

The Indian Express

Front Page

Uddhav Thackeray resigns ahead of floor test, BJP set to return with Sena rebels (Page no. 1) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

Outnumbered after a rebellion in his own party and realising he will not be able to prove majority on the floor of the Assembly, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray resigned Wednesday night, shortly after the Supreme Court declined to stay a floor test called Thursday by Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari.

His resignation as CM and MLC, which he announced in a Facebook address to the public, brought to an end the 31-month-old rule of the MVA and set the stage for the return of a BJP-led government.

Former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis hopes to be back in power with the help of 39 Shiv Sena rebel MLAs led by Eknath Shinde, independents and legislators of smaller parties.

“I have no regrets about leaving the CM’s chair. Whatever I did, I did for the Marathi people and Hindutva.

Today, in front of everyone, I am announcing my resignation as CM of the state,” Uddhav said in a speech that lasted 15 minutes. He said he was also resigning as MLC.

Before bowing out, he said he was happy to fulfil his father’s wish of renaming Aurangabad and Osmanabad. The initial idea of renaming Aurangabad, mooted by Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray, has been fulfilled and we have renamed it as Sambhaji Nagar. We have also renamed Osmanabad as Dharashiv.

Front Page

At least 12 states say continue GST compensation, no decision taken (Page no. 1) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

At least a dozen states demanded that compensation for losses due to implementation of the Goods and Services Tax be extended at the GST Council, but the two-day meeting concluded without any decision on the issue.

States were guaranteed compensation for five years till June 2022 at a compounded rate of 14 per cent (with 2015-16 as the base year) to make up for any losses due to the new tax regime that rolled out in July 2017.

In its 47th meeting, the GST Council discussed recommendations of four ministerial panels — on rate rationalisation, on movement of gold and precious stones, system reforms, and casinos, horse racing and online gaming.

A decision on levying a 28 per cent tax on casinos, online gaming, horse racing and lottery, has been deferred pending more consultations with stakeholders, Union Finance Minister.

It has been decided that the inverted duty structure will be corrected for a host of items translating into a rate hike for household items such as LED lamps, printing/drawing ink, power driven pumps, Tetra Pak to 18 per cent from 12 per cent, for solar water heaters, finished leather to 12 per cent from 5 per cent and for cut and polished diamonds to 1.5 per cent from 0.25 per cent. Among services, 18 per cent GST will be levied for issue of cheques.

Express Network

Amid sanctions, Russia becomes India’s top DAP fertiliser supplier (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

India has imported about 3.5 lakh tonnes (lt) of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser from Russia, which would be arriving during the April to July period.

This comes amid Western sanctions against Russia in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine.

The imports have been contracted by Indian Potash Ltd, Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilizers, Chambal Fertilisers and Krishak Bharati Cooperative at landed prices of \$920-925 per tonne, cost plus freight (CFR).

This is below the rates paid by other countries for DAP, mainly from China, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Jordan.

Bangladesh’s Agriculture Ministry, earlier this month, awarded an annual tender for import of 8.12 lt at \$1,020-1,030 per tonne.

Similarly, Indonesia and Thailand are reported to have paid \$992 and \$1,000 per tonne CFR respectively for 25,000-26,000 tonnes shipment each. Pakistan hasn’t been able to contract of late even at \$1,030 CFR, with the local currency’s depreciation against the dollar adding to the uncertainty.

India contracting DAP from Russia's PhosAgro at \$920 per tonne CFR – which is also the price cap that the government has put on importers – is likely to put pressure on other suppliers, especially Morocco's OCP Group, China's YUC and Saudi Arabia's Ma'aden and SABIC. They may have to cut prices to retain market share.

Editorial

Plastic Surgery (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 3, Environment)

From Friday, several common use-and-throw plastic products will cease to be in circulation with the government's rules to prohibit their manufacture and use, issued in August last year, coming into effect.

Plastic cutlery items, ice cream and balloon sticks, sweet boxes, invitation cards, cigarette packs, PVC banners measuring under 100 microns and earbuds are some of the items that will no longer be available.

Given that the country generates more than 25,000 tonnes of plastic waste every day — more than 40 per cent of it stays uncollected, often choking sewage networks — the need for measures to restrict the use of this non-degradable synthetic material cannot be overstated.

The government has also done the right thing in enforcing the ban in phases. The current strictures apply to relatively low utility items.

The real challenge will come when the prohibition is extended to polythene bags under 120 microns in December.

In the past five years, more than 20 states have put in place some form of regulation on plastic use. But by all accounts, their implementation has been patchy at best.

The poorly-staffed and feebly-empowered state pollution control boards or cash-strapped municipalities tasked with enforcing the bans have generally not been up to the task.

Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav has said that his ministry will set up control rooms to monitor the ban.

A better way would be to raise awareness amongst people and take all stakeholders into confidence — the success of Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh, to an extent, testifies to this.

Idea Page

Closing the gulf (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UAE on June 28 was his fourth, having visited the country earlier in August 2015, in February 2018 and again in August 2019. Juxtaposed against the fact that no Indian PM had visited the UAE for 34 years since the visit of Indira Gandhi in 1981, the transformation in India's engagement with this Gulf state has been quite extraordinary.

The reason for the latest sojourn, ostensibly, is to offer condolences on the demise of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan and to congratulate Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan on his elevation to the position of the ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of the UAE.

Viewed from the perspective of traditional diplomatic protocol, the visit was not necessary. Vice President Venkaiah Naidu had gone to Abu Dhabi on May 15 to offer the Government of India's condolences to the UAE leadership and in an unusual gesture, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had visited the UAE embassy in New Delhi to sign the condolence book.

But this is a relationship that has moved well beyond the confines of diplomatic protocols. The warmth and personal chemistry between the Prime Minister and Sheikh Mohamed is genuine and palpable.

It has been almost three years since their last meeting in Abu Dhabi when PM Modi was bestowed the Order of Zayed, the UAE's highest civilian award.

He had also planned to visit the Dubai Expo in January but a rise in Covid-19 cases linked to the Omicron variant had come in the way.

This stopover on the way back from the G7 summit in Germany was an opportunity to renew that relationship through a one-on-one meeting with Sheikh Mohamed and an engagement with key members of the royal family including the National Security Advisor and foreign minister.

The extent of poverty (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

The National Family Health Survey has recorded that infant mortality has gone down only marginally from 40.7 to 35.2 per thousand between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

The percentage of anaemic children aged 6 to 59 months, pregnant and nonpregnant women and adult males, on the other hand, have gone up.

And yet, the level of poverty turns out as very low or almost negligible in the terminal year. These are no proxies for poverty since their linkages with nutritional indicators are considered tenuous and these can be explained in terms of intra-household distribution, poor dietary habits, improper water/sanitation facilities, etc.

Then why is there an uproar about the working papers of the IMF and World Bank, reporting no or low poverty for India in the pandemic year or just before that?

What does the poverty index measure or attempt to capture? Its construction involves complex calculations — to identify a poverty basket of consumption, working out price indices for updation of the poverty line and then applying it to the income or consumption of households for determining their poverty status.

The computation becomes far more challenging in the absence of data on consumption expenditure as is the case in India and several developing countries.

Intending to provide inputs for policy making, researchers have evolved ingenious methods of estimating the data, using past datasets and those that have not been designed to get robust expenditure estimates.

Economy

No more mandatory GST registration for small online sellers, but with riders (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

In what will benefit small online sellers, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has cleared the proposal to waive mandatory registration of such online vendors if their turnover is lower than Rs 40 lakh and Rs 20 lakh for goods and services, respectively.

This is likely to come into effect from January 1. While this move will bring parity between online and offline sellers, it is subject to certain conditions, Finance Ministry officials said.

In addition to the waiver, the GST Council also permitted composition dealers — those with a turnover of up to Rs 1.5 crore who pay GST at flat rates with input tax credit (ITC) — to make intrastate supplies through e-commerce companies. These small online vendors will have to declare their Permanent Account Number (PAN), and principal place of business.

Further, unregistered entities will also be restricted to declare their principal place of business only in one state, and will not be permitted to make interstate taxable supplies.

The challenge for us in online service, a seller can sell through multiple e-commerce operators — Flipkart, Amazon, etc. We want one identity of that seller in the virtual world. So we will take the PAN number, do a KYC...we'll aggregate and find out that their turnover doesn't exceed the threshold.

Explained

Better road safety measures could save half a million lives annually worldwide: study (Page no. 14)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

New global and country-level estimates suggest that routinely wearing helmets and seat belts, obeying speed limits, and avoiding driving drunk could save between 347,000 and 540,000 lives worldwide every year.

The benefits of more motorcyclists wearing helmets would be the biggest in China, where 13,703 lives could be saved every year, followed by Brazil (5,802 lives), and India (5,683 lives), says the study published in The Lancet.

Analysis of data from 74 studies in 185 countries estimates that targeting four key risk factors for road injuries and deaths (speeding, drink driving, and non-use of crash helmets and seat belts) could prevent between 25% and 40% of all fatal road injuries worldwide every year.

Interventions to reduce speeding such as infrastructure changes and electronic speed control could save an estimated 347,258 lives globally each year, while measures to tackle drunk driving such as enhanced drink driving enforcement could save a further 16,304 lives, the study says.

An estimated 121,083 and 51,698 lives could be saved by passing and enforcing rules on wearing seat belts and motorcycle helmets respectively.

Improving seat belt use would have a particularly large effect on reducing road deaths in the United States (saving an estimated 14,121 lives every year) and China (13,228).

Tackling speeding would be the single most effective measure to reduce road fatalities in most countries, preventing an estimated 88,374 deaths in China, 1,027 in Spain, and 815 in the United Kingdom.

CAPSTONE (Page no. 14)
(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

NASA launched CAPSTONE, a microwave oven-sized CubeSat weighing just 55 pounds (25 kg). CAPSTONE, short for Cislunar Autonomous Positioning System Technology Operations and Navigation Experiment, is designed to test a unique, elliptical lunar orbit.

The satellite, launched on Rocket Lab's Electron rocket from the Rocket Lab Launch Complex 1, is heading toward an orbit intended in the future for Gateway, a Moon-orbiting outpost that is part of NASA's Artemis program.

As a pathfinder for Gateway, CAPSTONE aims to help reduce risk for future spacecraft by validating innovative navigation technologies, and by verifying the dynamics of the halo-shaped orbit.

The orbit is known as a near-rectilinear halo orbit (NRHO). It is significantly elongated, and is located at a precise balance point in the gravities of Earth and the Moon. This offers stability for long-term missions like Gateway, NASA said on its website.

At the Moon, CAPSTONE will enter NRHO, where it will fly within 1,600 km of the Moon's North Pole on its near pass and 70,000 km from the South Pole at its farthest. The spacecraft will repeat the cycle every six-and-a-half days and maintain this orbit for at least six months to study dynamics.

India's mRNA Covid vaccine (Page no. 14)
(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

The country's first home-grown mRNA Covid-19 vaccine — GEMCOVAC-19 — developed at Pune's Gennova Biopharmaceuticals has got a 'restricted emergency use' nod for the 18-and-above age group.

As mRNA vaccines are required to be kept at sub-zero temperatures, it was a mammoth task for Gennova scientists to develop a thermostable mRNA Covid-19 vaccine.

Scientists had to innovate to suit local needs to make it affordable and deployable. The new vaccine can now be stored at the temperature of a standard medical refrigerator.

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread, an mRNA vaccine candidate was the first to enter human trials globally. The first two vaccines that were made available for use in the US were based on mRNA technology.

Unlike vaccines that put a weakened or inactivated virus in your body to activate an immune response, these two Covid-19 vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) used messenger RNA or mRNA to deliver a message to your immune system.

Basically, the technology uses genetically engineered mRNA to instruct cells to make the S-protein found on the surface of the Covid-19 virus.

According to reports from US-based Mayo Clinic, after vaccination, the muscle cells begin making S-protein pieces and displaying them on cell surfaces. This causes the body to create antibodies.