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Allahabad High Court orders protection for a same-sex couple

1. Noting that it was duty-bound to monitor the rights of the citizens under threat on account of their sexual orientation, the Allahabad High Court has directed police protection for a same-sex woman couple in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur.
2. The petition highlights the stark reality of the society where the citizens are facing discrimination at the hands of the society only on account of their sexual orientation despite it being well settled that sexual orientation is innate to a human being.
3. Despite legitimacy being accorded to such relations by the Supreme Court in the case of Navtej Singh Johar, such incidents are happening.
4. The Court being a constitutional Court is duty-bound to monitor and observe the Constitutional morality as well as the rights of the citizens which are under threat only on account of their sexual orientation.

Economic Survey Highlights:

Economic Survey predicts 11% growth next fiscal

1. CEA says it is time to switch fiscal gears from a cautious stance to 'counter-cyclical' push.
2. India's economy is firmly in the middle of a V-shaped recovery and will bounce back to record 11% growth in 2021-22 after an estimated 7.7% contraction this year.
3. Making a strong pitch for the government to loosen its purse strings to spur the economy with a "counter-cyclical fiscal push" till the country returns to its pre-COVID-19 growth path.
4. While absolute growth numbers may be remarkable in 2021-22 due to the low base effect, returning to pre-pandemic growth and output levels would take longer.

'Withdraw forbearance once economy recovers'

1. The Economic Survey 2020-21 has prescribed an early withdrawal of the regulatory forbearance that was adopted in the wake of the pandemic to ward off the threat of financial sector failures impacting the real economy.



2. It recommends policymakers set thresholds of economic recovery at which such measures would be withdrawn. These thresholds ought to then be communicated to the banks in advance so that they could prepare for the same.
3. Apart from recapitalising banks, it is important to enhance the quality of their governance. Ever-greening of loans by banks as well as zombie lending is symptomatic of poor governance, suggesting that bank boards are “asleep at the wheel” and auditors are not performing their required role as the first line of defence.

‘Lockdown provided a boost to gig economy’

1. The lockdown gave a boost to the gig economy, while it had an “inevitable impact on the vulnerable and informal sector.
2. During the period of COVID-19 induced lockdown, the increasing role of the gig economy was evident with significant growth of the online retail business.
3. Gig or platform workers had lacked basic rights and social security till the recent Code on Social Security was introduced.
4. COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of urban casual workers, who account for 11.2% of the urban workforce (All-India) as per PLFS, January-March, 2020, a significant proportion of them are supposed to be migrants who were impacted by the lockdown.

Incentivize more women to join the workforce

In order to incentivise more women to join the labour force, investment in institutional support to affordable and quality child care facilities, paid parental leave, family-friendly work environment, and support for elderly care needs to be made” besides promoting non-discriminatory norms.

‘Focus on growth than on alleviating inequality’

1. India must keep its focus on economic growth, rather than trying to alleviate inequality, says the Economic Survey, arguing given India’s current stage of development, redistribution of wealth is not feasible without growing the overall pie.
2. Unlike the developed world, in India, economic growth and inequality both have similar correlations with socio-economic indicators such as health, education, fertility rates, crime and drug usage.



3. The Survey also draws on the Chinese experience to suggest in countries with high growth rates and high levels of absolute poverty, there is no trade-off between growth and inequality.
4. An Oxfam report had shown Indian billionaires increased their wealth by 35% during the lockdown at a time when a quarter of the country was earning less than ₹3,000 per month.

High out-of-pocket expenses for health can lead to poverty'

1. India has one-of-the highest level of Out-Of-Pocket Expenditures (OOPE) contributing directly to the high incidence of catastrophic expenditures and poverty, notes the Economic Survey.
2. It suggested an increase in public spending from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP — as envisaged in the National Health Policy 2017 — can decrease the OOPE from 65% to 30% of overall healthcare spend.
3. The Survey observes that the health of a nation depends critically on its citizens having access to an equitable, affordable and accountable healthcare system. The OOPE, as a share of total health expenditure, drops precipitously when public health expenditure increases.
4. The Survey also underlines that OOPE for health increases the risk of vulnerable groups slipping into poverty because of catastrophic health expenditures. The life expectancy in a country correlates positively with per capita public health expenditure, it notes.
5. The Economic Survey observed that the bulk of healthcare in India is provided by the private sector. Private hospitals charge much higher than government hospitals for treatment of the same ailment and higher charges do not assure better quality.

Agility key to countering pandemics

1. The ongoing pandemic has showcased how a healthcare crisis can get transformed into an economic and social crisis, noted the Economic Survey 2020-21.
2. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, a key portfolio decision that healthcare policy must make is about the relative importance placed on communicable versus non-communicable diseases.



3. It added that the pandemic had revealed the potential of telemedicine to provide healthcare access in remote areas. This needs to be harnessed to the fullest by especially investing in Internet connectivity and health infrastructure.

India's ratings don't reflect the economy's fundamentals: CEA

1. India's sovereign credit ratings do not reflect the economy's fundamentals, Chief Economic Adviser said while pitching for sovereign credit rating methodology to be made more transparent and less subjective.
2. Never in the history of sovereign credit ratings has the fifth-largest economy in the world been rated as the lowest rung of the investment-grade (BBB-/Baa3).
3. Reflecting the economic size and thereby the ability to repay debt, the fifth-largest economy has been predominantly rated AAA. China and India are the only exceptions to this rule.
4. The Economic Survey added that while sovereign credit ratings do not reflect the Indian economy's fundamentals, "opaque and biased credit ratings" damage FPI flows.
5. It is not possible to have complete regulations in a world which has uncertainty as it is not possible to account for all possible outcomes. The evidence, however, shows that India over-regulates the economy.

'Increase ration shop prices of rice, wheat'

1. The Centre must increase the prices which 80 crore poor people pay for subsidised rice and wheat at ration shops to trim the 'bulging' food subsidy bill, the Economic Survey recommended.
2. Under the National Food Security Act, ration cardholders are allowed to buy 5 kg of foodgrains per person each month at a subsidised rate of ₹2 per kg of wheat and ₹3 per kg of rice.
3. This rate, known as the Central Issue Price (CI), has not been increased since the NFSA was enacted in 2013. However, the Food Corporation of India's economic cost of buying and distributing food grains had surged since then.
4. While it is difficult to reduce the economic cost of food management in view of rising commitment towards food security, there is a need to consider the revision of CIP to reduce the bulging food subsidy bill.



Bare necessities gap between States has narrowed since 2012, survey shows (Bare Necessities Index (BNI) in Economic Survey 2020-21)

1. Poorer states have reduced the gap with rich States in providing citizens with access to the basics of daily life — housing, water, power, sanitation, cooking gas.
2. The index shows that between 2012 and 2018, serious gains were made in the area of sanitation although equity in housing access still lagged.
3. Inter-State disparities in the access to ‘the bare necessities’ have declined in 2018 when compared to 2012 across rural and urban areas,” said the survey.
4. Access to ‘the bare necessities’ has improved disproportionately more for the poorest households when compared to the richest households across rural and urban areas.
5. However, the survey noted there was still a gap between urban and rural India, as well as among income groups, and recommended: “effective targeting of the needier population” in government schemes.
6. Better Centre-State coordination with local governments is needed, as they were responsible for civic amenities in urban areas, added the survey. It also suggested the BNI could be constructed at the district level using large annual household survey data, to show progress.

‘Businesses must ramp up R&D spending to boost innovation’

1. To become the third-largest economy in terms of GDP at current dollar rates, India needs to significantly ramp up investment in R&D, driven by the business sector, according to the Economic Survey.
2. India’s gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD), which is currently the lowest amongst other large economies at about 0.65% of GDP, needs to go up to at least the average level of GERD in other top ten economies of more than 2%.
3. The survey attributed India’s low GERD mainly to the disproportionately lower contribution from the business sector. The business sector in India, it said, contributed much less to gross expenditure on R&D (about 37%) compared with businesses in each of the top ten economies (68% on average).



Health outcomes in the PM-JAY States better: Survey

1. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) contributed to improvement in many health outcomes in states that implemented the ambitious programme.
2. States that joined the PM-JAY, compared to those that did not experience greater penetration of health insurance, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, realised improved access and utilisation of family planning services and greater awareness of HIV/AIDS.
3. Across all the States, the proportion of households with health insurance increased by 54% for States that implemented PM-JAY while falling by 10% in States that did not.