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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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Warm water melts Antarctica's glacier: study

Reuters

MEXICO CITY

Scientists studying Antarctica's vast Thwaites Glacier – nicknamed the Doomsday Glacier – say warm water is seeping into its weak spots, worsening melting

caused by rising temperatures, two papers published in *Nature* journal showed on Wednesday.

Thwaites, which is roughly the size of Florida, represents more than half a metre of global sea level rise potential, and could

destabilise neighbouring glaciers that have the potential to cause a further three-meter rise.

As part of the International Thwaites Glacier collaboration, a team of 13 U.S. and British scientists spent about six weeks on

the glacier. They monitored the glacier using an underwater robot vehicle known as Icefin.

In one of the papers, Cornell University-based scientist Britney Schmidt said the melting was of grave concern.

India's Sri Lankan refugees need fair consideration

It will soon be 14 years since the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. The three-decade war that ended in May 2009 devastated the once peaceful and prosperous nation. Many civilians perished and large sections had no choice but to flee; some within the country while others left for foreign lands having lost livelihoods and fearing for their lives. Many sought protection in India, among a population of identical ethnicity in Tamil Nadu. The vast majority travelled in boats and dinghies in desperation. They entered India in search of safety, many without travel documents and were received and hosted by the Government of India on humanitarian grounds.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in its 2021-2022 Annual Report states that 3,04,269 Sri Lankan refugees entered India between July 1983 and August 2012 and were provided relief including shelter, subsidised ration, educational assistance, medical care and cash allowances. In addition to the warm welcome provided, access to public education and health facilities embodies the Government of India's recognition of the needs of Sri Lankan refugees. Sustaining assistance for decades is an example of best practices under the aegis of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Slow progress

The end of the civil war renewed hope for this nation wrecked after years of ethnic strife and displacement. The Government of Sri Lanka constituted the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission in 2010 "to look back at the conflict Sri Lanka suffered as well as to look ahead for an era of healing and peace building in the country". Its observations and recommendations on human rights, international humanitarian law, land rights, resettlement and reconciliation are noteworthy.

Since the end of the civil war, the Government



Oscar Mundia

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A solution that provides relief from enduring refugee status is what is needed

of Sri Lanka, and development partners initiated programmes in the Northern and Eastern provinces, with objectives of resettlement, restoration of critical infrastructure, livelihoods and social services to the local population. This led to significant improvements; the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), infrastructure development, expansion of agriculture and livelihoods. The government expenditure in the Northern and Eastern Provinces during 2009-18 is reported to be \$3.8 billion with another \$3.4 billion by development partners.

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain, including lack of funds for recovery needs. The Easter Bombings in 2019 followed by COVID-19 slowed the development process, compounded by the economic and political crises in 2022. As in the latest World Bank Sri Lanka Update, "poverty has more than doubled over the past few years, and poverty and vulnerability will continue to rise without appropriate support".

Refugees in India

In India, 58,648 refugees are residing in 108 camps in Tamil Nadu while 54 are in Odisha. Another 34,135 refugees registered with Tamil Nadu authorities reside outside camps. The Government of India provided ₹1,226 crore for the relief and accommodation of refugees from July 1983 to March 31, 2022. However, the objective of the Government of India remains the repatriation of refugees to Sri Lanka; 99,469 refugees were repatriated to Sri Lanka up to March 1995 and no organised repatriation was done thereafter.

Amongst them are 30,000 Persons of Indian Origin (also known as "Hill Tamils"). They have a claim to Sri Lankan citizenship *vide* the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreements of 1964, 1974 and 1987 and amendments to the Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act of Sri Lanka. Lack of

documents as well as a desire to continue in India differentiates them from other refugees. They may need special consideration and lie beyond 3.35 lakh people repatriated to India from October 1964 to December 2006, as in the MHA Report 2019-20.

Today, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India who wish to return voluntarily are being facilitated by the Government of Sri Lanka. Over the last year, 208 individuals have returned voluntarily, supported by the Government of India, bilateral donors and the UNHCR. Recent announcements, to commence ferry services to Kankensanthurai and direct flights to Jaffna from India (this has begun), will build confidence and aid those desirous of return.

The issue of voluntary return

Sri Lankan refugees in India are in a protracted situation, some for over four decades. At the UNHCR, we perceive voluntary return as the most desired choice to end refugee status. There is a significant population which may not wish to return, preferring to call India home. This is a cohort born and educated in India with no knowledge or experience of their country of origin. A solution that provides relief from enduring refugee status is the need of the hour.

India possesses the capacity and the legal framework to find durable solutions to the refugee situation in Tamil Nadu. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, India along with the international community has significantly contributed to building conditions within Sri Lanka for a safe and durable return.

The welfare of refugees including efforts towards self-reliance can be cited as global best practice. What remains is a solution for the group which may consider India to be their home after a stay of decades. They, above all, need fair consideration.

HC questions use of POCSO Act in Assam child marriage cases

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court has questioned the application of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in child marriage cases in Assam, while granting anticipatory bail to nine people booked under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) on February 14.

The Assam Police began a crackdown on child marriages across the State on February 3. More than 3,000 people allegedly linked with such cases have been booked under relevant sections of the PCMA read with punitive sections of the POCSO Act.

“If marriage is taking place in violation of the law, the law will take its

own course. These cases have been happening since time. We will only consider if immediate custodial interrogation is required or not. At this moment, this court thinks that these are not matters for custodial interrogation. We will ask them to appear and record their statements. These are not NDPS, smuggling, stolen property cases,” Justice Suman Shyam said.

Calling the allegations “weird”, the court sought to know if there was any allegation of rape.

“This (crackdown) is causing a havoc in the private life of people... Obviously, it (child marriage) is a bad idea. We will give our views but at the moment the issue is whether they should be all arrested and put in jail,” it added.

Brazen intimidation

Actions such as the tax survey on BBC are meant to produce a chilling effect

It is difficult not to see the Income Tax (I-T) department's two-day survey of the BBC's offices in New Delhi and Mumbai as an attempt to produce a chilling effect on Britain's well regarded public broadcaster and also media institutions willing to hold the current regime to account for past actions. The survey's officials said they were investigating charges related to "transfer pricing" and "diversion of profits". However, the fact that the action came in the wake of the release of the two-part documentary, *India: the Modi Question*, raises significant questions. That journalists were also subjected to what is essentially an accounting/financial survey can only be interpreted as an act of intimidation of media personnel. Besides, this also follows actions by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, which had, not too long ago, issued overzealous orders to online media platforms to disable links to the first part of the documentary by invoking emergency powers under the IT Rules, 2021 and Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000, and later blocking tweets with links to it. The reactions by BJP spokespersons – one called the BBC a "corrupt" corporation – only adds to the impression that this is an effort at de-legitimising the work done by critical media outlets. The survey of the BBC is not an exception if similar exercises in the past are considered: at the digital news organisation Newsland in 2021, the CBI's raid of NDTV in 2017, and the Enforcement Directorate's searches of digital portal Newslick and I-T searches of the Dainik Bhaskar group, both in 2021. Last year, the digital media-funding Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation and the think tank, Centre for Policy Research, had such "surveys". The unmistakable and common link is that the media organisations have published content critical of the Union government.

India's claim as a developing nation and a growing economy in a globalised world is that it is a flourishing democracy with constitutionally guaranteed institutional freedoms and separation of powers and is unlike authoritarian regimes that have promoted economic prosperity but do not play by institutional rules and values. Core to this is the idea of the freedom of the press in holding those in power to account. Even if media organisations raise uncomfortable questions, the response has to be factual, reasonable and measured. The reaction to the BBC's documentary has been anything but that. In trying to block access to the documentary, the government came across as ham-fisted and now, with this survey at the BBC offices, it comes across as intimidating. This does not augur well for India's global image, but worse, it is a clear threat to existing freedoms of the country's citizens.

A manifesto for tackling the silent pandemic of AMR

While the world is emerging from the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the very harmful but invisible pandemic of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is unfortunately here to stay. Most countries understood in 2020 the clear and present danger of COVID-19, forcing governments, including India's, to respond with speed and accuracy. The rapidly rising AMR rates also need an accelerated, multi-sectoral, global and national response.

In recent decades, while new drugs have revolutionised human health care, health experts have been struggling with disease-causing microbes that have become resistant to drugs. Global public health response has been threatened due to rising misuse and overuse of antibiotics in humans and animals.

Microbial resistance to antibiotics has made it harder to treat infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis (TB), blood-poisoning (septicaemia) and several food-borne diseases. AMR also imposes a huge health cost on the patient in the form of longer hospitalisation, health complications and delayed recovery. It puts patients undergoing major surgeries and treatments, such as chemotherapy, at a greater risk. Many times, patients recover from advanced medical procedures but succumb to untreatable infections.

In 2019, AMR was associated with an estimated 4.95 million human deaths. A 2018 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned of a phenomenal increase, by 2030, of resistance to back-up antibiotics (second and third-line).

AMR adds to the burden of communicable diseases and strains the health systems of a country. An Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) study in 2022 showed that the resistance level increases from 5% to 10% every year for broad-spectrum antimicrobials. An Indian Network for Surveillance of Antimicrobial Resistance (INSAR) study indicated a high rate of resistance to commonly used drugs such as ciprofloxacin, gentamicin, co-trimoxazole, erythromycin and clindamycin.

India and the Muscat conference

As the current G-20 president, and as a country vulnerable to this silent pandemic, India's role is critical in ensuring that AMR remains high on the global public health agenda.

India's commitment to the cause was evident at the Third Global High-Level Ministerial Conference on Antimicrobial Resistance



Dr. Soumya Swaminathan

is former Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization

(November 24-25, 2022) held in Muscat, where over 30 countries adopted the Muscat Ministerial Manifesto on AMR.

The Muscat Manifesto recognised the need to accelerate political commitments in the implementation of One Health action for controlling the spread of AMR. It also recognised the need to address the impact of AMR not only on humans but also on animals, and in areas of environmental health, food security and economic growth and development.

The conference focused on three health targets: reduce the total amount of antimicrobials used in the agri-food system at least by 30-50% by 2030; eliminate use in animals and food production of antimicrobials that are medically important for human health; and ensure that by 2030 at least 60% of overall antibiotic consumption in humans is from the WHO "Access" group of antibiotics.

In her address, India's Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar, said that AMR was a serious global health threat and could not be "overshadowed by other competing public health priorities".

India has committed to strengthening surveillance and promoting research on newer drugs. It also plans to strengthen private sector engagement and the reporting of data to the WHO Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS) and other standardised systems.

High levels of resistance

WHO has increasingly expressed concern about the dangerously high levels of antibiotic resistance among patients across countries. Take the example of ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic commonly used to treat urinary tract infections. According to WHO, resistance to ciprofloxacin varied from 8.4% to 92.9% for *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and from 4.1% to 79.4% for *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (a bacteria that can cause life-threatening infections such as pneumonia and intensive care unit-related infections). The global epidemic of TB has been severely impacted by multidrug resistance – patients have less than a 60% chance of recovery.

The Muscat Manifesto appears to respond to the AMR crisis by setting these three ground-breaking targets. The manifesto encourages countries to prioritise their national action plans for AMR keeping the One Health approach. The One Health approach requires all stakeholders to work together towards an integrated programme linking challenges of

humans, terrestrial and aquatic animal, plant health, food and feed production and the environment. This approach will enable the world to effectively prevent, predict and detect the health crisis induced by AMR. Tackling AMR requires constant monitoring of antibiotic consumption, identifying the types and quantities of antibiotics being used.

There is also an urgent need to reduce the usage of antimicrobials in the agri-food system. Scientific evidence suggests that the less antimicrobials are used, it is less likely that there will be an emergence of drug resistance. Countries such as the Netherlands and Thailand have decreased their usage by almost 50%. In China, the consumption of antibiotics in the agricultural sector has fallen substantially. The use of antibiotics in healthy animals to boost growth has also been reduced in the last decade in many countries.

From policy to the ground level

The National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2017-21) emphasised the effectiveness of the government's initiatives for hand hygiene and sanitation programmes such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Kayakalp and Swachh Swasth Sarvatra. The government has also attempted to increase community awareness about healthier and better food production practices, especially in the animal food industry. The National Health Policy 2017 also offered specific guidelines regarding use of antibiotics, limiting the use of antibiotics as over-the-counter medications and banning or restricting the use of antibiotics for growth promotion in livestock. It also called for scrutiny of prescriptions to assess antibiotic usage in hospitals and among doctors. Everything in these policies now needs strong implementation on the ground.

The various G-20 health summits spread through 2023 offer an opportunity for India to ensure that all aspects of AMR are addressed and countries commit to progress. Some key areas for action are: surveillance – both phenotypic and genotypic – of priority pathogens and sharing of data, including through WHO's GLASS platform; regulatory and policy action to stop use of antibiotics that are important for human health in animals; no use of antibiotics for growth promotion in animals; more government investment in research and innovation for new antibiotics; explore use of vaccines to prevent certain infections due to AMR organisms in humans and animals; special focus on combating TB and drug-resistant TB.

As the current G-20 president, and as a vulnerable country, India has a key role in ensuring that AMR remains high on the global health agenda

Understanding India's Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

What are the various challenges for the implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017? What did the National Human Rights Commission say about the Act's execution across the country?

Saumya Kalia

The story so far:

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in a report flagged the "inhuman and deplorable" condition of all 46 government-run mental healthcare institutions across the country. The report notes that the facilities are "illegally" keeping patients long after their recovery, in what is an "infringement of the human rights of mentally ill patients". These observations were made after visits to all operational government facilities, to assess the implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 (MHA).

What does the MHA, 2017 say?

The MHA, 2017 "centered the agency of individuals, acknowledged their right to live as part of a community [under

Section 19], and focused on rehabilitation," says Ms. Priti Sridhar, CEO of Mariwala Health Initiative (MHI). Under Section 19 of the Act, the government was made responsible for creating opportunities to access less restrictive options for community living – such as halfway homes, sheltered accommodations, rehab homes, and supported accommodation. The Act also discourages using physical restraints (such as chaining), unmodified electro-convulsive therapy (ECT), and pushes for the right to hygiene, sanitation, food, recreation, privacy, and infrastructure. More importantly, the Act recognised that "people have a capacity of their own – unless proven otherwise," says Tanya Fernandes, a researcher with the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy. Additionally, under Section 5, people are empowered to make "advance

directives". They can nominate a representative for themselves, thereby potentially helping to eliminate absolute forms of guardianship in favour of supported decision-making. This is barring cases where the person needs a higher degree of care and support. Experts note this was the first time a psychosocial approach to mental health was adopted. The Act acknowledged that external factors – such as income, social status, and education – impact mental well-being, and therefore, recovery needs a psychiatric as well as a social input.

What are the challenges?

While the MHA safeguards the rights of people in mental healthcare establishments, enforcement challenges remain. Almost 36.25% of residential service users at state psychiatric facilities were found to be living for one year or

more in these facilities, according to a 2018 report by the Hans Foundation.

Under the MHA, all States are required to establish a State Mental Health Authority and Mental Health Review Boards (MHRBs) – bodies that can further draft standards for mental healthcare institutes, oversee their functioning and ensure they comply with the Act. Ms. Fernandes notes that in a majority of States, "these bodies are yet to be established or remain defunct...Further, many States have not notified minimum standards which are meant to ensure the quality of MHEs." Ms. Sridhar further notes that the Act takes on a human rights lens by shifting the obligation of care onto different stakeholders – including caregivers, government institutions, police officials, and mental health practitioners. Poor budgetary allocation and utilisation of funds creates a scenario where shelter homes remain under-equipped, establishments understaffed, and professionals and service providers not adequately trained to deliver proper healthcare, she added. While Section 19 recognises the right of people to "live in, be part of, and not be segregated from society," there have been no concrete efforts towards implementation, according to Ms. Fernandes. The dearth of alternative community-based services further complicates access to rehabilitation.

THE GIST

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Taxing windfall profits of oil companies

What are windfall taxes? How are they calculated? What does the government do with the revenue accrued from these taxes? Why are the profits of oil and gas companies rising? What role does the Russia-Ukraine war have? What has the Chairman of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs said?

EXPLAINER

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

On February 3, the Union government hiked the windfall profit tax levied on domestically-produced crude oil as well as on the export of diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF). Just three days before this, the Chairman of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs Vivek Johri, told *PTI* that prices of crude were on the rise again and thus, "for the time being windfall tax will continue." He added that it would be difficult to predict for how long the taxation will continue.

Why tax windfall profits?

'Windfall profits' refer to an unanticipated spike in earnings of an entity resulting from an exogenous event (which could be one-off and/or prolonged) and not resulting from a business decision. The B.K. Chaturvedi committee's report on the Financial Position of Oil Companies (2008) had stated that taxing of these windfall gains has been seen as a prerogative of governments, in part to meet fiscal needs and in part to pursue redistributive justice. The central idea here is for sovereigns to capitalise on the lofty profits made by the entities and use it for specific domestic pursuits, for example, spur collections (of taxes) to guard against the consequences of a larger geopolitical event or redistribute them for it to be used for domestic social service schemes, among other reasons. As per the government, the collection of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) for the ongoing financial year is estimated to be ₹25,000 crore from production of crude oil, export of petrol, diesel and ATF. Windfall taxes are reviewed on a fortnightly basis and are subject to factors such as international oil prices, exchange rate and quantity of exports. India had first imposed SAED in July 2022.

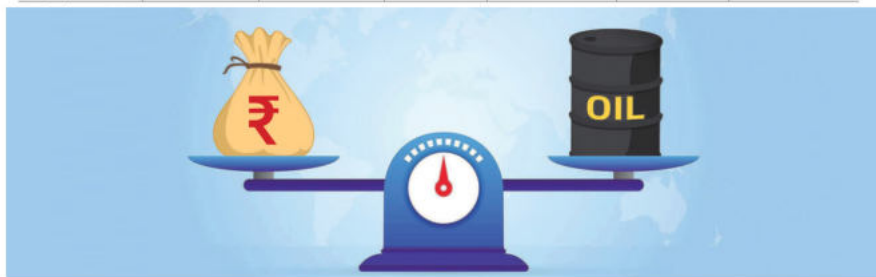
What led to windfall gains?

Russia's actions in Ukraine were central to

The oil charge

This table shows the details of recent revisions made in the Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on domestic crude oil production

The time period	November 17 to December 1, 2022	December 2 to December 15, 2022	December 16 to January 2, 2023	January 3 to January 16, 2023	January 17 to February 3, 2023	February 4, 2023 till date
Petroleum crude (rupee per tonne)	₹10,200	₹4,900	₹1,700	₹2,100	₹1,900	₹5,050



the volatility observed in the oil market in the previous calendar year. For perspective, Russia was among the major players in the global oil market and among the largest producers alongside Saudi Arabia and U.S. As a response to Russia's actions, several Western countries, moved to stop or curtail their energy imports from Russia. This led to sharp increases in fossil fuel prices as sovereigns went to look for other suppliers for its energy needs, culminating in major profits for oil companies. This was a total reversal of fortunes compared to the onset of the pandemic when oil had struggled to even attain fiscal breakeven. According to *Reuters*, all 'Big Oil' companies (including BP, Chevron, Equinor, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total Energies) combined, more than doubled their profits to \$219 billion in 2022. In fact, Chevron commenced a share buyback programme amounting to \$75 billion alongside a 6% increase in its quarterly dividend – both indicative of its financial strength.

In India, ONGC's profit-after-tax (PAT) until September end in the ongoing finan-

cial year stood at ₹28,032 crore, compared to the ₹40,306 crore in the complete fiscal ending March 31, 2022. The turn of events has led to oil companies prioritising investments in conventional sources to provide for energy security than transitioning towards cleaner energy to meet energy requirements. Industry participants have particularly argued about the need for investments to facilitate decarbonisation. In an interview to *CNBC*, Saudi Aramco's CEO Amin Nasser said that windfall taxes would not be helpful (for oil companies) to acquire additional investment. "There's no doubt, transition needs to (happen)," he stated, adding, "At the same time, we need to build oil and gas, while at the same time decarbonise oil and gas. We need support for alternatives. But at the same time, we need the support or the conventional sources of energy by building carbon capture and storage and giving incentives and support by policymakers."

What potentially lies ahead?

Nearly a year since the geopolitical conflict

erupted, the International Energy Agency (IEA) notes that global oil markets are trading in "relative calm".

Oil prices are back to pre-war levels, exception being diesel, though it has also drifted much lower than last summer's historical highs. "World oil supply looks set to exceed demand through the first half of 2023, but the balance could shift quickly to deficit as demand recovers and some Russian output is shut in," read IEA's Oil Market Report for February 2023. It added that Russian oil production and exports have held up relatively well notwithstanding the sanctions. It has managed to reroute shipments of crude to Asia and the G7 price cap on crude "appears to be helping to keep the barrels flowing."

IEA estimates that global oil demand is set to rise by 2 mb/d in 2023 to 101.9 mb/d. The Asia-Pacific region, fuelled by China which resumed economic activities following a prolonged period of lockdowns, dominates the outlook. The supply side has been largely steady in January at around 100.8 mb/d.

THE GIST

On February 3, the Union government hiked the windfall profit tax levied on domestically-produced crude oil as well as on the export of diesel and aviation turbine fuel.

'Windfall profits' refer to an unanticipated spike in earnings of an entity resulting from an exogenous event (which could be one-off and/or prolonged) and not resulting from a business decision.

Russia's actions in Ukraine were central to the volatility observed in the oil market in the previous calendar year.

Cereal inflation broad-based and worrying, say economists

Reuters
MUMBAI

The soaring prices of cereals such as wheat and rice are a concern for the Indian economy even though the latest set of inflation data may overstate the extent of the increase, economists said.

Inflation in the cereals category hit 16.1% in January compared to 13.7% in December, data released on Monday show. Alongside cereals, rising prices of protein items like milk, eggs and meat pushed up food and beverages inflation to 6.2% in January.

Besides their effect on



rates, elevated food prices will be a burden in India's rural areas, where disposable income is low and wage hikes have not kept pace with the rise in inflation.

"Higher inflation in more heavily weighted components such as staple cereals and proteins was

worrying," said Dhiraj Nim, an economist at ANZ Research. Mr. Nim said the persistently high wheat and rice prices – despite the government's steps such as curbing wheat exports – had led to inflation in items which use these staples as key inputs.

"The three-month moving average inflation rates for items like biscuits, bread, refined flour, and semolina have been substantially higher than their latest 3-year average inflation rates," he said.

"Cereal inflation, in short, has become broad-based, which is concerning."

Merchandise exports dip

Vikas Dhoot

NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports fell for the second month in a row in January, with the value of shipments slipping 6.6% to \$32.91 billion, while the trade deficit narrowed to the lowest in a year, at just \$17.75 billion, following a concurrent dip in imports.

The Commerce and Industry Ministry sharply revised the goods trade numbers for December 2022, lifting the export figure by \$3.6 billion to \$38.07 billion, indicating a year-on-year contraction of 3% in that month compared with 12.2% estimated earlier.

CONTINUED ON

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Merchandise exports decline in January

This constitutes the biggest revision in export numbers so far this year, followed by a \$3.1 billion upgrade for August and the \$2.85 billion change in November.

Imports, which fell 3.6% to \$50.66 billion in January, were also revised up by almost \$2 billion for December, from \$58.2 billion estimated earlier to \$60.18 billion. The month's trade deficit was thus revised lower to \$22.1 billion.

Based on the revised numbers, the sequential deceleration in both exports and imports is quite significant through January, with outbound shipments dropping 13.6% and imports falling 15.8% from the December 2022 levels. At a cumulative level, merchandise exports have grown 8.5% to \$369.25 billion in the first 10 months of 2022-23, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal pointed out, expressing optimism that "this growth momentum would continue despite strong global headwinds". Imports, on the other hand, have grown 21.9% between April 2022 and January 2023 to hit \$602.2 billion.

The Ministry attributed this to the dichotomy of a slowing global economy and strong domestic growth despite external headwinds. "This seems to be having a two-way effect on India's trade. On one hand, it is reducing exports as there is decline in global growth, resulting in sluggish export demand, while on the other hand increasing imports as domestic demand remains resilient due to relatively high growth," it explained.

As many as 16 of India's top 30 export commodities reported a decline, with handlooms, plastic and linoleum as well as jute products falling over 30%. Other labour-intensive sectors also reported a marked contraction in exports, including carpets (-27.4%), gems and jewellery (19.3%), man-made yarn (-21.1%), handicrafts (-8%), and readymade garments (-3.5%). Engineering goods exports, accounting for about a quarter of India's exports in recent years, fell nearly 10%. On the other hand, gold imports declined by 70.76% to just 0.70 billion in January, the Ministry pointed out.

HAL to provide maintenance and overhaul support for MQ-9B drone engines in India

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

As India looks to purchase armed Predator Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) from the U.S., Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) and General Atomics announced at Aero India on Wednesday that the turbo-propeller engines that power the MQ-9B Guardian High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) RPAS will be supported by the HAL engine division for the Indian market. The companies are looking to formulate a comprehen-

sive engine maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) programme for the upcoming HALE RPAS projects, a joint statement said.

“HAL has been manufacturing and providing MRO support for TPE 331-5 engines for the past 40 years. We are also establishing facilities for manufacturing TPE 331-12B engines for HTT-40 project. The engine used on the MQ-9B RPAS belongs to the same family of engines with upgraded configuration to adapt to the RPAS technology. I am glad that



Special service: The engine aboard the MQ-9B HALE RPAS is unique, requiring special training and equipment for MRO.

HAL Engine Division, Bengaluru would be providing MRO support to the engine for MQ-9B RPAS, one of the most sophisticated equipment in the world,” C.B.

Ananthkrishnan, Chairman and Managing Director, HAL, said.

The Indian Navy operates two MQ-9B Sea Guardians taken on lease in

2020. A larger deal for 30 armed MQ-9Bs, 10 for each Service, is pending. Last year, the Defence Ministry ordered a reassessment of the requirements of the deal estimated at around \$3 billion.

In another announcement, HAL and Germany-based HENSOLDT announced a collaboration agreement covering design/IPR Transfer for design and manufacturing of Obstacle Avoidance System (OAS) for Indian helicopters, primarily the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), and future exports.

Indigenous carrier *Vikrant* will be operational by year-end: Navy chief

The carrier will be put through trials and radar fitment over the next few months, says Admiral R. Hari Kumar at the Aero India defence expo; Navy is likely to acquire 45 twin-engine, deck-based indigenous fighter jets by 2040, he adds

Dinakar Peri
BENGALURU

The country's first indigenous aircraft carrier, *INS Vikrant*, which is undergoing aviation trials, will be fully operational by year-end, and all efforts are on to make it happen, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral R. Hari Kumar, said on Wednesday. The indigenous light combat aircraft (LCA-Navy) and the MiG-29K undertook maiden landings on the carrier earlier this month.

"We see another two months of trials in which in addition to the instrumented aircraft, other aircraft will start landing... MF-STAR (multi-functional dig-



Major strides: *INS Vikrant* was commissioned into the Navy last September. SPOKESPERSON NAVY/TWITTER

ital active electronically scanned array radar) fitment will commence from May onwards and should take three-four months time. During that time, she will also undergo some guarantee refit activity. Thereafter, once the mon-

soon gets over, she will be operationally ready," Adm. Kumar said in response to a question from *The Hindu* at Aero India.

It is an accomplishment that the LCA (Navy) landed on *INS Vikrant* within six months of its commission-

ing, he stated while expressing satisfaction with the performance of the ship.

In January 2020, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully demonstrated arrested landing of LCA-Navy on *INS Vikramaditya*. However, the Navy has projected a requirement for a twin-engine aircraft with reasonable combat payload and range to operate from the carriers. So the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) under the DRDO has embarked on developing a twin-engine deck-based fighter (TEDBF) with an all-up weight of 26 tonnes and wing folding based on the experience of LCA (Navy).

On this, Adm. Kumar said in their discussions with the ADA, DRDO and HAL were quite confident that by 2026 they should be able to develop the prototype and keep doing the trials and productionise it by 2031-32.

"We may be able to get 45 aircraft by 2040. That is as far as indigenous aircraft are concerned," he said, stating this would still leave a gap as the existing carrier compatible MiG-29K jets may not last till then. That is why we are looking at the acquisition of multi-role carrier-based aircraft, for which Boeing F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet and Dassault Aviation Rafale-M were evaluated, the Admiral explained.

Uttarakhand firms up Joshimath relief plan

The State government is offering three options for the permanent rehabilitation of families affected by land subsidence in the town through a policy based on cost and conditions

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Uttarakhand Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposed policy to offer compensation to people who lost their land and buildings due to land subsidence in Joshimath town.

Briefing presspersons, Ranjit Sinha, Secretary, Uttarakhand Disaster Management Department, said the policy was based on cost, options and conditions.

He said the rate of compensation for residential buildings would be calculated by applying the cost index to the plinth area rates of the Central Public Works Department. The final compensation would be calculated after the deduction of depreciation for the affected building from the cost of the upcoming building.

A similar form of relief could be paid for commercial structures for which the government had created five different slabs.

“For the permanent rehabilitation of disaster-affected families, the govern-



Preventive action: Two hotel buildings were demolished as a safety measure in Joshimath last week. ANI

ment is offering them three options,” Mr. Sinha said. The first is opt for compensation. In the second option, the affected person or family can seek land from the government and compensation for the damaged building. Land measuring up to 75 square metres (50 metres for building construction and 25 metres for cow shed and other works) would be provided for the construction of a residential building.

In the third option, a person or family can demand a residential building constructed relative to his land and building.

Buildings will be constructed by the State government on land up to a maximum area of 50 sq.m, with 25 sq.m for cow sheds and other works.

In case the owner wants the government to build a shop or other commercial establishment such as a hotel or a *dhaba*, he or she could opt to get compensation for the damaged commercial building or shop at the prescribed rate, and compensation for land at rates to be determined in the future on the basis of reports from technical institutions.

“If the disaster-affected

person demands land for a shop/business establishment after receiving the compensation for the building, then, in such a situation, land up to a maximum area of 15 sq.m will be provided for the construction of the shop/business establishment,” Mr. Sinha added.

If the affected person wanted the government to build a shop or business establishment, then it would be made available by the State government on land up to a maximum area of 15 sq. m. at the identified site.

The State government chalked out a plan for the employment of families and individuals living on rent in Joshimath town.

“If a person in Joshimath who has been working in the disaster-affected area of Joshimath for more than one year by taking a shop on rent and due to the disaster both the land and the building of the shop/business establishment is unsafe, his employment has been affected. If so, such persons will be provided a one-time financial assistance of ₹2 lakh,” it said.

Eye on China, Cabinet clears 7 ITBP battalions

Over 9,000 personnel to be recruited for deployment in Arunachal Pradesh; ₹4,800 cr. sanctioned under the Vibrant Villages Programme to stop migration and boost tourism in border villages

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

With a view to bolstering the social and security framework along the China border, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved raising of seven new battalions of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and allocated ₹4,800 crore under the Vibrant Villages Programme to stop migration and boost tourism in villages along the border.

The Cabinet Committee on Security cleared the proposal for raising the new ITBP battalions during a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This would entail recruitment of 9,400 personnel for deployment in Aru-



Adding muscle: The strength of the ITBP will increase to 97,000, making it the fourth largest Central Armed Police Force. PTI

nachal Pradesh, where 47 new border outposts and 12 staging camps are under construction. The outposts were sanctioned in January 2020. In all, there are 176 ITBP outposts along the 3,488-km Line of Actual Control.

A sector headquarters for the ITBP was also announced. Union Minister Anurag Thakur said the de-

cision was taken keeping an eye on the need for effective monitoring in the border areas and that the battalions and the sector headquarters would be raised by 2025-26.

“Under this, ₹1,808.15 crore non-recurring expenditure has been approved for construction of official and residential buildings, land acquisition,

arms and ammunition. A recurring expenditure of ₹963.68 crore per year for the salary and ration of personnel has been approved,” Mr. Thakur said.

With this, the strength of the ITBP will increase to 97,000 from the current 88,000.

Indian and Chinese troops are engaged in a stand-off at several locations in eastern Ladakh since April-May 2020.

The Cabinet also approved the Vibrant Villages Programme for the financial years 2022-23 to 2025-26 with an allocation of ₹4,800 crore for the development of villages on the northern border, thus improving the quality of life of people living there.

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Eye on China, Cabinet clears 7 ITBP battalions

An amount of ₹2,500 crore of the allocated funds would be spent on roads. Though the VVP was announced in the 2022-23 Budget, no concrete budget or concept plan was shared then.

“This will help in encouraging people to stay in their native locations in border areas and reversing the out migration from these villages, adding to improved security of the border. Students and college students will be encouraged to visit the border villages,” Mr. Thakur said.

The scheme will provide funds for development of essential infrastructure and creation of livelihood opportunities in 19 districts and 46 border blocks in four States and one Union Territory along the “northern land border of the country” which will help in achieving inclusive growth and retaining the population in the border areas. In the first phase, 663 villages will be covered. In all, 2,966 villages in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are proposed to be covered.

The Cabinet also approved the construction of Shinku La Tunnel to provide all-weather connectivity in Ladakh. Mr. Thakur said the construction work of the 4.1-km tunnel would be completed by December 2025 and the total expenditure would be ₹1,681 crore.

General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
General Studies Paper II	
A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;
K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health
General Studies Paper III	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
V	Linkages of organized crime with terrorism;
W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
General Studies Paper IV	
A	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
B	Dimensions of ethics;
C	Ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
D	Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
E	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour;
F	Moral and political attitudes;
G	Social influence and persuasion.
H	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service , integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
I	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
J	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
K	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems;
L	Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions;
M	Laws, rules, regulations and conscience as
N	sources of ethical guidance;
O	Accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding;
P	Corporate governance.
Q	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service;
R	Philosophical basis of governance and probity;
S	Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
T	Case Studies on above issues.