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DAILY NEWS **ANALYSIS**

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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EXPLAINER

In times of war, the yuan as a reference currency for interim oil trade

Why could India and Russia consider the use of Chinese currency to facilitate oil trade?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL

The story so far: India and Russia are said to be considering the use of the Chinese yuan as the reference currency to facilitate oil trade between the two countries. This news comes in the backdrop of economic sanctions imposed by the West against Russia after the Russian military invaded Ukraine late last month.

Why is Russia trying to sell oil to India?

Russia has been trying to sell oil at a significant discount to India as demand for Russian oil has dropped since the U.S. and Europe imposed sanctions last month. Although there is no outright ban yet on the purchase of Russian energy exports, many energy traders have been reluctant to purchase Russian energy and sell it. Traders fear that the United States may impose further sanctions if the war in Ukraine intensifies and that this may leave them holding energy inventory that they cannot sell.

As part of Western sanctions, certain Russian banks were removed from the SWIFT payments system, thus affecting Russia's ability to trade with the rest of the world. Russian businesses have been unable to pay for imports and Russian consumers have been unable to purchase goods. The Russian central bank's foreign reserves were also frozen, which in turn has dented the Bank of Russia's ability to use its foreign reserves to defend its currency. The Russian rouble has lost about a quarter of its value against the U.S. dollar since the invasion. U.S. President Joe Biden, earlier this month, also banned Russian energy imports into the United States.

Why use the Chinese yuan instead of the U.S. dollar for oil trade?

Major oil producers have for decades sold

their produce to foreign buyers in exchange for U.S. dollars. Oil sellers have been willing to accept U.S. dollars for their oil because the currency is widely accepted in the global market for goods and services. It should be noted that the value and the acceptability of any currency depend mainly on its purchasing power, that is, the amount of goods and services that can be bought using it. For a long time, the U.S. has been an economic powerhouse creating valuable goods and services. So, people around the world have been willing to sell their goods and services for U.S. dollars in the hope that they can use these dollars to purchase valuable American goods and services.

The U.S. government has made use of this economic advantage to further its foreign policy goals. Since global trade that is carried out using dollars is cleared by banks located in the United States, the U.S. government has the power to freeze dollars that belong to its adversaries which then debilitates economies.

To avoid this risk, many countries have been looking at alternatives to the U.S. dollar to carry out international trade. Of late, China has emerged as a significant economic power and this in turn has boosted the value of the yuan in the eyes of people and made it an increasingly acceptable currency for global trade. However, it should be noted that only about 3% of global trade is facilitated by the Chinese yuan while almost 90% of global trade still happens through the use of U.S. dollars.

What lies ahead?

It is unclear at the moment what using the Chinese yuan as reference currency would entail. It could simply just mean that the value of trade that happens between Russia and India will be quoted in terms of the yuan without the Chinese currency actually being used in bilateral trade. Or it could mean the



The use of the dollar as a financial weapon against Russia can accelerate efforts by countries to reduce their dependence on the U.S. dollar

the rupee's acceptability in global trade is minuscule compared to that of the dollar. The use of the yuan, which is more widely accepted, can help solve the problem. The use of the dollar as a financial weapon against Russia, as was evident with the freezing of dollar assets held by the Bank of Russia last month and other sanctions on Russian banks, can also accelerate efforts by countries to reduce their dependence on the U.S. dollar. Countries may want to hold fewer dollars and euros and instead opt for alternative trade arrangements that involve the use of emerging currencies such as the yuan. This could portend a fall in the status of the dollar over time unless the U.S. manages to maintain its current status as the most dominant economic superpower.

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THE GIST

■ As part of Western sanctions, Russian banks were removed from SWIFT payments and energy imports from the country have also reduced. Thus, Russia has been trying to sell oil at a significant discount using the yuan as a reference currency.

■ The U.S. is using its economic advantage to freeze dollars that belong to its adversaries. To avoid this risk, many countries have been looking at alternatives to the U.S. dollar.

■ For oil trade between India and Russia, neither the rouble nor the Indian rupee is suitable as a global currency for trade. Therefore, the yuan can become an alternate option.

Essentially flawed

Karnataka HC ruling on hijab fails to recognise the need for reasonable accommodation

The Karnataka High Court verdict upholding the ban on the wearing of headscarves by students in educational institutions is wrong on many levels. The manner in which it framed the questions arising from the controversy over Muslim girl students wearing the hijab undermines constitutional principles. The court failed to examine whether the wearing of the hijab, in addition to the prescribed uniform, but without any variation in colour, was a ground to refuse entry into a school or college. The Bench examined verses from the *Koran* to disagree with the students' claim that wearing the hijab was an essential practice in Islam and that, therefore, it was entitled to constitutional protection as part of religious freedom under Article 25. But is that the real issue? The court rejected the argument in favour of 'reasonable accommodation', by which a pluralist society may allow the classroom to reflect social diversity without undermining the sense of equality among students. Apparel norms may be needed in "qualified public spaces" such as schools. But there is no reason to not accommodate the choice of an additional piece of clothing that does not interfere with the prescribed uniform.

In rejecting the argument based on 'freedom of conscience', the court cited the absence of elaboration in the pleadings. The judgment's emphasis on the uniform as an inviolable symbol of equality and homogeneity seems to have overwhelmed any contention in favour of any sort of accommodation. Another question to raise is whether it was at all necessary to invoke the 'essential practice' test in this case. If something is egregiously religious, it is more likely to be kept out of the campus, if uniformity and eliminating any 'sense of separateness' are the hallowed goals. The matter could have been disposed of without entering the theological domain. The 'essential religious practice' test itself is a pointless exercise, as the Supreme Court has established a nearly unattainable standard to determine it. Something is an essential practice only if its absence or removal has the effect of destroying the religion itself. Save for a few fundamentals, no religious practice will actually survive such scrutiny. It would be far better if a claim for Article 25 protection is tested against constitutional values such as equality, dignity and privacy, subject, of course, to health and public order. In any case, the 'essentiality' test should be jettisoned forever if only because it theoretically allows some defining theological concepts to override all else. What is abhorrent to constitutional principles will remain so irrespective of what is considered essential to a religion. Freedom of religion is important because freedoms are important, and not because religions are important.

EXPLAINER

The curious case of sealed cover jurisprudence

What kind of information comes under the purview of 'confidential'? Is this practice of withholding documents against the idea of a fair trial?

DIKSHA MUNJAL

The story so far: While hearing a criminal appeal against the Bihar Government on Tuesday, Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana admonished a counsel for submitting a 'sealed cover report' to the court. The CJI asked the counsel to not submit the report in a sealed cover. "We will not accept it," Justice Ramana remarked.

Later in the day, senior advocate Dushyant Dave recalled the same remarks to a bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud hearing the government imposed ban on Media One channel. In this case too, the Centre had submitted relevant files to the court in a sealed cover.

"I am very averse to what is called the 'sealed cover jurisprudence'," Justice Chandrachud said.

What is sealed cover jurisprudence? It is a practice used by the Supreme Court and sometimes lower courts, of asking for or accepting information from government agencies in sealed envelopes that can only be accessed by judges.

While a specific law does not define the doctrine of sealed cover, the Supreme Court derives its power to use it from Rule 7 of order XIII of the Supreme Court Rules and Section 123 of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.

It is stated under the said rule that if the Chief Justice or court directs certain information to be kept under sealed cover or considers it of confidential nature, no party would be allowed access to the contents of such information,



except if the Chief Justice himself orders that the opposite party be allowed to access it. It also mentions that information can be kept confidential if its publication is not considered to be in the interest of the public.

As for the Evidence Act, official unpublished documents relating to state affairs are protected and a public officer cannot be compelled to disclose such documents.

Other instances where information

may be sought in secrecy or confidence are when its publication impedes an ongoing investigation, such as details which are part of a police case diary.

When has it been done in the past? Sealed cover jurisprudence has been frequently employed by courts in the recent past.

Documents were examined in sealed cover in multiple prominent cases during the tenure of the former Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi. In the case pertaining to the controversial Rafale fighter jet deal, a Bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi in 2018, had asked the Centre to submit details related to the deal's decision making and pricing in a sealed cover. This was done as the Centre had contended that such details were subject to the Official Secrets Act and Secrecy clauses in the deal.

In the matters related to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, the Supreme Court mandated coordinator of the NRC, Prateek Hajela, was asked by the apex court to submit period reports in sealed cover, which could neither be accessed by the government nor the petitioners.

Another instance was in the 2014 BCCI reforms case. The probe committee of the cricket body had submitted its report to the Supreme Court in a sealed envelope, asking it not to make public the names of nine cricketers who were suspected of a match and spot fixing scam.

Similarly, in the Bhima Koregaon case, in which activists were arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act

(UAPA), the Supreme Court had relied on information submitted by the Maharashtra police in a sealed cover.

In the case of activist Gautam Navlakha for instance, the police had submitted a sealed envelope including information recovered from the electronic devices seized from the activist. The police had stated that this information could not be disclosed to the accused as it would impede the ongoing investigation.

At the time, Navlakha's counsel had countered the submission citing violation of his rights to fair adjudication, stating that the applicant did not know the contents of the sealed cover or whether it formed a part of the police's case diary.

Information submitted by state agencies in a sealed cover was also relied upon in the 2G and coal scam cases, the Ram Janmabhoomi case, the high-profile case pertaining to the death of judge B.H. Loya, as well as the 2019 case pertaining to the release of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's biopic around the national elections.

What is the criticism and what do the courts say?

Critics of this practice contend that it is not favourable to the principles of transparency and accountability of the Indian justice system, as it stands against the idea of an open court, where decisions can be subjected to public scrutiny.

It is also said to enlarge the scope for arbitrariness in court decisions, as judges are supposed to lay down reasoning for their decisions, but this cannot be done when they are based upon information

submitted confidentially.

What is further contested is whether the state should be granted such a privilege to submit information in secrecy, when existing provisions like in-camera hearings already provide sufficient protection to sensitive information.

Besides, it is argued that not providing access to such documents to the accused parties obstructs their passage to a fair trial and adjudication. In the 2019 judgment in the case of *P. Gopalakrishnan vs The State of Kerala*, the Supreme Court had said that disclosure of documents to the accused is constitutionally mandated, even if the investigation is ongoing and said documents may lead to a breakthrough in the investigation.

In the INX Media case in 2019, while granting bail to Congress leader P. Chidambaram, a Bench of the Supreme Court had criticised the Delhi High Court for basing its decision to deny bail to the former Union Minister on documents submitted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a sealed cover.

The three-judge Bench of Justices R. Banumathi, A. S. Bopanna, and Hrishikesh Roy had said: "Though it is held that it would be open for the Court to peruse the documents, it would be against the concept of fair trial if in every case the prosecution presents documents in sealed cover and the findings on the same are recorded as if the offence is committed and the same is treated as having a bearing for denial or grant of bail".

With inputs from Saptaparno Ghosh

THE GIST

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Treating values of individual freedom as trifles

The hijab judgment has struck a blow against each of these principles – liberty, equality, and fraternity



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY

Our social contract is built on an edifice that grants pre-eminence to individual choice. The Constitution's Preamble recognises this when it places an onus on the state to secure to all citizens, among other things, liberty, equality and fraternity. The last of those values is fortified by a further commitment. The state, the Preamble says, will guarantee "fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation".

The chief architect of the Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, saw the standards contained in these words as forming a triumvirate of values. Liberty, equality, and fraternity, he said, were principles of life, "a union of trinity". Divorce one from the other and the very purpose of democracy will be defeated. The Constituent Assembly believed that it was only a deep commitment to these principles that can help usher in a social revolution in the country. The structures of India's democracy – the various minutiae of administration that the Constitution spells out – were each built on the idea that securing individual happiness required the state to foreground these standards.

Enforcing popular morality

In that picture, independent courts, the framers thought, would stand as a guardrail against any effort to undermine social democracy. But far from acting as "sentinels on the *qui vive*" – as a former Chief Justice of India once described the Supreme Court of India's role – the judiciary has time and again enforced the popu-

lar morality of the day, treating values of individual freedom as dispensable trifles. Tuesday's judgment by the Karnataka High Court, in *Resham vs State of Karnataka*, is the newest addition to this litany. It upholds a ban imposed on the use of hijabs by students in classrooms across the State (Karnataka), and, in doing so, strikes a blow against each of the principles contained in B.R. Ambedkar's union of trinity.

Court's use of precedent

The judgment is premised on three broad conclusions. First, the court holds that the wearing of a hijab is not essential to the practice of Islam, and, therefore, the petitioners' right to freedom of religion is not impinged; second, it finds that there is no substantive right to free expression and privacy that can be claimed within the confines of a classroom; and, third, according to it, since the Government's order does not by itself ban the use of a hijab and since it is otherwise neutral, there is no discrimination aimed at Muslim women students.

These conclusions suffer from one flaw or another. In rejecting the plea that the wearing of a hijab is a legitimate exercise of religious freedom, the court refers to a plethora of precedent that points to only "essential religious practices" enjoying constitutional protection. According to the court, the petitioners failed to produce any evidence to show that the use of a hijab was essential to Islam. Yet, despite this, it proceeds to perform a theological study – which one would think it is ill-equipped to do, especially without conducting a full-fledged trial – and concludes that Islam does not make the wearing of a hijab mandatory.

This is an extraordinary finding for a secular court to make. No doubt, similar leaps of judgment have been made by the judiciary in the past – for example, in 2004,



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the Supreme Court concluded that the performance of the Tandava dance was not indispensable to the Ananda Margis faith, even though the followers of that religion believed it to be so. But if the Karnataka High Court's inference is partly based on flawed doctrine, it must take the blame for posing to itself the question of whether at all a hijab was essential to religion.

Free choice and state action

Unlike many of the cases in which the doctrine of essential practice is invoked, this was not a case where individual freedom was at odds with group rights. On the contrary, this was a case where exercise of free choice was curtailed by state action. The petitioners had contended that they wore the hijab as a matter of conscience. Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees to all persons not only an equal right to profess, practise and propagate religion but also a "freedom of conscience." Counsel pointed to the Supreme Court's judgment in *Bijoe Emmanuel* (1986), where the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to partake in the singing of the national anthem was protected. There, the Court ruled that so long as students conscientiously believed that they must not participate in the recital, their rights could be abridged only in the interests of public order, morality or health.

In *Resham*, the Karnataka High Court draws a facile distinction from *Bijoe Emmanuel*. The judg-

ment holds that there is no evidence in this case that the petitioners conscientiously believed in the necessity of the hijab – this is anomalous given that once a pleading is made on affidavit, the onus ought to have been on the state to establish that the petitioners were not, in fact, wearing the hijab out of a sense of conscience.

The court then proceeds to make an even more astonishing assertion: all cases where a right of conscience is pleaded, according to it, are *ipso facto* cases of religious freedom, and, therefore, ought to be subject to the test of essentiality. This conclusion ignores the fact that *Bijoe Emmanuel* was explicitly decided based on conscience and that conscience need have no direct relation to religious faith. It is possible, for example, that the hijab might not be essential to Islam, and yet that Muslim women choose to wear it as an exercise of their own individual beliefs.

On the classroom space

That the court was simply unprepared to grapple with this difference is even more evident in its rejection of claims based on free expression. The petitioners argued that in choosing to wear the hijab, they were merely exercising a form of identity relatable to their rights to freedom of speech and privacy. The court counters this by holding that classrooms are "qualified public spaces", where individual rights cannot be asserted to "the detriment" of "general discipline and decorum". In spaces such as these – and the court draws a remarkable analogy with prisons – substantive rights, the judgment holds, metamorphose into derivative rights. It is unclear what the ruling means by all this, except that these apparently derivative rights are incapable of being invoked in protected environments.

In all of this, the court ignores

the classic test for determining when and how the right to free expression can be legitimately limited: that is, the test of proportionality. There is, according to the judgment, no need to dwell on legal doctrine, because "the petitions we are treating do not involve the right to freedom of speech & expression or right to privacy, to such an extent as to warrant the employment of these tests for evaluation of argued restrictions, in the form of school dress code". In this manner, the court also brushes aside requests for "reasonable accommodation".

Many accommodations

Kendriya Vidyalayas, for example, as the petitioners claimed, allow for hijabs within the contours of the prescribed uniforms. But the judgment holds that to make such an accommodation would defeat the very purpose of uniforms. This finding fails to recognise that even within the existing dress code, many accommodations are, in fact, made. For instance, religious and cultural marks on the forehead and accessories on other parts of the body are not disallowed. If the purpose of the uniform is to allow for no differences, surely every exhibition of faith in the classroom must be stamped out. Therefore, we can only see the failure to provide for a reasonable accommodation for the hijab as deliberate discrimination wrought on Muslim women.

The judgment makes repeated references to constitutional secularism. But secularism, properly understood, demands precisely what the petitioners here were pleading for: the rights to agency, choice, and equal treatment, and, more than anything else, a guarantee of fraternity undergirded, as the Preamble says, with dignity to every individual.

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Towards inclusive education

The accessibility guidelines for higher education institutions and universities require some modifications



RAHUL BAJAJ & HUSAIN AANIS KHAN

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 guarantees to every disabled person a large bouquet of rights and entitlements. But the reality that disabled persons confront in their everyday lives is far removed from the law's progressive vision. The Supreme Court judgment in *Avni Prakash v. National Testing Agency* (2021) is emblematic of this gap. As the appellant's answer book during an exam was snatched away, due to the testing authority's confusion and the centre's callousness, she did not get an hour of extra time to which she was legally entitled. The Court had to remind the competent authorities about their duty to provide her reasonable accommodation and inclusive education. Against this backdrop, the draft accessibility guidelines and standards for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Universities released by the University Grants Commission (UGC) are a welcome intervention.

A procedural flaw

The way in which the guidelines were released, however, left much to be desired. The public notice preceding the guidelines was inaccessible to persons with visual disabilities. This was because the notice appears to have been printed and poorly scanned. If the document had been a digital document, authenticated by the digital signature of the competent authority, it would have been fully accessible. Worse still, the same problem was seen late last year in the public notice released by the Union Home Ministry with respect to its guidelines on creating disabled-friendly infrastructure and the guidelines released by the Civil Aviation Ministry on making air travel more disabled-friendly.

The suggestions in the guidelines are capacious in scope and breathtaking in ambition. What the guidelines ignore, however, is that disabled students are neglected and sidelined at worst or grudgingly accepted at best in universities. The guidelines have to be realistic. Crucially, each chapter of the guidelines should be followed by a checklist that distils the key action items contained in that chapter. Further, the checklist should divide these action items into those that must be immediately implemented (for example, accessibility to Information and Communication Technologies and making

learning materials available in accessible formats) and those that must be implemented progressively (for example, accessibility to extracurricular activities). Further, the compliance of HEIs with this checklist must be monitored by the UGC, by requiring HEIs to submit a compliance report on an annual basis (instead of a self-certification mechanism). The UGC should also be empowered to take disciplinary action against HEIs not complying with the guidelines.

Assessment of disability-based needs

An assessment of the needs of persons with diverse disabilities should be conducted on an annual or biannual basis by the Equal Opportunity Cell/Enabling Unit to devise and thereafter revise the institutional plan for inclusion of students with disabilities. Such an assessment will equip the administration to undertake specific need-based interventions. The assessment must be in the form of hearings in which the plan's content or implementation can be discussed.

Further, when a student with a disability joins an HEI, the HEI should conduct an assessment of their disability-based needs. On this basis, a plan should be drawn up to fulfil those needs. Each HEI must maintain data on students with disabilities, on the basis of parameters such as applications, enrolment, retention and participation of students in academic and non-academic activities.

Finally, the guidelines should provide for a redress mechanism along the lines of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017. The mechanism may be resorted to by aggrieved persons with disabilities in case the concerned HEI does not implement or violates the UGC guidelines. The District Education Officer referred to in Rule 7 of the Rules can be empowered to deal with any such infractions. Likewise, the UGC can consider instituting a mechanism for affected persons with disabilities to file complaints about the violation of these guidelines. Such complaints must be dealt with within a time-bound fashion. A separate chapter should be added to the guidelines which comprehensively outlines the modalities of the grievance redress mechanism.

In sum, for the disabled, high-quality education represents a unique pathway for empowerment and meaningful participation in society. If modified suitably, these guidelines can serve as a catalyst to unlock this transformative potential for every student with disability pursuing higher education.

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Fed hikes rates, to battle inflation

REUTERS

WASHINGTON

The Federal Reserve on Wednesday raised interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point and projected its policy rate would hit a range between 1.75% and 2% by year's end in a newly aggressive stance against inflation that will push borrowing costs to restrictive levels in 2023.

In a new policy statement marking the end of its full-on battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. central bank flagged the uncertainty the economy faces from the Ukraine war and the health crisis, but said “ongoing increases” in the target federal funds rate “will be appropriate” to curb the highest inflation in 40 years.

Jet fuel price raised by over 18%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Jet fuel prices were hiked on Wednesday by over 18% – the steepest-ever rise – to all-time high levels after international oil price surged to a multi-year high.

The hike, sixth straight this year, led to prices soaring past the ₹1-lakh-per-kilolitre mark for the first time ever. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) was hiked by ₹17,135.63 per kl, or 18.3%, to ₹1,10,666.29 per kl in the national capital, according to a notification by state-owned fuel retailers.

In Mumbai, ATF price rose to ₹1,09,119.83 a kl and it costs ₹1,14,979.70 in Kolkata. Jet fuel is priced at ₹1,14,133.73 per kl in Chennai. Jet fuel, which makes up for almost 40% of the running cost of an airline, has surged this year.

IndiGo CEO Ronojoy Dutta said on Wednesday the government should bring aviation turbine fuel under the Goods and Services Tax and make flying affordable for consumers and viable for airlines.

‘AP HC ruling on renewables’ PPAs to lift investor confidence’

‘Order could serve as a deterrent to other States trying to rework such contracts’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Credit rating agencies on Wednesday said the Andhra Pradesh High Court’s decision upholding the sanctity of power purchase agreements (PPAs) with private renewable energy generators, which the State government had sought to annul, would provide a major boost to investors’ confidence.

The court’s order, overturning the September 2019 decision of a single judge permitting the State’s discoms to pay power producers at almost half the rate agreed in their contracts, could pave the way for improved liquidity for private



Contract sanctity: Investors in renewables would draw confidence as tariff reset risk is mitigated, says Fitch. ■ AFP

solar and wind power generators, the agencies observed. That would, however, hinge on the State paying up its dues for the past three years as ordered by the court, and not filing an appeal in the Su-

preme Court.

If AP’s distribution utilities clear their outstanding dues in line with the PPAs within six weeks, Fitch Ratings expects outstanding receivables to fall by 35% for

ReNew Power and by 48% for Greenko Energy Holdings, it said in a note.

ICRA estimates an incremental impact on power purchase cost of about ₹10,500 crore.

“The ruling will also bolster investor confidence in the renewable energy sector... as risks of tariff renegotiation and payment delays are mitigated,” Fitch said, flagging possible delays in payments under the order that affirms PPA tariffs cannot be reset unilaterally.

The order could also be a deterrent to other States trying to rework contracts, said Vishrov Mukherjee, partner at J. Sagar Associates.

Clean energy must use the battery of a circular economy

An efficient waste management ecosystem is crucial to manage the huge waste generated in India's new energy push



AKANKSHA TYAGI

In the Budget speech this year, the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, emphasised the role of cleaner technologies such as solar energy and batteries in India's future economic growth. In addition, she mentioned the importance of transitioning to a circular economy from the existing linear one.

Market estimates

The call for a creation of a circular economy is significant since an efficient waste management ecosystem would be necessary to manage the enormous waste generated by renewable energy projects in the coming decades. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) – an intergovernmental organisation that supports countries in their transition to a sustainable energy future – the cumulative waste generated by India's total installed solar capacity could be as high as 325 kilotonnes by 2030. A consulting firm, JMK Research and Analytics, estimates that the market for battery recycling will be around 23 Gigawatt hours (GWh) by 2030. The prevalence of a circular economy could also partially insulate these industries from potential supply chain shocks triggered by extraneous developments.

A study by the Council on Ener-

gy, Environment and Water (CEEW) has estimated that India would need over 5,630 GW of solar and 1,792 GW of wind energy to achieve its net-zero target in the year 2070. A robust renewables waste management and recycling ecosystem could help people and India reduce environmental harm, provide energy security, and also create new jobs. So, here are six steps to nurture a circular economy in the Indian renewable energy industry.

A clear framework

First, policymakers should revise existing electronic waste management rules to bring various clean energy components under their ambit. These rules are based on extended producer responsibility that identifies component producers as responsible entities to manage their waste products. The Indian renewable energy industry has a complex structure that comprises various manufacturers, assemblers, importers and distributors. Hence, the revised regulations should clearly define the responsibilities of various stakeholders involved in the renewable energy value chain and provide annual targets for the collection and the recycling of waste.

Second, dumping and burning of different components should be banned. Currently, in the absence of any regulation, landfilling is the cheapest and most common practice to manage renewable energy waste. However, it is not environmentally sustainable. All clean energy technologies thrive on metals and non-metals with different

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



levels of toxicity. If the waste equipment is dumped in the open, then these elements could leach into the environment and enter the food chain. Studies show that the leaching of heavy metals such as lead and cadmium from solar photovoltaic modules could increase by 90% and 40%, respectively, under acidic conditions. Further, burning the polymeric encapsulant layer in solar photovoltaic modules releases toxic gases such as sulphur dioxide and some volatile organic compounds.

R&D is essential

Third, the renewable energy industry should invest in the research and development of recycling technologies. Recycling is a multistep process that includes dismantling, disassembly, and extraction. Dismantling is largely a manual process that is sometimes automated. Disassembly can be done mechanically, thermally or chemically. Besides these traditional methods, investments in research and development could help discover new ways of recycling that result in higher efficiency and a less environmentally damaging footprint. Industries should also explore technology transfers with global recycling

firms for establishing domestic waste recycling facilities. For instance, efficient metal recovery from waste provides a resilient supply of raw material for the renewable energy manufacturing industry.

Focus on finance, quality

Fourth, there has to be a creation of innovative financing routes for waste management. Access to finance is a major roadblock for players in the recycling ecosystem. The central government should nudge public and private sector banks to charge lower interest rates on loans disbursed for setting up renewable energy waste recycling facilities. Assurance of a minimum waste quantum to run these facilities and issuing performance-based green certificates to recyclers that could be traded to raise money for waste management would also help ease the financial burden. A market for recycled materials could also be created through mandatory procurement by the renewable energy and other relevant manufacturing industries.

Fifth, there needs to be an improvement in product design and quality. Renewable energy component manufacturers should find substitutes for toxic metals such as cadmium and lead used in their products and simplify product designs to reduce recycling steps. Such improvements in process efficiencies could go a long way in curbing waste creation at the source and its subsequent impact on the environment.

Six, the Union and State governments should set stringent quality

control standards for components used in their tenders. This will prevent premature end-of-life of components, and consequent waste creation. Substandard components generate considerable waste due to early life damage that is often irreplaceable, and the components often have to be discarded. Such quality enforcement could also position India's renewable energy industry as a global supplier of quality products.

Largely in the informal sector

The renewable energy recycling ecosystem has a complex structure where there are multiple actors involved, but it would be an integral part of our journey toward a sustainable future. Beyond sustainability, it would also offer quality employment opportunities for the future generations as new jobs would be created across the entire value chain of waste management and recycling. Further, workers in the informal sector could access various socio-economic benefits and look forward to an improved quality of life. We ought to remember that the majority of India's recycling sector is informal and workers have to work in unsafe environments without standardised wages. Therefore, developing an efficient renewable energy waste management and circular ecosystem is imperative rather than a choice. We can ignore this, but only at our own peril.

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General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 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.