

The Indian Express

Front Page

No service charge by default, Govt tells hotels & restaurants (Page no. 1) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) on Monday barred hotels and restaurants from adding service charge “automatically or by default” in the food bill.

It said that in case of violation, a consumer can ask the hotel/ restaurant to remove the service charge, or seek redressal by filing a complaint.

The guidelines issued by CCPA stipulate that hotels or restaurants shall not add service charge automatically or by default in the food bill.

No collection of service charge shall be done by any other name,” the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

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.

The ministry specified that there should be no restriction on entry or provision of services based on collection of service charge. Service charge shall not be collected by adding it along with the food bill and levying GST on the total amount.

Govt still to clear 26 as judges, Bombay High Court down to nearly half its strength (Page no. 1) (GS Paper 2, Judiciary)

At least 26 recommendations for appointment of judges to the Bombay High Court, which is currently functioning at almost half its sanctioned strength, are pending with the government at different stages of consideration.

The Bombay High Court currently has 57 judges against a sanctioned strength of 96 judges. At least five more judges are expected to retire this year.

On February 16, the Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India N V Ramana, had recommended the appointment of 10 advocates as judges. While that list is pending with the government, sources said the High Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice Dipankar Datta, has sent two more lists.

In December last year, the High Court proposed the elevation of 10 advocates for appointment as judges of the HC. While this list is yet to be placed before the Supreme Court Collegium, that at least one advocate has withdrawn his consent for appointment.

In April this year, the High Court is learnt to have sent another list of seven district court judges to be considered for appointment as judges of the HC. That too, is yet to be placed before the SC Collegium.

Usually, the HC’s recommendations are made one batch at a time, allowing the Collegium and government time to consider and process the list. However, with the government dragging its feet on the February recommendations when the High Court is facing severe vacancies, two more lists have been sent.

Govt. and Politics

PM Modi hails Digital India: Transparency ending network of middlemen (Page no. 5) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The Digital India campaign has helped save Rs 2.25 lakh crore from falling into the wrong hands in the past eight years, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Gandhinagar.

The campaign has also helped to eliminate middle-men, he said while inaugurating “Digital India Week 2022” and a Digital Expo at Mahatma Mandir in the city.

The transparency that has come due to Digital India has eliminated corruption at various levels adversely affecting the poor and the middle class. We have seen that period when it was difficult to get a service without paying a bribe.

Digital India has saved money for the common man... ending the network of middle-men,” said PM Modi while speaking on the seventh anniversary of launching the “Digital India” campaign, a flagship programme of the Central government. In the last eight years, more than Rs 23 lakh crore has been transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to beneficiaries. Due to this technology, almost Rs 2.25 lakh crore that would have landed in the wrong hands have been saved,” he added.

He said the trio of Jan Dhan, Mobile and Aadhaar, or JAM, have “provided maximum benefit to the poor and the middle class”. The Digital India campaign has also helped eliminate “queues” in the country.

Idea Page

A chill down Asia's spine (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 2, International Relation)

One of the many interesting features of last week's summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in Madrid was the significant Indo-Pacific presence.

For the first time, the prime ministers of Australia, Japan, and New Zealand as well as the president of South Korea participated in a NATO summit.

Russia and China, who had unveiled a partnership "without limits" and with "no-forbidden areas" just weeks before Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, are now facing the whirlwind that has resulted from their muscular regional policies.

The conflict between Russian and Chinese expansionism on the one hand and the revitalisation of old alliances like NATO and the construction of new Asian coalitions like the Quad and AUKUS on the other is here to stay.

In unveiling a new strategic conception for the alliance in the wake of the war in Ukraine, NATO has declared Russia "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area".

The new focus on Russia has not meant ignoring the China problem. NATO has declared that China's "stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values."

The stakes in Kabul (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 2, International Relation)

It has been a busy summer in the New Delhi policy circles. After a strategic retreat from Kabul following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, India has re-established its diplomatic presence in the conflict-ravaged country. More importantly, it is a signal that New Delhi is back to retrieve its lost leverage in that country.

Although the current state of affairs is far from being business as usual, New Delhi's calculated risk of sending a small technical team to Kabul to deal with the humanitarian crisis following the earthquake in Paktika and Khost provinces as a first responder and reopening its embassy is certainly the beginning of a new chapter.

It is bound to be laced with challenges, but with a well-planned and long-term strategy it has the potency of securing many of India's strategic interests.

At one level, it can be argued that India never abandoned Afghanistan. Even after the closure of its consulates and embassy, it continued to express concerns about the humanitarian crisis in the country, built regional consensus about the threat of terrorism, voiced its support for an inclusive government, and provided aid and assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Much of that is in sync with the Agreement on Strategic Partnership (ASP) India had signed in October 2011. However, New Delhi did signal that it will be difficult to engage, let alone recognise the Taliban unless the latter mends its ways and engages in a course correction.

Such posturing continued while the new rulers of Afghanistan interspersed their ruthless policies against women and girls, minorities and elements of the previous government, with welcome calls to India to return and play a constructive role.

Degree of privacy and freedom (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 2, Governance)

The Delhi High Court in *Mrs. X v Union of India* is confronted with a familiar problem. A woman whose nude photos were shared online without her consent approached the Court to block this content.

While the Court has impleaded the Delhi Police's cyber cell and various online platforms to restrict the content, the case highlights the need for courts, law enforcement, and technology platforms to have a coordinated response to the sharing of non-consensual intimate images (NCII) online.

Publishing NCII is a criminal offence under the Information Technology Act 2000, with platforms doing their best to filter out such content.

While a criminal conviction is desirable, the more urgent need for victims is to stop the spread of this illegal content. The Intermediary Guidelines 2021 provide a partial solution.

They empower victims to complain directly to any website that has allowed the uploading of non-consensual images or videos of a person in a state of nudity or engaging in a sexual act.

This includes content that has been digitally altered to depict the person as such. The website must remove the content within 24 hours of receiving a complaint, or risk facing criminal charges.

Explained

What to do if restaurant adds service charge to bill (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) on Monday issued guidelines to prevent unfair trade practices, and to protect the interest of consumers with regard to the levy of service charge in hotels and restaurants.

Under the guidelines, consumers can lodge complaints against hotels and restaurants by calling the number 1915.

The CCPA was established in July 2020 under The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, to promote, protect, and enforce the rights of consumers as a class, and to investigate, prosecute, and punish violators.

The CCPA has issued five major guidelines regarding the levy of service charge by restaurants and hotels, which has for long been a contentious issue and has periodically triggered complaints from consumers. The guidelines say:

- No hotel or restaurant shall add service charge automatically or by default in the bill;
- Service charge shall not be collected from consumers by any other name;
- 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 the consumer's discretion;
- No restriction on entry or provision of services based on collection of service charge shall be imposed on consumers; and
- Service charge shall not be collected by adding it along with the food bill and levying GST on the total amount.

Large Hadron Collider's run 3 from today :what it look for now (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

The world's most powerful particle collider, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), will begin smashing protons into each other at unprecedented levels of energy beginning July 5.

Scientists will record and analyse the data, which are expected to throw up evidence of "new physics" — or physics beyond the Standard Model of Particle Physics, which explains how the basic building blocks of matter interact, governed by four fundamental forces.

The Large Hadron Collider is a giant, complex machine built to study particles that are the smallest known building blocks of all things.

Structurally, it is a 27-km-long track-loop buried 100 metres underground on the Swiss-French border. In its operational state, it fires two beams of protons almost at the speed of light in opposite directions inside a ring of superconducting electromagnets.

The magnetic field created by the superconducting electromagnets keeps the protons in a tight beam and guides them along the way as they travel through beam pipes and finally collide.

Just prior to collision, another type of magnet is used to 'squeeze' the particles closer together to increase the chances of collisions.

The particles are so tiny that the task of making them collide is akin to firing two needles 10 km apart with such precision that they meet halfway," according to the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (originally Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, or CERN, in French), which runs the particle accelerator complex that houses the LHC.

Folk hero Alluri Sitharama Raju: The legend and Political claims on his legacy (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 1, Modern India)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a 30-foot-tall bronze statue of Alluri Sitharama Raju at Bhimavaram in Andhra Pradesh as the year-long celebrations of the freedom fighter's 125th birth anniversary began on Monday.

The government has said that as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, it is "committed to giving due recognition to the contribution of freedom fighters and making people across the country aware of them". On the campaign website, Alluri's life is featured under the "Unsung Heroes" section.

The Prime Minister noted that the history of the freedom struggle went beyond just a few years, a few areas, or a few people — it is "a symbol of the strength of our diversity, culture and of our unity as a nation".

Union Culture Minister G K Reddy said the celebration of 75 years of Independence had provided an "opportunity to celebrate the unsung, unknown, and underappreciated in a structured manner".

Last month, Home Minister Amit Shah had named Raju, along with Ramji Gaur and Kumaram Bhim, as prominent leaders who stood against the Nizams.

Raju is believed to have been born in present-day Andhra Pradesh in 1897 or 1898. He is said to have become a sanyasi at the age of 18, and gained a mystical aura among the hill and tribal peoples with his austerity, knowledge of astrology and medicine, and his ability to tame wild animals.

Economy

Committed to 6.4% fiscal deficit target ;oil in focus (Page no. 13) (GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

India's macroeconomic fundamentals are strong to deal with global economic challenges and the Central government is committed to sticking to the fiscal deficit target of 6.4 per cent of GDP for the current fiscal, a Finance Ministry official said Monday.

The current account deficit will go up this year with headwind to capital flows, but the government is confident of meeting the challenge, the official added.

When oil prices are this high, obviously the current account deficit will go up. But for the past several years, India has been bridging the current account deficit with capital flows.

This year there has been headwind on the capital flows, but at the same time macroeconomic situation of the Indian economy as well as the reserves, we are in a far stronger position than ever in the past. Challenges are there but we are fairly confident that will we come out well when all this has subsided.

The government is taking steps to deal with the spiralling crude oil prices in the international market. India imports 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements and a weaker rupee makes imports costlier.

Commodity prices, including crude oil, are ruling high due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and has led to inflationary pressures across countries, including India.