

● POLITY

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

PRESIDENT MURMU CALLS FOR ALL-INDIA JUDICIAL SERVICE

CONTEXT: President Droupadi Murmu in her address during the Constitution Day celebrations at the Supreme Court called for the setting up of an All-India Judicial Service as a way to ensure equal representation of India's diversity in the judiciary, stressing that the cause of justice was best served by making it accessible to all.



The Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud in his address during the Constitution Day celebrations at the Supreme Court noted the solemn duty of the current generation to keep afloat the idea of India powered by a constitution based on the principles of individual liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The CJI stressed the focus of the court on making its work accessible to all free of cost. Besides live-streaming proceedings, 36,068 of its judgments, as of November 25, 2023, are available for free on the e-Supreme Court Reports (e-SCR) platform of the court. Launching e-SCR (Hindi), 21,388 judgments have been translated into Hindi, vetted, and uploaded on the e-SCR portal. Besides, 9,276 judgments have been translated into other Indian languages including Punjabi, Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Odia, Malayalam, Bengali, Kannada, Assamese, Nepali, Urdu, Garo, Khasi, and Konkani. These judgments have also been uploaded to the e-SCR portal.

Article 312 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of All India Judicial Service (AIJS), which shall not include any post inferior to that of a District Judge. The

PROPOSALS OF THE PRESIDENT

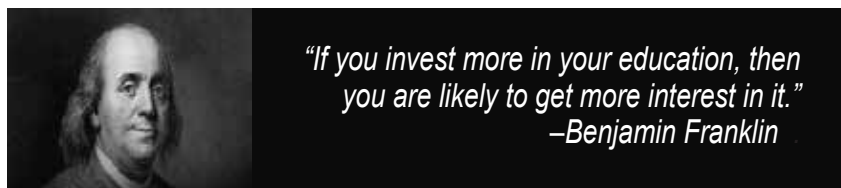
- Proposed for constituting an All-India Judicial Service to ensure representation of India's unique diversity on Bench and Bar, creating a system in which judges can be recruited from varied backgrounds through a process which is merit-based, competitive and transparent.
- Proposed a "citizen-centric approach" to override barriers such as cost and language came in the way of making improved access to justice a reality.

constitutional provision enables creation of the AIJS at District Judge level. In Government's view, a properly framed All India Judicial Service is important to strengthen overall justice delivery system. This will give an opportunity for induction of suitably qualified fresh legal talent selected through a proper all-India merit selection system as well as address the issue of social inclusion by enabling suitable representation to marginalized and deprived sections of society.

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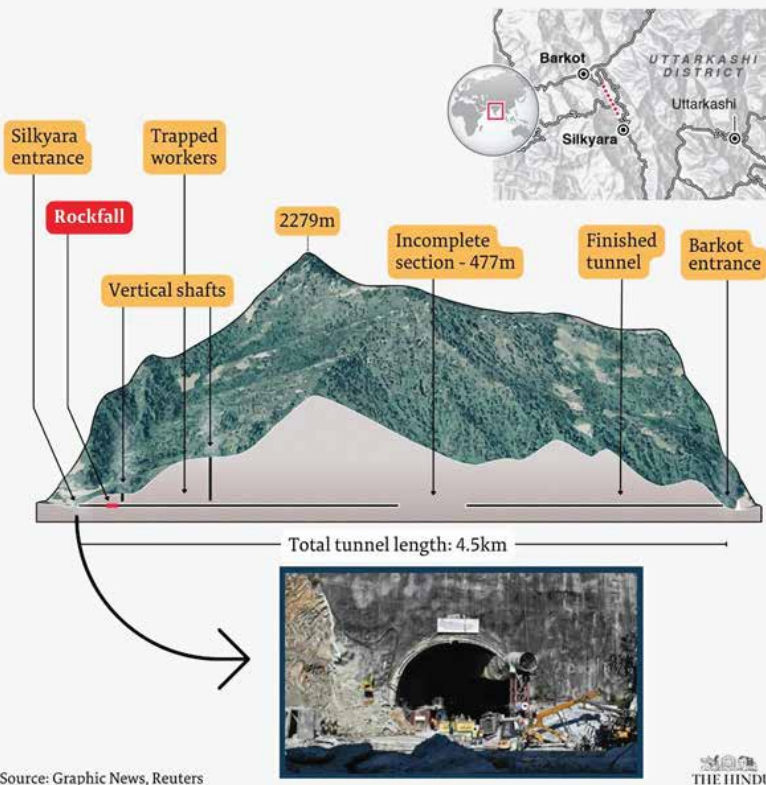
DISASTER MANAGEMENT

ON DAY 15 AT SILKYARA, RESCUERS SET A 100-HOUR VERTICAL DRILLING TARGET

CONTEXT: Rescuers began vertical drilling above the tunnel, completing nearly 19.5 metres of boring on Sunday with horizontal drilling to rescue 41 workers trapped in the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi stuck for the third consecutive day. The teams have set a target of drilling through 86 metres of mountain vertically in 100 hours, if there are no unexpected hurdles.

UTTARKASHI TUNNEL COLLAPSE

The 4.5km tunnel is part of Char Dham highway. The tunnel collapsed on Nov 12.



The attention of the authorities shifted to vertical boring when plans to restart the horizontal drilling process yet again failed, with workers struggling to retrieve the broken parts of the U.S.-made auger machine, which is stuck amid the pipes since Friday night. When the machine is completely extricated, rescuers are likely to start manual horizontal drilling to reach the workers, who are trapped behind 10-12 metres of debris.

In another challenge for the rescue teams, the India Meteorological Department has predicted snowfall and rainfall in Uttarkashi district on Monday, which is located at an altitude of 3,500 metres above sea level. The weather will further complicate the operation for the rescuers who are already braving difficult conditions including hilly terrain.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CENTRE DIRECTS STATE GOVTS. TO CLOSELY MONITOR CASES OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

CONTEXT: The Union Health Ministry on Sunday directed the State governments to closely monitor cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) in the wake of recent reports of a surge in respiratory illness in children in northern China.



The Ministry asked the district and State surveillance units of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project to keep a watch on the cases. The States have also been directed to send nasal and throat swabs of patients with such conditions, particularly children and adolescents, to virus research and diagnostic laboratories for testing for respiratory pathogens.

The Union Health Ministry advised the States to immediately review public health and hospital preparedness measures such as ensuring the availability of trained hands, hospital beds, drugs and vaccines for influenza, medical oxygen, antibiotics, personal protective equipment, testing kits and reagents, functionality of oxygen plants and ventilators, and infection control practices in health facilities.

INTERNAL SECURITY

PEACE TALKS ON WITH INSURGENT GROUP: BIREN

CONTEXT: Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh said his government was holding talks with an Imphal Valley-based insurgent group, and a peace accord would be signed soon.

Mr. Singh said the talks were at an advanced stage with a faction of the proscribed United National Liberation Front (UNLF) to sign a peace accord very shortly. This was for the first time that there was an official confirmation about such talks being held by the government, since ethnic violence broke out in the State on May 3.

“Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you’re finished.”—Leslie Nielsen

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

IN TEHRAN, KWATRA DISCUSSES GAZA CONFLICT, CHABAHAH PORT

CONTEXT: Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra led a delegation in Tehran for foreign office consultations (FOC) with the Iranian government on Sunday

The two sides reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relationship, including connectivity projects such as Chabahar port, political engagements, trade & economic matters, cultural exchanges, people-to-people ties, agriculture cooperation, and capacity building initiatives.

The Israel-Hamas conflict and India's investment in the Chabahar port developments were at the top of the agenda. During the talks, India and Iran discussed their own regional connectivity initiatives, including the Chabahar project where India is developing a cargo terminal in order to connect trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and which is also part of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to Central Asia and Russia via rail.

Mr. Kwatra's visit followed a telephone call between Mr. Modi and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on November 6, where they discussed the situation in Gaza, and Mr. Raisi called on India to "use all its capacities to end [Israeli] crimes against the oppressed people of Gaza".

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

BILL BARS COURTS FROM INQUIRING INTO 'PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION' BETWEEN MINISTERS, PRESIDENT

CONTEXT: The proposed Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) Bill seeks to replace the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 "bars the courts from inquiring into any privileged communication between Ministers and the President of India".

Article 74(2) of the Constitution of India states that "The question whether any, and if so what, advice was tendered by Ministers to the President shall not be inquired into in any court." This means that courts cannot investigate or question the advice given by the Council of Ministers to the President of India. This provision is intended to protect the confidentiality of communications between the President and his or her Ministers, and to ensure that the President is able to act independently without fear of judicial interference.

The scope and effect of Article 74(2) have been debated by legal scholars and the Supreme Court of India. In the landmark case of *Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court held that Article 74(2) does not bar the courts from inquiring into the material on the basis of which the

advice is given. This means that the courts can still review the President's actions to ensure that they are not based on irrelevant or extraneous considerations.

However, the Supreme Court also held that Article 74(2) does bar the courts from inquiring into the subjective motives of the Ministers in tendering the advice. This means that the courts cannot question the wisdom or judgment of the Ministers, even if they believe that the advice was not in the best interests of the country.

The Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) Bill, 2023, does not explicitly bar the courts from inquiring into any privileged communication between Ministers and the President of India. However, Section 165, which pertains to the "production of documents" on the orders of a court make it more difficult for the courts to intervene in such cases.

Under the BS Bill, communications between Ministers and the President of India are presumed to be privileged unless the President himself waives the privilege. This means that the courts would need to obtain the President's permission before they could compel the disclosure of such communications.

The BS Bill also makes it clear that the courts cannot inquire into any matters that are related to the President's exercise of his or her executive functions. This means that the courts would not be able to review the President's decision to withhold information from the courts.

The Bill, along with two other criminal codes, was introduced on August 11 in Parliament. They were referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs for examination. According to the report finalised by the committee, the Bill has omitted four Sections of the Indian Evidence Act.

The Union Home Secretary highlighted the major changes that have been introduced in the Bill vis-à-vis the Indian Evidence Act, including the deletion of British legacy references. The words 'Vakil', 'Pleader' and 'Barrister' have been replaced with the word 'Advocate', and Section 166 relating to the power of the jury has been deleted.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

HAMAS RELEASES THIRD GROUP OF HOSTAGES AS PART OF TRUCE

CONTEXT: Hamas militants on Sunday freed 17 more hostages, including 14 Israelis, in a third set of releases under a cease-fire deal. Israel's prison service said 39 Palestinian detainees were released on Sunday.



It was the third consecutive day in which Hamas released Israeli hostages it has been holding in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. A fourth exchange is expected to take place on Monday — the last day of the four-day cease-fire between the enemies. A total of 50 hostages and 150 Palestinian prisoners are to be freed.

Israel declared war on Hamas after the Islamic extremist group carried out a cross-border attack on October 7 that killed some 1,200 people and took 240 people hostage. An Israeli offensive in Gaza has left over 13,300 people dead.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

OLD CENSORSHIP ON A NEW MEDIUM

CONTEXT: As per this year's FICCI-KPMG Frames report, TV is still the primary medium beamed in approximately 165 million homes. But growth is slowing, as per Nielsen's India Internet Report of 2023: for instance, at least 85 million viewers in rural India share smartphones and huddle together to stream YouTube videos.

On November 10, the Ministry for Information and Broadcasting released a copy of the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023. On the Ministry's website, this Bill finds space right below an advisory to TV channels and self-regulatory bodies on the Uttarkashi tunnel collapse. The principal objective of the Bill is to achieve "the Prime Minister's vision" through specific provisions that "modernise" and "replace outdated" laws. Greater reasoning is contained in a Press Information Bureau release that notes an intention to repeal the "three decades-old" Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995.

Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023

The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023 is a proposed law that seeks to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for the broadcasting sector in India. The bill aims to replace the existing Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, which has been in place for nearly three decades.

Key Features of the Bill

- Consolidated Legal Framework:** The bill proposes a unified regulatory framework for all broadcasting services, including traditional linear broadcasting, over-the-top (OTT) platforms, and digital news media.
- Content Regulation:** The bill introduces a system of self-regulation for broadcasters through the establishment of Content Evaluation Committees. These committees will review content and ensure compliance with the Programme Code and Advertisement Code.
- Broadcast Advisory Council:** The bill proposes a Broadcast Advisory Council to advise the central government on matters related to broadcasting services. The council will replace the existing Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC).
- Penalty Structure:** The bill outlines a penalty structure for violations of the Programme Code, Advertisement Code, and other provisions of the bill. The penalties include advisory, warning, censure, and monetary penalties.
- Accessibility Measures:** The bill mandates that broadcasters and distribution platform operators make their services accessible to persons with disabilities.

Increasing government powers

The Cable Act was the product of a legislative vacuum prompted by a High Court ruling, security concerns from Pakistani channels, and a "cultural invasion". It manifested in a regulatory system not only requiring registrations and licensing for standardisation, service quality, or demarcation of shared resources, but content regulation to protect "Indian values". The "programme code" for censoring says no programme should be carried which "offends good taste or decency", "contains suggestive innuendos", and "ironical and snobbish attitudes", etc. The job of enforcing these was retained by the Central government through, finally, the Inter-Ministerial Committee.

The self-regulatory system advocated by the private sector evolved over time to be codified as rules under the Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules in 2021. The Union government first tried regulation through the Information Technology Rules, 2021, which was stayed by the High Courts of Madras and Bombay. It then made further amendments to the Information Technology Rules for creating a censorship for "fact checking". This has not come into force due to a challenge in the Bombay High Court, which will soon give its verdict.

More powers

The Broadcasting Bill requires registrations from, and adherence to the programme code, by not only online broadcasters, but even individual journalists and creators who systematically comment on "news and current affairs". It

establishes a system of self-certification where the names of the members of committees for each broadcaster will be made public. The Broadcasting Advisory Council packed with government bureaucrats is a mere change in title for the Inter-Ministerial Committee. The Council does not have power to make decisions but only advise the Union government.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

FLEET ELECTRIFICATION TO TACKLE URBAN POLLUTION

CONTEXT: As per two seminal studies pertaining to Delhi, the Urban Emission (2015) and the TERI study (2018), a significant contributor to urban smog is PM2.5 and PM10 pollution, which is caused by the transport and construction sector.

Increase in truck fleet

About 9 lakh new trucks are added to Indian roads every year to an already running fleet of 70 lakh trucks. India carries over 2 trillion tonne kilometres freight on trucks, annually. These trucks consume over one-fourth of Indian oil imports and contribute to over 90 % of road transport CO2 emissions.

India has already electrified rail freight transportation, but that caters to only about 20 % of the freight carried in the country. On roads, India's electric vehicle penetration rate has crossed the 6 % mark, but electric trucks remain a challenge due to upfront costs and charging infrastructure constraints.

Need of the hour

The recent demand for 7,750 e-trucks in India by 2030, if it materialises, will result in the country saving over 800 billion litres of diesel till 2050. However, the Indian truck fleet is likely to reach a figure of 1.7 crore in 2050. Public funding alone cannot meet the transformational scale required. A pipeline of bankable projects, effectively structured, which can attract private and institutional capital at a ratio of at least six rupees for every rupee of public money is the need of the hour.

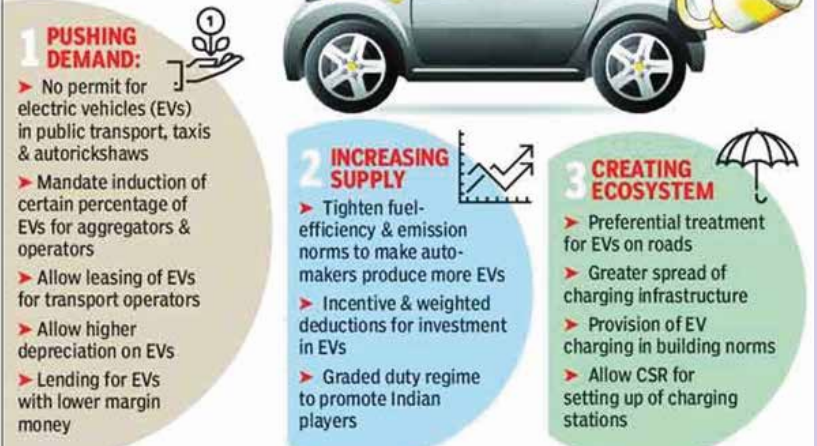
More than 50 % electric vehicle penetration in three-wheelers' electrification in India is an important milestone for the 2070 net zero agenda, transport sector decarbonisation pathways have to be led by truck electrification. However, the upfront cost of a mid-range electric truck in India is around ₹ 1.5 crore compared to about ₹ 40 lakh for a diesel truck. The cost of charging logistics remain major hurdles in the transition to e-trucks in the country.

Green freight corridors

Declaring some of the expressways and national highways as green freight corridors will have a demonstration effect in the country. Accelerating feasibility studies, demand aggregation, supplier readiness, and a prudent risk allocation strategy are required to create green freight corridors in India. Such corridors can first evolve in small stretches of 500 kilometres on routes with heavy truck movement. Innovative financial instruments, incentivisation of charging infrastructure, facilitation of entrepreneurial efforts, and a conducive regulatory

environment in the country can bring forth the much-needed breakthrough for truck electrification in India.

THREE-PRONGED PLAN TO BOOST SALE OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

WHY IS BIHAR DEMANDING THE SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS?

CONTEXT: On November 22, the Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led Cabinet passed a resolution seeking the grant of special category status (SCS) to Bihar. The demand comes in the backdrop of the findings from the "Bihar Caste-based Survey, 2022", which revealed that nearly one-third of Bihar's population continues to live in poverty.

What is a special category status?

It is a classification granted by the Centre to assist the development of States that face geographical or socio-economic disadvantages. The SCS was introduced in 1969 on the recommendation of the fifth Finance Commission (FC). Five factors such as (i) hilly and difficult terrain (ii) low population density and/or sizeable share of tribal population (iii) strategic location along international borders (iv) economic and infrastructural backwardness and (v) non-viable nature of state finances, are considered before granting SCS. In 1969, three States — Jammu & Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland — were granted the SCS. Subsequently, eight more States including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand were given the SCS by the erstwhile National Development Council.

What are the benefits attached?

The SCS States used to receive grants based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula, which earmarked nearly 30 % of the total central assistance for States to the SCS States. However, after the abolition of the Planning Commission and the recommendations of the 14th and 15th FC, this assistance to SCS States has been subsumed in an increased devolution of the divisible pool funds for all States (increased to 41% in the 15th FC from 32%). Additionally, in the SCS States, the Centre-State funding of centrally sponsored schemes is divided

in the ratio of 90:10, far more favourable than the 60:40 or 80:20 splits for the general category States. Besides, there are several other incentives available to the SCS States in the form of concession in customs and excise duties, income tax rates and corporate tax rates to attract investments to set up new industries etc.

Why is Bihar demanding the SCS?

The demand for SCS for Bihar has been made by various political parties of the State time and again. The poverty and backwardness of the State are argued to be because of the lack of natural resources, continuous supply of water for irrigation, regular floods in the northern region and severe droughts in the southern part of the State. Simultaneously, the bifurcation of the State led to the shifting of industries to Jharkhand and created a dearth of employment and investment opportunities. With a per-capita GDP of around ₹54,000, Bihar has consistently been one of the poorest States. Highlighting the same in his fresh demand for SCS, CM Nitish Kumar, said that the State is home to around 94 lakh poor families and the granting of SCS will help the government get about ₹2.5 lakh crore required to fund various welfare measures over the next five years.

Do other States also want SCS?

Since its bifurcation in 2014, Andhra Pradesh has asked for a grant of SCS on the grounds of revenue loss due to Hyderabad going to Telangana. Additionally, Odisha has also been requesting for the SCS, highlighting its vulnerability to natural calamities such as cyclones and a large tribal population (nearly 22%). However, the Central government citing the 14th FC report, which made a recommendation to the Centre that no State be accorded the SCS, has repeatedly denied their demands.

Is Bihar's demand justified?

Although Bihar meets most of the criteria for the grant of SCS, it does not fulfil the requirement of hilly terrain and geographically difficult areas, which is considered to be the primary reason for difficulty in infrastructural development. In 2013, the Raghuram Rajan Committee set up by the Centre, placed Bihar in the "least developed category" and suggested a new methodology based on a 'multi-dimensional index' for devolving funds instead of a SCS, which can be revisited to address the State's backwardness.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DAOS: HOW THESE DECENTRALISED ENTITIES ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

CONTEXT: Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) represent a ground-breaking innovation at the intersection of blockchain technology and governance.



DAO is an organisation represented by rules encoded as a computer program that is transparent, controlled by the respective organisation members, and not influenced by a government. DAOs are self-sustaining, community-driven entities governed by smart contracts on blockchain networks which gets automatically executed with predefined rules without the need for intermediaries, ensuring trust through code rather than traditional authorities.

Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) operate without centralised control and are governed by smart contracts and the consensus of their members, often utilising cryptocurrencies as a means of decision-making and resource allocation. DAOs have garnered attention for their potential to change various industries, including finance, art, and governance, by fostering transparent, democratic, and self-executing systems. These entities are not only reshaping traditional business structures but also challenging the way we perceive trust, governance, and collaboration in the digital world.

The genesis of DAOs

DAOs enable global, borderless cooperation on an unprecedented scale. Participants, often referred to as token holders, can propose and vote on decisions related to the organisation's goals and resources. This decentralised decision-making process ensures that no single entity holds undue influence.

The various use cases

DAOs are already making their mark across diverse industries. In the realm of decentralised finance, platforms like Compound and MakerDAO have introduced lending and borrowing services, enabling users to participate in the global financial ecosystem without relying on traditional banks. In the art world, artists are tokenising their creations and utilising DAOs to manage royalties and maintain control over their intellectual property.

Supply chain management is another arena where DAOs are gaining traction, as they offer transparency and traceability in global supply chains, ensuring the authenticity and quality of products. Even in the governance of online communities, DAOs have emerged as tools for decision-making, with platforms like DAOstack facilitating decentralised governance structures for internet communities. These examples showcase the versatility of DAOs, demonstrating their potential to reshape industries across various sectors.

Implications for the digital world

DAOs are ushering in a transformation in the digital world by embodying several key principles. Firstly, they are decentralising entities, shifting power away from centralised authorities and placing it firmly in the hands of the collective. Decision-making within DAOs becomes a democratic process, where token holders have a direct say, resulting in a more equitable distribution of influence. For instance, in a DAO governed community-driven project, contributors worldwide can participate in shaping its direction, diminishing the dominance of a single central entity.

Secondly, transparency and trust are fundamental tenets of DAOs. Smart contracts that underpin DAO operations are transparent and immutable, fostering trust

among participants. Rules are predefined and require consensus for alteration, minimising the need for intermediaries. This transparency can potentially disrupt traditional industries by eliminating the opacity often associated with centralised organisations.

Thirdly, DAOs champion inclusivity, democratising access to resources and opportunities. They transcend geographical and socio-economic barriers, enabling global participation. This inclusivity not only promotes diversity but also fuels innovation, as individuals from various backgrounds collaborate to create innovative solutions.

Lastly, DAOs inspire new forms of collaboration. They facilitate global cooperation, allowing participants with shared goals to unite without the need for intermediaries. This dynamic environment fosters innovation and cooperation as ideas flow freely, unencumbered by hierarchical structures. Together, these principles underscore the transformative potential of DAOs, paving the way for a more decentralised, equitable, and collaborative digital future.

The challenges and controversies

Legal liability within DAOs remain elusive, with decentralised decision-making and automated smart contracts making it difficult to assign responsibility for actions taken. Issues like smart contract vulnerabilities and security breaches introduce questions of legal recourse and liability. Taxation of transactions within DAOs, identity verification, and compliance with Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Know Your Customer (KYC) regulations further add layers of complexity to the legal framework. Dispute resolution, often relying on code-based solutions, present a unique challenge in the absence of traditional legal mechanisms.

Amongst these challenges, stakeholders are actively working to establish legal frameworks that balance innovation with compliance. DAO creators, participants, and regulators are collaborating to develop guidelines that accommodate the unique characteristics of DAOs within existing regulatory structures. They aim to address concerns such as governance, intellectual property, and cross-border operations while ensuring transparency and fairness in token-based decision-making.

As DAOs continue to evolve and proliferate, it is imperative that legal experts, blockchain developers, and policymakers engage in ongoing discussions to create a legal framework that allows DAOs to harness their transformative potential while adhering to the complexities of the law. Finding this delicate balance is essential for the future coexistence of decentralised innovation and legal compliance.

In conclusion, DAOs represent a pivotal shift in how we organise and collaborate in the digital world. While challenges and uncertainties remain, the potential for DAOs to drive positive change in various sectors is undeniable. It is crucial for regulators, developers, and participants to work collaboratively to harness the full potential of DAOs while addressing their evolving challenges. These decentralised entities are shaping the digital future, and the possibilities they offer are limited only by our collective imagination.

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AGRICULTURE

SUPPLY-DEMAND GAP FOR PULSES, OILSEEDS, FRUIT TO PERSIST OVER THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS: REPORT

CONTEXT: Dented production prospects amid an uneven monsoon spurred price spikes in pulses this year. India's output shortfalls vis-a-vis demand for the key protein source and edible oils and fruits are expected to persist or even widen over the next seven years.

Output shortage

The table shows the gap between projected demand and supply (in million tonnes) for 2025-26 and 2030-31

Food items	2025-26	2030-31	Food items	2025-26	2030-31
Rice	25.5	37.7	Foodgrains	42	70
Wheat	15.4	25.5	Oilseeds	-3	-6
Coarse cereals	3.2	6.4	Milk	31.7	76.2
Cereals	44.2	69.6	Fruits	4	10.6
Pulses	-2.1	0.4	Vegetables	8.3	18.4

SOURCE: NABARD AND ICRIER

"Prospects of India's demand and supply for agricultural commodities towards 2030", published by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations cautioned about burgeoning food import bills with food deficits compelling reliance on imports.

Commodities like oilseed, pulses, and fruits are expected to experience a supply and demand gap in the coming years. Therefore, there is a need to increase the level of production and productivity of oilseeds, pulses, and fruits since their demand in the future shows an increasing trend.

As per capita incomes rise, the consumption basket of people tends to diversify towards nutritious and high-valued commodities, including fruits and vegetables and dairy products and away from staples such as rice and cereals, the report noted. So demand growth for non-cereals and high-valued commodities is expected to exceed the population growth rate and cereal commodities' growth in coming years.

The report assumes significance as recurrent high food inflation spells, as seen this year, cramp the room for monetary and fiscal policies to promote economic growth.

Three-year low

Output of pulses, some coarse cereals and groundnut oil seeds could hit a three-year low this Kharif season, as per initial independent estimates for crop output. Retail inflation in pulses accelerated sharply to 18.8% last month, while inflation in fruits picked up to hit 9.34%. Edible oils have witnessed deflation through most of this year, as their prices had surged sharply last year after the Ukraine conflict erupted.

Oil seeds production is expected to rise to 35 million to 40 million tonnes (MT) by 2030-31. "Notably, the deficit of oilseeds in the food balance sheet in 2030 is worrisome for the country given the edible oil imports as high as 13.4 MT during 2020-21. A technological breakthrough in oilseeds to increase productivity or area expansion are two possible solutions to improve oilseeds' balance sheet in the long run," the report reckoned.

The report reiterated the recommendation of a 2012 report from the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) to raise the import duty whenever the import price of crude palm oil falls below \$800 a tonne to protect Indian producers.

However, it also added that attaining self-reliance in water-intensive and long-gestation crops such as oil palm may not be worth pursuing as a sustainable goal either.

The report has called for policy attention to ensure a balance between domestic production and the absorption of these commodities, diversification towards high-value commodities that require major investments in market infrastructure, processing, and cold storage and warehousing facilities to build an efficient and reliable value chain.

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