



Current Affairs of the Day

Hackathon to find out solutions for intel bodies

1. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), in coordination with the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), will launch an online hackathon “Manthan 2021”, for the identification of innovative concepts and technology solutions to address the challenges faced by intelligence agencies.
2. During this 36-hour online hackathon, scheduled from November 28 to December 1, 2021, the selected youth from education institutions across the country and registered start-ups will participate to offer strong, safe and effective technology solutions using their technical expertise and innovative skills.
3. The participants will have to develop digital solutions under six themes for 20 different challenge statements mentioned on the website, using new technologies like artificial intelligence, deep learning, augmented reality and machine learning. They must prove to the jury that the solution is technically feasible and, more importantly, implementable.

Centre raises the fair price of sugar cane

1. The Union government has increased the minimum price that sugar mills must pay to sugar cane farmers by ₹5 a quintal, setting the fair and remunerative price (FRP) at ₹290 a quintal for the 2021-22 sugar season, which runs from October to September.
2. Despite demands from sugar mills, however, the Centre refused to hike the minimum price at which they can sell the processed sugar, citing consumer interests.
3. The ₹290 a quintal national FRP will apply for a recovery rate of 10%. The decision will benefit five crore sugar cane farmers and their dependents as well as five lakh workers employed by sugar mills and related industries
4. The Centre had hiked FRPs by 38% since the ₹210 a quintal rate of 2013-14. He pointed out that this year's hike was only half the ₹10 increase seen last year.



‘Quite reasonable’

1. However, the government made it clear the Centre had no intention of increasing the MSP at this time, arguing that the mills received governmental support for exports and to divert surplus sugar to ethanol production. The delicate balance of the interest of farmers and consumers, as well as the industry, has been maintained in this decision.
2. The government also addressed the problem of late payment of dues to farmers, which is a thorny political issue, especially in western Uttar Pradesh’s sugar belt.
3. Most major sugar-producing states have set their own cane prices over and above the national FRP and a sore point for the U.P. farmers had been that the State had not hiked its price of ₹315 a quintal for the past three years. Over the last week, Punjab’s farmers took to the streets for an increase in the State price and negotiated a ₹50 a quintal hike to ₹360.

Campaign for one million soak pits in 100 days

1. The Jal Shakti Ministry has launched a campaign to create a million soak pits in villages across the country over the next 100 days, to help manage greywater and prevent the clogging of waterbodies.
2. Though the Central government does not have any comprehensive estimate of the total number of soak pits needed countrywide, the States have been asked to develop their own targets.
3. The household or community soak pit is the simplest solution for greywater management. With modernisation, people feel that the only solution is to have drains for wastewater, which is then dumped in a common village pond.
4. However, that is not the best solution for most villages which are generally dry, where greywater can be safely and inexpensively filtered through a soak pit. A household soak pit could be constructed for ₹3000-5000 in most cases.

Second phase:

1. The Swachh Bharat Mission’s first phase was to achieve open defecation free (ODF) status by constructing a toilet in every rural household and persuading all villagers to use it.



2. The second phase, termed ODF+, aims to sustain and extend these sanitation gains by focusing on solid and liquid waste management.
3. A dashboard would be made public within the next two weeks to enable proper monitoring of ODF+ work.

‘Sujalam’ campaign

1. Unlike the toilet construction phase, however, where targets were uniform across the country, the second phase has required a more nuanced approach.
2. In a letter to the States regarding the launch of the 100-day ‘Sujalam’ campaign centre asked states to “develop ambitious and measurable targets” of their own.
3. In regions such as Punjab where the water table was high, the soak pit would not be viable. So, there was no nationwide estimate of the number of pits required.

Probe agencies too hit by lack of manpower: CJI

The bench was hearing pleas about hundreds of criminal cases pending against MPs and MLAs, both sitting and former.

Lack of manpower

1. The Supreme Court said probe agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) suffered from the dearth of manpower and infrastructure that the judiciary too faced. Both were overburdened.
2. The court was hearing a petition about the hundreds of criminal cases pending against MPs and MLAs, both sitting and former, for years together. Some of these cases, investigated by agencies such as the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate (ED), have been pending for over a decade.
3. A report submitted by the court’s amicus curiae, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita, said 51 MPs and 71 MLAs were accused of offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.
4. Similarly, out of the 121 cases pending trial against MPs and MLAs before the CBI courts across the country, 58 were punishable with life imprisonment.



In 45 cases, even the charges have not been framed, though the offences were alleged to have been committed several years ago.

5. A total of 37 CBI cases against legislators were continuing in the stage of investigation for years on end now. One of these cases, according to the CBI, was “expected” to be completed by 2030, the report said.
6. In some cases, you have not filed a charge sheet in 10 or 15 years... In one case, CBI has attached assets worth over ₹200 crores but has not filed a charge sheet. Simply attaching property will not serve any purpose.
7. The information given by the ED and CBI presents a real, shocking, disturbing and gloomy picture.
8. The Chief Justice reasoned with Mr Mehta to complete the trial in these cases quickly rather than have them hanging over the heads of the accused like a Damocles sword.

Plea for directive

1. The Solicitor-General urged the Bench to pass a judicial order directing lower courts to complete the pending trial proceedings in a “mandatory time-bound manner”, possibly within the next six months.
2. The CJI stated efforts would be made to “rationalise” the number of cases before each trial court. The judiciary was slowly but surely dealing with the problem of scarcity of judges — High Courts have 455 judicial vacancies as on August 1. Besides, lower courts also have other urgent cases of bail, custody matters and so on to hear and decide.
3. The Bench said a mechanism would be put in place soon to monitor the progress of criminal trials involving legislators soon. This would include special courts.
4. In the previous hearing, the apex court questioned the Centre’s commitment towards the speedy trial and prosecution of criminal politicians. It also directed that a criminal case against an MP or MLA could be withdrawn only after getting the consent of the High Court concerned.
5. The court deemed it appropriate to direct that no prosecution against a sitting or former MP or MLA shall be withdrawn without the leave of the High Court.



6. Various State governments have resorted to the withdrawal of numerous criminal cases pending against MP/MLA by utilising the power vested under Section 321 CrPC.
7. The power under Section 321 CrPC is a responsibility that is to be utilised in the public interest and cannot be used for extraneous and political considerations. This power is required to be utilised with utmost good faith to serve the larger public interest.

Gadkari tells automakers to shift focus from diesel

1. Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari urged automobile manufacturers to move away from the production and sale of diesel engine vehicles, stating pollution from such vehicles was harmful.
2. Protection of ecology and environment must be the way of business and way of life for all of us, the Minister said, speaking at the annual convention of the Society of Indian Automobiles Manufacturers (SIAM).
3. He appealed to the vehicle manufacturers to discourage the production and sale of diesel-engine vehicles. The diesel-based position is extremely hazardous to the environment and human health. Industry must promote alternative fuel technologies.
4. He added the industry must swiftly shift to Indian technologies that allow the use of import-substitute, cost-effective, indigenous and pollution-free fuel.
5. The Minister said the government is promoting the adoption of cleaner and greener alternative fuels such as ethanol, methanol, bio-diesel, bio-CNG, LND, electric and green hydrogen fuel-cell technology to reduce dependency on petrol and diesel.