

Current Affairs of the Day

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No need to audit PM CARES: SC

➤ The Supreme Court on Tuesday endorsed the PM CARES Fund as a “public charitable trust” to which donors contribute voluntarily.

➤ There is “no occasion” for the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)

to audit a public charitable trust independent of budgetary support or government money.

➤ The court said that it is “not open” for a PIL petitioner to question the “wisdom” that created the fund in an hour of need.

No public scrutiny:

➤ NGO Centre for Public Interest Litigation, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, had argued that the PM-CARES Fund was not subject to CAG audit. It was not under “public scrutiny”. Contributions to it were “100% tax-free”.

➤ The court dismissed the idea that the PM CARES was constituted to “circumvent” the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) — the statutory fund already in existence under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 to receive contributions to finance the fight against a calamity. “Outbreak of COVID-19 in India as well as other countries of the world required immediate enhancement in the infrastructure of medical health and creation of a fund to contain COVID-19,” the court reasoned.

➤ The Bench refused to direct the transfer of funds from the PM CARES Fund to the NDRF. It said they were two separate entities.

Points of view

A look at some of the observations made by the top court

■ PM CARES Fund is a public charitable trust. Funds are voluntarily given

■ There is no occasion to direct the transfer of PM CARES funds to NDRF

■ Donors can also contribute to the National Disaster Response Fund

■ No need for CAG audit

■ No need for a fresh National Disaster Management Plan to combat COVID-19

■ No reason to lay down new 'minimum standards' of relief for COVID-19

■ Existing guidelines under Section 12 for minimum standards hold good





Integrate depression and diabetes treatment: study

- A joint Indo-U.S. research study found that integrating depression and diabetes treatment ('INDEPENDENT') improved parameters for both conditions. The study was published in a recent issue of the peer-reviewed journal JAMA.
- The study, performed over a one-year period and followed up at the end of the second year, found that a low-cost one-year collaborative care model delivered in diabetes clinics can lower depressive symptoms and improve cardio metabolic health at the same time.
- The study was a collaboration between Emory University, Atlanta and the University of Washington, Seattle; the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi; Madras Diabetes Research Foundation (MDRF), Chennai; Diacon Hospital, Bengaluru, and Endocrine and Diabetes Centre, Visakhapatnam, and was funded by the National Institutes for Health, U.S.
- Researchers compared an integrated care model with regular care among 404 patients with diabetes and moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms. These patients were attending four diverse diabetes clinics (one government and three private) in India over a two-year period.

'India committed to strengthening ties'

- Continuing New Delhi's high-level outreach with the newly elected government in Colombo, Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar on Tuesday called his Sri Lankan counterpart Dinesh Gunawardena, and underscored India's "commitment to taking bilateral ties to greater heights."
- Mr. Jaishankar's call follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's earlier call to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on August 6, when his party's big win seemed certain, although the Election Commission declared the official, final results only the following day.
- New Delhi's apparent swiftness and consistent messaging from the highest levels follows the Rajapapas' decisive mandate, and signals India's intent to strengthen ties with an administration that, in its previous term in office, was accused of a China-tilt.



- Further, the outreach comes in the backdrop of Mahinda Rajapaksa's request in February for a debt moratorium from India that the two countries are discussing. In May, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa sought a special \$1.1-billion currency swap facility from Prime Minister Modi to boost Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves, badly hit by the pandemic. This is in addition to the \$400 million currency swap facility that the Reserve Bank of India recently approved for Sri Lanka.
- Apart from ongoing negotiations of Sri Lanka's debt repayment and currency swap, New Delhi will be keen on reviving talks on the **East Container Terminal development project** at the Colombo Port that Sri Lanka, India and Japan agreed to jointly develop.

Report predicts 12% rise in India's cancer burden

- Cancer cases in the country are likely to increase to 15.6 lakhs by 2025 — a 12% increase from current estimated cases — based on current trends, according to the National Cancer Registry Programme Report 2020.
- The figures were released by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Centre for Disease Informatics & Research (NCDIR), Bengaluru, here on Tuesday.

Key findings:

- The report also found that in 2020, tobacco-related cancers are estimated to contribute to 27.1% of the total cancer burden, and highest in the northeastern region of the country.
- Cancers of the lung, mouth, stomach and oesophagus were the most common cancers among men.
- Cancers of the breast and cervix uteri were the most common cancers among women.
- According to a release issued by the ICMR, the report estimates that in 2020, cancer cases in the country will be at 13.9 lakhs.
- These estimates are based on information related to cancer collected from 28 Population Based Cancer Registries [PBCRs].



- Among women, breast cancers are estimated to contribute 2.0 lakhs (14.8%) and cervix cancer are estimated to contribute 0.75 lakhs (5.4%), whereas for both men and women, cancers of the gastrointestinal tract is estimated to contribute 2.7 lakhs (19.7%) of the total cancer burden.

‘States can’t unilaterally cancel exams’

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) argued in the Supreme Court on Tuesday that though its July 6 directive to conduct final-year exams by September-end was not a “diktat,” States could not unilaterally cancel the exams citing the pandemic.
- “If the State governments had an issue, they cannot change the exam schedule on their own. They should meet with the Centre and consult with the UGC about their apprehensions,” Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the UGC, submitted before a three-judge Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan.

‘No-Go’ forests approved for mining

- Since 2015, of the 49 blocks cleared for coal mining, nine were in ‘No-Go’ areas, or regions that were once classified by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change as containing very dense forests and hence closed to coal mining.
- In 2020, of the 41 blocks put up for auction, 21 feature in the original No-Go list, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said at a webinar on Tuesday.
- The meeting was organised to present results of an investigation into coal block auctions.
- On June 18, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the auction of 41 coal blocks through video-conference. A two stage e-auction is being adopted for the allocation of mines. The decision was part of the announcements made by the Centre under the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**.

Concerns:

- Though new blocks were being auctioned, the CSE investigation, published in the organisation-owned magazine Down To Earth (DTE), pointed out that



currently India was not utilising its existing capacity fully and that a Right To Information response by the Union Coal Ministry revealed that 67% of the mines auctioned since 2015 are were not operational yet. From 2015-2020, the government tried to auction 112 mines, but succeeded in only 42 cases.

- Several potential coal reserves are located in dense forests particularly in Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The government determined which of them were too ecologically important to touch, and which were amenable to be opened up using a 'decision support system software' that rated forest lands on environmental parameters.
- In some cases, the CSE investigation found that results of the software evaluation were "tweaked" to make 'No-Go' land into 'Go-forests'. It also found that officials from the Coal Ministry, the beneficiary organisation, were "deputed" to work with the Forest Survey of India to "rework" conditions and clear forests for mining.

Railways deploys 'Ninjas' for surveillance

- The Railways on Tuesday said it has introduced a drone-based surveillance system to enhance security at railway stations, tracks and workshops.
- **Eye in the Sky: Improving Surveillance System**, Railways has recently procured Ninja Unmanned Aerial Vehicles [UAV]. With real-time tracking, video streaming & automatic fail safe mode, the drones will enhance monitoring of the railway assets and ensure additional safety for passengers.

Significance:

- The Ninja UAV procured by Railways will be able to help inspect safety of railway assets, yards, workshops and car sheds.
- It can be used to launch surveillance on criminal and anti-social activities like gambling, throwing of garbage, hawking etc in Railway premises. It may be deployed for analysis of data collected which may prove to be extremely useful in vulnerable sections for safe operations of trains.
- In addition, these drones can also be utilised at disaster sites for helping in rescue, recovery, restoration and coordinating efforts of various agencies as well as mapping of railway assets to assess encroachments.
- A drone camera can cover a large area which requires 8-10 RPF personnel.



'Data, AI may add up to \$500 bn to GDP by 2025'

- Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) could add \$450-\$500 billion to India's GDP by 2025 and contribute to the country's economic recovery and growth, said industry apex body Nasscom.
- AI has become a strategic lever for economic growth across nations and will continue to be one of the most crucial technologies of the future," said Ravi Shankar Prasad, Minister of Electronics and IT, while releasing a Nasscom report titled 'Unlock Value from Data and AI: The Indian Opportunity' on Tuesday.
- "Digital India has reimagined how our government connects with citizens and the accelerated deployment of AI and other emerging technologies will help further this objective," he said.
- "To harness its full potential, India needs to embrace AI innovation and regulation with an open, inclusive and a collaborative mindset," the Minister added.
- Debjani Ghosh, president, Nasscom, said, "Data and AI's true potential emerges from its ability to drive transformation across multiple sectors through a diverse range of applications."

Farm exports rise 23% to ₹25,553 cr. in March-June

- India's farm exports rose more than 23% in value terms to ₹25,553 crore during March-June period amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Agriculture Ministry said on Tuesday.
- To promote farm exports, a "comprehensive action plan" has been prepared under which 'Export Promotion Forums' are being created and existing agri-clusters strengthened besides identifying certain destinations for promotion of agricultural exports, the Ministry said in a statement.

Forex earnings:

- Promotion of farm exports is extremely important not only for earning precious foreign exchange for the country but also for achieving the goal of an 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat,' for which self-reliant agriculture is critical, it



added. “Even during the difficult time of pandemic lockdown, India took care not to disturb the world food supply chain and continued to export,” it said.

- According to the Ministry, ‘clear and proactive interventions’ are required to be taken to ensure India becomes a top exporting nation in agriculture commensurate with the production.