



October 29, 2020 - Thursday

Key Developments

Govt releases consolidated FDI policy document; replaces countries of concern with land border

The government on Wednesday released the consolidated foreign direct investment (FDI) policy document for 2020, after a three year gap, incorporating all the changes made in the policy recently. The consolidated policy is a compilation of various decisions taken by the government with regard to FDI in different sectors. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) said the new circular has come into effect from October 15. The previous Consolidated FDI Policy was released in 2017 and was effective from August 28, 2017. As per the document, applications involving investments from an entity of a country, which shares a land border with India or where the beneficial owner of an investment into India is situated in or is a citizen of any such country, will need approval from the government. "Cases pertaining to sectors/activities under Government approval route requiring security clearance as per the extant Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019, FDI Policy and security guidelines, as amended from time to time," DPIIT said in the document.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/govt-releases-consolidated-fdi-policy-document-replaces-countries-of-concern-with-land-border/articleshow/78916870.cms>

15th Finance Commission on course to finalise report by end of this month

The 15th Finance Commission is on course to finalise its report by October 30, an official statement said on Wednesday. The Commission's Chairman N K Singh along with its members on Wednesday held a virtual meeting with the Chairmen of two previous Finance Commissions -- C Rangarajan and Vijay Kelkar -- respectively. Rangarajan and Kelkar chaired the 12th and 13th Finance Commissions, respectively.

"The Chairmen of the previous Finance Commissions appreciated the tough challenge faced by the 15th Finance Commission, given the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resultant loss of economic activity and its impact on fiscal parameters of the general government," the statement said. The 15th Finance Commission is mandated to make their final report for 2021-26 available by October 30, 2020. The Commission remains on course to complete their task, it added.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/15th-finance-commission-on-course-to-finalise-report-by-end-of-this-month-120102801127_1.html

Interest waiver: Outstanding as of Feb 29 to be reference for ex gratia relief

The loan outstanding as of February 29 would be the reference amount for calculating the differential interest amount under the 'scheme for grant of ex gratia payment of difference between compound interest and simple interest' according to the FAQs released by the Finance Ministry. The Reserve Bank on Tuesday asked all lending institutions, including non-banking financial companies, to ensure that the scheme of waiver of interest on interest for loans up to Rs 2 crore for the six-month moratorium period is implemented by November 5, as decided by the government. Last Friday, 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.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/banking/finance/banking/interest-waiver-outstanding-as-of-feb-29-to-be-reference-for-ex-gratia-relief/articleshow/78912302.cms>

Financial conditions recover significantly after hitting the abyss in April: Crisil

Financial conditions in India have witnessed a speedy recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic-led "harrowing abyss" courtesy the Reserve Bank's interventions, domestic credit rating agency Crisil said on Wednesday. While easy global monetary policies have helped, the RBI's accommodative stance has contained short-run pressures no less, the agency said, citing its newly-launched monthly Financial Conditions Index (FCI). "Financial conditions in India have staged a full-throttle recovery from the harrowing abyss they had been sent flailing into by the COVID-19 pandemic in April," it stated. It said the central bank's measures have helped mitigate the large and broad-based economic damage caused by the pandemic. However, it made it clear that pockets of stress still remain, pointing to the weak bank credit growth, wider spreads on lower-rated corporate bonds, and fundamental pressures due to high government borrowing. The agency has used 15 conditions for constructing the FCI, which includes monetary policy conditions, money market, equity markets, external finance conditions, bank lending conditions and money supply in the economy.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/financial-conditions-recover-significantly-after-hitting-the-abyss-in-april-crisil/2115708/>

Aarogya Setu app launched by GoI in public-private partnership mode

The government has clarified in a press statement that its contact tracing app Aarogya Setu was launched by Government of India in public private partnership mode on April 2. The Aarogya Setu App was developed in 21 days, to respond to the exigencies of the pandemic with lockdown restrictions. The objective was to build "a made in India contact tracing app with the best of Indian minds from industry, academia and government, working round the clock to build a robust, scalable and secure App," the ministry of electronics and IT said on Wednesday. The clarification comes after orders passed by the Central Information Commission regarding an RTI query with regard to Aarogya Setu App.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/information-tech/aarogya-setu-app-launched-by-goi-in-public-private-partnership-mode/articleshow/78916970.cms>

Economy

Lockdowns have changed consumer buying behaviour; omni-channel strategy key to business growth: Report

Coronavirus-induced lockdowns across the country have transformed consumers' buying behaviour and hyperlocal distribution model, and distribution alliances and an omni-channel strategy will be key to business growth, according to a joint report by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India and FICCI. As per the report, called 'REBOOT', while the pandemic brought massive disruptions across the value chain of the consumer sector, most companies adapted by building agile business models and innovative marketing strategies, along with expanding their presence through the online platforms to reach their consumers. "The prolonged lockdowns have also dramatically transformed consumer buying behaviour while making them more health and socially conscious," Deloitte India Partner Rajat Wahi said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/lockdowns-have-changed-consumer-buying-behaviour-omni-channel-strategy-key-to-business-growth-report/articleshow/78911763.cms>

GST collection from centrally administered assesses rise 10% in Sept in WB

The GST collection in West Bengal from centrally administered assesses has increased by 10.16 per cent in September 2020 as compared to the same month last year, an official said.

The collection from Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST), Integrated GST and coal cess from centrally administered assesses stood at Rs 1,377.04 crore in September 2020 as against Rs 1,250.06 crore in September 2019, he said. This shows that a recovery is taking place in economic activities in the state, which had taken a hit in April, May and June due to COVID-19 outbreak, the official said. The rise has also been due to tax collection from many small assesses in September.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/gst-collection-from-centrally-administered-assessees-rise-10-in-sept-in-wb-120102800938_1.html

Income Tax refunds of Rs 1.26 lakh crore issued to 39.14 lakh taxpayers till October 27

The Income Tax department has issued refunds worth over Rs 1.26 lakh crore to over 39 lakh taxpayers this fiscal so far. This include personal income tax (PIT) refunds amounting to Rs 34,532 crore and corporate tax refunds amounting to Rs 92,376 crore during this period. "Rs 1,26,909 crore tax refunds issued. 39.14 lakh taxpayers got refunds. Income tax refunds of Rs 34,532 crore have been issued in 37,21,584 cases. Corporate tax refunds of Rs. 92,376 crore have been issued in 1,92,409 cases (till 27th Oct,2020)," the Office of Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur tweeted.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/income-tax-refunds-of-rs-1-26-lakh-crore-issued-to-39-14-lakh-taxpayers-till-october-27/articleshow/78915180.cms>

Data Protection Bill: Twitter reps appear before Parliamentary panel

The representatives of social media giant Twitter on Wednesday appeared before the Joint Committee Parliamentary panel looking into the Data Protection Bill, 2019, sources said. According to sources, the representatives of e-commerce giant Amazon would appear before the panel later in the day while the representatives of Google and some other organisations will appear before the panel tomorrow.

Notably, Amazon had earlier expressed its inability to appear before the Parliament panel saying their officials are unable to travel to India due to the COVID-19 pandemic, after which the committee members, according to sources, had expressed unhappiness and said that coercive action may be initiated against it if their representatives do not appear before it.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/data-protection-bill-twitter-reps-appear-before-parliamentary-panel-120102800952_1.html

Fresh Covid-19 cases remain below 45,000 as India's tally nears 8 million

The new coronavirus cases reported in India in a span of 24 hours remained below 45,000, even as the total COVID-19 caseload inched closer to 80 lakh, the Union health ministry said on Wednesday. The country's COVID-19 caseload mounted to 79,90,322 with 43,893 fresh cases being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,20,010 with 508 new fatalities, the ministry data updated at 8 am showed. A total of 72,59,509 people have recuperated from COVID-19 so far, pushing the national recovery rate to 90.85 per cent, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.50 per cent. The active cases of coronavirus infections remained below 7 lakh for six days in a row, it said. There are 6,10,803 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country as on date, which comprises 7.64 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated. India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28 and crossed 70 lakh on October 11.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/fresh-covid-19-cases-remain-below-45-000-as-india-s-tally-nears-8-million-120102800335_1.html

Banking and Finance

In a first, UPI transactions exceed ATM cash withdrawals, courtesy pandemic

Things are changing faster than usual under the pandemic. People's spending on restaurants has plummeted to near-zero, but that on mobile data and broadband has surged. Travel expenses are being saved, but precautionary healthcare spend is rising.

It doesn't take much to realise that we are using digital payments more than ever and cash, quite rarely. The local kirana shop, the fruit seller, the electrician: everyone is accepting, in fact, preferring payments on platforms such as Google Pay or PhonePe.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/in-a-first-upi-transactions-exceed-atm-cash-withdrawals-courtesy-pandemic-120102801132_1.html

Gold loan assets of NBFCs expected to grow at 15-18% in current fiscal

As economic activity revives after the gradual lifting of the lockdown, the demand for gold loans is expected to rise. The gold loan assets of finance companies in country are estimated to grow by 15-18 per cent in current financial year, according to CRISIL. The demand, especially from individuals for meeting urgent personal requirements and from micro enterprises for working capital to restart businesses, would propel gold loan growth.

Gold loans would be preferred as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and banks have tightened their underwriting norms for other loans. Also, higher average gold prices mean gold-loan assets under management of NBFCs could grow 15-18% this fiscal.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/gold-loan-assets-of-nbfc-expected-to-grow-at-15-18-in-current-fiscal-120102801073_1.html

Board size matters for better performance of banks: study

Empirical results suggest that board size of a Bank matters, with more board members exerting pressure for performance by better monitoring and control, according to a working paper put together by two IIM Professors.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/money-and-banking/board-size-matters-for-better-performance-of-banks-study/article32962260.ece?homepage=true>

Industry

What ails Indian manufacturing? Industry captains speak their minds

What was the thrust of his argument when Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani recently said that India needs to rethink and reinvent manufacturing? Perhaps the sector's journey the past six years will provide some insight. The Make-in-India programme launched by the Modi government in September 2014 aimed to raise the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25 per cent in 2022, from around 16 per cent at that time. However, the share crashed to 11.83 per cent in the first quarter of 2020-21.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/what-ails-indian-manufacturing-industry-captains-speak-their-minds-120102800951_1.html

Growth of e-commerce in grocery channels irreversible; will co-exist with general trade: HUL CMD Sanjiv Mehta

Growth of e-commerce in the grocery segment is "irreversible" but kirana stores and modern trade channels would also remain relevant, Hindustan Unilever CMD Sanjiv Mehta said on Wednesday. Mehta also said rural sales are growing faster than the urban markets and would sustain depending on the support provided by the government. The recent farm reforms are in the right direction and would result in more technology and capital for the sector, he added. "The growth of the e-commerce is clearly irreversible but the way I look at India, general trade, modern trade, e-commerce will co-exist and India is not a country where the general trade would disappear, let's be absolutely clear about that," said Mehta. He was speaking at a panel discussion at 'Massmerize 2020', a conference organised by industry body FICCI.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/retail/growth-of-e-commerce-in-grocery-channels-irreversible-will-co-exist-with-general-trade-hul-cmd-sanjiv-mehta/articleshow/78916741.cms>

ISMA launches portal on health benefits of consuming sugar

Concerned that India's sugar consumption has been stagnant for the last six years because rich and urban Indians have been shunning the sweetener, industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has launched a knowledge portal meetha.org to counter negative publicity and educate Indians about the scientific facts regarding health benefits of consuming the sweetener while avoiding excesses. India is the second largest sugar producer in the world after Brazil. However, the industry which was confident that Indians, known for their sweet tooth, may not get affected by the negative publicity around sugar is increasingly getting worried. The annual sugar consumption of the country increased from 208 lakh tonnes in 2010-11 to 256 lakh tonnes in 2014-15 but has remained stagnant since. Consumption in 2019-20 is expected to be 257 lakh tonnes. According to government agencies, even the consumption of jaggery has been stagnant at 4 kg per person per year for past five years.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/food/isma-launches-portal-on-health-benefits-of-consuming-sugar/articleshow/78915259.cms>

Agriculture

There's business in farming: How companies gain from agri sector reforms

The recent farm bills are perceived as most significant for the development of the agriculture sector. They prompt a shift away from the monopoly of mandis regulated by Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) to a more

liberalised framework. However, the long-overdue reforms have become a subject of discourse though prominent economists and top agriculture technology companies have embraced them. The concept of a free market in agriculture will pave the way for corporate sector and make it more efficient. The emergence of private investment is expected to revamp the sector by driving productivity, adopting new technology, generating employment, increasing the value realisation, and lastly integrating supply chain "from farm to fork". We identified three crucial areas where the investment by corporate sector could change the course of agriculture.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/there-s-business-in-farming-how-companies-gain-from-agri-sector-reforms-120102800698_1.html

Paddy procurement up 26% this kharif season; Govt procures 170.53 lakh tonne at Rs 32,196 crore

The Food Corporation of India and state procurement agencies have bought 26 per cent more paddy so far in this year's kharif marketing season at 170.53 lakh tonne for Rs 32,196 crore. Paddy procurement for kharif 2020-21 is continuing at a good pace in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala and Gujarat with purchase of over 170.53 lakh tonne of paddy till Tuesday against 134.85 lakh tonne in the same period last year. Out of the total purchase, Punjab alone has contributed 114.97 lakh tonne, which is around 67 per cent of the total procurement. "About 14.37 lakh farmers have already been benefitted from the ongoing KMS procurement Operations with MSP value of Rs 32,195.69 crore," an official statement said. Procurement operations of seed cotton (kapas) under MSP are going on smoothly in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/paddy-procurement-up-26-this-kharif-season-govt-procures-170-53-lakh-tonne-at-rs-32196-crore/articleshow/78915845.cms>

Imported onion likely to ease prices in Kolkata's wholesale market

The skyrocketing onion prices in the retail market are likely to ease as imported bulbs have put a break, at least temporarily, on the rise in wholesale prices in Kolkata, officials said on Wednesday. National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (Nafed) has also offloaded a large portion of its buffer stock of onion, which too helped in containing the price rise, they said.

Since the last few weeks, onion prices have remained northbound after crop loss in south India due to incessant rain. The retail price of the bulb had crossed Rs 90 a kg in Kolkata. "Wholesale prices at Posta market have come down to Rs 55-60 a kg from a high of Rs 67.50 a few days ago. Some parcels of onion from Afghanistan and Egypt have arrived in the wholesale market which helped ease the price," agri analyst Siblu Malakar said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/markets/imported-onion-likely-to-ease-prices-in-kolkata-s-wholesale-market-120102801252_1.html

Jute bags shortage to hinder govt's kharif procurement

Shortage of gunny bags may create hinderances in kharif procurement, starting November, with the jute industry failing to supply the required quantity of jute bags to pack and store the crops. The jute mills, confronting a raw material crisis with low yields of raw jute for the Amphan in West Bengal and floods in Assam, are also combating price rigging and hoarding of the golden fibre thereof putting the industry in a disarray, according to a highly placed textile ministry official. While average spot prices of raw jute are hovering at around Rs 6,000 per quintal, much above the average MSP of Rs 4,225 per quintal for the jute year 2020-21, the textile ministry has barred stocking more than 1,500 quintal of raw jute in one's own account asking to sell out the excess stock from August 25 onwards. Despite the jute commissioner's office ordering regular inspection of godowns to prevent stocking beyond the prescribed limit, hoarding is in continuance disrupting supplies, industry sources said.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/jute-bags-shortage-to-hinder-govts-kharif-procurement/2115325/>

Infrastructure

Highway Ministry asks agencies to focus on maintenance and repair of national highways

The highways ministry has asked its implementing agencies, National Highways Authority of India and National Highways Infrastructure Development Corporation, to strictly follow timelines for transfer of road assets between States and the Centre to ensure there is no neglect in their maintenance and repair. This comes after union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari expressed concern over the fact that national highways spanning over

10,000 km were in urgent need of maintenance and repair, the lack of which is inviting public criticism. Gadkari has also pulled up officials for non-performance, which is leading to delays in decision making. At a recent public event, Gadkari said that officials who continue to squat on files and delay projects, should be shown the door.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/roadways/highway-ministry-asks-agencies-to-focus-on-maintenance-and-repair-of-national-highways/articleshow/78915588.cms>

DGCA extends suspension of scheduled international passenger flights till November 30

The suspension of scheduled international passenger flights has been extended till November 30 amid the coronavirus pandemic, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said on Wednesday. "However, the international scheduled flights may be allowed on selected routes by the competent authority on a case-to-case basis," the Indian aviation regulator said in a circular. The scheduled international passenger services have been suspended in India since March 23 due to the coronavirus pandemic. But special international flights have been operating under the Vande Bharat Mission since May and under the bilateral 'air bubble' arrangements with selected countries since July.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/airlines/-aviation/dgca-extends-suspension-of-scheduled-international-passenger-flights-till-november-30/articleshow/78909111.cms>

SpiceJet to operate two daily seaplane flights between Sabarmati riverfront, Statue of Unity from Saturday

SpiceJet on Wednesday said it will operate two daily seaplane flights between the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad and the Statue of Unity at Kevadia in Gujarat from Saturday. "The all-inclusive one-way fares will begin from as low as Rs 1,500 under the UDAN scheme and tickets will be available on www.spiceshuttle.com from 30th October, 2020 onwards," the airline said in a press release. The seaplane flights will be operated by SpiceJet's subsidiary Spice Shuttle. The duration of each flight would be around 30 minutes. Under the UDAN scheme, financial incentives in terms of concessions from the Centre, state governments and airport operators are extended to select airlines to encourage operations from unserved and underserved airports, and keep the airfares affordable.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/airlines/-aviation/spicejet-to-operate-two-daily-seaplane-flights-between-sabarmati-riverfront-statue-of-unity-from-saturday/articleshow/78911015.cms>

Telecom

SC reserves ruling on TRAI plea seeking information from Bharti, Vodafone on segmented offers

The Supreme Court has reserved its verdict on a plea by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), seeking details from Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea on segmented, or specific, offers made by the telecom companies to their subscribers. A three-judge bench led by CJI S.A. Bobde reserved its order on the issue on Tuesday. A copy of the order was published on the court website today. "Arguments concluded. Judgment reserved," the short order on an application by the TRAI said. The plea was opposed by telecom companies Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea on the ground that it would violate commercial confidentiality and help rivals poach their subscribers.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-news/sc-reserves-ruling-on-trai-plea-seeking-information-from-bharti-vodafone-on-segmented-offers/articleshow/78916188.cms>

Telecom companies meet parliamentary panel, urge 5G spectrum in multiple bands

Telecom companies underlined in a joint meeting with the parliamentary standing committee on IT on Tuesday that the government should make 5G spectrum available across multiple bands, including premium millimetre waves, at affordable prices for boosting India's readiness to deploy the next generation mobile broadband technology. Separately, the parliamentary panel, headed by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, sought clarity from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) on whether the government had actually banned Chinese telecom vendors, Huawei and ZTE from participating in 5G network contracts. Senior DoT officials, it is learnt, told the panel that there is no ban in theory on any Chinese gear makers, stopping them from selling 5G gear, but like other companies from bordering countries, they too have to take additional approvals.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-policy/5g-chinese-telecom-gear-parliamentary-panel-quizzes-top-government-officials/articleshow/78897451.cms>

Finance ministry to seek other ministries' views on whether India should appeal against the arbitration award in the Vodafone tax case

The finance ministry will seek the views of other ministries, including external affairs, on the law ministry's opinion regarding whether India should appeal against the arbitration award in the Vodafone tax case. These will be placed before the attorney general for his take on the matter, an official said. However, the call on whether to appeal or not will be taken at the highest political level, he said. India has the option of filing an appeal against the decision of the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at the Singapore-based appellate tribunal. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta has reportedly favoured appealing against the award.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/telecom/telecom-news/finance-ministry-to-seek-other-ministries-views-on-whether-india-should-appeal-against-the-arbitration-award-in-the-vodafone-tax-case/articleshow/78902733.cms>

Energy

India looks at innovative ways to fund ethanol blending programme

Back in 2018, the Union government had first announced an ambitious programme to encourage sugar mills to expand their ethanol production capacities which, along with the differential price regime for procurement by Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs), was aimed to usher in a new era of ethanol manufacture in the country. The aim was to ensure that around 10 per cent of the total petroleum consumed in the country is blended with ethanol by 2022 and thereafter the target could be scaled up to 20 per cent blending by 2030.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-looks-at-innovative-ways-to-fund-ethanol-blending-programme-120102801100_1.html

More reforms in offing to raise private participation in oil, gas fields, says Oil Secy

Oil Secretary Tarun Kapoor on Wednesday hinted at more reforms to raise the level of private participation in upstream oil and gas exploration and production, but remained non-committal on the industry's demand for cutting levies to make the business attractive during a low price regime. Talking to reporters at the end of the India Energy Forum of CERAWEEK, he said companies will have to learn to live with low prices. "There was a demand from various upstream companies for a reduction in cess and royalty. That was a demand that was there. To accept or not to accept is up to the government which takes a decision considering overall resource requirement (of the economy)," he said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/more-reforms-in-offing-to-raise-private-participation-in-oil-gas-fields-says-oil-secy/articleshow/78916401.cms>

87% households have access to grid-connected power; some still don't use electricity: Survey

A majority of households (87 per cent) in India have access to grid-connected electricity, while the remaining 13 per cent are either using non-grid sources for power or "do not use any electricity at all", according to a survey. The finding is part of the joint survey conducted by government think-tank NITI Aayog and the US-based philanthropic organisation Rockefeller Foundation on 'Electricity Access and Benchmarking of Distribution Utilities.' "Overall 87 per cent respondents said they have access to grid-based electricity. The remaining 13 per cent either use non-grid sources for electricity and lighting or don't use any electricity at all," the survey said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/87-households-have-access-to-grid-connected-power-some-still-dont-use-electricity-survey/articleshow/78913045.cms>

India's largest power producer NTPC ties up with Japan Bank for Rs 3,500 crore loan

India's largest power producer NTPC on Tuesday entered into foreign currency loan agreement with Japanese government's financial institution for about Rs 3,582 crore. The loan proceeds will be utilised by NTPC Ltd for funding its capex for Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) and renewable energy projects. "FGD, substantially reduces the SOx emission in the flue gases of thermal power plants and is a critical step towards environmental sustainability," an official statement said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/indias-largest-power-producer-ntpc-ties-up-with-japan-bank-for-rs-3500-crore-loan/articleshow/78913190.cms>

States

Goa govt allows all casinos to reopen from November 1 with Covid-19 norms

The Goa cabinet on Wednesday decided to allow casinos to reopen in the state from November 1 by following the COVID-19 prevention guidelines. The coastal state has six offshore and around a dozen onshore casinos, which have been shut since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in March this year.

Talking to reporters here after the cabinet meeting, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said, "The state cabinet has decided to allow casinos to reopen from November 1 onwards." The casinos will have to operate at 50 per cent of their capacity and follow all the standard operating procedures laid down by the state Home department, he said. Sawant also said that casino operators will have to pay the license fees before resuming operations.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/goa-govt-allows-all-casinos-to-reopen-from-november-1-with-covid-19-norms-120102800711_1.html

Tamil Nadu gives guarantee, budgetary support for Rs 30,230 cr liquidity loans

The Tamil Nadu government has approved guarantee and budgetary support for repayment of Rs 30,230 crore loan being taken from the Power Finance Corp (PFC) and REC Ltd under Atma Nirbhar Bharat liquidity infusion scheme. This is the biggest loan application by a state, about a-fourth of the Centre's extended Rs 1,20,000 crore liquidity infusion scheme, to settle power bills. The state has issued administrative orders for unconditional and irrevocable government guarantee and commitment letters from finance department for financial assistance of Rs 30,230 crore for loan proposed to be availed from PFC and REC Ltd, sources said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/tamil-nadu-gives-guarantee-budgetary-support-for-rs-30230-cr-liquidity-loans/articleshow/78915216.cms>

Survey shows Bengaluru second worst-affected Indian city to experience income loss due to pandemic

Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru and Mumbai were the worst-affected cities in terms of loss of income and loan repayment capacity due to Covid-19, according to a consumer insights report by Paisabazaar.com, India's largest digital marketplace for lending products. The survey showed Bangalore was the second most affected city among the top six metros, while Chennai was the least affected, according to a press release from Paisabazaar. Over 8500 consumers of Paisabazaar between the age of 24 to 57 years from 35+ cities with a debt of Rs 1 lakh or more took part in the survey -- 'Dealing with Debt: How India plans to pay EMIs.'

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/survey-shows-bengaluru-second-worst-affected-indian-city-to-experience-income-loss-due-to-pandemic/articleshow/78916841.cms>

Delhi schools to remain closed till further orders: Manish Sisodia

All schools in Delhi will continue to be closed till further orders in view of the COVID-19 situation, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia announced on Wednesday. Parents are not in favour of reopening schools either, Sisodia said at an online press conference. The Delhi government had earlier announced that schools will remain closed till October 31.

"We keep getting feedback from parents that they are really concerned about whether it is safe to reopen schools. It is not. Wherever schools have reopened, COVID-19 cases among children have risen. So we have decided that as of now schools in the national capital will not reopen. They will continue to be closed till further orders," Sisodia said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/delhi-schools-to-remain-closed-till-further-orders-manish-sisodia-120102800574_1.html

Healthcare

India among countries with lowest per million Covid cases, deaths: Govt

With calibrated measures and focussed strategy of the Centre along with the states and UTs, India has sustained its global position of recording one of the lowest COVID-19 cases as well as deaths per million population, the Union health ministry said on Wednesday. While the global figure for COVID-19 cases per million is 5,552, India is reporting 5,790 cases per million population. USA, Brazil, France, UK, Russia and South Africa are witnessing much higher numbers.

The COVID-19 deaths per million population in India is 87, substantially lower than the world average of 148. India's targeted strategies in COVID-19 management and the proactive as well as calibrated public health response over the last several months have resulted in such encouraging outcomes, the ministry underlined.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-among-countries-with-lowest-per-million-covid-cases-deaths-govt-120102800687_1.html

Drug regulator approves Hyderabad-based Biological E's phase I/II trials of Covid vaccine

India's drug regulator has given approval to Hyderabad based Biological E to start Phase I/II human trials in India for a vaccine against Covid-19. The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) that advises the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) on applications seeking permissions for new drugs, clinical trials, vaccines for Covid-19, gave its approval on October 26. "The firm presented its revised protocol to conduct Phase I/II clinical trial of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine along with non clinical toxicity data before the committee. After detailed deliberation, the committee recommended for grant of permission to conduct Phase I/II clinical trial," said the minutes of the meeting.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/drug-regulator-approves-hyderabad-based-biological-es-phase-i/ii-trials-of-covid-vaccine/articleshow/78906796.cms>

Some Covid survivors have antibodies that attack the body, not the virus

Some survivors of Covid-19 carry worrying signs that their immune system has turned on the body, reminiscent of potentially debilitating diseases like lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, a new study has found. At some point, the body's defense system in these patients shifted into attacking itself, rather than the virus, the study suggests. The patients are producing molecules called "autoantibodies" that target genetic material from human cells, instead of from the virus. This misguided immune response may exacerbate severe Covid-19. It may also explain why so-called "long haulers" have lingering problems months after their initial illness has resolved and the virus is gone from their bodies.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/some-covid-survivors-have-antibodies-that-attack-the-body-not-the-virus/articleshow/78906066.cms>

External

India, UK ink pacts on infrastructure, financial services and sustainable finance

India and the UK signed agreements on Wednesday on financial services, infrastructure and sustainable finance at the 10th Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD) between the two countries. The agreements will help boost jobs and investments in both countries while building economic ties, an official statement said. UK chancellor Rishi Sunak and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman held discussions on working together to deal with the global economic impact of the coronavirus and tackling climate change through sustainable finance. "The UK's economic and financial relationship with India has never been more important with the global challenges we face. Today we set out our ambition for even stronger ties with an agreement that will increase investment, and create and secure jobs," said Sunak. "We are also committed to working together to lead the global economic recovery as we build back better after the pandemic." Sitharaman said India-UK ties were important as the countries were among the world's top seven economies with a combined GDP of over \$5 trillion. She said India's \$1.4 trillion National Infrastructure Pipeline and the City of London are working together to ensure flows of sustainable finance.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-uk-ink-pacts-on-infra-fin-services-sustainable-finance/articleshow/78919587.cms>

India extends \$1 bn Line of Credit to Asia for connectivity & development projects

India on Wednesday announced an additional \$1 billion Line of Credit for Central Asian countries to widen connectivity and energy partnership among other sectors at the meeting of India-Central Asia Dialogue held virtually on Wednesday with participation of Afghanistan. The two sides discussed close cooperation in political and security matters. All Foreign Ministers echoed similar sentiments on combating terrorism by destroying safe-havens, infrastructure, network and funding channels and underlined the need for every country to ensure that their territory is not used to launch terrorist attacks against other countries, ET has learnt.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/india-extends-1-bn-line-of-credit-to-asia-for-connectivity-development-projects/articleshow/78916831.cms>

China bought nearly 30% of Indian steel exports in April-Sept - data

China was the top foreign buyer of Indian steel between April and September, government data showed on Wednesday, marking a rare rise in bilateral economic activity at a time of political tensions that have triggered some trade curbs. China bought 1.9 million tonnes, cornering 29% of India's finished steel exports, which hit their highest in at least six years at 6.5 million tonnes, the provisional data analysed by Reuters showed.

With the Indian economy contracting because of the coronavirus pandemic, domestic demand for steel has been weak, and producers have been offloading their surpluses to Chinese buyers. China, the world's top steel consumer, has bucked the Covid-linked trend of sluggish global demand, supported by economic stimulus such as infrastructure investments.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/markets/china-bought-nearly-30-of-indian-steel-exports-in-april-sept-data-120102801285_1.html

SCO members should leverage economic strength to boost trade: Goyal

The COVID-19 crisis is a clarion call to SCO member countries to leverage their economic strength to boost trade and investment in the region, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.

Addressing a meeting of trade and economy ministers of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member countries, he also said continued cooperation among the nations would help in ensuring speedy economic recovery from the aftermath of the pandemic.

"The current crisis due to COVID-19 is a clarion call to the SCO countries to leverage the economic strength and explore partnerships that enhance trade and investment in the region," he said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/sco-members-should-leverage-economic-strength-to-boost-trade-goyal-120102801253_1.html

Digitalisation to drive USD 6.8 trillion IT spending from 2020 to 2023: IDC

The global economy remains on its way to its "digital destiny" driving USD 6.8 trillion of IT spending from 2020 to 2023, according to International Data Corporation (IDC). The impacts from COVID-19 pandemic are ubiquitous and affect the many external forces that are driving change, the research firm said in its worldwide information technology (IT) industry predictions for 2021 and beyond. Yet despite the disruptions caused by the global pandemic in 2020, the global economy remains on its way to its "digital destiny" as most products and services are based on a digital delivery model or require digital augmentation to remain competitive, an IDC press release said. "With this shift, 65 per cent of global GDP is digitalised by 2022, driving USD 6.8 trillion of IT spending from 2020 to 2023", it said.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/digitalisation-to-drive-usd-6-8-trillion-it-spending-from-2020-to-2023-idc/2115504/>

France braces for another possible lockdown as coronavirus deaths mount

France is bracing for a potential new lockdown as the president prepares a televised address Wednesday aimed at stopping a fast-rising tide of virus patients filling French hospitals and a growing daily death toll.

French markets opened lower on expectations that President Emmanuel Macron will announce some kind of lockdown Wednesday, though the government has not released details amid ongoing discussions about what measures would be most effective.

Many French doctors are urging a new nationwide lockdown, noting that 58% of the country's intensive care units are now occupied by COVID patients and medical staff are under increasing strain.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/france-braces-for-another-possible-lockdown-as-coronavirus-deaths-mount-120102800906_1.html