

HIMACHAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Himachal high court gets two new judges

Anoop Chitkara and **Jyotsna Rewal Dua** were sworn in as the Judge and Additional Judge respectively of the high court of Himachal Pradesh. They were administered oath of office by **Justice Dharam Chand Chaudhary, the Acting Chief Justice** in a ceremony held in the high court at Shimla.

Facts to know: In the year 1966, the Delhi High Court Act was enacted by the Government of India and w.e.f. **1 May 1967**, the Central Government of India extended jurisdiction of the said Act to the Union Territory of Himachal Pradesh, replacing the Court of Judicial Commissioner by the Himachal Bench of Delhi High Court, at Shimla and it started functioning in old High Court building known as "**Revenswood**". On 18 December 1970, the State of Himachal Pradesh Act was passed by Parliament and the new state came into being on 25 January 1971 and established its own High Court with headquarters at "Revenswood" Shimla. **M.H. Beg** was appointed first chief justice of HP High Court.

17 th Loksabha Election 2019 Himachal voted for BJP

Kangra Seat: BJP candidate Kishan Kapoor is leading by 4,57,133 votes over his nearest rival Pawan Kajal of Congress

Hamirpur Seat: Sitting BJP MP Anurag Thakur is leading by 3,84,922 votes in Hamirpur over his nearest rival Ram Lal Thakur of Congress.

Shimla Seat (reserved) : BJP candidate Suresh Kashyap of the BJP is leading by 3,23,659 votes over his nearest rival Dhani Ram Shandil of Congress.

Mandi Seat: Sitting BJP MP Ram Swaroop is leading by 3,77,001 votes over his nearest rival Aashray Sharma of the Congress in Mandi.

Facts to know: State elect 3 member to Rajya Sabha for the term of 6 years and indirectly elected by the state legislators, since year 1956 (first in 1952). **Currently Viplov thakur 2014 -20 (INC), Anand Sharma 2016 -22 (INC), JP Nadda 2019 -24 (BJP) represent the State in the House.**

Chiranji Lal Verma was first to represent Himachal Pradesh In Rajya sabha back in 1952.

In 1952, 3 members were in Loksabha from **Mahasu, Mandi And Chamba -Sirmour seats. Rani Amrit Kaur (Mandi) was first health minister in Union Government.**

Other Election Highlights

1. Around 5000 women performed at Kullu's Dhalpur ground in their traditional dress, earlier to create a record of 'Largest folk dance with voter cards'. Their feat made an entry in the India Book of Records. The performance by the women was also aimed at creating awareness about the Lok Sabha elections, as reported by ANI.
2. Shyam Saran Negi, a 102-year-old voter who also participated in the 1951-52 general elections which were the country's first, cast his ballot on Sunday at a picturesque hamlet in Kinnaur district as elections were held to elect four members of Parliament from Himachal Pradesh. In 1951, Negi, a retired schoolteacher, was on an election duty and exercised his franchise in Chini constituency - later renamed Kinnaur. At that time, balloting in the snow-bound areas of the hill state was held ahead of other places in the country. This time he cast his 31st vote. He has voted in 17 parliamentary and 14 Assembly polls.

3. Nearly 1,000 Citizens Over Age Of 100 To Vote In Himachal Pradesh. Of the 7,730 polling booths in Himachal Pradesh, seven have been set up especially for senior citizens.
4. Himachal today recorded the highest -ever voter turnout in any parliamentary elections at 70.40 per cent, as compared to the all -time high of 65.32 in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The highest polling of 73.02 per cent was registered in the Mandi Lok Sabha segment, followed by Shimla at 71.59, Hamirpur at 71.26 and Kangra 66.18. The highest polling of 73.02 per cent was registered in the Mandi Lok Sabha segment, followed by Shimla at 71.59, Hamirpur at 71.26 and Kangra 66.18.

Himachal plans ropeway transport system in remote areas

The Himachal Pradesh government may introduce the ropeway transport system used in countries such as Bolivia, Switzerland and Austria in remote and inaccessible area of the state for providing all-weather connectivity.

“The transportation system is extremely robust as it can withstand extreme temperature and high wind speeds and can be used for providing connectivity over many snow clapped mountains and passes. The system could help in providing all weather connectivity to inaccessible areas in Himachal Pradesh,” said Sanjay Kundu, Additional Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister. Kundu recently led a delegation of government officials to Bolivia, Switzerland and Austria to study the ropeway system as a solution for urban and rural transport. They also visited the manufacturing units of the top ropeway companies in the world.

Facts to know: In Budget Speech 2019 -20, Chief Minister has mention to establish the **Ropeway and Rapid Transport System Development Corporation (RRTDC) in the Transport department of the State.** The RRTDC will get a prefeasibility study conducted to establish overhead mass rapid transportation system in Shimla and Manali Towns.

Himachal Pradesh to have SDRF on lines of NDRF

Himachal Pradesh government will establish a state disaster response force on the lines of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to generate a prompt and efficient response at the time of disasters. While chairing the 9th meeting of state executive committee (SEC) in Shimla, chief secretary BK Agarwal said that state is one of the most multi-hazard prone states of the country and faces various hazards like geological hazards, earthquakes and landslides, hydrological hazards such as floods, flash floods and glacial outbursts, besides meteorological hazards, hailstorms, droughts and cloudbursts. Thus it was essential to constitute SDRF in state

Agarwal said that state disaster response force, consisting of three companies from police, will be raised for dealing with disasters and emergencies. He said that **each company will have 100 personnel** each and for effective response at the time of disaster SDRF stations will be set up in **Mandi, Arki, and Mubarakpur.** It was also approved to constitute a state disaster mitigation fund to take preventive measures for reduction of disasters. He said that the SDRF will be under overall supervision of the department of revenue-disaster management government of Himachal Pradesh.

Facts to know: The Disaster Management Act, 2005 has been enacted as the central Act to deal with the management of disasters. This act envisaged a three tier Disaster Management structure in India at National, States and District levels. Under the act, the NDMA, SDMA, NEC, NDRF, NIDM and disaster related funds were established.

Himachal seeks speedy settlement of Pong dam oustees issue

Himachal Pradesh chief secretary B K Agarwal has urged Union water resources secretary U P Singh to quickly resolve long pending issues of Pong dam oustees. For the construction of the Pong Dam, 75,2 668

acres of land was acquired. Of the total 339 villages, complete acquisition of land was done in 226 villages while partial acquisition was done in 116 villages of Dehra and Nurpur tehsils of Kangra district. **Total 20,722 families were affected**, out of whom 16,352 displaced were found eligible for the allotment of land in Rajasthan. Agarwal also emphasized that order of the Supreme Court should be complied with under which the allotment of 1,188 plots by Rajasthan was held illegal and cancelled.

Issue of Pong Dam oustees was even raised in the Himachal Pradesh assembly in December 2018. While raising the issue, **Dehra MLA Hoshiyar Singh** had questioned the failure of Rajasthan to allot land to people who had to give up their property for the construction of dam. **He had called Pong Dam “Hiroshima of Himachal Pradesh” as its construction had displaced 2.5 lakh people.** Chief minister Jai Ram Thakur had informed the state assembly that Rajasthan had so far allotted plots to 12,027 dam oustees, of which 1,188 plots were cancelled according to the directions of the Supreme Court. Another 2,830 plots were cancelled for failing to take possession and failing to pay the instalment by Rajasthan. He had stated that according to records, only 8,009 people had taken the possession of land, while 2,180 files were pending with Rajasthan.

Facts to know: The **Pong Dam**, also known as the **Beas Dam**, is an earth-fill embankment dam on the Beas River in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The Pong Dam is a 133 m (436 ft) tall and 1,951 m (6,401 ft) long earth-fill embankment dam with a gravel shell. It is 13.72 m (45 ft) wide at its crest and 610 m (2,001 ft) wide at its base, construction on the dam began in 1961 and was completed in 1974. At the time of its completion, the Pong Dam was the tallest of its type in India. The reservoir created by the dam, Maharana Pratap Sagar, has a gross capacity of 8,570,000,000 m³.

Dam safety in Himachal Pradesh be damned

On May 3rd, 2019, Divya Himachal, a Hindi daily, reported that the 100 MW Sainj Hydropower Project in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu district had stopped its operations after severe leakage due to massive cracks in the dam was noticed. Owned by the Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd (HPPCL), the project has been non-operational for more than a month, creating a loss of Rs 5 crore so far for the company. Himachal Pradesh, known for its booming hydro power sector, has failed to provide for monitoring and accountability mechanisms, thereby creating risks for the people. Moreover, the manner in which increasing disasters around 'dammed' areas are being dealt with in the state, one doubts whether dam safety cells even exist. Concrete reasons for the same were revealed in Right to Information (RTI) responses received from the Directorate of Energy (DOE).

Himachal's mountainous landscape, though exquisite, is seismically fragile. According to Landslide Hazard Zonation Atlas of India, 2003, more than 97 per cent of the total geographical area of the state is prone to landslides. In this highly landslide-prone state, 153 hydropower projects (HPPs) have been commissioned as of March 2019, records the DOE. Astoundingly, a 2015 study of the State Disaster Management Authority warns that 56 per cent of Himachal's total constructed HPPs are under serious threat of landslide hazard risks. Any construction that involves underground disturbance, working near fast flowing rivers prone to flash floods and eroding the soil of steep slopes is risky business. Despite this state of affairs, Himachal's valleys are set to see 863 more HPPs, which are either under construction or at different stages of clearance.

Facts to know:

1. The State of Himachal Pradesh has an estimated Hydro Potential of 27,436 MW out of which 24,000 MW has been assessed as harnessable.
2. Out of the total harnessable potential of about 24,000 MW, a potential to the tune of 20,912 MW already stands allotted under various sectors.
3. A potential of about 10,547.17 MW has already been harnessed so far under various sectors.

Himachal Pradesh goes back on cannabis cultivation decision

Within hours of issuing an official statement on Tuesday that, like Uttarakhand, a proposal on cultivation of cannabis for medicinal purposes can be examined by Himachal Pradesh, the government took a step back by withdrawing it. The subsequent note did not find any mention of cannabis cultivation. The statement quoting Chief Secretary B.K. Agarwal said "the Israel Embassy is already pursuing a proposal with the government of Uttarakhand on development of cannabis for medicinal and hemp purposes". "A similar proposal can be examined by Himachal Pradesh for controlled cultivation of cannabis for medicinal purposes and cultivation of low psychotropic content cannabis for hemp production," it said. The note mentioned that a meeting of senior government functionaries led by Agarwal was held with the Ambassador of Israel Ron Malka in New Delhi to discuss issues related to state's Global Investors Meet to be held in Dharamsala in September.

Other Dimensions of the issue:

1. A section of growers, mainly in Shimla and Mandi parliamentary constituencies, for long have been asking the main political parties -- the Congress and the BJP -- that cannabis and poppy cultivation need to be legalised and promoted to supplement their income. They say their main apple crop is declining owing to various reasons, including variable climatic conditions.
2. Experts say there is a huge demand for opium, an extract of the poppy, in the pharmaceutical industry. Also, the climatic condition in the state is congenial for its cultivation. They argue that states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have allowed selective cultivation of poppy which greatly helped to strengthen the rural economy.
3. During his campaign in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Virender Kashyap had said poppy cultivation was not banned before Independence and its cultivation was a common practice in the state. Even three-time BJP MP Maheshwar Singh in November last wrote a letter to Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, asking to legalise cannabis and poppy cultivation as they would not only generate employment but would also stop the illegal trade in its contraband by-products.
4. Experts say the selective cultivation of cannabis and poppy could annually generate a revenue of Rs 800 crore -Rs 900 crore.
5. Former superintendent of the Narcotics Control Bureau, O.P. Sharma, who was leading the state's first drive to eradicate mass-scale cannabis cultivation in 2003, told IANS that "alternative farming is the only way of controlling poppy and cannabis cultivation".

Centre sanctioned 69 highways in Himachal

BJP leader and Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday said the Central government has sanctioned 69 national highways in Himachal Pradesh, the construction of most of which are underway.

Gadkari also said the BJP government in the state has speeded up the pace of development with support of the current Central government. He was speaking at an election rally in Sangla in Kinnaur district, some 300 km from the state capital.

Gadkari pointed out that there is a tremendous potential for tourism in the state. "With the strengthening of the road network, tourism business has increased in the last five years and the state has made a new name on the tourism map," he said.

50,000 farmers to be trained in natural farming in Himachal Pradesh

Governor Acharya Devvrat said that Himachal Pradesh government had fixed the target to train and cover about 50,000 farmers under natural farming in this financial year. Expressing satisfaction over the progress made by state in the direction of natural farming, he hoped that by 2022, Himachal would emerge as a fully natural farming state. Devvrat was presiding over the closing session of workshop on Subhash Palekar

Natural Farming under 'Prakritik Krishi Khushal Kisan Yojana' organized by agriculture department at Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry), Nauni in Solan.

Natural Farming or ZBNF: Zero-Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is a holistic alternative to the present paradigm of high-cost chemical inputs-based agriculture. It is very effective in addressing the uncertainties of climate change. ZBNF principles are in harmony with the principles of Agroecology. UN-FAO in April 2018 urged all countries to move towards the adoption of Agroecology to meet the twin goals of global food security and conservation of the environment.

New industrial policy awaits Cabinet nod

The state's new industrial policy promising a slew of incentives to the investors was awaiting a Cabinet nod after the finance department had accorded its approval. The government was keen to announce this policy ahead of its global investors meet where a delegation headed by Chief Minister was slated to visit Germany, UAE and the Netherlands in early June.

Sources said major incentives would include availability of plots at subsidized rates, reduction in the stamp and electricity duty besides subsidy on transport, registration fee, etc.

While suggestions of various stakeholders were elicited to ensure that the policy covered all significant areas of concern, its Cabinet approval would pave the way for its announcement. Since the last industrial policy was announced in 2004, the investors were keenly awaiting the new policy which would also include the budget allocation for various financial incentives.

Key issues like speedier clearance under Section 118 of the HP Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972, which was a major impediment in setting up industries in the state is likely to be simplified in the new policy.

With a view to rehabilitating sick units, provisions of granting some concessions in the interest, personal interest, etc., has also been proposed. A proposal to allow renting of surplus built-up area and sale of surplus land as well as 1 per cent interest subvention on a term loan of three years have also been mooted. It remains to be seen how much budget has been set aside for this aspect.

In a bid to consolidate unorganised scrap vendors, a provision to register them and extending concessions in power back up, green fuel gas, power tariff, the SGST, reimbursement of interest subsidy, purchase preference, credit guarantee trust fund for MSME and annual guarantee fee, etc., have also been mooted which were supposed to attract the investors in a big way.

Development of mini clusters for enhancing the competitiveness of the micro small and medium sector enterprises (MSME) by financial assistance has also been mooted where Rs 2 crore would be provided per cluster. The MSME units based on cow urine would be granted 20 per cent investor subsidy on purchase of plant and machinery. This will be in addition to such a subsidy being provided by the Union Government.

'Chuli' oil, 'kaala zeera' of Kinnaur get GI tag

Two products of Kinnaur - chuli (wild apricot) oil and kaala zeera- have got the Geographical Indications (GI) tag from the Registrar General of GI, Chennai. With this, the total number of products that have been registered by the patent cell of the Council for Science, Technology and Environment from Himachal under the GI registration has risen to seven.

The other products include Kullu shawl, Kangra tea, Chamba rumaal, Kinnauri shawl and Kangra miniature paintings. The decks for GI registration of chuli oil and kaala zeera had been cleared almost five months back, but the process could be completed only after public objections were invited and nobody else laid claim over the product being native of their area.

Chuli oil is extracted from the kernels of wild apricots, which grows extensively in most parts of Kinnaur district. Though wild apricot grows in Shimla and Lahaul Spiti as well, it is primarily identified with Kinnaur. Similarly, kaala zeera, which is known to have medicinal and herbal value and fetches good prices, is grown in certain parts of Kinnaur.

Facts to know:

The biggest advantage of having a tag on a product is that no other person or place can claim to sell the products with the same name. The tag also helps ensure authenticity of the product, fetching genuine price for weavers, growers or anyone who is producing it.

The tag has helped prevent the sale of cheap factory-made shawls in Ludhiana which are sold as Kullu or Kinnauri shawls. Also the Industries Department has been involved in the exercise so that consumers know that they should only buy a product which has a GI logo.

“Yuva Navjeevan Board” to be chaired by the Chief Minister

In budget speech CM Jairam Thakur mentioned to establish Yuvanavjeevan board to ensure community participation in various departments. “I am of the firm opinion that these departments need to work in a close coordinated manner and work out a well thought out strategy; many departments viz Social Welfare, Police, Youth Services and Sports, Health and Excise and Taxation are working in this direction..” he said.

This Board will formulate effective strategies to prevent trafficking and consumption of narcotics, and for rehabilitation and de-addiction. The Board will also monitor the implementation of these policies and strategies.

Tourism initiatives in Budget 2019 -20

1. Government started a new scheme “Nai Rahen – Nai Manzilen” during 2018 -19 to promote tourism in the State. An outlay of Rs. 50 crore was kept for this scheme. It is now proposed to continue this scheme during 2019 -20 with an outlay of Rs.50 crore.
2. “Shiv Dham” in Mandi district will be established with the dual objectives of promoting tourism and conserving religious heritage of the State. Replicas of 12 Jyotirlingas will be established at this site to attract tourists.
3. A “Light and Sound Show” at two sites in Shimla and another one in Kullu district, which will project the Dev Sanskriti of the State to encourage more tourists to visit the State and to learn about the local culture.
4. Government has also sent a proposal to the Government of India for starting water transport and other activities in Chamera, Kol Dam, Larji and Gobindsagar Lake.
5. Eco-Tourism Project at Janjehli District Mandi, Paragliding Destination in Bir-Billing District Kangra, Ski Destination at Chansal District Shimla and Larji Project District Kinnaur are being implemented in the first phase of “Nai Raahein Nai Manzilein” scheme.
6. The Government has also started a Joy Ride service from Manali -Rohtang -Manali for the facilitation of the tourists.