

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

PANEL HOLDS BACK ITS REPORT ON CRIME BILLS

CONTEXT: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs postponed adoption of a draft report on three Bills seeking to replace the existing criminal laws, after pressure from the Opposition parties seeking more time to examine it.

The panel began its consultations on the three Bills on August 24, with a presentation by Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla. It has held 12 meetings on the three Bills. According to Opposition members, this is highly inadequate, considering the scale and scope of the Bills. The opposition demand several changes in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 that will replace the Indian Penal Code, and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 that will replace the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

The opposition contend that the Hindi nomenclature of the Bills, has not been accepted in the draft reports. However, the panel's report states that since the text of the Bill is in English it does not violate provisions of Article 348 of Constitution. According to sources, the English version of the draft report was

circulated just last week and the Hindi version was sent to members of the Parliamentary panel only on Thursday evening, just hours before the adoption of the report was slated at Friday's meeting of the panel.

- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023:** On 11 August 2023, the Home Minister of India, Amit Shah introduced the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023 in Lok Sabha to repeal and replace Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023:** On 11 August 2023, the Home Minister of India, Amit Shah introduced the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023 to repeal and replace the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Indian Evidence Act.
- Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023:** On 11 August 2023, the Home Minister of India, Amit Shah, introduced the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023 to repeal and replace the Indian Evidence Act.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

LI KEQIANG, CHINA'S REFORMIST PREMIER SIDELINED BY XI, DIES

CONTEXT: Li Keqiang, who served as China's Premier for a decade and was seen by many in his country as one of the last remaining reformist politicians in an era of increasing political centralisation, died early on Friday after a sudden heart attack. He was 68.

Li was the pragmatic technocrat, while Mr. Xi brought back the focus on ideology. Li represented loosely a politics that spoke to continued momentum in China's reform and opening up, and a firm focus on the economy, including the private sector, which had emerged as a lynchpin of China's growth, jobs and innovation.

Born in a rural county of eastern Anhui province, Li joined the Communist Party at the age of 21, in the last year of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). He was among the first students admitted to the elite Peking University when students were allowed to return to campuses after being "sent down to the countryside" by Mao. He graduated with a degree in law, and was the first Chinese Premier with a background in economics and law. The intellectual milieu of Peking University in the 1980s to some degree explained his more open politics even within the straitjacket of CPC politics. Some of his classmates would become advocates for political and legal liberalisation. Li,

however, trod a more conservative path and jumped headlong into party politics through the Communist Youth League, where his association with Mr. Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao began.

After stints in the provinces garnered him a popular reputation especially among business leaders — one blot was a major crisis in Henan where his government covered up a scandal of mass HIV transmission through a blood donation programme — Li was initially put forward as the man to replace Mr. Hu. However, Mr. Xi emerged ahead of him at the 2007 Party congress, surprising observers as he was appointed Vice President and the anointed successor for 2012 in Li's stead.

Focus on economy

Unlike his predecessors Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao, Li had little say in economic policy-making which was moved out from the State Council, or government, to one of several new Party Committees headed by Mr. Xi. Li was praised by the leadership for choosing to make the "sacrifice" and retire in November last year although he was eligible for another five-year term on the Politburo Standing Committee. Li is survived by his wife Cheng Hong, a well-known academic in China and professor of English literature, and one daughter.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

DARK PATTERN SALES BY AIRLINES, ONLINE AGENTS DEEMED 'CYBERCRIME'

CONTEXT: The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation directed low-cost carrier IndiGo to rectify its website following complaints about practices by airlines and online travel agents that entail tricking consumers into making unintended purchases — such as paying for seats — while booking flight tickets.

For instance, IndiGo's website deploys a technique known as "false urgency" to give consumers booking an air ticket the impression that they have to pay an extra fee of ₹ 99 to ₹ 1,500 to buy a seat to complete the purchase showing all free seats as unavailable, despite four or five free available seats relegated to the bottom of the aircraft cabin and can be harder to locate and navigate to on the webpage.

While passengers can hit the "skip" button at the end of the seat selection page, they are not informed in a transparent manner that free seats will be auto-assigned to them if they do

not wish to pay the extra sum. On IndiGo's mobile application, even the option to "skip" is placed in the top right corner and displayed in a tiny font. Such a practice is also known as "interface interference", where the website design highlights certain specific information and deliberately obscures other information.

In the current online environment, there seemed to be a systemic practice of fooling consumers. The Ministry received nearly 10,000 such complaints through the National Consumers Helpline over the last eight to nine months.

A cursory analysis of airline websites, apps and online portals showed that such "dark patterns" were widely prevalent. "A dark pattern is one where an entity nudges consumers to buy products they didn't intend to, which is an unfair trading practice, and can constitute a cybercrime."

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INTERNAL SECURITY

SHELLING BY PAK. TRIGGERS SCARE IN JAMMU'S ARNIA

CONTEXT: Uneasy calm and fear prevailed in villages near the zero line in the Arnia sector of Jammu after an eight-hour skirmish between Indian and Pakistani troops left the 2021 ceasefire agreement hanging by a thread.

The Pakistan border has largely remained silent since February 25, 2021, when the Directors-General of Military Operations (DGsMO) of India and Pakistan agreed to a "strict observance of all agreements, understandings and ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and all other sectors".

It is for the first time that the Pakistan Rangers used mortar shells since the two countries renewed their pledge in February 2021 to abide by the 2003 ceasefire agreement. Thursday's is the fifth incident of ceasefire violation reported along the International Border in 2023.

Around 8 p.m. on Thursday, the Pakistan Rangers resorted to unprovoked firing on the International Border in Jammu sector and the BSF retaliated the firing. It added that around 9.15 p.m., the Pakistan Rangers fired mortar shells

targeting the border outposts (BOPs) and civilian areas. Some of the shells landed in Arnia town, injuring a civilian. The third spell of firing started around 10.40 p.m., when the Pakistan Rangers used heavy machine guns to target the BSF posts. The firing resumed around 1 a.m. on Friday and continued till 2.45 a.m. damaging the walls of several houses.

The BSF has been put on a high alert along the International Border in Jammu after the exchange of fire. The BSF continues to monitor the developments closely, while assessing the situation and remains alert to respond as necessary to ensure the safety and security of the border and its residents.

The Army said there was constant endeavour from across the Line of Control (LoC) to disturb peace in Kashmir, a day after five militants were killed in Kupwara. In the past eight months, Army has eliminated 27 terrorists and recovery of large quantities of war-like stores.



"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

80 % OF INDIA'S URBAN POPULATION HAS ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED INTERNET: PM

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed telecom operators' progress in spreading 5G coverage in urban centres, saying that over 80% of India's urban population now had access to the high-speed technology.

Within a year of 5G launch, about 4 lakh 5G base stations have been built in India. Improving Internet connectivity and speed is not just about rankings and numbers, it also increases ease of living. India is not only rapidly expanding 5G in India, but are also moving towards becoming a leader in the field of 6G,

referring to research efforts in India to standardise the next generation of telecommunications.

The Prime Minister pointed to a rise in domestic electronics manufacturing as a success, and pointed to tech giants Apple and Samsung's smartphone assembly in India as an example. He also cited Google's plans to assemble its flagship Pixel line-up in India. Today, India is exporting about ₹ 2 lakh crore in electronics manufacturing.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MYSTERY TRIAL

CONTEXT: The death sentence handed down by a Qatari court on Thursday to eight Indians reportedly accused of espionage is now a major test of the Narendra Modi government's diplomatic skills.

The trial was shrouded in secrecy, with scant information on the charges and evidence against the former Indian Navy servicemen, arrested in August 2022. Qatar has not explained why it has not divulged details of the case. Leaked reports suggest that the men have been accused of sharing secret information pertaining to the stealth submarine programme of Qatar. Apart from strategic and defence cooperation agreements, India sources 40% of its LNG needs from Qatar and is also Qatar's third biggest source of imports, particularly raw materials for construction and fresh food items. Pertinently, these supplies continued despite the Gulf blockade against Qatar in 2017. In addition, 7,00,000 Indian expatriates are an integral part

of Qatar's institutions, industry and workforce. A rift in ties, which a sentence like this is bound to engender, will be to the detriment of both countries, and India must make this clear to Qatar.

Apart from the legal appeals process and diplomatic legwork, channels to the Qatari leadership should be activated at the highest levels, including the Prime Minister if necessary. A case must be made for clemency and commuting the sentences to jail terms that could even be served out in India if the men are indeed found guilty in the appeals process. Notwithstanding reports that seek to tie the verdict to more geopolitical considerations, including perceived Qatari differences with India over its policy on Israel and Palestine in the current conflict, the government must demonstrate that the lives of the men are indeed a priority for their country.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ANOTHER HONEYMOON

CONTEXT: In 2017, Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader and three-time Prime Minister, was ousted from power after differences with the Pakistan Army. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of Imran Khan was voted to power in the subsequent election. Mr. Sharif was disqualified and jailed while his party Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) accused the military of rigging the election in favour of the PTI.

In 2019, Nawaz Sharif went into exile in London. Mr. Imran Khan, who was ousted from power last year, is now in jail and a critic of the military, and Mr. Sharif, once a foe of the generals, returned last week ending self-imposed exile. After his ouster, Mr. Khan launched a frontal attack on the PML-N and the military. The establishment, along with the post-Khan coalition government that was headed by Mr. Sharif's younger brother Shehbaz Sharif, responded with a massive crackdown on the

PTI. But the military's witch-hunt has only made Mr. Khan more popular. The PML-N, Mr. Khan's main political rival, was grappling with internal divisions and external challenges. The party now hopes that the charismatic elder Sharif, who is popular among its conservative base and influential among Punjab's wealthy business establishment, revives the PML-N ahead of the elections. Pakistan is grappling under a precarious economic situation, with hyperinflation, joblessness, a tanking rupee and a looming balance of payment crisis. To overcome these challenges and defeat Imran Khan, Mr. Sharif would need the blessings of, if not active support from, the generals, which in turn would weaken the civilian institutions and strengthen the hands of the military.

“Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you're finished.”—Leslie Nielsen



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