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Draft Space Activities Bill, 2017

Why in news?

Recently The Government has invited suggestions from the public or stakeholders regarding the draft Space Activities Bill, 2017.

Highlights:

- The objective of the Space Bill is to facilitate the overall growth of the space activities in India with higher order of participation of public/ non-governmental/ private sector stakeholders.
- The Bill provides for establishment of a regulatory mechanism through an appropriate body, by the Central Government for the purpose of authorization and licensing of space activities.
- The provision on liability for damages caused by space activities of licensee, provides for a risk sharing mechanism, by which the central Government may determine the quantum of liability to be borne by the licensee.

What does the Bill propose?

- The provisions of this Act shall apply to every citizen of India and to all sectors engaged in any space activity in India or outside India
- A non-transferable licence shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity
- The Central Government will formulate the appropriate mechanism for licencing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence.
- The government will maintain a register of all space objects (any object launched or intended to be launched around the earth) and develop more space activity plans for the country

- It will provide professional and technical support for commercial space activity and regulate the procedures for conduct and operation of space activity
- It will ensure safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity.
- It will share details about the pricing of products created by space activity and technology with any person or any agency in a prescribed manner.
- If any person undertakes any commercial space activity without authorisation they shall be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or fined more than 1 crore or both.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

Why in news?

Under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS), the premium payable by farmers has been substantially reduced and simplified and there is one premium rate on pan-India basis for farmers.

About Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:

The new Crop Insurance Scheme is in line with One Nation – One Scheme theme. It incorporates the best features of all previous schemes and at the same time, all previous shortcomings / weaknesses have been removed. The PMFBY will replace the existing two schemes National Agricultural Insurance Scheme as well as the Modified NAIS.

Objectives:

- To provide insurance coverage and financial support to the farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crop as a result of natural calamities, pests & diseases.
- To stabilise the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in

farming.
- To encourage farmers to adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices.
- To ensure flow of credit to the agriculture sector.

Highlights of the scheme:

- There will be a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all Rabi crops. In case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium to be paid by farmers will be only 5%. The premium rates to be paid by farmers are very low and balance premium will be paid by the Government to provide full insured amount to the farmers against crop loss on account of natural calamities.
- There is no upper limit on Government subsidy. Even if balance premium is 90%, it will be borne by the Government.
- Earlier, there was a provision of capping the premium rate which resulted in low claims being paid to farmers. This capping was done to limit Government outgo on the premium subsidy. This capping has now been removed and farmers will get claim against full sum insured without any reduction.
- The use of technology will be encouraged to a great extent. Smart phones will be used to capture and upload data of crop cutting to reduce the delays in claim payment to farmers. Remote sensing will be used to reduce the number of crop cutting experiments.
- PMFBY is a replacement scheme of NAIS / MNAIS, there will be exemption from Service Tax liability of all the services involved in the implementation of the scheme. It is estimated that the new scheme will ensure about 75-80 per cent of subsidy for the farmers in insurance premium.

Farmers to be covered

All farmers growing notified crops in a notified area during the season who have insurable interest in the crop are eligible.

Compulsory coverage :

- The enrolment under the scheme, subject to possession of insurable interest on the cultivation of the notified crop in the notified area, shall be compulsory for following categories of farmers:

- Farmers in the notified area who possess a Crop Loan account/KCC account (called as Loanee Farmers) to whom credit limit is sanctioned/renewed for the notified crop during the crop season. and
- Such other farmers whom the Government may decide to include from time to time.

Voluntary coverage :

Voluntary coverage may be obtained by all farmers not covered above, including Crop KCC/Crop Loan Account holders whose credit limit is not renewed.

Commercial Coal Mining

Why in news?

Recently Minister of Coal & Railways has given performance of Commercial Coal Mining in the Parliament.

About Commercial Coal Mining:

- The Centre opened up commercial coal mining for the private sector and approved the methodology for auction of coal mines / blocks for sale of coal.
- About 70% of power generated in India uses coal, [country having the world's fourth largest reserves of coal].
- Domestic coal has been able to meet only 75% of our annual coal demand. The shortfall in local coal availability is met through imports of around 200 mt (it was 195.4 mt in FY17 and 207.1 mt in FY16).
- The move to bring in Indian and foreign private firms is to ensure "assured coal supply to the power sector, affordable power for consumers, and accountability in allocation of coal mines."

What is the significance of the move?

- The government has termed it the most ambitious coal sector reform since 1973 when the sector was nationalised. With an aim to boost

coal production, the state-owned Coal India Limited (CIL) was set up in 1975. Ever since, it has monopolised the sector, and is now the world's largest coal-producer.
- With the latest decision, the sector will move from an era of monopoly to that of competition.

What led to this move?

- The coal ministry had, from 1993 to 2011, allocated 218 coal blocks to eligible Public Sector Undertakings and private firms for specified end-use projects, that is power, steel and cement, as well as for commercial mining by PSUs.
- This was done under the provisions of Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973 through the Screening Committee and Government Dispensation route.
- To manage and reallocate the cancelled blocks in a transparent and accountable manner, the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 was enacted.
- Enabling provisions were made in the above said Act for 'allocation of coal mines by way of auction and allotment for the sale of coal.'
- Also, the allocation of coal blocks other than the 204 cancelled were to be made under the provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2010 and Rules.

What are the benefits?

- It is expected to bring in greater efficiency, best possible technology, higher investment and more employment in coal-bearing areas especially in the mining sector.
- It would also lead to more revenue that can be used for development of the area and inhabitants around the mine by the State. Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra would benefit the most.
- Pointing out that currently, only aluminium and power producers are allowed to bid for captive mines (coal mined could be utilised only in the industry for which the auction / allocation of the block was done, and not for other purposes. Surplus coal needs to be sold to CIL at the specified price) in India, Angel Broking said, adding under the new guidelines, Indian and international companies will be allowed to participate in coal auctions with the condition that they will infuse

top-of-the-line technology into coal mining.

- The move could be the first step towards the full privatisation of the mining sector, adding that global mining giants like BHP, Rio Tinto, Anglo American and Glencore have expressed interest in prospecting for coal in India.

Agriculture Export policy

Why in news?

The Government has formulated a comprehensive Agriculture Export Policy to consolidate the efforts for export of agricultural products.

The objectives of the Agriculture Export policy are:

- To diversify the export basket, destinations and boost high value and value added agricultural exports including focus on perishables.
- To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional and non-traditional Agri products exports.
- To provide an institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phytosanitary issues.
- To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.
- Enable farmers to get benefit of export opportunities in overseas market.

Government's initiatives:

- The Department of Commerce has several schemes to promote exports, including exports of agricultural products: Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES), Market Access Initiatives (MAI) Scheme and Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).
- In addition, assistance to the exporters of agricultural products is also available under the Export Promotion Schemes of Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), Tobacco Board, Tea Board, Coffee Board, Rubber Board and Spices Board.

- These organisations also seek to promote exports through participation in international fairs & exhibitions, taking initiatives to gain market access for different products in different markets, dissemination of market intelligence and taking steps to ensure quality of exported products.