

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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Iran 'determined' to salvage nuclear deal as talks resume

The other side should show the same willingness: Tehran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VIENNA

International talks on Iran's nuclear programme restarted Monday after a five-month hiatus with Tehran "determined" to reach a deal as analysts warn of major obstacles to any speedy resumption of the 2015 nuclear deal.

Iran paused the negotiations in June after the election of an ultraconservative new President, Ebrahim Raisi. Diplomats at the time had said they were "close" to an agreement.

Iran ignored appeals from Western countries to restart the talks for several months, all the while strengthening the capabilities of its nuclear programme. In August, Mr. Raisi said Iran was again open to talks.

The talks started just after 3 p.m. in the Palais Coburg hotel where the 2015 agreement – known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – was clinched.



Ebrahim Raisi

Along with Iran, diplomats from Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia are attending. The United States is taking part in the talks indirectly.

On Monday, Iran said it had "a firm determination to reach an agreement and is looking forward to fruitful talks". "If the other side shows the same willingness, we will be on the right track to reach an agreement," said Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Said Khatibzadeh. Last week, U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley said Tehran's attitude

"doesn't augur well for the talks". "If they start getting too close, too close for comfort, then of course we will not be prepared to sit idly," Mr. Malley told the U.S. National Public Radio.

Back on track

The EU, which is chairing the talks, said on Monday it was "crucial to pick up from where we left it last June, and that all sides work swiftly and constructively to bring the JCPOA back on track as soon as possible".

The JCPOA offered a lifting of some of the array of economic sanctions Iran had been under in return for strict curbs on its nuclear programme. But the deal started to unravel in 2018 when then-U.S. president Donald Trump pulled out and began reinstating sanctions on Iran. The year after Mr. Trump's move, Iran retaliated by starting to exceed the limits on its nuclear activity laid down in the deal.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

On 27th November, the Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana urged the Government to seriously consider Attorney General K.K.Venugopal's suggestion to restructure the judiciary to include four National Courts of Appeals. He remarked that the judicial structure has remained stagnant since Independence and with four appellate courts, pendency will be remarkably reduced. Here we have two opposing views to such a restructuring, written back in 2016, when the suggestion was first put forward. Sriram Panchu, a senior advocate at the Madras High Court writes in favour while Suhrith Parthasarathy, also an advocate of the Madras High Court writes against such a re-vamping. Edited excerpts:

A National Court of Appeal? Aye

SRIRAM PANCHU

The primary role of the Supreme Court is to determine substantial questions of law relating to the Constitution or otherwise of general importance. Apart from disputes between the States, and some Public Interest Litigations, other cases come in appeal from the High Courts and Tribunals. The Chief Justice has initiated introspection on the need for a National Court of Appeal. At the heart of lies a fundamental question: Is the Supreme Court doing what it is meant to do? And if not, where lies the fault and where the remedy?

How the apex court works

Every week, the court spends three days in final hearings of cases. Two other days are meant for admission of fresh cases called Special Leave Petitions; in an inverse picture, total bedlam takes over the court. Each Bench of two judges has before it 60 to 70 cases. The hearing of each case lasts for a couple of minutes or less before the judges decide whether to admit or dismiss it. Owing to time and volume constraints, the judges read these papers before the hearing date. A substantial portion of four days of India's senior-most judges thus goes in just deciding which cases should join the appeals docket of the Supreme Court. Being tasked with the filtering process is a waste of the time, experience and wisdom of a Supreme Court judge.

Even while rejecting the mass, the admission of some appeals mean that they need to be disposed of. So, the court usually sits in Benches of two or three

judges on other days to hear and decide these appeals. Many of these do involve questions of law, and in several matters the Supreme Court does find that the High Courts or Tribunals have erred. But it is one thing to be a superior appellate court tasked with checking if the lower court has erred and doing this by revisiting the facts and application of law to the case on hand. It is a different matter to focus on examining a question of law of general public importance and to restate, clarify, change existing precedent, or create a new one. The latter is the seminal interpretative lawmaking that the apex court needs to do, which it seems not to be doing.

Few Constitution Benches

This is illustrated by the current relative paucity of Constitution Benches. These are formed by grouping five or more judges to decide major questions of law. In the 1960s, the court did much of its lawmaking through such Benches; over the years, as that number has dwindled. These numbers tell a tale which is worrisome: the cases unique to the court are not getting heard, including issues of religious freedom, rights of minorities, the right to privacy, governance, and validity of statutes. Another concern arises when cases of importance are dealt with by just a couple of judges, for lack of Constitution Benches. Larger Benches bring more judicial thinking to an issue, a balancing of different points of view and greater authority to the ruling of the court. Another key concern is that of access to justice. A vastly disproportionate

percentage of appeals to the Supreme Court come from Delhi and its neighbouring States; for those beyond, the court seems out of reach.

The problem, looked at from different perspectives, is that the run-of-the-mill appeals clog the Supreme Court. We cannot deny an appellate remedy for the general mass of civil and criminal cases. High Courts can and do make serious mistakes and these require rectification. It is this hard fact that forces the Supreme Court to take on such appeals. The answer is to create intermediate courts of appeal where senior judges can deal with these cases, giving them the time and consideration they deserve. These need to be located at different parts of the country. They can be manned by senior judges retiring from the High Courts at 62 years. These courts of appeal will signal the full stop to civil and criminal litigation at large.

We can thus restore the Supreme Court to what the Constitution envisaged – to decide the weighty issues under the Constitution and other laws, with appropriate judge strength, and give the judges the time and opportunity to do their best in the cases which matter most to all of us. It is somewhat surprising that the Centre's first response to the plea seeking setting up of a National Court of Appeal was that this is a "fruitless endeavour". Perhaps the Law Ministry and its legal team may like to consult the Bar Associations of all the States; it may find that the predominant voices do not share this barrenness of view.

The three farm laws were never a solution

True agricultural reform rests with local governments, and States need to go back to the basics and expert suggestions



SUDHA NARAYANAN

The recent announcement by the Prime Minister that the Union Government would seek to repeal the three Farm Laws in the winter session of Parliament has prompted diverse reactions. On November 29, the first day in Parliament, the Farm Laws Repeal Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha without discussion. These laws are the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act (ECA), 2020. Regardless of how this specific step is viewed and the motivations attributed to it, the prolonged protests by farmers and extended impasse offer a rare teachable moment for policy making for Indian agriculture.

Purpose, 'creation', passage

To recall, the three laws each intended to remove constraints on buyers to stock, contract and purchase agricultural commodities. Whereas the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 (ECA) was largely the prerogative of the Centre, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 governing contract farming and the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 (henceforth, the APMC Bypass Act), focusing on the public regulated markets were hitherto issues that were under the State-level Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Acts, therefore under the purview of the States.

The most troubling aspect of these laws was the way they were

written and passed. First, little is known to the public even today on who authored these laws or who was consulted before their introduction as ordinances.

Second, these were passed in Parliament in haste by voice vote, in what is viewed by experts as a violation of established procedures. That Acts with serious ramifications for States should be passed without deeper discussions even within Parliament, let alone with specific inputs from stakeholders and experts, is bewildering. Attempts by some to deflect such criticism by noting the long history of discussion on agricultural market reform only serves to shine a light on the departure from such a tradition in the case of these three laws. Such opaque processes increase the likelihood of poorly framed laws; indeed, many critics have pointed out serious flaws in these laws.

Centre-State agri-relations

Crucially, the APMC Bypass Act mandated that States can only regulate, via their respective APMCs, designated physical premises called the 'market yards'. Via this Act, the Centre essentially wrested control of market areas outside these yards, now called 'trade areas', from the States. The dominant popular narrative was that the Centre was doing what the States had failed to do, i.e., free agricultural trade from the clutches of the APMCs, an idea that finds support in the Economic Survey 2014-15.

Yet, perversely, the APMC Bypass Act particularly hurt States that had the most deregulated systems. A State that had no APMC Act, for example, suddenly found that all deregulated areas within the State would now come under the Centre's regulatory ambit and control, subjecting private players hitherto operating freely in a deregulated environment to the regulations of a whimsical Centre. Further, by absolving private players from adhering to any State law in agricultural marketing, it ef-



fectively nullified the power of States to shape the nature and functioning of agricultural markets.

Such transfer of regulatory authority from the States to the Centre might in principle be justified if there was systematic evidence to suggest that the Centre was better informed and better equipped to regulate agricultural markets. Here, the Centre's own actions following the three laws do not inspire confidence. For example, barely weeks after the ECA was amended, the Centre imposed restrictions on stocking, in October 2020 for onions and July 2021 for a range of pulses, apparently undermining the purported spirit of the reformed ECA it championed.

During the pandemic

Our analysis of COVID-19 lockdown management in the agricultural sector too found that the Centre was always a step behind, implementing relief measures for agricultural marketing reactively rather than proactively. In contrast, States, regardless of the ruling parties, offered a more timely, relevant and nimble response to manage the fallout of the COVID-19 lockdown on agriculture. Beyond agricultural marketing, the central government's efforts in the past such as One Million Ponds, 10,000 FPOs and One District One Product are often disconnected from local needs for robust and sustainable solutions for agriculture.

Another key concern is that to the extent that these Acts enable centralisation of authority to influence the functioning of trade

areas, this would facilitate consolidation of big business, a trend that is evident globally. The underlying premise of these three Acts was that freedom to operate in agricultural markets would attract capital-rich private players to a sector in sore need of rejuvenating investments; and that the proliferation of efficient value chains and competition would enable benefits to be passed on to the farmers in the form of higher, and perhaps more stable prices.

While it is hard to disagree with the purported goal of these Acts, many critics question the premise itself, pointing out that it was naive at best, and insidious at worst; the Acts in fact load the dice in favour of corporates with deep pockets who would now use this freedom, not to compete but to sidestep competition to gain control over supply chains at the expense of the farmer. Global evidence based on data from 61 countries between 2005-15, after all, suggests that farmers receive, on average, just 27% of consumer expenditure on foods consumed at home, the share falling significantly as national incomes rise.

Digital consolidation route

These fears of consolidation have been further stoked by recent memoranda of understanding that the Government of India has signed for building data stacks with Cisco, Jio, ITC, NeML, Ninjacart, Microsoft, Amazon, ESRI India Technologies, Star Agribazaar and Patanjali Organic Research Institute. While claiming to not involve private sector players, these select few have been granted limited access to "data from the federated Farmers' database" for specific areas. This, it seems, might be the thin edge of a wedge. A "trade" area under full control of the central government would potentially offer big business a digital data consolidation route to controlling supply chains.

The solution to the many problems of Indian agriculture and of Indian farmers was never going to

be solved by the three farm laws, even within the realm of marketing. Nor is the repeal of these three Acts going to reverse or slow the rapid growth of private players in agricultural marketing in the past two decades, as seen by the 2019 Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households in India.

What needs to be done

The agricultural marketing space has seen significant reform in many States in the past decade, even if such reform has happened at a leisurely pace and often piecemeal in its approach. While the Centre has the capacity to make landmark changes, true reform and action rests with local governments. States are better placed to assimilate and respond to the diversity of institutional and socio-economic contexts and agroclimatic regions. They are often better placed to incorporate local concerns for robust and sustainable solutions.

The central national challenge is that different States have different regulations and a different pace of reform in part due to the political stakes involved in tackling trader collusion in these markets. States need to go back to the basics and to the suggestions that many expert committees have proposed for agricultural market reform – for a start, delinking the regulatory and operational roles of the APMCs. The Centre for its part should turn its attention in the short term to offering a stable and predictable policy environment *vis-à-vis* imports and exports, the functioning of national commodity exchanges and futures markets, and providing inclusive platforms for discussions on State-level market reform, public procurement and price support, designing safeguards against consolidation of corporate interests and framing data policies.

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Parliament clears Farm Laws Repeal Bill without a debate

Opposition members protest as House managers refuse to allow a discussion

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 was passed by both Houses of Parliament on Monday without debate amid protests by Opposition MPs on being denied a debate.

On the first day of the winter session, as expected, the Government had listed the Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 for taking back the three contentious farm laws – Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 –



PM Narendra Modi addressing the media on the first day of the Winter Session in New Delhi on Monday • R.V. MOORTHY

but it was not clear that any debate would be allowed before the repeal.

Opposition leaders had expressed apprehension even before the Business Advisory Committee (BAC)

meetings of both Houses that the Government would want to clear the Bill without discussion. No consensus on a discussion was reached in the BAC meeting. In the Lok Sabha, which

was adjourned till 12 noon after it convened due to ongoing protests by the Opposition on farm Bill related issues, the Repeal Bill was taken up as soon as the House reconvened.

Opposition MPs from the DMK and the Trinamool were in the Well when Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar stood to introduce the Bill, demanding that discussion be allowed. Congress MPs were in their seats but they too raised the demand for a discussion.

Speaker Om Birla said unless the House was in order he would not allow a discussion.

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Parliament clears Farm Laws Repeal Bill

"I will allow the discussion only when the House is in order," he repeatedly said and asked Mr. Tomar to proceed first with introducing and then taking up the Bill for consideration and passing.

Leader of the Congress Legislature Party in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Choudhary intervened stating that in the past, six Acts had been repealed since 2014, and discussion had been allowed for the same and that this Bill too should come up for debate.

"The word here is consideration and passing, and we ask that the bill be taken up for consideration by the House before passing," he said.

Speaker Om Birla, however, said no discussion could take place with parliamentarians crowding the Well of the House.

"This is not the way one can debate bills," he said. The Bill was then passed by voice vote and the House adjourned till 2 p.m.

In Rajya Sabha, after two adjournments in the first half of the day, the House met at 2 p.m. to repeal the laws. The opposition parties again protested as the Government moved the bill, without offering a debate on the issue.

Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge was given a brief opportunity to speak on the issue. Mr Kharge said everyone in the house welcomed the repeal of the bills and congratulated the Government for the belated wisdom on withdrawing the bills. But the minute he started talking

about the deaths 750 farmers in the year long agitation, Deputy Chairman Harivansh who was in chair, told him that his time was up.

Lakhimpur Kheri case

"The farmers still continue to sit in protest. Many of their demands still remain unmet. We also need to debate the events of Lakhimpur Kheri," Mr. Kharge said.

As the Bill was passed without debate, opposition MPs rose in protest. TMC MPs Nadimul Haque and Dola Sen walked into the well of the house. As soon as Ms. Sen approached the chair, Parliament security officials trooped in.

Speaking outside Parliament, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "The manner in which the Government passed the Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 proves that the Government was wrong and was scared of a discussion."

Senior Congress leaders pointed out that at least 17 acts repealed by the current Government from 2014 onwards had been repealed after due discussion, and this exception of no debate therefore indicated the Government's pusillanimity in discussing issues related to farmers in the Houses of Parliament.

Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi, however, said that since Prime Minister Modi had already stated that the Bills were being repealed acknowledging the wishes of a certain section of farmers and the opposition, there was little need for debate.

Omicron poses very high global risk: WHO

It urges nations to boost health systems

REUTERS
GENEVA

The heavily mutated Omicron coronavirus variant is likely to spread internationally and poses a very high risk of infection surges that could have "severe consequences" in some places, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday.

No Omicron-linked deaths had yet been reported, though further research was needed to assess its potential to escape protection against immunity induced by vaccines and previous infections, it added.

In anticipation of increased case numbers as the variant, first reported last week in South Africa, spreads, the UN agency urged its 194 member states to accelerate vaccination of high-priority groups and ensure plans were in place to maintain health services.

"Omicron has an unprecedented number of spike mutations, some of which are concerning for their potential impact on the trajectory of the pandemic," it said.

"The overall global risk related to the new variant ... is assessed as very high."

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, sounded the alarm at the start of an assembly of Health Ministers that is expected to launch negotiations on an international



Medical staff wait for people at a vaccination centre in Rome on Monday. • AP

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agreement on preventing future pandemics.

"The emergence of the highly mutated Omicron variant underlines just how perilous and precarious our situation is," he said.

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Per capita out-of-pocket health expenditure sees decline: report

National Health Accounts estimates for 2017-18 released

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a share of total health expenditure and foreign aid for health has both come down as per the findings of the National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates for India for 2017-18 released on Monday by Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan.

As a share of total health expenditure, the OOPE has come down to 48.8% in 2017-18 from 64.2% in 2013-14. Even in the case of per capita OOPE, there has been a decline from ₹2,336 to ₹2,097 between 2013-14 and 2017-18.

"One of the factors attributing to this decline is the increase in utilisation and reduction in cost of services in Government health facilities. If we compare NHA 2014-15 and 2017-18, there has been a decline in OOPE for Government hospitals to the tune of 50%," said Mr. Bhushan.



Rajesh Bhushan

This is the fifth consecutive NHA report produced by National Health Systems Resource Centre, designated as National Health Accounts Technical Secretariat in 2014 by the Health Ministry. The NHA estimates are prepared by using an accounting framework based on internationally accepted System of Health Accounts 2011, provided by the World Health Organization.

Govt. support

Mr. Bhushan, releasing the report, said that the NHA estimates for 2017-18 clearly showed that there had been

an increase in the share of Government health expenditure in the total GDP of the country.

"It has increased from 1.15% in 2013-14 to 1.35% in 2017-18. Additionally, the share of Government Health Expenditure in total health expenditure has also increased over time. In 2017-18, the share of Government expenditure was 40.8%, which is much higher than 28.6% in 2013-14," he said.

The report further indicates that in per capita terms, the Government health expenditure has increased from ₹1,042 to ₹1,753 between 2013-14 to 2017-18.

Also the share of social security expenditure on health, which includes the social health insurance programme, Government financed health insurance schemes, and medical reimbursements made to Government employees, has increased.

GI tag sought for Marthandam honey

Bee-keeping in the town was started in 1924.

SANGEETHA KANDEL
CHENNAI

Marthandam Beekeepers' Co-operative Society Ltd. in Kanniyakumari district has filed an application seeking geographical indication (GI) tag for Marthandam honey.

P. Sanjai Gandhi, IP Attorney and Advocate, Nodal Officer, Geographical Indication Registration of Products, Government of Tamil Nadu, filed the application on behalf of the society and Tamil Nadu Khadi and Village Industries Board (a State government undertaking) was the facilitator for this. This particular honey is produced in Kakulam and Vilavancode taluks in Kanniyakumari. Data provided in the GI application shows that Marthandam and its neighbouring villages produce around 6 lakh kg of honey each year (from hives kept in Kanniyakuma-

ri). Historical records collated by Mr. Gandhi shows that bee-keeping in Marthandam was started at the YMCA, Marthandam campus, by Dr. Spencer Hatch, in 1924. The society was established in the year 1937. "The honey produced in Marthandam has been certified as AGMARK 'A' grade by the Government of India," Mr. Gandhi said.

The method of processing this specific honey is unique as it is extracted from the hives and stored in wax coated drums for over 4-9 months which helps in changing the density of the honey as well as removing all the dirt and impurities naturally, he said. The honey is then filtered and packed in glass jars to preserve its quality.

According to details furnished by the society, this honey is different also because the bees procure nectar from the wild flowers from the forest area nearby and from the rubber estates.

Omicron: wary world slams doors shut

New cases in Portugal and Scotland may point towards local spread of the variant, fear officials

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRUSSELS

Taking an act-now-ask-questions-later approach, countries around the world slammed their doors shut again to try to keep the new Omicron variant at bay on Monday as more cases of the mutant coronavirus emerged and scientists raced to figure out just how dangerous it might be.

Japan announced it would bar entry of all foreign visitors, joining Israel in doing so just days after the variant was identified by researchers in South Africa. Morocco banned all incoming flights. Other countries, including the U.S. and European Union members, have moved to prohibit travellers arriving from southern Africa.

Travellers infected with the new version have turned up in a widening circle of countries over the past few days, including Spain, and cases in Portugal and Scotland have raised fears that the variant may already be spreading locally.

"Many of us might think we are done with COVID-19. It's not done with us," warned Tedros Adhanom



Warning bells: People waiting to be transported to a quarantine facility after arriving at an airport in Japan. • AFP

Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization.

The infections have underscored the difficulty in keeping the virus in check in a globalised world of jet travel and open borders. Yet, many countries are trying to do just that, against the urging of the WHO, which noted that border closings often have limited effect and can wreak havoc on lives and livelihoods. Some argued that such restrictions could provide valuable time to analyse the new variant.

"This time the world showed it is learning," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, singling out South African President Cyril Ramaphosa for praise.

"South Africa's analytic work and transparency and sharing its results was indispensable in allowing a swift global response. It no doubt saved many lives."

Late last week, Ms. von der Leyen successfully pushed the 27-nation EU to agree to ban flights from seven southern African na-

tions, similar to what many other countries are doing.

Cases had already been reported in EU nations Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands before Portuguese authorities identified 13 Omicron infections among members of the Belenenses professional football team. Authorities reported one member had recently travelled to South Africa.

Spain also reported its first confirmed case of the variant. It was detected in a traveller who returned on Sunday from South Africa af-

ter making a stopover in Amsterdam. And after Scotland reported its first six cases, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon warned that "there might already be some community transmission of this variant".

Taking no chances, Japan, which has yet to detect any Omicron cases, reimposed border controls that it had eased earlier this month. "We are taking the step as an emergency precaution to prevent a worst-case scenario in Japan," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said. The new measures begin on Tuesday.

Boosting green hydrogen

Hydrogen is the most promising solution to decarbonise sectors like cement, steel, and refineries



PAWAN MULUKUTLA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced that India would aim for net-zero carbon emissions by 2070. The announcement was given credence by the country's solar achievements since 2015. India is the only major economy whose policies and actions are on track to limit global average temperature rise below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, as envisioned in the Paris Agreement.

India has a head start

As of now, 75% of India's energy demand is met by coal and oil, including imports. This is expected to increase. Therefore, the synergy between renewable energy and green hydrogen must be tapped to tackle the dependence on fossil fuel and take greater advantage of India's solar capacity. Hydrogen – green hydrogen, in particular – is a crucial weapon in India's arsenal to fight climate change as it improves the long-term energy storage capabilities of renewable energy. The simplest element in the periodic table is also the most promising solution to decarbonise sectors like cement, steel, and refineries. "Hydrogen can provide the lowest-cost decarbonization solution for over a fifth of final energy demand by mid-century – contributing a cumulated reduction of 80Gt of CO₂ – and is thus an essential solution to reach the 1.5°C climate scenario," read a recent statement from the Hydrogen Council. Several major economies which are adopting legislation to reduce carbon emissions are also catalysing global efforts towards transitions to green hydrogen.

A low-carbon source of energy is required to generate hydrogen through electrolysis – the splitting of a water molecule into hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen produced is coded with a colour, depending on the method of its production. While hydrogen generated through renewable energy sources is green, it is blue when the carbon generated from the process is captured and stored without dispersing it in the atmosphere. When the carbon is not captured, the generated hydrogen is labelled grey.

Nearly 70% of the investments required to produce green hydrogen through electrolysis goes into generating renewable energy. With India's solar capacity increasing nearly 3,000 times in less than a decade, the cost of solar energy has reached a low of ₹2 per kWh. This gives India a unique head start in

scaling up the use of green hydrogen.

India can reduce its carbon emissions and make a dent in its annual import bills by developing a value chain for hydrogen from its production to its diverse applications, including production technologies, storage, transport and distribution, infrastructure (ports, refuelling stations), vehicular applications, and electricity/gas grid.

Solutions

Government funding and long-term policies that attract private investments within the standards and a progressive compliance framework are essential to boost green hydrogen. Hydrogen's cross-sectoral capabilities should be exploited according to each sector's cost and ease of adoption. A few key sectors with low transition costs, such as refineries, fertilizers and natural gas, should be mandated to use hydrogen to bring down costs as part of near-term goals. New demand from steel, cement and road mobility should be mandated as part of medium-term goals. Heavy-duty vehicles should receive State and Central incentives. Shipping, aviation, energy storage and solutions towards power intermittency should be mandated to use green hydrogen in the long run.

Enforcing time-bound mid- and long-term policies would inspire the private sector to invest more in green hydrogen and give the boost it requires in its nascent stages. India's current grey hydrogen production is six million tonnes per annum, which is around 8.5% of global annual production. India should replace this with green hydrogen and reduce dependence on imported ammonia. It should aim to produce 4-6 million tonnes of green hydrogen per annum by the end of the decade and export at least 2 million tonnes per annum. India has already taken the first step with the Indian Oil Corporation floating a global tender to set up two green hydrogen generations units at the Mathura and Panipat refineries.

At present, more than 30 countries have hydrogen road maps and over 200 large-scale hydrogen projects across the value chain. If all the projects come to fruition, total investments will reach \$300 billion in spending by 2030. Governments worldwide have committed to more than \$70 billion in public funding, according to Hydrogen Council, to develop a hydrogen economy. With its abundant and cheap solar energy, India has the upper hand to tap into these investments and lead global efforts in transitioning to green hydrogen.

Pawan Mulukutla is the director for energy technology and green mobility at World Resources Institute India. Views expressed are personal

Regulation, not ban

India should regulate trading of virtual currencies through monitored exchanges

Eight years after the RBI issued its first advisory cautioning holders of virtual currencies about the potential financial and security risks, and two years after drafting a Bill to ban cryptocurrencies, the Government is set to introduce legislation that would, if passed, officially proscribe such currencies. Its concerns appear to be the risks associated with cryptocurrencies, including their potential use for money-laundering and financing of illegal activities. The risks investors and consumers face in dealing with these so-called currencies, given that they are neither 'a store of value nor are they a medium of exchange', and the ostensible threat they pose to financial stability, are also key factors. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had in a video address to the Sydney Dialogue earlier this month said: "It is important that all democratic nations work together on this [cryptocurrency] and ensure it does not end up in wrong hands." The Centre and the RBI's deep disquiet with cryptocurrencies notwithstanding, there has been an exponential jump in investment in virtual currencies, especially after the Supreme Court last year struck down an RBI notification barring financial entities from facilitating customer transactions related to virtual currencies. Industry estimates now peg cryptocurrency holdings in India at about ₹40,000 crore, held by about 15 million investors, and advertising trends show an upsurge in ads promoting brands associated with investment in virtual currencies.

That the ground has shifted since an Inter-Ministerial Committee set up to study the issues related to virtual currencies first proposed the ban in 2019 is beyond doubt. From the emphatic assertion in that panel's report that "no country across the world treats virtual currencies as legal tender" to a situation where earlier this year El Salvador – admittedly a small and heavily indebted nation – officially declared 'bitcoin' as legal tender, much has changed in the adoption of private virtual currencies worldwide. The pandemic has accentuated the global embrace of all things digital and investment in the technologies enabling cryptocurrencies including blockchain, appear to be no different. Canada, Japan and Thailand permit the use of virtual currencies as a payment method, with some jurisdictions regulating them as a digital asset, and others as a commodity. Canada and the U.S. closely monitor virtual currency activity to ensure they do not run afoul of laws on financial crimes, with the former also earning tax revenue on transactions. All things given, India should eschew the temptation to join China in proscribing virtual currencies and instead aim to tightly regulate their trading through monitored exchanges and earn revenue. Simultaneously, it should expedite the RBI's pilot of the Central Bank Digital Currency so as to offer an alternative to cryptocurrencies.

Indian-origin Parag Agrawal to replace Dorsey as Twitter CEO

An IIT-Bombay alumnus, he joined the company in 2011

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW YORK

Indian-origin technology executive Parag Agrawal was appointed the new chief executive officer of Twitter after the social media giant's co-founder Jack Dorsey stepped down on Monday.

In a message posted on Twitter, Mr. Dorsey said: "After almost 16 years of having a role at our company... from co-founder to CEO to Chair to Exec Chair to interim-CEO to CEO... I decided it's finally time for me to leave. Why? "There's a lot of talk about the importance of a company being "founder-led".

"Ultimately, I believe that's severely limiting and a single point of failure. I've worked hard to ensure this company can break away from its founding and founders," he said.

Mr. Agrawal, an IIT Bombay and Stanford alumnus, said in a note posted on Twitter that he was "honoured and humbled" on his appointment and expressed gratitude to Mr. Dorsey's "continued mentorship and



Parag Agrawal and Jack Dorsey. • TWITTER, REUTERS

your friendship". Mr. Dorsey said that there were three reasons he believed it was the right time.

"The first is Parag becoming our CEO. The board ran a rigorous process considering all options and unanimously appointed Parag. He's been my choice for some time given how deeply he understands the company and its needs," he said.

"Parag has been behind every critical decision that helped turn this company around. He's curious, probing, rational, creative, demanding, self-aware and humble," Mr. Dorsey said. "He leads with heart and

soul, and is someone I learn from daily. My trust in him as our CEO is bone deep," Mr. Dorsey added.

Mr. Agrawal joined Twitter 10 years ago when there were fewer than 1,000 employees.

He said: "While it was a decade ago, those days feel like yesterday to me. I've walked in your shoes, I've seen the ups and downs, the challenges and obstacles, the wins and the mistakes.

"But then and now, above all else, I see Twitter's incredible impact, our continued progress, and the exciting opportunities ahead of us," Mr. Agrawal said.

A launch window for India as a space start-up hub

The sector is in an embryonic stage and there is scope to build a feasible business model



RAJESH MEHTA &
UDDESHYA GOEL

The great space race of the 20th century was kicked off by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957. It was a competition between the world's great powers, a test of their ideologies, which proved to be a synecdoche of the entire Cold War between the capitalist United States and the socialist Soviet Union. The space race is on again, but this time, private players are on the power field to take the next leap for mankind and democratise space usage to build commercial value. This has huge implications for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in the space sector in India and is a promising venture for global investors.

India, a very marginal player
Last year, according to a report, the Government of India created a new organisation known as IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) which is a "single window nodal agency" established to boost the commercialisation of Indian space activities. A supplement to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the agency promotes the

entry of the Non-Government Private Entities (NGPEs) in the Indian space sector. The agency will also facilitate a swift on-boarding of private players in the sector through encouraging policies in a friendly regulatory environment and by creating synergies through already existing necessary facilities, the report says.

Today, the space economy is a \$440 billion global sector, with India having less than 2% share in the sector. This is despite the fact that India is a leading space-faring country with end-to-end capabilities to make satellites, develop augmented launch vehicles and deploy inter-planetary missions. While total early-stage investments in space technologies in FY21 were \$68 billion, India was on the fourth place with investments in about 110 firms, totalling not more than \$2 billion.

The hurdles

Another aspect to throw light on is the extensive brain drain in India, which has increased by 85% since 2005. This can be linked to the bottlenecks in policies which create hindrances for private space ventures and founders to attract investors, making it virtually non-feasible to operate in India.

Currently, a report on a leading news portal says: the reason for the lack of independent private participation in space includes the absence of a framework to provide transparency and clarity in laws. The laws need to be broken down



ISRO/SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

into multiple sections, each to address specific parts of the value chain and in accordance with the Outer Space Treaty (or the United Nations resolution, the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies). Dividing activities further into upstream and downstream space blocks will allow legislators to provide a solid foundation to products/services developed by the non-governmental and private sectors within the value chain, it adds.

Licences, liability

It says: "with the technicalities involved in the space business, timelines on licensing, issuance of authorisation and continuous supervision mechanism need to be defined into phases, like in France, where there are four obtainable licences in addition to case-by-case authorisation, with lack of clarity surrounding costs".

Another crucial aspect of space law is insurance and indemnifica-

tion clarity, particularly about who or which entity undertakes the liability in case of a mishap. In several western countries with an evolved private space industry, there is a cap on liability and the financial damages that need to be paid. In fact, space operators are required to hold insurance of up to AUD\$100 million under Australian space law.

As a part of the system

Currently, many of the private entities are involved in equipment and frame manufacturing, with either outsourced specifications or leased licences. However, to create value, Indian space private companies need to generate their intellectual property for an independent product or service (e.g. satellite-based broadband) with ISRO neither being their sole or largest customer nor providing them IP and ensuring buy-backs (which was how most suppliers in the Indian space ecosystem were born over the last three decades). This will help open the door to global markets.

Mature space agencies such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the United States, China's China National Space Administration (CNSA), and Russia's Roscosmos (Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities) seek support from private players such as Boeing, SpaceX and Blue Origin for complex operations beyond manufacturing support, such as send-

ing crew and supplies to the International Space Station. These companies have revolutionised the space sector by reducing costs and turnaround time with innovation and advanced technology. For such purposes, NASA and the CNSA award a part of their annual budget to private players. Until 2018, SpaceX was a part of 30 missions of NASA, getting over \$12 billion under contract.

India currently stands on the cusp of building a space ecosystem and with ISRO being the guiding body, India can now evolve as a space start-up hub for the world. The sector is in the embryonic stage where the possibilities are limitless with a scope to build a feasible business model. Already 350 plus start-ups such as AgniKul Cosmos, Skyroot Technologies, Dhruva Space and Pixxel have established firm grounds for home-grown technologies with a practical unit of economics. However, to continue the growth engine, investors need to look up to the sector as the next "new-age" boom and ISRO needs to turn into an enabler from being a supporter. To ensure that the sky is not the limit, investor confidence needs to be pumped up and for the same, clear laws need to be defined.

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Crypto trade not tracked: Govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Government does not collect information on cryptocurrency or Bitcoin transactions in the country and has no plans to recognise Bitcoin as a currency, the Finance Ministry told Parliament on Monday.

Responding to separate queries from Lok Sabha MPs on the booming trade in

cryptocurrency in the country and whether the Government has legally permitted their exchanges to do business, the Ministry said “cryptocurrencies are unregulated in India” and it “does not collect information” on their trading.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das has been raising serious concerns about cryptocur-

rency in the context of macroeconomic and financial stability and has called for more “well-informed” public discussions to understand the “far deeper issues” involved.

The Government has already said it plans to introduce a Bill to regulate cryptocurrency.

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We don't track crypto trading, says Govt.

It might possibly ban all private cryptocurrencies and facilitate the creation of the official digital currency, in the ongoing winter session of Parliament.

Last month, the RBI, which is eyeing a pilot project for a central bank digital currency (CBDC), urged the Government to amend the RBI Act of 1934, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in response to a query. The law will need to be changed to enhance the scope of the definition of a ‘bank note’ so as to include digital currency.

“RBI has been examining use cases and working out a phased implementation strategy for introduction of CBDC with little or no disruption,” the Minister said, adding that an official digital currency can potentially provide significant benefits, such as reduced dependency on cash, higher seigniorage due to lower transaction costs and reduced settlement risk.

“Introduction of CBDC would also possibly lead to a more robust, efficient, trusted, regulated and legal tender-based payments option. There are also associated risks which need to be carefully evaluated against the potential benefits,” he noted.

As per the available purport of The Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official

Digital Currency Bill, 2021, the Government may ban all private cryptocurrencies in India, while allowing for ‘certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses’.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently held a meeting with top officials from the central bank and the Ministries of Home Affairs and Finance on cryptocurrencies and expressed concerns about attempts to mislead the youth through over-promising and non-transparent advertising.

Bitcoin scam

On the Bitcoin hacking scam in Karnataka, the Finance Ministry said a case has been registered by the Bangalore zonal unit of the Enforcement Directorate, It added that any further disclosure of information in the matter is ‘not in larger public interest’ and put the onus on the State for investigating the criminal aspects of the case.

“Information in public domain suggests that a case of cybercrime involving Bitcoin has been under examination by the Karnataka police. ‘Police’ and ‘Public Order’ are State subjects as per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India,” Mr. Chaudhary said in reply to an unstarred question on the case.

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
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
General Studies Paper III	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
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
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
V	Linkages of organized crime with terrorism;
W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
General Studies Paper IV	
A	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
B	Dimensions of ethics;
C	Ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
D	Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
E	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour;
F	Moral and political attitudes;
G	Social influence and persuasion.
H	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service , integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
I	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
J	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
K	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems;
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.