



October 28, 2020 - Wednesday

Key Developments

COVID-19 to erode 3 years of fiscal consolidation gains of states: RBI

The additional outgo to combat the impact of COVID-19 will significantly erode the fiscal consolidation achieved by the state governments in the past three years, an RBI report said on Tuesday. In its study of the state budgets of 2020-21, the RBI report which has dwelled on the theme 'COVID-19 and its Spatial Dimensions in India', said that Gross Fiscal Deficit (GFD) of the states would spiral during the current fiscal. "States have budgeted their consolidated GFD at 2.8 per cent of GDP in 2020-21; however, the COVID-19 pandemic may alter budget estimates significantly, eroding the gains of consolidation secured in the preceding three years – the average GFD for states that presented their budgets before the outbreak of COVID-19 is 2.4 per cent of GSDP, while the average for budgets presented post-lockdown is 4.6 per cent," the report said.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/covid-19-to-erode-3-years-of-fiscal-consolidation-gains-of-states-rbi/2115017/>

Enforce waiver of interest on interest scheme: RBI to lending institutions

The Reserve Bank on Tuesday asked all lending institutions, including non-banking financial companies, to implement the waiver of interest on interest for loans up to Rs 2 crore for the six months moratorium period beginning March 1, 2020. On October 23, the government had announced the scheme for grant of ex-gratia payment of difference between compound interest and simple interest for six months to borrowers in specified loan accounts.

The scheme mandates ex-gratia payment to certain categories of borrowers by way of crediting the difference between simple interest and compound interest for the period between March 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020 by respective lending institutions. The government had asked the lending institutions to complete the exercise of crediting the amount in the accounts of borrowers by November 5.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/enforce-waiver-of-interest-on-interest-scheme-rbi-to-lending-institutions-120102700409_1.html

Loans against FDs, bonds, shares out of Nirmala Sitharaman's relief plan

Loans against fixed deposits, bonds and shares will not be eligible for relief under the government scheme for an 'ex gratia' payment to borrowers of up to Rs 2 crore. However, in the case of credit card dues, the government has clarified that the outstanding as on February 29 will be eligible for relief. The government on Tuesday released FAQs (frequently asked questions) on its scheme to provide ex gratia payment for the difference between simple and compound interest for borrowers of up to Rs 2 crore. This is available for the period of moratorium (March 1 to August 31, 2020) announced by the RBI. The FAQs clarify that for calculating the Rs 2-crore loan amount limit, banks will take into account all borrowings and not just a single loan.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/banking/finance/banking/loans-against-fds-bonds-shares-out-of-relief-plan/articleshow/78903239.cms>

Govt extends last date for availing direct tax dispute resolution scheme till December 31

The government has extended the last date for availing the direct tax dispute resolution scheme till December 31, 2020, the finance ministry notified on Tuesday. Taxpayers willing to settle their tax disputes under the Direct Tax

Vivad se Vishwas Act can file their declarations till December 31, and will be mandated to pay the settled tax amount by March 31, 2021, with a complete waiver of interest and penalty. After April 1, 2021, a 10% higher amount will have to be paid. Further, where arrears relate to disputed interest or penalty only, then 25% of the amount is to be paid by March 31, 2021 and 30% after April 1, 2021.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/govt-extends-the-last-date-for-availing-the-direct-tax-dispute-resolution-scheme-till-december-31/articleshow/78897175.cms>

New guidelines in works to speed up FDI approvals

The government of India, eyeing overseas investments, has begun working to revamp the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for processing foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals to fast track approvals. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is preparing a new set of guidelines to expedite the process for clearances, including security, for investment proposals on the approval route. As per the existing SOP issued in 2017, when the Foreign Investment Promotion Board was abolished, 8-10 weeks was time fixed for a decision on the proposals that need approval and 20 documents were to be submitted, seven of which were mandatory.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/new-guidelines-in-works-to-speed-up-fdi-approvals/articleshow/78899841.cms>

India, US sign multiple pacts spanning a wide spectrum

India and the US have announced five important pacts including the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA), which will allow India access to crucial data and images, and an agreement for the electronic exchange of Customs data between the Postal Operators in both countries, at the 2+2 Dialogue in New Delhi on Tuesday.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/policy/india-us-have-lot-to-discuss-from-covid-19-to-china-says-pompeo/article32953018.ece>

Economy

FM Sitharaman sees GDP growth in negative zone or near zero this fiscal

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said there were visible signs of revival in the economy but the GDP growth may be in negative zone or near zero in the current fiscal.

This is primarily because of a huge 23.9 per cent contraction in the economy in the first quarter of current fiscal (April-June), she added. Speaking at the India Energy Forum of CERAWEEK, she said there was a "very firm lockdown" imposed beginning March 25 as the government put lives before livelihood. The lockdown also gave time to do preparatory work to deal with the pandemic.

But with unlock, macroeconomic indicators have shown signs of revival, she said. Festive season will further spur the economy, rekindling hopes of positive growth in third and fourth quarters.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/fm-sitharaman-sees-gdp-growth-in-negative-zone-or-near-zero-this-fiscal-120102700914_1.html

Spike in internal remittance, EPFO registrations indicate recovery: Report

Indicating a faster-than-expected recovery, remittances from migrant labourers and the number of first-time EPFO registrations have crossed the pre-lockdown levels in September, according to a report.

Another silver lining is the massive 60 per cent increase in the number of Jan Dhan accounts to over 41 crore and the balances in them, which also indicate the fall in crimes during the lockdown months, SBI Research said in a report on Tuesday.

After a significant reduction in remittances due to the lockdown in April, it improved in June and July, and the numbers in September have crossed the pre-pandemic level in February. This seems migrant labourers are coming back in large numbers to the workplace for livelihood. However, the same declined in August primarily due to heavy rains that stopped work in many areas, according to SBI Research.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/spike-in-internal-remittance-epfo-registrations-indicate-recovery-report-120102701052_1.html

Government procurement to boost rural economy with Rs 50,000 crore to 2 million farmers

The government's rice procurement drive will give 2 million farmers a total of over Rs 50,000 crore before Diwali, which officials said would give another boost to the rural economy which has gained from a series of record harvests. "As per our internal estimate, we will be able to procure 16.7 million tonnes of rice by Diwali out of the total target of 49.75 million tonnes. The purchase will be mostly from Punjab and Haryana, where procurement is likely to be over by then. We expect to procure a total of 15.7 million tonnes rice from Punjab and Haryana during this period," said an official of Food Corporation of India, the apex agency which procures grains for the country.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/government-procurement-to-boost-rural-economy-with-rs-50000-crore-to-2-million-farmers/articleshow/78891906.cms>

Reviving demand key in Covid-hit economy

It is an accepted fact that the features of global economy have undergone a paradigm shift under the Covid pandemic. Especially, the concept of development economics, the branch that highlights the trend of various sectors of the economy as the country progresses from primary or agrarian stage to first the developing status glorifying the role of industry or the secondary sector and ultimately reaches the advanced economy category to display the characteristics of technology, innovation and sustainable growth of the economy with major role by the service sector. Some of the emerging and growing segments, tourism, hospitality, hotels and restaurants, travel and transportation, trade, media and entertainment, public and professional services, commercial buildings, and a few others have witnessed a sudden and stiff decline.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/reviving-demand-key-in-covid-hit-economy/2114503/>

Banking and Finance

SIDBI's 'Standup Mitra' portal records over 96,000 loan sanctions

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (Sidbi) on Tuesday said its 'Standup Mitra' portal has recorded over 96,000 loan sanctions worth over Rs 21,000 crore as of September end.

The portal, developed by Sidbi, was launched in April 2016 to extend online financial assistance to the unserved and underserved segment of the society without the need of visiting any bank branch, and apply for loan online under the Stand-Up India scheme.

The Standup Mitra portal "has successfully recorded more than 96,000 loan sanctions worth more than Rs 21,000 crore as on September 30, 2020," Sidbi said in a release. The Stand-Up India scheme aims to ensure access to unserved/underserved segments of women and scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) across the country by providing them financial assistance starting from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore for setting up greenfield enterprises.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/sidbi-s-standup-mitra-portal-records-over-96-000-loan-sanctions-120102700918_1.html

Rise in Jan dhan accounts during the pandemic point to economic revival, say SBI economists

Green shoots are visible even at the bottom of the pyramid, as the pandemic has led to a 60% increase in the opening of new Jan Dhan accounts and labour remittances have crossed the pre-Covid levels, according to a report by State Bank of India economists. Since April 1, about 30 million accounts have been opened, with a total increase in deposits of Rs 11,060 crore in these accounts. As per the latest data on October 14, the total number of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts stood at 410.5 million with a total balance of Rs 1.31 lakh crore. Only 19 million accounts were added in the year-ago period, while deposits rose by only Rs 7,857 crore. The pandemic hence led to a 60% increase in the opening of new Jan Dhan accounts, according to the report.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/rise-in-jan-dhan-accounts-during-the-pandemic-point-to-economic-revival-say-sbi-economists/articleshow/78899671.cms>

Industry

Online sale of durables nearly doubles this season, grabs offline share

The past few months may have been uncertain, but against all odds, the advent of the festive season has given hope to service engineer Shyam Ratan Singh. Contrary to expectations, the sale of consumer durables spiked since its beginning, offering him much-needed assignments.

Singh, who works for Samsung Electronics in Delhi, is however amused by the share of online orders versus offline stores. In contrast to last year, majority of the installations he attended recently were for appliances bought online. https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/online-sale-of-durables-nearly-doubles-this-season-grabs-offline-share-120102701139_1.html

Companies turn towards apprentices due to reverse migration of workers, rise in demand in these sectors

Labour loss due to reverse migration and increased demand for products and services post-lockdown have brought companies' interest towards apprentices. 46 per cent employers are keen to increase their apprentice pool in the period July-December 2020, compared to 41 per cent in H2 2019, according to the Apprenticeship Outlook Report released by TeamLease Skills University. About 32 per cent companies have been looking at apprenticeship to offset the workforce scarcity that they have been facing due to reverse migration due to Covid-19. Further, nearly 25 per cent companies have been hiring apprentices to meet the increased demand for products and services due to the pandemic, showed the report.

Another major reason for the surge in apprentice jobs is to optimize the manpower cost at the basic level. The top sectors where apprentices are expected to be in demand are healthcare & pharmaceuticals (42 per cent), manufacturing & engineering (40 per cent), retail (38 per cent), and e-commerce (38 per cent).

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/companies-turn-towards-apprentices-due-to-reverse-migration-of-workers-rise-in-demand-in-these-sectors/2114902/>

Secondary steelmakers to witness 12-15% decline in FY21, profitability to be hit by 100 bps: Crisil

India's secondary long steel makers may face a decline in profitability to an extent of 100 basis points for the financial year 2021 as long steel sales volume is seen declining 12-15 per cent in the current fiscal following the Covid-19 pandemic. "For secondary steel makers, operating margin will test the lower range of 5.5-6.5 per cent, marking a fall of nearly 100 basis points. This is largely due to the pandemic-driven shutdown in the first quarter of this fiscal, which led to a near-complete shutdown of operations for many producers," said Mohit Makhija, director, Crisil ratings in a report on Tuesday.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/indl-goods/svs/steel/secondary-steelmakers-to-witness-12-15-decline-in-fy21-profitability-to-be-hit-by-100-bps-crisil/articleshow/78892482.cms>

Agriculture

Kerala announces floor-price for 16 vegetables, scheme to kick off on November 1

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday announced floor price for vegetables as part of the government's measures to bail out farmers hurt by the Covid-19 pandemic, declaring that his is the first state in the country to do so. The scheme covers 16 varieties of vegetables grown in Kerala, and the new scheme will kick off from November 1. The chief minister said the floor prices will provide relief as well as support for the vegetable growers. "Farmers across the country are not satisfied but for the last four and half years, we have supported the farmers and the government has taken up several initiatives primarily targeted at the development of agriculture in the state." The floor price will be 20% above the production cost of the vegetables. Even if the market price goes below the floor price, the produce will be bought at the floor price from the farmers. The produce will be graded as per the quality and the floor price will be fixed based on the quality. Sixteen varieties of vegetables would be covered in the first phase, and there is a provision to revise the floor price on a regular basis, he said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/kerala-announces-floor-price-for-16-vegetables-scheme-to-kick-off-on-nov-1/articleshow/78895889.cms>

Nashik traders stay away from auction again

While traders in Nashik district stayed away from onion auctions for the second consecutive day, onion prices in the wholesale market dropped across the State. Onion farmers have threatened an agitation if auctioning at APMC markets are not resumed in the next two days.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/nashik-traders-stay-away-from-auction-again/article32955753.ece>

Sharp decline in soyabean production; exports take a hit

Decline in the production of soyabean during October 2019-September 2020 has resulted in limited availability of seeds for crushing and lower soyameal production during the year, if the estimates by Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA) are any indication.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/markets/commodities/sharp-decline-in-soyabean-production-exports-take-a-hit/article32956767.ece>

Intensive irrigation in India enhances deadly 'moist heat stress': Study

Intensive irrigation in India is increasing atmospheric moisture levels and enhancing potentially deadly extreme 'heat stress' conditions where people's bodies do not cool down easily, a new study says. The research, published in the journal Nature Geoscience, noted that heat stress occurs when the human body cannot cool itself, and can result from high environmental temperatures alone -- dry heat stress -- or from high temperatures with humidity -- moist heat stress.

It noted that India's irrigation area has doubled in recent decades, and the related increase in moist heat stress is closely linked to human mortality. According to the researchers, including Vimal Mishra from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar, the ongoing human-induced climate change is expected to intensify temperature extremes in India that could exacerbate this heat stress, affecting nearly 46 million people in South Asia -- especially among those working outdoors.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/intensive-irrigation-in-india-enhances-deadly-moist-heat-stress-study-120102700964_1.html

Infrastructure

Shipping minister Mansukh Mandaviya inaugurates 'Direct Port Entry Facility' at V.O. Chidambaranar port trust

Shipping minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday inaugurated a direct port entry (DPE) facility at V.O. Chidambaranar port trust, a development aimed at expediting cargo movement. DPE is a scheme meant to reduce release time and cost in case of exports, under which export containers are allowed direct entry into the port terminal prior to granting the let export order, which is the final step in the list of compliances required to export goods out of India. "DPE will help in increasing ease of doing business for the exporters, as the facility will bring efficiency and reduce dwell time, lower tariff cost and improve the competitiveness of shippers in international trade," Mandaviya was quoted as saying in a statement.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping/-/transport/shipping-minister-inaugurates-direct-port-entry-facility-at-v-o-chidambaranar-port-trust/articleshow/78893575.cms>

SpiceJet starts facilitating Covid-19 tests for passengers in India, UAE

SpiceJet has started facilitating COVID-19 testing for its passengers in India and the UAE with the help of VFS Global, a press release issued by the airline said on Tuesday.

"As the COVID-19 negative test report has become mandatory for passengers, especially for international travel, there are rising apprehensions among travellers regarding the entire process of complying with various pre-travel requirements," it said.

Passengers can submit their samples at a "location of choice", including at home, using the "At your Doorstep" service, the airline said, adding that the appointment booking service for testing is being offered by VFS Global.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/spicejet-starts-facilitating-covid-19-tests-for-passengers-in-india-uae-120102700740_1.html

Freebies, stamp duty cut help home sales in Mumbai surge past other markets

Mumbai's residential real estate market seems to be outperforming other property zones in the country. Freebies doled out by developers, recent cut in stamp duty and pent-up demand have done the trick, said consultants and analysts said.

Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) recorded housing sales of nearly 9,200 units in Q3 of calendar 2020, against 3,620 units in the preceding quarter, registering a 1.5 times growth which is the highest growth seen any city except Chennai.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/freebies-stamp-duty-cut-help-home-sales-in-mumbai-surge-past-other-markets-120102700887_1.html

Hyderabad records net office absorption of 1.54 mn sq. ft. in the third quarter of 2020

Strong signs of recovery were witnessed in the Hyderabad office market in Q3, 2020 with a healthy gross leasing at 1.9 mn sq. ft., according to JLL Research. At the same time, net absorption grew by 31 per cent from the previous quarter to 1.5 mn sq. ft. in Q3 2020. The city saw new completions of 3.3 mn sq. ft. during the quarter with Gachibowli and HITEC City submarkets being the highest contributors to the new supply. Nearly 81 per cent of the new completions were already pre-Rentals have largely remained range bound across most of the submarkets in the city during the quarter. "The growth was mainly driven by pre-commitments in newly commissioned buildings during the quarter. As a fallout of the pandemic struck economy, occupiers are reassessing their real estate portfolios in a bid to reduce costs and review long term expansions. Thus, significant churn was also witnessed during the quarter," said Sandip Patnaik, Managing Director (Hyderabad), JLL India.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/property/-/construction/hyderabad-records-net-office-absorption-of-1-54-mn-sq-ft-in-the-third-quarter-of-2020/articleshow/78889564.cms>

Telecom

Broadband India Forum urges Trai to relook at spectrum pricing, allocation norms

Industry think tank Broadband India Forum (BIF) has made a representation to the new chairman of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) for review of norms around spectrum pricing and allocation, including the much coveted E&V bands, among other issues. In a recent meeting with the new Trai chief PD Vaghela, BIF also discussed other key subjects including the possible methods for companies to make a reasonable return on investment in digital infrastructure, proliferation of public WiFi hotspot, satellite communication and virtual network operators. "We are motivated by the patient hearing of our submissions by the Trai chief and believe that the officials will take policy decisions in the best interest of all stakeholders," TV Ramachandran, president, BIF, told ET.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-policy/broadband-india-forum-urges-trai-to-relook-at-spectrum-pricing-allocation-norms/articleshow/78887936.cms>

Energy

India adds 2,320 MW solar capacity in COVID-19-hit January-September period

India has added 2,320 MW of solar energy capacity from January to September, when the Covid pandemic disrupted the economy, official data shows. Rajasthan, which added 360 MW, Tamil Nadu 341 MW, and Maharashtra 165 MW accounted for the bulk of the new capacity. Prior to the pandemic, research analytics firm JMK Research had projected around 8,000 MW of utility-scale projects this year. However, only 1,400 MW worth of capacity has been commissioned over the first nine months of 2020. "Because of COVID 19, there were construction delays, restricted movement of equipment supply, and labour shortages eventually leading to project delays," said JMK Research.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/india-adds-2320-mw-solar-capacity-in-covid-19-hit-january-september-period/articleshow/78891954.cms>

India will be the energy centre of the world: Pradhan

India's energy demand is going to surge once it steps out of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Daniel Yergin, Vice-Chairman, IHS Markit. Speaking with Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan during the India Energy Forum by CERAWEEK, Yergin said that China's energy demand is back to being on the rise, but India's demand is still at 2019 levels. He said that India's energy demand is going to surge significantly once the pandemic is over.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-will-be-the-energy-centre-of-the-world-pradhan/article32956330.ece>

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy to hold flagship green energy event from November 26-28

The third edition of RE Invest, the flagship event of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), will take place virtually from November 26 to 28. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to inaugurate the event on November 26, sources said. "The investment model has been dropped. You get commitments on paper and when they don't materialise, you get bad publicity," said a source close to the development, requesting anonymity. "MNRE has dropped out of the numbers game." CEOs of global companies are expected to participate in the event. "The goal

of the conference is to create awareness, define problems and come up with solutions to those problems," said the person quoted above.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/ministry-of-new-and-renewable-energy-to-hold-flagship-green-energy-event-from-november-26-28/articleshow/78890387.cms>

States

J&K LG sanctions over 10,000 loan cases for budding entrepreneurs

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday announced sanction of over 10,000 loan cases for the union territory's budding entrepreneurs under various programmes. Sinha said his mantra for Jammu and Kashmir revolved around 'four Ps' -- peace, progress, prosperity and people.

The sanctioning of over 10,000 cases under B2V3 (back to village-3) self employment programme, economic package and 'My Town-My Pride' highlights the UT government's commitment to empower the youth which is one of the foremost priorities of J&K government, he said. Sinha said 15,309 applications were received, out of which 10,828 have been sanctioned and an amount of Rs 100 cr has been disbursed to 6,734 applicants, identified under B2V3.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/j-k-lg-sanctions-over-10-000-loan-cases-for-budding-entrepreneurs-120102700974_1.html

Covid-19 lockdown cost Goa tourism Rs 1,000 crore: Industry group

The Covid-19 lockdown has cost Goa's tourism industry Rs 1,000 crore in earnings, Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Manoj Caculo said on Tuesday, and urged the state government to urgently resume mining operations to make up for revenue shortfall and open up more employment avenues. "It is estimated by various agencies that the state's tourism industry -- the second largest revenue earner for Goa -- has lost about Rs 1,000 crore in business because of the lockdown," Caculo said in a statement here.

Caculo also welcomed the "proactive steps" taken by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant-led government for the resumption of mining activities in Goa, including meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Mines Minister Prahlad Joshi. "We are hopeful that the follow-up meetings will be held at the earliest and an appropriate decision to resume mining in the interest of Goa and its subjects shall be taken at the earliest," Caculo said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/covid-19-lockdown-cost-go-tourism-rs-1-000-crore-industry-group-120102700754_1.html

Healthcare

After over 3 months, less than 40,000 COVID cases reported in single day across country: Govt data

The number of coronavirus cases reported in India in a span of 24 hours dropped below 40,000 after over three months, while the new fatalities registered during the same period remained under 500 for the second consecutive day, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday. India's COVID-19 caseload mounted to 79,46,429, with 36,470 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,19,502 with 488 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed. A total of 72,01,070 people have recuperated from COVID-19 so far, pushing the national recovery rate to 90.62 per cent while the case fatality rate stands at 1.50 per cent.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/after-over-3-months-less-than-40000-covid-cases-reported-in-single-day-across-country-govt-data/articleshow/78885386.cms>

Air pollution may hinder India's fight against COVID-19, say scientists

The causal link between air pollution and COVID-19 cases is yet to be established conclusively but long-term exposure will certainly make people more vulnerable to lung infections, warn scientists as the skies over large parts of north India, including Delhi, turn smoky and the air quality deteriorates rapidly. Their concerns come amid several global studies pointing to the possible connection between higher air pollution levels and increased COVID-19 cases and deaths. A study by researchers at Harvard University in the US in September showed that an increase of only one microgram per cubic metre in PM 2.5 is associated with an 8 per cent increase in the COVID-19 death rate. "Given the current limited literature, the surge of PM2.5 level in Delhi may be associated with increased COVID-19 cases... Although the literature is relatively sparse at this stage," Xiao Wu, corresponding author of the Harvard study, told PTI.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/air-pollution-may-hinder-indias-fight-against-covid-19-say-scientists/articleshow/78886052.cms>

External

Engineering exporters concerned about volume amid 'worsening' COVID-19 scenario in Europe

Engineering exporters are concerned about the volume of exports this year due to the "worsening" COVID-19 situation in Europe which is among top three destinations of shipments of such products from India, an official said on Tuesday. The engineering exports of the country have dropped by 13.73 per cent in the April-September period in the current fiscal as compared to the corresponding months last year, EEPIC India former chairman Rakesh Shah said. "The COVID-19 situation is worsening in the European Union (EU). We will be happy if this year's exports touch last fiscal's figure as the EU is among the top three destinations of engineering exports from India," he said at a virtual press conference.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/engineering-exporters-concerned-about-volume-amid-worsening-covid-19-scenario-in-europe/articleshow/78891974.cms>

Dairy farmers become roadblock for India's trade deals with US, EU

India's effort to wrap up bilateral trade deals with major economies after pulling out of a China-backed regional pact has hit a major stumbling block -- its dairy industry.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration is hesitant to allow free access of dairy products from several countries, including the US, the EU and the UK, due to strong opposition from politically-influential dairy farmers, according to people familiar with the situation. There are disagreements over a range of goods, but India feels more strongly about milk products on worries that their imports could destroy the livelihood of millions of farmers as most of whom are small and lack the economy of scale, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the matter isn't public.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/dairy-farmers-become-roadblock-for-india-s-trade-deals-with-us-eu-120102700678_1.html

Secy of State Pompeo, Defence Secy Esper call on PM Modi, convey US interest in strengthening ties

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Mark T Esper called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday and conveyed the American government's continued interest in building stronger relations with India as well as discussed several issues of regional and global concern. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and US Ambassador to India Ken Juster were also present during the meeting.

In a statement, the Prime Minister's Office said the US secretaries conveyed greetings from President Donald Trump to the prime minister. Recalling the successful visit of President Trump to India in February 2020, Prime Minister Modi warmly reciprocated the greetings, the statement said. "Pleasure meeting @SecPompeo and @EsperDoD. Happy to see tremendous progress made in India-US relations and the results of the third 2+2 dialogue. Our Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership stands on a firm foundation of shared principles and common strategic interests," Modi tweeted after the meeting.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/us-secy-of-state-pompeo-defence-secy-esper-call-on-pm-modi/2114929/>

US senators seek removal of high tariff on import of pecans from India

A bipartisan group of five influential senators has urged the Trump administration to seek removal of high tariffs on import of pecans by India, asserting that it is impacting a large number of American farmers. The growing middle class in India has demonstrated its desire for consumer-oriented agricultural products, like tree nuts, and the Indian market represents one of the most dynamic and fastest growing in the world, the senators wrote in a letter to US Trade Representatives Robert Lighthizer. "Unfortunately, the current high tariff (36 per cent) that India charges on pecan imports makes it difficult for American producers to compete in this important market," said the letter that was written by Senators Kelly Loeffle, David Perdue, Doug Jones, John Boozman and Tom Cotton.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/us-senators-seek-removal-of-high-tariff-on-import-of-pecans-from-india/articleshow/78885398.cms>

Piyush Goyal pushes for multilateral initiative on easy movement of healthcare professionals

Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday pushed for a multilateral initiative for easier cross-border movement of health care professionals by next year and sought support for a proposal on a waiver from obligations of countries to implement provisions of the global IPR agreement in order to ensure unimpeded and timely access to affordable medicines and medical products including diagnostic kits, vaccines, medicines, personal protective equipment and ventilators amid the pandemic. At a virtual mini-ministerial meet of around 20 members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Goyal also said that some nations who provide large fisheries subsidies and have led to the problem of industrial fishing, must make the highest contributions in line with the 'Polluter Pays' principle. India and South Africa have proposed a waiver from obligations of members from certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) and an exemption from a clause that pose as challenges for countries with limited manufacturing capacity in accessing these medical supplies.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/piyush-goyal-pushes-for-multilateral-initiative-on-easy-movement-of-healthcare-professionals/articleshow/78896974.cms>