

# Weekly Current Affairs

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# NATIONAL



## #1 Govind Ballabh Pant

- President Ramnath Kovind, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant on his 132nd Birth Anniversary.

### Key highlights

- Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant (1887 – 1961) was a lawyer, an Indian freedom fighter and one of the architects of modern India.
- In 1921, he was elected to the Legislative Assembly of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.
- He was an untiring participant in both the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement.
- He was also a member of the Central Legislative Assembly and the Constituent Assembly.

- He served as the 2nd Chief Minister of United Provinces from 1937 to 1939.
- After independence, he served as the 1st Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh from 1950 to 1954.
- He served as Union Home Minister from 1955–1961.
- As Home Minister, his chief achievement was the reorganisation of States along linguistic lines.
- He was also responsible for the establishment of Hindi as an official language of the central government and a few states.
- To honour his exemplary services to the nation, he received Bharat Ratna, in 1957.

## #2 Food Park

- Union Minister of Food Processing Industries Harsimrat Badal inaugurated the



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First Mega Food Park of Telangana in Lakkampally at Village Lakkampally, Nandipet Mandal of Nizamabad District.

**About:**

- Objective: To give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- Parent ministry of scheme: Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

**Implementing agencies:**

- The Mega Food Park project is implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which is a Body Corporate registered under the Companies Act.
- However, State Government, State Government entities and Cooperatives are not required to form a separate SPV for implementation of Mega Food Park project.
- Under the Scheme, Government of India provides financial assistance upto Rs. 50 Crore per Mega Food Park project.
- The Mega Food Park Scheme is based on "Cluster" approach and envisages creation of state of the art support infrastructure in a well-defined agri / horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units along with well-established supply chain.

### #3 Removes foreign nationals from Adverse List

- Government has removed 312 Sikh foreign nationals from a "Central adverse list" maintained by Ministry of Home Affairs.

**Key highlights**

- Government has reviewed the Adverse List containing 314 foreign nationals belonging to Sikh community and brought it down to just two.
- This review will afford an opportunity to such Sikh foreign nationals to visit India, meet their family members and reconnect to their roots.
- In future, Sikhs mentioned in the list could eventually apply for registration as Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) after they have applied for and held normal visa for a period of two years.
- Central government has also discontinued the practice of maintenance of local adverse lists by the respective Indian missions in various countries. All Indian missions have been advised to grant appropriate visa to all asylees whose names do not figure in the Central Adverse List.

### #4 Govt to widen the spectrum of Khelo India Programme: President Kovind

- Addressing the joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament, the President Ram Nath Kovind said the new government has decided to widen the spectrum of the 'Khelo

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India Programme' to cover the entire country.

**About:**

- Under this programme, 2,500 talented players have been selected and are being trained. The President said, this facility will now be provided to 2,500 new players every year.
- The President also stressed the importance of strengthening the existing sports infrastructure in the country and said the government is working in this direction.

**#5 Centre set to buy Kashmir apples to protect farmers, traders**

- Amidst mounting losses to apple growers in the Kashmir Valley, the Centre has now announced that it will procure apples directly from the growers and that money will be transferred directly to their accounts.

**Key highlights**

- The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) is slated to complete the process by December 15 through state agencies under the Centre's Special Market Intervention Price Scheme.
- Government will ensure payments to the bank accounts of the apple growers through direct benefit transfer (DBT).
- Since the August 5 move of the Centre to read down Article 370, the Kashmir Valley has been in a state of lockdown. Because the harvest began in mid-August during the

government-enforced security clampdown, growers have been unable to transport their produce to markets.

**#6 1 card for all utilities**

- Union Minister for Home Affairs, Amit Shah laid the Foundation Stone for construction of Janganana Bhawan – a new building of the Registrar General of India (RGI) that conducts census –in New Delhi.

**Key highlights**

- Announcing that the 2021 census exercise would be carried out digitally, Union Home Minister Amit Shah suggested one card for all utilities in future.
- He said there was no formal proposal for the common utility card, but digital census had the potential to bring all cards such as Aadhaar, passport, bank account, and driving licence on one platform.
- The decennial census exercise will be undertaken in 2021 and, for the first time, move from paper to digital format. Mr. Shah said ₹12,000 crore would be spent on the preparation of the National Population Register (NPR) and census.

**National Population Register (NPR)**

- The NPR links biometric and demographic details of any ordinary resident, thus making it a comprehensive database of residents.
- The NPR exercise is different from the census and is not linked to the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

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- For the purpose of the NPR, an ordinary resident is defined as a person who has resided in a local area for the past six months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next six months or more.

## #7 Portal for private security agency licensing

- The Union Home Ministry launched the Private Security Agency Licensing Portal at a National level.

### Key highlights

- This is a single-window system for issuing licences to private security agencies.
- The move attempts to streamline the licensing regime with the Home ministry becoming the dashboard for regulating the private security industry under The Private Security Agencies (Regulation) Act, 2005.
- The portal will be available in all official Indian languages in the next 90 days and have a section so that people know whether the agency they want hire has valid licence or not.
- The online portal would be useful in ensuring transparency in licensing in this sector and would give a boost to its credibility. With the online availability of

credentials, it would become easier for an agency registered in one state to expand its operations in another state.

- Gujarat has the highest number of private security agencies (2249), followed by Maharashtra 1309.

## #8 Common Digital Platform for Issuance of Electronic Certificates of Origin

- Union Minister of Commerce and Industry launched Common Digital Platform for Issuance of electronic Certificates of Origin (CoO) in New Delhi.

### Crucial highlights

- This platform will be a single access point for all exporters, for all FTAs/PTAs and for all agencies concerned.
- Certificate of Origin will be issued electronically which can be in paperless format if agreed to by the partner countries. Authorities of partner countries will be able to verify the authenticity of certificates from the website.
- Further, it provides administrative access to Department of Commerce for reporting and monitoring purposes.

  
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# INTERNATIONAL



## #1 24th World Energy Congress to commence in Abu Dhabi

- The 24th World Energy Congress will commence today in Abu Dhabi under the patronage of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.
- The UAE is honoured to be hosting the Congress, which builds on and reflects the ambitious energy transformation that the country is going through at present.

### Key highlights

- The four-day World Energy Congress aims to bring together international energy stakeholders, including governments, private and state corporations, academia and media.

- With over 15,000 participants expected, the Congress is set to welcome over 250 high-level speakers, 72 Ministers, 500 CEOs, 1000 media persons with 40,000 square-metre exhibition space that will cover the entire energy spectrum.
- The Minister added that the theme of this World Energy Congress is Energy for Prosperity which also represents the ambitious and dynamic energy transition of the country.

## #2 India, Nepal inaugurate Motihari-Amlekhgunj oil pipeline

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart K P Sharma Oli will inaugurate the Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline.

### Location of the pipeline



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- The pipeline will transport fuel from Barauni refinery in Bihar's Begusarai district to Amalekhgunj in South-eastern Nepal, situated across the border from Raxaul in East Champaran district.
- According to the spokesperson of Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), the 69-km pipeline will drastically reduce the cost of transporting fuel to landlocked Nepal from India.
- The Amalekhgunj fuel depot will have the capacity to store up to 16,000 kilolitres of petroleum products.

### Background

- The Motihari-Amlekhgunj pipeline project was first proposed in 1996, but progress was slow.
- Things began to move after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kathmandu in 2014.
- The following year, the two governments signed an agreement to execute the project.
- However, political tensions, including India's alleged economic blockade of Nepal, acted as roadblocks in the implementation.
- In 2017, state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) signed a petroleum trade agreement to supply about 1.3 million tonnes of fuel annually to Nepal with a promise to double the volume by 2020.
- In July 2019, the two countries successfully concluded a testing transfer through the oil pipeline.

### About the project and benefits

- The project was initially estimated to cost Rs 275 crore, of which India was to bear Rs 200 crore.

- Subsequently, the NOC said the total project cost had escalated to almost Rs 325 crore.
- Commercial operation of the cross-border fuel project will bring down fuel price by at least one rupee per litre said the NOC Deputy Executive Director.
- The pipeline will help in tackling the oil storage problem in Nepal and doing away with transportation of petroleum products through tankers.
- It will ensure smooth, cost-effective and environmentally-friendly supply of petroleum products to Nepal.

### #3 India, South Korea seal logistics pact

- India and South Korea concluded a military logistics agreement to extend logistical support to each other's Navies. India will be able to get assured logistic support when it operates in the Indo-Pacific in the ports of South Korea.
- A MoU was signed to further defence educational exchanges.

### Key highlights

- The two countries also formulated a forward-looking road map to take bilateral defence industry cooperation to the next level. It includes proposed areas of cooperation in land, aero and naval systems, R&D cooperation and collaboration in testing, certification and quality assurance.
- Rajnath Singh also invited the South Korean industry to explore the feasibility of local



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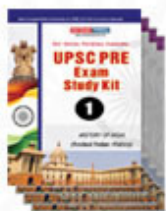
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production of items, used in main weapon systems imported by defence public sector undertakings (PSUs).

- He stressed that South Korea's 'New Southern Policy' and India's 'Act East Policy' will provide a strong framework for future engagement and consolidation of Special Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

#### #4 First conference on military medicine for SCO member states in Delhi soon

- The first conference of Military Medicine for Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) Member States will be held in New Delhi on 12 – 13 September, 2019.

##### About:

- The conference will be the first Military co-operation event hosted by India, under the SCO Defence Co-operation Plan 2019-2020, after it became a SCO Member State in 2017.
- Purpose of conference: To share best practices in the field of military medicine, build capacities and overcome common challenges. During the conference, the Indian Armed Forces will also demonstrate the Rapid Action Medical Team and organise a visit for the delegates to the Army Research and Referral Hospital.
- Organizers: The conference will be conducted by the Indian Armed Forces under the aegis of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS).

- Participants: The SCO Member States will be represented by senior military medical practitioners. Dialogue Partners Nepal and Sri Lanka will also be sending their delegations to participate in the Conference.

#### #5 World's first camel hospital

- World's first camel hospital at Dubai is set to expand its facilities by an additional 50 per cent in response to the increase in demand for its services.

##### About

- The camel hospital, built at an estimated cost of 40 million Dirhams, opened its doors in 2017 to meet the demand in the UAE for an advanced medical facility dedicated to treating camels.
- Since its inception, the hospital has attracted the interest of not only local owners but also camel breeders from across the world.
- Camels are an integral part of the United Arab Emirate's heritage. Camels were a source of transport as well as food and milk in the region.

#### #6 International Day of Sign Languages

- International Day of Sign Languages is being observed on 23rd September.
- The objective of the day is to raise awareness of the importance of sign language in the full realization of the human rights of people who are deaf.

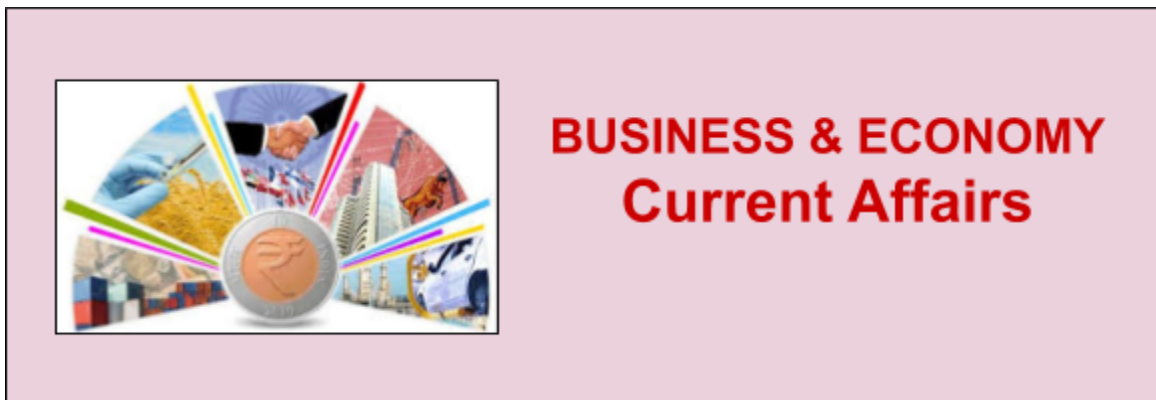
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- Sign languages are fully-fledged natural languages, structurally distinct from the spoken languages.
- The theme of the day is Sign Language Rights for All

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# BUSINESS AND ECONOMY



## #1 Sebi sets up panel to suggest norms for social stock exchanges

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said on Thursday it has constituted a working group on Social Stock Exchanges (SSE).

### Key highlights

- It is under the chairmanship of Ishaat Hussain, Director, SBI Foundation.
- The working group shall examine and make recommendations with respect to possible structures and mechanisms, within the securities market domain, to facilitate the raising of funds by social enterprises and voluntary organizations.

### Background

- In Budget in July, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed a social stock exchange for social enterprises and voluntary organisations working for social welfare to help them raise capital through debt, equity and mutual fund.



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## #2 SEBI tightens norms for liquid funds

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has made it mandatory for Liquid funds to hold at least 20% of its net assets in liquid assets while mandating an exit load on investors that exit within seven days of making an investment.

### About:

- Liquid funds belong to the debt category of mutual funds.
- They invest in very short-term market instruments like treasury bills, government securities and call money.
- They are getting popular with retail investors due to their higher than savings bank account returns and easy liquidity.

### Key highlights

- Liquid funds shall hold at least 20% of their net assets in liquid assets. For this purpose, liquid assets shall include cash, government securities, T-bills and repo on government securities.
- In case the exposure in such liquid assets falls below 20% of net assets of the scheme, the fund house will first have to meet the 20% norm before making any further investments.
- It also barred liquid funds and overnight funds from parking money, pending deployment, in short-term deposits of scheduled commercial banks and also debt securities having structured obligations and/or credit enhancements. Debt securities with government guarantee have been excluded from such restriction.
- The new norms, which will be effective from April 1, 2020, is an attempt to strengthen the risk management framework for liquid funds.

## #3 PACEsetter Fund programme

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy awarded Grants to the awardees of the second round of PACEsetter fund programme.

### Key highlights

- It is constituted by: India and the USA in 2015.
- It is a joint fund to provide early-stage grant funding to accelerate the commercialization of innovative off-grid clean energy products, systems, and business models.

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- The Fund's main purpose is to improve the viability of off-grid renewable energy businesses that sell small scale (under 1 megawatt) clean energy systems to individuals and communities without access to grid connected power or with limited/intermittent access (less than 8 hours per day).

#### #4 RBI expands scope of Bharat Bill Payment System

- The Reserve Bank of India has expanded the scope of the Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS) by adding other categories of recurring payments through the portal.

##### Key highlights

- BBPS, an interoperable platform for repetitive bill payments, functions under the aegis of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- BBPS currently covers bills of five segments viz. (1) Direct to Home (DTH), (2) Electricity, (3) Gas, (4) Telecom and (5) Water.
- Now, RBI has decided to expand the scope and coverage of BBPS to include all categories of billers who raise recurring bills (except prepaid recharges) as eligible participants, on a voluntary basis. This directive has been issued under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- With the expansion of the scope of the payment facility, other recurring payments such as school fees, municipal taxes, insurance premiums can also be paid via BBPS.

#### #5 SAIL allowed to offload 25% of iron ore output

- Government of India has taken a couple of initiatives in recent days to revive the steel sector.

##### Steel Import Monitoring System (SIMS):

- Steel Import Monitoring System (SIMS) will be effective from 1st November, 2019.
- The system has been developed in consultation with Ministry of Steel on the pattern of US Steel Import Monitoring and Analysis (SIMA) system.
- The SIMS will provide advance information about steel imports to Government and stakeholders including, steel industry (producers), steel consumers(importers) to have effective policy interventions.

##### SAIL allowed to offload 25% of iron ore production:

- The Ministry of Mines has allowed Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) to offload, in a year, up to a quantity equivalent to a maximum of 25 % of total iron ore production in the previous year. It is valid for a period of two years.
- This is subject to clearance from the respective State governments where the mines are located.

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- This implies that around 7 million tonnes of iron ore, produced at mines in Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh, can be offloaded by SAIL to the domestic market after getting the necessary clearances. This will ensure raw material security for Indian steel industry.

## #6 Nirvik

- Ministry of Commerce & Industry has introduced NIRVIK Scheme to enhance loan availability and ease the lending process.

### Salient features of the scheme:

- Ministry of Commerce & Industry through Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) has introduced a new Export Credit Insurance Scheme (ECIS) called NIRVIK to enhance loan availability and ease the lending process.
- Under ECIS, the insurance cover percentage has also been enhanced to 90% from the present average of 60% for both Principal and Interest of the loan for pre- and post-shipment credit.
- Claim inspection would be waived for up to ₹10 crore. For claims higher than this amount, inspection of bank documents and records by ECGC officials will be mandatory.
- The existing premium rate would be lowered, with loans to be categorised into two broad categories of those below ₹80 crore and those above that amount. Loans above ₹80 crore will be further divided into those that are not for gold, jewellery or diamonds, and those that are.
- Public sector banks had agreed to give the ECGC-covered loans at a rate that is a maximum of 2.2% higher than the prevailing repo rate, and this would be adjusted as the repo rate changes.

## #7 Vol Fefe index

- American investment firm JPMorgan has created 'Volfeffe' index to track the impact of Donald Trump's tweets on US interest rates and stock market.

### Key highlights

- JPMorgan's "Volfeffe Index," named after Trump's mysterious covfeffe tweet from May 2017, suggests that the President's tweets have increasingly moved the US rates markets immediately after they were published.
- Analysts also found that the number of market-moving tweets from Trump's handle rose in the past month, with those including words such as 'China,' 'billion,' 'products,' 'democrats,' and 'great,' most likely to affect prices.
- JPMorgan isn't alone in attempting to calculate the impact of the president's Twitter activity on markets. Analysts at Bank of America Merrill Lynch published a note last week concluding that days



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where President Trump tweets relatively frequently tend to see negative returns of 9 basis points on average.

## #8 Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum product pipeline

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart K P Sharma Oli inaugurated the Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum pipeline through video conferencing.

### About:

- The Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum product pipeline is the first ever cross-border petroleum products pipeline in South Asia.
- Route: The 69-km pipeline will transport fuel from Barauni refinery in Bihar's Begusarai district to Amalekhganj in southeastern Nepal, situated across the border from Raxaul in East Champaran district.

### Timeline:

- The project was first proposed in 1996, but progress was slow.
- In 2017, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) signed a petroleum trade agreement to supply about 1.3 million tonnes of fuel annually to Nepal with a promise to double the volume by 2020.

### Significance:

- The pipeline will help in tackling the oil storage problem in Nepal. The Amalekhganj fuel depot will have the capacity to store up to 16,000 kilolitres of petroleum products.
- It will drastically reduce the cost of transporting fuel to landlocked Nepal from India by doing away with transportation of petroleum products through tankers (as part of an arrangement which is in place since 1973).

## #9 IPPB rolls out Aadhaar-enabled payment services

- The government today announced the rollout of Aadhaar Enabled Payment System Services by India Post Payments Bank, IPPB.

### Key highlights

- Minister for Communications, Electronics and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad said this gives a strong boost to the Centre's efforts in expanding access to financial services for millions of unbanked and underbanked customers. He was speaking at the first anniversary celebrations of India Post Payments Bank in New Delhi.



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- IPPB has become the single largest platform in the country for providing interoperable banking services to customers of any bank by leveraging the last mile unprecedented reach of the Postal network.
- Mr Prasad congratulated the bank for achieving the milestone of one crore customers, and exhorted them to achieve five crore target in the next one year.
- Referring to 440 Central schemes on-boarded to the DBT platform, he said all these schemes must ride on IPPB platform, too.
- Stating that inclusive is the government's key mantra, he said the Department of Posts should strive for banking the unbanked, funding the unfunded and securing the unsecured.

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## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



### #1 Railways to adopt HOG system to save power cost

- Ministry of Railways has decided to adopt Head on Generation (HOG) technology in all LHB Coaches trains within this year. Till date 342 trains have already been converted into HOG.

#### Key highlights

- In HOG Technology, the power will be drawn from the overhead electric supply.
- The power generator cars which used to make huge noise and emit fumes will no more be there.
- In place of two such generator cars there will be one standby silent generator car to be used for emergency.
- In place of the other car, there will be LSLRD (LHB Second Luggage, Guard & Divyaang Compartment). This LSLRD will also have capability to convert power from the overhead supply to be utilised in the entire train while providing space for luggage guard room and additional passengers

#### Significance:

- The move will make the train journey quieter for travellers and more economical for the carrier.
- Till date, 342 trains have already been converted into HOG. This has resulted in savings of approximately Rs 800 crore.



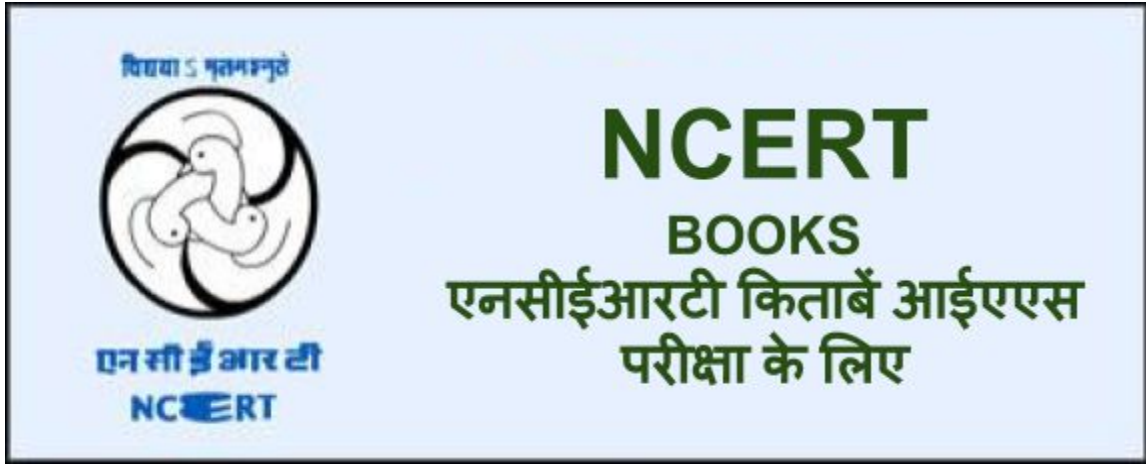
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- The new technology HOG will be available at ₹6 per unit as compared to the End-on-Generation (EOG) system, in which cost of power is ₹22 per unit.

## #2 Portal using artificial intelligence for personalised learning

- Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has announced a new PPP Scheme, National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) for using technology for better learning outcomes in Higher Education.

### About:

- The objective of the scheme is to use Artificial Intelligence to make learning more personalised and customised as per the requirements of the learner. MHRD would create and maintain a National NEAT platform that would provide one-stop access to these technological solutions.
- MHRD proposes to launch and operationalise NEAT in November 2019.

## #3 Stakeholders involved and their functioning :

- AICTE would be the implementing agency for NEAT programme.
- The scheme shall be administered under the guidance of an Apex Committee constituted by MHRD. MHRD would act as a facilitator to ensure that the solutions are freely available to a large number of economically backward students.
- EdTech companies would be responsible for developing solutions and manage registration of learners through the NEAT portal. They would be free to charge fees as per their policy.
- EdTech companies would have to offer free coupons to the extent of 25% of the total registrations for their solution through NEAT portal. MHRD would distribute the free coupons for learning to the most socially/economically backward students.

## #3 Doctors issue warning against heartburn drug

- Global public health regulators claim to have taken steps to remove supplies of a popular heartburn medication currently under investigation by U.S. FDA for the presence of human carcinogen called N-Nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA) in Zantac and its generic forms.

### Key highlights

- N-Nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA) is also known as dimethylnitrosamine (DMN).
- It is a semi-volatile organic chemical, produced as by-product of several industrial processes and present at very low levels in certain foodstuffs, especially those cooked, smoked, or cured.
- NDMA is water-soluble, yellow in color, and has little or no taste and odor.

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- It is toxic to the liver and other organs and is a probable human carcinogen. It is also used to create cancer in rats for cancer research.

#### #4 Frequencies at which sounds are disturbing, and how the brain reacts

- In a first, researchers have decoded what happens in our brain when we hear harsh sounds produced by alarms or from human shrieks – an advance that may help us better diagnose mental illnesses like schizophrenia.

##### Key highlights

- Neuroscientists from the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) have identified which frequencies are perceived as rough (distinct from each other) and which are perceived as smooth (forming one continuous and single sound).
- While smooth sounds (above 130 Hz) induce responses in the brain's "classical" auditory system, rough sounds (40-80 Hz) activate a wider network involved in processing aversion and pain.
- The researchers were able to establish that the upper limit of sound roughness is around 130 Hz, while the sounds considered intolerable were mainly between 40 and 80 Hz.
- When sounds are in the smooth range, the conventional auditory system is activated.
- When sounds are perceived as harsh (especially in the 40-80 Hz range), they induce a persistent response that additionally recruits a large number of cortical and sub-cortical regions that are not part of the conventional auditory system. These regions are related to aversion and pain.
- This is the first time that sounds between 40 and 80 Hz have been shown to mobilise these neural networks, although these frequencies have been used for a long time in alarm systems.

#### #5 National Centre for Clean Coal Research

- Union Minister of Science and Technology dedicated an Interdisciplinary Centre for Energy Research (ICER) to the Nation.

##### About:

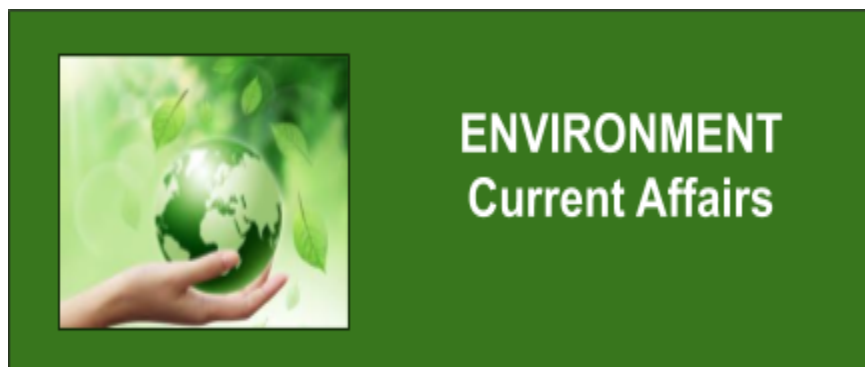
- Interdisciplinary Centre for Energy Research (ICER) is one of the youngest centres at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc)-Bengaluru.
- It is India's first of its kind centre equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for conducting a wide spectrum of energy research by knowledge network of elite researchers.
- It has been conceived to take up socially relevant research in line with national-level missions of the Government of India, which will directly benefit the people of the nation and the world.

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- The Centre hosts faculty members from different departments having diverse engineering and science backgrounds, pursuing cutting-edge research in the broad area of energy

## ENVIRONMENT



### #1 Post Disaster Needs Assessment

- The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) is organizing one day National workshop on Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) here tomorrow on 23rd September 2019.

#### Key highlights

- National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), undertook the study for developing a scientific tool on Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), under the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP).
- The focus of this workshop is to disseminate the outcome documents of the study to all the relevant stakeholders so that the same may be utilized by them as a reference document while preparing the memorandum for submission to the MHA in post disaster phase.
- The workshop will also discuss the issues and challenges faced by States in assessment of damage and loss along with the capacity gap for undertaking such detailed exercise.

### #2 Exercise of rehabilitating deer population begin in Kodikkarai WildLife sanctuary

- A unique exercise of rehabilitating deer population has been started in the Kodikkarai WildLife sanctuary in Tamilnadu.

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- The deer are being brought up from the protected environment in the Sivagangai park.

### Key highlights

- Kodikkarai Wildlife sanctuary is also known as Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary (PCWBS).
- It is a protected area in Tamil Nadu, along the Palk Strait where it meets the Bay of Bengal at Point Calimere (Kodiakkarai) at the tip of Nagapattinam District.
- The sanctuary was created in 1967 for conservation of the near threatened blackbuck antelope, an endemic mammal species of India.

### #3 Vulture culture

- Starting with just a few vultures, the total number of vultures in the Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centres (VCBCs) have increased to more than 700.

#### Background:

- The population of vultures in the country declined sharply from 40 million in the 80s to a few thousand by 2009.
- The major reason behind the vulture population getting nearly wiped out was the drug Diclofenac, found in the carcass of cattle the vultures fed on. The drug, whose veterinary use was banned in 2008, was commonly administered to cattle to treat inflammation.

#### Vulture Conservation And Breeding Centres (VCBC):

- To study the cause of deaths of vultures, a Vulture Care Centre (VCC) was set up at Pinjore, Haryana in 2004. At present there are nine Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centres (VCBC) in India, of which three are directly administered by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).
- The objective of the VCBCs is not only to look after the vultures and breed them in captivity, but also to release them into the wild.
- The total number of vultures in these VCBCs is now more than 700. The three endangered species of vultures bred in the VCBC are the White-backed, Long-billed and Slender-billed vulture.

### #4 TRIFED-GIZ

- On the sidelines of COP 14 of UNCCD, TRIFED and Union Tribal Ministry launched TICD (TRIFED's Initiative to Combat Desertification) under "The 4P1000 Initiative: The Tribal Perspective through Bamboonomics."

#### TICD (TRIFED's Initiative to Combat Desertification):

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- They finalized TRIFED DELHI Declaration on “The 4P1000 Initiative: The Tribal Perspective through Bamboonomics.”
- Under it, TRIFED will integrate its Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojna (PMVDY) with this new global environmental intervention termed as TICD (TRIFED’s Initiative to Combat Desertification).
- TRIFED, by partnering with the German Cooperation (GIZ), will involve the tribal community for rehabilitating the degraded land while supplementing the income of tribal community.
- According to TRIFED, the 4P1000 Initiative with the tribal perspective through Bamboo Nomics is the best answer for combating desertification and rehabilitation of degraded wastelands.

## #5 Two new species of ginger discovered from Nagaland

- Scientists from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) have discovered two new species of Zingiber, commonly referred to as ginger, from Nagaland.

### Zingiber perenense:

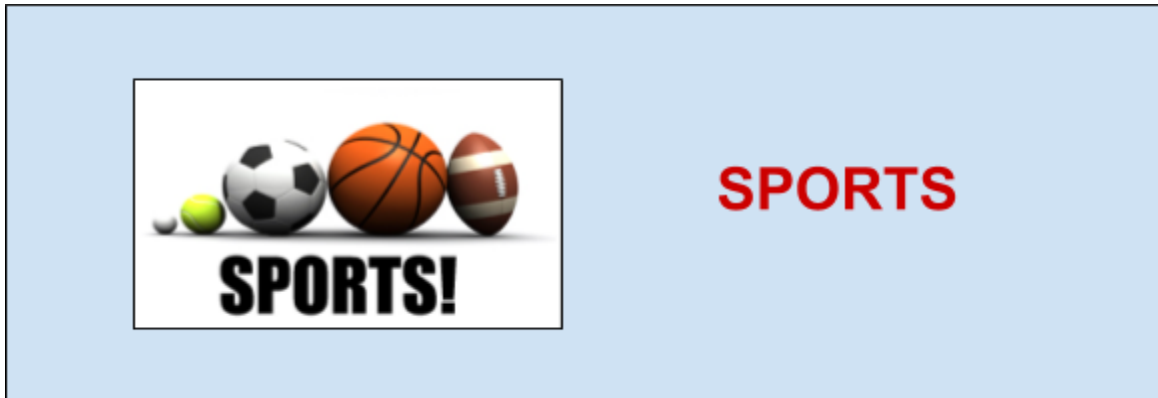
- Zingiber perenense: It has been discovered from the Peren district of Nagaland. In this, the lip of the flower is white with purplish-red streaks throughout, and the pollen is ellipsoidal.
- Zingiber dimapureense: It was found in the Dimapur district of Nagaland. In this, the lip of the flower is white in colour, with dense dark- purplish red blotches.
- Of the two species, Zingiber dimapureense is taller in size, with leafy shoots measuring 90-120 cm high, whereas the leafy shoots of Zingiber perenense reach up to 70 cm in height.

### Do you know?

- The genus Zingiber has 141 species distributed throughout Asia, Australia and the South Pacific, with its centre of diversity in Southeast Asia.
- More than 20 species have been found in northeastern India. Recent discoveries of Zingiber include Hedychium chingmeianum from Nagaland, Caulokaempferia dinabandhuensis from Manipur in 2017, and Zingiber bipinianum from Meghalaya in 201

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# SPORTS



## #1 Laxman Rawat won the World 6Reds title

- Laxman Rawat clinched the International Billiards and Snooker Federation (IBSF) World 6Reds title in Mandalay, Myanmar. He defeated Pakistan's Muhammad Asif and secured 6-5 to clinch the title.
- In the women's final, Indian snooker player Anee Kamaniwas defeated by three-time junior world champion Nutcharat with a score of 2-4.

### International Billiards and Snooker Federation (IBSF):

- The World Billiards and Snooker Council was formed in 1971.
- It was renamed in the year 1973 to the International Billiards and Snooker Federation. IBSF is headquartered in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The President of IBSF is Mubarak Al-Khayarin.

## #2 Shafali Verma became the youngest women player to play T20I for India

- Shafali Verma, 15, became the youngest women player to play Twenty20 International (T20I) for India. She achieved the feat at the age of 15 years and 239 days.
- She played the T20I for the first time against South Africa at Lalbhai Contractor Stadium, Surat. Shafali is also the second youngest to play an international match for the Indian team after Gargi Banerji.
- Previous record: The previous record was held by Sneha Deepthi. Ms. Deepthi had made her debut at the age of 16 years and 204 days against Bangladesh in 2013.
- Shafali Verma: Shafali Verma was born on January 28, 2004, in Rohtak, Haryana.

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- The Right-hand batswoman played for major teams including Haryana Women, Velocity. In September 2019 she was selected in India's Women's Twenty20 International (WT20I) team. On 24 September 2019, She made her WT20I debut for India, against South Africa.

### #3 Lionel Messi won the best FIFA Men's Player award for the first time

- 
- Barcelona striker Lionel Messi won the FIFA 2019 Men's Player of the Year 2019 award for the first time at a ceremony in Milan, Italy. Messi edged out Virgil Van Dijk, who won the UEFA player's award in August 2019.
- He also won the European Golden Shoe after scoring 36 goals, the La Liga title with Barcelona and helped Argentina to bronze at 2019 Copa America. Messi's rival and Juventus forward Ronaldo was also shortlisted for the award.
- He did not attend the ceremony as he was named in FIFA's World 11 best team along with Messi. Both Messi and Van Dijk are now counting on the Ballon d'Or which will be announced on 2 December 2019.
- The Best FIFA Men's Player Award:
- The Best FIFA Men's Player was initiated in the year 2016. The award recognizes excellence in the association football team and individual achievements.
- The first awardee, in 2016, of the award is Cristiano Ronaldo
- In the year 2017, Cristiano Ronaldo won the award
- In the year 2018, Luka Modrić won the award

## MCQ

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**Q1. Consider the following statements :**

- 1) In order to achieve international targets on climate change by minimizing anthropogenic emissions and also to address the ever-growing energy demand of India, development of clean coal technologies to reduce carbon emissions from coal-based power plants has become a prime necessity for India.
- 2) The pathways identified for lowering the carbon footprint of coal-based thermal power plants is by shifting towards high efficiency advanced ultra-supercritical (AUSC) steam power plants as well as supercritical carbon dioxide (s-CO<sub>2</sub>) based Brayton cycle power plants, along with exploration of new combustion and gasification technologies.
- 3) India is the largest importer of coal in the world as per 2018 estimates.

**Which of the above statements are true ?**

- a) 1 & 2 only
- b) 2 & 3 only
- c) 1 & 3 only
- d) all of the above

**Answer - (a)**

**Q2. Indian Railways will undertake one more drive of “MASSIVE SHRAMDAN” with main focus on “COLLECTION OF PLASTIC WASTE”. Which of the following is the possible objectives of the mission ?**

- 1) Enhanced cleanliness, through collection of plastic waste from all railway premises.
- 2) Creating awareness for a greater impact against single use plastic.

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- 3) Educating all in Railways, including vendors to be prepared for ban of single use plastic.  
4) Allowing concession fares to those passengers regularly following railway instructions with respect to plastic use.
- a) 1,2 & 3 only  
b) 2,3 & 4 only  
c) all the above  
d) None of the above

Answer - (a)

**Q3. India's oldest scientific department, the Survey of India (Sol) – historically tasked with mapping the country will for the first time rely on drones to map the country. Which of the following statements regarding the same stands true ?**

- 1) The aim is to map 75% of India's geography about 2.4 million sq km of the 3.2 million sq km within the next two years.  
2) The maps being prepared, according to senior officials associated with the project will be of 1:25000 resolution, meaning 1 cm will represent 250 cm.  
3) A major consequence of the drone-based exercise will be the mapping of settled habitations in villages. Based on the availability of accurate maps, residents will finally be able to get property cards as well as proper legal titles to their lands.
- a) 1 & 2 only  
b) 2 & 3 only  
c) 1 & 3 only  
d) all of the above

Answer - (c)

**Q4. The Semiconductor device is made up of a material that is neither a good conductor nor a good insulator, it is called a semiconductor. Which of the following can be defined as some of the useful advantages of semiconductor diodes ?**

- 1) As semiconductor devices have no filaments, hence no power is needed to heat them to cause the emission of electrons.  
2) Since no heating is required, semiconductor devices are set into operation as soon as the circuit is switched on.  
3) Ordinary semiconductor devices can handle more power as ordinary vacuum tubes can do.

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- 4) In high frequency range, they are good responders.  
5) Semiconductor devices require low voltage operation as compared to vacuum tubes.

- a) 1,2& 3 only  
b) 2,3 & 5 only  
c) 1,2 & 5only  
d) 1,3 & 4 only

Answer - (c)

**Q5. Consider the following statements :**

- 1) Defence sector has been identified as one of the most prominent sectors under Make in India initiative to realize 5 Trillion dollar Economy by 2024.  
2) The government claims that India will achieve 26 Billion dollars Defence Industry by 2050.  
3) A road map has been prepared to promote Artificial Intelligence in national security to make India a significant power in Defence Artificial Intelligence. It has been planned to develop 25 Defence Specific Artificial Intelligence products by 2024.

Which of the above statements are true ?

- a) 1 & 2 only  
b) 2 & 3 only  
c) 1 & 3 only  
d) all of the above

Answer - (c)

**Q6. Genetically modified crops are plants used in agriculture, the DNA of which has been modified using genetic engineering techniques. Which of the following GM crops have been developed in India ?**

- 1) Cotton  
2) Maize  
3) Brinjal  
4) Mustard  
5) Soyabean  
a) 1,2 & 3 only  
b) 2,3 & 4 only

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- c) 1,3 & 4 only
- d) 2,3 & 5 only

**Answer - (c)**

**Q7. The RBI has made it mandatory for banks to link all new floating-rate loans for housing, auto and MSMEs to external benchmark like repo from next month. Which of the following statements regarding the same stands true ?**

- 1) It has often been noticed that lending rates of banks and NBFCs, including housing finance companies, are not responsive to changes in the RBI's policy rate or the repo rate.
  - 2) The main objective behind linking loans to an external benchmark was for faster transmission of monetary policy rates, particularly in a declining interest regime.
  - 3) At present, there anchor rate forNBFCs, similar to banks, that is linked to the lending rate of a particular loan.
- a) 1 & 2 only
  - b) 2 & 3 only
  - c) 1 & 3 only
  - d) all of the above

**Answer - (a)**

**Q8. Consider the following pairs of fruits in India and their corresponding top producer states :**

- 1) Mango : Andhra Pradesh
- 2) Pineapple : West Bengal
- 3) Citrus : Maharashtra
- 4) Banana :Tamilnadu
- 5) Apple : Himachal Pradesh

**Which of the above pairs are correctly matched ?**

- a) 1,2& 3 only
- b) 3,4 & 5 only
- c) 1,2 & 4only
- d) 2,3 & 5 only

**Answer - (c)**

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**Q9. Which of the following statements with respect to the statistics in the newly released “Handbook on Fisheries Statistics - 2018” stands true ?**

- 1) Fisheries sector will play a crucial role in the doubling of farmers’ income, it is a major source of livelihood for over 1.60 Crore people along with double the number in down and upstream.
  - 2) India is currently the world's largest producer of fish. It is also the world's number one in aquaculture production as well as in inland capture fisheries.
  - 3) Andhra Pradesh has recorded the highest production of inland fish whereas Gujarat is the leading state in Marine fish in the country.
- a) 1 & 2 only
  - b) 2 & 3 only
  - c) 1 & 3 only
  - d) all of the above

**Answer - (c)**

**Q10. Which of the following pairs of Indian cities in the decreasing order of their GDP as per census 2011 data are definitely true ?**

- 1) Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai
  - 2) Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru
  - 3) Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad
  - 4) Delhi, Pune , Bengaluru, Mumbai
- a) 1 only
  - b) 2 only
  - c) 3 only
  - d) 4 only

**Answer - (b)**

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## Important Article from various newspapers



### #1 Why India's growth figures are off the mark

**Mains Paper 3: Economy**

**Prelims level: GDP data**

**Mains level: Economic growth projection data highlights**

#### Context

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and financial sector experts continued to predict till October 2008 that the global economy would grow rather than shrink.
- They were way off the mark since the global economy was rapidly slipping into a great recession.

#### Explaining the markdown

#### Is India facing a similar situation at present?

- The economic growth rate (quarterly) has been sliding for the last five quarters from 8% to 7% to 6.6% to 5.8% and now to 5%.

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- Yet, experts have been talking of a 7% annual rate of growth; every quarter when the rate of growth has been announced, they have argued that things have bottomed out and that the rate would rise henceforth.
- The Economic Survey in July talked of a growth rate of 7% for the current year.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its August policy statement, talked of a slowdown to 6.9%, from the 7% predicted in June and 7.2% predicted before that.
- The Asian Development Bank cut its growth forecast from 7.2% to 7% in April 2019.
- Similar is the case with the IMF which cut its forecast for the year from 7.3% to 7%. So, they all talked of a 7% rate of growth when a year earlier it had fallen below that.

#### **How could these agencies be so far off with their estimates?**

- The reason is that they are not independent data gathering agencies and depend on official data.
- So, if official data is erroneous, their projections would also turn out to be incorrect. Clearly, the government is interested in projecting a good image and so discounts bad news and ramps up data.
- The question to ask is, if the economy is growing at 5 or 6%, which is historically a good rate of growth, why is investment rate not rising and consumption in the economy stagnant?
- Where is growth dissipating?
- The alternative explanation is that the rate of growth is much less than 5%; that is why investment rate and consumption are stagnating or declining.
- The investment rate has hovered at around 30% for the last several years because the capacity utilisation in the economy has been around 75%.
- Unless this rises, fresh investment will mean even lower capacity utilisation and lower profitability since capital will be underutilised.
- In June, the stock market was at a record high and yet the investment rate did not rise.
- Data from the Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd. shows that investment proposals are at a 14-year low.
- In the last year, the RBI has cut interest rates four times and by a total of more than 1%; but the investment rate has not budged.

#### **Impact of announcements**

- The government has been in denial but now experts in the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, in NITI Aayog and the RBI have admitted that there is a slowdown.
- The Ministry of Finance has now gone into hyper drive to make major announcements so soon after the full Budget was presented in July.
- This is an admission of there being a slowdown in the economy.
- Unfortunately, none of these announcements will lead to a recovery since they do not address the source of the problem.

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- An hour before the latest data on the economy showing slowdown was to be announced, the government announced the big bank merger.

#### **Was this to divert attention from the data to be released?**

- The bank mergers will have little impact on the immediate problem of the slowing economy.
- It may only further disturb a major chunk of the banking system in the coming year – and that would not be good for a slowing economy.
- The package for the automobile sector or making banks pass on interest rate cuts to businesses, announced a little earlier will also have little impact since the problem did not originate there
- The announcement of a transfer of ₹1.76 lakh crore from the RBI to the government will only cover the shortfall expected in revenue (which is a result of an unduly high projection of revenue growth).
- It will allow the government to maintain the fiscal deficit target at 3.3%. But, this will not provide the needed stimulus.
- For that the fiscal deficit would have to be allowed to rise or there has to be an increase in expenditures on the basis of mobilisation of additional revenues.
- The fiscal deficit today is at about 9% if the States and the public sector units are taken into account. And how much can the government raise is a political decision that has not yet been taken.

#### **The source**

#### **So, where does the problem originate from?**

- It is from the unorganised sector which has been in decline since demonetisation.
- It was further hit by the Goods and Services Tax though it is either exempt from it or there is a simplified provision for this sector.
- This sector producing 45% of the output and employing 94% of the workforce, has been in decline, which is pulling down the rate of growth of the economy.

#### **But, why does it not show up in the growth data?**

- In simple terms, the reason is that the data for this sector is collected once in five years (called reference years) since the sector has tens of millions of units for which data cannot be collected monthly, quarterly or even annually.
- In between the reference years, the data is only projected on various assumptions. The government documents on estimating advance annual estimates and quarterly estimates makes this clear.
- For estimating quarterly growth it uses, “latest estimates of Agricultural Production, Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and performance of key sectors like, Railways, Transport other than Railways, Communication, Banking, Insurance and Government Revenue Expenditure”.
- Except for agriculture, these belong to the organised sector of the economy.

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- Even for the annual estimates, basically data for the organised sector are used – like in the case of mining, banking, hotels and restaurants, and transport.
- For construction, steel, glass, etc are used which are also derived from the organised sector production.
- Thus, the implicit assumption is that the organised sector can be a proxy for the unorganised sector.
- But with the economy suffering three shocks in quick succession over the last three years which adversely impacted the unorganised sector, this assumption does not hold true.
- Most of the experts have implicitly accepted the government’s fallacious argument and have thus fallen behind the curve.

### Way forward

- In brief, the official data only represents the organised sector.
- To incorporate the unorganised sector, data from alternative sources need to be used.
- The decline in the workforce, the rise in the demand for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, etc. suggests that the unorganised sector has declined by at least 10%.
- If this is taken into account, the current rate of growth is much less than 5%.
- If the government does not accept this, then it must reveal the rate of growth of the unorganised sector that it is using in its estimates and which is not based on using the organised sector as a proxy.

## #2 Effort worth emulation: On Rajasthan’s public information portal

**Mains Paper 2: Governance**

**Prelims level: Jan soochna Portal**

**Mains level: Utilisation of Jan Sookhna Portal and its effectiveness**

### Context

- Fourteen years since the implementation of the groundbreaking Right to Information (RTI) Act, which has helped shed light on government works and administration, the launch of the “Jan Sookhna Portal” (public information portal) by the Rajasthan government.
- It marks a milestone in increasing transparency and accountability in governance.

### About the portal

- The portal details various schemes run by 13 government departments the employment guarantee programme, sanitation, public distribution system among others, by not only explaining the schemes but also providing real time information on beneficiaries, authorities in charge, progress, etc.
- The information provided is in-depth, covering the whole gamut from the districts, blocks and panchayats, allowing access to details of schemes implemented at these levels.
- This is a laudable effort by the State government which is worthy of emulation by other States.

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- The RTI Act had dealt with the citizen's right to know about public information and required public authorities to expeditiously provide information on request from the citizenry.
- This aspect of the Act brought a sea change in accountability and has led to the possibility of a well-informed citizenry on the workings of the government.

### Significance of RTI

- While RTI filings have increased exponentially and RTI-activism has become part and parcel of civil society, there have been dilutions in the Act pertaining to the appointments of information commissioners, therefore impinging on their autonomy.
- Besides, the response rate to RTI requests has also slowed down compared to the flurry in the immediate aftermath of the Act's implementation.
- These problems with the RTI law apart, it is important to note that Section 4(2) of the Act, which specifically enjoins upon public authorities to publish information proactively, has not been implemented holistically so far.
- While government departments have successfully taken to e-governance and there has been a rapid release of public information on various government-run websites, this information has often been parcelled, dispersed and difficult to parse.
- Some of the better maintained central websites have also tended to deploy "dashboard" information, which is meant more to showcase data and records rather than release structured information for extensive study and for the knowledge of the citizenry.

### Conclusion

- As a one-shot portal for public information on government programmes, the JSP, therefore, can advance the objective of transparency.
- The challenge would be to ensure that the information flow remains unhampered over time. Besides this, it is important to educate the citizenry about the use of data on the portal.
- While digital connectivity and literacy have increased over time, these have not adequately translated into digital knowledge of public affairs.

## #3 Waiting for reforms: On the economic stimuli

**Mains Paper 3: Economy**

**Prelims level: Not much**

**Mains level: Highlights of the stimulus plan**

**Context**

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- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday presented the third round of stimulus measures to resuscitate the struggling economy, but once again these have largely failed to live up to the initial hype around them.

## Highlights of the stimulus plan

### Previous plan

- The previous two rounds of the stimulus plan, presented at press conferences held by the Minister over the last few weeks, focused primarily on reviving the automobile sector, boosting the confidence of foreign investors who were spooked by the Budget announcements in July, and improving the health of dangerously fragile state-owned banks by doing everything short of privatising them.

### The present one

- This time around the focus has been on helping out the underperforming export and real estate sectors through piecemeal fiscal reforms.
- Among other things, Ms. Sitharaman announced a new tax refund scheme and greater priority sector lending for the export sector to incentivise exports.
- It is expected that the new tax breaks to the exports sector will cause a dent of up to ₹50,000 crore to the government's revenue. Further, external commercial borrowing norms have been eased to make it easier for Indian real estate companies to tap funds from abroad, and funds worth ₹10,000 crore have also been allocated to aid the completion of affordable housing projects.

### Limitations

- With lack of demand and major supply-side bottlenecks being the primary issues facing exports and real estate, it is doubtful whether the present measures will be enough to revive these flailing sectors.
- Overall, cutting across all three stimulus rounds announced till date, the government has been relying almost entirely on providing fiscal relief, in the form of tax cuts coupled with a tiny amount of government spending, to wade through what seems like a structural crisis in the economy.
- Without enacting any major supply-side reforms like land and labour reforms that can raise potential growth, it is also hard to see how greater spending can raise growth for very long.

### Way forward

- This is, however, a far cry from what many expected from a government that promised radical structural reforms when it rose to power in 2014.
- The government may believe that the present slowdown, marked by five consecutive quarters of dropping growth, is merely a cyclical one.

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- But given the size of its victory in two consecutive elections, the government should aim higher by trying to push through long-pending structural reforms that can raise India's growth trajectory to the next level.

## #4 Let the farmer choose

**Mains Paper 3: Economy**

**Prelims level: ZBNF**

**Mains level: ZBNF analysis**

### Context

- Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) has received an endorsement from the NITI Aayog, FM and the PM.

### Challenges with ZBNF

- India's premier academy of agricultural scientists came out against this "unproven technology".
- They say that it brings no incremental gain to either farmers or consumers.
- Since the mid-1960s, India's annual foodgrain output has risen from 80-85 million tonnes (mt) to 280 mt-plus. It has risen from 20 mt to 176 mt for milk and by similar magnitudes in vegetables, fruits, poultry meat, eggs, sugarcane, and cotton.
- A significant part of these increases have come from crossbreeding or improved varieties/hybrids responsive to chemical fertiliser application, and crop protection chemicals to ensure that the resultant genetic yield gains aren't eaten away by insects, fungi or weeds.
- Without IR-8 rice, urea, chlorpyrifos or artificial insemination, the nation would simply not have been able to feed itself.
- The basic idea of "zero budget" itself rests on very shaky scientific foundations. Agriculture can never be zero budget.
- Its propounder claims that nitrogen, the most important nutrient for plant growth, is available "free" from the air. But being in a non-reactive diatomic (N<sub>2</sub>) state, it has to be first "fixed" into a plant-usable form – which is what ammonia or urea is.
- Even maintaining indigenous cows and collecting their dung and urine in microbial, seed treatment and insect pest management solutions – entails labor cost.
- Crop yields cannot go up beyond a point with just cow dung that has only around 3% nitrogen (as against 46%t in urea), 2% phosphorous (46% in di-ammonium phosphate) and 1% potassium (60% in muriate of potash).

### Way ahead

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- Promoting techniques such as conservation tillage, trash mulching, green manuring and vermicomposting.
- Reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and insecticides through integrated nutrient and pest management.
- Eliminating fertiliser subsidies to encourage their judicious use.
- Give farmers a fixed sum of money per acre, which they can use to buy chemical-based inputs or to engage the extra labour necessary for organic agricultural practices.

### Conclusion

- Let the farmer choose between non-organic, organic or even ZBNF.

## #5 No half measures

### Mains Paper 3: Economy

#### Prelims level: TARP

#### Mains level: Issues related public spending and investment

### Context

- The government unveiled measures aimed at reviving the country's troubled housing industry and exports.
- These include a Rs 20,000-crore refund to help the completion of affordable and middle-income housing projects that are Non Performing Assets and are not before the bankruptcy court or the National Company Law Tribunal, and which face last mile funding problems.
- The government will contribute Rs 10,000 crore to this stress fund and other investors will contribute the rest.
- A professional team will manage the fund that is estimated to potentially benefit 3.5 lakh housing units across the country.

### Introducing TARP

- This may seem like the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in the US in which the government provided funds to help avoid foreclosures by home buyers.
- In the absence of details on how many projects would qualify and the selection of such projects, considering that there are hundreds of projects promoted by developers in which thousands of crores of money pumped in by home buyers and banks are stuck, this and the package for the export sector appear to be half measures.
- In the backdrop of sliding exports the data for August shows a decline of 6.05 per cent compared to a year ago.

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- The finance minister announced a new export incentive scheme that will be WTO compliant, full electronic refund of GST to exporters by the end of this month, easier funding and annual mega shopping festivals in four cities by 2020.

### Criticism

- These are not likely to help significantly reverse the trend in the near term given the escalating trade war and the global slowdown.
- Indeed, better infrastructure and a shift to zero rating of exports or levying of zero rate of tax on exports on the lines of countries which have implemented GST, thus easing the compliance burden, and unlocking capital that is locked up could provide a better boost competitiveness of Indian exports.
- Ultimately, countering the slowdown may hinge largely on the government stepping up public spending or investment in stalled projects.
- And at a time when revenue growth is far lower than projected so far this fiscal, it is also important that the GST Council also stand firm in rejecting the growing demand for a cut in GST to arrest the secular decline in auto sales.

### Conclusion

- Fiscal orthodoxy and the spectre of bond vigilantism may deter the government from stepping up public spending.
- But it is interesting that in the face of weakening growth, fiscal rules are being overturned in the West.
- Monetary policymakers in Europe want governments to ramp up public spending to boost growth with the ECB having stepped up its bond buying programme.
- These should provide enough cues for the government here too.

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