Mizoram celebrates 31st anniversary of Mizo peace accord

Janata Dal Leader V.P. Singh offering water to Ms. Lal Blak Diki, widow of former Mizoram chief Minister Lal Denga when she and Mizoram National Front Leaders staged a day long dharna at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on June 30, 1994 to protest against non implementation of Mizo accord. However, three decades after its signing, the accord has largely put an end to the era of violence that once prevailed in the state. | Photo Credit: PTI

The 31st anniversary of the signing of the historic Mizo peace accord between the Union government and the erstwhile underground Mizo National Front (MNF) was celebrated today in Mizoram.

All government offices and educational institutions remained closed as the day was declared a public holiday.

Though no official function was organised by the state government, the opposition MNF organised meetings in different parts of the state.

A press statement issued by the Peace Accord MNF Returnee Association (PAMRA) said that of the 572 MNF cadre who came overground due to the accord, 150 have died till date.

The Mizo Accord was signed on June 30, 1986 ushering in an era of peace after 20 years of violence and disturbance in the state.

Says BJP will campaign against corruption, law and order problems and lack of development work in Himachal Pradesh

The process of holding the requisite Board Meetings and Shareholder Meetings has been completed in phases in September 2017.

Ruben George is staying at Ram Nath Kovind's house at Kalyanpur, near Kanpur

Integration of oil & gas majors is best avoided

In his fourth budget speech, Finance minister Arun Jaitley revisited the idea of an integrated oil and gas sector. The idea first made its appearance during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government in 1998. The proposal was then rejected for encouraging a monopolistic scenario in distribution of essential goods like LPG, petrol, kerosene etc. In 2005, the Krishnamurthy committee formed by the UPA government debunked the idea as it would reduce competition and manpower in the oil and gas sector.

Why, then, did the idea of an integrated oil major surface again in 2017 even after being rejected twice?

Five reasons

Mr. Jaitley stated five major reasons for the same: better capacity to bear higher risks, avail economies of scale, create more shareholder value, make better investment decisions and be more competent globally. From the table, it is apparent that Indian firms are much smaller in size compared with top international oil companies. The Government's track record of consolidating state run firms has not borne good results. The aviation sector suffered a major setback following the merger of Air India and India Airlines in 2007 and has not yet fully recovered. In oil and gas, minimum political interference and liberalisation have proven better in creating more shareholder value compared with integration. ONGC's decision to bail out debt-ridden Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation has been said to be the result of political interference. With oil firms facing such allegations and inefficiencies, giving complete autonomy to one entity can risk the nation's energy security.

Another concern is employment generation. The graph shows that the sector has seen a continuous decline in manpower since FY11. The Krishnamurthy Committee had earlier deduced that such integration will result in manpower reduction. At a time when the government is struggling with job creation, it will be difficult to justify job losses due to restructuring.

The ability of a company to take higher risks depends on the amount of capital it has. The financials of all six major oil PSUs show that they have more than the minimum amount of capital required. Size is also not the only factor that facilitates acquisition of offshore projects. Ireland's Tullow Oil, with a market cap of only $3.62 billion, has expanded in several countries by forming consortia with local oil firms. Therefore, companies should focus on better strategy, techniques and management practices to negate shortcomings of their size. The Indian oil market today has hardly any competition and is dominated by IOCL, HPCL and BPCL. Curbing competition in the past has already adversely affected the aviation and banking sectors.

So, any decision that creates a monopoly in the oil and gas sector must be carefully thought through. An important question here is whether a bigger oil company will help achieve the aims stated by Mr. Jaitley. Or, will it create new problems for the Indian people at large?

(The author is a BJD Member of Parliament and views are personal)

The service is available in Bengaluru, Kolkata and Chennai, operating 500 bicycles

END

ADB, Centre ink pact for road revamp

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley with Takehiko Nakao, President, Asian Development Bank in a meeting at North Block in New Delhi. File Photo. PTI

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India on Monday signed a $220 million loan agreement meant to improve connectivity, transport efficiency, and safety on the State highways of Rajasthan.

"The loan is the first tranche of the $500 million Rajasthan State Highways Investment Program, approved by ADB Board in May this year, that will upgrade about 2,000 km of State highways and major district roads to two-lane or intermediate-lane standards to meet road safety requirements," the government said in a release.

"The first tranche loan will improve about 1,000 km of State highways and major district roads," the release added.

"But for the medium term, we see a very solid track ahead for the Indian economy," Lagarde said to a question on India.

AFSPA may be partially lifted in Assam, parts of Arunachal Pradesh

THE ARMED Forces (Special Powers) Act may soon be partially withdrawn from parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, with the Home Ministry asking the two BJP-ruled states to review the situation in areas under AFSPA and prepare recommendations for the Centre to examine in consultation with the Army, said officials. While the entire state of Assam has been under AFSPA for the last 27 years, three districts of Arunachal bordering Assam and 16 other police station limits in the state are currently under the Act.

Speaking to The Indian Express, a senior Home Ministry official said, "We want people in these states to lead a normal life, considering that the situation in both states have improved. A major insurgent group of the Northeast, United Liberation Front of Assam, is in peace talks with the government while smaller groups have been neutralised. A relook is required to see if the Act can be partially lifted in some areas."

Officials said the notification extending AFSPA in Assam and Arunachal is issued every six months after a review. "Recently, we reduced this duration to three months and will see if it can be withdrawn completely from certain areas. For the time being, the proposal is only for the two states but we are also looking at a similar solution in Manipur," said the official.

Earlier, the BJP had been against the withdrawal of AFSPA, saying that it could help extremists.

In May, the Home Ministry extended AFSPA for three more months in Assam. In the same month, the ministry issued a fresh notification to continue AFSPA in Arunachal for three months, until August 8. The notification stated that the three border districts of Arunachal were being used by militants of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) to escape to Myanmar and that 25 incidents of violence were reported here from September 2016 to February 2017.

The Act is also in force in Nagaland, Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area), parts of Meghalaya bordering Assam, and J&K.

The controversial Act, which has given rise to several allegations of rights violations, empowers the Army and central forces deployed in "disturbed areas" to "shoot to kill" and arrest any suspect without a warrant. It was imposed in Punjab during the militancy before being withdrawn in 1997, and in Tripura from 1997 to 2015.

"The Army is of the view that if state governments require its presence, it will have to be given powers under AFSPA. Once the Army is withdrawn, the states will be required to deploy their own forces. These local forces can be supplemented with central paramilitary, which will work under the Indian Penal Code instead of AFSPA," said another senior official.

The official said that the Army has already been removed from operational roles in some areas of these two states and replaced by the paramilitary.

One of the primary reasons cited by the Centre for imposing AFSPA in Arunachal's Tirap, Changlang and Longding, all bordering Assam, and 16 police station limits was alleged extortion and killing of security forces by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN-K in these areas.

While the NSCN-IM signed a framework agreement with the government, the NSCN-K's capabilities have been depleted after the death of its leader S S Khaplang, said officials.

END

Drug-resistant TB higher among children than expected: report

While detection of tuberculosis (TB) in children remains a challenge, it has now emerged that Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR) TB is higher among children than expected. This has been described as a "worrying trend" by the Union Health Ministry.

As many as 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine cities have been diagnosed with TB. Nine per cent of these paediatric TB cases have been diagnosed to have MDR TB, according to the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) that conducted the tests in collaboration with the Central TB Division under the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP).

FIND initially started a unique initiative for diagnosing paediatric TB in four cities of Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata from April 2014 with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It has now scaled up the project to include additional five cities —Nagpur, Surat, Visakhapatnam, Bengaluru and Guwahati. The project will start in Indore next week. The aim of the project is to provide rapid access to quality TB diagnosis for all presumptive paediatric TB patients in the project intervention areas.

Sunil D Khaparde, Deputy Director General (TB) and Head of the Central TB Division, told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that the RNTCP is committed to providing increasing access to quality TB diagnostics for the paediatric population. In 2016, the proportion of children among new TB patients reported was 6%. Absence of appropriate samples coupled with decentralised capacity to get good samples from children to test for TB remains a challenge in paediatric TB case detection, he said.

Admitting that paediatric MDR-TB cases had not been documented so far, he said children were more prone to primary MDR infection as they were in close contact with their parents and grandparents, who would have been infected.

"A considerable number of the 9% diagnosed to have MDR-TB are primary infections. This is a worrying factor," said Dr. Khaparde, who is also the Project Director of RNTCP.

"FIND's collaboration with RNTCP is to enable rapid linkage to treatment with an overall aim of improving clinical outcomes in this vulnerable (paediatric) population. As of now the project is in nine cities and based on the success we will extend it to other cities," he said.

According to Sanjay Sarin, who heads FIND, India, TB diagnosis in children is complicated due to challenges associated with sample collection and poor sensitivity of tests like the Acid fast bacilli (AFB) smear. FIND, through this project, has collaborated with the Central TB Division to improve access to more sensitive diagnostic tools like the GeneXpert in the paediatric population, he said.

Free test

The project was initially started to assess the feasibility of roll out of GeneXpert MTB/RIF, a cartridge-based test used with an automated molecular diagnostic platform that enables the diagnosis of TB and some drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) in less than two hours.

The focus was on testing various types of paediatric specimens in routine programmatic settings.

According to Debadutta Parija, Medical Officer, FIND, GeneXpert labs have been established within the reference labs of RNTCP in each of the project cities, catering to patients in both the public and private sectors.

GeneXpert MTB/RIF testing was performed free of cost for all presumptive paediatric TB and drug-resistant TB patients (aged under 15 years).

FIND's Project Coordinator (Paediatric) Aakshi Kalra said both sputum and non-sputum specimens are being tested using GeneXpert except stool, urine and blood. This is as per the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations, Dr. Kalra said.

Lifestyle-related risk factors are being cited, compounded by an inadequate number of treatment centres in the region

Without policies to stop the worrying spread of antimicrobial resistance, the mortality rate could be disturbing

China: Beijing's Bhutan gambit: Here's how to contain China

By Abhijit Iyer-Mitra

The recent skirmishes with China near the Bhutan border bring home one thing loud and clear: the danger is clear and present. The question is: how do we defuse this, and what options does India have on the table?

The recent spate of deliberate incursions — and let us be clear about it that these are planned in Beijing — seems to have had multiple triggers and multiple desirables. All Chinese actions invariably are multi-causal.

In conjunction with ongoing provocations by China in the South China Sea, the first message is clearly aimed at the United States to show that China can activate multiple fronts to make Washington's life miserable and bog it down in many theatres of action. More importantly, this also demonstrates that the US's regional allies are security lightweights, and that the benefits they bring are outweighed by the security baggage they lug along.

The second is aimed at India — the message that any closer proximity with the US comes with consequences, and should those consequences escalate militarily, there is very little that the US can realistically do to help India. The third message is also to India — and it has to do with India's furious rejection of the 'One Belt One Road' (Obor) initiative — something President Xi has associated his personal prestige with and the rejection of which he seems to have taken quite personally as well. The final message is to Bhutan. To Bhutanese policymakers, it is to demonstrate the limits of Indian help.

After all, will India risk Gangtok, Itanagar or, for that matter, Delhi, for Thimpu, if push comes to shove? Clearly then, one of the desired tangibles of the latest Chinese action is to co-opt Bhutan into joining Obor and pave the way for formal bilateral relations between the two, reducing, if not jettisoning, India's vice-regency. So what can India do? The response has to be divided in two: the tactical talking down of China, and the strategic containment of China. The tactical involves appeasing China to some degree and assuaging Xi by pursuing the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum for Regional Cooperation vigorously.

This enables Xi to portray this initiative as a subset of Obor for the purposes of the 19th Congress of Communist Party of China later this year, and in so doing 'save face'. India, too, saves face by not joining Obor, while ignoring the domestic messaging in China of BCIM being 'Obor-minus'. The strategic containment borrows from a US Cold War template. The closest point between the US and the Soviet Union was in the Bering Straits, where the two were separated by a mere 90 km. Yet, the US kept the Soviet Union bogged down in Europe, seldom — if at all — paying attention to the straits.

In the Indian iteration, India needs to turn the South China Sea into the Fulda Gap and the Himalayas into the Bering Straits. India's fear has always been 'What if China does the same in the Indian Ocean'? This is where our policymakers have a clear decision to make and cannot afford to dither.

Do we continue to invest in an obsolete Army facing what is literally an uphill battle, and indulge the Navy's power projection fantasies? Or do we focus on the problem at hand, cut the Army, focus on the Air Force, and force our Navy into a sea denial posture in a domain where we enjoy an overwhelming advantage? The path ahead seems quite clear. The question is will Delhi choose it.

(The writer is Senior fellow at the Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies)
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"JIGYASA" - Student-Scientist connect programme launched

Signing of MoU between CSIR & KVS

Student-Scientist connect programme "JIGYASA".

1151 Kendriya Vidyalayas connect with 38 CSIR Laboratories targeting one lakh students and nearly 1000 teachers annually

Jigyasa, a student- scientist connect programme was officially launched in the national capital today. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), has joined hands with Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) to implement this programme. The focus is on connecting school students and scientists so as to extend student's classroom learning with that of a very well planned research laboratory based learning.

Memorandum of Understanding signing ceremony was held in the presence of Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Science & Technology, Earth Sciences, Environment, Forests and Climate Change and Shri Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Human Resource Development.

Addressing the gathering, the Minister for Science & Technology, Dr Harshvardhan said, that the Jigyasa programme was inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a new India and "Scientific Social Responsibility (SSR)" of scientific community and institutions. It is a historic day when two ministries are collaborating on the Youth who are the future of the nation. The day also coincides with the birthday of Shri Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who is an inspirational figure and a role model for all Indians.

Speaking on the occasion, Union Minister of Human Resource Development Shri Prakash Javadekar said that "to inculcate scientific temper among the students we have to make them aware about the impact of science on the society. Science has played a very important role in changing our lives". Thanking Dr Harshvardhan and CSIR, Shri Javadekar further said that access to these premier institutions is only the beginning. CSIR will also talent hunt among the visiting students for furthering the cause of scientific development. The Minister also informed that he will personally review the status periodically.

CSIR has been contributing for several decades for socio-economic development in the country. It has been through development and deployment of knowledge base focused at Technology and Innovation. CSIR has also been playing a key role in human resource development, in particular training of the young researchers through Ph. D. programmes in diverse fields.

The "JIGYASA" would inculcate the culture of inquisitiveness on one hand and scientific temper on the other, amongst the school students and their teachers. The Programme is expected to connect 1151 Kendriya Vidyalayas with 38 National Laboratories of CSIR targeting 100,000 students and nearly 1000 teachers annually.

The program will also enable the students and teachers to practically live the theoretical concepts taught in science by visiting CSIR laboratories and by participating in mini-science projects. The model of engagement includes:

- Student Residential Programmes;
- Scientists as Teachers and Teachers as Scientists;

- Lab specific activities / Onsite Experiments;
- Visits of Scientists to Schools/Outreach Programmes;
- Science and Maths Clubs;
- Popular Lecture Series/ demonstration programme at Schools;
- Student Apprenticeship Programmes;
- Science Exhibitions;
- Projects of National Children's Science Congress;
- Teacher Workshops; and
- Tinkering Laboratories.

"JIGYASA" is one of the major initiative taken up by CSIR at national level, during its Platinum Jubilee Celebration Year. CSIR is widening and deepening its Scientific Social Responsibility further with the programme.

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RDS/AK/RV

Bird flu: India declares itself free from Bird Flu

NEW DELHI: India has declared itself free from [Bird Flu](#) (highly pathogenic [Avian Influenza](#) - H5N1 and H5N8) and notified it to the [World Organisation for Animal Health](#). The move will help it resume export of poultry products to the countries which had banned trade in such items early this year.

India had reported outbreaks of Avian Influenza at various epicentres in Delhi, Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh), Rajpura (Punjab), Hissar (Haryana), Bellary (Karnataka), Allappuzha and Kottayam (Kerala), Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Daman (Daman) and Khordha and Angul in Odisha during October 2016 to February 2017.

"India has declared itself free from Avian Influenza (H5N8 and H5N1) from June 6, 2017 and notified the same to the World Organisation for Animal Health", said the Union agriculture ministry in a statement on Thursday.

The countries which banned Indian poultry products, include [United Arab Emirates](#) (UAE) and Hong Kong.

The ministry said that all the outbreaks of Avian Influenza were notified to the world body and the control and containment operations were carried out as per the action plan on preparedness, control and containment.

"Surveillance was carried out throughout the country and around the areas of the outbreaks since completion of the operation (including culling, disinfection and clean-up). Surveillance in the states showed no evidence of presence of Avian Influenza virus", said the ministry while justifying its action.

The World Organisation for Animal Health is recognised as a reference body by the [World Trade Organization](#). It has 181 countries as its members. This global body keeps tab on animal health issues and advises countries on best practices to be followed during such outbreaks.

This organisation also supports countries to help them control animal diseases that cause livestock losses and pose a risk to public health. Under its norms, ban can be lifted after 90 days of surveillance.

Though many West Asian countries have already lifted the ban to import from India, the remaining ones are expected to open their markets after the latest notification to the world body.

India is, at present, the world's fifth largest egg producer and the 18th largest producer of broilers. In terms of export from India, poultry products recorded 18% growth during the 2015-16 financial year over the same period of 2014-15.

The country had exported over 6,59,304 metric tonne of poultry products worth Rs 768.72 crore during 2015-16. The major importing countries of these products were Oman, USA, Saudi Arabia, Japan, UAE and Germany.

END

GST may dampen gold demand: WGC

Losing sheen: A move to ban cash transactions more than 2,00,000 from April 1 may hurt gold demand in rural areas.

A hike in taxes on gold sales in India could pressure short-term demand from the world's No.2 consumer of the metal, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a report.

Faltering appetite in a country where gold is used in everything from investment to wedding gifts could drag further on global prices, already trading near their lowest level in 7-weeks.

"In the short-term at least, we believe (the tax) may pose challenges for the industry. Small-scale artisans and retailers with varying degrees of tax compliance may struggle to adapt," the WGC said in a report published on Thursday.

As part of a new nationwide sales tax regime that kicked in on July 1, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on gold has jumped to 3% from 1.2% previously.

Smuggled gold

There have been fears the tax increase could stoke under-the-counter buying and drive up appetite for precious metal smuggled into India, where millions of people store chunks of their wealth in bullion and jewellery.

Meanwhile, the WGC also said a government move to ban cash transactions more than 200,000 ($3,090) from April 1 could hurt gold demand in rural areas where farmers often purchase the metal using cash. Two-thirds of gold demand comes from rural areas.

"(The transactions rule's) potential impact isn't entirely clear: it could curb gold purchases; it could encourage gold shoppers to buy smaller amounts of gold spread over more transactions; or it could push a large part of demand underground and encourage a black market in gold," said the WGC.

The group kept its demand estimate for India at 650 to 750 tonnes for 2017, well below average annual demand of 846 tonnes in the past five years.

"But for the medium term, we see a very solid track ahead for the Indian economy," Lagarde said to a question on India.

END

No-detention policy in school may be scrapped from next academic year: Union minister

The no-detention policy might be scrapped from the next academic year as the policy has negatively impacted affected quality of basic education in the country, Union minister of state for human resources development Mahendra Nath Pandey said on Thursday.

"Many states have expressed worry over declining education quality due to the no-detention policy and supported to remove it. Eyeing this, a decision has been made where the Centre approved that the no-detention policy can be uprooted from the next academic year," Pandey told the media at the BJP headquarters in Agartala.

The minister said the state governments will decide if they want to continue with the policy or remove it.

Under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, no child admitted in a school will be held back in any class or expelled till the completion of elementary education covering classes 1 to 8.

"There has been a unanimous decision of withdrawing the no-detention policy from the Right to Education Act 2009," the minister said.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has decided to transform 20 universities of the country into world class ones and the ministry was working in this direction.

During his two-day visit, Pandey visited the Sanskrit Institute and the National Institute of Technology. He also assured to extend support for upgradation of the engineering institute.

Pandey also expressed pleasure over growing popularity of the BJP in the Left-ruled state. "I hope BJP will be the new parivartan (change) in Tripura in the 2018 assembly election," he said.

(With PTI inputs)

END

crop insurance scheme: SC gives government six months to show results of PM's crop insurance scheme

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday gave the central government six months time to demonstrate the gains of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana on the ground level as it observed that a serious issue like this could not be dealt with overnight.

The bench of Chief Justice Jagdish Singh Khehar and Justice D.Y.Chandrachud said: "We are of the view that a serious issue like this can't be dealt with overnight, it will take time to implement it (PMFBY)."

The top court gave six months as Attorney General K.K.Venugopal sought a year's time to see the gains of the scheme.

Urging the court to close the matter, he said: "Why should the court interfere when government is doing all to help the farmers."

He said the scheme that was launched just a year ago has covered 5.3 crore farmers, or 40 per cent of the country's 12 crore farmers and covered 30% of the total crop area in the country.

However, Chief Justice Khehar refused his demand, saying: "We are not going to close the matter."

"Whatever needs to be done has to be done, not on paper. We are not going to close. We are keeping ourself in the loop to know what is going on. You may be doing a good thing."

Pointing out that inability to pay loans was the major cause of farmers suicide in the country, Chief Justice Khehar said: "Inability to pay the loans is the major cause of farmers' suicide. If all of them have been covered, then how can you say that only 40 per cent have been covered?"

At the outset of the hearing, Chief Justice Khehar called for some alternatives to address the farmers woes observing that paying compensation to the famers was no solution.

"Don't worry about the directions, tell us what are you doing (to address the issue of farmers suicide)," the bench said as Attorney General referred to earlier directions issued by the court.

Suggesting an insurance policy with low premium, the bench said that there must be something to soften the impact if a farmer was not able to discharge his loan liabilities.

Asking Venugopal to tell what the government was doing and how it was doing, the bench said: "First you decide what you are taking from the farmers. Rest will be divided between you and the states."

Appreciating the crop insurance policy, senior counsel Colin Gonsalves appearing for the petitioner NGO Citizens Resource and Action and Initiative (CRANTI) said that the Madhya Pradesh and other state governments were not fixing minimum support prices and as a consequence, the farmers were selling their agriculture produces at throw away prices.

Rejecting the government's description of the NGO's suggestions as something in the "in air", he said that they were based on the expert reports including one by noted agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan.

CRANTI is seeking compensation to the families of the debt-ridden farmers who had committed

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END

Minister of Food Processing Industry laid foundation stone for First Maize Based Mega Food Park in Kapurthala, Punjab

Minister of Food Processing Industry laid foundation stone for First Maize Based Mega Food Park in Kapurthala, Punjab

Shri Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Union Minister of Food Processing Industry laid the foundation stone for First Maize based Mega Food Park in Kapurthala, Punjab today. Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, Minister of State for Food Processing was also present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion Shri Harsimrat Kaur Badal said that Maize is an amazing cereal and is an alternate to *Jhona* (paddy) and *Kanak* (wheat). Maize is rich in protein, provides nutritional requirements that India needs and Maize consumes much lesser water and could contain the problem of further water depletion. The Mega Food Park is being developed by Sukhjit Mega Food park & Infra Limited at village Rehana Jattan, Phagwara, District Kapurthala, Punjab. She also said that Kapurthala has been declared as a Dark Zone district where slow desertification is happening because of overexploitation of water due to cash crops. So establishment of this Mega Food Park was not allowed. Since this would be a maize based Mega Food Park which will promote crop diversification and water conservation, Smt Harsimrat Kaur Badal informed that her ministry made special efforts to get this Mega Food Park approved from Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. Establishment of this Mega Food Park will result in the development of this Dark Zone which includes Job opportunities, Environmental Conservation, she added.

Smt Harsimrat Kaur Badal also said that there is an urgent need to turn to Maize and our government would relentlessly work to make Maize as the third viable staple crop of Punjab after Wheat and Rice and growing of maize with enhanced quality of seeds. A Maize based Food Park is like putting an engine to the cart so that cultivation of maize grows leaps and bounds. Highlighting the new flagship scheme "KISAN SAMPADA YOJANA", Minister of Food Processing Industries said that with the aim of making every farmer a Food Processor also, this scheme has been designed where farmers can also set up big or small food processing units and marketing units. She also said that enterprises willing to set up maize based food processing units in Sukhjit Mega Food Park would get loan from NABARD at affordable rates. She also thanked the state government for extending support for the establishment of the Mega Food Park.

Background:

Maize Based Mega Food Park is the first major and serious step in the history of India for containing the desertification problem of Punjab and would make farmers turn to maize cultivation which need less water for more production. Maize is being used by different industries for seed, starch, brewery, food additives, sweeteners etc and it is also a basic raw material to thousands of industrial products like oil, proteins, pharmaceutical, cosmetics, beverages, film, textile, gum, value added foods, paper industries, bio-ethanol etc.

The Mega Food Park will leverage an additional investment of about Rs.250 crores in 25-30 food processing units in the park and generate turnover of Rs.450-500 crores annually. The Park will provide direct and indirect employment to 5,000 persons and benefit about 25,000 farmers.

Set up in an area of 55 acres, the first Maize based Park is being built with an investment of Rs. 123.7 crores with a grant of Rs.50 crores by Union Food Processing Industries Ministry to have Multipurpose Cold Storage of 3, 000 Metric tonnes, Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) and Deep Freezer 1 Metric Tonne/Hour capacity, Sorting and Grading Yard of 2,000 sqm and Food Testing Lab. In addition to that promoter is also set up an Anchor Unit with an investment of Rs.105 crores

for Maize Processing with an installed grinding capacity of 500 Metric Tonnes a day.

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Scheme for IPR Awareness – Creative India; Innovative India

Taking forward the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy 2016, a 'Scheme for IPR Awareness – Creative India; Innovative India' has been launched by Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) under the aegis of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.

The Scheme aims at raising IPR awareness amongst students, youth, authors, artists, budding inventors and professionals to inspire them to create, innovate and protect their creations and inventions across India including Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 cities as well as rural areas in the next 3 years.

The Scheme for IPR Awareness aims to conduct over 4000 IPR awareness workshops/seminars in academic institutions (schools and colleges) and the industry ,including MSMEs and Startups, as also IP training and sensitization programmes for enforcement agencies and the judiciary.

Workshops will cover all vital IP topics including international filing procedures, promotion of Geographical Indications and highlighting the ill effects of piracy and counterfeiting.

The Scheme for IPR Awareness would be implemented through partner organizations to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, for which complete details can be viewed at http://dipp.nic.in/whats-new/scheme-ipr-awareness.

MJPS

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What is Swayam?

President [Pranab Mukherjee](#) launched the Swayam and Swayam Prabha platforms to facilitate imparting education to all. The Swayam program offers digital classrooms with the help of internet and satellite connectivity to the remotest corners in the country. Swayam is essentially a portal which has been formulated as a solution to the problem of difficult access to physical educational infrastructure and teachers along with study material and textbooks. Swayam will provide online study material to students free of cost and the courses will be taught via digital classrooms.

The program of Human Resource Development Ministry spells out as Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM). It offers courses ranging into hundreds and they are those which are taught at school, college and university level. The program will also likely rope in foreign teachers for some courses.

Furthermore, it can easily be integrated into one's formal traditional education. The system allows the transfer of credits that a college student earns from a course directly into their academic records. It also provides courses of vocational nature and also for those who want to study while continuing with their jobs. All courses are free in Swayam and the fee is only for issuing of a certificate.

In the initial phase, courses will be offered by IITs Bombay, Madras, Kanpur, Guwahati, Delhi, IGNOU, University of Delhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, IIM Bangalore, IIM Calcutta, Indian Institute of Science, NCERT etc. The courses offered are from school to post-graduate level.

The broad categories of courses offered are engineering, management, science, arts and recreation, mathematics, languages, general studies, humanities, library sciences, energy, sustainable development, social science etc. The government expects at least 1 crore students to enroll in the initial 2-3 years.

The program also provides certification. If a student wants to get certification for course studies, one needs to register for it and the certification process will be carried out after the completion of the course. The certificate will be provided for a "nominal fee" as per the Swayam website.

The program takes digital education and satellite technology to a new paradigm in the country. Students across the country will be able to make use of the service and any queries that they have will apparently be clarified in real time to maintain a classroom-like environment.

The program will make available quality teachers to pupils and multi-language study material including in regional languages to get them started quickly. The program is of a Massive Open Online Learning format and seeks to provide the best teachers for students across the country with ICT solutions to bridge the gap between urban and rural education.

A total 32 Swayam Prabha DTH channels launched along Swayam portal seek to help students living in remote areas who don't have proper connectivity to IT services.

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22nd WPC 2017 - About

Turkey has won the bid to host the 22nd World Petroleum Congress (WPC) in 2017, widely recognized as the `Olympics` of the oil and gas industry.

"This time – Istanbul!" was the motto for the Turkish delegation as they faced the USA with Houston, Kazakhstan with Astana and Denmark with Copenhagen in the election to host the 22nd World Petroleum Congress in 2017. In a tightly run competition, Istanbul won the right to host the prestigious Congress with 55% of the votes in the third round against its strongest rival Houston with 45%. Turkey participated the Council meeting in Calgary, where the elections were held, with students, experts, Turkish National Committee and the government delegation, including the Deputy Energy Minister of Turkey.

All candidates had been conducting an extensive lobbying campaign from January 2013. They visited many of the 70 WPC member countries in person to promote their bids to host the prestigious event. As the "Olympics" of the oil and gas sector, the Congress attracts large attendances with over 6000 delegates, 500 CEOs, 50 Ministers and around 25,000 visitors for the World Petroleum Exhibition, one of the largest strategic oil and gas expos in the world.

In accordance with the World Petroleum Council regulations and the Memorandum of Understanding, establishing the right of Turkey to host the 22nd World Petroleum Congress and assigning responsibilities for preparation and hosting of the Congress between the World Petroleum Council and the Turkish National Committee, was signed on April, 9th, 2014 in Ankara, Turkey.

Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Turkey, Mr. Taner Yldz, President of World Petroleum Council, Mr. Renato Bertani and Chairman of WPC Turkish National Committee, Mr. Besim iman, WPC Director General, Mr. Pierce Riemer, together with participants from Turkish Petroleum (TP) attended the signature ceremony.

They all presented their pleasure of Turkey's success being selected as the next host country.

Turkey kicked off its promotion for the 2017 Congress at the 21stWPC in Moscow, Russia, 15-19 June 2014; with its stand activities, interviews, speeches and closing ceremony presentations. The Turkish delegation at the 21st WPC consisted of more than 100 delegates, from TP, government, national companies and universities.

At the closing ceremony, the WPC Symbol was handed over from Russia to Turkey after fantastic shows from Russia. The Congress Symbol inauguration by Russia Minister of Energy Alexander Novak to Minister of Energy of Turkey, Mr. Taner Yldz was followed by colorful performances of Turkish folk dance ensemble.

The 22nd World Petroleum Congress will be held in stanbul (Turkey) on 9-13 July, 2017.

During the 3 years period, WPC Turkish National Committee and the Organizing Team will be communicating all National Committees about the progress and the preparations.

Turkey welcomes all industry stakeholders to Istanbul in 2017 to the 22ndWPC!

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122 countries adopt global treaty banning nuclear weapons

A global treaty banning nuclear weapons was adopted at the United Nations on Friday despite opposition from the United States, Britain, France and other nuclear powers that boycotted negotiations.

The treaty was adopted by a vote of 122 in favour with one country — NATO member The Netherlands voting against —while Singapore abstained.

Loud applause and cheers broke out in the UN conference hall following the vote that capped three weeks of negotiations on the text providing for a total ban on developing, stockpiling or threatening to use nuclear weapons.

Nuclear-armed states have dismissed the ban as unrealistic, arguing it will have no impact on reducing the global stockpile of 15,000 atomic weapons.

"Is there anyone that believes that North Korea would agree to a ban on nuclear weapons?" asked US Ambassador Nikki Haley when negotiations began in March. "There is nothing I want more for my family than a world with no nuclear weapons, but we have to be realistic."

But supporters hailed a historic achievement.

"We have managed to sow the first seeds of a world free of nuclear weapons," said Costa Rica's ambassador, Elayne Whyte Gomez, the president of the UN conference that negotiated the treaty.

Led by Austria, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and New Zealand, 141 countries joined in drafting the treaty that they hope will increase pressure on nuclear states to take disarmament more seriously.

None of the nine countries that possess nuclear weapons — the United States, Russia, Britain, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel — took part in the negotiations or the vote.

Even Japan — the only country to have suffered atomic attacks, in 1945 — boycotted the talks as did most NATO countries.

Nuclear powers argue their arsenals serve as a deterrent against a nuclear attack and say they remain committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The decades-old NPT seeks to prevent the spread of atomic weapons but also puts the onus on nuclear states to reduce their stockpiles.

Impatience however is growing among many non-nuclear states over the slow pace of disarmament as are worries that weapons of mass destruction will fall into the wrong hands.

Disarmament campaigners say the treaty will go a long way in increasing the stigma associated with nuclear weapons and will have an impact on public opinion.

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Cattle trade rules: Supreme Court extends stay, new rules likely in August

New Delhi: The Centre on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that a set of amended rules governing trade in livestock and transport of cattle are likely to be notified by the end of August.

Noting this, a bench headed by chief justice J.S. Khehar extended a stay on the Centre's cattle trade rules to all the states until the amended rules are notified. It disposed of a batch of petitions challenging the cattle trade rules.

Additional solicitor general P.S. Narasimha, appearing for the Centre, said that the ministry of environment and forest (MoEF) was seized of the issue and was working towards defining the amended rules.

"The Centre is taking a fresh look and will put in place a better regime to regulate livestock market and animal market, one that will serve the interest of all," Narasimha said.

In May, the Union environment ministry had notified the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules 2017, tightening trade in livestock and transport of cattle to ensure their welfare at animal markets and also prevent smuggling.

The rules banned trading in cattle for slaughter at animal markets. The rules included buffaloes in their definition of cattle, raising concerns that they would jeopardize the buffalo meat export business as the supply chain of spent buffaloes will be disrupted.

The Central rules drew criticism from various quarters, including opposition parties, who argued that they virtually ban the sale of cattle in the country.

This time around, to avoid controversy and ensure a consensus, the Central government is planning a consultation process including a national level meeting of all stakeholders, after which the government would address contentious issues and reframe the rules. Given the sensitive nature of the issue, the effort will be overseen by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

A draft of the proposed amendments to the rules will be put up online for feedback following which the rules will be finalized and notified, said a senior official of the environment ministry, who requested anonymity.

"The ministry is proceeding very carefully as PMO is overseeing each and everything," the official added.

One activist noted that laws on cow slaughter already existed in many states and that concern over the rules put in place had surrounded the inclusion of buffaloes in the definition of cattle.

"But if they drop (only) buffaloes then the rules won't be worth the paper they are printed on. Why waste public time and money," said N.G. Jayasimha, managing director of Humane Society International India, an NGO working on animal rights, and who was one of the members of a panel that drafted the controversial rules.

Twenty four states currently have in place either partial or full restrictions on sale, transport or slaughter of cows. The north-eastern states, and Kerala and West Bengal are exceptions, but the new regulations are likely to affect these states as well.

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Sensor network to map and predict pollution in Godavari

The Ganga may be the focus of the government's river-cleaning efforts, but a group of U.S. researchers is working on a system to map undulating pollution trends in the Godavari, India's second longest river.

Using a mix of methods, including satellite-monitoring, traversing stretches of the river to collect water samples and using special sensors to measure bacterial and chemical pollution, the researchers are trying to develop a cost-effective forecast system.

The team's long-term objective is to be able to inform State officials and citizens of a probable spike in, say, levels of dangerous microbes or effluents, similar to weather and air pollution forecasts. That apart, said Anup Malani, Professor of the University of Chicago Law School, it is to be able to access "raw data" that could be used to inform the efficacy of a proposed faecal sludge treatment plant and whether behavioural interventions — including incentives or punishments — to restrict activities that pollute the river could actually work. "We've had debates with town planners who told us that all the pollution gets washed away… Is that true? We need to find out," Mr. Malani, who is also co-founder of the International Innovation Corps, told *The Hindu*. "That would help us know whether interventions are needed only up-river or along various stretches."

The project started eight months ago and has so far identified two "hotspots" of pollution, which Mr. Malani declined to reveal, saying he would first inform the Andhra Pradesh government about them. The sampling exercise, being done along a portion of the 1,400-km river spanning Rajamundhry (East Godavari district) and Kovvur, Narsapur and Palakol (all in West Godavari), measures parameters such as total dissolved salts, nitrate, pH, temperature, turbidity and electrical conductivity. These are relayed to a website called Thoreau, a wireless sensing network maintained at the University of Chicago to map environmental parameters, for analysis. Some river attributes such as microbial levels require to be measured in laboratories, though the team hopes eventually to be able to use low-cost sensors that measure them, too, in real time.

"Through cloud-based data collection and real-time mapping systems, the research and implementation teams intend to demonstrate the importance and value of detecting and anticipating pollutants that enter the river in the form of human waste, organic materials, and chemical contaminants," the University of Chicago research team said in a statement.

The exercise is part of a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation project to support the programme of the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) to provide city-wide sanitation improvements in urban Andhra Pradesh. Sensors to monitor river pollution are an emerging technological approach in India.

In April, Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology (DST), said 40 proposals to make the sensors (to monitor river and environmental pollution) had come in, and two would be short-listed soon. Intel, which will make the chips powering the devices, and the DST will split a 35-crore investment.

Says BJP will campaign against corruption, law and order problems and lack of development work in Himachal Pradesh

The process of holding the requisite Board Meetings and Shareholder Meetings has been completed in phases in September 2017.

Ruben George is staying at Ram Nath Kovind's house at Kalyanpur, near Kanpur

Cabinet approves SASEC Road Connectivity Investment Program - Tranche 2

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for upgradation and widening of 65 kms of Imphal-Moreh Section of NH-39 in Manipur at a cost of Rs. 1630.29 crores.

Manipur being a landlocked state with almost 90% of the area under difficult terrain presently has only road transport as a means of mass transport system within the state. Hence development of the road infrastructure is of paramount importance to improve connectivity and progress of the State and to ensure that the administrative set up reaches the isolated and remote habitats. The project will improve connectivity between Imphal with the eastern part of the state. Based on the existing and projected traffic requirements the NH-39 will be widened to 4 lane between Lilong village and Wanginj village, while the stretch between Wanginj village to Khongkhang will be upgraded to 2 lane with paved shoulder.

The project is being developed with ADB's loan assistance under the South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Investment Program which aims at upgradation of road infrastructure in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India (BBIN) in order to improve the regional connectivity among BBIN nations. The project corridor is also a part of the Asian Highway No. 01 (AH01) and acts as India's Gateway to the East. Thus trade, commerce and tourism in the region will get a boost.

Background

For fulfilling India's "Look East" Policy and to promote and enhance trade link with South East Asia, the Government of India has notified an Integrated Custom Post (ICP) at Moreh. The development of this project is essential in order to support the increased traffic volume due to coming up of ICP. The workers of Manipur who specialize in creating bamboo and wood based handicraft items and uniquely designed hand woven textile items will get a new market among the Myanmar's customers. Small scale industries such as those making farm implements and tools, stationery, plastic extrusion items, carpentry units, could also develop markets beyond the border.

Besides socio-economic development the project will also lead to reduction in average travel time along the project road by nearly 40%. In addition, the new features of road

safety namely vehicular underpasses, crash barriers, road signs & markings, service roads for segregation of slow and high moving traffic, truck lay-by, bus-bays etc. will help in greatly reducing accidents. Improved highway and lesser travel time will lead to savings in terms of fuel cost.

AKT/VBA

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Minister of Railways Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu launched various Railway initiatives

Minister of Railways Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu launched the following Initiatives:-

1. RAIL CLOUD PROJECT.
2. NIVARAN-Grievance Portal (First IT Application on Rail Cloud).
3. Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE) Scheme and Handing over of 1st CTSE Card.

Minister of State for Railways Shri Rajen Gohain was specially present to grace the occasion. Member Staff, Shri A.K.Mital, other Railway Board Members and senior officials were also present on the occasion. Ministry of Railways has launched the RailCloud project in association with its PSU, RailTel Corporation of India Limited.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of Railways Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu said, "Efforts are being made to bring entire Railway system on Integrated dIGITAL Platform. RailCloud is another step towards Digitization of Railways. Rail Cloud works on popular Cloud Computing system. Most Important works are done through Cloud Computing. Also, this is going to reduce the cost & data may be safely ensured on the servers. Also, another important step is Cashless Treatment Scheme in Emergency. Life Expectancy has increased, so many health problems have evolved. This scheme would improve health care facilities of Railway employees."

Salient Features of the Initiatives Launched:

1.RailCloud

Indian Railway has started a strategic IT initiative, christened IR-OneICT, for enterprise wide digital single platform with an aim to improve customer satisfaction, improve revenue and effective, efficient and safe operations. To achieve the goal of single digital platform for IR a few foundational projects need to be implemented first, establishment of RailCloud is one such project. Cloud Computing is the emerging technology for faster and on demand commensurate deployment of Server resources which result in reduced cost. Accordingly, RailCloud Phase-I has been sanctioned at the cost of Rs. 53.55 Cr under PH-17, DF(3) in FY 17-18. Potential benefits to Railways after implementation of RailCloud are:

Faster and on-demand deployment of application- RailCloud will pave the way for swifter deployment of application (within 24 hrs as compared to conventional time running into weeks and months). At the same time the cloud hardware and environment will be available for rigorous testing of the new applications.

Optimum use of Servers and storage- The technology enables maximising the usage of the available server and storage resulting in accommodation of bigger data and more applications within same server space.

Utilization of existing infrastructure as part of Cloud- The existing resources available with railway will be subsumed in RailCloud thereby ensuring that expenditure is minimized in acquiring new resources.

Rapid scalability and elasticity- Server and storage space will scale up and down as per the demand. This makes the system suitable to meet the higher demand at peak hours with less

expenditure.

IT Security enhancement and Standardization: The cloud shall be equipped with security features as per the latest GOI guidelines, the security features can be updated in one go for all the applications hosted on the cloud, resulting in enhanced security and stability with less expenditure and effort.

Cost reduction: The server and storage infrastructure will be deployed as per the requirement, resulting in substantial savings to railway as expenditure will be incurred as and when required instead of upfront shelling out money on procurement of expensive servers.

Better User Experience: In Cloud, the server resources are constantly scaled up or down as per the no. of users logged on to the system. This ensures a better user experience to the customer.

The Managed Network and Virtual Desktop Interface (VDI) services are also being planned, in near future, for providing faster and more efficient work environment to each rail worker.

2. NIVARAN-Grievance Portal'First IT application on RailCloud

'NIVARAN-Grievance Portal' is the first IT application to be launched on the RailCloud. It is the platform for resolution of service related grievances of serving and former railway employees. The existing application was hosted on a conventional server; it has been made cloud-ready and being migrated as the first cloud application of Indian Railways. It will save significant revenue and at the same time user experience will also improve.

3. Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE)

Railway provides Comprehensive Health Care Facilities to its beneficiaries through in-house health Institutions, supplementing with referrals to recognized hospitals whenever necessary. The beneficiaries include retired employees and their dependent family members. Large no. of retired beneficiaries lives in the newly developed suburbs of various cities. These parts of the city are often far away from the established Railway Health Institutions. In this scenario the RELHS beneficiaries coming to Railway Health Institutions in routine is acceptable, however in emergency situations, precious time (Golden Hour) is lost in travel.

To provide immediate care to its retired employees in 'Golden Hour' Railway Board has decided to roll out a "Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency' (CTSE), in empanelled hospitals, for retired employees and their dependent family members. A web based system of communication between private hospitals and railway authorities has been developed wherein identity of the beneficiary shall be established using biometrics stored in Aadhar (UIDAI) server, eligibility shall be determined using Railway Data Base and emergency shall be verified by Railway Medical Officer based on private hospital's clinical report. The whole system is online and even the bill processing shall be online. This scheme shall provide help and succor to the retired railway employees at the time of need and at the same time will have a morale boosting effect on the serving employees.

The Scheme fulfils both the avowed objectives of the GOI; utilizing IT tools to cut the red-tape and promoting cashless transactions.

Rather than creating a separate time and resource consuming vertical the scheme has used the existing resources by bringing on board the UIDAI and ARPAN database. Railway has not incurred any capital expenditure on the scheme, M/s UTIITSL has developed the software in consultation with Railway and shall be paid on per bill processed basis. The online processing will ensure swifter disposal of bills in a transparent manner.

At present the scheme has been rolled out in four metro cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and

Chennai, based on the experience of this pilot the scheme may be extended to the whole of country.

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AKS/MKV/ENS

India ranks 116 out of 157 nations on SDG index

UNITED NATIONS: India is ranked 116 out of 157 nations on a global index that assesses the performance of countries towards achieving the ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The SDG Index and Dashboards Report produced by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that world leaders need to strengthen their joint efforts to realise the 17 global goals.

"Not only does a rising trend of nationalism and protectionism impede the implementation of the goals, but as the report shows, industrialised countries are not serving as role models," the report added.

It said many of the richest countries in the world are nowhere near achieving the global policy objectives but also deteriorate the implementation process for poorer countries because of negative spillover effects.

India is ranked 116th on the index with a score of 58.1, behind countries such as Nepal, Iran, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and China. Pakistan is ranked 122.

The report said that the countries which are closest to fulfilling the goals are not the biggest economies but comparably small, developed countries.

Sweden leads the list, followed by Denmark and Finland. Among the G7 countries, only Germany and France can be found among the top ten performers. The United States ranks 42nd on the Index, while Russia and China rank 62nd and 71st respectively.

"One of the greatest obstacles to achieving the global goals for high-income countries are poor performances regarding sustainable consumption and production. All countries that score lowest on electronic-waste generation, for example, are high-income countries," it said.

Bertelsmann Stiftung chairman and CEO Aart De Geus said the report's findings show that politicians, businesses and society altogether must urgently intensify their efforts and commit themselves to this agenda.

"SDG Index and Dashboards highlight the need for urgent action on the part of G20 countries in making sustainable development a reality both within and beyond their borders. If the world is to achieve the SDGs, all countries must take up the goals as part of their national development strategies, and ensure that they take responsibility for their impact on the rest of the world," said Jeffrey D Sachs, Director of the SDSN.

The SDG Index and Dashboard collect available data for 157 countries to assess where each country stands in 2017 with regard to achieving the SDGs.

The SDG Index ranks countries based on their performance across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

"Not only does a rising trend of nationalism and protectionism impede the implementation of the goals, but as the report shows, industrialised countries are not serving as role models," the report added.

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EU, India set up fund for investments

Investment boost: The mechanism will help promote European Union's investments in India.

European Union (EU) and India on Friday announced the establishment of an Investment Facilitation Mechanism (IFM) for EU investments in India.

"The mechanism will allow for a close coordination between the European Union and the Government of India with an aim to promote and facilitate EU investment in India," an official statement said.

Ramesh Abhishek, secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (or DIPP -- the nodal body for foreign direct investment policy), said: "The IFM has been established with the key objectives of paving the way for identifying and solving problems faced by EU companies and investors with regard to their operations in India."

He added that the IFM will cover new investors as well as those already established in India. "The IFM is also going to serve as a platform for discussing general suggestions from the point of view of EU companies and investors with regard to ease of doing business in India, which I am sure, would boost and encourage the EU investors to avail the investment opportunities available in India," said Mr Abhishek.

Ease of doing business is a fundamental priority of the Indian Government's Make in India Campaign and the establishment of IFM for facilitating EU investments in India is another step to achieve this goal, he said.

The IFM builds on the Joint Statement of the 13th EU-India Summit held in Brussels in March 2016, where the EU had welcomed India's readiness to establish such a mechanism and leaders from both sides had reaffirmed their shared commitment to oppose protectionism and to work in favour of a fair, transparent and rule-based trade and investment environment, the statement said.

As part of the IFM, the EU Delegation to India and the DIPP will hold regular high level meetings to assess and facilitate "ease of doing business" for EU investors in India. This will include identifying and putting in place solutions to procedural impediments faced by EU companies and investors in establishing or running their operations in India. Invest India, the Indian government's official Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency, will also be part of the IFM. It will create a single-window entry point for EU companies that need assistance for their investments at the central or state level. The DIPP will also facilitate participation of other relevant ministries and authorities on a case-to-case basis.

Tomasz Koslowski, Ambassador of the European Union to India, said, "the establishment of the IFM is a right step in the direction of strengthening the trade and investment ties between the EU and India. The EU is the largest foreign investor in India and this initiative helps ensuring a more robust, effective and predictable business environment for the EU investors."

Trade and Investment are key elements of the EU-India Strategic Partnership launched in 2004. Along with being the first trade partner in goods and services, EU is one of the biggest provider of foreign investment in India, with a stock exceeding $81.52 billion (more than Rs 4.4 lakh crores) as of March 2017, the statement said. There are currently more than 6,000 EU companies present in India, providing direct and indirect employment to over 6 million people.

Such expenditure needs expeditious resolution of stressed loan problem: Crisil

Govt. clears three export infra plans

With deficient infrastructure severely hurting the competitiveness of India's exports, the Centre – for the first time under a new scheme launched in March to address the problem — has given its approval for three proposals including one to establish an Integrated Cargo Terminal (ICT) at the Imphal International Airport.

The other applications that received the green signal from an (Inter-Ministerial) Empowered Committee (EC) chaired by Commerce Secretary Rita Teaotia were: modernisation of infrastructure facility in Karnataka for marine exports – where the total cost is 13.34 crore; and construction of a new 'Standard Design Factory' building at Cochin Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for which a total of 61.63 crore will have to be spent, official sources told *The Hindu*.

The EC on 'Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES)' — in its first ever meeting that was held on June 9 — deferred on technical grounds an application to set up "the first dedicated facility" in India to test medical devices.

This is proposed to be established at the Andhra Pradesh Med Tech Zone in Visakhapatnam – with four separate facilities at a total cost of about 169 crore.

The Indian medical device market was worth about $4 billion in 2015 and exports of these items from India were close to $1 billion (in 2016).

The EC has, however, granted an in-principle nod for a proposal to establish a 'Coastal Cashew Research and Development Foundation' in Karnataka, for which the total cost estimated is 10 crore.

The cost of building the ICT at Imphal is 16.2 crore, of which the share of TIES is 12.96 crore and that of the Airport Authority of India (AAI) is 3.24 crore. The AAI is learnt to have informed the EC that there was no cargo facility at the Imphal airport, and that the proposed ICT "would act as a hub for air cargo movement and air connectivity to South-East Asian countries."

'600 crore allocation'

The TIES, which is being implemented from FY18 till FY20, has a budgetary allocation of 600 crore. The scheme's annual outlay is 200 crore.

According to a March 2016 report on 'Export Infrastructure in India' by the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce, "deficient infrastructure and the manner in which infrastructure is being operated (in India) are the major obstacles to ensure competitiveness in manufacturing of goods and exports thereof."

The report said Indian exports lose competitiveness on account of huge logistics costs. It noted that "the logistic cost in India is about 14% of the GDP whereas in advanced economies like the U.S. and the European Union, it is 8% and 10% of the GDP respectively."

The Standing Committee further said, "Owing to sub-optimal logistic capability, certain sectors dependent on logistics lose as much as 2% on sales return. An ASSOCHAM study conducted a few years ago shows that India runs against a disadvantage of about 11% of its trade due to deficient infrastructure."

According to an ASSOCHAM-Resurgent India joint study, "India can save up to $50 billion if

logistics costs are brought down from 14% to 9% of country's GDP thereby making domestic goods more competitive in global markets." As per the Commerce Ministry, the objective of the TIES is to "enhance export competitiveness by bridging gaps in export infrastructure, creating focused export infrastructure and first-mile and last-mile connectivity."

Such expenditure needs expeditious resolution of stressed loan problem: Crisil

A looming threat - OPINION

About 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine Indian cities have been diagnosed with tuberculosis, 9% of them with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB), highlighting the silent spread of the disease. Though the actual prevalence of MDR-TB among children in India is not known, the results from a limited number of children tested in this sample, under the Revised National TB Control Programme, is worrying. According to a 2015 study, of the over 600 children who had tested positive for TB in four cities, about 10% showed resistance to Rifampicin, a first-line drug. Since the incidence of TB among children is a reflection of the prevalence of the disease in the community at large, the high prevalence of both drug-sensitive TB and drug-resistant TB in children from these nine cities is a grim reminder of the failure of the health-care system to diagnose the disease early enough in adults and start them on treatment. Very often, children who test positive for TB have been in close contact with adults with the disease in the same household. With up to a couple of months' delay in diagnosing the disease being the norm, there is a continuing threat of TB spreading among household contacts and in the larger community. In line with World Health Organisation guidelines, the RNTCP requires all household contacts, particularly children, of a newly diagnosed pulmonary TB patient to be tested and started on treatment if needed. Children below six years of age in the household of a newly diagnosed patient are required to be given the drug Isoniazid as a prophylactic even when they do not have the disease.

A proactive approach to testing helps in early and correct diagnosis of all contacts and in cutting the transmission chain. Unfortunately, as several studies have shown, the RNTCP guidelines on contact screening are heeded mostly in the breach. The results from this limited study should now compel the government to take up contact screening more urgently. In 2010, WHO had revised the dosage of certain TB drugs for children. Fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs that take into account the revised dosages for children were finally made available in late 2015. The FDCs are meant for treating children with drug-susceptible TB and cannot be used to treat children who require second-line drugs or who have MDR-TB. After more than a year's delay, a few months ago India finally introduced FDCs in six States. The remaining States will be covered by the end of this year. Adherence to treatment will improve, and correct dosage for children weighing less than 25 kg will become easier when child-friendly FDCs become available throughout the country. Using the Xpert molecular diagnostic test to screen children with TB is a positive step and should be welcomed, but all the diagnosed children should be guaranteed paediatric FDCs. It would be unethical to deny them this lifeline.

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When Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought up the issue of food wastage on his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme about two months ago, he endorsed a valid point when he asked people not to waste food. Though he raised an extremely critical issue of national importance, he could also have used the occasion to propose some government-led mechanism to handle it.

He was right to an extent when he linked food wastage to people's behaviour. However, there are wastages which happen in any case due to food's perishability and the absence of an effective distribution mechanism and legal framework. Looking at the scale of problems, it is wise to frame a comprehensive strategy by combining the efforts of the government and private sectors and civil society. The government can create a time-bound task force under Niti Aayog, with experts from different sectors, to frame a national policy to tackle this gigantic issue, which can recommend the legal framework to support initiatives to reduce food loss and waste. As a nation, we need to give priority to tackling this issue so that we can handle the social, economic and environmental ill-effects of wastage of food.

One third of food wasted

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), "One third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year." It also states: "Food is lost or wasted throughout the supply chain, from initial agricultural production to final household consumption." The losses, it says, represent "a waste of resources used in production such as land, water, energy and inputs, increasing the green gas emissions in vain".

Food wastage has multiple socio-economic and environmental impacts. In a country like India, not only is food scarce for many poor families, it is a luxury for many others. Though hunger cannot be tackled directly by preventing food wastage, a substantial amount of food that is wasted in our country can feed many hungry people. India ranked 97th among 118 countries in the Global Hunger Index for 2016. About 20 crore people go to bed hungry and 7,000 people die of hunger every day; wastage of food is not less than a social delinquency. According to one estimate, 21 million tonnes of wheat are wasted in India every year. A recent study by the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, revealed that only 10% of food is covered by cold storage facilities in India. This, coupled with poor supply-chain management, results in significant wastage, both at pre- and post-harvest stages, of cereals, pulses, fruits and vegetables.

The wastage of food entails loss of considerable amount of resources in the form of inputs used during production. For example, 25% of fresh water and nearly 300 million barrels of oil used to produce food are ultimately wasted.

The increasing wastage also results in land degradation by about 45%, mainly due to deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, and excessive groundwater extraction. Wastage results in national economic loss. To put a monetary value to the loss in terms of wastage, India loses Rs. 58,000 crore every year, to quote *The CSR Journal* .

The energy spent over wasted food results in 3.3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide production every year. Decay also leads to harmful emission of other gases in the atmosphere; for instance, decaying of rice produces methane. Food waste emissions have a major impact on climate change and result in greater carbon footprint.

Laws to encourage donation

Many countries have legislation providing for global best practices, such as the 1996 Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act in the U.S., which was intended to encourage donation of food and grocery products that meet quality and labelling standards by protecting the donor and the recipient agency against liability, except in the case of gross negligence and/or intentional misconduct. France has taken a lead by becoming the first country in the world to ban supermarkets from destroying unsold food, forcing them instead to donate it to charities or food banks or send it to the farmers to be used as fertilisers in crop production.

In India, there are many civil society, private sector and community initiatives aimed at distributing food among the poor. The government is also committed to securing availability of food grains for two-thirds of the 1.3 billion population, under the National Food Security Act, 2013. While securing food for all or feeding them through such initiatives is important, addressing wastage of food in all forms is equally critical to complete the cycle of food sufficiency and food sustainability. There are initiatives such as India Food Banking Network (IFBN), which is promoting the concept of collaborative consumption with support from the private sector and civil society organisations. Such initiatives, creating networks and channels of distribution between those who have surplus food and those who are in need of them, are necessary.

The government needs to do more and should play a larger facilitating role. The Prime Minister's call to the nation needs to be followed up with further interventions. There is an urgent need to understand the complexity of the problem and then to devise a national-level strategy to combat it so that surplus of food can be turned into an advantage instead of resulting in wastage. Hunger and food wastage are two sides of the coin. The cycle of hunger cannot be broken without channelising the wasted food to help the needy. Without stopping wastage of food, we cannot do justice to millions of hungry people, our economy and the planet.

Sanjay Kumar is the India Country Director of Harvard South Asia Institute. Views are personal

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Govt. panel to study cow derivatives

Harsh Vardhan.

The government has set up a 19-member panel, including three members linked to the RSS and VHP, to carry out what it says will be scientifically validated research on cow derivatives including its urine, and their benefits, according to an inter-departmental circular and members of the panel.

Headed by Science and Technology Minister Harsh Vardhan, the committee will select projects that can help scientifically validate the benefits of panchgavya — the concoction of cow dung, cow urine, milk, curd and ghee — in various spheres such as nutrition, health and agriculture, says the circular accessed by PTI.

Named the National Steering Committee, the panel includes secretaries of the departments of Science and Technology, Biotechnology, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, and scientists from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi.

It also has three members of Vigyan Bharti and Go Vigyan Anusandhan Kendra, outfits affiliated to the RSS and VHP. The government circular says former CSIR Director R.A. Mashelkar, known for vigorously campaigning against U.S. patents on turmeric and basmati rice, is also a member of the panel. The others include IIT-Delhi director Prof. V. Ramgopal Rao and Prof. V.K. Vijay of the IIT's Centre for Rural Development and Technology.

The government has given the project the acronym SVAROP, which stands for Scientific Validation and Research on Panchagavya, and says it is a "national programme" that's being conducted by the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Biotechnology, and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) of the Ministry of Science and Technology in collaboration with IIT-Delhi.

The document also says "this multi-disciplinary programme" will involve participation of other related ministries, government departments, academic institutions, research laboratories, voluntary organisations and others "to carry out research and development and also build capacities, and cover five thematic areas including scientific validation of uniqueness of indigenous cows."

It will cover "scientific validation of 'panchagavya' for medicines and health, scientific validation of 'panchagavya' and its products for agriculture applications, scientific validation of 'panchagavya' for food and nutrition," the circular says.

Vijay Bhatkar, president of the Delhi-based Vigyan Bharti, an RSS-affiliated science body, is the co-chairman of the committee.

Says BJP will campaign against corruption, law and order problems and lack of development work in Himachal Pradesh

The process of holding the requisite Board Meetings and Shareholder Meetings has been completed in phases in September 2017.

Ruben George is staying at Ram Nath Kovind's house at Kalyanpur, near Kanpur

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GM mustard policy: SC gives govt. time

The government on Monday informed the Supreme Court that a policy decision on the commercial release of the Genetically Modified (GM) mustard crop is yet to be finalised.

The Centre said it was poring through the various suggestions on and objections to the commercial rollout of the GM crops.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India J.S. Khehar and Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, granted the government one week to report back on when the policy would be finalised. It said the policy should be good-intentioned and well-informed.

The court had on October 17, 2016, extended the stay on the commercial release of the GM mustard until further orders. It had asked the Centre to collect public opinion before the release.

The government had assured the court that there would be no commercial release of GM seeds till the views of the public were collected and placed before the appraisal committee.

Sowing without safety

The hearing was conducted on the basis of a petition filed by activist Aruna Rodrigues, who had alleged that the government was sowing GM seeds without the relevant tests.

Mustard is one of India's most important winter crops, sown between mid-October and late November.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for Ms. Rodrigues, alleged the government was sowing the seeds in various fields and that the bio-safety dossier, which has to be made public by putting it on the website, had not yet been done.

Says BJP will campaign against corruption, law and order problems and lack of development work in Himachal Pradesh

The process of holding the requisite Board Meetings and Shareholder Meetings has been completed in phases in September 2017.

Ruben George is staying at Ram Nath Kovind's house at Kalyanpur, near Kanpur

Shri J P Nadda launches the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22)

Shri J P Nadda, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare launched the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22) at a function, here today. The Strategic Plan gives year wise elimination targets in various parts of the country depending upon the endemicity of malaria in the next 5 years. Speaking at the launch, Shri Nadda said that the government would like to eliminate malaria by 2027 and urged the states for active cooperation. He further stated that the programme has to be owned by the states. Dr.Jagdish Prasad, DGHS, Shri R.K.Vats, Additional Secretary & Director General and Acting WHO Representative to India Dr. Suchaxaya Prakin were also present at the launch function.

Recalling the launch of the National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) last year, Shri Nadda stated that NFME outlined India's commitment for eliminating malaria by 2030. "Today we are here for the launch of the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22) which gives strategies for working towards the ultimate goal of elimination of malaria by 2030," Shri Nadda elaborated. The Health Minister further said that the National Strategic Plan is for five years and requested the Programme Officers to work with a strategy and follow the operational guidelines laid down in the National Strategic Plan.

The Health Minister further said that encouraging results have been achieved in the North East India and our efforts are now focussed in other states such as Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Shri Nadda further informed that since the past three years focus is on Long Lasting Impregnated Nets (LLINs). "The Ministry has distributed 14 million nets and 25 million nets are to be distributed", Shri Nadda said.

Highlighting the salient features of the NSP, Shri Nadda stated that the strategies involve strengthening malaria surveillance, establishing a mechanism for early detection and prevention of outbreaks of malaria, promoting the prevention of malaria by the use of Long Lasting Impregnated Nets (LLINs), effective indoor residual spray and augmenting the manpower and capacities for effective implementation for the next five years. "Intersectoral coordination is the key, we have to work together with the other Ministries and Municipal Corporations to achieve the desired results, Shri Nadda added.

Dr Suchaxaya Prakin, acting WHO representative to India said that today's development is an important step in the direction of global efforts for elimination of malaria in various countries. She informed that one child dies of malaria every two minutes and the burden is the heaviest in the African region. India has the third highest malaria burden in the world. She stressed on harnessing innovation and research along with monitoring and surveillance, and community participation.

Also present at the event were Sh. Navdeep Rinwa, Joint Secretary, Dr. P. K. Sen, Director, NVBDCP along with the other senior officers of the Ministry and representatives of international development organizations.

MV/SK

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Despite the most stringent penal provisions in the law against manual scavenging, it continues in parts of India. The **recent order of the Madras High Court** asking the Centre and the Tamil Nadu government to ensure the strict enforcement of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, in the wake of the death of 30 people engaged in the activity in the State in recent years, points to the malaise. Evidently, the vigorous national campaign for the rehabilitation of those engaged to manually clean insanitary latrines, and urban structures into which human excreta flows without sewerage, has been unable to break governmental indifference and social prejudice. Manual scavenging persists mainly because of the continued presence of insanitary latrines, of which there are about 2.6 million that require cleaning by hand, according to the activist organisation, Safai Karmachari Andolan. In spite of a legal obligation to do so, State governments are not keen to demolish and rebuild old facilities lacking sanitation, or conduct a full census of both the latrines and the people engaged in clearing such waste. The Central government, which directly runs the self-employment scheme for the rehabilitation of these workers, has reduced funds from 448 crore in the 2014-15 budget to 5 crore this year. High allocation in the past has not meant substantial or effective utilisation. This is incongruous, as sanitation is high on the agenda of the NDA government, and the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's favourite programmes, to which the public was contributing a cess.

The ugly truths of manual scavenging

A determined approach to end the scourge requires a campaign against social prejudice that impedes solutions in two ways. Many communities still regard the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as ritual and physical pollution of the house, and even the less conservative are ready to accept only large, expensive and unscientific structures much bigger than those recommended by the WHO. More pernicious is the entrenched belief in the caste system, that assumes Dalits will readily perform the stigmatised task of emptying latrines. Clearly, the law on punishment exists only on paper. Change now depends on the willingness of the courts to fix responsibility on State governments, and order an accurate survey of the practice especially in those States that claim to have no insanitary latrines or manual scavenging. Raising the confidence level among those engaged in manual cleaning is vital; even official data show their reluctance to take up self-employment. Empowerment holds the key to change, but that would depend on breaking caste barriers through education and economic uplift. Compensation sanctioned for the families of those who died in the course of the humiliating and hazardous work should be paid immediately; only a fraction of those with verified claims have received it.

An earlier version of this editorial had stated that a cess is being levied for the Swach Bharat Abhiyan. The cess is not being levied anymore. The error is regretted.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

BharatNet deadline pushed to March 2019

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the second phase of the BharatNet project that forms the backbone for the government's Digital India initiative, according to an official aware of the development.

However, the deadline for the delay-marred project had been pushed to March 2019, the official said.The project seeks to bring high speed broadband to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats (GPs) through optical fibre.

Phase I

The Centre was still working on completing the first phase of the project for which the deadline was March 2017. It had been able to lay optical fibre in nearly one-lakh GPs, however, only about 22,000 GPs have been provided Internet connectivity due to equipment procurement issues.

The second phase aims at covering the remaining 1.50 lakh GPS. "The Cabinet has approved a modified implementation strategy of BharatNet project for providing broadband connectivity to all GPs by March 2019," the official said. The official said the approval entails a total estimated expenditure of 42,068 crore for the implementation of project bankrolled from the Universal Service Obligation Fund.

"Out of this amount, 11,148 crore is the cost of providing connectivity to 1 lakh GPs in Phase-1 and 18,792 crore is for providing connectivity to remaining 1.5 lakh GPs in Phase-II," the official said, adding that balance amount is for activities such as last mile connectivity architecture, operation and maintenance, and replacement of BSNL's poor quality fibre.

The BharatNet project, earlier National Optical Fibre Network or NOFN, seeks to bring high-speed broadband to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through optical fibre. It was approved by Cabinet in 2011 and deadline was fixed by end of 2013 then deferred to September 2015 by UPA Government. The Narendra Modi-led government re-examined project status and set target to complete roll out by end of 2016. This was later delayed to December 2018.

Such expenditure needs expeditious resolution of stressed loan problem: Crisil

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Think beyond loan waivers

Valuing the produce: A farmer carrying his harvested paddy on a buffalo cart in Mayong village in Morigaon district, Assam.

Indian agriculture is characterised by low scale and low productivity. About 85% of the operational landholdings in the country are below 5 acres and 67% farm households survive on an average landholding of one acre. More than half of the area under cultivation does not have access to irrigation. Agriculture income generated at average size of landholding is not adequate to meet farmers' needs.

The problem is exacerbated by weather and market risks. According to the latest National Sample Survey on Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households (NSS-SAS), 13.9% farm households experienced negative return from crop production during 2012-13. Non-farm income comprised 40% of the income of farm households, but access to non-farm sources of income is highly skewed as about 40% of farm households reported zero income from such sources.

Modern agriculture requires investment in farm machinery and use of purchased inputs like seed, fertiliser, agri-chemicals, diesel and hired labour. Most often, savings generated from unremunerative crop enterprise are inadequate for such investments. Rising expenses on health, education, social ceremonies and non-food items put additional financial demand on farm families. Consequently, majority of the farmers have to take loans from institutional or non-institutional sources or both. The share of institutional loans disbursed during a year to agriculture and allied sectors has risen from 8.9% of the value of output in 2000-01 to 31.4% in 2015-16.

The lowdown on farm loan waivers

The amount of short-term institutional loans for agriculture exceeds the total cost of inputs including hired labour at an all-India level and in many States. This indicates that a part of crop loans is likely spent on non-agricultural purposes. A more worrisome fact out of NSS surveys on Investment and Debt (NSS-I&D) is that the loans taken by cultivators from non-institutional sources, which involve high interest rate, is rising faster than from institutional sources. These indicators point to a worrying development — much of the growth in household demand in rural India has been debt-ridden and not supported by growth in income.

Recently a few States like [Uttar Pradesh](), [Maharashtra](), [Punjab]() and [Karnataka]() have responded to farm distress by rolling out farm loan waiver schemes as a measure of immediate relief to those farmers who qualify certain criteria. The demand for such measures is spreading to other States too.

The ultimate goal of farm loan waiver is to lessen the debt burden of distressed and vulnerable farmers and help them qualify for fresh loans. The success of the loan waiver lies on the extent to which the benefits reach the needy farmers. Loan waivers suffer from several drawbacks in this respect. First, it covers only a tiny fraction of farmers. According to 2012-13 NSS-SAS, 48% of the agricultural households did not have any outstanding loan.

Further, out of the indebted agricultural households, about 39% borrowed only from non-institutional sources. The farmers investing from their own savings and those borrowing from non-institutional sources are equally vulnerable to weather and market risks. But all such households are outside the purview of loan waiver.

Farm loan waiver may dent State finances, risk slippage: Fitch Ratings

Second, it provides only a partial relief to the indebted farmers as about half of the institutional borrowing of a cultivator is for non-farm purposes. Third, in many cases, one household has multiple loans either from different sources or in the name of different family members, which entitles it to multiple loan waiving. Fourth, loan waiving excludes agricultural labourers who are even weaker than cultivators in bearing the consequences of economic distress. Fifth, it severely erodes the credit culture, with dire long-run consequences to the banking business. Sixth, the scheme is prone to serious exclusion and inclusion errors, as evidenced by the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) findings in the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008.

According to the CAG report, 13.46% of the accounts which were actually eligible for the benefits under the scheme were not considered by the lending institutes while preparing the list of eligible farmers. On the other hand, in 8.5% of the cases, the beneficiaries were not eligible for either debt waiver or debt relief but were granted the benefits. Further, 34.28% of the beneficiaries were not issued debt relief certificates which would have entitled them to fresh loans. Beside these errors in implementation, the loan waiver as a concept excludes most of the farm households in dire need of relief and includes some who do not deserve such relief on economic grounds.

Apart from above drawbacks, such schemes have serious implications for other developmental expenditure, having a much larger multiplier effect on the economy. For instance, loan waiver may cost Uttar Pradesh at least 36,000 crore, which is 4.4 times the State's capital expenditure of 8,191 crore (Budget estimate) in agriculture, including irrigation and flood management, in 2016-17. A similar amount spent on improvement of agriculture infrastructure and other developmental activities would create a base for future growth and development of the sector.

It appears that loan waiving can provide a short-term relief to a limited section of farmers; it has a meagre chance of bringing farmers out of the vicious cycle of indebtedness. There is no concrete evidence on reduction in agrarian distress following the first spell of all-India farm loan waiver in 2008. In the longer run, strengthening the repayment capacity of the farmers by improving and stabilising their income is the only way to keep them out of distress.

For providing immediate relief to the needy farmers, a more inclusive alternative approach is to identify the vulnerable farmers' based on certain criteria and give an equal amount as financial relief to the vulnerable and distressed families. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh 23.2% (41.87 lakh) agricultural households (180.49 lakh) are estimated to have income below poverty line. With 36,000 crore, each of these households can be given 85,980. This looks to be a more inclusive approach and provides farmers flexibility to spend this money.

In our view, the sustainable solution to indebtedness and agrarian distress is to raise income from agricultural activities and enhance access to non-farm sources of income. The low scale of farms necessitates that some cultivators move from agriculture to non-farm jobs. Improved technology, expansion of irrigation coverage, and crop diversification towards high-value crops are appropriate measures for raising productivity and farmers' income. All these require more public funding and support and there is a danger of these getting adversely affected by resources diverted towards loan waiver. Another major source of increase in farmers' income is remunerative prices for farm produce. This requires removal of old regulations and restrictions on agriculture to enable creation of a liberalised environment for investment, trading and marketing. Agrarian distress and farmers' income will be addressed much better if States undertake and sincerely implement long-pending reforms in the agriculture sector with urgency.

Ramesh Chand is Member and S.K. Srivastava an Agricultural Economist with the NITI Aayog. Views expressed are personal

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

FM to formally launch Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY) tomorrow; PMVVY is a Pension Scheme announced by the Government of India exclusively for the senior citizens available from 4th May, 2017 to 3rd May, 2018; The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation of India

The Union Minister for Finance, Defence and Corporate Affairs will formally launch the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY) tomorrow in the national capital. PMVVY is a Pension Scheme announced by the Government of India exclusivelyfor the senior citizens aged 60 years and above which is available from 4th May, 2017 to 3rd May, 2018. The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India which has been given the sole privilege to operate this Scheme.

Following are the major benefits under the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY):

- Scheme provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.
- Pension is payable at the end of each period, during the policy term of 10 years, as per the frequency of monthly/ quarterly/ half-yearly/ yearly as chosen by the pensioner at the time of purchase.
- The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase price along with final pension installment shall be payable.
- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years (to meet the liquidity needs). Loan interest shall be recovered from the pension installments and loan to be recovered from claim proceeds.
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/ terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.
- On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.
- Minimum / Maximum Purchase Price and Pension Amount:

Mode of Pension	Minimum Purchase Price	Maximum Purchase Price	Minimum Pension amount	Maximum Pension amount
Yearly	Rs. 1,44,578/-	Rs. 7,22,892/-	Rs. 12,000/-	Rs. 60,000/-
Half-yearly	Rs. 1,47,601/-	Rs. 7,38,007/-	Rs. 6,000/-	Rs. 30,000/-
Quarterly	Rs. 1,49,068/-	Rs. 7,45,342/-	Rs. 3,000/-	Rs. 15,000/-
Monthly	Rs. 1,50,000/-	Rs. 7,50,000/-	Rs. 1,000/-	Rs. 5,000/-

- The ceiling of maximum pension is for a family as a whole, the family will comprise of pensioner, his/her spouse and dependants.
- The shortfall owing to the difference between the interest guaranteed and the actual interest

earned and the expenses relating to administration shall be subsidized by the Government of India and reimbursed to the Corporation.

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DSM/SBS/KA

Cabinet approves revision of Indian Community Welfare Fund guidelines

Cabinet approves revision of Indian Community Welfare Fund guidelines

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved revision of the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) guidelines.

ICWF, set up in 2009, is aimed at assisting Overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency in the most deserving cases on a means tested basis. The revised guidelines being made broad-based seek to expand the scope of welfare measures that can be extended through the Fund. The guidelines would cover three key areas namely Assisting Overseas Indian nationals in distress situations, Community Welfare activities and Improvement in Consular services. They are expected to provide Indian Missions and Posts abroad greater flexibility in swiftly addressing to requests for assistance by Overseas Indian nationals.

Apart from assisting Indian nationals in distress abroad, ICWF has been a critical support in emergency evacuation of Indian nationals in conflict zones in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, South Sudan and other challenging situations like assistance extended to undocumented Indian workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the Nitaqat drive in 2013 and the ongoing Amnesty drive in 2017.

The scale and speed of these evacuations and assistance rendered through the Fund has been universally appreciated. It has also created a sense of confidence among the migrant workers going overseas about the support they can expect from India during critical times.

ICWF stands extended to all Indian Missions and Posts abroad and is primarily funded by levying service charge on various consular services rendered by Indian Missions and Posts abroad.

AKT/VBA/SH

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Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana (AGEY)

The Government of India has decided to launch a new sub-scheme named "Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana (AGEY)" as part of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM). The Self Help Groups under DAY-NRLM will operate road transport service in backward areas. This will help to provide safe, affordable and community monitored rural transport services to connect remote villages with key services and amenities (such as access to markets, education and health) for the overall economic development of backward rural areas. This will also provide an additional avenue of livelihood for SHGs. The basic outline of AGEY was discussed in a meeting of State Transport Ministers of 13 States held in June 2016 at Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh and all the Transport Ministers had expressed their appreciation of this initiative.

The Community Investment Fund (CIF) provided to Community Based Organization (CBOs) under DAY-NRLM will be utilized to support the SHG members in this new livelihoods initiative. The beneficiary SHG member will be provided an interest free loan by the CBO from its Community Investment Fund upto Rs.6.50 lakh for purchase of the vehicle. Alternative, CBO will own the vehicle and lease it to an SHG member to operate the vehicle and pay lease rental to the CBO

AGEY will be initially implemented in 250 Blocks in the country on pilot basis with each Block provided upto 6 vehicles to operate the transport services. During the current year implementation of the scheme has been so far approved for 52 Blocks in 8 States namely Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttarakhand and West Bengal with a total provision of Rs.16.06 Crore of which the Government of India share would be Rs.10.16 Crore. The balance funding would be provided by the respective States.

The Blocks will be selected by States from among the Blocks where NRLM is being implemented intensively and where mature CBOs are already functioning. Backwardness, lack of transportation links and sustainability of service would be the guiding factors in the selection of Blocks and routes.

The State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) will do a feasibility study and traffic survey

in the selected blocks to identity the routes and the number and capacity of vehicles which can be operated on sustainable basis. The study will be conducted by technically sound organizations with expertise in transport network planning. The choice of vehicle could be either e-riksha, 3 wheeler or 4 wheeler within a cost ceiling of Rs.6.50 lakh.

The SRLMs will be co-ordinating with State Transport Department for issue of permit for the vehicle. The SHG member operating the vehicle shall ensure that all necessary legal and statutory requirement such as valid permit, road tax permit, valid insurance policy etc. are met.

The SHG member shall run the vehicle on approved routes at pre-determined frequency as jointly agreed between the CBO and the SHG operator based on financial viability and the need for transport link.

All vehicles under the scheme shall have a defined colour code and carry AGEY branding to ensure their identity and avoid diversion to other routes.

The State Rural Livelihood Mission will arrange capacity building for their staff at State, District and Block levels for operating the Scheme. The members of the CBO and the beneficiary SHG member shall also be provided adequate training in the Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs) and other partner organizations.

SNC

END

Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi launches Scheme Implementation Guidelines of Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana

Norms for pre-school education developed by the Government for the first time: WCD Minister

The Minister of Women & Child Development, Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi released the Guidelines of Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana in New Delhi today. The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi had announced the pan-India implementation of this scheme w.e.f. 01st January, 2017. PMMVY is implemented by the Ministry of Women & Child Development in collaboration with State Governments.

Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi also released an important training module for anganwadi workers called Early Childhood Care and Education Training Module. The training module is designed to provide the anganwadi workers a basic understanding of the ECCE curriculum and pedagogical approaches to ensure optimal and holistic development of young children so that they are ready to start formal schooling at the age of six years. It also includes a component on psycho social development of children below the age of three years, to help anganwadi workers counsel parents/caregivers on early stimulation.

Another important module i.e. ICDS Training module and e-training module were also released by WCD Minister today. This module aims to improve the service delivery mechanism of ICDS Programme and to accelerate better programme outcomes.

Speaking on the occasion, Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi said that ECCE training module is a landmark achievement since the government has for the first time ever prepared norms for anganwadi workers to impart pre-school education. Since pre-school education lays the foundation of a child for the future, it is very important to have norms under which anganwadi workers are able to plan and conduct appropriate ECE activities for 3-6 year old children. She urged the State Governments to complete the training of anganwadi workers for ECCE within a year so that the new norms can be implemented at the earliest possible. Smt Maneka Gandhi also asked the States to print advertisements about Childline (1098), POCSO e-box and healthy eating habits at the back of exercise books and text books of all school children.

The Minister of State for Women & Child Development, Smt Krishna Raj said that the pan-India expansion of PMMVY will benefit women across the country.

Secretary WCD, Shri Rakesh Srivastav assured that since the guidelines of PMMVY have now been issued, funds under the scheme will be transferred to the States very soon. He expressed gratitude to UNICEF and Ambedkar University for assisting in developing the booklets.

Some of the other booklets which were issued today included Activity Books for Children of 3-6 years, Child Assessment Card and Recommended List for Play and Learning Material. The Common Application Software for PMMVY and software user manual for PMMVY-CAS were also launched on the occasion. To maintain transparency and timely disbursal of benefits, the PMMVY Scheme will be run through PMMVY-CAS Software.

Secretaries of State WCD Departments attended today's function through video conferencing. Representatives of UNICEF and senior officers of the WCD Ministry wre also present on the occasion.

NB/UD

END

Government mulls insurance cover for digital transaction frauds

NEW DELHI: The government is "very seriously" considering the recommendations of the Chandrababu Naidu committee on digital payment security, including insurance cover for the victims of fraudulent digital transactions, a union minister said on Friday.

In response to a question by [Samajwadi Party](#) MP Naresh Agrawal, Union Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told the Rajya Sabha that the number of digital transactions in the country was rising and hence the concern for their security.

"The government is very seriously considering the recommendations made by the Chandrababu Naidu committee. And I am in principle for it (idea of insurance)," Prasad said.

The Committee of Chief Ministers on Digital Payment, chaired by Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh [N. Chandrababu Naidu](#), has in its interim report suggested several measures for digital payment security, including an insurance scheme to cover losses incurred in digital transactions on account of fraud, etc.

The report suggests that in order to address the apprehension of the general public in adopting digital payments, the scheme should target low-ticket transactions to cover the vulnerable sections like small merchants, farmers etc.

Prasad said the number of fraudulent digital transactions in comparison to the total number of digital transactions was negligible and the government was taking steps to curb those frauds.

"Around 1,200 crore digital transactions take place annually in the country. Of these, between 0.005 per cent and 0.007 per cent are fraudulent transactions," he said.

As per data presented by the minister before the House, the number of cases of frauds involving [credit cards](#), ATM/debit cards and Internet banking during 2015-16 was 16,468 and in 2016-17 it was 13,653.

He said that for prepaid payment instruments, including [e-wallets](#), the [Reserve Bank of India](#) (RBI) has started maintaining provisional data of fraudulent transactions.

According to the data for March, April and May 2017, the number of fraudulent transactions is between 0.005 per cent and 0.007 per cent of the total number of transactions.

"As per incidents reported to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), 40 phishing incidents affecting 19 financial organisations and 10 incidents affecting ATMs, Point of Sale (POS) systems and [Unified Payment Interface](#) (UPI) have been reported during November 2016 to June 2017," Prasad said.

"As part of promotion of digital payments, the government is taking several steps to ensure that frauds are minimised and even when an incident of this nature takes place, corrective action is immediately taken," he added.

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END

India performs miserably in war on inequality

NEW DELHI: India has been ranked 132 out of 152 countries in an index that rates countries by their commitment to reducing inequality. The first report edition of the index, released recently, showed that OECD countries headed by Sweden ranked the highest while Nigeria was at the bottom. The US had the highest level of inequality among developed countries, though it is the wealthiest country in history.

Ironically, Bhutan, known for coining the term 'Gross National Happiness', is ranked even lower than India at 143. Of India's immediate neighbours, all but Nepal (81) and China (87) ranked between 138 and 150. Given that this region is home to the largest chunk of poor people in the world, that's worrying news.

The index and the inequality report were put together by the international NGO Oxfam and Development Finance International to measure the efforts of governments that had pledged to reduce inequality as part of the sustainable development goals. The index mainly focused on redistributive actions governments can take, rather than those that would prevent rising inequality in the first place.

"A recent study of 13 developing countries that had reduced their overall inequality level found that 69% of the reduction... was because of public services," stated the report. It added that progressive taxation, where corporations and the richest individuals are taxed more in order to redistribute resources and ensure the funding of public services, is a key tool for governments committed to reducing inequality.

The report noted that government spending on health, education and social protection was woefully low in India.

The tax structure looks reasonably progressive on paper, but in practice much of the progressive tax is not collected, it added. India fared poorly on labour rights as well as respect for women in the work place. The report said that if India were to reduce its inequality by a third, 170 million people could be raised out of poverty. In contrast, it noted how Namibia had halved the poverty rate from 53% to 23% with very high spending on health and education.

Transfer unclaimed accruals to fund: IRDA

Insurance companies can no longer retain unclaimed amounts of policyholders if those accruals are more than 10 years old. Such sums need to be, instead, transferred to the Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund (SCWF) of the Centre.

"All insurers having unclaimed amounts of policyholders for a period of more than 10 years as on September 30, 2017 need to transfer the same to the SCWF on or before March 1, 2018," insurance regulator IRDAI said.

The direction from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India has come in the backdrop of the amendment made in April to the Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund Rules. The amendment expanded the purview beyond the unclaimed amounts in small savings and other saving schemes of the Centre, PPF and EPF.

It brought in unclaimed amount lying with banks, including cooperative banks and RRBs; dividend accounts, deposits and debentures of companies coming under the Companies Act; insurance companies and Coal Mines PF.

Minister of State for Finance Santosh Kumar Gangwar had informed the Lok Sabha that unclaimed deposits as on March 31, 2016, with insurers (life and non-life) totalled 11,725.45 crore, rising sharply from the 7,227.23 crore in the previous year.

Details as to how much of the unclaimed amounts was more than ten years were not immediately available. Unclaimed amounts include sum payable as death claim, maturity claim, survival benefit, premium due for refund and indemnity claims.

Such expenditure needs expeditious resolution of stressed loan problem: Crisil

END

Policy boosts care for blood disorders

People living with Thalassaemia, sickle cell anaemia and other variant haemoglobins can now look forward to better screening and treatment, based on the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry's new policy.

The Ministry recently released a policy on the Prevention and Control of haemoglobinopathies in India.

Supported by the National Health Mission, Blood Cell and the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram, the guidelines provide for screening of pregnant women during antenatal check-up, pre-marital counselling at college level and one-time screening for variant anaemia in children.

The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare) Anupriya Patel stated this in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha on July 18.

Thalassaemia and sickle cell anaemia are the most frequently encountered 'rare blood disorders' in the country and impose a significant economic burden on families. The policy aims at creating treatment protocol benchmarks, to improve the quality of life of patients.

It is also a guide on prevention and control, which includes antenatal and prenatal testing to reduce the incidence of live haemoglobin disorder births (currently pegged at 10,000-15,000 live births a year).

Using public health awareness programmes and education, it highlights various haemoglobinopathies. The guidelines include the creation of a national registry to plan future patient services. The registry will also collect useful data, such as the location of patients to identify areas of high concentration, ethnicity or other characteristics, age distribution, records of deaths and their cause.

Shobha Tuli, president of the Federation of Indian Thalassaemics, who contributed to the policy, said it was a big step to prevent haemoglobinopathies.

'Provide all drugs'

"Since not more than 20% of patients can afford treatment, the government should ensure that all patients get it free. Such free treatment is given in States such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha and Karnataka besides Delhi, and others should follow suit. All chelation drugs should be made available free because one drug does not suit all," she said.

The policy, however, makes no reference to carrier testing for relatives of patients.

Namitha A. Kumar from the Centre for Health Ecologies and Technology (CHET), who is also living with Thalassaemia said people with the genetic disorder unknowingly pass it on to their children, as preventive checks are not the norm in India.

"In Pakistan, a law making carrier testing compulsory for relatives of Thalassaemia patients was passed in February. A similar system is in place in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. I wish it could be made compulsory here too," she said.

Cecil Reuben Ross, Head of the Department of Medicine and Haematology in St. John's Medical College Hospital, hailed the policy but said testing had to be voluntary.

"There is more awareness about the condition now, especially after the Indian Council of Medical Research took up screening of 50,000 antenatal mothers and 50,000 college students a few years ago. "Testing cannot be made compulsory and people should opt for it. A concerted effort by people as well as government will help ," Dr. Ross said.

Lifestyle-related risk factors are being cited, compounded by an inadequate number of treatment centres in the region

Without policies to stop the worrying spread of antimicrobial resistance, the mortality rate could be disturbing

END

Not just a question of weeks

On Friday, the Supreme Court of India declined the abortion request of a 10-year-old rape survivor who was reportedly 32 weeks pregnant. Doctors who examined the adolescent opined that an abortion at this stage posed a risk to her life. Under the circumstances, the court could not have done much else. But this decision must be looked at in contrast to the recent landmark decision by the Supreme Court allowing an adult mother to abort her over-20 week foetus. The top court's decision was not the first time that it had made an exception from the existing law. Like always, it relied on a report of a medical board which said that the infant was likely to suffer from a severe mental injury or cardiac problems that would require multiple surgeries. As is evident, leniency is not always extended from the existing legislation.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act stipulates a cap of 20 weeks within which an abortion can be performed. While advising an abortion, medical practitioners are expected to evaluate whether continuing with the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the mother or cause grave injury to her physical and mental health. Alternatively, the decision is based on whether there would be a substantial risk of the child being handicapped by physical or mental abnormalities. Notably, the Act also provides that if any of these medical eventualities is likely to arise, then the mother's actual or foreseeable environment must also be taken into consideration.

The 20-week cap is somewhat arbitrary and has drawn rightful criticism. Foetal impairments often get detected at the ultrasound done between 18 to 22 weeks, when the foetus is said to have "substantially developed". But in a country where a majority of expectant mothers still seek advice from midwives and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), ultrasounds are only done when something "unusual" is suspected. Perhaps taking note of this, the government, in 2016, launched the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan under which doctors at private and government facilities are required to provide free antenatal care on the ninth of every month. While ultrasounds are also covered, some ASHAs report that free ultrasounds are often not offered.

In fact, even before this programme, the government, in 2014, introduced the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill. A step forward, it proposed increasing the abortion ceiling limit from 20 to 24 weeks. It introduced the concept of "substantial foetal abnormalities" — in which case the time period of pregnancy is irrelevant — and widened the scope of who could carry out the abortions by introducing the term "registered health care provider", which included recognised practitioners of Ayurveda, Unani and homoeopathy.

Unfortunately, the Bill is still awaiting approval. The Prime Minister's Office is reported to have returned the proposed amendments and called for stricter implementation of the law. It believes that amendments to the Act are likely to give rise to illegal sex selection and abortion rackets.

In contrast, the World Health Organisation notes: "Legal restrictions on abortion do not result in fewer abortions nor do they result in significant increases in birth rates. Conversely, laws and policies that facilitate access to safe abortion do not increase the rate or number of abortions. The principal effect is to shift previously clandestine, unsafe procedures to legal and safe ones. Restricting legal access to abortion does not decrease the need for abortion, but it is likely to increase the number of women seeking illegal and unsafe abortions, leading to increased morbidity and mortality. Legal restrictions also lead many women to seek services in other countries/states, which is costly, delays access and creates social inequities."

The WHO report also says that "laws and policies on abortion should protect women's health and their human rights. Regulatory, policy and programmatic barriers that hinder access to and timely provision of safe abortion care should be removed." While at present, petitions questioning the

constitutional validity of the Act are pending before the Supreme Court in India, in the past, provisions of the Act have been held to be reasonable restrictions placed on the exercise of reproductive choices. The court has observed that in the case of pregnant women, there is also a "compelling state interest" in protecting the life of the prospective child. Therefore, the termination of a pregnancy is only permitted when the conditions specified are fulfilled.

But from a women's rights perspective, should not a pregnant mother have the right to decide whether to go through full-term when there is even the slightest chance of a foetal infirmity and not "substantial foetal abnormalities"? It is fair to state that no woman who voluntarily chose to get pregnant is likely to seek an abortion unless there are compelling circumstances. Should not the wishes and desires of the person who will be the caretaker be considered?

Abortion the world over is a sensitive topic. Arguments cut both ways. Each country has its own time limit within which the pregnancy may be terminated, but in most cases it's more than 20 weeks. Given the advancements in medical science, a lot of abnormalities can be determined by an ultrasound midway through a pregnancy. Unfortunately, there appear to be no guidelines relating to the conduct of ultrasounds. As a starting point, we need uniformity in medical standards. Simultaneously, the long-pending Bill, which took into account some of the changed circumstances, needs to get passed. It would be helpful alongside to also lay down objective standards to be followed by health-care providers so that every case does not fall in the court's cradle. If the cord isn't cut, we will continue to rely on court-ordered termination of pregnancies, which, most times, is not the desired route for the delivery of justice in abortion cases.

Satvik Varma is a litigation counsel and corporate attorney based in New Delhi

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

Ministry of Health releases Operational Guidelines for Planning and Implementation of Family Participatory Care

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently released Operational Guidelines for Planning and Implementation of Family Participatory Care (FPC) for improving newborn health. The guidelines will serve as a guiding document for those intending to introduce FPC in their facility as an integral part of facility based newborn care. The document also provides details of infrastructure, training, role of health care providers and steps in the operationalization of FPC in the newborn care unit. The operational guidelines of FPC are for all stakeholders involved in the process of planning and delivering newborn care.

The guidelines also addresses various aspects of attitudes, infrastructural modifications and practice that will help in establishing FPC at Special Newborn Care Units (SNCU) such as sensitization of State and District Managers on FPC, prioritization of SNCUs for initiating FPC, making required infrastructural enhancement in SNCU, creating family participatory care environment in SNCU, ensuring availability of supplies for parents-attendants, training of SNCU staff for SNCU, role of healthcare providers for FPC implementation and institutional support for FPC.

Under FPC, the capacities of parents-attendants are built in newborn care through a structured training programme (audio -visual module and a training guide). The staff at newborn care unit will provide continuous supervision and support. Provisions for infrastructure and logistics strengthening required for implementing FPC are ensured in the annual state Program Implementation Plan (PIP). The guidelines will be shared with the States for implementation and it is expected that these guidelines when implemented by States would further improve the quality of care being provided in the SNCUs across the country.

Sick and newborn are highly vulnerable and require careful nurturing in order to survive the neonatal period and first year of life. Under National Health Mission, more than 700 state of the art Special Newborn Care Units (SNCU) have been established across the country to provide 24 X 7 comprehensive care to the newborns by dedicated trained staff.

In the recent years, it is realized that if parents are trained, during the stay of their babies in the hospital, to provide supportive care to their sick and newborns, it will help in not only improving survival of the babies after discharge but will also provide for psycho-social and developmental needs of the newborn. In this regard, Family Participatory Care has emerged as an important concept of health care which provides for partnership between health care staff and families in care of sick newborns admitted in the SNCU.

MV/SK

Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi launches "Jiyo Parsi Publicity Phase-2" in Mumbai

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Minority Affairs & Parliamentary Affairs Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi today said here that the NDA Government has been working with commitment to "inclusive growth" and "Antyodaya" to ensure prosperity, security and dignity of the last person of the society.

Addressing a large number of people from Parsi community and renowned personalities from various fields at the launch of "Jiyo Parsi Publicity Phase-2" at Mumbai, Shri Naqvi said that Parsi community has immense contribution in nation building and Parsi community has been a "role model" for other communities for its culture and traditions. The Parsi community has given so many great people who have been "architects of nation building".

Shri Naqvi said that even though the Parsi community is a very small minority community in India, there is no doubt that the Parsi community is one of the most liberal, aware towards education and an example of "peace and harmony".

Shri Naqvi said that Jamshetji Tata played a crucial role in industrial development of India; Dadabhai Naoroji and Madam Bhikaji Cama played an important role in India's freedom struggle; Homi J Bhabha is "father of Indian nuclear programme. Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw's service to the nation will be remembered always. Be it industry, military service, legal service, architecture or civil services, the Parsi community has always shown its talent.

Shri Naqvi said that declining population of Parsi community in India is a matter of concern. "Jiyo Parsi Publicity Phase-1" was initiated in 2013 for containing the declining trend of population of the Parsi community and reverse it to bring their population above the threshold level.

The main objective of the "Jiyo Parsi" scheme is to reverse the declining trend of Parsi population by adopting a scientific protocol and structured interventions, stabilize their population and increase the population of Parsis in India. Ministry of Minority Affairs' scheme has two components: Medical Assistance and Advocacy/Counselling. The scheme has been successful. 101 babies have been born in Parsi community through "Jiyo Parsi" scheme.

Shri Naqvi said that Parzor Foundation was an important link between the Parsi community and the government in success of "Jiyo Parsi" scheme. And the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai; the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) and Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of India have also played a key role in this regard.

These organisations have been publicising the scheme through outreach programmes like seminars, workshops, publicity, brochures, Parsi journals and other advocacy programmes and awareness campaign.

AK

The HEERA conundrum

The Central Government (CG) plans to dissolve the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) and replace them with a single body, tentatively titled Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency (HEERA). According to statements made by the Human Resource Development Minister, having a single statutory body for higher education will simplify and consolidate the mass of regulations and compliances that currently operate in the sector.

Background

Policy analysts and experts have been advocating replacement of AICTE and UGC with a more efficient regime for a long time. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC), which was constituted in 2005 under the chairmanship of Sam Pitroda to recommend reforms in the education sector, found that there was a multiplicity of regulators prescribing standards and minimum norms for higher education institutions. This meant that the barriers to entry for new higher education institutions were high and often overlapped with each other, leading to confusion and disorganisation. Accordingly, NKC recommended creation of an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE), which would function at an arm's length from all concerned stakeholders, accord degree-granting status to universities, set standards for higher education and award licences to accreditation agencies.

Further, the Yashpal Committee, constituted in 2009 with the mandate of advising on "renovation and rejuvenation of the education sector", identified a need for a "drastic overhaul" of the higher education system. The committee concluded that if higher education was to be seen as an integrated whole, the governance of professional education could not be separated from that of general education; there ought to exist a "single, all-encompassing higher education authority", which could regulate the sector on a pan-India basis.

Considering the above, the CG's initiative for introduction of a single independent regulator in the higher education space is welcome. Details regarding the HEERA proposal are being ironed out. The National Institution for Transforming India and the Ministry of Human Resource Development are in the process of drafting both a formal proposal to introduce HEERA, and the legislation which would govern HEERA (HEERA Law).

Powers of UGC

At present, the UGC has two primary responsibilities: (a) providing funds to educational institutions; and (b) coordinating, determining and maintaining standards in institutions of higher education.

An indicative list of the functions covered under UGC's mandate is set out as follows: promoting and coordinating education in universities, determining and maintaining standards for teaching, examination and research in universities, framing regulations on minimum standards for education, disbursing grants to universities and colleges, liaising between the CG, State governments and higher educational institutions, and advising the CG and State governments on possible policy measures to improve higher education in India.

Powers of AICTE

AICTE is a professional council constituted by the CG to govern technical education in India. AICTE's objectives include: promoting quality in technical education, planning the co-ordination

and development of the technical education system and regulation of technical education and maintenance of norms and standards for technical education in India.

Necessity

The jurisdiction of AICTE and UGC often tends to overlap. Given that UGC governs universities and prescribes minimum standards for higher education, and AICTE performs similar functions for the stream of 'technical education', there are many cases where institutions fall under the domain of both UGC and AICTE, for example, a college affiliated to a university which is recognised by the UGC may also be called upon by AICTE to obtain its approval. This is where the problem of multiplicity arises leading to lack of clarity over which regulations to conform to.

It appears that often the idea of conforming to two sets of norms set out by both regulatory bodies can be a huge barrier for setting up of nascent institutions. Even for existing institutions, overlapping and complex regulations make regulatory compliance burdensome.

The multiple sets of rules and sub-regulations prescribed by UGC and AICTE, unfortunately, seem to have acted as a deterrent to the development of premier educational institutions. There has long been a need for change in the regime governing higher education in India. Industry players opine that there has been little room for business development in the area, while state authorities lament the difficulty they have faced in enforcing overlapping, often labyrinthine compliances. Further, the separation between the standards governing technical and non-technical education is seen as unnecessary and illusory.

Clearly there is a need to smoothen existing procedures and ensure their efficient enforcement. It is in this light that the CG has proposed to bring HEERA into existence. The introduction of a unified regulator would minimise administrative delays and remove jurisdictional ambiguity. Sponsoring bodies of institutes of higher education would no longer be required to approach multiple authorities for clearances, which is likely to promote ease of development of institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, HEERA is expected to have sharper teeth than the extant AICTE and UGC: the HEERA Law is likely to empower HEERA to take strict penal action against defaulting institutions. Thus far, both private players and governmental authorities seem pleased with the idea of a single, unified regulator to govern the higher education space.

However, these sentiments are in most part contingent on stakeholders' expectations regarding the manner in which HEERA will function on the ground, once formalised. In the immediate future, one could expect more complexity in an already complex sector once the interim reform measures by way of amendments to prevailing higher education regulations are announced.

The authors are executive director, principal associate and associate respectively at Khaitan & Co.

As the new academic session has begun, elections are not very far. Should colleges have student political parties? Freshers speak up.