



PM expands health cover scheme to people aged 70 and over; no income bar

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



In a major expansion of the Union government's flagship scheme, the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced that health coverage under the scheme will now be available to all senior citizens aged 70 and above, regardless of their income. The government bears the cost of hospitalisation for beneficiaries up to ₹ 5 lakh.

With the expansion now, every elderly person above 70 years of age in the country will get free treatment in the hospital with the Ayushman Vaya Vandana Card. With an Ayushman Vaya Vandana card for the elderly in the house, the out-of-pocket expenditure will be reduced to a

great extent.

Other projects

Mr. Modi also launched other health sector projects worth around ₹12,850 Cr. on the occasion of Dhanvantari Jayanti and the ninth Ayurveda Day, at the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA). Ayurveda Diwas is being celebrated in more than 150 countries today, offering this as proof of the growing attraction of Ayurveda.

The PM slammed the governments of Delhi and West Bengal for not implementing the scheme, expressing his concern that senior citizens in these States cannot avail themselves of free treatment under the expanded programme.

The Prime Minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for projects worth more than ₹13,000 Cr., including the creation of four centres of excellence under the Ayush Health scheme, expansion of health services with the use of drones, helicopter services at AIIMS, Rishikesh, new infrastructure at AIIMS, New Delhi and AIIMS, Bilaspur, expansion of services in five other AIIMS in the country, establishment of medical colleges, the launch of nursing colleges, and other projects related to the health sector. The Government is leveraging technology to enhance healthcare and save citizens' money under the e-Sanjeevani scheme, through which over 30 Cr. people have consulted doctors online.

Five pillars

Stating that the progress of a nation is directly proportional to the health of its citizens, Mr. Modi

listed the five pillars of his government's policy: preventive healthcare, early detection of ailments, free and low-cost treatment and medicines, availability of doctors in small towns, and the expansion of technology in health services. There are 7.5 lakh registered AYUSH practitioners already contributing to the nation's healthcare.

The Prime Minister inaugurated the second phase of India's first All India Institute of Ayurveda, and three medical colleges at Mandsaur, Neemuch and Seoni in Madhya Pradesh, and laid the foundation stones for five nursing colleges, and 21 critical care blocks.

'India must adopt an offensive approach against cyberthreats'

INTERNAL SECURITY

India is facing growing threat to its national security from adversaries resorting to a new kind of cyberwarfare and, therefore, an offensive approach involving "super cyberforce" and "surgical strikes" is required, according to a report by non-government organisation Prahar.

The report, titled The Invisible Hand, projected that if unchecked, cyberattacks on India was likely to rise to one trillion per annum by 2033, reaching 17 trillion by 2047.

Stating that cyberspace is the new battlefield, the report suggested that India must go on the offensive. "Other interventions include sophisticated tech infrastructure, skill improvement, whitelisting digital apps and platforms, and educating citizens. Until India creates a holistic cyberpolicy and execution strategy, restricting identifiable legitimate platforms could push citizens into the hands of dark web operators.

The report noted that in 2023, the country experienced over 79 million cyberattacks, ranking it third globally in terms of the number of such incidents. In the first quarter of 2024, reports indicated a sharp rise in cyberattacks with over 500 million incidents blocked in just three months. In the first four months, Indians lost more than ₹1,750 Cr. to cybercriminals, reported through over 7,40,000 complaints on the national cybercrime reporting portal.

GE may deliver engines for LCA by March or April

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



After several delays, the F-404 jet engines, meant to power the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A, are expected to be delivered by the U.S. engine manufacturer General Electric (GE) by March or April 2025, according to sources in the know. The contractual obligations in terms of penalty for delayed deliveries have been invoked.

The deal is between the GE and the defence public sector undertaking Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL). However, sources said there were no politics involved, and termed the delay in deliveries a "pure logistical issue".

In February 2021, the Defence Ministry had signed a ₹ 48,000 Cr. deal with the HAL for 83 LCA-Mk1A, a more capable fighter than the current LCA-Mk1 in service. Following this, in August 2021, the HAL signed a \$716-million deal with GE Aviation for 99 F-404 aircraft engines and support services for the LCA-Mk1A.

As per contract, three jets were to be delivered to the IAF in February 2024 and 16 aircraft per year for subsequent five years. There are two engines available with GE for now that are being given to India, sources said. They will be used to deliver two jets to the Indian Air Force (IAF) while regular deliveries are awaited.

The engines are now expected by March or April next year, which is a two-year delay from the contractual terms. The contractual terms will have to be implemented. High-value defence contracts typically have a penalty clause for delays or violations. Another source confirmed that the penalty clause in the deal has been invoked.

Minister discussed

The engine delays were also discussed between the National Security Advisers of the two countries when they met and was also taken up during the visit of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The Aerospace industry continues to experience unprecedented supply chain pressures. The GE Aerospace is working with our partner HAL and suppliers to resolve constraints and deliver F-404-IN20 engines for the LCA-Mk1 programme. The Security of Supply Arrangement (SoSA) that India and the U.S. concluded recently enables this kind of cooperation.

In addition to the 83 Mk1A aircraft on order, the Defence Ministry has given approval for procurement of another 97 of them. This would eventually make 180 LCA-Mk1A jets and 220 jets of the MK1 variant. The combined cost of the 180 Mk1As is an estimated at ₹1.15-lakh Cr.

India calls for early meeting with Sri Lanka to discuss issues concerning fishermen

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



India on Tuesday, during a meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries, reiterated its call for an early meeting of the fishermen's associations of the two countries to discuss issues concerning the two fishing communities. This was conveyed at the sixth meeting of JWG in Colombo.

It assumed significance in the wake of the "increase in detention of Indian fishermen and their boats in Sri Lankan custody, including the imposition of long sentences and heavy fines," a matter that India raised at the meeting. The arrested fishermen are all from the Palk Bay-bordering districts of Tamil Nadu. They have been accused of having transgressed the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, in his latest

letter to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, pointed out that "in the year 2024 alone, 30 such incidents have occurred. As of today (October 27, 2024), 140 fishermen and 200 fishing boats are under the custody of the Sri Lankan authorities."

The arrests in recent months had triggered protests by the fishermen of Rameswaram. However, fishermen of the Northern Province have been contending that, in addition to illegal fishing, the Tamil Nadu fishermen have been resorting to “destructive” bottom trawling, a practice banned by Sri Lanka since July 2017, in view of its ability to deplete the marine resources.

Don't use force

At the JWG meeting, India, which referred to the “recent tragic incidents at sea” leading to unfortunate injuries and loss of lives [of the Tamil Nadu fishermen], “strongly reiterated” that the use of force should be avoided under all circumstances. Calling for the release of Indian fishermen and their boats under Sri Lankan custody at the earliest, New Delhi stressed the need for upholding “established understandings and modalities” on issues related to the fishermen.

Humanitarian manner

Both sides agreed that the highest priority should be accorded to address the issues faced by the fishermen in a “humanitarian manner” as they “pertained to livelihood concerns”. The Indian delegation was led by Abhilaksh Likhi, Secretary, and Department of Fisheries while the Sri Lankan team was headed by M.P.N.M. Wickramasinghe, Secretary, and Ministry of Fisheries. The two sides would continue to have “comprehensive discussions on the issues related to fishermen for finding a mutually acceptable and long lasting solution.”

Rajnath flags off Sagarmala Parikrama to Thoothukudi

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday virtually flagged off the Sagarmala Parikrama, a 1,500-km passage by an autonomous surface vessel manufactured by Sagar Defence Engineering, from Mumbai to Thoothukudi.

The vessel's journey, unveiled at Swavlamban, the annual event of the Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO), is an important technology demonstration especially as the Indian Navy looks to induct autonomous surface and underwater vessels in large numbers.

The Minister formally unveiled the third edition of Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI 3.0) challenge and 13th edition of Defence India Start-up Challenges (DISC 13) aimed to advance indigenous defence technologies and operational efficiencies. ADITI 3.0 features a challenge from the Navy to design a high-power microwave weapon system. DISC 13 presents seven challenges — three from the Army and two each from Navy and Air Force — in the domains of AI, military communication and autonomous bots among others.

Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi reiterated that the Navy has resolved to become a “fully aatmanirbhar force” by 2047. Such initiatives has resulted in fructification of more than 2,000 proposals, with an outlay of over ₹2,000 Cr. and conclusion of 171 contracts for an excess of ₹700 Cr. towards development of “swadeshi solutions” many of them being “global firsts, game changers and technologically futuristic”.



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Maithili missed out on classical status as proposal did not come from Bihar govt.

ART & CULTURE

While five languages were accorded the classical status earlier this month, Maithili missed out as the Bihar government had not forwarded the proposal officially.

The recommendation according classical status for a language is made by the Linguistics Expert Committee, which comprises representatives of the Union Ministries of Home and Culture and four or five linguistic experts at any given time. The panel is chaired by the president of the Sahitya Akademi. The recommendation then has to be approved by the Union Cabinet following which a Gazette notification is issued.

The proposal for Maithili had been forwarded by the Patna-based Maithili Sahitya Sansthan, but the same had not been forwarded to the Home Ministry by the Bihar government, which is the official procedure. Thus, though the 300-page proposal for Maithili was discussed at the meeting of the committee, it could not be considered due to this technicality.

12 million speakers

By the 2011 Census, there were approximately 12 million Maithili speakers in India. Maithili was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as a recognised Indian language in 2003. It is included as an optional paper in the UPSC exam. In March 2018, Maithili received the second official language status in Jharkhand. Besides, Jharkhand and Bihar, it is the second most spoken language in Nepal.

In a written reply in the Bihar Assembly in July, State Education Minister Sunil Kumar Singh, while asserting that the decision to accord classical status to languages was under the Central government, had said the Bihar Government would soon send the proposal to the Centre.

Among the five languages given classical status on October 3, the proposals for Assamese and Bengali had come from the respective State governments as had been the case for Marathi which has been pending since 2014.



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New guidelines promote Ayurveda, curb antibiotics use in veterinary treatment

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Standard Veterinary Treatment Guidelines (SVTG), released recently by the Union Ministry of Animal Husbandry, aims to reduce and regulate the use of antibiotics to treat diseases found among livestock and poultry. The SVTG also provides for the use of Ayurvedic drugs in veterinary treatment. It is for the first time that the Centre has come up with a standard set for treatment of almost all diseases of animals and birds. The guidelines were designed to minimise antimicrobial resistance and effectively control diseases. SVTG is for minimising the usage of drugs, including antibiotics. The guidelines will help in reducing the economic burden on farmers as medicines will be cost-effective from now. The guidelines were drafted by a team of more than 80 professionals from veterinary and medical fields.

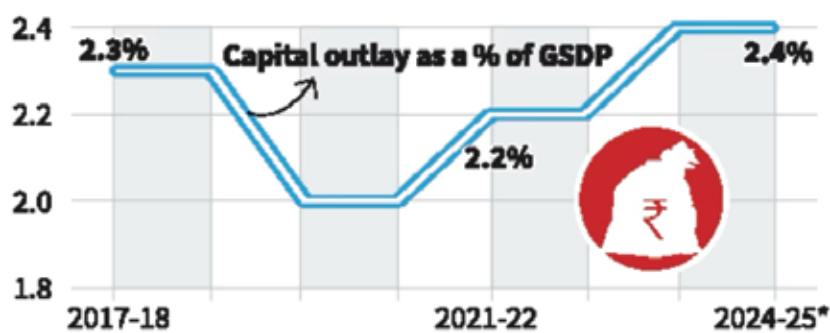
Ayurvedic drugs had been clinically proven for the treatment of some of the diseases by the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). The document has prescribed the use of “ethnoveterinary medicine” and herbal drugs, tried on a large-scale by the NDDB to treat mastitis. “The validated ethnoveterinary medicine practices for treatment and better management of bovine mastitis are in use to reduce the irrational use of antibiotics, thereby reducing the cost of treatment.

Despite a slow start, States' capex likely to rise further this year

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Multiplier effects

Despite a slow start on public capex this year, 18 major States are expected to clock 7%-9% growth in capital spends with an outlay of ₹7.2 lakh crore, as per Crisil Ratings



States include: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jharkhand and Goa

*P: Projection

Source: State budgets, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India & CRISIL Ratings

Capital expenditure by States, a key driver of India's economic growth in recent times, may have started on the back foot in 2024-25 with the general elections taking up the first quarter, and States' capex dropping 7% from last year by August, but those spends may pick up steam in the coming months, rating agencies reckon.

This positive prognosis is significant as the Finance Ministry in a review of the economy late September had identified lower capex spends by States as one of the 'incipient signs of strains in certain sectors', along with other cooling signals for the economy like the drop in passenger vehicle sales in the first few months of the year.

In a report on Tuesday, Crisil Ratings said it expects the capex outlays of India's top 18

States that account for about 94% of the capital spending done by State governments, to rise in the range of 7% to 9% and hit ₹7.2 lakh Cr., compared with ₹6.7 lakh Cr. in 2023-24.

Rating firm ICRA also recently said it expects the combined capital spending of 13 major States to

rise 13% to ₹6.5 lakh Cr. this year, though that would be slightly lower than these States' ₹7.2 lakh Cr. Budget estimate for capex.

ICRA economists attributed this to a dull start to capex in the initial months of 2024-25 and an anticipated undershooting in States' revenues. However, of the 13 States they analysed, ICRA expects Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu to have enough fiscal space to meet their budgeted capex plans.

CRISIL Ratings senior director Anuj Sethi expects a 7-9% growth in capital outlays, which translates to States achieving about 90% of their budgeted target this fiscal. Though similar to last fiscal, it will be higher than the levels of 82%-84% achieved between FY2018 and FY2023.

The expectations of a pickup in the capital outlays for the remainder of this fiscal, were also backed by the evidence "from a step-up in States' borrowings, which have already surged about 26% year-on-year in the second quarter [July to September] after a 15% year-on-year decline in the first quarter".

These 18 States' capital outlay as a share of their gross state domestic product (GSDP) is projected at 2.4% this year, the same as 2023-24 when their capex grew 27%. Growth will vary across States, and a slowdown in economic activity or higher revenue spending would impact these estimates.

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