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**ANALYSIS**  
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## **FOREWORD**

We, at Team Vedhik is happy to introduce a new initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" compilations to help you with UPSC Civil Services Examination preparation. We believe this initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" would help students, especially beginners save time and streamline their preparations with regard to Current Affairs. A content page and an Appendix has been added segregating and mapping the content to the syllabus.

It is an appreciable efforts by Vedhik IAS Academy helping aspirants of UPSC Civil Services Examinations. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Babu Sebastian, former VC - MG University in extending all support to this endeavour. Finally I also extend my thanks to thank Ms. Shilpa Sasidharan and Mr. Shahul Hameed for their assistance in the preparing the compilations.

We welcome your valuable comments so that further improvement may be made in the forthcoming material. We look forward to feedback, comments and suggestions on how to improve and add value for students. Every care has been taken to avoid typing errors and if any reader comes across any such error, the authors shall feel obliged if they are informed at their Email ID.

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# Charting a trade route after the MC12

An upbeat global trade scenario provides an ideal setting for Trade Ministers to correct iniquitous rules and provisions



BISWAJIT DHAR

The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) is being convened in Geneva, Switzerland at the end of this month, a year-and-a-half after it was scheduled to be held in Kazakhstan (June 2020, but postponed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic). The MC12 is being held at an important juncture when the global trade scenario is quite upbeat.

## The outlook

Recent WTO estimates show that global trade volumes could expand by almost 11% in 2021, and by nearly 5% in 2022, and could stabilise at a level higher than the pre-COVID-19 trend (<https://bit.ly/3EQTO55>). The buoyancy in trade volumes has played an important role in supporting growth in economies such as India where domestic demand has not yet picked up sufficiently. Therefore, these favourable tidings provide an ideal setting for the Trade Ministers from the WTO member-states to revisit trade rules and to agree on a work programme for the organisation, which can help maintain the momentum in trade growth.

But above all, the MC12 needs to consider how in these good times for trade, the economically weaker countries "can secure a share in the growth in international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development", an objective that is mandated by the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

Does the run-up to the MC12 provide any evidence that the global trading system can be slightly less iniquitous than it has been? The answer lies in the possible

outcomes in some of the areas that are currently witnessing intense negotiations. These include adoption of WTO rules on electronic commerce, investment facilitation, and fisheries subsidies. But there is one issue that surmounts all others, namely, the WTO's response to demands that technologies necessary for producing vaccines, medicines, and other medical products for COVID-19 treatment should be available without the restrictions imposed by intellectual property rights (IPRs).

## IPRs and vaccine issue

From the very outset of the COVID-19 pandemic it had become clear that IPRs protected using the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) are formidable barriers to ensuring equitable access to vaccines. Pharmaceutical companies controlling the global markets have used monopoly rights granted by their IPRs to deny developing countries access to technologies and know-how, thus undermining the possibility of production of vaccines in these countries. The involvement of developing countries in vaccine production could have increased supplies of affordable vaccines to the low-income countries. Availability of vaccines remains a critical problem in these countries even after a year since the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine was administered. Recent statistics show that until now, a mere 4.1% of the population in low-income countries have received at least one dose of the vaccine (<https://bit.ly/3mKDK8G>).

To remedy this situation, India and South Africa had tabled a proposal in the WTO in October 2020, for waiving enforcement of several forms of IPRs on "health products and technologies including diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, medical devices ... and their methods and means of manufacture" useful for COVID-19 treatment. By



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

doing so, barriers created by IPRs to timely access to affordable medical products could be removed. This proposal, supported by nearly two-thirds of the organisation's membership, was opposed by the developed countries battling for their corporates. However, after the Joe Biden Administration in the United States lent limited support to the India-South Africa proposal, there was a glimmer of hope that WTO members would agree to lift restrictions on access to technologies for COVID-19 vaccines and medicines; at least by the MC12. The unfortunate reality of the current discussions is that an outcome supporting affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines and medicines looks distant. A further confirmation of this possibly came from the WTO Director General, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, when in her recent musings on the MC12 in *The Economist*, she was completely silent on this issue.

## Fisheries, e-commerce

Although discussions on fisheries subsidies have been hanging fire for a long time, there is considerable push for an early conclusion of an agreement to rein in these subsidies. However, the current drafts on this issue are completely unbalanced as they do not provide the wherewithal to rein in large-scale commercial fishing that are depleting fish stocks the world over, and at the same time, are threatening the livelihoods of small fishermen in countries such as India.

In recent months, the proposal by the members of the Organisa-

tion for Economic Co-operation and Development and the G-20 members to introduce global minimum taxes on digital companies has made headlines. But in the WTO, most of these countries have been investing their negotiating capital to facilitate the expansion of e-commerce firms. Discussions on e-commerce are being held in the WTO since 1998 (<https://bit.ly/302dkgf>), after the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce wherein WTO members agreed to "continue their ... practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions". The more substantive outcome was the decision to "establish a comprehensive work programme" taking into "account the economic, financial, and development needs of developing countries".

Fast forward to the discussions in 2021, and a key focus of the 1998 e-commerce work programme, namely "development needs of developing countries", is entirely missing from the text document that is the basis for the current negotiations. On the negotiating table are issues relating to the liberalisation of the goods and services trade, and of course guarantee for free flow of data across international boundaries, all aimed at facilitating expansion of businesses of e-commerce firms. In fact, the decision on a moratorium on the imposition of import duties agreed to in 1998 has become the basis for a push towards comprehensive trade liberalisation – a perfectly logical way forward, given that the sole objective of the negotiations on e-commerce is to facilitate expansion of e-commerce firms.

## Divisions over investment

Complementing the current focus of the WTO to promote the global interests of oligopolies is the initiative for the adoption of an investment facilitation agreement. Inclusion of substantive provisions on investment in the WTO has been

one of the more divisive issues. In 2001, the Doha Ministerial Declaration had included a work programme on investment (<https://bit.ly/3bjSeWw>), but it was soon taken off the table as developing countries were opposed to its continuation because the discussions were geared to expanding the rights of foreign investors through a multilateral agreement on investment. An investment facilitation has reintroduced the old agenda of concluding such an investment agreement. The proponents have been careful not to load the agenda by seeking substantial commitments from the Government to promote the interests of foreign investors, but it should be clear even to the uninitiated that the ultimate objective is to bind host governments into a multilaterally agreed commitment to comprehensively protect investor interests.

## One-sided negotiations

Besides the bias in favour of global oligopolies, the current negotiating processes in the WTO are fundamentally flawed. The negotiations on e-commerce and investment facilitation are being conducted not by a mandate given by the entire membership of the WTO in a transparent manner that are also consistent with the objectives of the WTO. Instead, these negotiations owe their origins to the so-called "Joint Statement Initiatives" (JSI) in which a section of the membership has developed the agenda with a view to producing agreements in the WTO. This will then be offered to the rest of the membership on a "take-it-or-leave-it" basis. This entire process is "detrimental to the very existence of a rule-based multilateral trading system under the WTO", as India and South Africa have forcefully argued in a submission against the JSIs early this year (<https://bit.ly/2ZXN5XV>).

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## State of emergency

Ethiopia's government has declared a national state of emergency after rival Tigrayan forces seized two strategic cities in an apparent push towards the capital, Addis Ababa



**Under attack:** A file photo of the site of an air strike in Mekele, Tigray. • AP

**Nov 4, 2020:** Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed orders a military response to what he calls a "traitorous" attack by the TPLF on federal army camps in Tigray

**Nov. 28:** Abiy announces military operations are "completed", but fighting continues

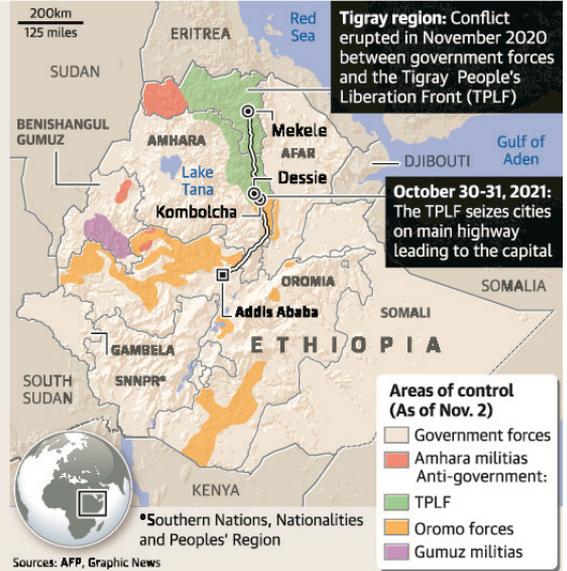
**Feb. 2021:** Amnesty International says Eritrean soldiers killed "hundreds of civilians" in November in the holy city of Axum

**June 28:** Ethiopian officials flee Mekele in the face of a rebel advance. They take the Tigray capital and push south

**Oct. 4:** Abiy is sworn in for a new five-year term in office



**Nov. 5:** Nine rebel groups, including the TPLF, agree to "collaborate and join forces" against the government of Prime Minister Abiy



# Ethiopia rebels 'join forces' against govt.

TPLF, which has joined hands with Oromo rebels, says Addis Ababa could fall within weeks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ADDIS ABABA

Nine rebel groups battling Ethiopia's government joined forces on Friday, as fears grow of Tigrayan fighters advancing on the capital.

The alliance includes the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which has been locked in a year-long war against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government.

The TPLF said on Wednesday that its fighters had reached the town of Kemisie in Amhara region, 325 km northeast of the capital, and were running "joint operations" with the OLA, which predicted Addis Ababa could fall in a matter of weeks.

The nine groups, in a statement, said they were forming a united front "to reverse the harmful effects of the Abiy Ahmed rule on the peoples of Ethiopia... and in

recognition of the great need to collaborate and join forces towards a safe transition in the country".

### United Front

It is unclear whether the alliance, named the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces, will affect the trajectory of the conflict, which Mr. Abiy's government has termed "an existential war".

The TPLF and the OLA,

which the government officially designated as terrorist groups in May, are well-known, but the alliance's other seven members are obscure, said one diplomat following security matters.

"If they are really serious about taking up arms against the government then it's potentially a real problem for the government," the diplomat said. "I don't know the majority of them, I don't know how many people they

have, what resources they have." The government has dismissed rebel claims of territorial gains, saying on Thursday the TPLF was "encircled" and close to defeat, while also urging Ethiopians to unite and join the fight.

On Friday, the Defence Ministry called on veterans to re-enlist in the armed forces.

The U.S. Embassy issued an advisory urging citizens to leave the country as soon as possible.

# China to punish Taiwan independence 'diehards'

They are severely undermining cross-strait relations: Beijing

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING

China vowed on Friday to punish "diehard" Taiwan politicians, saying it would ban several from visiting the mainland, as tensions between Beijing and Taipei spiked to their highest level in years.

China claims Taiwan as its territory – to be seized one day, by force if necessary – and has intensified efforts in recent years to isolate the self-ruled island on the international stage. On Friday, the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing warned that "the mainland will pursue criminal responsibility for Taiwan independence diehards in accordance with the law, to be effective for life".

The statement by spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian named Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang, Parliament Speaker Yu Shi-kun and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu as among a minority of independence supporters.

Ms. Zhu said the politicians "have tried to instigate cross-strait confrontation, maliciously attacked and slandered the mainland... severely undermining cross-strait relations". She added

that Beijing has prohibited them and their family members from entering the mainland, Hong Kong or Macau.

Their affiliates would also be restricted from cooperating with mainland organisations and individuals, she said, without giving more details.

## 'Won't be intimidated'

Taiwan's Mr. Su on Friday brushed off the threat from Beijing, saying he "won't be intimidated."

"It doesn't (rule) Taiwan for one day but it's bossing Taiwan around," Mr. Su said of Beijing when asked about the list of "diehards" in Par-

liament. The nationalist Kuomintang party fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the Chinese civil war.

The island of 24 million people has since transformed into a vibrant democracy and major tech hub, leading many – including President Tsai Ing-wen – to assert Taiwan's distinct identity, which Beijing attacks as separatism. Beijing-Taipei ties have plunged since Ms. Tsai rose to power in 2016.

"Those who forget their ancestors, betray their motherland and split the country will not come to a good end," Ms. Zhu said.

# Case delay: Madras HC apologises to SC

High Court Judge dismisses plea by IPS officer accused of extorting ₹3 crore

MOHAMED IMRANULLAH S.  
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court has apologised to the Supreme Court for taking six years to dispose of a writ petition filed by an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer accused of extorting ₹3 crore from a woman involved in an economic offence and not keeping up the hope and trust that the apex court had reposed on the High Court in 2015 by expecting it to dispose of the case at the earliest.

Dismissing the writ petition now, Justice C.V. Karthikeyan wrote: "I must append a note of apology. The High Court had not kept up the hope and trust of the honourable Supreme Court. The matter was heard in full after more than six years (since the Supreme Court had directed the High Court to take a relook into the mat-

ter) and the controversy is hopefully disposed of by this order."

The judge pointed out that the petitioner Pramod Kumar was serving as Inspector General of Police (West Zone) in 2009 when a case was booked by Tiruppur Central Crime Branch against three directors of Paze Forex Trading India Private Limited. They were accused of accepting deposits worth crores from the public by promising attractive returns. Subsequently, one of the directors Kamalavali Arumugam went missing on December 8, 2009 and a woman missing case was booked at Tiruppur North Police Station. The woman surfaced on December 11, 2009 and she claimed to the police that she was abducted by unknown persons.

However, on further in-



I must append a note of apology. The High Court had not kept up the hope and trust of the honourable Supreme Court. The matter was heard in full after more than six years and the controversy is hopefully disposed of by this order. — JUSTICE C.V. KARTHIKEYAN  
JUDGE, MADRAS HIGH COURT

quiry, the woman accused Inspector of Police V. Mohan Raj of having demanded ₹3 crore from her for not taking action against her in the economic offence case.

She also claimed to have enacted a drama of getting abducted and told the police that she had already paid ₹2.95 crore since she was subjected to threats and harassment.

Thereafter, the woman missing case was altered into a case of extortion. During interrogation, the Inspector reportedly told the sleuths that he got involved into the

issue only on the instructions of the then IG (west zone).

CB-CID issued summons to the IG and questioned him. Meanwhile, disposing of a criminal petition filed by the investors of Paze, the High Court transferred the investigation in the economic offences case as well as the extortion case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) since they were connected.

The CBI arrested the IG on May 2, 2012. He filed a writ petition in August 2012 to restrain the CBI from investigating the case since it had

not obtained prior sanction from the Centre to prosecute him. A single judge dismissed the writ petition on December 5, 2012.

A writ appeal was also dismissed by a Division Bench of the High Court on April 29, 2013. However, when the matter was taken on further appeal, the Supreme Court on March 17, 2015 remanded the writ petition to the High Court for a fresh hearing. In the meantime, the CBI filed final reports before two different special courts in the economic offence case as well as the extortion case.

While the trial had commenced in the economic offence case, the extortion case was kept in suspended animation due to Supreme Court orders. Dismissing the 2012 writ petition once again after a full fledged hearing, Justice Karthikeyan directed the special court for CBI cases to proceed since *prima facie* materials were available against the accused.

## 'Duty cuts, stock limits helped curtail oil prices'

Apart from the cuts in duties and cesses, the Centre had used stock limits to help control prices of both edible oils and pulses this year, using the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act.

The amendments to the Act, which were passed by Parliament last year but suspended by the Supreme Court in January due to opposition by farm unions, would not have allowed the imposition of stock limits given the current rate of price hikes.

### Extraordinary times

"These are extraordinary times. Global commodity prices are extremely high. COVID-19 is a major factor, disrupting supply chains, closing down industry," Mr. Pandey said.

"There is insufficient labour in the oil production industry in many countries. Given the extraordinary circumstances, it is right to invoke this," he said explaining why the Government

had chosen to use the same legal provisions it had sought to remove through last year's amendments.

The retail prices of most major cooking oils were 35-45% higher than a year ago. However, a clear decline in prices was seen in Delhi from the beginning of the week till the Deepavali eve, with prices falling ₹5-10 a kg over the three-day period.

Some smaller centres saw even greater declines, such as the ₹18 a kg fall in palm oil in Aligarh and the ₹20 a kg fall in sunflower oil prices in Meghalaya.

Nationally, the palm oil prices fell about ₹1.45 a kg, while soybean oil increased the same amount.

Mustard oil, which accounted for 1% of the domestic consumption, saw a ₹2.29 a kg increase in prices, although Mr. Pandey hoped that the 12-15% increase in mustard acreage this winter season would cool down prices once the harvest comes in.

# Duty cuts, stock limits helped curtail edible oil prices: Govt.

No plan to extend free rations beyond Nov. 30

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The prices of most major cooking oils dropped about ₹5-10 a litre in Delhi and as much as ₹20 in some other cities in the run-up to Deepavali, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said on Friday, giving credit to the stabilisation of global prices as well as measures such as duty cuts and stock limits. However, the national average retail prices for cooking oils showed little change, and mustard oil, which is only produced domestically, continued to see rising prices.

### Price chart

The retail prices of cooking oils dipped in select markets since October. The table shows the variation in edible oil prices between Oct. 31 and Nov. 3 (in ₹/kg):



Oil type	Delhi	Mumbai	Aligarh	Cuddalore
Palm	-6.0	-1.0	-18.0	-7
Soyabean	-5.0	-3.0	-5.0	NR
Groundnut	-7.0	-2.0	-5.0	-10
Sunflower	-10.0	1.0	NC	-1
Mustard	-6.0	-1.0	-10.0	NR

\*NR: NOT RECORDED; NC: NO CHANGE | SOURCE: DEPT. OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

"International edible oil prices remain high, but have stabilised over the past week. Interventions by the Central Government along with the State Governments' proactive involvement and

the cut in wholesale prices by major private players have led to retail prices cooling down much more than in the international market," the Food Secretary told journalists.

On the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), Mr. Pandey observed that there were no plans to extend the free ration scheme introduced as COVID-19 relief last year beyond November 30.

"...As the economy is also reviving and the OMSS [or open market sale scheme] is also exceptionally good, there is no proposal from the department for extension," he noted.

PMGKAY was rolled out in March 2020 and has been extended twice. It provides five kg of free foodgrains a month to the 80 crore beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act..

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

# Goyal urges fivefold boost to export of technical textiles

India's share is \$19 bn in a \$250-bn global market, he says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
COIMBATORE

The annual growth rate of the technical textiles sector in the country should be in the 15%-20% range in the next five years, from the current 8%, said Union Minister of Textiles, Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs and Food and Public Distribution Piyush Goyal.

It is time to target a five times' increase in export of technical textiles in three years, he told representatives of the Indian Technical Textile Association (ITTA) in New Delhi on Friday.

The world market for technical textiles is \$250 bil-



Piyush Goyal

lion and India's share is \$19 billion.

### 'Net exporter'

The biggest players are the U.S., West European countries, China and Japan.

In January 2019, the government issued 207 HSN Codes for technical textiles and in less than two years, India had become a net exporter of technical textiles.

It also unveiled the National Technical Textiles Mission in February last year. In FY21, India's major share of technical textile exports was in PPEs, N-95 and surgical masks, and fabric for PPEs and masks. As many as 92 technical textile items have been made mandatory for use by government organisations covering agriculture, horticulture, highways, railways, water resources, and medical applications.

# India's revenue surge to fund welfare, not fiscal gap: sources

Govt. to spend more on rural job guarantee, incentives programme for exporters

REUTERS  
NEW DELHI

India will utilise a big bump in revenue collection to fund welfare programmes instead of trying to beat its fiscal deficit target or lower borrowing, two government officials told Reuters.

The country is set to exceed its revenue collection target of ₹15.45 lakh crore, the first beat in four years, but a big chunk of the extra cash will go to a rural job programme and to provide free cereals to the poor.

The Centre is also likely to lose ₹550 billion to ₹600 billion in revenue after cutting fuel taxes this week.

"Even after the cut in fuel taxes we should be able to exceed the tax collection tar-



**Ray of hope:** Govt. plans to top up its rural job-guarantee effort by up to ₹300 billion, says an official. ■KOMMURI SRINIVAS

get for the year but will use the funds for rural job programme and subsidies," said one of the officials, both of whom declined to be identified talking about market-sensitive figures. "Fiscal deficit and borrowing will be at the budget estimate levels."

The finance ministry declined to comment.

Before the fuel tax cut, many economists had predicted India bettering its fiscal deficit target of 6.8% by 30-50 basis points for the year that ends on March 31.

Market participants had

also expected the government to review its budgeted borrowing of ₹12.05 lakh crore before starting discussions on its next budget to be presented on February 1.

## Top-up planned

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration is planning to top up its rural job-guarantee effort by up to ₹300 billion, said the second official, having used up ₹730 billion allocated for the current fiscal year.

The government will also have to provide an additional ₹500 billion each for its free food drive and an incentives programme for exporters, said the officials. It has also approved ₹400 billion extra in fertiliser subsidies.

# 'PLI will allow AC sector to compete globally'

## Firms see 3-fold jump in value added

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The production linked incentive (PLI) scheme approved by the Centre earlier this week would help provide a level-playing field to domestic players and create an enabling environment for the industry to compete globally, leading manufacturers said.

Firms would get an opportunity to make high-quality products on par with global counterparts, said industry players such as Daikin, Blue Star and Panasonic.

On Wednesday, the government had said it would select 42 firms as beneficiaries under the PLI scheme for the white goods sector. The selected applicants include 26 for air-conditioner manufacturing with a committed investment of ₹3,898 crore.

The highest approved proposal of ₹538.70 crore was from Japan's Daikin Industries. Its subsidiary Daikin Airconditioning India plans to manufacture compressors, heat exchangers, sheet metal components and plastic moulding components under the PLI scheme at Sri City, Andhra Pradesh, where it is setting a 75-acre greenfield project.

"This investment is not only for India, but we are also looking for an exports market in a big way... We have been observing the government approach. It's quite positive," Daikin India CMD K.J. Jawa told PTI.

Via the PLI scheme, the firm is aiming to make India a production hub for the African and West Asian market, he said. "We are looking at [a] China-plus-one model and capitalising on the current resistance against China after the pandemic. Daikin has established itself



very well in the last few years... We would be putting up a compressor plant, device factory and also heat exchanger," he added.

### 'More locally-made ACs'

Panasonic India CEO Manish Sharma said: "Last year, the Indian AC market was pegged at around 7.5 million. Of this, 2.5 million were imports, which have come down significantly due to the ban on the import of gas-filled ACs.

"We expect the market to touch 9 million this year; of this, 8-8.5 million will be [made] locally. Currently, ACs come with 25% local value addition; with the current PLI scheme, this can go up to 75% in the next 3-5 years," he said.

Blue Star MD B. Thiagarajan said it had received approval for heat exchangers and sheet metal components for its upcoming project at Sri City.

"The component ecosystem in the country in the next three years would be good," he said.

Consumer Electronics and Appliances Manufacturers Association President Eric Braganza said: "The scheme would lead to inclusive growth, which in turn will aid in creating more job opportunities in the country and will also put an upward thrust in the economy by bringing in large-scale manufacturing to India."

# The right time for India to have its own climate law

The country's existing laws are inadequate in dealing with climate change; India's situation is also unique



NEHA SINHA

As the world watches the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26, from October 31 to November 12, 2021), the most important climate summit in years at Glasgow, Scotland, India has said it wants to be a part of the climate solution.

## The Indian proposals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced, on November 1 at Glasgow, a 'Panchamrit solution' which aims at reducing fossil fuel dependence and carbon intensity (reduce one billion tonnes of total projected carbon emissions by 2030), and ramping up its renewable energy share to 50% by 2030. Glasgow is important as it will call for practical implementation of the 2015 Paris Accord, setting the rules for the Accord. And as the world recovers from the biological and environmental stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, climate change has also become personal.

Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav has reassessed the call for the promised \$100 billion a year as support (from the developed world to the developing world) but as we consider new energy pathways, we must also consider the question of climate hazard, nature-based solutions and national accountability.

This is the right time for India to pull setting up a climate law while staying true to its goals of climate justice, carbon space and environmental protection. There are a few reasons for this.

## Current laws and gaps

Which law covers climate? First, our existing laws are not adequate to deal with climate change. We have for example the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. Yet, climate is not exactly water or air. Which law would cover the impacts of a cyclone, for instance or work to reduce future climate impacts? And neither are we ready to tackle environmental/climate violations. The Environment (Protection) Act is grossly inadequate to deal with violations on climate. Clause 24 of the Act, "Effect of Other Laws", states that if an offence is committed under the EPA or any other law, the person will be punished under the other law (for example, Code of Criminal Procedure). This makes the EPA subordinate to every other law.

Second, there is a need to integrate climate action – adaptation and mitigation – and monitor progress. Comprehensive climate action is not just technological (such as changing energy sources or carbon intensity), but also nature-based (such as emphasising restoration of ecosystems, reducing natural hazard and increasing carbon sinks.)

Finally, India's situation is unique. Climate action cannot come by furthering sharpening divides



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

or exacerbating poverty, and this includes our stated renewable energy goals. The 500 Gigawatt by 2030 goal for renewable, solar or wind power for example (of installed power capacity from non-fossil sources), can put critically endangered grassland and desert birds such as the Great Indian Bustard at risk, as they die on collision with wires in the desert.

## Create a commission

A climate law could consider two aspects. One, creating an institution that monitors action plans for climate change. A 'Commission on Climate Change' could be set up, with the power and the authority to issue directions, and oversee implementation of plans and programmes on climate.

The Commission could have quasi-judicial powers with powers of a civil court to ensure that its directions are followed in letter and spirit. It should be assisted by a technical committee which can advise the commission in the discharge of its functions as well as guide various private and public agencies in meeting their climate-related obligations. As an example, the commission could look at agencies or institutions that have a disproportionate impact on cli-

mate or environment, and suggest lower energy pathways that are adhered to.

## Tracing carbon footprints

What, for example, is the carbon footprint of a single activity from start to finish? We have the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, but we also need overall carbon efficiency that looks beyond electronics. How could intelligent interventions be made for reduction of footprints, along with common sense, and practical public health interventions which are unaccounted for so far? In a recent case in the National Green Tribunal it was revealed that the National Thermal Power Corporation did not even cover coal wagons with tarpaulin on railways, decades after environmental clearances were granted in 1999, in Chhattisgarh. In 2020, the Supreme Court passed an order directing for the wagons to be covered within a month's time. There will be eventual emissions by coal use. But there is also the issue of respirable coal dust that is spewed into the air through irresponsible transportation.

As of now, many environmental mediations remain glaringly haphazard. The ban on plastic bags in Delhi is a failure because plastic bag substitutes were never really pushed at scale by the understaffed environment department. A plastic bag ban to succeed in one State requires a similar commitment from neighbouring States. A nation-wide intervention here, led by a Climate Commission, considering substitutes at scale for plastic-based products (which are derived from petroleum) and looking at both innovation and implement-

ation, would be useful.

## Need for accountability

Second, we need a system of liability and accountability at short-, medium- and long-term levels as we face hazards. This also means having a legally enforceable National Climate Change Plan that goes beyond just policy guidelines. Are climate vagaries acts of god, or do certain actions exacerbate them? In an order of the National Green Tribunal in 2016, the court examined the damage caused when floods occurred in 2013 in Pauri, Uttarakhand. When Srinagar dam (Uttarakhand) opened its sluice gates, muck created 8-foot tall deposits, destroying property and fields.

While muck is not hazardous, the handling of the dam – especially in a mountainous area in the face of climate events – created serious damage. The court held the damage was not an 'Act of God' and invoked the Principle of No Fault liability. The Alaknanda Hydro Power Company was asked by the Tribunal to pay more than ₹9 crore in damages. But all this was after the disaster. A Climate Commission could ideally prevent such gross negligence in fragile areas and fix accountability if it arises.

We have an urgent moral imperative to tackle climate change and reduce its worst impacts. But we also should Indianise the process by bringing in a just and effective law – with guts, a spine, a heart, and, most importantly, teeth.

*Neha Sinha is a conservation biologist and author of 'Wild and Wilful: Tales of 15 Iconic Indian Species'. The views expressed are personal*

## Act now on climate, youth tell leaders

Greta Thunberg labels COP26 a 'failure'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
GLASGOW

Thousands of young people marched through the streets of Glasgow on Friday to protest against a lack of climate action with a clear message to negotiators at the COP26 summit: "If not now, when?"

Two days of demonstrations are planned in the Scottish city to highlight the disconnect between the glacial pace of emissions reductions and the climate emergency already swamping countries across the world.

Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg branded the UN summit a "failure" and said that pledges from some nations made during COP26 to



**Clean up your mess:** Climate activist Greta Thunberg taking part in a protest march in Glasgow on Friday. \*GETTY IMAGES

accelerate their emissions cuts amounted to little more than "a two-week long celebration of business as usual and 'blah, blah, blah'."

"It is not a secret that COP26 is a failure," she said at the mass protest. "This is no longer a climate conference. This is now a global

greenwashing festival."

Onlookers to Friday's march lined the streets and hung out of windows to watch the stream of protesters, who held banners reading "No Planet B" and "Climate Action Now".

"I'm here because the world leaders are deciding

the fate of our future and the present of people that have already been impacted by climate crisis," said 18-year-old Valentina Ruas.

"We won't accept anything that isn't real climate policy centred on climate justice."

Sixteen-year-old Beth Donaldson said young people were fed up with hollow promises from leaders.

"We see on the TV all these political leaders saying they're going to take action but we never see what action they're actually going to take," she said.

School children were out in force, with some schools allowing pupils to skip lessons to see the march and one young green warrior holding a placard that read: "Climate change is worse than homework".

# ST(E)PS for a cleaner Yamuna

A major cause of pollution in the river is the 22 drains dumping sewage and industrial effluents into it, prompting the authorities to build more sewage treatment plants in the city



1. Water in the Delhi Gate drain is dark, polluted, and has a stench. This water is taken to the STP through an underground tunnel, which is about 90-metre long



2. The water passes through two screens: a medium screen, which traps materials above 20 mm, and then through a fine screen, which traps all materials above 5 mm



3. Suspended particles are removed by adding ferric alum and polyelectrolyte in two different stages. As suspended particles become heavy, they settle down due to gravity



4. Dissolved particles are removed in aeration tanks, which have specific bacteria that eat the dissolved particles. Air is pumped into these tanks



5. Samples of water before and after being treated at the STP. This water is used for other purposes or released back to the drains from where it flows into the Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Pollution in the Yamuna rises as the river enters deeper into the national capital. Once considered the lifeline of the city, the river currently carries fecal coliform (microbes from human and animal excreta) beyond prescribed levels at all points except Palla village, where the river enters Delhi.

A major cause of pollution in the Yamuna is the 22 drains dumping sewage and industrial effluents into the river. Illegal industries also add to the effluents ending up in the river. Because of this, the role of sewage treatment plants (STPs) becomes most important in depolluting the river water.

According to Government estimates, 14% of all sewage generated in the city is not being treated at present due to lack of facilities and the authorities are building more STPs to address this problem.

## How does an STP work?

Stormwater drains are supposed to carry rainwater to a waterbody, which in case of Delhi is the Yamuna. Apart from this, there is supposed to be a separate sewage network, which is not connected to the stormwater drains, and the sewage from it is to be treated at the STPs.

In Delhi, however, the sewage flows into the stormwater drains at many points, polluting the water. So, in most cases, the STPs take water directly from the drains, clean it, and use it for other purposes (not drinking) or release it back to the drains from where the water flows into the Yamuna.

## Primary stage

At Delhi Gate STP, water from the Delhi Gate drain is taken in through an underground tunnel, which is about 90-metre long. There is a coarse filter at the entrance of the tunnel to trap large floating waste and water from the drain flows under the effect of gravity to a storage sump inside the plant.

At this point, the water still has a lot of smaller floating bits. This water is then pumped up to a large overhead tank from where it flows through a slightly sloping path to different chambers.

Here it passes through two screens: a medium screen, which traps all waste bits above 20 mm in size and then through a fine screen, which traps all bits above 5 mm. At this point, the water is still blackish and has a stench. It then goes to a grit chamber (another tank) where heavy particles settle down due to gravity, and then through an aeration chamber where oil,

grease etc. are removed from the water by adding air and mixing it. Oil and grease froths to the surface of the water and goes to a separate chamber.

## Secondary stage

Now, whatever pollutants are present in the water are either dissolved or suspended in it.

Suspended particles are extremely tiny and light pollutants floating in the water. They have to be made heavy to settle them at the bottom and remove them.

For this, first ferric alum is added to the water in a chamber and then the water is pumped to another chamber where polyelectrolyte is added.

This water is then introduced from one chamber to another through an opening at the bottom of a wall separating the two chambers.

As the water flows from the bottom to the top of the second chamber, heavy particles settle down due to gravity.

At this point, the biological oxygen demand (BOD) of the water is reduced by 75% and the colour of the water also improves. BOD is the amount of dissolved oxygen consumed by microorganisms to decompose organic matter present in the water. So, a higher value of BOD implies lower quality of water.

The heavy particles removed from the water form a sludge and it is removed to another tank. It is then passed through a filter press to drain off excess water before it falls through a pipe from the top into a dumper waiting near the gate. This sludge is used in landfills.

After the suspended particles are removed, only dissolved particles are left in the water.

The water now goes to aeration tanks, which have specific bacteria that eat the dissolved particles and air is also supplied to these tanks.

The water then flows into another tank, where a different type of bacteria eats up the ammonia present in the water. The BOD value of the water at the end of the process is 6.47 mg/l, which is better than the National Green Tribunal-recommended standard of 10 mg/l. The cleaned water is then supplied to Pragati Power Corporation Limited, where it is used for power generation.

According to the Delhi Pollution Control Committee, 22 out of the 33 STPs in the city do not comply with their standards. "At some STPs, the BOD of water after the process is more than 10 mg/l. But to reduce the BOD further, we need more tanks for various processes and many STPs do not have space for more construction," a Delhi Jal Board official said.

# Stubble burning impacts lung health, says study

Over 3,500 persons tracked in two phases across six villages in Punjab

**JACOB KOSHY**  
NEW DELHI

Pollution from stubble burning significantly reduced lung function and was particularly harmful to women in rural Punjab, says one of the largest studies of its kind in India, correlating the effect of air pollution on health.

The study was conducted in six villages of Patiala, Punjab, and spanned two phases. The first was in October 2018 and again the following summer from March to April

## SPECIAL

2019 and the second phase was undertaken in the same villages during late October-November, 2018. The latter is the period when crop burning peaks and the two time-frames were considered to measure the change in air quality during both periods. Close to 3,600 participants, from 10-60 years of age, were included in the study.

While the links between particulate matter pollution and respiratory health are

widely documented, there have been limited studies in India that have clearly linked the impact of poor air on lung health. It emerged from the study that the concentrations of PM2.5, the category of unburnt carbon particles considered most harmful to respiratory health, was found to increase more than twice between the two phases, from 100 g/m<sup>3</sup> to 250 g/m<sup>3</sup>. Incidentally these are around 10-15 times the WHO prescribed air quality standards though the permissible standards by India's Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) are higher.

### More symptoms

During the crop residue burning period, a two- to three-fold increase was noted in most of the respiratory symptoms, including wheezing, breathlessness on exertion, cough in morning, cough at night, skin rashes, runny nose or itchiness of eyes, across all age groups. The highest number of complaints were reported by the elderly population (>40-60) and the lowest in the younger age group (>10-18) during crop burning period in Punjab, the study's authors note.

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