



October 22, 2021 – Friday

Key Developments

Union Cabinet approves PM GatiShakti National Master Plan

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved PM GatiShakti National Master Plan, including implementation, monitoring and support mechanism, for providing multi-modal connectivity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on October 13, had launched a Rs 100 lakh crore national master plan for multi-modal connectivity to develop infrastructure to reduce logistic costs and boost the economy. It targets to cut logistic costs, increase cargo handling capacity and reduce the turnaround time.

An Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) headed by the Cabinet Secretary and secretaries of 18 ministries as members, among others, will be set up. Briefing the media regarding the decision, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said a Multimodal Network Planning Group (NPG) will be constituted with representation from the heads of the Network Planning Division from various ministries and departments.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/union-cabinet-approves-pm-gatishakti-national-master-plan-121102101028_1.html

Centre's Rs 2,000-3,000 crore scheme to digitalise PACs on anvil

The Union Cooperation Ministry is working on a new central scheme to modernise and digitalise over 97,000 primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACs) spread across the country, with a budget outlay of around Rs 2,000-3000 crore over the next five years. Primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACs) -- commonly known as agriculture cooperative credit societies -- are village-level lending institutions based on cooperative principles. They provide short and medium term loans to rural people to meet their financial requirements. There are about 97,961 PACs across the country, out of which viable ones are about 65,000.

"We are working on a central scheme to computerise PACs. The aim is to ensure seamless connectivity of panchayat level PACs till headquarters," a senior Cooperation Ministry official told PTI.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/centre-s-rs-2-000-3-000-crore-scheme-to-digitalise-pacs-on-anvil-121102100844_1.html

Economy

WHO chief congratulates PM, health workers as India hits vaccine milestone

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the scientists, health workers and citizens of India for equitable vaccine distribution as the total Covid vaccine doses administered in the country surpassed the 100-crore mark on Thursday. India took 279 days to administer 100 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses.

Congratulating the country on the vaccination landmark, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO, South-East Asia, said it was not possible without a strong political leadership. "Huge congratulations to India for marking yet another milestone- a billion COVID-19 vaccine doses administered. This extraordinary feat in a short span was not possible without strong leadership, inter-sectoral convergence, dedicated efforts of the entire health and frontline workforce and the people themselves," she said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/who-chief-congratulates-pm-health-workers-as-india-hits-vaccine-milestone-121102100775_1.html

India poised to become USD 5-trillion economy by 2024-25: Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri

Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday exuded confidence that India will become a USD five-trillion economy by 2024-25 and USD 10-trillion by 2030. Speaking at a virtual conference of PAFI India, Puri said, "Economic growth is accelerating. India is poised for growth to become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2024-25 and USD 10-trillion economy by 2030". On Bharat Petroleum Corporation divestment, he said: "All feedback is proceeding well..." The petroleum and urban development minister also hailed the recent Air India divestment.

There are reports that after the Air India deal, the government intends to close the disinvestment of BPCL this fiscal only. About the vaccination drives in the country, he said, "We are celebrating one billion doses of vaccines administered today". On economic growth momentum, he said petrol consumption is 16 per cent higher than pre-COVID levels, while diesel consumption is 10-12 per cent higher.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/india-poised-to-become-usd-5-trillion-economy-by-2024-25-union-minister-hardeep-singh-puri/2354187/>

E-way bills in October may surpass Sept levels on festive season supplies

E-way bills in October are likely to surpass September levels with production picking up to meet rising demand during festive season, said experts. The uptick will further strengthen tax collections and economic recovery trends. With a present daily average of over 2.17 million, the trend indicates that the total month's e-way bills may well cross 67 million, same as September, but festive orders are likely to push up demand thus leading to higher numbers.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/e-way-bills-in-october-may-surpass-sept-levels-on-festive-season-supplies/articleshow/87181652.cms>

Soaring prices dampen consumer mood in India's festival season

For Delhi resident Suman Milind, rising prices in India are casting a long shadow this year over the upcoming Diwali festival of lights. The 33-year-old homemaker is tightening her purse strings and altering her spending habits, thanks to soaring costs of fuel, transport and many manufactured items, coupled with stagnant incomes due to the pandemic.

"Earlier we used to get four or five boxes of dry fruits during festivals, but now we hardly get one or two. Because of the high prices," said Milind, adding that her family has reduced spending on food too by cutting back on meat to just once a week compared to several times a week earlier. Millions of Indian households are facing similar strains on their budgets ahead of Diwali, which this year falls in early November and marks the country's busiest shopping season for consumer goods.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/soaring-prices-dampen-consumer-mood-in-india-s-festival-season-121102100653_1.html

Festivals boost demand for gig workers as economy opens up: Experts

Amid the ongoing festival season in the country, the hiring of gig workers has zoomed across sectors as the businesses have begun opening up leading to an uptick in consumer sentiments and rising pent-up demand, according to experts. "In the third quarter, with the onset of festive season, we are witnessing a 400 per cent spike in the hiring for gig workers. Earlier, in the first quarter of this year, as many businesses and companies were not operating at full strength, growth was muted. "However, things began picking up and became more promising from the second quarter, as the demand for gig workers across sectors grew," Taskmo, a subsidiary of Quess Corp, co-founder Prashant Janadri told PTI here. Given the impact of the pandemic, companies are preferring quick hiring processes, therefore gig workers and short-term workers are in high demand, he added.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/festivals-boost-demand-for-gig-workers-as-economy-opens-up-experts/2354200/>

CBDT issues refunds of Rs 92,961 cr to 63.23 lakh taxpayers

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has issued refunds of over Rs 92,961 crore to more than 63.23 lakh taxpayers from April 1 to October 18, the Income Tax Department said on Thursday. "CBDT issues refunds of over Rs 92,961 crore to more than 63.23 lakh taxpayers from April 1, 2021 to October 18, 2021. Income tax refunds of Rs.

23,026 crore have been issued in 61,53,231 cases and corporate tax refunds of Rs. 69,934 crore have been issued in 1,69,355 case," the Income Tax department tweeted. The department said the amount includes 32.49 lakh refunds of Assessment Year (AY) 2021-22 amounting to Rs 2498.18 crore.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/cbd-t-issues-refunds-of-rs-92961-cr-to-63-23-lakh-taxpayers/articleshow/87181830.cms>

Blue collar hiring sees significant uptick across job categories: QJobs data

The worst of the pandemic for the Indian job market could most likely be behind us, with recovery lying ahead. Blue collar hiring is seeing a significant uptick across job categories, especially in the delivery and retail segments. There has been a 320% growth in overall new job openings added in the blue collar hiring market during Q2 (July-September) of FY22 compared to the previous quarter, with a concentration on the jobs in the retail and delivery segments, finds data from QJobs, Qness Corp's blue collar jobs app. There are 5,40,000 active job openings on the platform, with the top job categories including delivery and driver, BPO/customer care, retail/counter sales, data entry/back office and field sales.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/blue-collar-hiring-sees-significant-uptick-across-job-categories-qjobs-data/articleshow/87183682.cms>

Banking and Finance

Govt appoints seven executive directors for public sector banks

The government has appointed seven executive directors at various public sector banks on Thursday. These appointments are made for three years. While making the appointments, the government said these officials can get another two-year extension if they are eligible but only after a performance review. The government has appointed Nidhu Saxena (53), a general manager in UCO Bank, as executive director in Union Bank of India, from February 1, 2022, in place of Gopal Singh Gusian, one of the EDs in Union Bank, who will be retiring on January 31, 2022.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/govt-appoints-seven-executive-directors-for-public-sector-banks-121102101030_1.html

Banks may set up central repository to tackle gold loan frauds

Banks are exploring whether a centralised repository for reporting frauds in gold loans should be set up to tackle rising incidents of frauds amidst robust demand for these loans since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. The repository could help prevent/minimise gold loan frauds as lenders will be able to cross-check prospective borrowers' record on the quality of gold they pledged for their earlier borrowings, said a senior public sector bank official.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/money-and-banking/banks-may-set-up-central-repository-to-tackle-gold-loan-frauds/article37107487.ece?homepage=true>

PSU banks likely to get capital support in Q4 to meet regulatory needs

The government is likely to pump capital in public sector banks during the last quarter of the current financial year to meet the regulatory requirements. The government in the Budget 2021-22 has made an allocation of Rs 20,000 crore for the capital infusion in the state-owned banks.

The capital position of banks would be reviewed in the next quarter, and depending on the requirement, the infusion will be made to meet the regulatory needs. In the current fiscal so far, all 12 public sector banks have posted a profit, which is being ploughed back to bolster the balance sheet of the banks, sources said. Going forward, they said, the rise in stressed assets would determine capital requirement. If numbers are anything to go by, the sources said, the financial health of public sector banks are showing gradual signs of improvement across the spectrum.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/psu-banks-likely-to-get-capital-support-in-q4-to-meet-regulatory-needs-121102100921_1.html

Trade credit insurance: Firms likely to be ready by early next year

Companies are gearing up for trade credit insurance covers, the guidelines for which will come into effect from November 1, and believe that this will improve liquidity for micro, small and medium enterprises.

A number of insurance companies are understood to be already working on draft agreements and products and they are expected to be fully prepared by early 2022.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/money-and-banking/trade-credit-insurance-firms-likely-to-be-ready-by-early-next-year/article37108565.ece?homepage=true>

Industry

Cement prices may continue to move northwards on production cost escalation

Cement prices are likely to move northwards in the December quarter as a robust demand scenario may provide opportunities for manufacturers to pass on the increase in cost of cement making. The manufacturers have faced two major price inflations on the cost side — a rise in pet coke and coal prices, and the diesel price hikes. These two components — power and fuel and freight — are almost 55–60 per cent of total cost of cement making.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/macro-economy/cement-prices-may-continue-to-move-northwards-on-production-cost-escalation/article37104426.ece?homepage=true>

Festive season to see record smartphone sales of \$7.6 billion in 2021: Counterpoint

Smartphone sales in the country are expected to touch a record USD 7.6 billion (about Rs 56,858 crore) this festive season, according to research firm Counterpoint. The smartphone retail average selling price (ASP) during the festive season is also expected to grow 14 per cent to reach its highest ever at USD 230 (about Rs 17,200). High consumer demand in the mid and premium segments is expected to drive the sales. Counterpoint senior analyst Prachir Singh said the festive season has been driving smartphone sales in India due to high consumer demand during Dusshera and Diwali.

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/electronics/festive-season-to-see-record-smartphone-sales-of-7-6-billion-in-2021-counterpoint/articleshow/87184780.cms?utm_source=ETTopNews&utm_medium=HP&utm_campaign=TN&utm_content=23

Infrastructure

Model Tenancy Act to provide new direction to rental housing segment: Housing Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra

The Model Tenancy Act will give new direction to the rental housing segment in real estate as most states have already adopted the act and remaining states are expected to do so in their winter assembly sessions, said Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Housing and Urban Affairs Department. The Union Cabinet, in June 2021, approved The Model Tenancy Act, 2021 for circulation to all states and UTs for adoption by way of enacting new legislation or amending the existing rentals laws.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/property/-cstruction/model-tenancy-act-to-provide-new-direction-to-rental-housing-segment-housing-secretary-durga-shanker-mishra/articleshow/87186635.cms>

Office leasing up 34% in July-Sep in 6 cities; down 1% in Jan-Sep: Colliers

The gross leasing of office space rose 34% year-on-year to 10.3 million square feet during the July-September period in six major cities on higher demand from corporates and coworking operators after the second wave of the COVID pandemic, according to Colliers. The gross leasing stood at 7.7 million square feet in the corresponding period of the last year. Absorption of office space grew by 89% in July-September compared with the previous quarter. "The quarter has brought in much-needed cheer for the market. Large deals made a comeback, led by demand from flexible workspace operators," Colliers India CEO Ramesh Nair said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/property/-cstruction/office-leasing-up-34-in-july-sep-in-6-cities-down-1-in-jan-sep-colliers/articleshow/87183192.cms>

Energy

Coal shortage: 59 thermal power plants have less than 4 days of fuel stocks

Coal shortage at thermal power plants is lingering on, with 59 non-pit head projects having the dry fuel stocks for less than four days as on Wednesday, according to official data. The number of such projects having less than four

days of coal (supercritical stock) stood at 61 on October 19, the latest data from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) showed. The count of the plants having supercritical stocks was at 64 on October 13. The latest figures indicate that the coal shortage situation is improving slowly. CEA monitors the coal stock situation of 135 thermal power plants with cumulative generation capacity of over 165 GW.

As per the data, the number of power plants with zero days of coal has come down to 15 as on Wednesday with cumulative installed generation capacity of 16,280 MW compared to 17 projects with 17,050 MW capacity a week back.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/coal-shortage-59-thermal-power-plants-have-less-than-4-days-of-fuel-stocks-121102101266_1.html

'India should have strategic fuel reserves to manage demand shocks'

The union secretary of power, Alok Kumar on Thursday said, India should consider having strategic fuel reserves for coal, gas and oil in order to tackle any demand supply mismatch.

"Let us start thinking about keeping strategic reserves of these fuels - coal, gas, oil, so that economies are able to adjust and tide over any supply shortfall for about a month or so. That would be a small cost vis-a-vis the cost of disruption and uncertainty which these countries face," Kumar said.

The secretary's statement comes at a time when the country is barely out of the coal shortage crisis which started in August. Since August, coal stock levels at thermal units have dwindled. Currently, 29 Gw of power generation capacity has one day of coal stock and 22 Gw has less than three days of coal, according to the National Power Portal.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-should-have-strategic-fuel-reserves-to-manage-demand-shocks-121102101057_1.html

India to sell half of Mangaluru strategic oil reserves by December

India has started selling crude oil from its strategic reserves to state refiners with a view to soften the blow from surging global crude prices, while also creating space for leasing out to private and international companies. "We have started selling to oil marketing companies. This will help to create space that we will then offer for leasing," Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL) CEO H P S Ahuja said on Thursday. As much as 0.3 million tonnes of Upper Zakum crude stored at the Mangaluru cavern has already been emptied and the remaining 0.45 million tonnes will be sold by the end of the year.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/india-to-sell-half-of-mangaluru-strategic-oil-reserves-by-december/articleshow/87184473.cms>

Maharashtra sugar factories produce over 65 cr litres ethanol so far this year, much above target: NFCSF

Private and co-operative sugar factories as well as standalone distillery units in Maharashtra have produced and supplied 65.06 crore litres of ethanol so far this year, as against the target of 59.61 crore litres set till October, the National Federation of Co-operative Sugar Factories (NFCSF) said on Thursday. Talking with PTI, NFCSF President Jayprakash Dandegavkar said the purchase prices of ethanol should also go up with the fuel prices in the country by keeping the base price intact. "In Maharashtra, the private and co-operative sugar factories and standalone distillery units were given the target of making and supplying 59.61 crore litres of ethanol till October 2021.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/renewables/maharashtra-sugar-factories-produce-over-65-cr-litres-ethanol-so-far-this-year-much-above-target-nfcsf/articleshow/87189763.cms>

States

Shah visits rain-hit Uttarakhand, state govt pegs damage at Rs 7,000 cr

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday conducted an aerial survey of rain-ravaged areas of Uttarakhand to assess the damage which the state government has pegged at Rs 7,000 crore. Talking to reporters at the Jollygrant airport here after returning from the survey of affected areas in Kumaon region, Shah said that alertness of the central and state government agencies had helped contain the damage. Relief and rescue operations continued in the worst-hit Kumaon region amid efforts to restore connectivity and evacuate people from vulnerable areas. Earlier, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said three days of incessant rains in the state have caused damages worth Rs 7,000 crore. Restoring the network of damaged roads and bridges at the earliest and evacuating people to safety is the priority at the moment, he said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/shah-visits-rain-hit-uttarakhand-state-govt-pegs-damage-at-rs-7-000-cr-121102101042_1.html

Healthcare

India needs to raise public health spending to 2.5-3.5% of GDP: Report

India needs to raise public health spending to 2.5 - 3.5 per cent of GDP to support healthcare transformation, according to a report released on Thursday. As per the Union Budget 2021-22, the total public health sector allocation stood at 1.2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). The FICCI and KPMG in India report titled 'COVID-19 Induced Healthcare Transformation in India' said the pandemic saw the country undergo a paradigm shift from traditional legacy systems to cloud-based applications last year. The crisis proved to be a catalyst for increased adoption of digital healthcare systems across the world.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/healthcare/india-needs-to-raise-public-health-spending-to-2-5-3-5-of-gdp-report/articleshow/87188111.cms>

Govt extends insurance scheme for healthcare workers

The insurance scheme for healthcare workers fighting Covid-19 – the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) – has been extended by 180 days with effect from October 21, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday. This has been done to continue providing the safety net to dependents of health workers who are deputed to take care of Covid-19 patients. So far, 1,351 claims have been paid under the scheme, it said. “Since the Covid-19 pandemic has still not abated and deaths of health workers deployed for Covid-related duties are still being reported from different States/UTs, the insurance policy has been extended with effect from October 21 for a further period of 180 days so as to continue to provide the safety net to the dependent of health worker who are deputed to take care of Covid-19 patients. A letter dated October 20, 2021 to this effect has been issued to the Additional Chief Secretaries (Health)/Principal Secretaries (Health)/ Secretaries (Health) of all States/UTs for giving wide publicity amongst the health workers in their respective States/UTs,” the Ministry said in a statement.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/govt-extends-insurance-scheme-for-healthcare-workers/article37096308.ece>

External

India, UK looking at interim trade agreement: Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla

India and the UK are looking at concluding an interim trade agreement amid negotiations towards a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said on Thursday. Addressing the India Global Forum (IGF) in London virtually from New Delhi, Shringla noted that British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss visit to India, expected over two days starting Friday, will add further momentum to the partnership as it coincides with the UK's Carrier Strike Group (CSG) arriving in Mumbai for joint exercises.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-uk-looking-at-interim-trade-agreement-foreign-secretary-harsh-varadhan-shringla/articleshow/87186490.cms>

Converting Northeast as economic hotspot can energise ASEAN-India partnership

Converting Northeast as an economic hotspot in India's Act East Policy and utilizing connectivity in uniting rest of the Cs in 3Cs, Commerce and Culture can energise ASEAN-India partnership. This was highlighted in the webinar on ASEAN-India: Harnessing Connectivity and Supply Chain Resilience, organized by ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) run up to coming 18th ASEAN-India Summit.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/converting-northeast-as-economic-hotspot-can-energise-asean-india-partnership/articleshow/87187370.cms>

India is exporting strictly non-genetically modified rice: Centre

The government on Wednesday clarified that India does not export genetically modified (GM) rice as there is no commercial variety of such crop in the country and its cultivation is also banned here. The clarification from the commerce ministry came following a news report regarding food recall linked to alleged GM rice from India.

"It may be clarified that there is no commercial variety of GM rice in India, in fact the commercial GM cultivation of rice is banned in India. There is no question of export of GM rice from India," the ministry said in a statement. It further said in the particular incident, which was reported through Rapid Alert by EU (European Union), the GMO contamination is suspected to have been found in the rice flour which was processed in EU and they themselves are not sure of the exact source of the contaminant.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-is-exporting-strictly-non-genetically-modified-rice-central-govt-121102100051_1.html

Tea, coffee exports find the RoDTEP rates inadequate

Exports of tea and coffee, the two main beverages exported from India, are finding the rates announced under RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products) inadequate in the face of uncertainty in exports which has increased as the pandemic hit key export markets like Iran, Egypt, Russia, USA, UAE and UK, where the cafes and tea lounges and boutiques are yet to open up fully.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/tea-coffee-exports-find-the-rodtep-rates-inadequate/articleshow/87180312.cms>

India pushes for rotation system to appoint officers in WTO bodies

India has proposed a rotation system for the appointment of officers to World Trade Organization (WTO) bodies to achieve balanced representation of members from different groups. The current practice of Developed Group alternating with the other regional groups should be done away with as this amounts to reverse special and differential treatment for developed countries, India has told the WTO. Citing lack of transparency and clear cut guidelines in the current process, New Delhi

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-pushes-for-rotation-system-to-appoint-officers-in-wto-bodies/articleshow/87183929.cms>

Serum Institute could export 20-30 million vaccine doses a month to COVAX: Adar Poonawalla

The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's biggest maker of vaccines, could export 20 million to 30 million doses of the AstraZeneca shot to the WHO-backed global platform COVAX this year and then many more from January, its CEO told Reuters. Adar Poonawalla said the company's production of the vaccine could go up to 240 million doses a month from around 220 million now. He also said SII will make only the single-dose Sputnik Light vaccine from Russia and not the two-dose Sputnik V.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/healthcare/biotech/pharmaceuticals/serum-institute-could-export-20-30-million-vaccine-doses-a-month-to-covax-adar-poonawalla/articleshow/87184798.cms>

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