Front Page

Hotels can't force customers to pay service charge: Centre (Page no. 1)
(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)
The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has issued guidelines here on Monday preventing hotels and restaurants from levying service charge on customers.
Hotels or restaurants should not add service charge automatically or by default in the food bill, according to the guidelines.
The guidelines, issued by Nidhi Khare, Chief Commissioner, CCPA, adds that if any consumer finds that a hotel or restaurant is violating the guidelines, he or she may make a request to remove the service charge from the bill amount or lodge a complaint on the National Consumer Helpline (NCH). Complaints can be filed with the Consumer Commission too or with the District Collector.
No hotel or restaurant shall force a consumer to pay service charge and shall clearly inform the consumer that service charge is voluntary, optional and at consumer's discretion.
No restriction on entry or provision of services based on collection of service charge shall be imposed on consumers.
Service charge shall not be collected by adding it along with the food bill and levying GST on the total amount.
The Ministry said the National Consumer Helpline (NCH) has received a number of complaints by consumers against levying of service charge. The guidelines added that component of service is inherent in price of food and beverages offered by the restaurant or hotel.

States

Centre stops work on Rajasthan canal project (Page no. 5)
(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)
The proposed Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP), set to benefit 13 districts of Rajasthan through interlinking of three rivers, has taken a political twist following the Centre's directive to stop all work in view of "lack of consent" by other States.
The Congress government has termed the Centre's interference undesirable and described it as crossing the line of cooperative federalism.
Rajasthan has been demanding the national project status for ERCP for quite some time, while pointing out that any delay in its implementation would lead to a phenomenal increase in its cost, which is at present estimated at ₹37,200 crore.
 The ambitious project stipulates transfer of excess water from the Chambal river basin to the regions facing water scarcity.
Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said at a workshop on ERCP with the Congress leaders here that the objections raised by neighbouring Madhya Pradesh were baseless, as any of the two States could use water from its catchment area as well as 10% of the water received from the catchment areas of the other State, as per an agreement reached in the Inter-State Water Control Board.

Editorial

A chaotic world, the perils of multilateralism (Page no. 6)
(GS Paper 2, International Relation)
Today at a Quad summit, tomorrow at a BRICS summit and the day after at a G-7 summit is a statesman's dream come true. The exchange of ideas with world leaders, seeking common ground on burning issues and recalibrating our policy accordingly are at the heart of diplomacy.
But at a time when the world is trying to grapple with the impact of unprecedented problems which arose in the first two decades of the 21st century, the various intergovernmental organisations and groupings, which are undergoing fundamental changes, may not be fertile places for building peace.
The time is not opportune for collective bargaining when countries are holding their cards close to their chest and scheming for positions of advantage.

The least common denominators are so shallow that joint statements read like a string of diverse statements without any political glue. Bilateral engagements may be much more productive at this point in history.

The 14th virtual BRICS summit hosted by China (June 23-24) was a clear attempt by China to hijack the grouping, going by a blueprint it has prepared for the new world order.

Curiously, BRICS was not meant to be a political grouping when the acronym, BRIC, was coined by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill in 2001 to categorise Brazil, Russia, India and China, which were expected to collectively dominate global growth by 2050.

Seeing the possibility of developing a non-western global economic system, China welcomed the idea of BRICS as the nucleus of a new economic grouping and invested energy and resources in building it.

The others, joined later by South Africa, were also attracted by the idea of creating a catalyst for an alternative to the Bretton Woods Institutions.

Deal or no deal? (Page no. 6)
(GS Paper 2, International Relation)
Reviving the Iran nuclear deal was a campaign promise of U.S. President Joe Biden. In the White House, Mr. Biden appointed a special envoy for Iran, starting indirect negotiations with the country and direct talks with other signatories of the 2015 agreement to meet this objective.

But almost one and a half years later, there has still been no breakthrough in one of the most contentious issues he faces in West Asia. Multiple rounds of talks in Vienna made progress in bringing the deal back on track, which had sought to scuttle Iran's nuclear programme in return for lifting international sanctions.

But the talks collapsed earlier this year as the Biden administration reportedly refused to remove the terrorist designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a critical arm of Iran's armed forces.

Last week, Qatar, which hosted the U.S.-Taliban talks that led to the February 2020 agreement between the Afghan Sunni fundamentalist insurgency and the Trump administration, held indirect talks between the U.S. and Iran.

However, as Mr. Biden prepares for his first West Asia tour as U.S. President later this month, a deal is still elusive.

While Iran says the Doha talks were positive, U.S. officials say the prospects of reviving the agreement are now worse. That they stay engaged in talks shows that both sides are still keen on a solution, but they face structural impediments.

To be sure, the current mess was created by Donald Trump. The Obama administration and the Rouhani presidency, along with other world powers, had engaged in painstaking negotiations to reach the 2015 agreement, which practically cut off Iran's path towards building nuclear capabilities.

Iran was fully compliant with the agreement's terms when President Trump unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the agreement. He had hoped that Iran, under economic pressure, would renegotiate the agreement.

India needs to scale up direct nutrition interventions (Page no. 6)
(GS Paper 2, Governance)
As India launches the celebrations of its 75th anniversary of Independence, there is much to be proud about; significant advances have been made in science, technology, and medicine, adding to the country's ancient, traditional, and civilisational knowledge base, wisdom and wealth.

Still, it is disconcerting that even after seven decades of Independence, India is afflicted by public health issues such as child malnutrition (35.5% stunted, 67.1% anaemic) attributing to 68.2% of under-five child mortality.

Poor nutrition not only adversely impacts health and survival but also leads to diminished learning capacity, and poor school performance. And in adulthood, it means reduced earnings and increased risks of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.

The good news is that the Government appears determined to set it right — with an aggressive push to the National Nutrition Mission (NNM), rebranding it the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition, or POSHAN Abhiyaan. It has the objective of reducing malnutrition in women, children and adolescent girls.

The Ministry of Women and Child (MWCD) continues to be the nodal Ministry implementing the NNM with a vision to align different ministries to work in tandem on the "window of opportunity" of the first 1,000 days in life (270 days of pregnancy and 730 days; 0-24 months).

Global and Indian evidence fully supports this strategy, which prevents the largely irreversible stunting occurring by two years of age.

POSHAN Abhiyaan (now referred as POSHAN 2.0) rightly places a special emphasis on selected high impact essential nutrition interventions, combined with nutrition-sensitive interventions, which indirectly impact mother, infant and young child nutrition, such as improving coverage of maternal-child health services, enhancing women empowerment,

availability, and access to improved water, sanitation, and hygiene and enhancing homestead food production for a diversified diet.

OPED

The problem with our university vision (Page no. 7)
(GS Paper 2, Governance)
It has now become an annual ritual in India to discuss the international rankings of higher education institutions (HEI) only when global ranking systems such as the coveted QS World University Rankings are announced.
The QS World University Rankings rank HEIs on the following components: academic reputation (40%), employer reputation (10%), faculty student ratio (20%), citations per faculty (20%), international faculty ratio (5%) and international student ratio (5%). The international research network and employment outcomes were 0% for this edition.
While it is heartening to see that the number of Indian institutes among the top 1,000 globally has risen to 27 from 22 last year, and that the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, has moved up 31 places to emerge as the highest ranked Indian institute in the 2023 edition, there is no serious debate on the abysmal performance of Indian universities barring the Institutes of Eminence (IOE).
IOEs occupy a special place as they are granted more academic and administrative autonomy, and public IOEs get additional funding. Therefore, their dominance in the top 500 in the QS World University Rankings comes as no surprise.

Right intent, confusing content (Page no. 7)
(GS Paper 3, Environment)
Last month marked a decade since the E-waste (Management and Handling) Rules came into effect in India. The Rules have been amended a few times since.
The most recent amendment is the Draft E-waste Management Rules, 2022, released for public comments in May 2022 by the Environment Ministry.
Despite retaining the underlying extended producer responsibility (EPR) framework, the new draft Rules depart significantly from the previous regulations.
One major change is the introduction of a market for e-waste recycling certificates. The draft rules state that producers of e-goods have to ensure that at least 60% of their produced e-waste is recycled by 2023.
This shift from collection rate targets (which set targets for the collection of e-waste as a percentage of the quantity of products sold by weight in the market in the previous year) in the current Rules to recycling rate targets in the proposed Rules is another important change.
The proposed market for e-waste recycling appears unrealistic. First, large-scale recycling of e-waste is still in its infancy in India. Most of the recycling of valuable material is carried out within the informal sector using inefficient and unsafe technologies.
At a time when the technical feasibility and commercial viability of different recycling technologies and approaches for e-waste components is being worked upon in India, a target to recycle 60% of the e-waste generated in 2022-23 appears too optimistic.
Second, if the regulatory targets were to create a vibrant market for recycling, the existing formal and informal players would have to play a crucial role.
In light of this, the complete silence on regulating registered collectors, dismantlers, and producer responsibility organisations is puzzling.

Explainer

Enforcing the single-use plastic ban (Page no. 8)
(GS Paper 3, Environment)
A ban on the use of single-use plastics that was notified by the Union Environment Ministry on August 2021 came into effect on July 1 this year.
The notification said national and State-level control rooms would be set up to check illegal manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of banned single use plastic items.
The Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, will also prohibit manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of plastic carry bags having thickness less than 120 microns with effect from December 31, 2022.

The Centre defines it as an object made of plastic that is intended to be used "only once" before being disposed off or recycled.

For the purposes of the ban, there is a list of 21 items that come under the definition of single-use plastic including ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, thermocol for decoration, plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays, wrapping or packing films around sweet boxes, invitation cards, and cigarette packets, plastic or PVC banners less than 100 microns, stirrers.

These objects were listed by the Environment Ministry in August when it notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021.

Single-use plastic items such as these had "low utility and high littering potential," it noted. Plastic packaging waste, a major contributor to the much larger problem of plastic waste pollution, isn't yet covered under the phase-out of single-use plastic items.

Mineral water bottles or plastic bottles of aerated drinks are unaffected by the ban, though, in popular imagination, they are representative of 'plastic pollution.'

The need for space sustainability (Page no. 8)
(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)
On June 23, the U.K. hosted the fourth summit for Space Sustainability in London in collaboration with the Secure World Foundation. In line with the ambitious U.K. National Space Strategy, George Freeman, the Minister of Science, announced a new 'Plan for Space Sustainability.'

According to him, this plan aims to "set a global commercial framework for the insurability, the licensing and the regulation of commercial satellites."

It also aims to reduce the cost for those who comply with the best sustainability standards and thus encourages a thriving ecosystem for the industry.

The earth's orbital environment has more than tripled in the past decade. As the cost of missions reduce and the number of players increase, the complexity of missions and slot allotment issues also increase.

With the emergence of large constellations and complex satellites, there is a risk of collisions and interference with radio frequencies.

As the outer space is considered a shared natural resource, the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) in 2019 adopted a set of 21 voluntary, non-binding guidelines to ensure the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

One of the hot issues when it comes to space sustainability is orbital crowding. It poses a direct threat to the operations and safety of a mission and is likely to cause legal and insurance-related conflicts.

Space debris is another prominent issue. After the completion of a mission, an 'end-of-life protocol' requires space objects to be moved to the graveyard orbit or to a low altitude.

Neither of the options are sustainable in the long run. Other causes of concern are solar and magnetic storms which potentially damage communication systems. Such space weather threats need to be addressed along with the efforts to identify the terrestrial carbon footprint of outer space missions.

Text and Context

UPI: the dawn of digital fintech nirvana (Page no. 9)
(GS Paper 3, Economy)
If you own a smartphone, you have most probably done UPI-based payments using BHIM or some other mobile application.

The Unified Payments Interface or the UPI, processed ₹10,41,520 crore worth of transactions just in May of this year in India. More than 40% of all retail digital payments (non-cash and non-paper payments) in India happen through UPI now.

The UPI was launched in 2016 and is operated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The NPCI was formed in 2009 as an initiative of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) with the goal to create a robust payment and settlement infrastructure.

UPI operates on top of the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) which was created by the NPCI for immediate fund transfers.

UPI based payments function broadly through three steps. First, one's bank account is mapped to a Virtual Payment Address (VPA). A VPA eliminates the risk of mentioning account details in every transaction.

It can be created in a couple of minutes using a UPI app. The only prerequisite is that your bank account be linked to a mobile number.

Secondly, a Payment Service Provider (typically a bank) takes care of the to-and-fro transactions to this VPA (and hence to the underlying bank account) and finally, the UPI software orchestrates the fund movement from a customer's VPA to a target VPA and completes the transaction.

This transaction is different from paying with a debit card or credit card as it does not involve a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR). The MDR is a fee that the recipient bank collects from the merchant.

For UPI transactions, there is no MDR (like in the case of the Indian government's Rupay card which also does not have an MDR) and hence there is no price to be paid by the merchant.