations, comes **immense challenges of integrity and security of digital payment systems** which is where there is a need to partner together, as government and industry.

Source: PIB

Protection and Preservation of Endangered Language

The Government of India is running a scheme known as "Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages" for conservation of threatened languages.

Background

- According to the census 1961, India has around 1652 languages. But by 1971, only 808 languages were left.
- According to the **People's Linguistic Survey of India 2013**, around 220 languages has been lost in the last 50 years and 197 has been categorised as **Endangered**.
- Government of India currently defines a language as one that is **marked by a script** and effectively neutering oral languages. Therefore, government recognizes **122 languages** which is far lower than the 780 counted by the **People's Linguistic Survey of India** (along with a further 100 suspected to exist).

This discrepancy is caused primarily because **Government of India** doesn't recognise any language with less than **10,000 speakers**.

- According to the criteria adopted by the **UNESCO**, a language becomes extinct when nobody speaks or remembers the language. The UNESCO has categorized languages on basis of endangerment as follows:-
 - Vulnerable
 - Definitely Endangered

- Severely Endangered
- Critically Endangered
- UNESCO has recognised 42 Indian languages as Critically Endangered.

Causes For Decline

- GOI does not recognize languages with less than 10,000 speakers
- In and out migration of communities which leads to dispersal of traditional settlement.
- Changing employment pattern which favours majority language.
- Changes in social and cultural values.
- Growth of “individualism”, which puts self interest over that of community.
- Encroachment of materialism in traditional communities allowing spiritual, moral and ethical values being overshadowed by consumerism.

What needs to be done?

- The proven method to ensure the survival of language is the development of schools that teach in languages of minority (tribal languages) which enables the speakers to preserve and enrich the language.
- A vast digital project - on the lines of Project Tiger - for preserving and growing India's endangered languages must be launched.
- Audio-visual documentation of the important aspects of such language - like storytelling, folk literature and history.
- Existing work from groundbreaking initiatives like Global Language Hotspots can be used to enhance such documentation efforts.

Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL)

- It was instituted by **Ministry of Human Resource Development** (Government of India) in 2013.
- The sole objective of the Scheme is to document and archive the country's languages that have become endangered or likely to be endangered in the near future.
- The scheme is monitored by **Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)** located in Mysuru, Karnataka.
- University Grants Commission (UGC) provides financial assistance for creation of centres for endangered languages at Central and State Universities to undertake research projects.

Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)

- Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) was established in 1969.
- It is under the administrative control of **Ministry of Human Resource Development.**

Purpose

- To coordinate the development of Indian Language.
- To bring about the essential unity of Indian languages through scientific studies.
- Promote interdisciplinary research.
- Contribute to mutual enrichment of languages and contribute towards emotional integration of the people of India.
- protects and documents minor, minority and tribal languages.

Source: PIB

International Charter on 'Space and Major Disasters'

India, by virtue of being a member of the **International Charter 'Space and Major Disasters'** has received a **satellite data** related to the **Assam floods** from other member nations including France, Russia and China.

- Whenever there is a **natural** or **man-made disaster**, the **National Remote Sensing Center** (NRSC) and member space agencies of other countries which are a part of the International Charter Space and Major Disasters can **activate** the platform.
- National Remote Sensing Center represents the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** as a member of the charter which has been set up under the **UN-SPIDER** (United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response).

The International Charter 'Space and Major Disasters'



World's **first coordinated multi-satellite** operational setup for emergency response
Introduced at Space Assembly (UNISPACE III) in 1999 and is Operational since Nov 1,
2000.

Purpose

It is an **International Agreement** among **Space Agencies** to support with space-based data and information for relief efforts in the emergencies caused by major disasters, on humanitarian ground at **no cost**.

Need

- No single space agency can provide imaging capability to meet the **spatial** and **temporal** requirements of different types of disasters.
Different space sensors (Thermal, Microwave, Optical) are required for different disasters (Fire, Floods, EQ).
- Hence the need for a **global system** for **disaster management**, supported by **multi-satellite** and **multi-imaging** capabilities.

Members

- Currently 16 global space agencies including **India's ISRO** are its members.
- The members cooperate on a **voluntary basis**.
- UN-SPIDER and UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research is a dedicated training arm of the United Nations system) are not formal members of the mechanism, but are authorized to request the activation of the mechanism on behalf of UN agencies, in countries affected by disasters.

Disasters Types Supported

Charter addresses both:

- **Natural disasters** like floods, earthquakes, forest fires, landslides, tsunamis, ocean storms, volcanic eruptions.
- **Man made disasters** like oil spills and industrial accidents.

Mechanism

- **Direct activation:** Authorized Users (civil protection agencies, governmental relief organizations, or other authorities with a mandate related to disaster management) are able to request the activation of the Charter to support emergencies in their own country.
- **Activation via an Authorized User on behalf of a user from another country without AU:** Authorized Users can access the charter to request support for a disaster in another country with which they cooperate for relief purposes.
- **Activation via the UN for UN users:** The Charter has an agreement with UN OOSA (Vienna) and UNITAR/UNOSAT (Geneva) to provide support to UN agencies, may submit requests on behalf of users from the United Nations.
- **Activation for Asia Pacific users via Sentinel Asia:** Sentinel Asia is a regional collaboration for satellite based emergency response in Asia Pacific.

Source: TH

Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVY)

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, the **Union Minister of Textiles** mentioned the steps taken by the government to implement the Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana.

Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana

- The Government launched the Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVY) in the year 2001-2002.
- The scheme was launched with a view to **mobilize the artisans into Self Help Groups** and training the groups on various aspects of forming and running the

community business enterprises for self sustainability of artisans.

- The **salient features** of the Yojana are as follows:
 - Baseline Survey & Mobilization of Artisans
 - Design & Technology Upgradation
 - Human Resource Development
 - Direct Benefit to Artisans
 - Infrastructure and Technology Support
 - Research and Development
 - Marketing Support & Services

Steps taken by the Government

- The Government organized **Hastkala Sahyog Shivirs** at more than 300 places all over the country for providing Aadhaar linked identity card, marketing facilities, facilitating to artisans through Mudra loan and enrolment of artisans under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana for the welfare of artisans during the Hastkala Sahyog Shivirs.
- The Government has identified and **adopted 90 clusters** across the country which will also cover aspirational districts, women clusters, weaker section and export potential clusters. The objective is to transform these clusters in a time period of 3 years by ensuring self-sustainment of the Self Help Groups/artisans of these clusters.
- During the current financial year, 2019-20, the Government has taken initiative to organize campaign to **educate cluster artisans about the scope of handicraft producer company**, its importance for long term sustainable business development for the cluster and motivate prospective artisans/Self Help Groups members to form producer companies in various cluster areas across the country.

Source: PIB

Seed Bankers for Conserving Native Crops

A total of 1597 farmers varieties have been registered with Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority and certificates of registration have been issued.

India's Seed Bank

- India has established its own seed storage facility at **Chang La** in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir.
- It has been built jointly by the **Defence Institute of High Altitude Research (DIHAR)** and the **National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR)** in 2010 under the aegis of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

- It stores over 5,000 seed accessions (one accession consists of a set of seeds of a particular species collected from different geographical and demographic locations).
- **Note: Svalbard Global Seed Vault is the world's largest seed storage facility situated at Norway.**

ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR)

- It is a nodal organisation for management of plant genetic resources in India and functions under the control of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- It is conserving seed germplasm for long-term conservation (at -20°C) in its National Genebank (NGB)
- It plans, organizes, conducts and coordinates exploration and collection of indigenous and exotic plant genetic resources.

Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority

- It is a statutory body created under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act, 2001 (PPV&FR Act).
- **Plant Genome Saviour Reward** is also given by it to the farmers engaged in the conservation of genetic resources of landraces and wild relatives of economic plants and their improvement.

Objectives

- Establishment of an effective system for the protection of plant varieties, the rights of farmers and plant breeders and to encourage the development of new varieties of plants.
- Recognition and protection of the rights of farmers in respect to their contribution in conserving, improving and making available plant genetic resources for the development of new plant varieties.
- Accelerate agricultural development in the country by stimulation of investment for research and development both in public and private sector.
- Facilitate growth of seed industry to ensure the availability of quality seeds and planting material to the farmers.

Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001 (PPV&FR Act)

- It has been enacted to fulfill India's obligation under the agreement on **Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) of the World Trade Organization** as also to stimulate investment in Research and Development for the development of new plant varieties which will facilitate the growth of the seed industry and ensure the availability of high quality seeds to the farmers.

- The Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Act, 2001 provides for the establishment of an effective system for the protection of plant breeders' rights.
- According to section 39 of the Act, farmers are allowed to save, use, sow, re-sow, exchange, share and even sell farm produce including seed of a protected variety. But when it is sold, it cannot be packaged and branded as such.

Source: PIB

Mobile Scheme to Quit Tobacco

The **World Health Organization's (WHO) report on global tobacco epidemic**, launched in July 2019 makes a special reference about **mCessation programme** and other initiatives of India for helping smokers quit.

- The 2019 report is the seventh in a series that tracks the status of tobacco epidemic and interventions to combat it.
- Released in Brazil, the report states that **India is the second largest consumer of tobacco products**, with more than 200 million users of smokeless tobacco and 276 million consumers of tobacco overall.
- The programme has shown strong outcomes in terms of health and outreach, and provides a huge opportunity to help several million tobacco users who want to quit.
- In 2017, a **Global Adult Tobacco Survey** found that 38.5 percent of adult smokers and 33.2 per cent adult users of smokeless forms of tobacco had attempted to quit, the report noted.

About mCessation Programme

- It is an initiative **using mobile technology** for tobacco cessation.
- India launched mCessation using text messages in 2016 as part of the government's **Digital India initiative**. It uses two-way messaging between the individual seeking to quit tobacco use and programme specialists providing them dynamic support.
- The **National Tobacco Control Programme** and the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, with support from the WHO and the International Telecommunication Union's '**Be He@lthy, Be mobile**' initiative, implemented the programme.

Be He@lthy, Be mobile' initiative

- Be He@lthy, Be Mobile initiative harnesses the power and reach of mobile phones to address the **noncommunicable disease (NCD)** risk factors by educating people to make healthier lifestyle choices to help prevent and manage NCDs via their phones.
- The initiative uses mobile phone technology to deliver disease prevention and management information directly to mobile phone users, and strengthens health

systems by providing training to health workers.

- The programme allows people who want to quit tobacco use to register by giving a missed call to a dedicated national number.
- The programme's progress is **monitored in real-time** through an online dashboard that details the number of registrations.
- Till date, the programme has over 2.1 million self-registered users.
- An evaluation conducted by the Health ministry found an average quitting rate of 7 per cent for both smokers and users of smokeless tobacco six months after enrollment.
- The government has recently released **version-2** of the "mTobaccoCessation" platform, which can deliver content through SMS or interactive voice response in 12 languages.
- MCessation should be included in PHC (Primary Health Care)-level advice to enable maximum reach.
- Since 2007, the Union Health ministry is pushing to introduce stronger **graphic health warnings on tobacco packets**, with mixed success.

Significance of graphic warning on tobacco packs

- Over half the world's population - or 3.9 billion people living in 91 countries - benefit from large graphic health warnings, and **India is among the countries with the highest level of achievement**, the WHO report notes.
- While there has been no India-specific evaluation, studies from several countries that introduced similar strong labels have shown that this policy has been **most effective in reducing tobacco use among the youth, and also in motivating users to quit.**

Source: IE

Elephant Undercounting

Kerala may have undercounted almost 2,700 elephants in the latest elephant census conducted in 2017.

- The earlier 2017 elephant census figures indicated that Kerala had only 3,054 elephants whereas, recent number showed Kerala as having 5,706 elephants.



- Elephant census, is conducted **once in 5 years** under the aegis of **Project elephant**.
- A scientist associated with the census are of the view that discrepancy had resulted from Kerala's insistence in 2017 on using a technique called the 'direct count' method.

Elephant Counting Methods Employed in Census

- **The direct counting method** is based on sightings of elephants.
- **The indirect counting method** uses the elephant elephant '**dung decay**' formula, in which the analysis of dung is used to estimate the population of the elephant.

Project Elephant

- Project Elephant (PE), is a **centrally sponsored scheme**, and was launched in February 1992 for the **protection of elephants**, their habitats and corridors.
- It also seeks to address the issues of **human-wildlife conflict** and welfare of domesticated elephants.
- **The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** provides the **financial** and **technical support** to major elephant range states in the country through Project Elephant.

Source: TH
