



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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PM KISAN scheme

Why in news?

The central government has disbursed around Rs 11,000 crore among 31 million farmers in the PM KISAN scheme so far.

Highlights:

- To provide an assured income support to the small and marginal farmers, the Government is launching the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).
- Under this programme, vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares, will be provided direct income support at the rate of Rs. 6,000 per year.
- This income support will be transferred directly into the bank accounts of beneficiary farmers, in three equal instalments of Rs. 2,000 each.
- This programme will be funded by Government of India. Around 12 crore small and marginal farmer families are expected to benefit from this.
- The programme would be made effective from 1st December 2018 and the first installment for the period upto 31st March 2019 would be paid during this year itself. This programme will entail an annual expenditure of Rs.75,000 crore.
- PM-KISAN would not only provide assured supplemental income to the most vulnerable farmer families, but would also meet their emergent needs especially before the harvest season. PM-KISAN

would pave the way for the farmers to earn and live a respectable living.

Sri Lanka names local Islamist group for Easter Sunday blasts

Why in news?

Sri Lankan authorities named a little-known local Islamist radical group, **the National Thowheed Jamaath**, as responsible for the ghastly Easter Sunday serial blasts that claimed nearly 300 lives and injured over 500 at different locations across the island nation.

State Emergency:

- The country's National Security Council has decided to enforce a state of emergency from midnight on Monday.
- The police have arrested nearly 30 suspects in connection with Sunday's explosions at churches and hotels in and around Colombo and in Batticaloa, in the island's Eastern Province.
- Meanwhile, a van parked near one of the attacked churches exploded on Monday, but no casualties or injuries were reported. The police also said they found 87 bomb detonators at a Colombo bus station.
- President Maithripala Sirisena convened an emergency meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) and formed a high-level panel to probe the incidents.
- The Council announced imposition of a "conditional state of emergency", a statement from the President's media unit said.

International network?

- While no domestic or international organisation has so far claimed responsibility for the attacks, Health Minister Rajitha Senarathne said the National Thowheed Jamaath had perpetrated the attack using suicide bombers.
- All suicide bombers are believed to be Sri Lankan nationals, he said.

- However, Mr. Senaratne said, “We do not believe these attacks were carried out by a group of people who were confined to this country.
- There must be an international network, without which these attacks could not have succeeded.
- Further, a statement from the President’s office said Sri Lanka would “**seek international assistance**”, as intelligence agencies reported there were “international organisations behind these acts of local terrorists”.

India’s Response:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured Sri Lankan President Sirisena that New Delhi was ready to “**provide any assistance at any time**” to help combat terrorism, according to a statement from the President’s office
 - Mr. Modi, who called Mr. Sirisena to convey his condolences, said, “The relationship between the two countries will remain in a strong manner in the future as well.”
 - Bodies of almost all the victims of Sunday’s blasts have been handed over to families, but nearly 20 bodies are yet to be identified
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India issued alert to Sri Lanka on possible blasts

Why in news?

India had issued an alert to Sri Lanka **in early April** on possible bomb attacks at different spots in the island, including the Indian High Commission building, sources in Colombo and New Delhi said, pointing to a possible lapse on the part of Sri Lanka’s security agencies.

Lapse in assessment:

- Health Minister Rajitha Senaratne told media-persons that “international” intelligence agencies had “warned the government on April 4” regarding an impending attack in the country.

- He did not name the country. However, sources in Colombo told that India had shared “as much information as they could” at that time.
- The Colombo mission, which was among the potential targets, had since taken “necessary precautions”.

Note from DIG:

- Further, a note from the DIG-Special Protection Range, bearing a seal of the date of April 11, and addressed to security divisions of Ministers, diplomatic community, judges and former Presidents, had warned recipients of “suicide attacks” being planned by “**Mohammed Zaharan**”, “Leader of the National Thowheeth Jamaath”, the organisation that Sri Lankan authorities attributed the attacks to.
- Referring to “several people” involved in the plot, the note said churches and the **Indian High Commission in Colombo were targets**.
- The note, written in Sinhala, has been doing the rounds on social media since Sunday’s blasts.
- While initially a section of Sri Lankan authorities dismissed it as a fake document, it acquired more credence, especially after Minister Senaratne named the same Islamist radical organisation, little known even within the country.
- Police have made nearly 30 arrests, but the person identified as the fringe outfit’s “leader” is said to be absconding.
- While many have commended Sri Lankan police and other security agencies for their swift response following the blasts, questions about their strategy to prevent the attacks remain unanswered.
- What specific measures were taken between April 4 (when Sri Lanka received the intelligence on the matter), April 11 (when the DIG’s note was sent) and April 21 (when the serial blasts occurred) remains unclear to many, even within the government, including at the highest levels.
- Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has said that the authorities were aware, but he and his Ministers were not informed.

Suspects monitored:

- Not that the Sri Lankan side was caught unawares. Sources part of key security briefings told that a list of at least hundred suspects had

been drawn up some time ago, with select phone numbers to monitor. The names, reportedly Muslim, were mostly of local youth.

- Sri Lankan authorities were already tracking a few young men with suspected links with militant organisations abroad following the arrests of at least two youth in December, who were accused of damaging Buddha statues in Mawanella town, some 100 kms away from Colombo.
 - All the same, the responses to these different leads somehow did not add up to a timely operation to avert the imminent risk, sources noted.
 - The intelligence apparatus was preoccupied with their heightened drive against narcotics, which has become a major political issue.
 - Moreover, they seem to have let their guard down around New Year weekend [Sinhala and Tamil New Years were celebrated on April 14] when the whole island virtually shuts down. That is possibly one reason,” said a source familiar with the investigations said.
 - Moreover, as Mr. Wickremesinghe’s statement on Sunday indicated, the lingering tensions between the President and him since the political crisis last year may have been a factor, say some.
 - Government Ministers voiced serious concern over police “inaction” despite prior warning and even sought the resignation of the IGP. Both the Law and Order and the Defence Ministries are with President Maithripala Sirisena.
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Scientists use EU satellite to spot Aegean Sea litter

Why in news?

In an experiment to detect marine litter using satellites, a team of Greek University students deposited wall-sized PVC frames on the surface of Aegean Sea.

About the project:

- The team gathered some 2,000 plastic bottles and lashed them to the frames.
 - Other targets were crafted with plastic bags, as these are even harder to spot in the water and usually constitute the deadliest threat to **Aegean marine life such as dolphins, turtles and seals.**
 - We knew that the European satellite system passes at regular intervals with a spatial resolution of 10 metres
 - In theory, then, the satellites should be able to detect the floating rafts of plastic the team pushed out to sea.
 - The results of the experiment “Satellite Testing and Drone Mapping for Marine Plastics on the Aegean Sea” will be presented at a European Space Agency symposium in Milan in May.
 - Marine litter is a global problem that affects all the oceans of the world.
 - The advantage is that we are using existing tools,” which brings down costs and makes it easier to scale up.
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Saving the planet may cost \$100 billion per year

Why in news?

Saving the diversity and abundance of life on the earth may cost \$100 billion a year, say scientists who have proposed a policy to prevent another mass extinction event on the planet.

Biodiversity catastrophe:

- There have been **five mass extinctions** in the history of the earth.
- Scientists now estimate that society must urgently come to grips this coming decade to stop the very first human-made biodiversity catastrophe.
- The sixth extinction is on our society’s shoulders; it really is,” ecologist Greg Asner, of Arizona State University in the U.S., said in a statement on the occasion of Earth day.

- Mr. Asner is one of 19 international authors with a bold new science policy proposal to reverse the tide, called “**A Global Deal for Nature**” (GDN).
- The policy’s mission is to save the diversity and abundance of life on the earth for the price tag of \$100 billion a year.

Companion pact:

- Societal investment in the GDN plan would, for the first time, integrate and implement climate and nature deals on a global scale to avoid human upheaval and biodiversity loss.
- While the **2015 Paris Climate Agreement** was the first major accord to take global action toward climate change policies, the international team of GDN scientists believe a similar companion pact is desperately needed to implement the very first global nature conservation plan to meet these challenges.
- The Global Deal for Nature is a time-bound, science-based plan to save the diversity and abundance of life on Earth.
- Achieving the milestones and targets of the Global Deal for Nature is the best gift we can offer to future generations, an environmental reset, a pathway to an Eden 2.0,” said Eric Dinnerstein, of the U.S.-based nongovernmental organisation Resolve.
- The study, published in Science Advances, outlines the guiding principles, milestones and targets needed to avoid the extinction threats of a two degrees Celsius warming forecast.
- The three overarching goals of the GDN are to protect biodiversity by conserving at least 30% of the earth’s surface by 2030; mitigate climate change by conserving the earth’s natural carbon storehouses; and reduce major threats.
- The essence of implementing the plan is to set up protected areas of land as natural ecosystems.

Climate change protesters chart a new course

Why in news?

Some of London’s busiest streets re-opened for the first time in a week as

climate change protesters regrouped and plotted a new course after police made over 1,000 arrests.

Extinction Rebellion:

- The so-called Extinction Rebellion took over the heart of the U.K. capital in a bid to **focus global attention on rising temperatures and sea levels caused by greenhouse gas emissions.**
 - The grassroots group was established last year in Britain by academics and has used social media to become one of the fastest-growing environmental movements in the world.
 - But it abandoned four of the five main protests sites over the weekend in response to a more forceful police approach and an outcry from local businesses that claimed a heavy loss in sales.
 - Extinction Rebellion organisers retreated to **Marble Arch a monument on the edge of Hyde Park that allows limited protests to continue without disrupting traffic.**
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CJI violated procedure by hearing own case

Why in news?

A storm of public opinion is gathering against the manner in which a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi convened on April 20 and suo motu heard a case involving sexual harassment allegations levelled against him by a former Supreme Court employee.

Violation of the procedure:

- The Bench was convened at short notice after online news portals published allegations levelled by a woman against the CJI.
- The hearing sparked a public debate on whether the CJI was sitting as a **“judge in his own cause”** and whether the Bench should have

followed the principles of natural justice by giving her a fair chance to be heard in the first place before passing remarks about her.

- On Monday, the first working day after a tumultuous weekend, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), a body of over 6,000 lawyers practising in the Supreme Court, said Saturday's hearing was "in violation of the procedure established by as well as the principles of natural justice."
- In an urgent meeting, the executive committee of the SCBA said a Full Court should take "all the necessary steps" under the law in this issue.
- The Supreme Court Advocates on Record Association (SCAORA) also expressed "**deep reservations against the procedural impropriety shown by the CJI in suo motu proceedings held on Saturday.**"
- The allegations of the ex-employee have to be dealt with as per the procedure established by law. The law must be applied in each and every case uniformly," SCAORA resolved.
- The association said it "strongly disapproves the manner in which the complaint was dealt with."

Course of correction:

- It urged for an inquiry and action into the woman's complaint. She has already written to 22 Supreme Court judges, detailing her allegations against the CJI

IMA threatens agitation over bridge course proposal:

Why in news?

The allopathic practitioners are up in arms over the NITI Aayog's proposal to bring in **a bridge course between the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) and the MBBS allowing dentists to practise family medicine** with the Indian Medical Association (IMA) threatening nationwide agitation, in case the proposal is taken forward.

Plug the shortage of doctors:

- The Central government noted that it was trying to **plug the shortage of doctors** using the fact that the dental courses follow the same training and curriculum as the MBBS courses for the first three years.
- The NITI Aayog had earlier proposed a bridge course for Ayush (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) doctors in the **National Medical Commission Bill** meant to replace the Indian Medical Council Act. Following pressure from the IMA, the course was rejected.

Issues:

- It is a criminal offence to let dentists into mainstream medicine by just doing a bridge course.
- The government is not able to generate jobs for medical graduates.
- 63,250 MBBS graduates come out of 494 medical colleges and we have only 23,729 post-graduate seats.
- Unemployment among medical graduates is a cause for concern, then how can government say that they will give jobs to dentists.
- MBBS graduates were not being absorbed into post-graduate courses. The IMA demands that medical graduates be given their due, the health budget be flexed to include job creation and the government abandon their half-baked proposal to convert dentists, nurses, pharmacists and Ayush practitioners into mid-level medical practitioners.
- The IMA is left with no choice but to initiate a nation-wide protest against the move.

U.S. ends waiver for India on Iran oil

Why in news?

The U.S. will not renew exemptions from its sanctions for importing oil from Iran, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced. The exemptions were granted last November for a **180-day period** for India and seven other countries, and are due to expire on May 2.

Pressure campaign:

- Today we are announcing the United States will not issue any additional Significant Reduction Exceptions [SREs] to existing importers of Iranian oil. The Trump Administration has taken Iran's oil exports to historic lows, and we are dramatically accelerating our pressure campaign in a calibrated way that meets our national security objectives while maintaining well supplied global oil markets," Mr. Pompeo said via a statement.
- We will continue to apply maximum pressure on the Iranian regime until its leaders change their destructive behaviour, respect the rights of the Iranian people, and return to the negotiating table.
- India, China and U.S. allies Japan, South Korea and Turkey will be the most impacted by the non-renewal of waivers.
- The other three currently exempted countries Italy, Greece and Taiwan have already reduced their imports to zero.

U.S. warns nations against trade with Iran:

- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned nations against interacting with Iran in violation of the sanctions.
- Any nation or entity interacting with Iran should do its diligence and err on the side of caution. The risks are simply not going to be worth the benefits.
- Earlier in April, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), had said that **India and the U.S. were "continually engaged"** on the issue of India's oil imports from Iran since sanctions kicked in last November, The Hindu had reported.
- That an announcement of this nature was imminent, was first reported by the Washington Post on Sunday. The price of global benchmark Brent crude hit a six-month intraday high on Monday.
- Oil exports from Iran hit a low of 1.0 to 1.0 million bpd in March this year down from 2.5 million bpd in April 2018.
- The U.S. announced that it would withdraw from the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or "Iran deal" in May.**
- The U.S. has tried to allay fears that oil markets will be impacted following the decision to stop exemptions.
- Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the global

oil cartel led by Saudi Arabia, has been coordinating with Russia to cut oil supply since January.

- Saudi Arabia and others in OPEC will more than make up the Oil Flow difference in our now Full Sanctions on Iranian Oil,” U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted.

Digital infra to play key role in reviving economy

Why in news?

The Aadhaar has worked as a digital infrastructure backbone helping governments in India to roll out several real-time initiatives and service delivery capabilities for citizens and enterprises alike, said Nandan Nilekani, chief architect of Aadhaar and co-founder and chairman, Infosys.

Data central to citizens:

- The Aadhaar, serving as an **electronic know-your-customer (KYC) tool**, has triggered massive customer additions in the country’s financial and telecom sectors and similar explosive growth is expected across other segments as well in the years to come, said Mr. Nilekani.
- Once data becomes the basis for decision-making across businesses, the country will witness dramatic transformation and growth.
- Data, globally, is becoming central to individual citizens and governments. We have witnessed dramatic transformation through Aadhaar-based e-KYC and online payments and our existing digital infrastructure will play a key role in reviving the economy,” he said.
- He further said that with Aadhaar, many elements of the digital infrastructure have been created.
- Aadhaar is now critical for to open a bank account, to get a mobile connection or to buy a mutual fund.

Real-time easy Process:

- Earlier, KYC used to be a cumbersome process, and therefore, opening a bank account or getting a new phone connection used to be a tough affair.
 - Also, with digital signature becoming a reality, identity verification and other credential checks are now being done real-time and as a result, banks are able to sanction loans in hours.
 - The country already has over a billion bank accounts that are Aadhaar number linked.
 - It makes transferring of funds easier and the country conducts over four billion financial transactions.
 - In addition, Aadhaar based e-KYC made LPG subsidies, MNREGA payments, farmer subsidies and pensions corruption-free and seamless. For all these, the underlying technology is Aadhaar.
 - On the benefits of technology for business, he said, the Goods and Services Tax has increased the number of taxpayers.
 - Aadhaar e-KYC has been revolutionary in making life simpler for people and India now has the infrastructure to deal with direct benefits transfers (DBT) in any segment, adding that DBT can revive the power sector.
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RBI may have Rs. 3 lakh cr. excess capital

Why in news?

As the Bimal Jalan Committee prepares to submit its report on **RBI's economic capital framework**, a report by Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BofAML) has said the excess reserves that the central bank holds could be up to Rs. 3 lakh crore or 1.5% of the GDP.

Findings of the report:

- Our stress tests estimate RBI's excess capital at Rs. 1,000-Rs. 3,000 billion, the report said.
- The Jalan Committee was set up in end-December and is expected to

submit its report within 90 days of its first meeting.

- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had said during the post-monetary policy interaction on April 4 that the deliberations were in advanced stages and it would require 'a few more days' to finalise the report.
 - If the contingency reserves are halved to 3.25% from the current 6.5%, it would release Rs. 1.282 lakh crore still 50% higher than what central banks in the BRICS grouping have.
 - Similarly, halving the yield cover hike to 4.5% from the present 9% would release another Rs. 1.17 lakh crore, the report said.
 - BofAML further said capping the overall reserves at 20% from the present 25.5% will release Rs. 1.96 lakh crore. Using the excess capital for bank recapitalisation would be liquidity neutral and aid in making rate cuts.
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India-China Bilateral Relations

Why in news?

India signalled its urgency to resolve differences with China on listing Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.

Bilateral consultations:

- In his opening remarks during "bilateral consultations", visiting Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale, who arrived in Beijing, said India and China should remain "sensitive to each other's concerns".
- During talks with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Mr. Gokhale stressed that India will work together with the Chinese side to deepen mutual understanding, strengthen mutual trust to implement the decisions taken by our leaders and do it in a manner where we are sensitive to each other's concerns.
- Azhar's designation was highlighted across the globe when China placed a "technical hold" on listing the head of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) as a global terrorist, following the February

14 Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed.

- Last week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the Azhar issue “**is moving towards the direction of settlement**” in the 1267 Committee of the Security Council.
- Since April 1, China has been saying a consensus was emerging within the **1267 Committee** on designating Azhar, after rejecting a parallel initiative by the U.S., backed by Britain and France, to seek a ban on him through a separate resolution in the Security Council plenary.

All available avenues:

- During Monday’s talks, India appeared not to endorse China’s position that Azhar’s designation should only be confined to the 1267 Committee.
 - In New Delhi, in response to a query on Mr. Gokhale’s discussion on listing Azhar, the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs said India will continue to pursue “all available avenues” to ensure that terrorist leaders involved in heinous attacks on Indian citizens are brought to justice.
 - It is now for the 1267 Sanctions committee and other authorised bodies of the UN to take a decision on the listing of Masood Azhar, the spokesperson said.
 - He added India had shared with China “all evidences of terrorist activities of the Jaish-e-Mohammed and its leader Masood Azhar”.
 - Earlier Chinese officials told that Indian and Chinese delegations have been interacting at the U.N. headquarters in New York on the Azhar issue.
 - Chinese officials had conveyed to their Indian counterparts their fears that in case the JeM head is proscribed, India will seek labelling of Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism, which Beijing roundly rejects.
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