



Current Affairs of the Day

More plastic items to be banned

Come July next year, the manufacture of a range of plastic products will be banned. These include earbuds with plastic sticks, plastic flags, ice-cream sticks, thermocol for decoration, plates, cups, cutlery such as forks, spoons and knives, straws, trays, wrapping or packing films around sweet boxes, invitation cards, and cigarette packets, plastic or PVC banners less than 100 microns, and stirrers.

The Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021

1. The Environment Ministry on Friday notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, which prohibit specific single-use plastic items which have “low utility and high littering potential” by 2022.
2. Plastic packaging waste is not yet covered under the phase-out of single-use plastic items. The Ministry informed the Rajya Sabha in July of its proposal to phase out some categories of single-use plastic by 2022.
3. A draft outlining the way forward was issued in March and involved amending the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.
4. Currently, the rules prohibit the manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of carrying bags and plastic sheets less than 50 microns in thickness in the country.
5. There is a ban on sachets using plastic material used for storing, packing or selling gutkha, tobacco and pan masala.
6. At the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly in 2019, India piloted a resolution on addressing pollution caused by single-use plastic products.

Taliban gains complicate India's options

1. Even by the most pessimistic prognoses of the situation, the fall of major Afghan cities and provinces to the Taliban has been swift, and the impact on India's interests is coming clearly into focus.



2. The first concern is for Indian diplomats, personnel and citizens based in Afghanistan, and over the past year, since it became clear that the U.S. troops would leave the country, India has pared down its diplomatic presence there.
3. In April 2020, the government flew home all Indian staff at its missions in Herat and Jalalabad, given the security and COVID-19 concerns. In the past month, consulates in Kandahar and Mazar have been closed as well, and the Kabul Embassy, the only working mission, has issued stern advisories telling all Indian citizens they must take commercial flights out at the earliest.
4. With the Taliban in power in much of Afghanistan, India has other concerns as well. One worry is that groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad could now have more ungoverned spaces to carry out attacks against India.
5. The Taliban's control will also mean a bigger hand for the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies to influence outcomes for the country, which will mandate a much smaller role for Indian development and infrastructure work that has won it goodwill over the past 20 years.
6. In addition, trade through Afghanistan under a Taliban regime would be routed through Karachi and Gwadar, and the Indian investment in the Chabahar port, meant to circumvent Pakistan, may become unviable.
7. In addition, there is the threat of growing radicalisation and space for pan-Islamic terror groups in India's neighbourhood.

India has four options

1. Given all these concerns, India has four options, none of which are easy, nor without repercussions.
2. The first option is to stick to its principle of backing only a democratically-elected government in Kabul, and providing political and humanitarian support while that lasts.
3. The second one would be to go further and supply the ANDSF with military supplies, including ammunition and airpower, possibly via the Iranian route. In an interview with NDTV on Friday, Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen threatened consequences for India if it did that, however.



4. The third would be to accelerate contacts with the Taliban. However, this is unlikely to give India much leverage, given the Pakistan factor, as well as the fact that all regional and donor countries have already done so.

Finally, India could simply wait and watch, until the chaos of conflict reveals a winning side, and weigh its options accordingly. This option seems expedient, but it also denies India relevance at the “high table” where Afghanistan’s future is being discussed, especially the “Troika-plus” grouping of special envoys of U.S.-Russia-China with Pakistan, that met again this week, while India was included in a group at Doha of more distant countries with a much lower stake in the future of Afghanistan.

AB-PMJAY gave ₹2,794 cr. for COVID treatment

1. Under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the Union government’s health insurance scheme, approximately 20.32 lakh COVID-19 tests and 7.08 lakh treatments were authorised from April 2020 to July 2021.
2. The total value of the tests and treatment stood at ₹2,794 crores, a senior official told The Hindu.
3. While several States had made testing and even treatment of COVID-19 free, the cover allowed beneficiaries to avail of free testing and treatment across all empanelled hospitals — both public and private
4. The National Health Authority (NHA) is the nodal agency responsible for the nationwide roll-out and implementation of the AB-PMJAY scheme.
5. It noted that the response towards COVID-19 had been dynamic, keeping pace with the spread of the disease. The prevalence of the disease had not followed a uniform pattern across States.
6. Many State governments decided to make COVID-19 testing and treatment free under the scheme for all the residents. While some of them used the Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY ecosystem, including the IT platform, others also made it free but without recording the transaction on the NHA’s IT platform.
7. The Union Cabinet had approved a new scheme — India COVID-19 Emergency Response & Health System Preparedness Package: Phase-II (ECRP-II package) — on July 8, 2021, amounting to ₹23,123 crores.



The vehicle-scrapage policy will promote a circular economy: PM

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the National Automobile Scrapage Policy and said the initiative will promote a circular economy and make the process of economic development more sustainable and environmentally friendly.
2. The policy, aimed at recycling old and unfit vehicles, will give a new identity to India's mobility and auto sector.
3. The summit, which saw the participation of potential investors and industry players, was organised to attract investment for setting up vehicle-scraping infrastructure under the Voluntary Vehicle Fleet Modernisation Programme, as per an official release.
4. This policy will play a major role in removing unfit vehicles from our roads in a scientific manner. It will modernise the vehicular population on our city roads. Under this policy, people who give their old vehicles for turning them into scrap will be given a certificate by the government.
5. People having this certificate will not be charged any registration fee on the purchase of a new vehicle, said Mr Modi, adding that such vehicle owners will also be entitled to some rebate on road tax.
6. The policy would attract an investment of ₹10,000 crores and create thousands of employment opportunities, he said.

'Only 5 out of 136 unicorn founders are women'

1. India's 136-strong unicorn founders' club has only five women, and as of August 4, the country had 56 start-ups that had turned unicorns.
2. A gender analysis brought out the skewed scenario as 131 of the 136 unicorn founders in the country are males and only five are women: Divya Gokulnath (Byju's), Falguni Nayar (Nykaa), Ruchi Kalra (OfBusiness), Saritha Katikaneni (Zenoti) and Gazal Kalra (Rivigo), as per EMA Partners, a global executive search and leadership advisory.
3. The study, titled 'An analysis of Indian unicorns & their founders', also found it took seven years on a median basis for 56 start-ups to achieve unicorn status.