



PRS Capsule - February 2024

Key Highlights of PRS

▪ Governance and Social Justice

- Supreme Court Struck Down The Electoral Bonds Scheme
- Parliament Passes Bill Amending Local Bodies Laws of Jammu and Kashmir
- Parliament passes Bill modifying the list of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh
- Law Commission Submits Report On Various Subjects
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Judicial Infrastructure In North-East India
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Strengthening Legal Education
- Parliament Passes Bill Prohibiting The Use Of Unfair Means In Public Examinations
- UGC Releases Guidelines On Internships For Undergraduate Students
- Comments Invited On Guidelines For Prevention Of Misleading Coaching Ads
- Home Secretary Required To Destroy Records Of Interception Under IT Amendment Rules
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Digital Payments And Online Security
- Surrogacy Rules Amended To Allow An Intending Couple To Use Donor Gametes
- Standing Committee submits report on Quality of Medical Education in India
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Promotion Of Medical Device Industry
- Standing Committee submits report on National Ayush Mission
- Draft Greenwashing Guidelines Released For Public Comments
- Comments invited on the Draft Cinematograph Certification Rules
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Regulation Of Cable Television In India
- Comments invited on draft Rules on Offshore Areas Mineral Trust
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Functioning Of Mgnrega

▪ Economy

- Interim Union Budget 2024-25
- Central Sector Scheme For Fisheries Approved
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Employment And Revenue Earning Potential Of Fisheries
- Cabinet Approved Amendments To FDI Policy For Space Sector
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Strategy To Maximise Exports And Minimise Imports
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Development Of Cotton Sector
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Operation And Maintenance Of National Highways
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Status Of Ship Building Industries
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Smart Cities

▪ Environment

- Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 passed by Parliament
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Climate Resilient Farming
- Cabinet Approves A Scheme To Provide For Rooftop Solar In One Crore Households
- Amendment to Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020 notified
- Draft Regulations To Determine Tariff For Renewable Energy Released
- Standing Committee Submits Report On Review Of Yamuna River Cleaning Projects In Delhi

Governance and Social Justice

Supreme Court Struck Down the Electoral Bonds Scheme

The [electoral bonds](#) scheme introduced through the [Finance Act, 2017](#), was deemed **unconstitutional** by a five-judge bench.

- An electoral bond is an **anonymous instrument** for making political donations, available for purchase by Indian citizens or companies, and allows [political parties](#) to receive undisclosed donations.
- The Court found electoral bonds violate voters' [right to information](#) and allowing unlimited corporate contributions to political parties is arbitrary and violates the [right to equality before the law](#).
- The [Supreme Court](#) instructed the State Bank of India to halt the issuance of electoral bonds and ordered it to reveal the political parties that received contributions through these bonds since April 12, 2019, with all details to be disclosed to the [Election Commission of India](#) for publication on its website.

Parliament Passes Bill Amending Local Bodies Laws of Jammu and Kashmir

Parliament passed the [Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws \(Amendment\) Bill, 2024](#), which amends three laws governing local bodies in the Union Territory, including the J&K Panchayati Raj Act, 1989, and the J&K Municipal Act, 2000 and J&K Municipal Corporation Act, 2000.

- **Key features Include:**
 - **Reservations For Other Backward Classes(OBCs):** Reserved seats under three Acts in J&K are for [SCs](#), [STs](#), and now [OBCs](#), proportional to their population, with one-third reserved for women, in [panchayats, municipalities, municipal corporations, block development councils, and district development councils](#).
 - **Mandate of the State Election Commission:** The J&K Panchayati Raj Act, 1989, designates the [State Election Commission](#) for panchayats, block development councils, and district development councils' elections and electoral rolls, while municipalities and municipal corporations' elections and rolls are managed by the Chief Electoral Officer, with the Bill proposing a transfer of these duties to the State Election Commission.
 - **Removal of State Election Commissioner:** The Bill proposes that the removal of the State Election Commissioner be based on the same grounds and process as for a High Court judge, amending the J&K Panchayati Raj Act, 1989.

Parliament Passes Bill Modifying the List of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh

Parliament passed [The Constitution \(Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes\) Orders \(Amendment\) Bills, 2024](#), amending the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, regarding Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

- **Scheduled Tribes in Odisha:** The Bill adds the following communities to the list of Scheduled Tribes in Odisha:
 - Muka Dora, Mooka Dora, Nuka Dora, Nooka Dora (for districts of Koraput, Nowrangapur, Rayagada, and Malkangiri)
 - Konda Reddy, Konda Reddi.
- **Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh:** The Bill adds the following to the list of Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh:
 - Bondo Porja
 - Khond Porja
 - Konda Savaras

Law Commission Submits Report On Various Subjects

- The [Law Commission](#) of India submitted its reports on:
 - The Law on Criminal Defamation

- A Comprehensive Review of the [Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897](#)
- Law on Matrimonial Issues relating to Non-resident Indians and Overseas [citizens of India](#).
- **Key observations and recommendations of the Commission include:**
 - **Criminal Defamation:** The Commission emphasized that the **right to reputation** is a fundamental aspect of the [right to life and liberty](#), not to be infringed upon by freedom of expression, suggesting that [criminal defamation](#) should coexist with free speech.
 - **Epidemic Diseases Act:** The Commission highlighted gaps in the [Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897](#), proposing clarifications on definitions for outbreak, epidemic, and pandemic, assigning primary epidemic prevention responsibility to states as per constitutional jurisdiction, suggesting concurrent laws by center and states for infectious disease prevention, and advocating for a **national Epidemic Plan** by the central government, allowing states to issue local regulations.
 - **Matrimonial Issues related to NRIs and OCIs:** The Commission highlighted issues with NRI husbands abandoning Indian wives, suggesting defining NRIs, mandating marriage registration, and adding provisions for divorce and maintenance in the [NRI Bill, 2019](#), including compelling NRIs to appear in court for matrimonial cases.

Standing Committee Submits Report On Judicial Infrastructure In North-East India

The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, submitted a report on the implementation of a **centrally sponsored scheme** since 1993-94 for developing judicial infrastructure in the [North-Eastern States](#) of India, with the Centre contributing 90% for these states as well as Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:**
 - New guidelines for the release of funds under the CSS require utilizing at least 75% of disbursed funds before further installments.
 - Some northeastern states faced fund release issues due to **compliance failure**, geographical challenges, and delays in project proposals.
 - The Committee recommended considering these challenges in fund release criteria, relaxing existing criteria, and enhancing funds for states unable to contribute **10% of project funds**.

Standing Committee Submits Report On Strengthening Legal Education

The Standing Committee submitted a report on strengthening legal education amid emerging challenges.

- As per the [Advocates Act, 1961](#), the [Bar Council of India](#) regulates legal education standards, recognizes law degree-offering universities, and inspects them for compliance.
- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are as follows:**
 - **Powers of the Bar Council of India (BCI):**
 - Proposed restricting the [Bar Council of India's \(BCI\)](#) authority to oversee fundamental qualifications for practicing law, while advocating for an autonomous body to manage legal education.
 - Recommended the establishment of a National Council for Legal Education and Research under the envisioned [Higher Education Commission](#) of India to govern legal education.
 - It recommended taking effective measures to curb the growth in substandard law colleges.
 - **Uniform curriculum:** The Committee recommended redefining the BCI's role to ensure a uniform undergraduate law curriculum and proposed that an independent authority oversee a standardized post-graduate curriculum.

Parliament Passes Bill Prohibiting The Use Of Unfair Means In Public Examinations

The Parliament passed the [Public Examinations \(Prevention of Unfair Means\) Bill, 2024](#), aiming to curb the use of unfair means in public examinations.

▪ **Key features of the Bill include:**

- The Bill prohibits various offences related to public examinations, including collusion or conspiracy to enable **cheating, unauthorized** access to question papers or answer keys, assisting candidates during exams, tampering with computer networks or resources, manipulating documents for merit lists or ranks, etc.
 - The above offences will be punishable with imprisonment between three and five years, and a fine up to Rs 10 lakh
- **Responsibilities of service providers:** Service providers must promptly report violations of the Bill to the police and the relevant examination authority, failure to do so constitutes an offence.

UGC Releases Guidelines On Internships For Undergraduate Students

The [UGC](#) issued guidelines for undergraduate internships, distinguishing between those aimed at improving employability and those focused on fostering research skills.

▪ **Key features of the guidelines are as follows:**

- **Responsibilities of officers at the HEI:** Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should designate a **nodal officer** to secure internship opportunities, a supervisor to monitor student activities, and a mentor to guide and validate student performance.
- **Process:** HEIs should create an internship portal for organizations, experts, and faculty to register, allowing students to apply for internships, including options for digital or group internships for those unable to secure physical placements, followed by evaluation by their internship supervisor.
- **Credits:** Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can require a minimum of two to four internship credits for a three or four-year undergraduate course with Honours, to be completed in the fourth semester over 60-120 hours.

Comments Invited On Guidelines For Prevention Of Misleading Coaching Ads

The [Central Consumer Protection Authority](#) issued draft guidelines under the [Consumer Protection Act, 2019](#), to prevent misleading advertisements in the coaching sector, encompassing all forms of academic support or guidance.

▪ **Key features of the Guidelines are:**

- **Misleading ads:** Ads must not hide vital information affecting consumers' decisions, make false success claims, attribute all success to coaching, or induce unnecessary anxiety.
- **Obligations:** Coaches must **disclose candidates'** ranks and course durations, use disclaimers in ads, truthfully represent facilities, and avoid highlighting only exceptional cases.
- **Prohibited activities:** Coaches cannot use successful candidates' details without consent, use fake reviews or false claims like 100% selection, imply guaranteed results, or exaggerate faculty credentials.

Home Secretary Required to Destroy Records of Interception Under IT Amendment Rules

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology notified the [Information Technology \(Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information\) Amendment Rules, 2024](#).

- As per the 2009 Rules, the security agency must destroy all records pertaining to the interception, monitoring, and decryption of data every six months.
- Records pertaining to directions for such actions must also be destroyed. These records must be destroyed unless required or likely to be required. The amendment adds that the **competent**

authority (under the Rules) must also destroy such records.

- The competent authority is the:
 - Secretary in the **Ministry of Home Affairs** (in case of the Central Government) and
 - Secretary in charge of the Home Department (in case of a state government or union territory).
- These authorities sanction the action of interception, monitoring, or decryption on behalf of the government.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Digital Payments and Online Security

The Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology presented its report on 'Digital Payment and Online Security Measures for Data Protection'.

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are as follows:**
 - **Increase in online financial frauds:** The Committee recommended a multipronged approach involving all concerned Ministries to prevent **cybercrime** and suggested the Ministry of Home Affairs to establish a **nodal agency** with representatives from all involved agencies.
 - **AePS-based crimes:** The Committee observed a rise in frauds using AePS, with the Ministry of Home Affairs reporting the use of dummy or rubber fingers to falsify biometric authentication through **Aadhaar**.
 - **Recovery of money:** It recommended that the Ministry of Home Affairs streamline the process of returning the amounts frozen to the victims.

Surrogacy Rules Amended to Allow an Intending Couple to Use Donor Gametes

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued the **Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2024**, which amend the Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022, under the **Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021**, regulating surrogacy in India.

- The 2022 Rules **initially prohibited** the use of donor gametes for surrogacy, requiring single women (widows/divorcees) to use their own eggs.
- However, in October 2023, the **Supreme Court** allowed the use of donor eggs if a woman cannot produce her own.
- The 2024 amendment **now permits** the use of donor gametes under specific conditions, stating that either the intending husband or wife must have a medical condition necessitating surrogacy, and the child born must have at least one gamete from the intending couple, with certification by the District Medical Board, while the condition for single women remains unchanged.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Quality of Medical Education in India

The Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare submitted its report on the '**Quality of Medical Education in India**'.

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:**
 - **Limited seats:** To ensure greater availability of seats, the Committee recommended:
 - continuing the initiative to **establish medical colleges** attached to district or referral hospitals,
 - offering **online and distance learning** to increase student intake without overburdening physical infrastructure,
 - permitting new medical colleges to increase annual intake up to 250 seats,
 - encouraging private investment in medical education.
 - **Uneven distribution of medical colleges:** The Committee noted a significant disparity in the distribution of medical colleges among states, suggesting a revision of existing guidelines to establish region-specific norms.
 - **Cost of medical education:** The Committee suggested measures including need-based scholarships for students, tax concessions for medical college-running organizations, collaboration between private medical colleges and district hospitals, and subsidizing

laboratory equipment in private medical colleges to reduce operational costs.

Standing Committee Submits Report On Promotion Of Medical Device Industry

The Standing Committee on Chemicals and Fertilisers presented its report on the 'Promotion of Medical Device Industry'.

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are as follows:**
 - **Impediments to the growth of the medical device industry:** The domestic manufacturing of medical devices in India is primarily focused on **low to moderate-end products** like consumables and implants, with 70% of high-end devices such as electronic equipment and advanced surgical instruments being imported.
 - Despite initiatives by the Pharmaceuticals Department since 2015, including incentives such as interest subsidies, concessional power, and price controls for devices like surgical instruments, there has been limited progress.
 - **Import dependence:** The Committee recommended formulating an **inter-ministerial and inter-governmental strategy** to offer domestic manufacturers competitive advantage.
 - **Medical devices parks:** The [Promotion of Medical Devices Parks Scheme](#) aims to establish four medical device parks with shared testing facilities and labs in four states, with only Rs 89 lakh of the allocated Rs 120 crore for the first phase (2022-23) utilized thus far, prompting the Committee to advocate for ongoing progress monitoring with state agencies and the expansion of the scheme to additional states.

Standing Committee Submits Report on National Ayush Mission

The Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare submitted its report on the '[Review of National Ayush Mission](#)'.

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are as follows:**
 - **Implementation of the Mission:** The Committee noted that about 69% of integrated Ayush Hospitals approved under the Mission are still under construction.
 - The Committee recommended extending the Mission by five years beyond 2024-25.
 - It also recommended that [Sowa-Rigpa](#), a traditional system of medicine prevalent in the Himalayan regions, should be included in the Mission.
- **Reasons for delays:** The Mission's implementation delays stem from late fund allocation, overlapping administrative functions, and delays in utilization certificate submission, with the Committee suggesting solutions like streamlining budget line items in state action plans and clarifying entity roles.

Draft Greenwashing Guidelines Released For Public Comments

The [Central Consumer Protection Authority](#) issued Draft Guidelines for the [Prevention and Regulation of Greenwashing under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019](#).

- **Key features of the draft Guidelines include:**
 - **Greenwashing to be prohibited:** The Guidelines ban greenwashing in advertising and communication, applying to all involved entities except for general advertisements or communication not specific to a product or service.
 - **Substantiation of environmental claims:** When making environmental claims, avoid using generic terms like clean, green, eco-friendly, cruelty-free, and carbon-neutral without proper explanation and justification, and ensure that technical terms are clarified in consumer-friendly language.
 - **Disclosures:** All environmental claims must be **truthful, comprehensive**, and based on verifiable data, supported by credible certification or scientific evidence, encompassing goods, manufacturing processes, packaging, or services.
 - **Claims regarding the future:** Environmental claims must be backed by clear and actionable plans detailing how objectives will be achieved.

Comments Invited on the Draft Cinematograph Certification Rules

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting invited comments on the draft of the [Cinematograph \(Certification\) Rules, 2024](#).

▪ Key changes include:

- **UA certification:** The Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023 introduced markers indicating age appropriateness for UA certification.
- **Approving authority for content:** The approving authority for certification will be different based on the type and length of the content.
- **Representation of women in Board:** The draft Rules specify that one-third of the members of the Board and advisory panels must be women.
- **Invitation of experts for certification:** The draft Rules allow the Regional Officer to invite one or more subject or language experts in the field of film for the examination of a film.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Regulation of Cable Television in India

The Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology presented its report on [‘Regulation of Cable Television in India’](#).

▪ Key observations and recommendations of the Committee includes:

- **Regulation of cable television:** Cable TV is primarily regulated by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995. However, multiple regulators issuing rules and guidelines have caused content disparity across platforms.
- The Act does not regulate services like [Over The Top \(OTT\) platforms](#), which are instead governed by Rules from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, while the Committee noted the necessity of comprehensive regulation for the cable TV industry.
- **Constraints and challenges faced by the Ministry:** Challenges for the MIB include **under-reporting** of cable subscribers, lack of oversight at the ground level, and the absence of a central database of Local Cable Operators.

Comments Invited on draft Rules on Offshore Areas Mineral Trust

The Ministry of Mines has invited comments on the draft Offshore Areas Mineral Trust Rules, 2024.

▪ Key features of the draft Rules include:

- **Governance of the Trust:** The Trust will be overseen by a Governing Body and administered by an Executive Committee, with their compositions notified by the central government.
- **Fund under the Trust:** An Executive Committee will manage a non-lapsable, non-interest-bearing Offshore Areas Mineral Trust Fund, funded by offshore mine production lease holders paying 10% of royalties to the central government.
- **Annual plan:** The Secretary of the Executive Committee must present a yearly plan to the Governing Body, detailing proposed projects, timelines, milestones, and activities for the financial year.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Functioning of MGNREGA

The Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj submitted its report on “Rural Employment through [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\)](#) - An Insight into Wage Rates and Other Matters relating thereto”

▪ Key recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Revision of wage rates:** The Committee suggested revising the wage rates for MGNREGA, as using 2010-11 as the base year for minimum wages was not in line with current inflation and living costs.
- **Delay in payments:** The Committee noted delays in wage and material component

- releases, recommending streamlined payment processes and providing physical pay slips for technologically backward scheme beneficiaries.
- **Gaps in budgetary allocation:** The Committee noted that reduced budgeted allocation can negatively affect the timely release of wages and materials.

Economy

Interim Union Budget 2024-25

The Finance Minister has presented the 2024-25 Interim [Union Budget](#).

▪ **Key highlights of the Budget include:**

- **Expenditure:** The government has proposed to spend Rs 47,65,768 crore in 2024-25.
- **Receipts:** The receipts (other than borrowings) in 2024-25 are expected to be Rs 30,80,274 crore.
- **GDP growth:** The nominal GDP growth rate has been estimated at 10.5% in 2024-25.
- **Deficits:** In 2024-25, the fiscal deficit is targeted at 5.1% of GDP and the Revenue deficit in 2024-25 is targeted at 2% of GDP.
- **Tax proposals:** No changes in direct and indirect taxes have been proposed.
- **Policy proposals:**
 - An additional two crore houses will be built over the next five years under the [PM Awas Yojana](#).
 - [Rooftop solarisation of one crore houses](#) will also be taken up.
 - Private entities will receive long-term loans at low or zero interest rates for scaling up research and innovation.

Central Sector Scheme For Fisheries Approved

The Union Cabinet approved the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)**, a sub-scheme under the central sector scheme [PM Matsya Sampada Yojana](#), aimed at formalizing the fisheries sector and supporting small and micro fisheries enterprises

▪ **Key components of the scheme include:**

- **Formalizing unorganized fisheries:** The scheme aims to register fishers, farmers, and **workers on a digital platform for incentives and training**.
- **Promoting aquaculture insurance:** Introducing insurance for one lakh hectares, with small farmers getting up to one lakh rupees incentive.
- **Enhancing value chain efficiency:** Improving efficiency with performance grants to encourage microenterprises to resume production, with a grant limit of 25% of total investment or Rs 35 lakh for the general category.
- **Implementing product safety and quality systems:** Encouraging micro and small enterprises to adopt safety and quality standards with performance grants.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Employment and Revenue Earning Potential of Fisheries

The Standing Committee on Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying presented its report on 'Employment Generation and Revenue Earning Potential of Fisheries Sector'.

- **The key findings and recommendations of the Committee are as follows:**
- **Employment generation in fisheries:** The Committee suggests boosting investments in exports, post-harvest processing, and import substitution to create more job opportunities.
 - **Fisheries industry:** The Committee highlighted the sector's growth potential and its potential contribution to government revenue, recommending the formation of a dedicated research council due to its importance.

Cabinet Approved Amendments to FDI Policy for Space Sector

The Union Cabinet approved amendments to the [foreign direct investment \(FDI\) policy](#) for the space sector.

- As per the amended policy, up to 74% FDI will be allowed for satellite manufacturing and operation, satellite data products, ground segment, and user segment under the automatic route.
 - FDI beyond 74% will be subject to government approval.
- FDI up to 49% under the automatic route will be allowed for launch vehicles and
- spaceports, beyond which it will be subject to government approval.
- 100% FDI under the automatic route has been allowed for the manufacturing of components and systems/sub-systems for satellites.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Strategy to Maximise Exports and Minimise Imports

The Standing Committee on Commerce submitted its report on 'Comprehensive Strategy to Map Major Products and Countries to Maximise Exports and Minimise Imports'.

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:**
 - **Import of petroleum products:** To **reduce India's reliance on imports**, the Committee emphasized the importance of boosting domestic production of crude petroleum, coal, coke, and other petroleum products by incentivizing hydrocarbon exploration and extraction, along with promoting a transition from traditional fuel-based vehicles to electric vehicles.
 - **Engineering exports:** India's engineering exports, accounting for over a quarter of total merchandise exports, hit USD 107 billion in 2022-23; however, challenges such as tariff and non-tariff barriers from the USA and the EU, including the EU's [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism \(CBAM\)](#), potentially affecting products like fertilizer, aluminum, and cement, were highlighted by the Committee, proposing a three-year extension on its application to the [MSME sector](#) due to financial constraints.
 - **Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) Scheme:** The [RoDTEP scheme](#), implemented since January 2021, aims to remit taxes, duties, and levies not covered by other refund mechanisms to enhance export competitiveness, with a committee suggesting an urgent review of remission rates and expansion of covered products.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Development of Cotton Sector

The Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles and Skill Development presented its report on 'Development of [Cotton Sector](#)'

- **Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:**
 - **Low productivity of cotton:** The Committee suggested expanding irrigated cotton cultivation sustainably and transitioning irrigation to a demand-driven system, while also recommending the development of new farming techniques, crop health campaigns, pest eradication efforts, and demonstration of best practices.
 - **Outdated seed varieties resulting in low productivity:** The Committee also noted that the seed technology in use is outdated and that there is an urgent need for a new variety of seeds.
 - It recommended that the Ministry augment the development of early maturing and hybrid seeds that suit Indian needs.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Operation and Maintenance of National Highways

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture presented its report on 'Operation and Maintenance of National Highways and Management of Toll Plazas'.

- **Key recommendations of the Committee include:**

- **Delay in construction and inadequate funds for maintenance:** The Committee observed that the completion of hundreds of highways is running behind schedule, and recommended expediting the construction process.
- **Slow progress in monetization:** It recommended that the pace of monetization should be increased to cope with [NHAI's](#) rising debt. The Committee noted that hybrid structures where the traffic risk is shared by the authorities and the assured minimum payments are made to concessionaires could alleviate some of the existing challenges.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Status of Ship Building Industries

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture submitted its report on 'Status of Ship Building, Ship Repair and Ship breaking industries in the Country'.

▪ Key recommendations include:

- **Financial Assistance Policy:** The Committee highlighted the underutilization of the Rs 4,000 crore policy corpus, suggesting an evaluation of reasons for the poor utilization and its impact on Indian shipyards' competitiveness, including high material imports and low automation.
- **Development of shipbuilding industry:** India's 1%-2% share in the global shipbuilding industry is attributed to high shipbuilding costs; the Rangarajan Commission advocated classifying ships and vessels as infrastructure, a status now granted to shipyards, enabling them to access long-term funding at lower rates.
- The Committee proposed extending infrastructure status to all ships and vessels, along with incentivizing domestic production of specialized steels and creating a Maritime Development Fund for access to working capital and long-term finance.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Smart Cities

The Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs submitted its report on "[Smart Cities](#) Mission: An Evaluation".

▪ Observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs):** The Committee noted that the frequent transfer of CEOs and lack of clear guidelines is one of the major challenges faced by [SPVs](#).
 - It recommended appointing dedicated CEOs with a minimum fixed tenure, ensuring representation of experts and stakeholders in SPVs, and utilizing an SPV's existing expertise in future projects.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** The Committee recommended that the government should analyze the reasons behind low private investments and take remedial steps towards the same.
- **Digital infrastructure protection:** The Committee recommended formulating a mechanism to protect digital infrastructure from cyber threats and maintain data privacy.

Environment

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 Passed by Parliament

The [Water \(Prevention and Control of Pollution\) Amendment Bill, 2024](#), amends the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, which establishes the central and state pollution control boards (CPCB and SPCBs) to prevent and control water pollution.

- The Bill removes criminal penalties for various offenses, opting for fines instead, initially in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and the union territories, with other states able to extend its scope through resolutions.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Consent exemptions for establishing industries:**
 - The Act requires prior consent from the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) for

establishing any industry or treatment plant that may discharge sewage, with the Bill allowing the central government, in consultation with the [Central Pollution Control Board \(CPCB\)](#), to exempt certain industrial categories;

- The Bill also empowers the central government to issue guidelines for granting, refusing, or canceling SPCB's consent, while both the Act and the Bill penalize operating an industry without such consent, with imprisonment up to six years and a fine, and penalize tampering with monitoring devices with a penalty ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15 lakh.
- **Discharge of polluting matter:** The Act authorizes the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) to promptly halt pollution-causing activities in water bodies and prohibits the breach of pollution standards set by the SPCB, except for specified activities like depositing non-polluting materials for land reclamation, punishable by imprisonment or fine; however, the Bill substitutes the imprisonment penalty with a fine ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15 lakh.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Climate Resilient Farming

The Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Food Processing, presented a report on 'Promotion of Climate Resilient Farming.'

▪ Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Crop diversification:** The Committee suggested that the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare provide farmers with comprehensive assistance for crop diversification.
- **Water conservation:** The Committee emphasized the necessity of improving irrigation infrastructure in north-western India, and proposed the use of algorithms to optimize irrigation schedules and reduce environmental impact.
- **Potential impact and mitigation measures:** The Committee suggested that the [National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture \(NICRA\) Scheme](#) should be implemented in all risk-vulnerable villages to protect farmers from climate and meteorological incidents.

Cabinet Approves a Scheme to Provide For Rooftop Solar in One Crore Households

The Union Cabinet approved the [PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana](#).

- The scheme aims to provide for the installation of rooftop solar systems in one crore households.
- The scheme will provide financial assistance worth 60% of the system cost for installations up to 2 kilowatt (kW) capacity. In addition, 40% of additional system cost will be provided for capacity between 2 kW and 3 kW.
- For installing rooftop solar systems up to 3 kW capacity, households will also be eligible for collateral-free loans at an interest rate of around 7%.

Amendment to Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020 Notified

The Ministry of Power issued the [Electricity \(Rights of Consumers\) Amendment Rules, 2024](#), which modify the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020, delineating the rights and responsibilities of electricity consumers.

▪ Key features of the amended rules include:

- **Choice to opt for a single connection for a building:** The revised Rules allow owners in apartments/flats/colonies to decide on either individual or shared connections, with a majority vote determining the final choice; for shared connections, the Resident Welfare Association handles metering, billing, and collection.
- **Rooftop solar systems:** Earlier, Rules required a technical feasibility study within 21 days, now amended to 15 days with failure to report results deeming the project feasible; solar systems under 10 kW exempt from study with distribution infrastructure upgradation cost borne by discom.
- **Protocol for meter related complaints:** The amended Rules mandate discoms to test

meters within 30 days of receiving complaints, removing the State Commission's discretion, and require installation of an additional meter within five days for complaints of meter reading variance, to be kept for at least three months.

Draft Regulations to Determine Tariff for Renewable Energy Released

The [Central Electricity Regulation Commission](#) released draft regulations to determine the tariff of power from [renewable energy \(RE\)](#) sources.

▪ Key features include:

- **Tariff types:** CERC will set annual generic tariffs for various renewable energy projects, with project-specific rates for solar PV, floating solar, and wind power projects.
- **Tariff structure:** For projects that have a fuel cost component, a two-component tariff with a fixed cost and a fuel cost will be determined.
- **Over-generation:** If a renewable energy project produces more energy than needed, it can sell the excess to any entity, with the first right of refusal given to the beneficiary at the applicable tariff.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Review of Yamuna River Cleaning Projects in Delhi

The Standing Committee on Water Resources submitted its report on “Review of Upper [Yamuna River](#) Cleaning Projects up to Delhi and Riverbed Management in Delhi”.

▪ Key recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Groundwater extraction:** The Committee recommended that the agricultural sector adopt micro and drip irrigation techniques, and practice water budgeting and watershed management.
- **Water Quality:** Between 2021 and 2023, the Committee observed that out of 33 monitored locations, the water quality in 23 locations did not meet the Primary Water Quality Criteria for Outdoor Bathing (PWQC), with dissolved oxygen levels below the prescribed 5 mg/l for life sustenance, particularly in Delhi.
- **Riverbed Pollution:** The Committee noted a significant increase in debris dumping in the Yamuna from one case in 2018 to 610 in 2021, with high levels of lead, copper, and zinc found in sludge samples, recommending rules for debris dumping, exploring controlled dredging for debris and heavy metal removal, and creating a system for proper disposal of polluted sludge.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/prs-capsule-february-2024>