

NO UNION, BUT CENTRE READY TO EASE LIVING OF GAY COUPLES

The Union government informed the Supreme Court on Wednesday that it was willing to form a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary to consider administrative measures for addressing "genuine, human concerns" faced by same-sex couples in their daily lives in areas such as banking and insurance, without delving into their petitions for legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

"The government is positive. Something can be done administratively regarding genuine concerns of same-sex couples. This would require coordination among different Ministries. Therefore, we have decided, subject to the court's approval, to form a committee headed by none less than the Cabinet Secretary. My friends [the petitioners] can give their suggestions about the problems they are facing. The committee will go into them and see, as far as possible and legally permissible, how they can be addressed," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, submitted before a Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud.

The Bench termed the government's stand a "step forward" and even a "big, big positive" towards achieving wider social acceptance of the right of same-sex couples to cohabit.

The court said the Centre's offer of a forum to address the day-to-day human concerns of the same-sex community would ensure that the petitioners' movement does not hit a wall, even if they may fail in their endeavour in court. Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, for the petitioners, said the LGBTQIA+ community was happy to accept the "low-hanging fruit" the government is willing to offer by forming a committee, which may do some "administrative tweaking" of office orders or circulars. "But you [Constitution Bench] need to declare the real, symbolic and actual meaning of marriage for the same-sex community," Mr. Singhvi said.

"Ninety-nine per cent of same-sex couples want to get married. Marriage will give their relationship meaning, purpose and identity," senior advocate Saurabh Kirpal, for a gay couple, submitted.

Senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy said same-sex marriage was not an elitist concept. "I speak in many small towns. Young people there want marriage. Do not let them experience what we did. We want a positive enactment of the right to marry," she said.

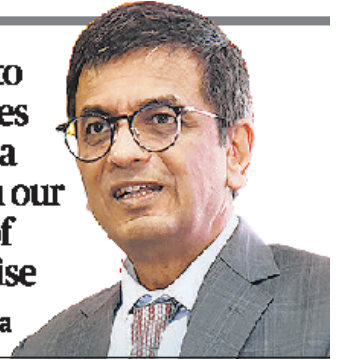
"We do not go by either popular morality or segmental morality. We decide what the Constitution says. If you say this is what young people feel, then there will be people on the other side who will throw tons of materials at us, saying this is what the country feels," Chief Justice Chandrachud reacted.

Justice S. Ravindra Bhat asked the petitioners to consider the government's proposal as a "building block" for future changes.

Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul reasoned that even if the petitioners were to get a judicial declaration from the court legally recognising same-sex

The court can now go into whether same-sex couples have a right to cohabit together in a normal, peaceable environment in our country without facing any form of discrimination, societal or otherwise

D.Y. CHANDRACHUD Chief Justice of India



The government, though reluctant to give same-sex relationships the status of marriage, is not reluctant to sort out the human concerns arising out of them. To that extent, there is consensus

S.K. KAUL Supreme Court judge



Govt. proposes panel to look into 'genuine, human concerns'; Supreme Court says it is a 'step forward' and a 'big, big positive' towards social acceptance of right of same-sex couples to cohabit

marriage, there would be "many, many changes required in administrative and legislative aspects". Whether the court recognises same-sex marriage or not, these human concerns have to be addressed.

"The government, though reluctant to give same-sex relationships the status of marriage, is not reluctant to sort out the human concerns arising out of them," Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said.

Justice Hima Kohli said the petitioners should not go for an "all-or-none approach" and finally reach a dead end.

Next step

The Chief Justice said the court could now go into whether same-sex couples have a "right to cohabit together in a normal, peaceable environment in our country without facing any form of discrimination, societal or otherwise".

The court said the suggestion from the government to form a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary indicates its readiness to recognise the incidence of cohabitory relationships among same-sex couples.

GO FIRST LANDS IN NCLT WITH ₹11,463-CR. DUES

Go First approached the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Wednesday and sought the admission of its insolvency plea. It owes creditors ₹11,463 crore, the airline said in its insolvency filing.

The NCLT, Delhi has listed the matter for Thursday.

According to Reuters, the airline, in its petition, said its total liabilities to all creditors stood at ₹11,463 crore, which includes dues to banks, financial institutions, vendors and aircraft lessors.

"Currently, the assets of the company are not sufficient to meet its liabilities," the airline said in the filing as per Reuters.

On Tuesday, the airline suspended flights for three days and announced its decision to seek insolvency proceedings before the NCLT. It blamed grounding of 25 aircraft due to delays in delivery of engines by Pratt & Whitney for its failure to meet its financial obligations.

Responding to Go First's claims that its cash crunch was precipitated by Pratt & Whitney's failure to deliver engines, the engine maker said it was complying with the March 2023 arbitration ruling. The Singapore International Arbitration Centre had ordered P&W to provide Go First 10 engines by April 27 and another 10 by December.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

APRIL PMI SIGNALS SERVICES SECTOR HAD BEST EXPANSION IN 13 YEARS

India's services sector recorded its highest uptick in new business and output levels since June 2010 this April, led by a strong upturn in the finance and insurance segment, as per the seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Services PMI Business Activity Index, which rebounded from a decline to 57.8 in March to 62 in April.

A reading of 50 on the index indicates no change in business activity levels.

New export orders expanded for the third month in succession and at the fastest pace over this period. However, job creation remained negligible in April and input cost inflation, which had hit a two-and-a-half-year low in March, surged to a three-month high, with firms reporting a rise in costs on food, fuel, medicine, transportation and wages.

Consumer services firms recorded the fastest upturn in average expenses, as per the survey-based monthly indicator, but all services sectors raised selling prices at the fastest pace in 2023, with the most acute price hikes undertaken by transport, information and communication businesses.

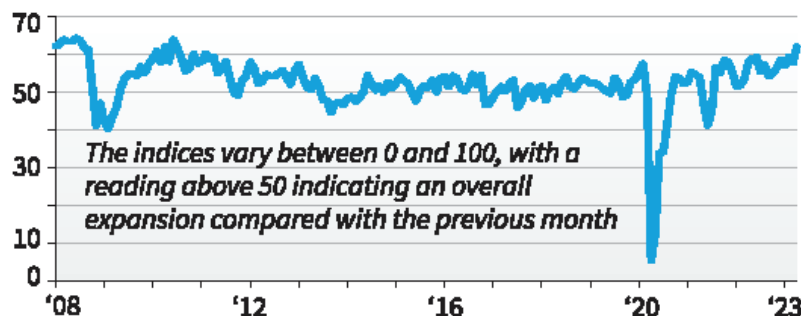
Business confidence which had plummeted to an eight-month low in March, revived a bit in April. Close to 22% of surveyed companies forecast growth of business activity over the course of the coming 12 months, compared with 2% that anticipate a reduction, S&P Global said.

"India's service sector posted a remarkable performance in April, with demand strength backing the strongest increases in new business and output in just under 13 years," noted Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at S&P Global Market Intelligence. "One area of weakness highlighted in the latest results was the labour market. Despite the substantial pick-up in sales growth and improved business sentiment towards the outlook, the increase in employment seen in April was negligible and failed to gain meaningful traction," she added.

Outstanding business volumes increased for the sixteenth straight month, but rose "only marginally" in April, reflecting the slowest growth in sixteen

Getting down to business

Rising from 57.8 in March to 62 in April, the seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Services PMI Business Activity Index signalled the fastest expansion in output since June 2010



months.

The services sectors' performance lifted overall output in India's private sector to the highest level since July 2010, with aggregate sales also rising at the fastest pace in almost 13 years. The S&P Global India Composite PMI Output Index rose from 58.4 in March to 61.6 in April. The S&P Global Manufacturing PMI had risen to a four-month high of 57.2 in April.

"Despite the substantial upturn in sales, job creation across the private sector remained mild. Rates of expansion were broadly similar at manufacturing firms and their services counterparts," S&P Global underlined.

PRESENT IMPERFECT IRRESPECTIVE OF WHAT THE USCIRF SAYS, INDIA MUST REVIEW ITS RIGHTS RECORD

For the fourth consecutive year, the government has expressed outrage and rejected the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) latest report, calling it "biased and motivated". In its report released on Monday, the independent congressional body has called for India to be designated a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) for its "worsening" record on religious freedoms. The report has targeted the Indian government for "promoting and enforcing religiously discriminatory policies", naming laws that deal with conversion, interfaith relationships, wearing the hijab and cow slaughter, as well as the CAA and the NRC. All of these, it alleges, have impacted minorities including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and Adivasis (indigenous peoples and Scheduled Tribes) negatively. The USCIRF has also catalogued acts of violence and the vilification of minorities and criticised the "suppression of critical voices" by intimidation that includes surveillance, demolition of property, detentions and the targeting of NGOs through laws curtailing foreign donations. It has criticised the U.S. State Department for not having designated India as a CPC, and has called for sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials. In the only such sanction imposed on India, the U.S. had, in 2005, revoked Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's U.S. visa after a USCIRF recommendation on the 2002 Gujarat riots. In its response, the External Affairs Ministry has told the USCIRF to "desist" from such reports and to "develop a better understanding of India...."

The government's stern reaction is understandable, and is in line with its response to such reports over the last two decades, since the USCIRF began to publish its findings. The process the USCIRF follows is non-inclusive, and the fact that it does not study the state of religious freedoms inside the U.S., suggests a double standard. Moreover, its recommendations hold no sway within India, and are meant only for the U.S. government to deliberate on, and accept or dismiss. Either way, there is little need for or utility to New Delhi's public responses, which make it sound defensive and do not actually repair the reputational damage to India as a secular, inclusive and pluralistic democracy. Given the detailed and pointed accusations, however, the Centre may well consider an internal review of its conduct and the direction it hopes to lead India in, on issues such as religious freedoms and rights. Eventually, any government's duty is not in achieving a perfect score in a survey run abroad, but rather in burnishing its record of delivering justice, equality and security to its citizens back home.

VALOUR AND PRESTIGE — THE WORLD OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

The evacuation of 121 Indians from Wadi Seidna, north of Khartoum in Sudan, in the dead of night, using an Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J Super Hercules, has been lauded all round. The IAF's press release is an understatement of the stupendous task done on the night of April 27-28, but is a subtle shabash to the personnel involved. And let us not forget the steed they flew, the C-130J, and the foresight of the IAF and national leadership in the beginning of the century which, considering the growing stature and responsibilities of the nation, had planned the purchase of this aircraft, an

outstanding capability enabler. One also needs to acknowledge the acquisition of the other aircraft for the IAF, the C-17 Globemaster heavy lift aircraft.

The Wadi Seidna mission will soon be forgotten and it is only right that the reader is able to have some idea of how special operations capability has progressed, and what should be kept in mind as it is developed further.

The impact of Kandahar

During the 'Kandahar' incident of December 24, 1999, when an Indian Airlines flight IC-814 was hijacked while on a flight from Kathmandu to New Delhi

— it ended on December 31, 1999 — I happened to be with Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis on December 24 in Israel when the chief's mobile phone rang; the Vice Chief was on line with the news that IC-814 had been hijacked and had landed at Amritsar, a civil airfield. We all know how standard operating procedures did not work thereafter and the plane eventually landed at Kandahar in Afghanistan, leading to the release of dreaded terrorists.

Could India have done a rescue like the famous Israeli rescue at Entebbe, Uganda in July 1976? Here, Israeli commandos flew all the way to Uganda and stormed a hijacked Air France jet in trying circumstances. The will is sure to have been there but for two big impediments — the presence of Pakistan whose territory could not have been overflown and no IAF aircraft that could carry out a very risky mission avoiding Pakistani airspace, entering Afghanistan from the south and returning without refuelling.

The Afghanistan rescue missions

Enter the C-130J in the IAF's inventory, and we now have this capability if the political leadership decides to intervene in such a critical situation where national interests and reputation are at stake. Before the Sudan rescue there have been two other such missions that are known in the open domain. The first was the evacuation of Indian Embassy personnel from Herat, in Afghanistan in April 2020. The aircraft flew from India and had its engines running even after landing; the IAF's Garud commandos stood guard while the diplomatic staff disembarked.

The second mission, on August 20, 2021 was an equally high risk one from Kabul; one had evacuation videos by the United States and the fiasco that unfolded going viral. The airspace was uncontrolled and the ground situation chaotic for want of a better word. There were a large number of aircraft in the air and the pilots had to avoid them and use night vision goggles while landing; the only call they received from the ground controller was the line, "Land at your own risk" (a phrase that is etched on the shoulder patch that squadron crew wear on

their flying overalls).

While the crew on these missions were awarded for their professionalism and gallantry, what needs to be appreciated too is the aircrew selection and their special training.

In the case of the Sudan rescue, the crew faced many problems too. Intelligence was poor and the runway was rough with no landing aids. All they had was top-class onboard aircraft instrumentation such as synthetic runway generation on the head-up display, electro-optical night vision capability, night vision goggles, and of course, great confidence in their ability to pull it off.

The essence of special ops

Special operations are much more than stick and throttle operations, night vision goggles and dark nights. Every member of such a mission bears on his shoulders the weight of a nation's prestige. They are India's 'strategic corporals'. This term, coined by General Charles C. Krulak of the U.S. Marine Corps, denotes that in modern warfare, the actions of even the enlisted man on the front lines has a strategic effect on a nation's policies; and that institutional training should cater for this. When it comes to failure, the bungled hostage rescue attempt by the Americans from Iran in 1980 or the picture of Gary Powers in USSR custody when his U-2 was shot down in 1960 are reminders of the loss of face for the U.S. In terms of success, what brought laurels for the U.S. was the elimination of Osama bin Laden in a Special Forces raid. There is, thus, a non-military intangible element in every such operation that a young officer or a corporal, far removed from his base, has to accomplish. It is only right that this ethos and training in the IAF's special operations crew not be diluted by the lure of sending the versatile C-130s for routine tasks and VIP carriage.

The IAF's C-130J special ops squadrons (there are two) call themselves the 'Veiled Vipers' and the 'Raiding Raptors.' It is incumbent on the leadership to ensure that their sting stays potent.

THE EU'S ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ACT

After intense last-minute negotiations in the past few weeks on how to bring general-purpose artificial intelligence systems (GPAIS) like OpenAI's ChatGPT under the ambit of regulation, members of European Parliament reached a preliminary deal this week on a new draft of the European Union's ambitious Artificial Intelligence Act, first drafted two years ago.

Why regulate artificial intelligence?

As artificial intelligence technologies become omnipresent and their algorithms more advanced — capable of performing a wide variety of tasks including voice assistance, recommending music, driving cars, detecting cancer, and even deciding whether you get shortlisted for a job — the risks and uncertainties associated with them have also ballooned.

Many AI tools are essentially black boxes, meaning even those who designed them cannot explain what goes on inside them to generate a particular output. Complex and unexplainable AI tools have already manifested in wrongful arrests due to AI-enabled facial recognition; discrimination and societal biases seeping into AI outputs; and most recently, in how chatbots based on large language models (LLMs) like Generative Pretrained Transformer-3 (GPT-3) and 4 can generate versatile, human-competitive and genuine looking content, which may be inaccurate or copyrighted material.

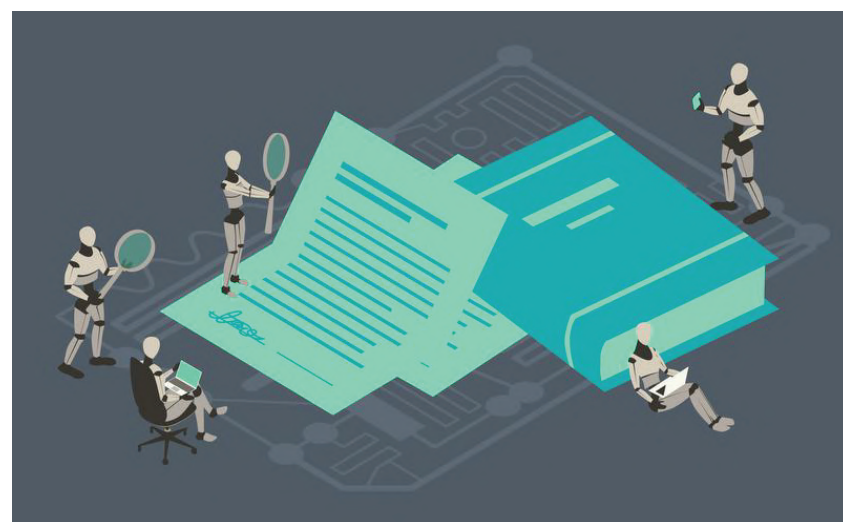
Recently, industry stakeholders including Twitter CEO Elon Musk and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak signed an open letter asking AI labs to stop the training of AI models more powerful than GPT-4 for six months, citing potential risks to society and humanity. "Powerful AI systems should be developed only once we are confident that their effects will be positive and their risks will be manageable," the letter said. It urged global policymakers to "dramatically accelerate" the development of "robust" AI governance systems.

How was the AI Act formed?

The legislation was drafted in 2021 with the aim of bringing transparency, trust, and accountability to AI and creating a framework to mitigate risks to the safety, health, fundamental rights, and democratic values of the EU. It also aims to address ethical questions and implementation challenges in various sectors ranging from healthcare and education to finance and energy. The legislation seeks to strike a balance between promoting "the uptake of AI while mitigating or preventing harms associated with certain uses of the technology".

Similar to how the EU's 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) made it an industry leader in the global data protection regime, the AI law aims to "strengthen Europe's position as a global hub of excellence in AI from the lab to the market" and ensure that AI in Europe respects the 27-country bloc's values and rules.

What does the draft document entail?



What are the stipulations mentioned in the new draft document of the European Union's AI Act? Why are AI tools often called black boxes? What are the four risk categories of AI? How did the popularity of ChatGPT accelerate and change the process of bringing in regulation for artificial intelligence?

The draft of the AI Act broadly defines AI as "software that is developed with one or more of the techniques that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, generate outputs such as content, predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing the environments they interact with". It identifies AI tools based on machine learning and deep learning, knowledge as well as logic-based and statistical approaches. The Act's central approach is the classification of AI tech based on the level of risk they pose to the "health and safety or fundamental rights" of a person. There are four risk categories in the Act — unacceptable, high, limited and minimal.

The Act prohibits using technologies in the unacceptable risk category with little exception. These include the use of real-time facial and biometric identification systems in public spaces; systems of social scoring of citizens by governments leading to "unjustified and disproportionate detrimental treatment"; subliminal techniques to distort a person's behaviour; and technologies which can exploit vulnerabilities of the young or elderly, or persons with disabilities.

Act lays substantial focus on AI in the high-risk category, prescribing a

number of pre-and post-market requirements for developers and users of such systems. Some systems falling under this category include biometric identification and categorisation of natural persons, AI used in healthcare, education, employment (recruitment), law enforcement, justice delivery systems, and tools that provide access to essential private and public services (including access to financial services such as loan approval systems). The Act envisages establishing an EU-wide database of high-risk AI systems and setting parameters so that future technologies or those under development can be included if they meet the high-risk criteria. Before high-risk AI systems can make it to the market, they will be subject to strict reviews known in the Act as 'conformity assessments'— algorithmic impact assessments to analyse data sets fed to AI tools, biases, how users interact with the system, and the overall design and monitoring of system outputs. It also requires such systems to be transparent, explainable, allow human oversight and give clear and adequate information to the user. Moreover, since AI algorithms are specifically designed to evolve over time, high-risk systems must also comply with mandatory post-market monitoring obligations such as logging performance data and maintaining continuous compliance, with special attention paid to how these programmes change through their lifetime.

AI systems in the limited and minimal risk category such as spam filters or video games are allowed to be used with a few requirements like transparency obligations.

What is the recent proposal on general purpose AI like ChatGPT?

As recently as February this year, general-purpose AI such as the language model-based ChatGPT, used for a plethora of tasks from summarising concepts on the internet to serving up poems, news reports, and even a Colombian court judgment, did not feature in EU lawmakers' plans for regulating AI technologies. The bloc's 108-page proposal for the AI Act, published two years earlier, included only one mention of the word "chatbot." By mid-April, however, members of the European Parliament were racing to update those rules to catch up with an explosion of interest in generative AI, which has provoked awe and anxiety since OpenAI unveiled ChatGPT six months ago.

Lawmakers now target the use of copyrighted material by companies deploying generative AI tools such as OpenAI's ChatGPT or image generator Midjourney, as these tools train themselves from large sets of text and visual data on the internet. They will have to disclose any copyrighted material used to develop their systems. While the current draft does not clarify what obligations GPAIS manufacturers would be subject to, lawmakers are also debating whether all forms of GPAIS should be designated as high-risk. The draft could be amended multiple times before it actually comes into force.

How has the AI industry reacted?

While some industry players have welcomed the legislation, others have warned that broad and strict rules could stifle innovation. Companies have also raised concerns about transparency requirements, fearing that it could mean divulging trade secrets. Explainability requirements in the law have caused unease as it is often not possible for even developers to explain the functioning of algorithms.

Lawmakers and consumer groups, on the other hand, have criticised it for not fully addressing risks from AI systems.

The Act also delegates the process of standardisation for AI technologies to the EU's expert standard-setting bodies in specific sectors. A Carnegie Endowment paper points out, however, that the standards process has historically been driven by industry, and it will be a challenge to ensure governments and the public have a meaningful seat at the table.

Where does global AI governance currently stand?

The rapidly evolving pace of AI development has led to diverging global views on how to regulate these technologies. The U.S., currently does not have comprehensive AI regulation and has taken a fairly hands-off approach. The Biden administration released a blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights (AIBoR). Developed by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the AIBoR outlines the harms of AI to economic and civil rights and lays down five principles for mitigating these harms. The blueprint, instead of a horizontal approach like the EU, endorses a sector-specific approach to AI governance, with policy interventions for individual sectors such as health, labour, and education, leaving it to sectoral federal agencies to come out with their plans. The AIBoR has been described by the administration as a guidance or a handbook rather than a binding legislation.

On the other end of the spectrum, China over the last year came out with some of the world's first nationally binding regulations targeting specific types of algorithms and AI. It enacted a law to regulate recommendation algorithms with a focus on how they disseminate information. China's Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), which drafted the rules, told companies to "promote positive energy", to not "endanger national security or the social public interest" and to "give an explanation" when they harm the legitimate interests of users. Another piece of legislation targets deep synthesis technology used to generate deepfakes. In order to have transparency and understand how algorithms function, China's AI regulation authority has also created a registry or database of algorithms where developers have to register their algorithms, information about the data sets used by them and potential security risks.

SC COLLEGIUM REJECTS IB OBSERVATION ABOUT CANDIDATE FOR HC JUDGESHIP

The Supreme Court Collegium has shown that the published opinions of a former senior who is critical about the government will not affect the prospects of a lawyer to become a High Court judge.

The Collegium has recommended the name of Firdosh Phiroze Pooniwalla, an advocate, for Bombay High Court judgeship.

Though the Intelligence Bureau (IB) found nothing adverse about his image or integrity, it flagged an article written by Mr. Pooniwalla's former senior at the Bar in 2020 "expressing concerns over the alleged lack of freedom of speech/expression in the country in the last five-six years".

"The views which have been expressed by a former senior of Shri Pooniwalla have no bearing on his own competence, ability or credentials for appointment as a Judge of the High Court of Bombay," the Collegium said, finding the advocate suitable for appointment as High Court judge.

Moreover, the Collegium reasoned that Mr. Pooniwalla and his former senior did not share an employee-employer relationship as both practised on the Original side of the High Court which allowed juniors associated with a chamber

to have their own independent legal practice. Mr. Pooniwalla and two other advocates, Shailesh Pramod Brahme and Jitendra Shantilal Jain, have been recommended for appointment as Bombay High Court judges.

Separately, in a resolution proposing Justice Robin Phukan as a permanent judge of the Gauhati High Court, the Collegium lists 11 points which provide an insight into what it looks for while evaluating the judgments of candidates in its zone of recommendation.

The 11 factors include judgments which are well articulated and structured with proper recording of facts, clear identification of issues and reasoned answers to them, apt advertence to the law, due consideration and application of mind to the submissions made by lawyers in court, adequate reference to the material and relevant pleadings, appreciation of 'circumstantial evidence' and appropriate compliance with 'sentencing'.

The Collegium said Justice Phukan's judgment had clarity with precision and lucidity.

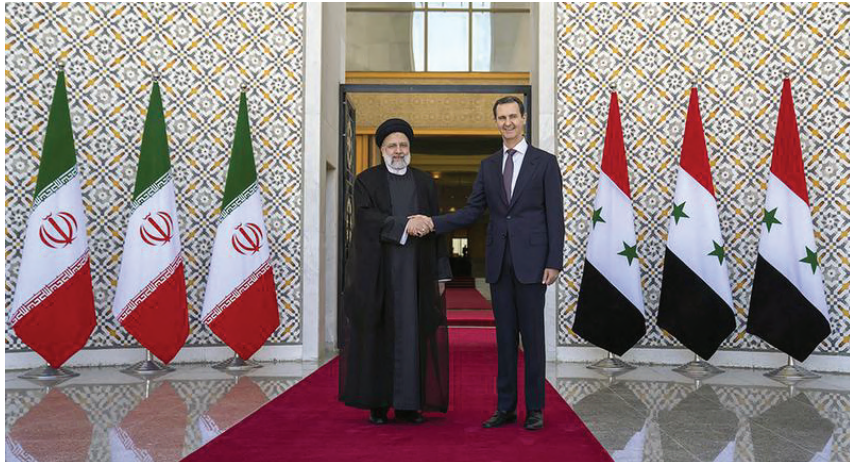
WTO NEEDS TO LOOK AT FARM SUBSIDY ISSUE WITH OPEN MIND: FM

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) should look at the issue of farm subsidies with an open mind as it impacts the food security needs of emerging economies in the backdrop of COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday. Speaking at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Governor's seminar on 'Policies to support Asia's rebound', Ms. Sitharaman said the sooner a solution is found out by the WTO, the better it would be for the world.

"Since WTO was founded, there has been a grievance with respect to the export of agricultural products and generally in trade, the voice of the Global South and emerging markets has not been heard at par with that of the developed countries," she said. The 'Global South' largely refers to countries in Asia, Africa and South America.

"We will all have to talk again [about food and fertiliser security] at the WTO with an open mind," the Minister said.

RAISI PRAISES SYRIA'S VICTORY IN CIVIL WAR DESPITE SANCTIONS



Timely ties: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, left, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, Syria, on WednesdayAP

Visiting Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi hailed Syria's Bashar al-Assad

on Wednesday for overcoming sanctions and achieving "victory" in the country's 12-year-long civil war, in which Tehran has been a major ally.

The Syria conflict has killed more than 5,00,000 people, displaced millions and battered the country's infrastructure and industry. While the front lines have mostly quietened in recent years, large parts of the country's north remain outside government control.

"Syria's government and people have gone through great difficulties, and today we can say that you have overcome all these problems and achieved victory despite the threats and sanctions imposed on you," Mr. Raisi told Mr. Assad, according to a statement from the Syrian presidency and Iran's IRNA news agency.

Helping hand

Tehran has provided economic, political and military support to Syria, helping Damascus claw back most of the territory it lost at the start of the conflict.

Both countries remain under heavy Western sanctions.

Mr. Assad told Mr. Raisi that Syria-Iran ties "were stable and steady during difficult times despite heavy political and security storms that struck the Middle East", according to the statement.

Iran "did not hesitate to provide political and economic support (to Syria), and even offered blood," Mr. Assad added.

'ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE TO COST INDIA ₹85.6 LAKH CRORE BY 2030'

The cumulative total expenditure for adapting to climate change in India is estimated to reach ₹85.6 lakh crore (at 2011-12 prices) by 2030, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Department of Economic and Policy Research (DEPR) said in its Report on Currency & Finance 2022-23.

India's goal of achieving the net zero target by 2070 would require an accelerated reduction in the energy intensity of GDP by about 5% annually and a significant improvement in its energy-mix in favour of renewables to about 80% by 2070-71, the DEPR said in its report themed 'Towards a Greener Cleaner India'.

India's green financing requirement is estimated to be at least 2.5% of GDP annually till 2030 to address the infrastructure gap caused by climate events, and the financial system may have to mobilise adequate resources and also reallocate current resources to contribute effectively to the country's net-zero target., it added.

Results of a climate stress-test reveal that public sector banks (PSBs) may be more vulnerable than private sector banks.. Globally, however, measurement of climate-related financial risks remains a work in progress.

"A pilot survey of key stakeholders in the financial system in India suggests that notwithstanding rising awareness about climate risks and their potential impact on the financial health of entities, risk mitigation plans are largely at the discussion stage and yet to be widely implemented," the RBI's policy researchers added.



Green push: India needs a big improvement in its energy-mix in favour of renewables to about 80% by 2070-71, says RBI's DEPR.AP

RBI's Department of Economic and Policy Research sees need to cut energy intensity of GDP by 5% annually to achieve net zero target by 2070; green financing requirement estimated to be at least 2.5% of GDP a year to address infrastructure gap

QUALITY CONTROL NOT AIMED AT STOPPING IMPORTS: GOYAL



Union Minister for Commerce, Consumer Affairs and Food Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday that the Centre was implementing Quality Control Orders (QCOs) on several products and services in alignment with world standards. He said the QCOs would help India have the same quality products used worldwide, and hence importers abroad would have confidence in Indian goods.

Mr. Goyal noted that the National Quality Mission included sensitising citizens as part of its agenda so that consumers started demanding good quality products.

The Minister said no new QCOs were introduced without adequate industry consultations. "In the leather and footwear sector, we issued three QCOs in October 2020 after consultations with industries. If in 2.5 years somebody has not yet become compliant, then there is vested interest, which we cannot fulfill," he said, and added that QCOs would help reduce wastage and bring down prices.

"No one has the right to play with the lives of people. No one has the right to dump low-quality products in India," he said.

Mr. Goyal said a perception was being spread that QCOs were being implemented to stop imports. "It is not true. Our attempt is to change the mindset of the consumers towards quality products," the Minister added.

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"We will all have to talk again [about food and fertiliser security] at the WTO with an open mind," the Minister said.

FOREGONE CONCLUSION

Mirziyoyev must now make good on his promises after an emphatic win. Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev won overwhelming voter approval (90%) in Sunday's referendum to rewrite the Constitution, which the 65-year-old leader claims would not only improve governance and quality of life in the former Soviet republic but could also allow him to extend his rule beyond his current term. Mr. Mirziyoyev, a former loyal Prime Minister of dictator Islam Karimov, has gradually opened up the country for social and economic reforms ever since becoming the President in 2016 after his boss's death. He cracked down on forced labour in cotton fields, released political prisoners, relaxed media censorship and promoted women's rights, while his policies aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship and attracting foreign investments are transforming what was once a closed economy to becoming the fastest growing in Central Asia. The new charter, which describes Uzbekistan as "sovereign, democratic, legal, social and secular", promises a new media code and criminalises domestic abuse. It promises to ban the death penalty, guarantees prisoner rights and offers better social protection, including housing to lower income people.

But it would also reset the President's terms to zero, allowing him to contest in two more elections under the new Constitution, which has increased

the presidential term from five years to seven. Mr. Mirziyoyev is currently serving his second five-year term, which would expire in 2026. Two more seven-year terms would mean that he could remain in power until 2040, the year he would turn 82. The Election Commission had made detailed arrangements to showcase the voting process as free and fair. International journalists and monitors were invited, allowed to visit polling stations and speak to voters and officials on the day of voting. But still, everyone knew what the results would be as there was no campaign against the President's proposals. While the big media houses were largely aligned with the government, social media activists and press freedom advocates were under pressure not to campaign against the reforms. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which had sent election observers, stated the voting was not truly representative. Yet, Mr. Mirziyoyev's reign is markedly different from that of his dictatorial predecessor. Mr. Mirziyoyev's social and economic reforms, while making sure that his political powers are not threatened, are not enough. If he is serious about his promise of building a new Uzbekistan, he should also launch political reforms, respecting the right to dissent and allowing the opposition to operate free from fear of government pressure and intimidation.

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