



Current Affairs of the Day

How Asian desert dust enhances Indian summer monsoon

The dust has incredible power: it is known to influence monsoons, hurricanes and even fertilize rainforests. A new study now details how dust coming from the deserts in the West, Central and East Asia plays an important role in the Indian Summer Monsoon. The researchers also explain how the Indian Summer Monsoon has a reverse effect and can increase the winds in West Asia to produce yet more dust.

Dust storms and Monsoon:

1. Dust swarms from the desert when lifted by strong winds can absorb solar radiation and become hot. This can cause heating of the atmosphere, change the air pressure, wind circulation patterns, influence moisture transport and increase precipitation and rainfall.
2. A strong monsoon can also transport air to West Asia and again pick up a lot of dust. The researchers say this is a positive feedback loop.
3. Not just the dust from the Middle East [West Asia], we think the Iranian Plateau also influences the Indian Summer Monsoon. The hot air over the Iranian Plateau can heat the atmosphere over the plateau, strengthen the circulation over the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and increase dust emission from the Middle East [West Asia].

Aerosols transported

1. Deserts across the globe play important roles in monsoons. The dust aerosols from deserts in West China such as the Taklamakan desert and the Gobi Desert can be transported eastward to eastern China and can influence the East Asia summer monsoon. And in the southwest United States, we have some small deserts that influence the North African monsoon.
2. Some studies have found that the anthropogenic aerosols emitted from the Indian subcontinent can decrease summer monsoon precipitation, while others found that absorbing aerosols such as dust can strengthen the monsoon circulation.



Why study dust?

Many studies have shown that the dust emission scheme is extremely sensitive to climate change and understanding these mechanisms and effects of dust will help understand our monsoon systems in the face of global climate change.

Maintaining the inflation target at 4%

The story so far:

1. On the last day of the financial year 2020-21, the Finance Ministry announced that the inflation target for the five years between April 2021 and March 2026 will remain unchanged at 4%, with an upper tolerance level of 6% and a lower tolerance level of 2%.
2. This is the retail inflation target that will drive the country's monetary policy framework and influence its decision to raise, hold or lower interest rates.

Why is this important?

1. India had switched to an inflation target-based monetary policy framework in 2015, with the 4% target kicking in from 2016-17.
2. Many developed countries had adopted an inflation-rate focus as an anchor for policy formulation for interest rates rather than past fixations with metrics like the currency exchange rate or controlling money supply growth.
3. Emerging economies have also been gradually adopting this approach. In adopting a target for a period of five years, the central bank has the visibility and the time to smoothly alter and adjust its policies in order to attain the targeted inflation levels over the medium term, rather than seek to achieve it every month.

What is the RBI's position on this?

1. The RBI had, in recent months, sought a continuance of the 4% target with the flexible tolerance limits of 2%. The 6% upper limit, it argued, is consistent with global experience in countries that have a large share of food items at their consumer price inflation indices.



2. Accepting inflation levels beyond 6% would hurt the country's growth prospects, the central bank had asserted. Below 2 % there is deflationary pressure.
3. Price stability boosts consumer and investor confidence which is crucial for long term economic growth.

Reversing a ban

The story so far:

1. Last June, the administration of former President Donald Trump, a Republican, halted the issuance of non-immigrant work visas of several types, including the skilled worker visa, or H-1B.
2. Now, the 46th and current U.S. President, Democrat Joe Biden, has allowed the ban on H-1B visa issuance to expire, potentially bringing relief to a large number of Indian nationals, especially IT workers who are prospective applicants for the visa.

Was it economics or politics that prompted the ban?

1. It is unlikely that any significant economic benefits of the skilled-worker visa ban, in terms of protecting U.S. jobs from foreigners, could have been realised during 2020 and early 2021 given the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic on the U.S. economy.
2. Firstly, the ban did not apply to visa-holders already within the U.S., or those outside the country for whom a valid visa was already issued. Second, given that the ban remained in force only during the pandemic and that there had been a slowdown in economic activity during this period, U.S. firms relying on skilled foreign nationals may have anyway been unable to make new hires.
3. Given this, it is hard to see the Trump White House's policy as anything other than a political manoeuvre.

Mr Biden has sought to nudge the broader immigration ethos of the U.S. back towards one that is consistent with Democratic values. In allowing the H-1B visa ban to expire, he is walking a fine line between restoring the inflow of skilled workers into the U.S., a source of productivity-increase for its labour force, and



not being seen as overly aggressive in unwinding Trump-era immigration crackdowns.

What was the economic fallout of the visa ban?

1. Even more than Mr Biden, it turned out that America Inc., the employers of perhaps millions of non-immigrant foreign workers, from Wall Street to Silicon Valley, was at the vanguard of the backlash against the skilled worker visa ban.
2. For example, Google CEO Sundar Pichai lashed out at the policy, saying at the time of its announcement, Immigration has contributed immensely to America's economic success, making it a global leader in tech, and also Google the company it is today.

Indian Dominance:

1. Until now, the U.S. issued 85,000 H-1B visas annually, of which 20,000 went to graduate students and 65,000 to private sector applicants, and Indian nationals would garner approximately 70% of these.
2. Given that the order banning H-1B visa issuance expired, all H-1B applicants will now be in a position to receive a visa and travel to the U.S. to begin or resume work as full-time employees or independent contractors.
3. This would also benefit Indian IT companies with U.S. operations. The opening up of H-1B visa availability is also premised on U.S. diplomatic missions worldwide resuming new visa issuance to appropriately qualified skilled workers.