

VEDHIK
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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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Chinese firms eye Afghanistan's lithium

With Taliban nod, companies have begun 'inspections' of possible projects to tap lithium deposits

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

A number of Chinese companies have already begun "on-site inspections" of possible projects to tap lithium deposits in Afghanistan, having received the green light to do so from the Taliban regime, according to a report in the Chinese state media on Wednesday.

Lithium is one of many resources in Afghanistan present in large deposits but as yet untapped, largely because of years of political instability and the lack of infrastructure. A Chinese company secured the rights to mine one of the world's biggest copper reserves in Afghanistan at Aynak more than a decade ago, but has not yet begun work on extraction.

While Chinese firms are aware of the risks and pitfalls, they have not wasted time scouting out potential deposits of lithium, a valuable resource for a range of industries from electric cars to



Untapped market: Taliban members atop military vehicles in Kabul earlier this month. • REUTERS

energy storage systems.

A report on Wednesday in the Communist Party-run newspaper *Global Times*, citing Chinese businessmen, said, "Representatives of several Chinese companies have arrived in Afghanistan on special visas and are conducting on-site inspections of potential lithium projects, while others have made contacts about such projects."

The visas were obtained from Afghan authorities "after coordination between the China Arab Economic

and Trade Promotion Committee in Kabul and Afghanistan's Mining Ministry" with "representatives of five Chinese companies" arriving in early November "to conduct on-site inspections", Yu Minghui, who heads the trade promotion committee, told the newspaper.

Besides the five companies present in Afghanistan, another "at least 20" state-owned and private firms had made inquiries about lithium projects, the committee said.

Mr. Yu said company re-

presentatives were "most concerned about basic guarantees of security and social order in Afghanistan", but also "praised the Afghan Taliban's friendliness toward Chinese investors".

The Taliban Government has said it would welcome Chinese investment and support President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, and was also open to extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.

Security situation

The security situation, not to mention a dire economic crisis including food shortages, are among the many challenges. Chinese media reported that on Saturday, a train carrying 1,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid was sent to Afghanistan from China's western Xinjiang region. "The problem is to ensure safety," Zhou Shijian, former vice president of the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals and Chemi-

cals Importers and Exporters, told the newspaper. "If safety is not guaranteed, the gain will not be worth the loss."

Last month, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with acting Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Doha, who assured Beijing that "a friendly policy towards China" was "a firm choice" by the Taliban.

Mr. Wang "expressed China's willingness to continue to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan within its capacity and work with the international community to help Afghanistan alleviate temporary difficulties and realise economic reconstruction as well as independent development", the Chinese Foreign Ministry said then. Mr. Wang in September had announced China would "urgently provide 200 million yuan [\$30.96 million] worth of grains, winter supplies, vaccines, and medicines to Afghanistan" as well as 3 million vaccines.

'India first responder in Indian Ocean Region'

Rajnath highlights unique position

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Time and again India has proved itself to be "first responder" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday while stating that the COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the "centrality of multilateralism" in our interconnected world not only for matters of international security but also disaster management.

"India's unique position in the IOR, complemented by a capability of our armed forces, enables us to contribute significantly in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) situations," said Mr. Singh while virtually inaugurating the 5th World Congress on Disaster Management.

"India has been regularly conducting exercises to deepen the HADR co-operation and coordination among our neighbours and friendly countries with a focus on sharing expertise and building capabilities," he said.

In this context, he re-

ferred to some of the HADR missions in the IOR undertaken by India in recent years, including Operation Rahat in Yemen in 2015; cyclone in Sri Lanka in 2016; quake in Indonesia in 2019; Cyclone Iddai in Mozambique and flooding and landslips in Madagascar in January 2020.

Challenging landscape

Stating that we live in a challenging geo-political landscape where countries have to face, traditional and non-traditional threats including natural calamities which include pandemics like COVID-19, which has wreaked havoc in the last two years, Mr. Singh said, "We must look at cooperating more closely to strengthen international architecture for building structures to prevent and manage future disasters."

He said benefits of cutting-edge technologies emerging in the fields of space, communication, bio-engineering, bio-medicine and Artificial Intelligence should be shared with all.

Sri Lanka Cabinet clears China's role in terminal project

Island nation ropes in Chinese firm for second phase

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka has decided to rope in China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) to construct the second phase of the Colombo Port's East Container Terminal (ECT), which was earlier to be developed jointly by Sri Lanka, India and Japan, until Colombo reneged on a 2019 trilateral agreement.

In a Cabinet decision taken on Tuesday, Colombo approved the development of the strategic port terminal



Boosting ties: Colombo Port's East Container Terminal.

in stages, to be "totally operated" by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

Prominent Sri Lankan firm Access Engineering and CHEC have won the bid to construct the facility, the Department of Government In-

formation said in a statement.

CHEC, a subsidiary of the state-owned China Communications Construction Company, is already involved in strategic infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, including

the \$1-billion Colombo Port City coming up near Galle Face – the capital's iconic seafront – and a four-lane elevated highway connecting Colombo's suburbs, with a near-\$1-billion investment. The terms of the highway deal allow the state-run Chinese firm to own and run the highway for 15 years before transferring ownership to Sri Lanka.

With the ECT development project now, China's role in Sri Lanka's ports – China Merchants Port Holdings Company already holds majority stakes at the southern Hambantota Port as well as the Colombo International Container Terminal at the

Colombo Port – has further increased.

Limited to civil works

CHEC's role at the ECT appears limited to civil works, according to sources familiar with the tendering process. The Ministry of Port and Shipping, in its invitation for international bids, said only firms with a domestic majority ownership – over 51% of the state held by Sri Lankan nationals – were eligible to participate. The ECT's development would require construction of an additional 700-metre-long quay wall and infrastructure around it, that was earlier estimated to cost at least \$700 million.

While India and Japan had earlier agreed to bring in the investment, involving India's Adani Group, the Rajapaksa administration in February scrapped the deal signed by the former Sirisena-Wickremesinghe Government with New Delhi, citing resistance from port worker unions, and the Adani Group's refusal to agree to the terms set by Sri Lanka. India and Japan were quick to express their displeasure. Within weeks, Sri Lanka offered the West Container Terminal development project at the same port to the Adani Group, with no known tendering process, in what Colombo called "a compromise".

Centre's cryptocurrency ban plan said to spur heavy selling

Traders said several exchanges were facing deposit and withdrawal challenges

REUTERS
MUMBAI

Plans by the government for a new bill that would ban most private cryptocurrencies has triggered heavy selling in the country's digital currency markets, as investors look to exit positions despite the losses, said traders and investors.

The government will allow only certain cryptocurrencies to promote the underlying technology and its uses, according to a legislative agenda for the winter session of Parliament set to start this month.

The bill, if passed, would effectively ban Indian citizens from transacting in



In the shadows: Industry estimates peg the number of investors in cryptocurrencies at 15-20 million. •AFP

most cryptocurrencies.

The dollar-linked stable coin tether (USDt) slumped 25% to almost ₹60 on Wednesday after news of the bill, according to Nainish Sanghvi, a cryptocurrency invest-

tor.

A second crypto investor said the value of his portfolio had fallen to about ₹22,000 from ₹34,000 on Tuesday as a result of the heavy selling. "I am contemplating sell-

ing because the future is so unclear," said the investor, who asked not to be named.

Several exchanges were facing deposit and withdrawal challenges due to the high volume of selling, said cryptocurrency traders.

WazirX, one of India's largest cryptocurrency exchanges, said earlier on its Twitter account that it was investigating reports that users were facing delays on its app and website. It later said the issue had been resolved.

There are an estimated 15-20 million cryptocurrency investors in India, with total crypto holdings of about ₹400 billion, according to industry estimates.

A unified regulatory framework

As there is competition between telcos and Internet companies, regulatory parity between them is required



ROHIT PRASAD & V. SRIDHAR

It is evident that the success of Internet firms and telcos goes hand in hand. However, the ownership of approximately 18% of Jio by Facebook and Google provides a hint that new dynamics are on the horizon – with the evolution of 5G technologies, we are seeing the growth of an integrated sphere of cooperation as well as competition between telcos and Internet companies on account of substitute services, and competition in complementary value networks.

Asymmetric regulatory stance

The growth in over-the-top (OTT) messaging services provided by Internet firms has been accompanied by significant reductions in the revenues of text messaging services provided by telcos. For instance, the quarterly SMS volume in the U.K. has declined by half to 10 billion by 2021 in the past five years. Similarly, the growth of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services offered by OTT service providers is also a threat to telcos.

Complementary value networks or 'Walled Gardens' comprise a bouquet of services provided by network operators, handset manufacturers, platform vendors, and content providers. An example is the one created by Apple with exclusive wholesale agreements with AT&T Wireless in the early 2000s for its iPhones. By subsidising the iPhone with long tenure contractual agreements, and creating a proprietary app store, Apple created a walled garden. Recently in India, Rjio has forged arrangements with Google for JioPhone Next to create an ecosystem of handsets, connectivity and applications. These walled gardens often have a "platform captain" (i.e. Apple, Rjio) which provides coordinating mechanisms, rules, key products, intellectual property and financial capital. Platform captains generally derive business benefit from their pole position. Hence, members of a walled garden may aspire for the position of captain. This brings a new element of competition into the telcos-Internet companies' relationship.

Despite the fact that services can be substituted and despite increasing competitive pressures within walled gardens, there is an asymmetric regulatory stance with respect to telcos and Internet companies. Some of this stems from fundamental differences in the nature of business such as the jurisdic-

tional nature of operation and technology used. However, the asymmetry partly reflects a certain world view with regard to the regulation of competition across telcos and Internet firms.

Net neutrality regulation

An example is net neutrality regulation. When net neutrality was conceptualised in the early 2000s, it was meant to stem the significant market power of telcos, which provide an essential service. A dominant telco can hinder competition in a downstream market by a vertical merger with content and application providers. Net neutrality regulation that prohibits discriminatory treatment of Internet companies – either with respect to pricing or traffic management – in a sense eliminates any incentive for vertical integration. Net neutrality regulation can also be explained as a way of preventing telcos from extracting all their revenues from Internet companies. This possibility arises because such firms have no choice but to make themselves available via all telecom service providers. On the other hand, subscribers restrict themselves to one service provider.

However, over the past decade, the Internet has evolved to a point where many Internet companies also provide an essential service and enjoy significant market power. For instance, web search, a market dominated by Google, is often the starting point for navigating the World Wide Web. Without search neutrality, search results may be manipulated to favour certain firms. This concern becomes heightened in the presence of vertical integration between the search engine company and downstream companies. Hence, net neutrality principles need to be applied to Internet companies as well.

Beyond net neutrality, just as it is mandatory for telcos to provide "equal access" for interconnecting with other telcos' networks, social media networks, instant messengers, and indeed any Internet service that exhibits critical mass dynamics needs to be governed by interconnection regulation.

In sum, there is an element of competition between telcos and Internet companies in the context of overlapping services and walled gardens. Hence, there is a need for a measure of regulatory parity between the two. In the U.S. and in India, while the sector regulator makes rules for telcos, the competition regulator oversees the behaviour of the Internet firms. It is time for a unified regulatory framework. A semblance of this convergence is visible in the European Union. India too needs an integrated perspective.

Rohit Prasad and V. Sridhar are Professors at MDI Gurgaon and IIT Bangalore, respectively



Hard work: A daily wage labourer eats lunch on a piece of tin sheet at a construction site in New Delhi, in 2019. •THE HINDU

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The shaky foundation of the labour law reforms

It could be a long wait before employers and workers enjoy the so-called benefits extended by the labour codes

THE GIST

■ The National Democratic Alliance Government enacted the Code on Wages in August 2019 and the other three Codes, viz., the Industrial Relations Code, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code and Code on Social Security (CSS) in September 2020.

■ The Government passed these laws in a hurry and held only symbolic and partial consultation with the central trade unions. Till August 2021, major States have not even issued the draft rules under any codes.

■ In the meanwhile, the Supreme Court of India has exerted pressure on both the Central and the State Governments to implement a 'one nation, one ration card' (ONOR) scheme and register all the unorganised workers under the National Database for Unorganized Workers (NDUW).

K.R. SHYAM SUNDAR

Following the repeal of the farm laws by the Union Government, the Trade Unions have decided to step up their protests against the Labour codes passed in 2019, 2020 and which are yet to be notified. In this article dated August 10, 2021, K.R. Shyam Sundar writes about the codes, what they are, how they were formed and are now being implemented. Edited excerpts:

The National Democratic Alliance Government enacted the Code on Wages in August 2019 and the other three Codes, viz., the Industrial Relations Code, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code and Code on Social Security (CSS) in September 2020. Later, it had framed the draft rules albeit incompletely under all the codes – incompletely because the rules have not covered some aspects of the Codes, e.g. rules regarding recognition of central trade unions have not been framed so far.

A rushed exercise

Controversies surround the processes of the enactment of codes and the framing of rules. The Government has held only symbolic and partial consultation with the central trade unions. The three codes were passed in Parliament even as the Opposition parties, otherwise insignificant, boycotted the proceedings. The tearing hurry in which the Government carried out the reforms even during the COVID-19 period gave tremendous hope to employers and potential investors. It announced its intentions of implementing the Codes from April 1, 2021 even as State governments were completely unprepared with the rules. Symbolically, labour law reforms have been affected and the Government can boast of it; simply put, it is more symbolic rather than a meaningful act.

Court directives

The Central Government has deferred the possible date of implementation to October 1, 2021, again tentatively. In the meanwhile, the Supreme Court of India has exerted pressure on both the Central and the State Governments to implement a 'one nation, one ration card' (ONOR) scheme and register all the unorganised workers under the National Database for Unorganized

Workers (NDUW), which was to have been done by July 31, 2021. Government agencies are rushing to comply with both the directives. In ONOR, Aadhaar seeding and the universal availability of an electronic point of sale (EPOS) system are necessary. And for the NDUW, it has to register each of the approximately 400 million workers, a conservative figure.

Perhaps, the Supreme Court passed such an extraordinary perhaps impracticable order following the hesitancy in early 2020 to provide relief to suffering migrant workers following the national lockdown. One is not sure when Governments would comply fully and well with the Supreme Court's orders. Unorganised workers including migrant workers will continue to be deprived of their promised and extended entitlements.

The Government said the codes would extend universal minimum wages, social security, enable enhanced industrial safety and the provision of social security to gig workers, among other things.

Government's line vs reality

The Government said the codes would extend universal minimum wages and social security, enable enhanced industrial safety and the provision of social security to gig workers, among other things. The Industrial Relations Code provides for recognition of trade union(s) by employers, a labour right that eluded workers for seven decades. On the other hand, employers celebrated the extension of tremendous flexibility to them, even those unasked, such as relief from framing standing orders for most firms. But do they enjoy these benefits?

On August 3, 2021, I browsed the Simpliance website (a law portal) to assess the record of State Governments regarding rules under the codes. It was a revelation to find that major States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Haryana and Delhi have not issued the draft rules under any codes. Karnataka, Gujarat and Jharkhand have framed Rules for the Code on Wages and the Industrial Relations Code. Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab have framed rules for all

the codes. Even though the Code on Wages was enacted in August 2019, it was only in March 2021 that the Central Government notified the constitution of an advisory committee. On June 3, 2021 it also announced an expert committee with a tenure of three years to advise it on minimum wages. Then, on July 12, 2021, it announced that the wage index's base year would be shifted from 1965 to 2019 to use the revised wage index to determine minimum wages. The Government seems to be clueless regarding the implementation of minimum wages.

Poor safety record

The incidence of major industrial accidents has remained undiminished even during the COVID-19 period. For instance, IndustriAll reported that between May to June, 32 major industrial accidents occurred in India, killing 75 workers. Industrial safety continues to be a grave concern even after the enactment of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code.

According to several research reports, COVID-19 intensified informality, led to the withdrawal of workers from the labour market, reduced earnings, increased unemployment and widened inequality. The non-statutory floor level minimum wage remains a meagre ₹178 still even as Wholesale Price Index-inflation rates have galloped to 12% in June 2021. It did not implement the widely endorsed measure of direct benefit transfer at least for low-income families.

In perspective

Thus, we see two aspects concerning labour market governance in India. One, the Government has failed to provide legal visibility to millions of unorganised and migrant workers, even after decades, and despite direction by the highest court in the land.

Two, despite the gazetting of four Codes, age-old laws are in force. Thus, they reflect poorly not only on the governance abilities of the governments but also on the countervailing power of the Opposition parties. Were the labour law reforms rushed with little or no debate and consultation whatsoever, only to remain in the gazette books? Employers and workers cannot enjoy the so-called benefits extended by the codes.

A food crisis of the government's own making

Sri Lanka's decision to ban imports on chemical fertilizers was not backed by scientific evidence



R.S. DHARMAKEERTHI

There is consensus in the scientific community that organic agriculture could reduce crop yield. Quoting three global meta-data analysis, Meemkem and Qaim (2018) pointed out that on average, the yield reduction in organic agricultural systems could be 19-25%, depending on the crop and agro-climatic region. To switch to 100% organic agriculture, a country must have robust scientific evidence and a meticulously planned methodology along with targeted actions. Otherwise, it will plunge into a food crisis, if food security cannot be achieved by other means.

Organic mania

In May, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa ordered a halt to importing chemical fertilizers to turn the island nation's agriculture sector fully organic. By that time, the Yala cropping season (May to August) had already started and farmers were using the agro-chemicals available in the market. However, no additional agro-chemicals were to be released in the market. The government stated that if there is any yield loss as a consequence of this decision, the affected farmers would be compensated for it. It is unclear how the government was planning to separate yield loss related to lack of agro-chemicals from yield loss due to natural causes, farmers' attitudes, and so on.

It is apparent now that when the Sri Lankan government took this policy decision, it had neither solid scientific information nor a clear action plan. It had taken half-baked advice from some opportunists who regularly state in public that only organic and traditional agriculture is safe to the environment and human beings. Not only did the government seem to believe that there would be little or no yield loss from agriculture that is only organic; it also seemed to think that all plant nutrients could be organically produced in the country by October 2021. If the organic agricultural production system is that simple and straightforward, why is



A farmer works at a paddy field in Dektatana, Sri Lanka. • REUTERS

that globally, only 1.5% of farmland is organic? Sri Lanka has been almost entirely reliant on its own rice production since the mid-2000s. Could it not have maintained this?

Unsurprisingly, even when the Maha season officially started on October 15, the country was well short of the required quantities of organic fertilizers. As the most critical plant nutrient for higher yields in Sri Lanka is nitrogen (N), the authorities have estimated that for this Maha season, about 0.1 million tonnes of N is required for some major crops including paddy and tea. This is equivalent to about 15 million tonnes of compost. The country produced only around 3 million tonnes of compost by the end of August 2021.

Realising that the required quantities of organic fertilizers cannot be produced within five months, the government attempted in September to import solid organic fertilizers. According to the Plant Protection Act, No. 35 of 1999, no organic substance that has harmful organisms can be imported into the country. Moreover, Sri Lanka Standards (SLSI 1704) require all imported solid organic fertilizer to be devoid of any micro-organism. A tender to supply about 0.1 million tonnes of solid organic fertilizer was offered to a Chinese fertilizer company. It was later revealed that two samples provided by this company did not pass the quality standards. This message was conveyed by the authorities to the company. However, due to reasons unknown, the first load of that solid organic fertilizer is said to have come

to Sri Lankan waters and is sailing around still looking for an opportunity to reach the shores of Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, farmers started getting angry as there were no fertilizers to start cultivation. They began to protest, demanding fertilizers to be provided in all major agricultural areas and setting aside preliminary land preparation practices. They did not want to start commercial cultivation without any assurance from the government on the availability of the required fertilizers.

Then, the government was advised to purchase a liquid nano-N fertilizer from the Indian Farmer Fertilizer Corporation Limited (IFFCO), which, some said, is organic and 100% efficient. However, according to the IFFCO website, this liquid fertilizer is actually nano-urea and hence cannot be used in organic agriculture as it is chemical in nature. Given the urgency of the situation, the government ordered 3.1 million litres of nano-urea, which has only 4% N, from IFFCO. The first quantity was air-lifted into Sri Lanka and distributed as Nano-Raja among paddy farmers. Farmers were advised to apply 2.5 L of Nano-Raja as a foliar spray.

Scientists are sceptical about the efficacy of this fertilizer as there has been heavy rainfall in Sri Lanka over the last few weeks. Nonetheless, even in India, there is limited large-scale evidence on the effectiveness of this product. Not much is known about the health concerns that might arise on long-term exposure to nanoparticles. Moreover, 2.5 L of Nano-Raja provides only 100g of N when at

least 50kg of N is needed for the paddy crop. The farmers will at most get an additional 5-10kg of N through locally available compost. The quality of these composts, mostly produced using municipal solid wastes, cannot be guaranteed either, as there is no quality control mechanism in place.

Crop decline

Now, even over a month after the season started, only about 25-40% of farmers have started paddy cultivation in Sri Lanka. The distributed quantities of N fertilizers have not been adequate to achieve the expected yield target of the farmers (4-6 tonnes per hectare). Therefore, reduction in national paddy production is an inevitability. The same would be true for other crop sectors as well. Therefore, the government must do something within a very short period of time to provide sufficient quantities of N fertilizer, at least to paddy farmers and tea-growers. Failure to do so will reduce foreign exchange earnings from tea, increase food prices, create food shortage and lead to food imports. The government will have to import food from other countries – food that is produced using agro-chemicals because of the higher price of organic food. This would be ironic as food without agro-chemicals was one of the major policy objectives of the ban on the import of agro-chemicals.

The overarching policy document of the government titled 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor' promises to provide the nation with safe food and food security. However, the ill-advised policy of banning agro-chemicals, which was based on inadequate scientific evidence and false belief, hit the Sri Lankan agriculture and plantation crop sectors like a cyclone. With a crippling economy thanks to COVID-19, this was uncalled for. On November 24, the Sri Lankan government announced that it would partially lift the ban on chemical fertilizers and permit the private sector to import these fertilizers. However, considerable damage has already been done, with farmers claiming that their crop production has declined, food prices rising, and a food crisis looming.

R.S. Dharmakeerthi is Professor in Soil Fertility and Nutrient Management, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

POCSO shocker

HC ruling ignores specific provision defining aggravated form of sexual offence

The recent Allahabad High Court verdict that a penetrative sexual assault on a 10-year-old boy by an offender did not amount to an aggravated form of the crime appears to be *per incuriam*, that is, a ruling handed down without due regard to the law and facts. The offence that was proven in the trial, and endorsed without demur by the High Court, involved the child being made to perform an oral sexual act. The Court agrees that it was a “penetrative sexual assault” as defined by the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, as the accused had put his member into the victim’s mouth. However, it did not amount to “aggravated penetrative sexual assault”, a crime punishable with a minimum prison term of 10 years that can go up to life, Justice Anil Kumar Ojha has said. Instead, it was punishable under Section 4 of POCSO, which prescribes a minimum seven years. Accordingly, he reduced the trial court sentence of 10 years in jail to seven years. The High Court is palpably in error, as it failed to note that a sexual offence takes the character of an aggravated form of the same offence in certain circumstances under POCSO. The main circumstances involving aggravation given in Section 5 are where the offender is a police officer, a member of the armed forces, a public servant or someone on the staff of a jail, remand home, hospital, educational or religious institution, or any place of custody or care and protection.

However, these are not the only circumstances. Where the crime involves a group of offenders, or is done repeatedly, or when it pertains to the use of deadly weapons or causes grievous harm or injury, or leads to physical or mental incapacitation, pregnancy, or disease, it is also an aggravated form of the offence. Significantly, Section 5(m) adds “whoever commits penetrative sexual assault on a child below 12 years” to this list. The High Court seems to have missed either this legal provision while reducing the sentence, or the fact that the child was about 10 years old when the offence took place. The fact that the convicted person will stay in jail for seven years will not obviate the deleterious effect of the ruling – that a particular act, amounting to a penetrative sexual act, does not attract the punishment prescribed for its aggravated form – will have on lower courts trying similar cases. It is a matter of coincidence that this ruling came from the Allahabad High Court on the same day as the Supreme Court’s judgment underscoring the importance of not diluting the gravity of an offence against a child by ignoring the plain meaning of POCSO’s provisions. The verdict in *Sonu Kushwaha vs State of U.P.* is a fit case for review, as it seems to be based on an error of law.

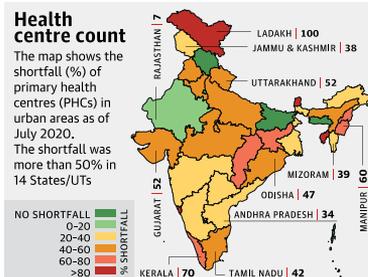
Life expectancy lower for urban poor, says study

It drops by 9.1 years in men and 6.2 years in women; report highlights disproportionate disease burden

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

Life expectancy among the poorest is lower by 9.1 years among men and 6.2 years among women from the corresponding figures for the richest in urban areas, noted a report released recently by Azim Premji University in collaboration with 17 regional NGOs across India.

The report, “Healthcare equity in urban India”, explores health vulnerabilities and inequalities in cities in India. It also looks at the availability, accessibility and cost of healthcare facilities, and possibilities in future-proofing services in the next decade. It notes that a third of India’s population lives in urban areas, with this segment seeing a rapid growth



from about 18% (1960) to 28.53% (2001) and 34% (in 2019). Close to 30% of people living in urban areas are poor.

The study also draws insights from data collected

through interactions with civil society organisations in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Surat, Lucknow, Guwahati, Ranchi and Delhi. This also included an analysis of the National Family and Health Surveys,

the Census, and inputs from State-level officials on the provision of healthcare.

The report, besides finding disproportionate disease burden on the poor, also points to a chaotic urban health governance, where the multiplicity of healthcare providers both within and outside the Government without coordination are challenges to urban health governance. The other key findings include a heavy financial burden on the poor, and less investment in healthcare by urban local bodies.

Steps to be taken

The report calls for strengthening community participation and governance; building a comprehensive

and dynamic database on the health and nutrition status, including comorbidities of the diverse, vulnerable populations; strengthening healthcare provisioning through the National Urban Health Mission, especially for primary healthcare services; and putting in place policy measures to reduce the financial burden of the poor. It also advocates for a better mechanism for coordinated public healthcare services and better governed private healthcare institutions. “As urbanisation is happening rapidly, the number of the urban poor is only expected to increase. A well-functioning, better coordinated and governed healthcare system is crucial at this point,” the report says.

More hospital births, but limited gains in childhood nutrition: NFHS

Total Fertility Rate has dropped to 2.0, indicating just replacement level

JACOB KOSHY
JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Births in institutional facilities, such as a hospital, improved by nearly eight percentage points but children who were either stunted or displayed signs of wasting only dropped by a maximum of three percentage points, shows a comparison of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 5 and 4.

The complete results of the NFHS-5 were made public on Wednesday. The

Hunger watch

The nutritional status of children in India barely improved in 2019-20 from the levels in 2015-16, the National Family Health Survey-5 data show



Indicator	2019-20	2015-16	2005-06
Children under five who are stunted	35.5	38.4	48
Children under five who are wasted	19.3	21	19.8
Children under five who are underweight	32.1	35.8	42.5
Children aged six months to 59 months who are anaemic	67.1	58.6	69.4

NFHS-4 was released in 2014-15 and the latest, which captured population health indicators in 2017-19, was delayed due to the pandemic. India has also officially hit a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of

2.0 that indicates a decrease from the 2.2 in the NFHS-4. According to the UN Population Division, a TFR of about 2.1 children per woman is called replacement-level fertility. If replacement level

fertility is sustained over a sufficiently long period, each generation will exactly replace itself. The urban TFR is 1.6 and rural 2.1.

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EXPLAINER

Falling back on reserves to tilt the scales

Will the move to exert pressure on the powerful OPEC+ oil producers, that turned down suggestions to enhance output, pay off or prove counter-productive?

N.RAVI KUMAR

The story so far: India on November 23 announced that it will release 5 million barrels of crude oil from strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) or the stockpiles. This is part of a coordinated approach mooted by the U.S. and other major oil consumers after the oil-producing OPEC+ bloc waved off suggestions to boost the output for a calming effect on the prices. At the heart of this are the petroleum product prices that have been rising steadily for months now, and which threaten to throw a spanner in the post-pandemic economic recovery process.

What is behind India's decision to use crude oil stockpiles?

Rising crude oil prices in international markets to which pump prices of petrol and diesel in the country are intrinsically tied to, a nudge from the U.S. and the long-felt need to send out a stern message to the powerful oil-producing lobby are behind the Centre's decision to use crude oil reserves, albeit in a

The U.S. along with China, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom have also announced that they will be part of this exercise.

limited way. Quoting an unnamed top Government official, PTI said it would be the first time that India will be releasing crude oil stocks to cool international oil prices. About 5 million barrels will be released, starting as early as 7-10 days, according to the official.

India is not alone in resorting to such a move. The U.S., China, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom have also announced that they will be part of this exercise, widely perceived to be a measure by major energy-consuming countries to flex their muscles.

When are the rest in the group likely to follow suit?

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), in a statement on November 23, said that at the direction of President Joe Biden, the Secretary of Energy, Jennifer M. Granholm, authorised 50 million barrels of crude oil from the DOE's Strategic Petroleum Reserve to be made available. According to the PTI



Black gold: A view of the crude cavern of the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd at Lova Gardens in Visakhapatnam, in 2015.

THE HINDU

report, China has also said it is working on crude oil release. Citing a report in *Nikkei* newspaper, Reuters stated that Japan will hold auctions for about 4.2 million barrels of oil out of its national stockpile.

How many petroleum stockpiles does India hold and who will get access to it?

India stores 5.33 million tonnes (MT) of crude oil in underground caverns. The strategic crude oil storage at Visakhapatnam, commissioned in June 2015, Mangaluru (October 2016) and Padur, near Udipi (December 2018), were created from a perspective of ensuring energy security, especially during any supply disruptions. The contents from the caverns can be supplied to refineries either through pipelines and coastal movement, according to the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) Ltd, the wholly owned subsidiary of the oil industry Development Board. These strategic storages are in addition to the

existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies. Two new SPRs, with an additional storage of 6.5 MT, are proposed to be constructed at Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur.

India relies on imports to meet 80-85% of the crude oil refined in the country. According to the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell, there were 226.955 MT crude oil imports in 2019-2020 as against 226.498 MT in the previous fiscal year. In 2020-21, a year ravaged by the pandemic, the imports were lower at 196.461 MT.

According to PTI, the 5 million barrels will be sold to refineries of Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), which are connected by pipeline to the strategic reserves.

Will this move change pump prices of petrol and diesel?

The pump prices declined sharply after the Centre, earlier this month, reduced the

excise duty on petrol by ₹5 a litre and the levy on diesel by ₹10 a litre. In addition to this, some States also reduced the VAT on the fuels. Interestingly, global crude oil prices that were behind the Government's decision to cut the levy started tapering on the back of fresh COVID-19-triggered worries in Europe. The threat of a coordinated release of the reserves, the PTI report said, has knocked the wind out of crude oil's rally.

It would be sometime before any impact is likely on the pump prices as the quantities committed to be released are not enough to cause a ripple effect. The OPEC and its ally producers could resort to putting on hold the incremental production they planned ahead as a measure to keep the global prices from crashing. Bloomberg oil strategist Julian Lee says the OPEC+ group would have to defer at least two months' worth of planned output increases to offset strategic stockpile releases led by the U.S. The group is due to hold discussions on Dec. 2 to set production plans for January.

THE GIST

India has announced that it will release 5 million barrels of crude oil as part of a coordinated approach mooted by the U.S. after the oil producing OPEC+ bloc waved off suggestions to boost the output for a calming effect on the prices.

India stores 5.33 million tonnes (MT) of crude oil in underground caverns which can be supplied to refineries either through pipelines or through a combination of pipelines and coastal movement.

The OPEC and its ally producers could resort to putting on hold the incremental production they planned ahead as a measure to keep the global prices from crashing.

Pointers that India is witnessing a K-shaped recovery

The economic ravages of the pandemic have had an uneven impact and taxation policies continue to be regressive



ANAND SRINIVASAN & SASHWATH SWAMINATHAN

There has been great chatter about a V-shaped recovery for quite a while, ever since the first lockdown following the novel coronavirus pandemic. A V-shaped recovery is characterised by quick and effective recovery in measures of economic performance after an acute decline in the economy. There is undeniably some type of recovery, but one can hardly label it V-shaped. The economic ravages of the pandemic have had an uneven impact on different socio-economic groups. The recovery we see today is more K-shaped than V-shaped, with various groups and industries recovering much more rapidly than their counterparts.

Signs from industry

Government taxation policies continue to be regressive, with increased indirect taxes and lower direct taxes placing greater tax incidence on the destitute. The effects of this K-shaped recovery can be observed through the growth and consumption in specific industries.

Two-wheelers represent the

economic situation of the lower and middle-class groups and India's small businesses. A report by analytical company CRISIL indicates that in the year 2021, two-wheeler sales are set to decline by 3%-6% year-over-year. This is on top of a lower base in the year 2020 already affected by the pandemic. The actual decline of two-wheeler sales from pre-pandemic times on account of the base effect must be much more significant. The sales of two-wheelers are the second-lowest it has been in seven years. It is imperative to note that entry-level models are the ones most affected under the category of two-wheelers. The festival season was said to rectify this phenomenon, but it had been unable to. On the other hand, premium cars and premium motorcycles have been resistant to the pandemic slowdown.

Impact of taxation

Moreover, the usurious taxation policy of the Government, which insists on maintaining indirect taxes on fuel and consumer products while lowering corporate taxes, paints a picture explaining these figures. The Government had recently raised taxes on textile products from 5% to 12%. While inflation soars, the incomes of the middle and lower-middle-class have at best remained constant. There is tremendous pressure on the financial stability of these households, which seemingly face a



sustained loss in disposable income. Besides, the figures representing those who are employed only partially explain this phenomenon.

On jobs, NREGA

Over five million or 50 lakh people lost their jobs in October, according to a Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report. Many of those who lost their jobs during this period are likely economically insecure and abstain from non-essential purchases. This, paired with the astronomically high food and fuel prices, delivers a deadly blow pushing families to poverty.

Additionally, it is prudent to look at Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) figures as it acts as a proxy for the informal sector, which employs a large portion of Indians. In the year 2021-2022, the Government of India had cut its budget allocation towards MGNREGA by 34%. There is a greater demand now for MGNREGA

jobs than in the pre-COVID-19 era. The lower Budget allocation accounts for the inability to compensate workers in time and fairly. A portion of the Budget this year is spent on paying the liabilities for the previous financial year. Those looking for MGNREGA work cannot afford to be unpaid for such long durations. This again ties back to placing upward pressure on unemployment figures.

Stimulus and growth

Therefore, there seems to be no surprise that the consumption of two-wheelers and other such products has taken a significant hit. The U.S. and European economies have stimulated the economy bottom-up through unemployment cheques and social welfare schemes. The economist, John Maynard Keynes, popularised the concept of the money multiplier and the relationship between government stimulus and economic growth. It fundamentally makes great sense to prioritise those who are more likely to spend (the middle and lower-middle-class) rather than those who have a greater propensity to save. The velocity of money which sustained a significant shock from pandemic lockdowns needs to be kickstarted. Furthermore, the inflation of asset prices over the recovery period helps determine the nature of this recovery.

The recovery in the stock market and other such financial assets

over the past year has been phenomenal. However, it is essential to understand that this does not necessarily reflect the economy's condition as observed previously. Less than 5% of India invest in equities, which means that less than 5% of India directly benefited from said recovery. The lower middle class, which does not invest in such assets for many reasons, has no guard against inflation. Their only hedge against inflation is their income which makes for a poor one.

Think welfare schemes

Therefore, as discussed before, their financial situation is worsened due to the rising prices of essential goods. Moreover, the disproportional benefit of the asset price inflation favouring the upper-middle-class further displays the inherent K-shape of the recovery. It is crucial that the Government addresses this phenomenon and works towards aiding the middle and lower-middle class. Social welfare schemes must be given greater importance to assist households to get through this period. A seemingly viable solution is for the Government to increase progressive (direct) taxes and reduce regressive (indirect) taxes to ease the financial pressure on lower-income households.

Anand Srinivasan is a consultant.

Sashwath Swaminathan is a research associate at Aionion Investment Services

'RBI must aid growth by staying accommodative'

Reversal risks faster revival: Assocham

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should continue with an accommodative interest rate stance as long as necessary to sustain and further push the pace of economic growth, Assocham said on Wednesday.

While concerns over inflation, especially in the Wholesale Price Index, needed to be addressed, measures other than reversal of the accommodative stance should be encouraged, it added. "The RBI and its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) have done a commendable job to retain the present policy rates. However, central banks in some of the developed economies are mov-



ing towards tapering the accommodative policies.

"We are sure and as we have been maintaining that the RBI would not follow this template and continue with the low interest rates," the industry body said in a statement. "Any reversal of the accommodative interest rate stance may dampen faster revival in investment," Assocham added.

'Airports to attract ₹90,000 cr. in investments over five years'

Airport count to rise to 220, from 136 currently: Bansal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The airports sector is expected to see an investment of ₹90,000 crore in a five-year period, with almost ₹68,000 crore coming from the private players, a senior official said on Wednesday.

The civil aviation sector, which was battered by the COVID-19 pandemic that had also resulted in the suspension of domestic and international flight services, is slowly on the recovery path and the daily domestic air traffic is nearing the pre-COVID level of 4 lakh.

Civil Aviation Secretary Rajiv Bansal said investments totalling ₹90,000 crore would be made for air-



ports over the five-year period which started in 2020-21.

'Private sector to invest'

Of the total amount, about ₹20,000-₹22,000 crore would be invested by the Airports Authority of India (AAI), while the remaining amount of about ₹68,000

crore would be from the private sector, he said.

The government expects to have 220 operational airports, including heliports over five years. Currently, there are 136 operational airports in the country, and many aerodromes are in the works. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone for the new airport at Jewar in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday.

A new airport at Mopa in Goa is expected to be ready next year, and an aerodrome is also coming up at Navi Mumbai in Maharashtra.

Besides, expansion work has been taken up at the airports in Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad.

Centre's free foodgrain scheme on till March

Union Cabinet also approves repeal of farm reform laws

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Acknowledging that poor families still need food security support in the middle of a recovering economy, the Centre has decided to extend its free ration scheme, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), for another four months, until March 2022.

At its meeting on Wednesday, the Union Cabinet also gave its formal approval to repeal the three contentious farm reform laws in the winter session of Parliament, as announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week.

"On [November] 19th, PM announced, and today, within five days, we have fulfilled all the formalities. In the upcoming winter session, the priority would be to take these Bills and repeal them at the earliest," Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur told presspersons in a briefing on Cabinet decisions.

However, he evaded questions on the farmers' continued demand for a legal guarantee on minimum support prices for their crops, and declined to set any timeline on the PM's promise to set up a committee to make the MSP more effective and transparent, as well as to change



As the economy is getting back on track, the figures are looking much better. At the same time, Prime Minister wants to help those poor families who have gone through this COVID-19 pandemic, so that for the next four months, they should be helped and foodgrains given to them

ANURAG THAKUR
Information and Broadcasting Minister

crop patterns and promote zero-budget agriculture.

In its other major decision, the Cabinet approved the extension of the PMGKAY which provides more than 80 crore ration card holders with five kg each of rice or wheat a month free of cost, in addition to the five kg which they are eligible for on a subsidised basis under the National Food Security Act. Initially introduced in the first COVID-19 relief package from April 2020, the scheme has been extended thrice, but was scheduled to end in November. Earlier this month, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey had told presspersons that there was no proposal for extension as the economy was reviving.

"In the last more than 20 months, we have seen that

the poor, even the middle class families have suffered, not here but globally as well. One of the ways to help the poor families was to give them foodgrains," Mr. Thakur said.

"We still feel as the economy is getting back on track, the figures are looking much better. At the same time, Prime Minister wants to help those poor families who have gone through this COVID-19 pandemic, so that for the next four months, they should be helped and foodgrains should be given to them," the Minister added.

In the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, the State Government had announced a unilateral extension of the PMGKAY until March 2022.

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'Survey suggests 71% have low or no trust in cryptocurrency'

'It must be taxed like a digital asset held abroad'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

About 71% Indians have low or zero trust in cryptocurrencies, according to a recent survey by LocalCircles. The survey added that 54% do not want the government to legalise cryptocurrencies but want them taxed on par with digital assets held abroad.

The community social network said the survey results were based on 56,000 citizen responses from 342 districts of India, received over the past 15 days.

The Centre plans to introduce a Bill to regulate cryptocurrency and ban all private cryptocurrencies in the winter session of Parliament

The findings show that the Central Bank Digital Currency is seen as more trustworthy

that begins on November 29. The bill also seeks to create a facilitative framework for creation of an official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

As per the survey, families of 87% of the respondents do not have anyone trading or investing in cryptocurrencies and 54% do not want the government to legalise cryptocurrencies but tax them like a digital asset held abroad. "About 26% say they should be legalised and then taxed in India," LocalCircles

said in a release. "The study also finds that 51% of the respondents support India rolling out its own digital currency which is managed by the RBI while 26% are against the same. This indicates that the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) would be a more trustworthy investment," it added.

"LocalCircles will be sharing the findings of this study with the senior leadership of Government of India, the RBI leadership and all Members of Parliament such that public feedback on cryptocurrencies can be given the due consideration as laws related to it are finalised," said Sachin Taparia, founder, LocalCircles.

While spotlight's on Delhi, smaller northern towns often fare worse

Agra, Firozabad, Vrindavan had higher pollution levels than national capital after Deepavali; experts call for focus on areas beyond NCR too

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

An analysis of air quality data by *The Hindu* shows that Agra, Firozabad, and Vrindavan were more polluted than Delhi during the week after Deepavali. However, during this period, the media attention and actions were concentrated more on Delhi and the NCR.

While Delhi was among the top 10 most polluted cities for three out of seven days, Agra, Firozabad, and Vrindavan were part of the list for four days, as per the air quality index (AQI) data of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Also, the average daily AQI of these three places is more than that of the national Capital.

On some days, other non-NCR districts such as Kaithal and Kanpur made it to the top 10 list and were more polluted than Delhi. Interestingly, Delhi was never among the top five polluted cities in the country during this week.

The Supreme Court ordered actions have also been mainly for the Delhi-NCR,

Date	AIR QUALITY INDEX			
	Vrindavan	Firozabad	Agra	Delhi
Nov. 5	448	449	429	462
Nov. 6	424	430	390	437
Nov. 7	435	443	412	428
Nov. 8	475	-	486	390
Nov. 9	454	489	472	404
Nov. 10	373	400	383	372
Nov. 11	458	415	437	411
Average	438.14	437.67	429.86	414.87

SOURCE: CPCB

which is monitored by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in NCR and Adjoining Areas. For instance, despite the high pollution, schools were not closed or construction activities were not banned in Agra, Firozabad or Vrindavan after Deepavali, officials said.

However, on November 13, these actions were taken in Delhi after the Supreme Court pulled up the State and Central Governments earlier that day. Also, Delhi and the NCR have a Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), according to which,

different actions kick in as per levels of air pollution. But no such plan exists for areas beyond the NCR.

Most polluted

From November 5-11, the average daily AQI of Delhi was 414.8, while Vrindavan's was 438.14, Agra's 429.85, and Firozabad's 437.6. On November 9, Delhi was not part of the top 10 polluted places, and there were four non-NCR districts in the top 10 and Firozabad was the most polluted place in the country. Similarly, on November 10, Agra was the most polluted place in the country.

Delhi has 39 air quality monitoring stations, while Agra has six and Vrindavan and Firozabad have only one each. "It is not that we are not giving attention to these cities. These three cities are also part of the 132 cities which are covered by the NCAP (National Clean Air Programme)," a CPCB official said.

About smaller cities witnessing higher pollution compared to Delhi, the official said that though meteorological conditions of Delhi and these places are similar, local factors could be behind the higher AQI.

Attention needed

Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director of Centre for Science and Environment, a research and advocacy NGO, said that during winter, the natural ventilation of the entire Indo Gangetic Plains (IGP), which stretches from Punjab and touches the boundaries of West Bengal, is constrained and pollutants get trapped. This is due to a drop in temperature, wind speed and the height

up to which pollutants can be dispersed in the atmosphere.

"A big chunk of the IGP is affected by stubble burning also. Because of these factors, several cities and sub-regions that are outside the NCR, but within the IGP, are more polluted than even Delhi during winter. But the annual average pollution of these places could be lower than Delhi," Ms. Roychowdhury said.

"Delhi gets an undue importance as initial cases on air pollution were filed about the Delhi-NCR in the Supreme Court. Because of the court orders, the region got focus," she added.

But Ms. Roychowdhury said that the Government should pay more attention to the entire IGP for pollution mitigation, as the entire region is more vulnerable to high pollution. "The NCAP is for 132 cities. The Government should implement NCAP at district and State levels and take into consideration rural areas too, instead of just focusing on cities," she said.

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 th 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
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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;
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P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
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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.
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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
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E	Land reforms in India
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H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
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M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
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S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
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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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G	Social influence and persuasion.
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L	Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions;
M	Laws, rules, regulations and conscience as
N	sources of ethical guidance;
O	Accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding;
P	Corporate governance.
Q	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service;
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.