

VEDHIK  
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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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# 'No change, it's only green agriculture'

Gotabaya clears the air on farm policy

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

There is no change in Sri Lanka's 'green agriculture' policy, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said on Monday, after senior officials in his government pointed to the contrary.

News agency *AFP* on Sunday reported media remarks made by Udith Jayasinghe, Secretary to the Agriculture Ministry that the government would immediately allow import of chemical fertilizer, effectively reversing its controversial decision in May 2021 banning it.

## Food security

"We will now allow chemical inputs that are urgently needed... considering the need to ensure food security, we have taken this decision," the secretary was quoted as saying.

It was not just the bureaucrat who indicated a policy reversal, but also State Minister of Agriculture Shashendra Rajapaksa, a nephew of the President, who told media that the restrictions on the use of chemical fertilizer would be lifted, except for paddy cultivation. Sri Lanka's main Opposition party even hailed it as a victory for the farmers' protests in the country.

However, following a "special discussion" on Monday morning with subject ministers and district officials, President Rajapaksa "stressed that the country's agriculture policy is only for a green agriculture that focuses on the sole use of organic fertilizers", a statement from the Presidential Media Division said. Subsidies would be provided only for organic farming, he said.

Commenting on the farmer protests across the country, President Rajapaksa said: "the reason behind



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

farmers organising protests and delaying cultivation was that they have not been properly educated." Officials should work to find answers for the agitating farmers, in accordance with the government's green agriculture policy, the President said, adding that officials who do not agree with government policy were free to leave, according to the statement released by his office.

The Rajapaksa government's decision to ban chemical fertilizers, instead opting for an "organic only" policy, has drawn severe criticism from farmers across the nation, as well as scientists and agriculture experts.

## Farmer protests

Farmers from Sri Lanka's agriculture-intensive regions have been agitating for months now, demanding that the government revoke the ban on agrochemicals. Tea and paddy farmers are especially concerned, anticipating a 50% drop in production in the coming harvest season, due to the rash policy shift.

Senior bureaucrat Mr. Jayasinghe, formerly an academic, has earlier said that the President's decision was "based on wrong advice" given to him. The transition from chemical to organic fertilizer ought to be achieved over a decade, he told *Daily Mirror* in an interview last month.

# Pak. to allow wheat transit to Afghanistan

Indian assistance to take land route

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

One month after India offered humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said his Government would allow the aid to transit over the land route through Pakistan. India had protested against the delay in Pakistan's permissions for the aid to be facilitated, including most recently at the eight-nation Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in New Delhi, which had ended with a declaration that called for assistance to be 'unimpeded'.

"[The Prime Minister] announced Pakistan's decision to allow the 50,000 MT of wheat India has offered to provide Afghanistan as humanitarian assistance to go through Pakistan as soon as modalities are finalised with the Indian side," the Pakistan PM's office said, adding that Pakistan has also decided to facilitate "the return of Afghan patients who had gone to India for medical treatment and are stuck there".

The Ministry of External Affairs did not respond to the announcement from Pa-



India had earlier protested against the delay in permission. • FILE PHOTO

kistan. On November 11, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had said India was looking at all possibilities to transfer the aid "but there have been difficulties due to lack of unimpeded access". Asked why India had not sent the aid through the Chabahar port in Iran, the route it had employed in the last few years, officials declined to comment, but suggested that the route would prove too circuitous given the immediate need in Afghanistan. The offer of wheat and other medical supplies was made formally to the Taliban regime by a Ministry of External Affairs delegation that attended the Moscow format conference in Russia.

# China doesn't seek hegemony, says Xi

At ASEAN meet, Philippines President Duterte condemns recent flare-up in the South China Sea

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BEIJING

Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Monday said his country will not seek dominance over Southeast Asia or bully its smaller neighbours, amid ongoing friction over the South China Sea.

Mr. Xi made the remarks during a virtual conference with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, held to mark the 30th anniversary of relations between China and the grouping.

Two diplomats said ASEAN member Myanmar was not represented at Monday's meeting after its military-installed Government refused to allow an ASEAN envoy to meet with ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other arrested politicians. Military ruler Gen. Min Aung Hlaing was also barred from representing his country at the last ASEAN summit.

China has repeatedly sought to overcome concerns about its rising power



**Mixed signal:** Xi Jinping waves as he chairs the virtual ASEAN-China Special Summit on Monday. • AP

and influence in the region, particularly its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea that overlaps the claims of ASEAN members Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and the Philippines.

"China resolutely opposes hegemonism and power politics, wishes to maintain friendly relations with its neighbours and jointly nurture lasting peace in the region and absolutely will not seek hegemony or even less,

bully the small," Mr. Xi said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Mr. Xi's remarks came days after Chinese coast guard ships blocked and sprayed a powerful stream of water at two Philippine boats carrying supplies to troops at a disputed South China Sea shoal and forced them to turn back.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte highlighted the incident in his remarks at the

conference, referring to the shoal by its Philippine name.

"We abhor the recent event in the Ayungin Shoal and view with grave concern other similar developments. This does not speak well of the relations between our nations and our partnership," Mr. Duterte said, according to a statement from his office.

Mr. Duterte also called on China to respect the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which establishes maritime entitlements and sovereign rights over maritime zones, along with a 2016 Hague arbitration ruling that mostly invalidated China's South China Sea claims. China has refused to recognize the ruling.

"We must fully utilise these legal tools to ensure that the South China Sea remains a sea of peace, stability and prosperity," Mr. Duterte said.

On Monday, the Philippines redeployed the two

supply boats to provide food to the marines based at Second Thomas Shoal aboard a Second World War-era warship which it deliberately ran aground in 1999 in a move to fortify the country's claim. Chinese vessels have surrounded the shoal and demanded the Philippines tow away the ship, the *BRP Sierra Madre*.

At a daily briefing on Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian reasserted China's position rejecting the 2016 arbitration ruling and claiming that its "territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea are backed by sufficient historical and legal basis."

"Any attempt to challenge China's sovereignty and interests will not succeed," Mr. Zhao said. "At present, the situation in relevant waters in the South China Sea are generally calm, and China and the Philippines are maintaining close communication."

# Dynamism in India-U.S. ties

Interactions between Indian MPs and members of the U.S. Congress are significant and should be institutionalised



PRASAD KUNDURI

The trajectory of India-U.S. bilateral ties continues to go up. While there are regular interactions among officials at various levels and across sectors, as well as people-to-people engagement, there are no formal interactions between Members of Parliament in India and members of the U.S. Congress.

## Visit to India

In November, a congressional delegation (CODEL) led by U.S. Senator John Cornyn travelled to the Indo-Pacific Command countries, including the Philippines, Taiwan and India. In New Delhi, the six-member delegation interacted with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and representatives of the Dalai Lama. Senator Cornyn is a senior member of the Republican Party and co-founder and co-Chair of the Senate Caucus on India and Indian Americans. Mr. Modi and the members of the delegation noted the “increasing convergence of strategic interests” between India and the U.S. and said they would like to “further enhance cooperation... to promote global peace and stability”.

After the trip, Senator Cornyn said, “The Indo-Pacific is the largest military theater in the world, and our allies there are invaluable to ensuring we can counter China’s overreach. Our delegation was able to see firsthand the issues facing countries from mainland India to island partners in the Pacific...”. The China overhang was visible in the backdrop. Mr. Modi appreciated the consistent support and constructive role of the U.S. Congress in deepening the India-U.S. comprehensive global strategic partnership. Mr. Modi and CODEL exchanged views on enhancing the bilateral relationship and strengthening cooperation on contemporary global issues such as terrorism, climate change and reliable chains for critical technologies.

Last month, Senator Cornyn and Democrat colleague Mark Warner urged President Joe Biden to grant a waiver to India which faces the prospect of sanctions for procuring S-400 missiles from Russia. Two days after returning from his trip to India, CODEL member Senator Tommy Tuberville favoured India getting the presidential waiver under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. More on the issue is in the works on Capitol Hill.

The significance of the CODEL visit is not lost in the U.S. as members of the U.S. Congress play an important role in determining foreign policy, which at times is dictated by the demands of constituents. But despite the robustness in India-U.S. relations, there is no institutional communication or interaction between MPs in India and members of the U.S. Congress. Noting that there is popular and political support in both countries for a robust India-U.S. partnership, the joint statement at the end of the 2+2 Dialogue in 2019 stated: “The Ministers looked forward to the establishment of India-US Parliamentary Exchange to facilitate reciprocal visits by Parliamentarians of the two countries”. With the next edition of the 2+2 Dialogue due to be held soon, the Ministers could examine progress on this aspect. India can take it forward through the Indian Parliamentary Group, which acts as a link between the Indian Parliament and the various Parliaments of the world. In 1953, the Group had first invited then U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon to address MPs in the Central Hall of Parliament. Over the years, Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama also addressed MPs at Central Hall.

## Shaping foreign relations

At present, there are eight Parliamentary Friendship Groups of India’s including Japan, Russia, China and the European Union. The U.S. is absent from this list. It is important to note what former Congressman and veteran Democrat Jim McDermott, a former co-Chair and pioneer of the India Caucus on the House side, said: legislative interactions inject dynamism in bilateral relations. Dr. McDermott was part of the CODEL led by John Lewis to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr’s historic journey to India. CODEL travels across the world during the periods when Congress takes a break from legislative work. Interactions during these travels are important in shaping relations with foreign countries.

India’s connection with the U.S. Congress goes back to November 17, 1954, when Vice President S. Radhakrishnan presented the Senate with a gavel to replace the hour-glass-shaped piece of ivory that had shattered during a heated debate when Nixon had used it. Radhakrishnan hoped that the gavel would inspire senators to debate “with freedom from passion and prejudice”. In 2022, when Parliament celebrates its 70th year, a formal arrangement with Congress can institutionalise this unique relationship between representatives of the U.S. and India.

*Prasad Kunduri is a journalist and former Fulbright-APSA Fellow with the U.S. Congress*

## Belarus asks EU to take migrants

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
REUTERS  
MOSCOW

Belarus does not want confrontation with Poland but it does want an answer from the European Union on whether the bloc will accept 2,000 stranded migrants, President Alexander Lukashenko was quoted as saying by the Belta news agency on Monday.

The EU accuses Belarus of flying in thousands of people from the West Asia and pushing them to cross into the EU via Poland, Lithuania and Latvia in response to European sanctions. Minsk denies fomenting the crisis.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki warned on Sunday that the migrant crisis on the Belarus border may be a prelude to "something much worse", and Poland's border guard said Belarusian forces were still ferrying migrants to the frontier.

Mr. Lukashenko said he did not want things to escalate. "We need to get through to the Poles, to every Pole, and show them that we're not barbarians, that we don't want confrontation. We don't need it. Because we understand that if we go too far, war is unavoidable," he said.

"And that will be a catastrophe. We understand this perfectly well. We don't want any kind of flare-up."

Mr. Lukashenko also said he insisted Germany take in some migrants and complained that the EU was not making contact with Minsk on the issue.

Meanwhile, Belarusian opposition head Svetlana Tikhonovskaya on Monday appealed to EU Ministers "to refrain from any contacts" with Mr. Lukashenko, describing German Chancellor Angela Merkel's calls with the Belarusian ruler as "very strange".

# 'Unpredictable norms key impediment to bilateral trade'

### U.S. Trade Representative flags high tariffs and market access restrictions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai on Monday flagged India's 'unpredictable' regulatory norms, high tariffs and market access restrictions as key impediments to bilateral trade, emphasised America's continued interest in agriculture market access, and conveyed that "worker-centric" policies will be the pivot for the Joe Biden administration's approach to trade policy.

On a maiden two-day visit to revive the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum (TPF) after a four-year hiatus, Ms. Tai said the relationship is a top priority both for President Biden and for her, but highlighted that bilateral trade "never seems to quite live up to its significant potential".

"At the USTR's office, we hear very frequently from our stakeholders, who are not shy, on issues that will be familiar to those of you involved in moving goods and services between our two countries – market access restrictions, high tariffs, unpredictable regulatory requirements, restrictive trade



**Trade relations:** USTR Katherine Tai with Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal in New Delhi • AFP

measures... These are issues where we intend to make progress on and they will be on the top of my list while I am here," Ms. Tai said.

Signalling a major switch to a "worker-centric" focus in the U.S. policy, Ms. Tai said: "President Biden is convinced that the U.S. policy needs a fundamental shift to ensure that our policies and actions focus on the impact that trade and trade agreements have on the lives of real working people."

She said she will work closely with the Indian Government 'colleagues' including Labour and Employment Minister Bhupendra

Yadav on connecting trade "more directly with working people".

"There is a huge potential for growth in our two countries, in areas like the digital economy, services, health-related trade and yes, even agriculture. I believe that a revive TPF can help our trade relationship keep pace with our other areas of engagement," she said after a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

"India and the U.S. also face shared challenges like climate change and sustainability, vulnerable supply chains and promoting mar-

ket-oriented principles and structures. These are areas that are ripe for closer collaboration now," Ms. Tai said, underlining that the U.S. is committed to ensuring a robust and sustainable trade partnership.

"Delivering results and further integrating our two economies will require concerted efforts from our Governments, businesses, civil society, our people as both workers and consumers," she said on the eve of the TPF meeting on Tuesday.

Mr. Goyal said he was pleased that the trade policy forum is being rejuvenated after "languishing for four years" and expressed confidence that the two sides will be able to resolve issues in an amicable manner and send a message to the world that the U.S. and India are strong partners. "Citizens from both our countries look towards India-U.S. partnerships with great optimism and hope. The U.S. and India share a partnership that can not only help each other but the entire world to recover, if we were to work together," he said.

# Australia signs sub deal with U.S., U.K.

Exchange of 'naval nuclear propulsion info' formalised as part of AUKUS pact

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SYDNEY

Australia formally embarked on Monday on a hotly contested programme to equip its Navy with nuclear-powered submarines in a new defence alliance with Britain and the United States.

Defence Minister Peter Dutton joined U.S. and British diplomats in signing an agreement allowing the exchange of sensitive "naval nuclear propulsion information" between their nations.

It is the first agreement on the technology to be publicly signed since the three countries announced in Septem-

ber the formation of a defence alliance, AUKUS, to confront strategic tensions in the Pacific where China-US rivalry is growing.

"The deal will help Australia to complete an 18-month study into the submarine procurement," Mr. Dutton said after signing it in Canberra with U.S. Charge d'Affaires Michael Goldman and British High Commissioner (ambassador) Victoria Treadell.

Details of the procurement have yet to be decided, including whether Australia will opt for a vessel based on U.S. or British nuclear-po-



Australia is set to obtain eight nuclear-powered submarines. ■ GETTY IMAGES

wered attack submarines.

"With access to the information this agreement delivers, coupled with the decades of naval nuclear-powered experience

our U.K. and U.S. partners have, Australia will also be positioned to be responsible and reliable stewards of this technology," Mr. Dutton said in a statement.

Ahead of the signing, U.S. President Joe Biden said in a memorandum approving the deal on Friday that it would improve the three countries' "mutual defence posture".

Under the AUKUS deal, Australia would obtain eight state-of-the-art, nuclear-powered but conventionally armed submarines capable of stealthy, long-range missions.

# Falling short

JPC Bill gives much leeway to Govt. to exempt its agencies from data protection provisos

It has been more than three years since a draft Bill on personal data protection was crafted by the Justice Srikrishna Committee of experts and submitted to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 2018. Two years since a Joint Parliamentary Committee was set up to scrutinise another version – the Personal Data Protection Bill (PDPB), 2019 – it was finally adopted by it on Monday. But as dissent notes submitted by some panel members from the Opposition point out, the draft falls short of the standards set by the Justice Srikrishna Committee to build a legal framework based on the landmark judgment, *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India*, on privacy. The key divergences from the Justice Srikrishna Committee’s draft Bill are in the selection of the chairperson and members of the Data Protection Authority (DPA) which shall protect the interests of data principals and the leeway provided to the Union government to exempt its agencies from the application of the Act. While the 2018 draft Bill allowed for judicial oversight, the 2019 Bill relies entirely on members of the executive government in the selection process for the DPA. In contrast to the 2018 Bill that allowed for exemptions to be granted to state institutions from acquiring informed consent from data principals or to process data in the case of matters relating only to the “security of the state” and also called for a law to provide for “parliamentary oversight and judicial approval of non-consensual access to personal data”, the 2019 Bill adds “public order” as a reason to exempt an agency of the Government from the Act, besides only providing for those reasons to be recorded in writing.

As JPC member from the Rajya Sabha, the Congress’s Jairam Ramesh, rightly mentions in his dissent note, the “government must always comply with the Bill’s requirement of fair and reasonable processing and implementing the necessary safeguards”, which requires that the exemptions granted in writing should at least be tabled in both Houses of Parliament; but that was not accepted by the JPC. His note also points out to the dangers of exemption on the grounds of “public order” as it is susceptible to misuse and not limited to “security of the state” which is recognised by other data regulations such as Europe’s General Data Protection Regulation as a viable reason for exemption. In October 2021, the Global Privacy Assembly, featuring Privacy Commissioners from over 19 countries including those from the European Union, Japan and the U.K., came up with a clear resolution on principles for government access to personal data. In its resolution, the Assembly asked for a set of principles on legal basis, the need for clear and precise rules, proportionality and transparency, data subject rights, independent oversight, and effective remedies and redress to the individuals affected. As the JPC’s adoption of the draft Bill and the dissent notes appended to it suggest, it has fallen short of standards protecting privacy rights of individuals against blanket misuse by the state. It is now the task of Parliament to tighten the provisions further and bring them in conformance with the 2018 Bill.

# JPC retains exemption clause, adopts personal data Bill

Six of the 30 committee members file dissent notes; Manish Tiwari says it creates parallel universes for private sector and the Government

SOBHANA K. NAIR  
YUTHIKA BHARGAVA  
NEW DELHI

A secure nation alone provides the atmosphere which ensures personal liberty and privacy of an individual, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019, has argued in its report defending the controversial exemption clause that allows the Government to keep any of its agencies outside the purview of the law. The committee has retained the clause with a minor change.

The report on the PDP Bill was adopted on Monday at the committee meeting in Delhi. The committee has been deliberating on the report since 2019.

Clause 35, in the name of "public order", "sovereignty", "friendly relations with foreign states" and "security of the state", allowed any agency under the Union Government exemption from

all or any provisions of the law. Six of the 30 members of the committee have filed dissent notes against the exemption clause. Sources said two more members would be filing a dissent note in the next few days.

## Widely debated

This was one of the widely debated clauses in the panel meetings, where the members had argued that "public order" should be removed as a ground for exemption. They had also pressed for "judicial or parliamentary oversight" for granting such exemptions. The members had also suggested that "there should be an order in writing with reasons for exempting a certain agency from the ambit of the Bill". Some of them had asked that only partial exemption should be given to the agency if needed.

The final report that *The Hindu* has accessed did not

## Ringfencing data

Concluding its deliberations since 2019, the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Personal Data Protection Bill adopted its report on Monday

### Key recommendations

- Treat as publishers all social media platforms which do not act as intermediaries, and they be held accountable for the content they host
- Allow no social media platform to operate in India unless the parent company handling the technology sets up an office in India

- Develop an alternative indigenous financial system for cross-border payments
- Set up dedicated lab for certification of all digital devices



- In case of cross-border transfer of data, a mirror copy of sensitive and critical personal data be mandatorily brought to India

accept any of these suggestions, arguing that there was a need to balance the concerns regarding national security, liberty and privacy of an individual. Conceding that there could be no easy choice between these concerns, the report said, "A secure nation alone provides the atmosphere which ensures personal liberty and privacy of an individual where

multiple examples exist where without individual liberty and privacy, national security itself gives rise to autocratic regimes."

The report noted that this clause was for "certain legitimate purposes" and also said there was precedent in the form of the reasonable restrictions imposed upon the liberty of an individual, as guaranteed under Article

19 of the Constitution and the Puttaswamy judgment. At the same time, the committee expressed concerns with possible misuse. The committee, therefore, said though the State had rightly been empowered to exempt itself from the application of this Act, this power may, however, be used only under exceptional circumstances and subject to conditions as laid out in the Act, the report said.

In one of the longest dissent notes, Congress leader Manish Tiwari rejected the Bill in its present form in entirety for its design flaw. He raised specific objections to 37 clauses. This included an objection to the Government exemption clause of 35. He said the Bill created two parallel universes – one for the private sector where it would apply with full rigour and one for the Government where it was riddled with exemption, carve outs and es-

cape clauses. "A Bill that seeks, therefore, to provide blanket exemptions either in perpetuity or even for a limited period to the 'state' and its instrumentalities, in my estimation is *ultra vires* of the Fundamental Right to privacy as laid down by the nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India in Puttaswamy (2017) judgment," he said.

## 'No adequate safeguards'

In a joint dissent note, Trinamool Congress leaders Derek O'Brien and Mahua Moitra said the Bill did not provide adequate safeguards to protect the right to privacy and gave an overboard exemption to the Government. Clause 35 was open to misuse since it gave unqualified powers to the Government.

Among its key recommendations, the committee pitched for stricter regulations for social media platforms. It recommended that

all social media platforms, which did not act as intermediaries, should be treated as publishers and be held accountable for the content they host, and should be held responsible for the content from unverified accounts on their platforms.

It said no social media platform should be allowed to operate unless the parent company handling the technology sets up an office in India and that a statutory media regulatory authority, on the lines of the Press Council of India, may be set up for the regulation of the contents on all such platforms irrespective of the platform where their content is published.

Some of the other recommendations of the committee included development of an alternative indigenous financial system for cross-border payments on the lines of Ripple (U.S.) and INSTEX (European Union).

## No evidence to back need for boosters: ICMR chief

Current focus is on the second dose, says Balram Bhargava

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

There is no scientific evidence so far to support the need for a booster vaccine dose against COVID-19, ICMR Director-General Dr. Balram Bhargava said on Monday underlining that the completion of the second dose for the adult population is the priority for the Government for now.

According to sources, the booster dose issue is likely to be discussed in the next meeting of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation in India (NTAGI).

"Administering the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine to all adult population and ensuring that not only India but the entire world gets vaccinated is the priority of the government for now."

"More so, there is no scientific evidence so far to support the need for a booster vaccine dose against COVID-19," Mr. Bhargava said. On the probability of administering a booster dose, Un-



Ensuring that not only India but the entire world gets vaccinated is the priority of the Government now

BALRAM BHARGAVA  
ICMR Director-General

ion Health Minister Manukh Mandaviya recently said that adequate stocks were available and the aim was to complete the vaccination of the target population with two doses. After that, a decision on booster dose would be taken based on expert recommendation, he had said.

"The Government cannot take a direct decision in such a matter. When the Indian Council of Medical Research

and expert team will say that a booster dose should be given, we will consider it then," he had said, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always depended on expert opinion, be it vaccine research, manufacturing or approval.

According to officials, around 82% of the eligible population in India have received the first dose of the vaccine while around 43% have been fully inoculated.

The total number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has exceeded 116.87 crore, according to provisional reports till 7 a.m. on Monday.

The Government has launched a month-long 'Har Ghar Dastak' campaign for house-to-house COVID-19 vaccination of those who are yet to take a dose and for people whose second dose is overdue. According to officials, over 12 crore beneficiaries are overdue for their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine after the expiry of the prescribed interval between the two doses.

## RBI announces draft scheme for PMC-USFB amalgamation

'USFB set up with ₹1,100-cr. capital, higher than mandated'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday placed in public domain a draft scheme for amalgamation of the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank with Unity Small Finance Bank Ltd. (USFB), a banking company incorporated in India under Companies Act, 2013, and having its registered office in New Delhi.

USFB commenced operations with effect from November 1, 2021.

The draft scheme of amalgamation envisages takeover of the assets and liabilities of



PMC Bank, including deposits, by USFB in terms of the provisions of the scheme, giving a greater degree of protection for the depositors.

"It may be seen that USFB is being set up with capital of about ₹1,100 crore as against

the regulatory requirement of ₹200 crore for setting up of a small finance bank under the guidelines for on-tap licensing of small finance bank in private sector, with provision for further infusion of capital at a future date after amalgamation," the banking regulator said.

Mumbai-based PMC Bank Limited, a multi-State urban cooperative bank, was placed under all-inclusive directions with effect from the close of business hours on September 23, 2019, on account of fraud, which led to a 'steep deterioration' in the networth of the bank.

# Reforming the fertilizer sector

In order to address the multiple goals of fertilizer policy, India needs to work on four key areas



RAMESH CHAND & YOGESH SURI

Since 1991, when economic reforms began in India, several attempts have been made to reform the fertilizer sector to keep a check on the rising fertilizer subsidy bill, promote the efficient use of fertilizers, achieve balanced use of N, P and K (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium), and reduce water and air pollution caused by fertilizers like urea.

## Increase in subsidy

The Economic Survey of 1991-92 noted that fertilizer prices remained almost unchanged from July 1981 to July 1991. The Union Budget of July 1991 raised the issue prices of fertilizers by 40% on average. But from August that year, this was reduced to 30%, and small and marginal farmers were exempted from the price increase. The Economic Survey further noted that even with this 30% increase, fertilizer subsidy remained substantial and needed to be reduced further. Due to opposition to increase fertilizer prices, the increase in the price of urea was rolled back to 17% a year later over the pre-reform price.

This change disturbed the relative prices of various fertilizers and resulted in a big shift in the composition of fertilizers used in the country in favour of urea and thus N. The ratio of use of N:P:K increased from 5.9:2.4:1 in 1991-92 to 9.7:2.9:1 in 1993-94. Farmers tended to move towards balanced use, but policy and price changes reversed the favourable trend a couple of times in the last three decades. Thus, little success has been achieved on any of the three fronts. Rather, there has been an uncontrolled increase in subsidies on urea, due both to almost freezing the MRP of urea in different time periods and its rising sale leading to an increase in indiscriminate and imbalanced use of fertilizers.

Concerned with the adverse environmental impact of certain chemical fertilizers, some sections of society suggest the use of organic fertilizers and biofertilizers instead. There is a growing demand to pro-



K. K. MUSTAFAH

vide subsidies and other incentives for organic fertilizers and biofertilizers to match those provided for chemical fertilizers.

Fertilizer subsidy has doubled in a short period of three years. For 2021-22, the Union Budget has estimated fertilizer subsidy at ₹79,530 crore (from ₹66,468 crore in 2017-18) but it is likely to reach a much higher level due to the recent upsurge in the prices of energy, the international prices of urea and other fertilizers, and India's dependence on imports.

In 2019-20, fertilizer use per hectare of cultivated area varied from 70 kg of NPK in Rajasthan to 250 kg in Telangana. This gap was much wider at the district level. Further, composition of total plant nutrients in terms of the N,P,K ratio deviated considerably from the recommended or optimal NPK mix. It was 33.7:8.0:1 in Punjab and 1.3:0.7:1 in Kerala. This also has implications for inter-State disparities in fertilizer subsidy due to high variations in subsidy content, which is highly biased towards urea and thus nitrogen. As a result, the magnitude of fertilizer subsidy among the major States ranges in the ratio of 8:1.

The government introduced the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) in 2010 to address the growing imbalance in fertilizer use in many States, which is skewed towards urea (N). However, only non-nitrogenous fertilizers (P and K) moved to NBS; urea was left out.

The total demand for urea in the country is about 34-35 million tonnes (mtn) whereas the domestic production is about 25 mtn. The requirement of Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) is about 12 mtn and domestic production is just 5 mtn. This leaves the gap of nearly 9-10 mtn t for urea and 7 mtn t for DAP, which

is met through imports. The use of Muriate of Potash is about 3 mtn. This is entirely imported. In addition, consumption of complex fertilizers (NPK) is about 12-13 mtn t, which is largely produced within the country and so the import requirement is only 1 mtn t.

The international prices of fertilizers are volatile and almost directly proportional to energy prices. Besides, cartels of major global producers have a strong influence on prices. Of late, there has been a surge in international prices with urea prices rising to a record level of over \$900 per metric tonne (mt) in November 2021 from nearly \$270 per mt in September 2020. Likewise, the international prices of DAP have risen from about \$360 per mt in September 2020 to about \$825 per mt in November 2021. These extraordinary price rises are on account of a sharp upsurge in international energy prices and supply constraints in major producing countries due to robust domestic demand, production cuts and export restrictions. This also coincides with the peak demand for the Rabi season. In order to minimise the impact of rise in prices on farmers, the bulk of the price rise is absorbed by the government through enhanced fertilizer subsidy. This is likely to create serious fiscal challenges.

In the last 20 years, the price of urea has increased to ₹5.36 per kg in 2021 from ₹4.60 in 2001. In the same period, the Minimum Support Price of paddy increased by 280% and that of wheat by 230%. In other words, in 2001, 37.7 kg of wheat was required to buy one bag of urea (50 kg), which has now reduced to 13.3 kg. At current prices, farmers pay about ₹268 per bag of urea and the Government of India pays an average subsidy of about ₹930 per bag. Thus, taxpayers

bear 78% of the cost of urea and farmers pay only 22%. This is expected to increase and is not sustainable.

## The way forward

In order to address the multiple goals of fertilizer policy, we need to simultaneously work on four key policy areas. One, we need to be self-reliant and not depend on import of fertilizers. In this way, we can escape the vagaries of high volatility in international prices. In this direction, five urea plants at Gorakhpur, Sindi, Barauni, Talcher and Ramagundam are being revived in the public sector.

Two, we need to extend the NBS model to urea and allow for price rationalisation of urea compared to non-nitrogenous fertilizers and prices of crops. The present system of keeping the price of urea fixed and absorbing all the price increases in subsidy needs to be replaced by distribution of price change over both price as well as subsidy based on some rational formula.

Three, we need to develop alternative sources of nutrition for plants. Discussions with farmers and consumers reveal a strong desire to shift towards the use of non-chemical fertilizers as well as a demand for bringing parity in prices and subsidy given to chemical fertilizers with organic and biofertilizers. This also provides the scope to use a large biomass of crop that goes waste and enhance the value of livestock byproducts. We need to scale up and improve innovations to develop alternative fertilizers. Though compost contains low amounts of nitrogen, technologies are now available to enrich this.

Finally, India should pay attention to improving fertilizer efficiency through need-based use rather than broadcasting fertilizer in the field. The recently developed Nano urea by IFFCO shows promising results in reducing the usage of urea. Such products need to be promoted expeditiously after testing.

These changes will go a long way in enhancing the productivity of agriculture, mitigating climate change, providing an alternative to chemical fertilizers and balancing the fiscal impact of fertilizer subsidy on the Union Budgets in the years to come.

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### General Studies Paper I

A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 <sup>th</sup> century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies

### General Studies Paper II

A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;
J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;

K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health
<b>General Studies Paper III</b>	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
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C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
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E	Land reforms in India
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H	e-technology in the aid of farmers;
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W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
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F	Moral and political attitudes;
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R	Philosophical basis of governance and probity;
S	Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
T	Case Studies on above issues.