

Headlines at a Glance - 18th September 2020

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Two agriculture sector bills passed in Lok Sabha amid protests

Lok Sabha on Thursday passed two bills related to the agriculture sector amid protests by the Opposition and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), a constituent of the ruling NDA.

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill were passed by voice vote as the Congress, DMK and Revolutionary Socialist Party members staged a walkout. Another bill related to the farm sector, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, was passed on September 15. These three bills will replace ordinances promulgated by the government earlier. Union Minister for Food Processing Harsimrat Kaur Badal on Thursday evening resigned from the Union Cabinet in protest against the three farm bills tabled in the two Houses of Parliament. About the lone Shiromani Akali Dal's minister in the Narendra Modi government, her party announced in Lok Sabha today that Harsimrat Kaur will resign from the government. The three bills, including the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, which has been passed by Lok Sabha, are going to affect 20 lakh farmers and 15-20 lakh farm labourers in Punjab alone, said the SAD president.

SOURCE: *Times of India*

NASA to set up community response forum to assess impact of stubble burning in northern India

A month before harvest season begins in Northern India —which also means the onset of an increased pollution load in Delhi on account of large scale crop residue burning in the region — the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is rushing to set up a ‘community response forum’ to conduct a thorough analysis of the impact of stubble burning on the national capital and its neighbouring areas, while looking at possible solutions. NASA’s Universities Space Research Association (USRA) will work towards developing this community forum to cover multiple aspects of biomass burning and its impact on regional air quality in the Indian sub-continent during the winter months. Through the forum, NASA will also invite a panel of experts to share this knowledge with the public. Pawan Gupta, research scientist at the Goddard Earth Sciences Technology and Research (GESTAR), USRA, said, “Air pollution season in India, usually associated with crop burning, will be starting soon. This year, we will be supporting satellite AQ (air quality) data analysis and forecasting through a community forum.” The first meeting of the forum will be conducted on September 24, after which the expert panel will meet twice every week starting October 1, till the end of the fire season.

SOURCE: Hindustan Times

India cautions against securitisation of environmental issues

India at the UN on Thursday cautioned against “securitisation” of environmental issues, saying linking up everything related to environmental degradation to peace and security does nothing to address climate concerns meaningfully nor does it ensure that real perpetrators adhere to their commitments on environmental issues. Environmental degradation can have humanitarian impact or effect just as many other aspects of human activity have humanitarian dimensions, India said in a statement to the UN Security Council’s high-level open debate on maintenance of international peace and security: Humanitarian Effects of Environmental Degradation and Peace and Security.

India said that in many cases, perpetrators of environmental degradation may well be “outside national boundaries” while the people suffering are inside. India said there has been an increasing tendency both in the Security Council and outside to start discussing environmental issues with a certain “disregard” for the various important principles which govern environmental discussions, including climate change and biological diversity.

Principles such as common but differentiated responsibilities are sacrosanct in this matter, it said.

SOURCE: The Hindu

Pakistan to make Gilgit Baltistan its 5th province despite India's protests

Disregarding India's strong protests, Pakistan is moving ahead with plans to make Gilgit Baltistan (GB) its fifth province, with a federal minister saying that elections in the region that New Delhi opposes will be held in November. Prime Minister Imran Khan will soon visit the region and make the formal announcement, Ali Amin Gandapur, Pakistan's minister for Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan Affairs, told a delegation of journalists from the region in Islamabad on Wednesday. New Delhi had conveyed to Pakistan several times that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession. In May, the external affairs ministry said Pakistan or its judiciary had no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it and rejected attempts to bring material changes in Pakistan-occupied areas of the Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir. "Instead, Pakistan should immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation," the ministry had said. Gandapur said the status of a full-fledged province with all constitutional rights is being planned for Gilgit-Baltistan and this will include representation in both houses of parliament.

SOURCE: *The Indian Express*

Indian cities drop in Global Smart City Index, 'not prepared' for pandemic

Four Indian cities — New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru — witnessed a significant drop in their rankings in the global listing of smart cities that was topped by Singapore. The Institute for Management Development (IMD), in collaboration with Singapore University for Technology and Design (SUTD), has released the 2020 Smart City Index, with key findings on how technology is playing a role in the Covid-19 era.

In the 2020 Smart City Index, Hyderabad was placed at the 85th position (down from 67 in 2019), New Delhi at 86th rank (down from 68 in 2019), Mumbai was at 93rd place (in 2019 it was at 78) and Bengaluru at 95th (79 in 2019). It further added that "Indian cities have suffered more from the pandemic because they were not prepared". From 15 indicators that the respondents perceive as the priority areas for their city, all four cities highlighted air pollution as one of the key areas that they felt their city needed to prioritise on. For cities like Bangalore and Mumbai, this was closely followed by road congestion while for Delhi and

Hyderabad it was basic amenities, the report said.

The 2020 Smart City Index (SCI) was topped by Singapore, followed by Helsinki and Zurich in the second and the third place respectively.

SOURCE: *Business Standard*