



Current Affairs of the Day

'State resolutions on Central laws are fine'

The Supreme Court found no harm in State Legislative Assemblies, such as those in Kerala and West Bengal, passing resolutions against Central laws like the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act or the new agriculture laws.

Highlights:

1. The court said these resolutions are mere “opinions” of the majority members of a Legislative Assembly and do not have the force of law.
2. The court was hearing a PIL filed by a Rajasthan-based NGO, Samta Andolan Samiti, that said State Assemblies, such as Rajasthan, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal, have no business passing resolutions against Central laws that come under the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
3. The hearing mostly focused on the resolution passed by the Kerala Assembly on December 31, 2019, criticising CAA as a law violating the right to equality. The Assembly had called upon the Centre to abrogate the CAA.

COVID may have doubled poverty in India

India's middle class may have shrunk by a third due to 2020's pandemic-driven recession, while the number of poor people — earning less than ₹150 per day — more than doubled, according to an analysis by Pew Research Center. In comparison, Chinese incomes remained relatively unshaken, with just a 2% drop in the middle-class population, it found.

Highlights:

1. The report uses World Bank projections of economic growth to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on Indian incomes. The lockdown triggered by the pandemic resulted in shut businesses, lost jobs and falling incomes, plunging the Indian economy into a deep recession. China managed to avoid a contraction, although growth slowed, the report said.
2. “The middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 3.2 crores in 2020 as a consequence of the downturn, compared with the number it may have



reached absent the pandemic,” said the report, defining the middle class as people with incomes of approximately ₹700-1,500 or \$10-20 per day.

NREGA demand up

1. “Meanwhile, the number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of \$2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 7.5 crores because of the COVID-19 recession. This accounts for nearly 60% of the global increase in poverty,” the report added,
2. It estimated an increase from almost 6 crores to 13.4 crore poor people. It also noted the record spike in MGNREGA participants as proof that the poor were struggling to find work.

Scrap 1886 lease on Mullaperiyar Dam: a plea

The Supreme Court on Friday decided to examine a plea to terminate the lease deed concerning the Mullaperiyar dam, originally signed between the Maharaja of Travancore and the British Secretary of State for India in Council for ‘Periyar Project’ in 1886.

Highlights:

1. The petition contended that the States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which succeeded the original signatories of the lease deed in 1970, has breached the terms of the deed. It said both States have not taken care of the safety issues concerning the dam.
2. Tamil Nadu has “not carried out the construction of an evacuation tunnel at low level to make possible evacuation of water in the event of a distress to one of the oldest dams in India, as prescribed mandatory in the ‘Guidelines for Preparing Operation and Maintenance Manual for Dams’.
3. This is a breach of the terms of the lease deed”, the petition said. Tamil Nadu did not carry out the necessary repairs on the dam, it added.
4. It said that Kerala, as the “landlord” of the 8,000 plus acres on which the dam is situated, should terminate the lease with “tenant” Tamil Nadu.

Background:

Mullaperiyaru Dam is a masonry gravity dam on the Periyar River in the Indian state of Kerala. It is located 881 m (2,890 ft) above mean sea level, on the



Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats in Thekkady, Idukki District of Kerala, South India. It was constructed between 1887 and 1895 by the British and also reached an agreement to divert water eastwards to the Madras Presidency area (present-day Tamil Nadu).

It has a height of 53.6 m (176 ft) from the foundation, and a length of 365.7 m (1,200 ft). The Periyar National Park in Thekkady is located around the dam's reservoir. The dam is built at the confluence of Mullayar and Periyar rivers. The dam is located in Kerala on the river Periyar but is operated and maintained by the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. Although the Periyar River has a total catchment area of 5398 km² with 114 km² downstream from the dam in Tamil Nadu, the catchment area of the Mullaperiyar Dam itself lies entirely in Kerala and thus not an inter-State river.

Six tigers 'missing' in Ranthambore

Six tigers — four adults and two sub-adults — have been unaccounted for since March 2020 in the Ranthambore tiger sanctuary, Rajasthan. However, State forest officials are not willing to label them “missing” and denied reports that they may have been poached.

Highlights:

1. Independent wildlife groups such as Tiger Watch have alleged that the tigers have been missing for over a year and that “negative human intervention being a cause [poaching]” could not be ruled out.
2. It was not unusual for tigers to move outside the reserve — even as far as Mathura, Uttar Pradesh; Bharatpur in Rajasthan and Dati in Madhya Pradesh — but they have not ruled out other causes.
3. There have been no camera trap images of the six creatures since March. Ranthambore's estimated 70 tigers exceeded its carrying capacity and newer tigers were driving out older ones and so the tigers had possibly branched out of their territories.
4. The disappearance of tigers was a cause for concern as generally established adults don't venture very far. So if it is this category of tigers and so far not captured on camera, then there is cause for concern. Also, the particular territories in Ranthambore are notorious for poaching.



India has 2,967 tigers, a third more than in 2014, according to results of a census made public on July 29 last year. Ranthambore, according to this exercise, had 55 tigers. Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442). Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in tiger population and all other states saw an increase.

Specify reasons for rejecting health claims: IRDAI to insurers

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has cautioned insurers against not being transparent to policyholders while rejecting health insurance claims.

Highlights:

1. “Insurer shall ensure that the repudiation of the claim is not based on presumptions and conjectures,” the IRDAI said in a circular to Life, General and Standalone Health Insurance Companies as well as TPAs.
2. IRDAI said when a claim is denied or repudiated, the insurer should communicate the same, specifically mentioning reasons and also referring to the corresponding policy conditions.
3. Separately, IRDAI asked insurers to make special arrangements to facilitate eligible policyholders to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as a group or individually either at government or private facilities as per the option of the policyholders.
4. The insurer should assist them by making arrangements through pre-booking slots and send reminders when the second shot of vaccine is due, IRDAI said. The regulator did not specify whether the cost of the vaccination would be covered under the policies for those taking the shots at private hospitals.
5. However, on Thursday the regulator had clarified that “in the unlikely event of hospitalisation following an adverse reaction to COVID-19 vaccination, hospitalisation is covered under the health insurance policies subject to the specific terms and conditions of the policy.”



Auto firms see scrappage policy boosting the sector

Auto majors have welcomed the new vehicle-scrappage policy saying it would encourage people to replace older vehicles, thus boosting demand in the sector.

Highlights:

1. The new policy presents a huge business opportunity for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and can significantly cut pollution while bolstering road safety.
2. It would offer the much-needed reprieve for auto, steel and electronics industries that were in need of resuscitation after the 'onslaught of the pandemic'. The move will also boost the demand for environment-friendly vehicles.
3. Only a joint effort by the government, industry and customers can result in a policy that offers true safety, economic and environmental benefits.