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1. How RBI's new directions on credit cards could benefit customers

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed credit card issuers to give customers an option to choose from multiple card networks. The regulator has restricted card issuers from entering into any kind of exclusive arrangements with a card network for the issuance of credit cards. The move is beneficial for customers as they will get the freedom to choose from multiple card networks.



What does the announcement entail?

The RBI has ordered banks and non-banks that issue credit cards not to enter into any arrangement or agreement with card networks that restrain them from availing the services of other card networks.

The card issuers should provide an option to their eligible customers to choose from multiple card networks at the time of issue, it said. The regulator has given a timeline of six months to card issuers to follow the new norms.

Why have new directions been issued?

There are five authorised card networks in India: American Express Banking Corp, Diners Club International Ltd, MasterCard Asia/ Pacific Pte Ltd, National Payments Corporation of India–Rupay, and Visa Worldwide Pte Ltd.

These authorised card networks tie up with banks or non-banks (card issuers) for the issuance of credit cards. The choice of network for a card issued to a customer is decided by the card issuer and is linked to the arrangements that the card issuers have with card networks in terms of their bilateral agreements.

After a review, the RBI found that some of these arrangements existing between card networks and card issuers are not conducive to the availability of choice for customers.

How will the new norms benefit customers?

With the new directions in place, eligible customers will get to choose one among the multiple card networks. Banks and non-banks will not be able to force customers to take credit cards issued by a particular card network with whom they have any tie-ups. The move will boost competition among card networks as they will have to issue cards with attractive features.

What happens to existing credit card customers?

The RBI said for existing cardholders, the option to choose the card network should be provided at the time of the next renewal of the credit card.

Is there any exclusion?

The regulator said the new directions are not applicable to credit card issuers with the number of active cards issued by them being 10 lakh or less in number.

The RBI also said that card issuers such as American Express, who issue credit cards on their own authorised card network, are excluded from the new norms.

What is the total number of credit cards in India?

The number of outstanding credit cards at the end of January 31, 2024, stood at 9.95 crore, as per the RBI's latest data. Some of the top credit card issuers include HDFC Bank (2.01 crore), SBI Cards (1.86 crore), ICICI Bank (1.68 crore) and Axis Bank (1.37 crore).

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Indian Express

2. Bengaluru's first driverless metro train, aided by AI

Why in news?

The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) received the first set of six train coaches, which are part of the Communication-based Train Control (CBTC) system for its under-construction yellow line last month. It is now set to undergo various safety tests.

What is a CBTC-enabled driverless metro train?

According to the Indian Railways' handbook, CBTC technology is a modern communication-based system that uses radio communication to transfer timely and accurate train control information. CBTC is "one train talking to another train".

The yellow line will have Unattended Train Operations (UTO), allowing full automation in tasks such as opening and closing of doors and stoppage and movement of trains, and Enhanced Supervision Capability from the Operations Control Centre (OCC).

Every morning, the train will “wake up” to a command from the OCC. This will activate the interior lights and start the engine. The train then undergoes an automatic self-check to ensure its technical fitness. It will go through automated washing plants for cleaning, before moving to the platforms. At night, the train will enter a “sleep mode”.



Who has manufactured and designed these trains?

The coaches for the driverless Bengaluru Metro are manufactured by Chinese firm CRRC Nanjing Puzhen Co Ltd, along with their domestic partners Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd. as part of the Make In India Initiative. The Chinese firm won a Rs 1,578 crore contract in 2019 to supply 216 coaches to BMRCL.

How is Bengaluru Metro tapping into AI for the first time?

AI will be used to monitor tracks on the new line for the safety of operations. AI algorithms can analyse data from sensors to detect anomalies such as cracks, wear and tear or other irregularities along the track. Cameras mounted on trains can capture visual data and AI-powered systems can analyse it in real-time to detect safety concerns.

What are the other special features of the driverless metro train?

Hot axle detection system: It is a train monitoring system that detects overheating in the bearings of the trains. Temperature data and diagnostic data are transmitted to OCC via an onboard antenna, wayside wireless equipment and telecom network at designated stations.

Real-time location: The driverless train is equipped with an LCD-type dynamic route map. This will provide information on doors opening or closing and on the arrival/departure.

Front view and rear-view camera: Rear-view cameras are on both sides of the cars so that train operators can view the passengers boarding and deboarding before train departure.

The front-facing camera will record the front images for safety/security purposes during driverless operations.

Emergency Egress Device (EED) unit: During an emergency, passengers can operate the handle till it reaches the 'REQUEST' position. A request will go to the OCC/train operator, who will check the situation via CCTV camera and let the door unlock.

When will the driverless trains be operational?

The train has to undergo at least 37 tests on the mainline for four months and signalling tests for at least 45 days. The yellow line, which was set to be operational in 2022, is now expected to start only by December 2024.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

3. Kerala declares man-animal conflict a state-specific disaster: What changes with this?

Why in News?

Amid repeated deaths from animal attacks and rising anger over them, Kerala recently declared man-animal conflict as a state-specific disaster, becoming the first state in the country to do so.



What changes

At present, managing man-animal conflict is the responsibility of the forest department, which acts as per the Wild Life Protection Act. Once the issue is declared a state-specific disaster, the onus to deal with it shifts to the state disaster management authority, which, powered by the Disaster Management Act, can take quicker and more decisive action.

At the state level, the Chief Minister is the ex officio chairman of the body, and several departments, including the forest department, are

stakeholders. In the districts, the district disaster management authority is headed by the district collector, who is also the executive magistrate.

Once an issue is declared a state-specific disaster or a national disaster, the disaster management authority can take quick decisions and actions overriding all other norms. Also, district collectors can directly intervene in their capacity as the chairman of the district disaster body.

Why the change

In the past few weeks, every time a life has been lost to man-animal conflict, there has been a mounting chorus to tranquilise/capture/kill the animals responsible.

At present, the chief wildlife warden — there is only one such post in the state — is the only authority to take a call on a wild animal wreaking havoc in human settlement. Also, in the past, there have been cases where the decision to tranquilise a killer animal, such as a wild elephant, has been questioned in court.

Once the issue is under the disaster management authority, it can take actions overriding other norms, including those under the Wildlife Protection Act.

As per section 71 of the Disaster Management Act, no court (except the Supreme Court or a High Court) shall have jurisdiction to entertain any suit or proceeding in respect of anything done by relevant authorities in pursuance of any power conferred by this Act. Section 72 of the Act says that the provisions of this Act will have an overriding effect on any other law during the specific period that a disaster has been declared.

Other state-specific disasters

In 2015, Odisha had declared snakebite a state-specific disaster. In 2020, Kerala declared Covid as a state specific disaster. Besides, heat waves, sunburn and sunstroke have been declared so in 2019, the phenomenon of soil piping in 2017, and lightning and coastal erosion in 2015.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: The Indian Express