

NEWS ALERT

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DECCAN HERALD

ECONOMIC TIMES

HINDU

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INDIAN EXPRESS

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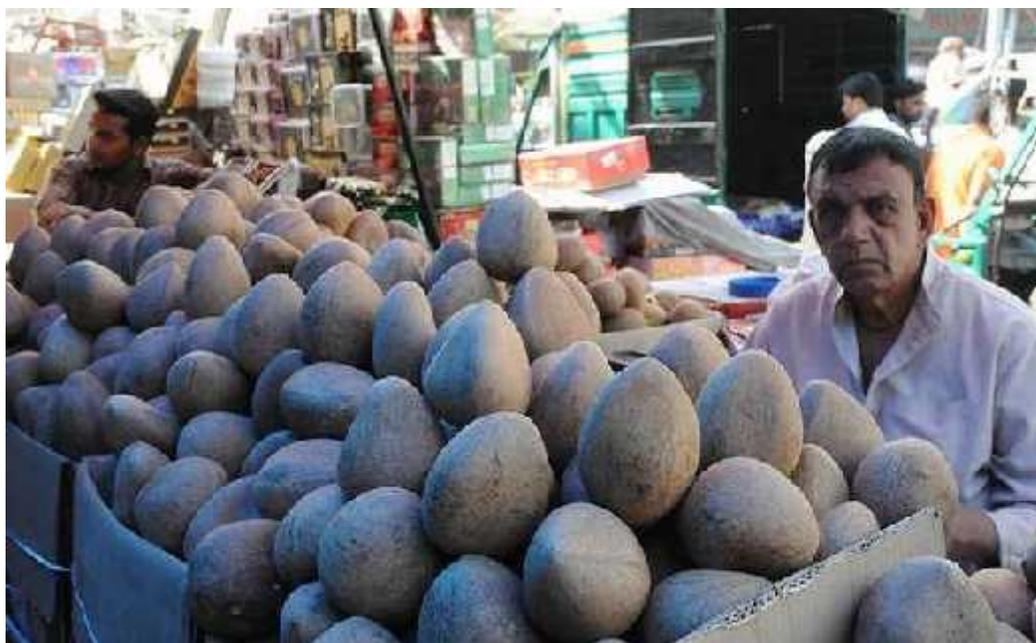
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AGRICULTURE

HINDU, SEP 13, 2018

Cabinet Committee clears new procurement policy



The Centre has announced a 15,053 crore scheme to ensure that farmers growing oilseeds, pulses and copra actually get the minimum support prices (MSP) they are promised for their crops every year.

The umbrella policy — Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) — was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday.

According to an official statement, it clubs together an existing procurement scheme with newly introduced options — meant for oilseeds only — of additional procurement by private traders or a cash payment scheme.

Credit guarantee

Apart from the 15,053 crore to be spent over a two-year period to implement the scheme, the Cabinet approved an additional government credit guarantee of 16,550 crore for agencies undertaking procurement. “The government is working with a holistic approach... Increasing MSP is not adequate and it is more important that farmers get the full benefit of the announced MSP,” said the statement.

MSP hiked by 50%

The government announces minimum support prices for 23 crops every year. This year, these rates were set at 50% higher than the farmers’ production costs, including labour cost. The rates are meant to give remunerative prices to the farmers.

About one-third of the harvest of the two major foodgrains, rice and wheat, are procured by the Centre at the MSP for sale in ration shops. However, most of the 21 other crops are sold at market prices, often below the MSP, as the government’s procurement operations are temporary.

Over the last two years, the government has increased the procurement of pulses and oilseeds at MSP under the Price Support Scheme.

In 2017-18, the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India said it bought 31.9 lakh tonnes of pulses and oilseeds at the MSP, benefiting 20 lakh farmers. But the total production of pulses was estimated at 240 lakh tonnes, while oilseed production was 300 lakh tonnes.

Copra, pulses will still get price support

Under the new PM-AASHA scheme, the existing Price Support Scheme (PSS) will continue for pulses and copra, with Central agencies — including the NAFED and the Food Corporation of India — physically

procuring the produce whenever the market rates fall below MSP, up to a maximum limit of 25% of the total harvest. The Centre will bear the costs, according to the existing guidelines. However, for oilseeds alone, the States will be allowed to choose between the PSS or two new schemes, the statement said.

The Price Deficiency Payment Scheme is modelled on the Bhavantar experiment in Madhya Pradesh last year, where there is no physical procurement at all. Instead, farmers will sell their produce in the market, and the government will directly pay them the difference between the MSP and the average market rate. The cash payment will be deposited in their bank accounts. When this scheme was proposed by the NITI Aayog to the States in April 2018, a 60:40 split in costs between the Centre and the States was suggested; it is unclear how the burden will now be shared.

The other option is a pilot scheme where selected private procurement agencies will procure the commodity at the MSP, instead of the government. Maximum service charges up to 15% of the notified MSP will be payable, said the statement.

Experts sceptical

While Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh called the policy an important step to double farmers' income by 2022, experts remained sceptical about its implementation. "NAFED has a stock of more than 4 million tonnes [of pulses and oilseeds] because of the last two years' procurement, but their distribution policy is non-existent. When market prices are 30% lower than the MSP, who is going to bear the loss," asked Ashok Gulati, an agricultural economist with the ICRIER and former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, which sets the MSP.

He had co-authored a research paper on Madhya Pradesh's Bhavantar scheme, which showed that it could not reach more than 22% of the produce, and led to corruption as trader cartels depressed market rates during the implementation of the scheme. He felt that involving private agencies would also be a non-starter, if market prices fell below the 15% compensation limit.

Agriculture and food policy expert Devinder Sharma said that earlier experiments with private procurement — such as the ITC e-choupal scheme — had collapsed once demand fell. He felt that the 25% limit on procurement was a sign the government was not serious about farmers' welfare. “We have half-heartedly come out in the name of farmers...What will the remaining 75% do?”

“What is done in the name of farmers is actually the government's way of solving its own problems of a high edible oil import bill,” said Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav, explaining the policy's focus on oilseeds. He felt the policy was “too little, too late,” given that kharif harvesting had already begun, and two-thirds of the country — mostly the eastern States — do not even have any infrastructure for procurement. “If the government was serious about ensuring MSP, it would focus on building that infrastructure. Otherwise, all this is just on paper,” he said.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2018

Centre to impose penalties for delays in settling farmers' crop insurance claims

The Modi government will impose penalties on state governments, insurance companies and banks for delays in settling crop insurance claims of farmers, by far the biggest hurdle in the flagship Pradhan

Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana scheme (PMFBY), according to an official familiar with the development.

Penalties for payment delays, which stoke discontent among farmers, signal an aggressive approach to boosting the performance of a programme central to the government's farm agenda. Farmers often receive compensation after year-long delays. Timely claims settlement is critical to the scheme's success.

The government had launched the PMFBY in 2016-17, dismantling two previous poorly-designed schemes and replacing them with a simplified programme. Yet, the farm ministry has had to troubleshoot systemic hurdles in the new scheme. Farmers pay between 1.5 and 2% of the total premium. The rest is shared 50-50 between the Centre and states.

Over the past year, the government has relied on a raft of technologies – from remote sensing to Android apps – to iron out bottlenecks.

State governments will have to pay penalties if they do not pay farmers within applicable deadlines after the Centre pays its share of subsidy, the official said. Insurance firms will have to pay penalties at the rate of 12% for payments delayed beyond a month. Banks are also proposed to be fined if they do not submit actuarial data on time, the official said. The changes have been vetted by the Prime Minister's Office and the finance ministry, a second official said.

“I do not think penalties are a good idea because a lot of improvements are already taking place. There are many stakeholders in the insurance scheme. State governments often provide yield loss estimates to insurance companies very late,” said Rajeev Chaudhary, the chief risk officer of the Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd.

Tussles between states and insurance companies over estimates of crop losses and computation of claims are a key bottleneck. Often, insurance companies suspect fudging of data. For transparent estimation of crop losses, the most crucial step, the ministry has developed an Android app for hand-held devices and harnessed satellite technologies

Pointing out drawbacks in the PMFBY, the government's committee on doubling farmers' income, in its report, Risk Management in Agriculture, had said the "number of bidders in the drought-prone rainfed areas have been relatively lesser, resulting in premium rates as high as 25%". This points to cherry-picking or the practice of insurance firms selectively bidding for low-risk areas.

The number of farmers, who opted for insurance, fell 17% to 47.9 million in 2017-18, from 57.4 million in 2016-17. Area coverage under the scheme rose to 57.1 million hectares in 2016-17, the initial year, from 52.4 million hectares in 2015-16, when a different insurance regime was in force. However, in 2017-18, the area insured fell to 47.5 million hectares. Of the total premium of ~19,000 crore in kharif 2017, payouts have been made to the tune of ~14,000 crore.

PIONEER, SEP 8, 2018

Govt procures 38 mn tones rice so far in 2017-18, exceeds target

The Centre's rice procurement has surpassed the target at 38 million tonnes so far in the ongoing 2017-18 marketing year that will end this month. The rice procurement target set for this year was 37.5 million tonnes.

According to Food Ministry, the Government had procured 34.35 million tonnes during the last marketing year (October-September), surpassing the target of 33 million tonnes set for that year.

“Rice procurement is coming to closure this month. So far, we have procured 38 million tonnes. We have purchased more than the target set for this year,” the official said

Much of the rice was purchased from States like Punjab, Chattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Over 33 percent of the country’s total rice production has been procured at the MSP.

The paddy is procured at the minimum support price (MSP). State-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State agencies have undertaken procurement operation.

For the current year, the Government has fixed paddy MSP of ‘common’ grade variety at Rs 1,550 per quintal, while that of ‘A’ grade variety at Rs 1,590 per quintal. According to Agriculture Ministry data, the total area planted during the current kharif season crossed the 100-million-hectare mark this week. And for the first time this year, rice planting overtook the area sown in the previous season. The total area under cultivation, however, is still marginally lower at 1,023 (lakh hectare) as compared to 1,027 lakh hectare covered during the corresponding week last year. Rice planting, on the other hand, was completed on 370 lakh hectare as against 368 lakh hectare covered in same period in the previous year.

ARMED FORCES

BUSINESS STANDARD, SEP 11, 2018

Restructuring the force: Army chief to hold talks with top generals today



Army chief General Bipin Rawat will hold talks with his top generals – the seven army commanders, and his personal staff officers – on Tuesday here, seeking to bring them on board as he embarks on the most far-reaching personnel and organisational reforms the force has attempted since Independence.

The defence ministry has already initiated a reduction of 57,000 personnel, including 30,000 civilian employees, in line with the recommendations of the Shekatkar Committee. Now Rawat is

courageously targeting the reduction of another 50,000 uniformed soldiers.

These include not just logistics and services personnel, but even manpower from infantry battalions — the basic fighting unit of the Army and widely considered untouchable.

Confirming the process to *Business Standard*, Rawat stated: “The Army has become 1.25 million-strong and is continuing to expand. We spend 83 per cent of our budget on revenue expenditure, mainly salaries and pensions, which leaves just 17 per cent for modernisation. We have to cut down on manpower to make more for equipment.”

BACKWARD CLASSES

HINDU BUSINESS LINE, SEP 8, 2018

Can't stay SC/ST Act as it is now a law: Apex court

The recent amendments to the SC/ST law passed by Parliament cannot be stayed at this stage, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday, as it sought the Centre's response on a batch of pleas challenging the fresh provisions. The pleas have sought declaration of the amendments to the Schedule Castes and Schedules Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act as ultra vires.

Parliament on August 9 had passed a Bill to overturn a March 2018 order of the apex court concerning certain safeguards against arrest under the SC/ST law.

On Friday, a Bench of Justices AK Sikri and Ashok Bhushan issued notice to the Centre and sought its response in six weeks. Counsel for petitioner Prathvi Raj Chauhan said the Bench should at least stay the operation of the new provisions till the plea is being heard.

To this, the Bench said: "What stay? It is now a legislation and cannot be stayed at this stage."

CIVIL SERVICE

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 11, 2018

Haryana government has to ‘request’ babus to implement cabinet decisions

On September 11, the cabinet branch that functions under the chief secretary sent a “most urgent” memo to all administrative secretaries, seeking reports about the status of the implementation of cabinet decisions.



The Manohar Lal Khattar-led BJP government’s two key officers, the chief secretary and the additional chief secretary (vigilance department), have shot off letters to administrative secretaries, which highlight Haryana bureaucrats’ slothful approach in implementing cabinet decisions.

On September 11, the cabinet branch that functions under the chief secretary sent a “most urgent” memo to all administrative secretaries,

seeking reports about the status of the implementation of cabinet decisions.

The cabinet branch had set 2 pm of September 12 as the deadline for submitting the reports through special messengers, according to official records.

“It has been observed that decisions taken by the cabinet are not being implemented by the administrative departments despite the lapse of three months as mentioned in cabinet letters conveying the decisions,” the cabinet branch said in its letter.

The administrative secretaries were “requested” to implement the cabinet decisions “at the earliest”.

The government also sought “implementation report” from the frontline bureaucrats about the cabinet decisions pertaining to their departments since January 1, 2018.

“This letter is a testament of the government’s inability to rein in the bureaucracy. Often this issue crops up in our informal meetings. This problem pertains to certain departments,” said a cabinet minister, who did not want to be identified.

Next month, the first-ever BJP government will complete four years in office under the command of the first-term MLA Khattar, the RSS Pracharak-turned chief minister.

It is this lack of command and control, coupled with administrative inexperience of most of the BJP ministers and the MLAs, which has been at the root of government’s inability to tackle the bureaucracy effectively and get its policies implemented.

The letter in question underlines the anxiety of the government, which is already in a poll mode and has been taking a slew of populist decisions preparing the ground for the high-stakes Lok Sabha polls next year.

No response on graft complaints

In another instance of the poor health of the administration, additional chief secretary (ACS-vigilance) on Thursday sent a letter to the administrative secretaries and the heads of 29 different departments, seeking replies about corruption complaints/source reports of the vigilance department.

As per this letter, (of which HT has a copy), the vigilance department is yet to receive responses of 211 corruption complaints and source reports.

“In spite of repeated reminders no replies have been received,” the letters says, pointing out that the vigilance department has been sending complaints to the departments for enquiry/comments.

The vigilance department will hold meeting of the chief vigilance officers on September 26 to discuss the issues it has referred to these departments.

The departments with maximum number of pending complaints and from which the vigilance department is awaiting comments are town and country planning (25), development and panchayats (31), urban local bodies (24), , cooperation (15) school education (11), transport (10) home and police (10), public health engineering (10) and PWD (9).

This is not for the first time that the vigilance department shot off such a missive. In April this year, it had sent a similar letter ahead of a meeting, pointing out how the departments were not responding to over 202 corruption complaints despite “repeated reminders” to submit comments.

BUSINESS STANDARD, SEP 11, 2018

Bureaucratic Reshuffle: 30 New Joint Secretaries Appointed In Different Central Govt Depts

As many as 30 joint secretaries (JSs) have been appointed in various central government departments as part of a major bureaucratic reshuffle effected Monday by the Centre.

IAS officers Piyush Goel and Nidhi Khare will be joint secretaries in the Home Ministry for five years, an order issued by the personnel ministry said.

Nidhi Mani Tripathi has been appointed JS in Department of Commerce, Anand Mohan Bajaj will be joint secretary of Department of Economic Affairs and Mandeep Bhandari has been named JS in Department of Health and Family Welfare.

IAS officer V Vidyavathi has been moved from Cabinet Secretariat to replace Gyanesh Bharti as joint secretary in ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

Bharti will now be joint secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat. Senior IPS officer Sadanand Vasant Date has been appointed joint secretary in Department of Justice. He is at present inspector general (operations) in Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

M C Jauhari and Priyank Bharti have been appointed joint secretaries in NITI Aayog and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways respectively.

Bhabani Prasad Pati, a Gujarat-cadre Indian Forest Service officer, and Vismita Tej will be joint secretaries in Coal Ministry, the order said.

Abhilaksh Likhi and Atish Chandra have been named joint secretaries in Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare.

Paban K Borthakur, joint secretary, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, has been appointed chairman of Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) under Department of Commerce.

IAS officer Partha Sarthi Sensharma will be joint secretary, Department of Fertilizers. R K Khandelwal will be deputy director general, Department of Telecommunications and S Jagannathan has been appointed JS in Department of Food and Public Distribution.

Sukriti Likhi and Mandeep Bhandari will be joint secretaries in Department of Heavy Industry and Department of Health and Family Welfare respectively.

Rajiv Sharma has been appointed financial advisor of NATGRID for a tenure of five years, Neelam Sanghi will be additional central provident fund commissioner (Hqrs), Employees' Provident Fund Organisation under Ministry of Labour and Vijaylakshmi Bidari will be regional director of Staff Selection Commission in Bangalore.

V Shashank Shekhar, joint secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, has been shifted to the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances in the same rank.

Ramchandra Meena, an Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) officer,

has been appointed JS, Department of School Education and Literacy, in place of Shekhar.

Ashish Srivastava will be joint secretary, Ministry of Woman and Child Development. He is at present resident commissioner, Madhya Pradesh Bhawan here. PTI AKV AKV IND IND

CORRUPTION

PIONEER, SEP 8, 2018

Interpol issues Red Corner Notice against Nirav Modi's aide

The Interpol has issued a Red Corner Notice (RCN) against fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi's close aide Mihir R Bhansali in connection with the alleged swindling of over Rs 13,000 crore of public sector banker PNB.

The RCN issued at the behest of Enforcement Directorate mentions that Bhansali (40) is required by Indian probe agencies on charges of "money laundering". Bhansali was CEO of Nirav Modi's jewellery firm in the US, Firestar International.

The ED wants Bhansali to join the probe and told the Interpol that he was likely to visit the US, the UK, Hong Kong, China or the UAE.

Through an RCN against a fugitive, the Interpol requests all its 192 member countries to arrest or detain the person if spotted in their countries after which extradition or deportation proceedings can begin.

The ED has identified Bhansali as the "second-in-command" in the Firestar Group after Nirav Modi. He was allegedly actively involved in the diversion and laundering of the funds received from PNB in the form of Letters of Undertaking. Bhansali was instrumental in diversion and circulation of the "proceeds of crime" generated in the money laundering case.

The ED probe has revealed that Bhansali inducted dummy partners in Solar Exports, Stellar Diamond and Diamond R US (Modi's firms in

whose names LOUs were issued) for issuance of LoUs by the PNB. He was also instrumental in formation of overseas dummy companies in Hong Kong and Dubai, and employees/ex-employees of the Firestar Group were sent as dummy directors/owners in these entities at his directions laundering the money received from the PNB through LoUs.

Bhansali is also suspected to have acquired a property in the US worth \$7 million from the funds illicit funds generated from the PNB scam.

The case relates to cheating the PNB through fraudulent issuance of Letters of Undertaking and Foreign Letters of Credit worth over Rs 13,000 crore in favour of Nirav Modi, his uncle Mehul Choksi and other associates.

ASIAN AGE, SEP 11, 2018

Delhi HC rejects Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul's plea in tax case



The Delhi High Court on Monday dismissed the pleas of Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi challenging reopening of their tax assessments for 2011-12.

A bench of Justices S Ravindra Bhat and A K Chawla said, "The writ petitions have failed." The bench also dismissed the petition of Congress leader Oscar Fernandes who too had challenged reopening of his tax assessment for the same year (2011-12).

The high court had on August 16 reserved its order on the pleas of the three leaders after the Income Tax Department had contended that Rahul Gandhi's tax assessment for 2011-12 was reopened as material facts were concealed.

The bench had orally asked the tax department not to take any coercive step against Sonia, Rahul and Fernandes till pronouncement of its verdict. Senior advocate P Chidambaram, appearing for Sonia Gandhi, had said he had faith in the oral statement made by the Additional Solicitor General Tushar Mehta.

Mehta had argued that the Congress leaders had alleged mala fide on the part of the tax department but had not made any averments in this regard. The income tax cases against the Congress leaders have arisen from the probe into the private criminal complaint filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy before a trial court in connection with the National Herald case.

In the complaint, Sonia, Rahul and others have been accused of conspiring to cheat and misappropriate funds by paying just Rs 50 lakh, through which the Young India (YI) had obtained the right to recover Rs 90.25 crore that the Associated Journals Ltd (AJL) owed to the Congress party.

It was alleged that YI, which was incorporated in November 2010 with a capital of Rs 50 lakh, had acquired almost all shareholdings of the AJL, which was running the National Herald newspaper. In this process, YI had also acquired AJL's debt of Rs 90 crore.

The tax department had said the shares Rahul has in YI would lead him to have an income of Rs 154 crore and not about Rs 68 lakh, as was assessed earlier. It has already issued a demand notice for Rs 249.15 crore to YI for the assessment year 2011-12.

The department's move followed its probe on a complaint alleging that the Gandhis had misappropriated AJL's assets while transferring their shares to the newly formed Young Indian.

DEFENCE

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2018

India, Russia likely to sign warship deal at Modi-Putin meet next month



India and Russia are expected to hammer out a deal for four more Krivak/Talwar class stealth frigates for the navy in October when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and president Vladimir Putin meet in New Delhi for an annual summit between the two countries, two senior officials familiar with the matter, said on Tuesday.

Two of the warships will be constructed at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad and the remaining two at the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).

GSL chairman Shekhar Mita, a retired rear admiral, said the two countries have completed the groundwork for signing the deal.

“After the contract is signed, Russia will take four years to deliver the two warships. We will take six years to build the first warship and one more year to deliver the second,” said Mital, who was part of an Indian delegation that visited the Yantar Shipyard in August.

India inked an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with Russia for the four frigates in 2016. The navy currently operates six stealth frigates — three Talwar class and three Teg class — bought from Russia and inducted between 2003 and 2013.

The new Grigorovich-class ‘Project 1135.6’ frigates will be powered by gas turbine engines to be supplied by Ukrainian firm Ukroboronprom’s Gas Turbine Research & Production Complex Zorya-Mashproekt.

Several Russian delegations have visited GSL and are satisfied with the facilities there.

The two countries are also likely to sign a Rs 39,000-crore deal for the supply of the Russian S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems to India during the summit, brushing aside Washington’s concerns about the purchase. The S-400 is capable of destroying jets, missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles at a range of 400km.

Washington has already flagged concerns about the S-400 purchase, saying it complicates interoperability between Indian and American forces, amid US sanctions against Russia.

India is in talks with the US to secure a sanctions waiver as its military is heavily dependent on Russian equipment. “The US understands our concerns. They know there are legacy issues,” said an official on condition of anonymity. India and Russia are also exploring ways to bypass the American sanctions.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2018

8.2% GDP growth, but how is the economy really doing?



India's GDP grew 8.2%, the highest in two years, during April-June 2018 (Q1 2018-19). The headline growth numbers, however, do not capture the macroeconomic dynamics currently at play in the Indian economy. While the larger economic picture is not one of immediate crisis, there are factors, especially on the external front, which should be cause for concern.

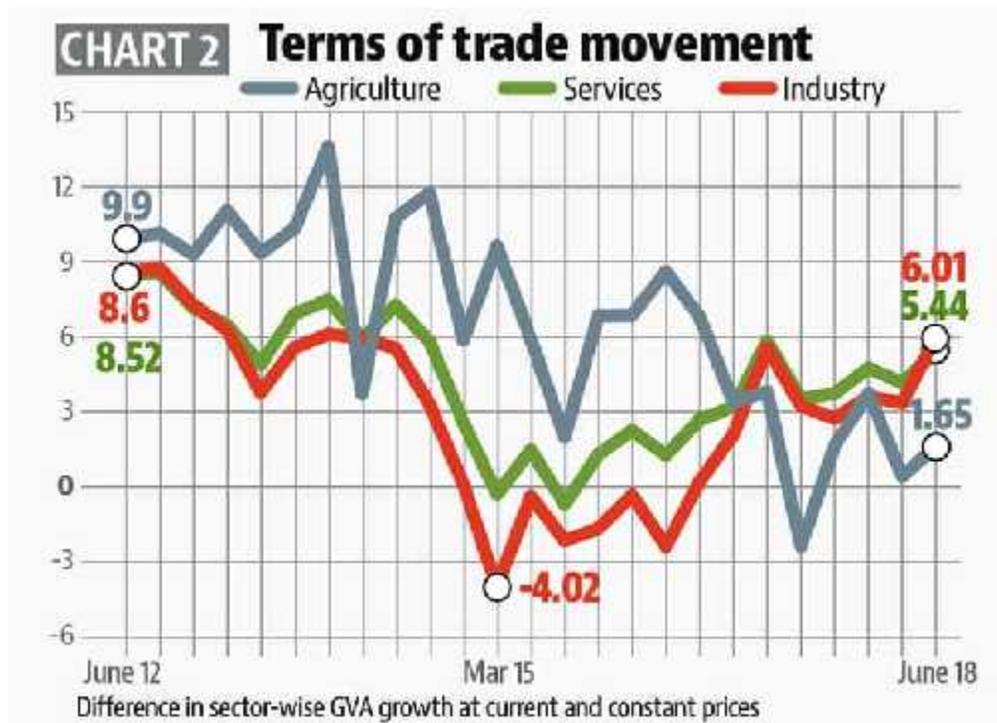
Economic growth: The 8% plus GDP growth is more a result of the base effect due to demonetisation's disruption than any drastic increase in the level of economic activity. This can be seen from the trend in the two-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of GDP, which shows economic growth to be stagnant, and slightly lower, compared to the performance before note ban. (Chart 1) To be sure, even a 6.8% GDP growth rate is not bad and India remains the fastest growing major economy in the world.



Terms of trade: Terms of trade between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors is an important political economy contradiction in India. Roughly speaking, terms of trade can be thought of as the ratio of prices paid and received by various sectors in an economy. The difference between growth of Gross Value Added at current and constant prices for agriculture, industry and services can give an idea about these trends in the economy(Chart 2).

As can be seen in the Chart 2, the sectoral deflator for agriculture had started declining from the last phase of the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. In September 2017, agriculture's deflator went below the values for industry and services, which suggests that prices of agricultural commodities were rising at a slower pace than the other two sectors. Things changed in the last quarter when the agriculture deflator shows a slight increase. This trend will probably continue after the government's decision to significantly (compared to previous years) hike Minimum Support Prices for Kharif crops in July.

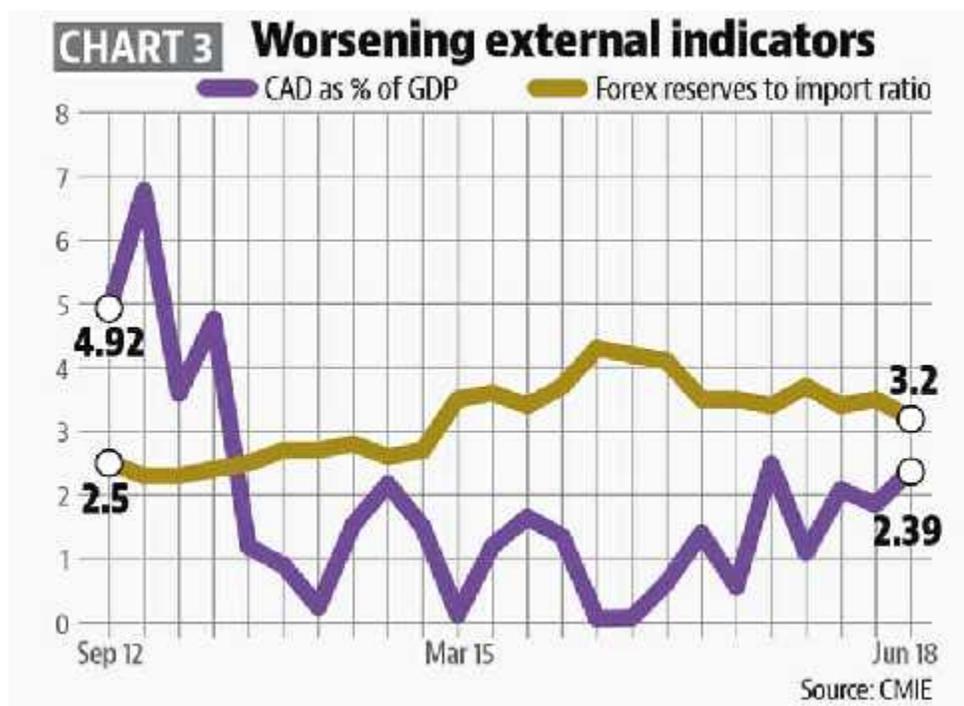
If the government can maintain a close to 7% overall growth rate with improvement in terms of trade for agriculture, it can expect strong political tailwinds in the 2019 elections. The question is whether this can continue.



Inflation and the external sector: Inflation and growing problems on the external front are emerging as major headwinds. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy committee noted the hike in MSPs and rising oil prices as potentially important drivers of inflation in its last meeting. Under the new inflation-targeting framework, RBI is bound to raise interest rates in case it expects inflation to rise. The government is expected to maintain the formula of MSP giving a 50% guaranteed return over cost of the cultivation (the so-called A2+FL measure) in the next Rabi season as well. Oil prices are expected to remain tight in the near future. India could face a bigger oil shock if it agrees to adhere to US sanctions on stopping oil imports from Iran. A depreciating rupee will further add to the inflationary impact of the rise in oil prices.

Even on a standalone basis, these developments are likely to drive down growth. RBI's rate hikes will increase the cost of investment and conducting business. A higher import bill due to rising oil prices will reduce GDP figures by fall in net exports. This will further trigger inflation and probably a rate hike cycle.

The real impact of these developments could be even bigger. Last week, the RBI reported a significant reversal in foreign portfolio investment (FPI) in the country. There was a net outflow of \$8.1 billion during Q1 2018-19 compared to a net inflow of \$12.5 billion during Q1 2017-18. This is only the third quarter in which the country has recorded a net outflow of FPI under this government. In absolute terms, the value of net FPI outflows in the last quarter was the second highest since September 2003. The outflows were the highest in December 2016, the quarter in which Donald Trump became the US President. At a time when the trade deficit has been widening, portfolio outflows will add to the strain on our foreign exchange reserves (Chart 3).



The ratio of total foreign exchange reserves and India's imports in Q1 2018-19 was the lowest since Q4 2014-15. At a time when trade wars threaten the rule-based global trade regime, an exogenous shock could create a big disruption on the external front.

Avoiding any such mishap will require clarity and close coordination between the government and RBI. This does not seem to be the case right now. Reactions on the falling value of rupee are a case in point.

While government officials, including the finance minister, have given statements downplaying the fall in the rupee's value, reports suggest that the government has asked the RBI to soften the rupee fall and is also contemplating selling deposits denominated in foreign currency.

In an interview to Bloomberg Quint, former RBI governor Y V Reddy rightly pointed out that government should resist from commenting too much about the exchange rate as it confuses the markets. If at all the government expresses an opinion, it should be with intent, Reddy added. In this case, this could imply that the government wants the rupee to deteriorate even further.

To be sure, the former RBI governor's advice is not easy for the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government to follow.

The Opposition's attacks on the government over the rupee and oil prices today are not very different from those the party used to launch against the previous government.

ENVIRONMENT

PIONEER, SEP 8, 2018

India, France sign pact to reduce greenhouse gas emission

India and France signed an implementation agreement on ‘Mobilise Your City (MYC) programme in which three pilot cities will be provided support to reduce their Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in urban transport. Under the programme, three Indian cities — Nagpur, Kochi and Ahmedabad — will get grant to the tune of 3.5 million Euros as part of the EU’s commitment under the Paris Climate agreement to achieve a “sustainable transport policy”. These cities are the part of the 100 cities selected under the smart city mission in the country.

The MYC agreement was signed by Mukund Kumar Sinha, OSD and ex-officio Joint Secretary in the Urban Affairs Ministry and the Regional Director of Agence Française de Développement (AfD), Nicolas Fornage. It was signed in the presence of Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri and Alexander Ziegler, Ambassador of France in India. MYC aims to extend help to 100 cities globally to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by promoting sustainable urban transport and to promote sustainability in urban spaces.

“More funds would be provided to India as loan to take forward the smart city and sustainable transport initiatives in the three cities on pilot basis,” said officials of HUA ministry. According to the ministry, based on a proposal made by AFD in 2015, the EU has agreed to provide 3.5 million euros through the AFD to contribute to specific investments and technical assistance components within the MYC in India.

“The pilot cities selected as well as the MoHUA will benefit from the technical assistance activities. The programme includes learning and exchange formats with other cities across India for exchanges on best practices. The details of the project activities will be worked out by AFD in consultation with MoHUA and the three partner cities including institutions such as the respective special purpose vehicles (SPVs) for smart cities, the municipal corporations and any transport authority or transport related SPV,” the Ministry officials said.

According to the MoU, the MYC is an initiative combining urban mobility objectives and climate considerations. It aims at providing solutions in a fully integrated manner, analysing different modes of transportation within the urban fabric, with the objective of providing people long-term, sustainable, adequate, reliable and cost-efficient transportation opportunities.

EUTHANASIA

ASIAN AGE, SEP 11, 2018

Everyone has right to die with dignity: Chief Justice of India on euthanasia



Pune: Just a few days after the Supreme Court gave a landmark judgment by decriminalising homosexuality, Chief Justice of India (CJI), Dipak Misra said that each individual has the right to life as well as the right to live with dignity, but cases involving conflicting interest have to be dealt with in a balanced manner.

Delivering the Dr Patangrao Kadam Memorial Public Lecture Series at Pune's Bharti Vidyapeeth, the CJI, while referring to the Aruna Shanbaug case, touched upon the issue of conflict between two fundamental rights, and said that the verdict in such cases should be given after thoroughly studying the facts of the case and the fundamental structure of the Constitution.

The Aruna Shanbaug case led to a change in euthanasia laws of the country. The bench handling this case in 2017, recognised a living will by a terminally-ill patient for passive euthanasia and drafted new guidelines clarifying the way to execute the will and the role of the medical board in giving assent to the will.

"Everyone has a right to life but at the same time, he or she has a right to life with dignity. If he/she is unable to live with dignity because of prolonged illness, from which he/she will not overcome then in such cases he/she has the right to die with dignity. This is what balancing of rights mean. Adjustment, acceptance, compromise, and settlement comes in the balancing of rights and for the coexistence of rights. We have to balance them for the well being of mankind," Misra added.

Citing the Mazdur Krishna Shakti Sangathan case, the Chief Justice said that in situations where conflict arises between two fundamental rights or intra-fundamental rights in respect of some person, it becomes slightly difficult for a bench to give out the verdict. "No particular parameter can be fixed but yet the courts try and endeavor to fix certain parameters, it has to be judged on facts of each case, taking care of certain constitutional concepts," he noted.

Furthermore, Dipak Misra noted that it is important for an individual to exercise rights granted by the constitution in order to develop the society and strengthen the democracy.

"We have a constitutional democracy and it is conceded with a singular and a sole mission and purpose of securing its citizen's rights and liberties which foster and strengthen the spirit and growth of development in a society. Rights protected and guaranteed under a constitution are the fulcrum of any free society. We ought to live in a democratic and free society. As far as that concept is concerned there is

no compromise. We have the rights and must exercise them within the constitutional parameters. These rights are interest recognised and protected by a rule of justice. If the rule of justice collapses, rule of law will automatically collapse. I must respect your freedom, you must respect mine and this is how we can build up a societal fraternity in a true sense," the Chief Justice said.

Speaking further on the importance of individual's right in a democratic country, CJI Misra said, "In a democratic setup, every right matters and no right is absolute. There is no hierarchical order in rights. A particular fundamental right cannot exist in isolation."

The CJI also cited an example of the 1975 Narendra Prasad case and said that in this case, the judiciary observed that "A particular fundamental right cannot exist in isolation in a watertight compartment and one fundamental right of a person may have to coexist in harmony with the exercise of another fundamental right by others. So, we have to co-exist, therefore the rights have to be balanced."

HEALTH SERVICES

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2018

Meghalaya increases health cover to Rs 5 lakh under national health protection scheme



Among the 16 states piloting Ayushman Bharat before its September 23 launch, Meghalaya has universalised the Rs 5 lakh annual hospitalisation coverage under the national health protection scheme in the state

Among the 16 states piloting Ayushman Bharat before its September 23 launch, Meghalaya has universalised the Rs 5 lakh annual hospitalisation coverage under the national health protection scheme in the state.

The state increased the cover to Rs 5 lakh by allocating an additional Rs 40 crore to its universal insurance scheme, under the Megha Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS), Rs 2.8 lakh annual cover was being provided to all families in Meghalaya.

“As Meghalaya is a hilly state, it will get 90% central assistance for the poor and vulnerable as identified by the Socio-Economic Caste Census

(SECC). Since the state already spends Rs 60 crore on MHIS, we decided to raise the budget to Rs 100 crore and expand the new scheme,” said Meghalaya health minister A L Hek.

Hek said the health insurance coverage in Meghalaya is higher—over 50% — than the national average of 27% according to the National Health Profile 2017.

Of the state’s 880,000 families, 80,000 were covered under the government employees’ health scheme. As many as 354,000 poor households have been selected for the Centre’s assistance.

For MK Syiemiang, the increased hospitalisation cover means he may not have to pay anything for his brother’s cancer treatment. He considers himself lucky to have registered for MHIS in July last year. Just after he received the MHIS smartcard, his brother, David Mana, 42, was diagnosed with throat cancer.

Mana does not need to pay for medicines, including the Rs 5,000 chemotherapy drug. He pays a nominal fee for the tests and the money is reimbursed to him. Since he lives about 8 km from the Shillong Civil Hospital, where he is undergoing treatment, he gets Rs 200 allowance to travel for treatment.

Meghalaya has adopted the insurance model of paying for services and is in the process of finalising the implementation of the new policy. Once that is done, an insurer can enrol beneficiaries and upload the data to a centralised database.

“We had a data collection drive to identify SECC beneficiaries and the list was further updated with the help of Ashas (village-level accredited social health activists). For the registration process, however, we need an internet connection but connectivity is a real issue in most parts of the

state,” said a Meghalaya health department official on condition of anonymity.

The state has begun testing the new software to update patient information real-time to the central database.

But for an operator doing it using a laptop and a dongle, it is tough. Updating each record takes over 20 minutes and the data keeps getting lost midway because the system hangs.

At the next window, the operator filing the claims of the MHIS patients has no such problems because the software has an offline version.

“We update the patients’ details to the local database and upload it when the internet is back. Alternatively, we carry the data in a pen-drive or a CD and upload it from a cyber cafe,” said the MHIS operator, who did not want to be named. The new software has benefits. Being a national scheme, it can be accessed from all states and insurers, who can then approve the claims online. “The flowchart for registering a claim is much better and a patient’s photograph is taken at every stage to rule out mismatch in claims,” said Steven Bareh, an officer at the State Nodal Agency for MHIS.

The government meets around 90% of the state’s health care needs in Meghalaya. To meet the shortfall of health services, Meghalaya is considering empanelling its 109 primary health centres under Ayushman Bharat that offers cover for secondary and tertiary care only in community centres, district hospitals, medical colleges and empanelled private hospitals. “In Meghalaya, the topography is such that travelling to the nearest hospital can be a challenge,” said state health secretary and Ayushman Bharat chief operating officer Pravin Bakshi. “Enrolling PHCs (public health centres) will ensure everyone receives the benefits

of the health services. So, we have written to the central government,” said Bakshi.

“The best thing about this national health insurance scheme is that it is flexible and the states can modify it according to their own needs. If the PHCs in Meghalaya have a doctor and 24x7 emergency care, it makes sound ground for them to implement the medical packages in PHCs and we will agree,” said Ayushman Bharat deputy CEO Dr Dinesh Arora.

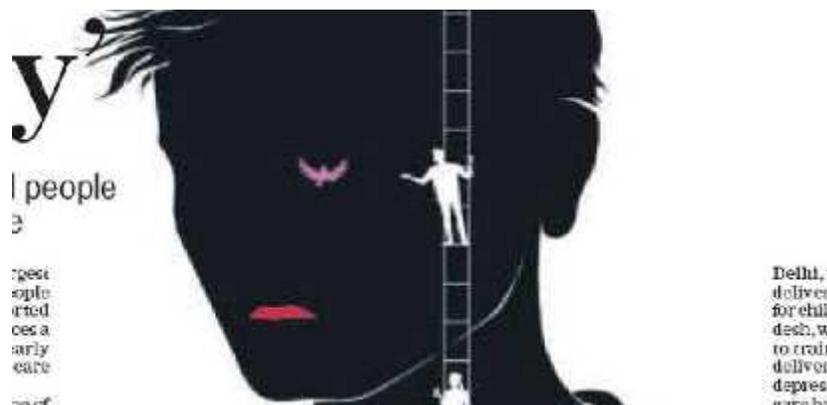
“It is an evolving scheme and all the states will have different mechanisms for implementing and we will be able to learn from the best practices. Just like the Meghalaya government will be providing stand-alone diagnostic tests.”

The new scheme will also cover tertiary care in other states.

“One of the best things about the scheme is the portability,” said Arora. “This will be a single health insurance scheme across the country and people can avail of the benefits in any state without worrying about the insurance cover,” he said.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2018

New law is the most progressive globally’



India's Mental Health Care Act is one of the most progressive legislations on mental health globally, and should be read as a bill of rights for people with mental disorders. Fundamentally, the Act enshrines equality for mentally ill people with those who have physical health problems in all matters related to health care. Conceptually, it transforms the focus of mental health legislations from supposedly protecting society and families by relegating people with mental disorders to second-class citizens, to emphasising the provision of affordable care, aligned with the preferences and needs of the affected person, financed by the government, through the primary care system.

Involuntary treatment and confinement in mental hospitals, which have historically been associated with profound depravity and abuse of human rights and which have been robustly contested by the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, has been greatly reined in with stringent procedures to ensure that these are restricted to the rarest of circumstances with systemic supports to enable the right of the person to make his/ her own decision.

However, it is hard to imagine these visionary ideals finding their way into the grim realities of the lived experiences of the tens of millions of Indians living with a mental disorder and the countless more of their family members and friends who are also affected. The National Mental Health Survey of India (2016), the largest exercise to count the numbers of people affected by mental disorders, reported that one of every ten adults experiences a clinically significant condition. Nearly 90% of these people have received no care at all in the past year.

The recent observation that some of the victims of the horrific series of lynchings in our country were people with mental disorders is a tragic

reminder of their vulnerability. Indeed, no other health condition in this country has such astonishing levels of unmet needs for care. Scarcity is the mother of invention, and this is so true of health care innovations in India, a country where the majority of people get too little of the care that they desperately need, while a few get as much care, never mind if it is actually needed, that they can pay for. And the care that many receive, whether too little or too much, is often not aligned with scientific evidence. In the case of mental disorders, for example, only a tiny fraction of the population will have access to brief psychosocial interventions, one of the most effective classes of treatments in medicine.

As with so many other formidable challenges facing our people, the community has been at the heart of innovative solutions. A variety of community actions have illustrated paths to mental health care which is affordable, evidence based, empowering and equitable. Prominent amongst these are the use of community based workers to deliver mental health care.

The community health worker, including cadre such as the ASHA worker and the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife, are the foundation of our public health care system. Indeed, they have played a central role in the success of our public health programmes which substantially reduced maternal and child mortality. Even as they are slowly, but surely, winning these age-old battles, they present a unique human resource to be deployed to helping people with mental disorders to recovery.

Over the past decade, some national health care programmes (such as for adolescent health) and NGOs have begun to task community-based workers to provide low intensity psychosocial interventions. Sangath, an

NGO I co-founded in Goa in 1996, has pioneered the design of an entire suite of psycho social interventions for delivery by persons from the local community with no prior professional training in mental health. These interventions have targeted a range of conditions, from autism in childhood, emotional and behavioural problems in adolescents, depression, drinking problems and psychosis in adults, to dementia in older people. Through rigorous public health trials, we have demonstrated, time and again, that such interventions are not only effective but, importantly, highly desired by people who are affected by these disorders. There is no longer any doubt about whether community health workers can be trained and supervised to deliver clinically effective psychosocial interventions. The challenge before us now is how to go beyond pilots and research studies and scale these innovations up in routine health care.

Sangath is currently embarking on a series of projects seeking to achieve these goals, by embedding its proven interventions for delivery through existing community health workers and counsellors of the public system, in partnership with state governments. In New Delhi, we will train ASHA workers to deliver parent-mediated interventions for children with autism. In Madhya Pradesh, we will design digital interventions to train and support ASHA workers to deliver brief psychological therapies for depression. In Goa, we will train primary care based counsellors and community based workers to reduce the burden of depression in the population. Each of these models for scaling up could offer opportunities for wider adoption across the country.

No NGO can ever match the mandate, reach and resources of the state for taking health care to India's vast and diverse population. For this to happen, we will need a structural rethink in how we plan and implement

mental health care. The doctor and hospital-centric approach which dominates must be balanced with a robust investment in community based care, as was done with such great results for maternal and child health.

The recent decision to rebrand the primary health care sub-centre as a Health and Wellness centre, with a mid-level provider trained in community health, offers a major new opportunity. Coordination between mental health professionals, primary care providers and community workers is essential to address the longterm nature of many mental disorders and the need for integrating clinical and social care. Only then will the creativity and science, which harnesses civil society's talent and instinct to care, be able to play its rightful role in realising the vision of the National Mental Health Care Act.

The author is the Pershing Square Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School and is affiliated with the Public Health Foundation of India and Sangath.

ASIAN AGE, SEP 11, 2018

Health Ministry announces implementation of HIV, AIDS Act from Sept 10



The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has announced implementation of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Act, 2017 starting September 10, 2018.

Passed on April 20, 2017, the Act prohibits discrimination against people with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (PLHIV) in terms of treatment, employment and workplace.

The Act also says that no person shall be compelled to disclose his/her HIV status for obtaining employment or services, except with their informed consent, and if required by a court order.

The Central Government will also issue necessary guidelines with respect to protocols for HIV and AIDS related diagnostic facilities. Anti-retroviral Therapy and Opportunistic Infection Management will also be applicable to all persons.

An ombudsman will also be appointed by each state government to inquire into complaints related to the violation of the Act and the provision of health care services.

As per the Act, a person between the age of 12 and 18 years, who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS-affected family, shall be competent to act as a guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age. This provision will be applicable in the matters relating to admission to educational establishments, operating bank accounts, managing property, care, and treatment.

The discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) could also lead to imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh.

"Notwithstanding any action that may be taken under any other law for the time being in force, whoever contravenes the provisions of section 4

shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than three months but which may extend to two years and with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees, or with both" the act lays down.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TRIBUNE, SEP 10, 2018

India receives support on terrorism during Prez Kovind's three-nation tour: Official

President Ram Nath Kovind's tour of Cyprus, Bulgaria and Czech Republic was "highly productive" and all the three nations supported India's position on terrorism, a senior Indian diplomat said on Sunday.

During the President's visit, aimed at continuing India's high-level engagements with the European countries, a number of MoUs were signed, including combatting climate-related challenges and cooperation on peaceful use of nuclear energy.

"All the three visits were highly productive, very substantive and resulted in good outcomes. All three countries are very important countries for us in the Central Europe. We share very warm and friendly relationships with them, not just at the political level, but also at the cultural and people-to-people levels," Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs Ruchi Ghanashyam said. "The visit helped to consolidate these ties and provide new energy, new visions for us to take forward in the years to come," she said in the wind-up briefing.

Ghanashyam said all the three countries supported India's Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). "All three countries support India's position on terrorism. They have unequivocally expressed their position...All three countries are members of the EU and the EU has a list of proscribed terror outfits. When the EU has got the list, all its members automatically subscribe to that," she said in response to a question.

INVESTMENT

TRIBUNE, SEP 10, 2018

In India, only one-third save for retirement

Only a third in India are regularly saving for retirement while just 33 pc of working-age respondents globally are putting anything aside for their later life, as per a report.

The lack of saving is likely linked to low knowledge of how much money is needed after retirement as well as many prioritising their immediate financial situation over planning for their older years, according to a HSBC report.

“For many, retirement is thankfully no longer a short period tacked on to the end of our life. It can be a long and very fulfilling part of a person’s life... Our needs at 65 can be very different from our needs at 75 or 85, with very different financial implications,” HSBC India head of wealth management Ramakrishnan S said.

The research was carried out online by Ipsos on behalf of HSBC among 16,000 adults in 16 markets, including Australia, Argentina, Canada, China, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, Taiwan, France, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Turkey, UAE, UK and USA

It revealed that only 19 pc of working age people are saving for future nursing or care home fees. This is despite 51 pc respondents claiming to be concerned about affording residential care post-retirement.

JUDICIARY

TRIBUNE, SEP 10, 2018

Govt for faster filling of lower court vacancies

Asks HCs to expedite exams, interviews of judicial officers

CURRENT STATUS

Sanctioned strength

22,444

Working strength

17,221

Vacancies

5,223

Cases pending

2,76,74,499

The Centre has asked High Courts that it must speed up the process of filling vacancies in the lower judiciary by appointing judicial officers, as it claimed lack of judges was one of the main reasons for high pendency of cases in the country.

In a letter to chief justices of 24 High Courts, Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has urged them to expedite the process of holding timely examination and interviews to recruit judicial officers in lower courts.

In the letter, the minister pointed out that there were a total of 2,76,74,499 cases pending in the district and subordinate courts of the country. “One of the underlying reasons behind the high pendency is sometimes the inordinate delay in filling the vacancies of judicial officers,” he said in the letter to the chief justices.

The sanctioned strength of the district and subordinate courts, Prasad said, had increased from 19,518 judges in 2013 to 22,444 as in June, 2018.

“However, the working strength of judges has not kept pace with the sanctioned strength. As on June 30, 2018, the total working strength was only 17,221 judges, indicating a vacancy of 5,223 judges,” he added.

Keeping in view “the high number of vacancies”, the minister, while acknowledging that attempts were being made to fill the sanctioned positions, insisted that “an urgent need to take further proactive steps” to reduce the number vacancies in a time bound manner.

Urging the chief justices to monitor the status of the vacancies regularly, the minister asked them to ensure “proper coordination with the State Public Service Commission” so that the examination and the interviews are conducted in accordance with the time schedule prescribed by the Supreme Court.

LABOUR

BUSINESS STANDARD, SEP 11, 2018

Centre in a fix over amending British-era industrial labour law reform

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's efforts to amend the British-era industrial relations law — touted as its most ambitious labour law reform — is facing its biggest hurdle so far: the state governments. Pressure from the labour unions had forced the Centre to dilute several proposals in the draft Industrial Relations Bill 2015, including easing the retrenchment norms for industries and curbing outsiders' role in trade union management at the industry-level.

LYNCHING

PIONEER, SEP 8, 2018

Will summon Home Secys if you don't file compliance report on lynching: SC to states

With only 11 of the 29 states and seven union territories having filed compliance reports on its order to take steps to check mob lynching, the Supreme Court on Friday warned that it will summon home secretaries of states/UTs if they did not file their reports within a week.

Taking strong exception to non-filing of compliance report by several states and UTs, a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra gave them last opportunity to file their report.

The Centre told the Bench that an empowered Group of Ministers had been set up to consider framing a law on mob violence following the verdict.

The top court was hearing a petition by Congress leader Tehseen Poonawala seeking contempt proceedings against Rajasthan officials including the Chief Secretary and the police chief for allegedly violating its verdict in the alleged lynching of dairy farmer Rakbar Khan on July 20.

Amid growing concern over incidents of mob lynchings in various parts of the country, the Supreme Court had on July 17 ordered a set of preventive, remedial and punitive measures to check vigilante groups from taking law into their own hands.

Such acts have to be curbed with iron hand, it had said, directing the Centre and states to implement its order within four weeks and file compliance reports.

It was the duty of the State to ensure maintenance of law and order, pluralistic social fabric and rule of law in the country, it had said, adding, “Horrendous acts of mobocracy cannot be tolerated... it cannot be allowed to become a new norm. It has to be curbed with iron hand.”

POLICE

PIONEER, SEP 10, 2018

IPS officer dies five days after suicide bid

A 2014-batch IPS officer, Surendra Kumar Das, died at a Kanpur hospital following multiple organ failure on Sunday, five days after he attempted suicide. Das is survived by his wife, widowed mother and a brother.

Posted as Kanpur SP City (East), Das (30) had allegedly consumed celphos tablets over “marital discord” early on September 5. A suicide note addressed to wife Raveena spoke of marital discord between them but did not blame anyone for the extreme step.

Efforts to save the officer went in vain as the poison affected his vital organs. A medical team from Mumbai had earlier arrived with an extra corporeal membrane oxygenation, an advanced medical apparatus, to save the officer. His condition worsened on Saturday after which he underwent an emergency procedure to remove blood clots in the leg. His heart stopped working and the officer died at 12.19 pm.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT – JAMMU & KASHMIR

ASIAN AGE, SEP 11, 2018

After NC, PDP to boycott panchayat, local body polls over Article 35A



Srinagar: Following the footsteps of National Conference, former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said on Monday that her party has decided to boycott local body and panchayat polls in the state scheduled from next month.

Mufti also asked the Centre to review the decision to hold elections in J&K at present. “Situation linking panchayat polls case pending in Supreme Court about Article 35A has created apprehensions in minds of people. Party, therefore, urges the government to review its decision to hold polls at this juncture,” the PDP chief said.

She added, “Looking at this situation, we have decided to stay away from this process”.

Earlier, the National Conference has already said that it will boycott the panchayat elections and even the 2019 Lok Sabha elections if the Centre does not take steps to protect Article 35A.

"The core group (of NC) unanimously decided that the National Conference will not participate in these elections unless and until the government of India and the state government clarify their positions in this regard and take effective steps for protection of Article 35A in and outside the courts," party chief Farooq Abdullah had said.

While the urban local body polls are slated for the first week of October, the panchayat elections are scheduled to be held in November-December this year.

Article 35A, which was incorporated in the Constitution by a 1954 Presidential Order, accords special rights and privileges to the citizens of Jammu and Kashmir and bars people from outside the state from acquiring any immovable property in the state.

The article has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT – KERALA

PIONEER, SEP 8, 2018

Church sex scandal: Nun to move Kerala HC

A senior Catholic nun who has accused Latin Catholic Bishop Franco Mulakkal of the Jalandhar Diocese of raping her several times or her family may approach the Kerala High Court on Monday in the context of the police's alleged reluctance to arrest him even as more nuns of the diocese have reportedly told the investigators about the bad experiences they have had from the prelate who, they said, used to embrace them forcibly.

A nun of the same diocese, who has already abandoned her religious habit after being fed up with the bishop's allegedly perverse behaviour, is said to have told the police team probing the rape charge against him that he used to touch the nuns, members of the Missionaries of Jesus congregation that came under his control, in immoral manner and embrace them forcibly.

As per reports, a minimum of 18 nuns had given up their service in the congregation due to the bad experiences they had had from the Bishop, especially during a Church programme he himself had implemented, 'A Day with the Shepherd', which necessitated the nuns to spend whole days with him.

It is said that the Bishop used to call the nuns to his room even after evening in the name of prayer sessions held as part of the programme which was launched in the diocese in 2014 but only one nun would be

allowed at a time. The programme had triggered widespread protests from within the congregation and even several priests in the diocese had come out against it.

One of the nuns who have abandoned their religious habit has reportedly told the police that she had faced bad behaviour from the part of the Bishop during such prayer sessions. Even the Mother General of the congregation had admitted to the police that the programme, A Day with the Shepherd, had to be suspended after a couple of sessions due to objections.

In her complaint to the police, the senior nun, now 47, had said Bishop Franco Mulakkal (54) had raped her at a guest house attached to St Francis Mission Home, her convent at Kuravilangad in Kottayam district, 13 times in two years. He had raped her first on May 5, 2014 when he had visited Kerala for taking part in a Church programme in Thrissur, she had said.

Meanwhile, the rape victim or her family is likely to file a petition in the High Court on Monday against the alleged reluctance of the Kerala Police to arrest the Bishop, who hails from a Syro-Malabar Catholic family in Thrissur, despite the fact they have collected ample evidences and witness statements against him.

There were rumours that the nun herself might hold a Press conference on Sunday to disclose details of her allegations in a bid to mount pressure on the police. The victim's family is convinced that the probe team headed by DySP K Subhash wants to arrest the Bishop at the earliest but the action is being delayed due to pressure from their superiors and political bosses.

“The police have collected strong evidences and sufficient witness statements against the Bishop but they are not arresting him. Nothing

will happen as far as the present police chief – DGP Loknath Behera – remains in that position. In this situation, the only way before us seems to be to approach the court,” said a brother of the victim.

Pointing out that the probe in the case had started 72 days ago, the family said the police had already recorded the statement of the nun six times while the only action taken in the case of the accused was that the probe team had recorded his statement once and that too in a “very generous manner” at his diocesan headquarters in Jalandhar.

The family thinks that the police, who have already come across a nearly two dozen contradictions in the statement given by the accused, have been “questioning” the victim again and again with the intention of finding contradictions in her statements that could be interpreted in the Bishop’s favour so that his arrest can be avoided or delayed further.

The charge against the Bishop, the disrepute and shame it has brought to the Catholic Church and the police’s alleged reluctance to arrest the accused have sowed unhappiness among a large section of the Catholic laity in Kerala. Catholic organizations in Kochi have been preparing to stage protests against the Bishop and the police in the coming days.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

HINDU BUSINESS LINE, SEP 9, 2018

Pranab Mukherjee to teach IIM-A students



Course to deal with a broad overview of inclusive development and the system of parliamentary democracy

Former President Pranab Mukherjee to teach a course on ‘Public Policy for Inclusive Development of India’ at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. The course will be taught to the students of PGPM (Post Graduate Programme in Management), FABM (Food and Agri-Business Management) and PGPX (Post Graduate Program in Management for Executives) programs.

This new course is housed within the JSW School of Public Policy at IIM-A and former President would be a guest faculty for at least 12 out of 22 sessions. Vijaya Sherry Chand, Chairperson of JSW School of Public Policy and Anil Gupta will be handling other sessions of the course.

The course deals with a broad overview of the interplay between the desired end of inclusive development and the system of parliamentary democracy in India.

Constitutional Provisions for Socio-economic Inclusivity: Theory and Parliamentary Practice, Policy and Institutional Intervention for Financial Inclusion: A Legacy to be Built Upon and Articulating Policy and Institutional Agenda for Future Transformation of India, are the broad themes on which Mukherjee would be delivering lectures.

“In a complex democratic society such as ours, technically ideal solutions to public problems have to be balanced by the management of conflicts that are inevitable when there are multiple and contradictory pulls. This should also help in understanding why the idea of inclusion goes beyond narrow economic perspectives on poverty and its alleviation,” said Chand.

RAILWAYS

PIONEER, SEP 10, 2018

Work in a mission mode: Modi to Rlys

Peeved by the tardy progress of some sectors in the railways, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has directed the Ministry of Railways to "work in a mission mode rather than on incremental progress".

At a meeting with railways, the PMO has finalised and in some cases advanced the deadlines of projects like that of achieving punctuality by next month end, couple of them to be completed by year end and other important projects like commissioning of Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) by March 2019, that is before the General Elections.

Sources said that the Prime Minister, at the backdrop of several apprehensions regarding Bullet Train, also took stock of the situation of Indian Railways' ambitious projects like the High Speed Mumbai Ahmedabad corridor and redevelopment of some of the chosen railway stations which includes one in his home State Gujarat.

The Prime Minister was more concerned about the delays of passenger trains and has directed the national transporter to put trains on time on the tracks by October 2018 under the railways "Mission Raftar", a project conceived by PM himself during the tenure of Suresh Prabhu as Railway Minister.

As per the latest report the trains on Delhi Howrah route registered a dismal punctuality performance with North Central Railways Zone recording only 42.11 percent. The Zone accounts for dropping of the average punctuality figures of entire railways. The best punctuality

performance (PP) has been registered by Western Railway at 99.9 percent followed by South Central Railways.

While most of the other Zones PP oscillate between 74-79 percent, the Central Railway and South Eastern Railways hovers around 86 percent. Northern Railway which receives maximum number of trains with important stations like New Delhi under its jurisdictions, has fared compared to neighbouring NCR and has recorded 62 percent punctuality performance (PP).

Sources said that the PM has also sought details by this month end pertaining to the ideas and projects deliberated during the two Chintan Shivirs which was attended by the Prime Minister himself. Another significant aspect discussed by the PMO was rationalizing of the passenger and freight fares and to generate revenue from non-fare sectors like the national transporter properties like land, station buildings etc and for which a deadline for December 2018 has been set up.

Railway Ministry sources said following the PMO meeting, very soon a decision on the controversial flexi fare in premium trains is to be taken which might bring a big relief ahead of the festive season to rail passengers.

Other issues discussed in the meeting last month has a timeline till the end of this fiscal which includes many infrastructure development projects which had a deadline of June 2019 and beyond. Sources said that the PM also discussed over restructuring of the Railway Board and to improve upon the legacy of the national transporter.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, SEP 12, 2018

PM Modi announces over 50% pay hike for Asha, Anganwadi workers



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced a substantial increase in the honorarium for Anganwadi and Asha (Accredited social health activists) workers from October in a move that is expected to help millions of women from relatively poor households

All Asha workers will also get free coverage under the two flagship insurance schemes of the government, Modi announced during a video interaction with Asha, ANM (auxiliary nurse midwife) and Anganwadi workers from across the country.

There are around 1.4 million Anganwadis or child care centres in rural areas across the country and a total of 1.28 million Anganwadi workers and a little over 1 million helpers. There are also a total of 1 million accredited Asha workers.

Those who drew an honorarium of Rs 3,000 will from now on get Rs 4,500 and those who used to get Rs 2,200 will get Rs 3,500, Modi said. The honorarium of Anganwadi helpers will be hiked from Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,500, he added. In percentage terms, that works out to an increase of 50%, 59%, and 66.67% respectively.

The PM also announced that Anganwadi workers and helpers using techniques such as common application software (ICDS-CAS) would get additional incentives. The incentives, ranging from Rs 250 to Rs 500, would be based on performance, he explained. The software monitors, in real time, the services provided by Anganwadis in the area of nutrition.

Bharatiya Janata Party president Amit Shah said the government's decision would not only boost the morale of the Anganwadi and Asha workers but also improve their living standards and thus the quality of service.

Modi also said the government's flagship health insurance programme Ayushman Bharat will be launched from Jharkhand on September 23, and added that the beneficiaries have already been identified.

Reacting to increase in honorarium of Anganwadi workers and helpers, women and child development minister Maneka Gandhi said she was grateful to the PM "for leading the Poshan Abhiyan from the front".

"Over the last 4 years, we have been putting the pieces of puzzle together so that the fight against malnutrition can be taken up in a

mission mode. The first aspect we dealt was the increase of daily cost norms for the beneficiaries of the ICDS Programme. The second was to have a technology-based real-time monitoring system of Anganwadi services. These two have been put in place,” she added.

“The third aspect was the identification and elimination of fake beneficiaries which is an ongoing process. We have already eliminated approximately one crore fake beneficiaries from the system. The fourth piece has been announced today,” Maneka said.

TAXATION

HINDU BUSINESS LINE, SEP 8, 2018

'Govt using data analytics to detect GST default'

A lot of misconceptions among tax payers have been quelled over the last one year since the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was launched.

“GST is not a disruptive law but a transformational law. As the law matures, industry, which initially had inhibitions and doubts, is now voluntarily complying with the law. We do accept the fact that GST initially had several glitches and had created complexity in complying with it, but now a sizeable chunk of the hitches stand removed,” said A K Jyotishi, Principal Chief Commissioner of Central Taxes, Bengaluru Zone.

Addressing a workshop on ‘GST: Practical Requirements and Challenges’ organised by the Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce (BCIC) on Friday, Jyotishi said the Centre is seriously contemplating reducing the number of tax rate slabs under GST in the near future.

“There is a proposal with the government to reduce the current five-rate tax slab to two rates, as 90 per cent of the taxes imposed come under the 18 per cent tax bracket,” he added. In the same vein, he also sounded a word of caution to GST defaulters.

Jyotishi said: “There is an impression that tax assesseees can get away by not complying with GST law in the garb that the department is still using manual methods. But let me flag you, after the initial hand-holding and a go-slow attitude by the trade, which was deliberate, we now have the wherewithal to track tax defaulters and will act with a stern hand, if tax

payers continue to default”. He also said the government is using data analytics and defaults have already been detected.

Explaining how simple and plain the GST law is, Jyothishi cited the example of a credit card seller and how he forced him to buy the card despite his strong reservation. “After the initial no-no, I was coaxed to take the credit card. After reaping the benefits of the credit card, I was overwhelmed by the benefits and the ease of transaction. Similarly, GST may look complex initially, but let me tell you that once you begin to adapt to the new law, operations will be as simple as sending an SMS to the department.”

Jyothishi said according to current records, there are eight lakh assesseees (3.4 lakh Central Government monitored and the rest by the state). The Department collects on an average Rs 6,500 crore every month. The tax base has increased from 60 lakh to 1.10 crore. Basically, the increase is due to voluntary compliance and also some sectors, hitherto left out, have now come under the GST gambit.

Jyothishi said “Any change in taxation policy is very sensitive in nature as it has a range of ramifications across population and asset class. However, what is undeniable is that we must embark on reforming tax structures, simplifying the code, widening the tax net and also aim at reducing the slab rates of GST.”

Kishore Alva, President, Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce (BCIC) & Joint President and Executive Director, Adani - Udupi Power Corporation Ltd said: “Despite a few drawbacks that the industry is facing due to the new tax legislation, we must celebrate this landmark reform. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that half the job is done as far as tax reform is concerned. We have a long way to go.”

TERRORISM

TRIBUNE, SEP 10, 2018

Tamil Nadu recommends release of Rajiv assassination convicts

The AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu Sunday decided to recommend to the state Governor Banwarilal Purohit, the release of all seven life convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

A resolution to this effect was adopted at the state cabinet which met here under Chief Minister K Palaniswami's leadership, Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar told reporters.

It decided to recommend to Governor Purohit, the release of Murugan, Santhan, Perarivalan, Jayakumar, Ravichandran, Robert Payas and Nalini, serving life imprisonment.

The moves comes days after the Supreme Court asked the Tamil Nadu Governor to consider the mercy petition of Perarivalan seeking remission or pardon under Article 161 of the Constitution and disposed of the Centre's petition opposing Tamil Nadu government's earlier proposal for the release of the convicts.

Though the apex court had asked the Governor to consider the plea of Perarivalan, the government decided to recommend setting free all others also as they had also petitioned seeking premature release, he said.

The cabinet resolution will be sent to the Governor "immediately," he said.

Former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated on May 21, 1991 at Sriperumbudur near here by an LTTE woman suicide bomber, Dhanu, at an election rally. Fourteen others, including Dhanu herself, were also killed.

ASIAN AGE, SEP 11, 2018

2 sentenced to death for 2007 Hyderabad blasts



Hyderabad: The two men found guilty of setting off the two blasts that killed 44 persons at Gokul Chat and Lumbini Park here in 2007 were sentenced to death on Monday. Another accused was given life imprisonment. The sentences were read out by second additional metropolitan sessions court in-charge judge T Srinivas Rao at the Cherlapally central prison.

The court sentenced Mohammed Akbar Ismail Choudhary and Aneeq Shafique Sayeed to death. They were convicted on September 4, 11

years after the blasts took place. Tariq Anjum, who was accused of harbouring the convicts in Delhi and other places before and after the blasts, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Special public prosecutor K. Surender told this newspaper: “The court found that Aneeq and Ismail were guilty of the charges framed by the prosecution of conspiring to form a group and planting bombs. Tariq has been found guilty of harbouring the accused before and after the blasts. The first two were given death punishment and a penalty of Rs 10,000 for each offence and Tariq was given life imprisonment.”

The two blasts that occurred in a span of five minutes at the eatery and the amusement park on the evening of August 25, 2007, killed 44 people and left about 68 persons injured. According to the prosecution, the bomb planted by Aneeq at Lumbini Park exploded at 7.40 pm and the bomb planted by Ismail at Gokul Chat exploded five minutes later. Another bomb planted under the foot-overbridge at Saroornagar did not explode.

Aneeq and Ismail were sentenced to life imprisonment in the case of the unexploded bomb recovered at Dilsukhnagar under the foot-overbridge. However, as the death penalty is the highest punishment,” said Challa Seshu Reddy, the special public prosecutor of Counter Intelligence Cell.

The first charge sheet in the case was filed on May 16, 2009, and a month later, two supplementary charge sheets were filed in the court by the Counter Intelligence Cell. The prosecution questioned 159 witnesses in the case. Three other accused, Riyaz Bhatkal and his brother Iqbal Bhatkal, and Amir Reza Khan are still absconding.

“As the accused are still absconding, the court said that they will face trial after they are caught,” said Mr Surender. Aneeq and Choudhary

were found guilty under several sections of the Indian Penal Code., including murder, and also under the Explosive Substances Act, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act (PDPPA). Defence counsel Gandham Gurusurthy said the defence will challenge the judgment in the case of all three once the judgment copy is received.

Responding to a query, he said: “The accused have the right to challenge the judgment in the higher courts and can also go for Presidential pardon.”

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