



## Current Affairs of the Day

### GS Paper II

- Significant progress in SDGs on clean energy, health: NITI index
- 'Journalists need protection against sedition charges'
- 30% PMGKAY recipients yet to get grains for May
- Govt. advised the split in MGNREGA wage benefit

### GS Paper III

- WhatsApp is indulging in anti-user practices: govt.
- Strong policies on black carbon can sharply cut glacier melt: World Bank study
- Centre orders 30 crore doses from Biological E



## Significant progress in SDGs on clean energy, health: NITI index

India saw significant improvement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to clean energy, urban development and health in 2020, according to the NITI Aayog's 2020 SDG Index. However, there has been a major decline in the areas of industry, innovation and infrastructure as well as decent work and economic growth.

### Highlights:

1. Although the index shows improvement on the inequality SDGs, the NITI Aayog has omitted key economic indicators used to measure inequality in income and expenditure last year and given greater weightage to social indicators instead.
2. Kerala retained its position at the top of the rankings in the third edition of the index, with a score of 75, followed by Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, both scoring 72. At the other end of the scale, Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam were the worst performing States.
3. However, all the States showed some improvement from last year's scores, with Mizoram and Haryana seeing the biggest gains.
4. The NITI Aayog launched its index in 2018 to monitor the country's progress on the goals through data-driven assessment and to foster a competitive spirit among the States and Union Territories in achieving them.

### Inequality: Thrust on social equality

1. The NITI Aayog Index shows some improvement in the SDG on inequality, but a look at the indicators used to assess this goal shows that the think tank has changed the goalposts.
2. In 2019, the indicators for inequality included the growth rates for household expenditure per capita among the bottom 40% of rural and urban populations, as well as the Gini coefficient — a measure of the distribution of income — in rural and urban India.
3. Such economic measures have been omitted from the indicators used for this SDG in the 2020 edition of the Index. Instead, it gives greater weightage to social equality indicators, such as the percentage of women and Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe representatives in State Legislatures and the



Panchayati raj institutions and the levels of crime against the SC/ST communities.

4. The only economic indicator this year is the percentage of the population in the lowest two wealth quintiles.
5. The SDGs that do deal directly with wages and industrial growth better reflect the fact that India's economy has taken a beating over the last year.
6. The country's score on the SDG related to industry and infrastructure dropped 10 points to 55, while the scores on decent work dropped three points to 61.
7. The Clean Water and Sanitation SDG also saw a five-point drop, despite flagship government schemes in this sector.
8. In a more welcome development, the SDGs on eradication of poverty and hunger both saw significant improvement.

## **'Journalists need protection against sedition charges'**

1. The Supreme Court quashed a sedition case registered against a senior journalist and Padma Shri awardee Vinod Dua for his critical remarks against the Prime Minister and the Union government in a YouTube telecast, underscoring its 59-year-old verdict that "strong words" of disapproval about the ruling regime did not amount to sedition.
2. The court upheld the right of every journalist to criticise, even brutally, the measures of the government with a view to improving or altering them through legal means. The free speech of a journalist should be protected from charges of sedition.
3. The time is long past when the mere criticism of governments was sufficient to constitute sedition. The right to utter honest and reasonable criticism is a source of strength to a community rather than a weakness, the judgment said.
4. It upheld the spirit and intent of the 1962 Kedar Nath Singh verdict, which said, "Commenting in strong terms upon the measures or acts of government, or its agencies, so as to ameliorate the condition of the people or to secure the cancellation or alteration of those acts or measures by lawful means, that is to say, without exciting those feelings of enmity and disloyalty which imply excitement to public disorder or the use of violence is not sedition".



5. Justice Lalit declared, “Every journalist is entitled to protection under the Kedar Nath Singh judgment.”
6. The 1962 judgment said Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (sedition) was intended only to punish subversion of a lawfully established government through violent means.

## 30% PMGKAY recipients yet to get grains for May

1. Almost a third of all ration card holders are yet to get their free foodgrains allocation for May under the Centre’s COVID-19 relief scheme, according to the Food Ministry.
2. The centre said it was up to the States to take further action on providing rations to migrants and others without ration cards in compliance with a Supreme Court order, indicating that the Centre does not intend to revive last year’s scheme meant for these vulnerable populations.
3. Out of the 79.25 crore beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), only 55 crore have so far received their 5 kg per person quota of free wheat or rice under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), which was announced to mitigate the economic distress caused by the pandemic. Thus, more than 30% have still not got their benefit.
4. The Centre issued an advisory to all States asking them to launch a special drive to issue ration cards to the most vulnerable sections of society, including migrant workers and street dwellers, noting that “some of the poor and needy people who do not have address proof may be finding it difficult to obtain a ration card”.
5. An analysis of NFSA data shows that the only major States which have significant coverage gaps are Himachal Pradesh (23%), Madhya Pradesh (14%) and Gujarat (9%).
6. The Supreme Court had directed that migrant workers and poor people without ration cards should be provided with dry ration under the Atma Nirbhar scheme — which was implemented last year — or any other scheme found suitable by the States and Centre.



## Govt. advised the split in MGNREGA wage benefit

1. The decision to split the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) wage payments by caste categories was done on the advice of the Union Finance Ministry in order to assess and highlight the benefits flowing from budgetary outlay towards Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
2. This should not cause any delay in wage payments or any changes for beneficiaries if processes were put in place correctly, and added that there was no plan to focus MGNREGA only on districts with high SC and ST populations.
3. Workers' advocates feared this move would cause unnecessary delays and complications in the payment system, and worried that it could lead to a reduction in scheme funding.
4. The measure was to a large extent aimed at highlighting what the Centre was doing for the SC and ST communities.

## WhatsApp is indulging in anti-user practices: govt.

1. The Centre has informed the Delhi High Court that WhatsApp, the instant messaging app, was indulging in "anti-users practices" by obtaining "trick consent" from the users for its updated privacy policy.
2. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, in an affidavit filed before the court, stated that WhatsApp was "bombarding" million of its existing users who have not accepted the updated 2021 privacy policy, with notifications on a daily basis.
3. The Ministry has urged the court to give a direction to WhatsApp to "desist from any action of 'pushing notifications' to existing users related to updated 2021 privacy policy".
4. The current notifications as being pushed by WhatsApp on its users whether existing or new is against the Competition Commission of India's [CCI] order. The CCI had called for an investigation into WhatsApp's new privacy policy.
5. Having considered the overarching terms and conditions of the new policy, the Commission is of prima facie opinion that the 'take-it-or-leave-it nature of privacy policy and terms of service of WhatsApp and the information sharing



stipulations mentioned therein merit a detailed investigation in view of the market position and market power enjoyed by WhatsApp.

## Strong policies on black carbon can sharply cut glacier melt: World Bank study

1. Black carbon (BC) deposits produced by human activity which accelerates the pace of glacier and snowmelt in the Himalayan region can be sharply reduced through new, currently feasible policies by an additional 50% from current levels, a study by World Bank (WB) specialists have said.
2. The research covers the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush (HKHK) mountain ranges, where, the report says, glaciers are melting faster than the global average ice mass.
3. Full implementation of current policies to mitigate BC can achieve a 23% reduction but enacting new policies and incorporating them through regional cooperation among countries can achieve enhanced benefits.

### Curbing Black Carbon:

1. BC is a short-lived pollutant that is the second-largest contributor to warming the planet behind carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). Unlike other greenhouse gas emissions, BC is quickly washed out and can be eliminated from the atmosphere if emissions stop. Unlike historical carbon emissions, it is also a localised source with greater local impact.
2. Some of the ongoing policy measures to cut BC emissions are enhancing fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, phasing out diesel vehicles and promoting electric vehicles, accelerating the use of liquefied petroleum gas for cooking and through clean cookstove programmes, as well as upgrading brick kiln technologies.
3. However, with all existing measures, water from glacier melt is still projected to increase in absolute volume by 2040, with impacts on downstream activities and communities.
4. Regional integration and collaboration was one way to address the question of melting glaciers. Glacier melt produces flash floods, landslips, soil erosion, and glacial lake outburst floods.



## Air temperature

1. Deposits of BC act in two ways hastening the pace of glacier melt: by decreasing surface reflectance of sunlight and by raising air temperature, the researchers point out.
2. Specifically, in the Himalayas, reducing black carbon emissions from cookstoves, diesel engines, and open burning would have the greatest impact and could significantly reduce radiative forcing and help to maintain a greater portion of Himalayan glacier systems.

The WB publication says “Industry [primarily brick kilns] and residential burning of solid fuel together account for 45–66% of regional anthropogenic [man-made] BC deposition, followed by on-road diesel fuels (7–18%) and open burning (less than 3% in all seasons)” in the region.

## Centre orders 30 crore doses from Biological E

1. The Union Health Ministry has finalised arrangements with Hyderabad-based vaccine manufacturer Biological E to reserve 30 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses.
2. The RBD protein subunit vaccine, now undergoing Phase-3 clinical trial, is likely to be available in a few months.
3. The arrangement with the company was a part of the wider endeavour of the government to encourage indigenous vaccine makers by providing them support in research and development and financial aid.
4. The vaccine candidate has been supported by the government from the preclinical stage to the Phase-3 studies. The Department of Biotechnology has provided a grant-in-aid of over ₹100 crores and partnered with the firm to conduct all animal and assay studies.