

DAILY PT POINTERS

20th June, 2024



Union Cabinet gives go-ahead to increase MSP of 14 kharif crops

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave its nod to raise the minimum support price (MSP) for paddy by 5.35% to ₹2,300 a quintal for the 2024-25 kharif marketing season, a decision that comes ahead of the Assembly elections in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi.

In the first major decision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term in office, the Cabinet approved MSP hike for all 14 kharif season crops, in alignment with the government's "clear policy" of keeping MSPs at least 1.5 times above the cost of production as calculated

They are bajra (77%), followed by arhar dal (59%), maize (54%), and black gram (52%).

Paddy, the season's key crop, will see an MSP increase of ₹117 per quintal, which will allow farmers a margin of 50%. The hike comes despite the government holding a record stockpile of rice, over four times the required buffer, but is significant ahead of the upcoming elections in key States. Kharif sowing usually begins in June with the onset of the southwest monsoon, while the crop marketing season will run from October 2024 to September 2025.

The MSP hike is likely to result in a total financial implication of ₹2 lakh

- The Union Cabinet gave its nod to raise the minimum support price (MSP) for paddy by 5.35% to ₹2,300 a quintal for the 2024-25 kharif marketing season.

MSP

MSP stands for Minimum Support Price. It is the minimum rate at which farmers sell their crops to the government. This price prevents farmers from market fluctuation and offers stability and income security.

Established in 1965, the CACP or Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, recommends the MSP based on various factors. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, headed by the Prime Minister, takes the final call on the MSP.

The Hindu : GS 3-Environment –Page 8

On the Hindu Kush Himalayas snow update

What does the report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development highlight? How important is snow persistence? How much of a role does climate change play in river basins receiving low levels of snowmelt this year?

EXPLAINER

Pravali Prakash

The story so far:

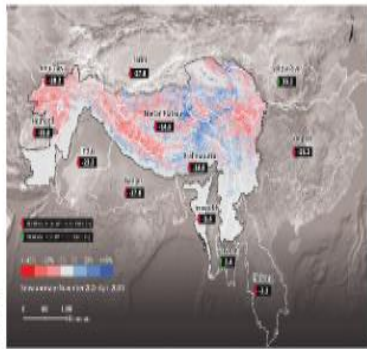
The Ganga river basin – India's largest – reached a record low snow persistence in 2024, the Hindu Kush Himalaya snow update of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has reported. The Brahmaputra and the Indus basins have suffered similarly, threatening water supply to millions of people. "Tragically this is yet another postcard from the frontlines of a climate crisis that is accelerating even beyond scientists' projections and causing huge challenges in one of the most populated regions of the world," Miriam Jackson, Cryosphere Lead at ICIMOD and a contributor to reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, told *The Hindu*.

What is snow persistence?

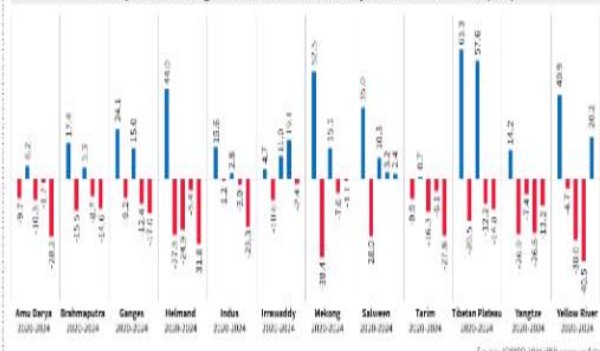
Snow persistence is the fraction of time snow is on the ground. When this snow melts, it provides water to people and ecosystems. In the river basins of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), snowmelt is the biggest source of water in the streams. Overall, it contributes 23% of the runoff to the region's 12 major river basins every year. The HKH mountains extend around

Where does the snow go?

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Snow persistence changes between 2020 and 2024 in major river basins of the HKH (in %)



THE GIST

The Ganga river basin – India's largest – reached a record low snow persistence in 2024. The Brahmaputra and the Indus basins have suffered similarly, threatening water supply to millions of people.

The authors of the 2024 HKH snow update analysed data from 2003 to 2024 and found significant fluctuations in snow persistence between November and April every year, when snow accumulates above ground.

In the long term, experts say, reforestation with native tree species can help the ground retain more snow. Better weather forecasting and early warning systems can also help local communities prepare for impending water stress.

- International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which publishes the annual Snow Update Report, warn water management officials to initiate drought management strategies and pre-emptive emergency water supply. The Ganga river basin – India's largest – reached a record low snow persistence in 2024. The Brahmaputra and the Indus basins have suffered similarly, threatening water supply to millions of people. Snow persistence is the fraction of time snow is on the ground. When this snow melts, it provides water to people and ecosystems. In the river basins of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), snowmelt is the biggest source of water in the streams. The HKH mountains extend around 3,500 km over eight countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and Pakistan. These mountains are also called the "water towers of Asia" because they are the origins of 10 crucial river systems on the continent – Amu Darya, Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, Yangtse, Yellow river, and Tarim.

The Hindu :GS2/IR/GS3-Economy

India, U.S. working to scale up partnership on critical minerals

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

India and the U.S. are looking to “quickly” conclude a bilateral agreement on furthering cooperation on critical minerals between the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Mines, and to drive a partnership in supply chains for graphite, gallium, and germanium.

One of the aims will be to promote “India’s vital role in the mineral security partnership, including through co-investing in a lithium resource project in South America and a rare earths deposit in Africa, to responsibly and sustainably diversify critical mineral supply chains,” said a fact sheet issued on June 17



In July 2023, India released a list of 30 minerals critical for the country.

on the India-U.S. Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) dialogue, chaired by the National Security Advisers of the countries.

In July 2023, India released a list of 30 minerals critical for the country and has been looking to acquire mines abroad in addition to expanding explo-

ration within the country. To enable this, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 was amended through the MMDR Amendment Act, 2023.

India has incorporated a joint venture company Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL) with equity contribution from three Central Public Sector Enterprises – National Aluminium Company Ltd, Hindustan Copper Ltd and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd – with the objective of acquiring critical mineral assets abroad to ensure consistent supply of critical minerals to the Indian domestic market. KABIL is presently exploring opportunities for acquisition of critical minerals assets like lithium and cobalt in Australia, Argentina and Chile.

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Do you know ?

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The Hindu- GS 2/Health /GS3-Science and Tech

India eyes breakthrough against sickle cell

Researchers working to develop gene therapy using CRISPR-Cas9, a gene-editing tool, to fight the genetic blood disorder that has a high prevalence rate among the Scheduled Tribes; Tribal Affairs Ministry wants ground-level healthcare workers such as ASHAs trained to screen for the disease

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

India is getting closer to developing a gene therapy for sickle cell disease, a genetic blood disorder with a high prevalence rate among the Scheduled Tribes, officials of the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry said on Wednesday. Vibhu Nayyar, Secretary, Tribal Affairs Ministry, said the government was expecting to hear "good news" by January 2025 on the laboratory tests that are being run.

M. Srinivas, Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), said researchers were working to develop a gene therapy using CRISPR-Cas9, a gene-editing tool.

"We want that in the next six months to one year, we will be able to go forward with using this method for treating sickle

cell disease – making India one of the first countries to do so," Mr. Srinivas said.

He was speaking at the National Conclave on Generating Awareness on Sickle Cell Disease, organised by the Tribal Affairs Ministry in collaboration with the Birsa Munda Centre at the AIIMS.

Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram, addressing the opening of the conclave, lauded the efforts but said it was important to involve and coordinate with ground-level healthcare workers such as ASHAs and anganwadi workers for these plans to be implemented properly.

"They will be the ones doing the heavy lifting on the ground," Mr. Oram said.

Officials of the Tribal Affairs Ministry told *The Hindu* that the "good news" Mr. Nayyar was referring to was related to the tests that



Tribal Affairs Ministry official says the government was expecting to hear "good news" by January 2025 on laboratory tests being run. AP

are currently being run by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB).

"Following this, the tests will proceed to the next phase and eventually move on to being tested on patients," a senior official said.

make this therapy cost-effective. Developing a gene therapy using CRISPR has been part of India's mission to eradicate sickle cell disease by 2047.

A government dossier on the mission, which was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July 2023, said the technology had "the potential to be a single dose cure for blood disorders like sickle cell anaemia".

Part of this mission is to also conduct over seven crore screenings among vulnerable tribal populations across 17 States and Union Territories, of which three crore screenings have been achieved so far, Ministry officials said.

The CRISPR-Cas9 system consists of an enzyme that behaves like molecular scissors, which can be directed to cut a piece of DNA at a precise location. This will then allow a guide

RNA to insert a changed genetic code at the sites of the incision.

While there are a few ways to effect such changes, the CRISPR system is believed to be fast and the most versatile of all.

Addressing the gathering of doctors, experts, and healthcare professionals, Mr. Oram said the Union government was committed to working on the sickle cell disease eradication mission and called for officials from across Ministries and departments to ensure that grassroots workers were roped in for the implementation process and that they should themselves engage with them.

Following the addresses by senior officials and the Minister, a series of technical panel discussions were also held on recognising and screening for sickle cell disease, managing the disease, and other issues.

Making it cost-effective
Ministry officials said one of the main challenges for India was to find a way to

- **Researchers working to develop gene therapy using CRISPR-Cas9, a gene-editing tool, to fight the genetic blood disorder that has a high prevalence rate among the Scheduled Tribes;**

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a group of inherited red blood cell disorders.

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a group of inherited blood disorders. Abnormal hemoglobin is produced.

Red blood cells become hard and sticky and get stuck in small blood vessels, resulting in pain and other serious complications.

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The Hindu—Education (GSII)-Page 12

PM inaugurates Nalanda University campus in Bihar

The Hindu Bureau
PATNA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated the new campus of Nalanda University, an international university, close to the site of the ancient ruins of Nalanda at Rajgir in Bihar.

Asserting that Nalanda is a symbol of India's academic heritage and vibrant cultural exchange, Mr. Modi said, "Nalanda is the proclamation of this truth that books may burn in the flames of fire, but the flames of fire cannot destroy knowledge. Nalanda is an identity, respect, and pride."

Wide representation

He expressed his happiness over the presence of representatives of many countries for the inauguration. He said the new campus proved that Bihar was on the path of development.

Parliament established Nalanda University through the Nalanda University Act, 2010.

The Act formed the basis for implementing the decisions arrived at the second East Asia Summit in the Philippines in 2007 for the establishment of the university as an "international institution for pur-



Glorious expense: The campus of Nalanda University has an amphitheatre that can seat 2,000 people. @CHIRAGPASHAN/1

suit of intellectual, philosophical, historical and spiritual studies" and at the fourth summit in Thailand in 2009.

It started functioning in 2014 from a makeshift location with 14 students and the construction work started in 2017.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and 17 Ambassadors from participating countries attended the event. Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Deputy CMs Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Sinha were present.

Before inaugurating the campus, the PM visited the ancient ruins of Nalanda and planted a sapling of the Bodhi tree brought from Bodhi Gaya.

Nalanda University

Chancellor Arvind Panagariya and Interim Vice-Chancellor Abhay Kumar Singh were present.

In his address, Mr. Modi said, "The renaissance of Nalanda University near its ancient ruins will introduce India's potential to the world. Nalanda is not just a renaissance of India's past, the heritage of many countries and Asia is linked to it. In days to come, Nalanda University will once again become a major centre for our cultural exchange."

The ancient Nalanda University was established in the 5th century and attracted students from all over the world. The ancient university flourished for 800 years before it was burnt down by invaders in the 12th century.

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The Hindu –IR(GSII)-Page 14

Russia, N. Korea sign defence pact, vow to assist each other if attacked

Kim says the two countries have a 'fiery friendship', and that the deal is the 'strongest ever treaty' between them; Putin's visit to Pyongyang comes amid U.S. criticism that the North is supporting Moscow in its war on Ukraine with arms supplies

Associated Press
SEOUL

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on Wednesday signed a new partnership that includes a vow of mutual aid if either country faces "aggression," in a pact that came as both face escalating stand-offs with the West.

Details of the deal were not immediately clear, but it could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War. Both leaders described it as a major upgrade of their relations, covering security, trade, investment and



Mutual beneficiaries: Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un exchange documents at a signing ceremony in Pyongyang on Wednesday. AP

cultural and humanitarian ties.

The two met as Mr. Putin visited North Korea for the first time in 24 years. The summit came as the

for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

Mr. Kim said the two countries had a "fiery friendship," and that the deal was the "strongest ever treaty" between them, putting the relationship at the level of an alliance. He vowed full support for Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mr. Putin said that it was a "breakthrough document" reflecting shared desire to move relations to a higher level.

North Korea and the former Soviet Union signed a treaty in 1961

which experts say necessitated Moscow's military intervention if the North came under an attack. The deal was discarded after the collapse of the USSR, replaced by a pact in 2000 that offered weaker security assurances.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser said the leaders exchanged gifts after the talks.

In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Mr. Putin's visit to North Korea illustrates how Russia tries, "in desperation, to strengthen relations with countries that can provide it with what it needs to continue the war of aggression that it started against Ukraine."

- Russia, N. Korea sign defence pact, vow to assist each other if attacked
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The Hindu –IR(GSII)

Australia hopes to conclude CECA negotiations with India early next year

Amiti Sen
NEW DELHI

Australia is keen to conclude negotiations for the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with India in the next six-seven months since it may not be in a position to take hard decisions from early next year as the country prepares for its federal elections, according to sources.

New Delhi may find it a challenge to fast-track the talks, especially in sensitive areas such as agriculture, digital trade and government procurement, as views of coalition partners also need to be taken into account by the new BJP-led government, an industry official said.



“India-Australia CECA negotiations were well on track before talks briefly halted due to the Indian elections. The Australian side is keen that the momentum be now maintained as it has barely a six-seven months window to conclude the talks because of the upcoming elections next year,” the source said. Australia’s federal elections are likely in mid-2025

and the ruling government is expected to steer away from controversial decisions, the source said. The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) came into force on December 29, 2022.

New areas

It served as a stepping stone for the CECA which is to be a deeper and comprehensive agreement covering five tracks agreed in the ECTA, including goods, services, digital trade, government procurement and Rules of Origin (ROO)-Product Specific Rules Schedule. New areas in which either party has shown interest for coverage include competition policy, MSME, gender, in-

novation, agri-tech, critical minerals and sports.

“Australia, wants market access at least for premium items that are not in competition with items produced domestically in India. But with a new Minister heading the Agriculture Ministry and the interests of coalition partners that are also to be taken into account, negotiations could be tougher than earlier,” the industry official said. Moreover, areas like government procurement and digital trade, where India has not opened up significantly in any of its existing free trade deals because of sensitivities may also be difficult to negotiate.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Australia hopes to conclude CECA talks with India by early next year

In 2023-24, India’s imports from Australia declined 15 per cent to \$ 16.15 billion. India’s exports during the fiscal increased 14.23 per cent to \$7.94 billion. Australia was India’s 13th largest export destination accounting for 1.83 per cent of total exports in 2023-24. The country was India’s 14th largest import source accounting for 2.39 per cent of total imports during the fiscal.

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Indian Express:GS 2-IR

China eyes plan to link railways across Southeast Asia, expand BRI

Proposal to connect Kunming in China to Singapore via Malaysia, Thailand

REUTERS
KUALA LUMPUR, JUNE 19

CHINA SAID it was willing to study a plan to connect Malaysia's \$10-billion East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) to other China-backed railway projects in Laos and Thailand, potentially expanding Beijing's Belt and Road initiative across Southeast Asia.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who is on a three-day visit to Malaysia, said on Wednesday the proposal would make the central line of a proposed Pan-Asia Railway, running from Kunming in China to Singapore, a reality.

"This will better promote the

ments in the Asia-Pacific region amid an ongoing rivalry with the United States.

He met Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in the administrative capital of Putrajaya following his arrival in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday for a visit to mark 50 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

After Wednesday's closed-door meeting, Li and Anwar witnessed the signing of more than a dozen pacts, including renewing a five-year programme to collaborate in areas such as trade and investment, agriculture manufacturing, infrastructure and financial services, a statement after the meeting showed

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China officially announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.

The BRI was established with two primary components: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The Economic Belt part of the strategy aims to build and expand land routes for people and commerce across Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and Asia. Meanwhile, the Maritime Road component consists of plans for expanded sea routes across East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Indian Express:GS 2-Polity and Governance

Cabinet clears scheme for forensic infra with outlay of ₹2,200 crore

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 19

IN A bid to have more scientific investigations across the country to achieve better conviction rates in criminal cases, the Union Cabinet Wednesday approved the National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme (NFIES).

The scheme, with a financial outlay of Rs 2,254.43 crore during the period from 2024-25 to 2028-29, aims to establish campuses of National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) across the country apart from setting up more central forensic science laboratories enhancing existing infrastructure of NFSU, Delhi.

The development assumes significance in the wake of the new criminal laws coming into effect from July 1.

According to the MHA, with the enactment of the new criminal laws which mandates forensic investigation for offences involving punishment of seven years or more, a significant increase in the workload of forensic science laboratories is expected. Further, there is a significant shortage of

Forensic Science Laboratories (FSL) in the country.

The Cabinet decision came on a proposal from MHA. Financial outlay of the central sector scheme will be provisioned by the MHA from its own budget.

"... The scheme underscores the importance of high quality, trained forensic professionals in the timely and scientific examination of evidence for an efficient criminal justice process, leveraging the advancements in technology & evolving manifestations and methods of crime," an MHA statement said.

"The establishment of additional off-campus of the National Forensic Sciences University and new Central Forensic Science Laboratories would address the shortage of trained forensic manpower," the MHA statement said.

Meanwhile, as per PTI, the government also approved a development plan worth Rs 2,869.65 crore for the Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport at Varanasi that will entail constructing a new terminal building, extending the runway and expanding the total annual passenger handling capacity to 9.9

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Indian Express:GS 3-Environment

Air pollution killed 8.1 million globally, 2.1mn in India in 2021: Report

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 19

AIR POLLUTION has caused 8.1 million deaths around the world in 2021 with China and India accounting for more than half of the global burden at 2.3 and 2.1 million deaths respectively, according to the recently released State of Global Air Report.

As per the report, air pollution is considered to be one of the biggest killers globally, second only to high blood pressure. In fact, it outranks tobacco consumption as a leading cause of death and disability, said the report. Of the total deaths, 700,000 were children under the age of 5 years. "Air pollution poses an enormous — and growing — public health challenge," the report states.

India bears the brunt

Even though the situation is bleak globally, India is among the countries which bears the highest brunt of air pollution. India with 2.1 million deaths and China with 2.3 million deaths due to air pollution, account for 55% of the global burden. Not only the particulate matter, Indians are also exposed to high levels of ozone. Short-term

while long term exposure is linked to Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease — a condition where the lungs remain inflamed obstructing the airflow. The report states that 489,000 deaths globally were attributable to ozone exposure in 2021 — of these deaths nearly 50% or 237,000 deaths took place in the country. India also reported the highest number of pollution-linked deaths in children under the age of five in 2021 with at least 169,400 deaths attributed to air pollution.

As per data, there has been a steady increase in the number of deaths attributable to air pollution in India, barring a small dip seen during the pandemic.

Health challenge

Air pollution poses a big public health challenge — becoming the second leading risk factor for early deaths after high blood pressure and ahead of tobacco consumption. Unlike high blood pressure and tobacco consumption — which mainly affects adults — air pollution kills children. With over 169,400 children deaths under the age of five attributable to air pollution, India recorded the highest total number of deaths in children worldwide in 2021. The report

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HEADLINES OF THE DAY



PIB:GS 3-Economy

Cabinet

Cabinet approves Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme for implementation of Offshore Wind Energy Projects

Scheme aims to set up first ever offshore wind energy projects in India

Posted On: 19 JUN 2024 7:57PM by PIB Delhi

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, today approved the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme for offshore wind energy projects at a total outlay of Rs.7453 crore, including an outlay of Rs.6853 crore for installation and commissioning of 1 GW of offshore wind energy projects (500 MW each off the coast of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu), and grant of Rs.600 crore for upgradation of two ports to meet logistics requirements for offshore wind energy projects.
- The VGF scheme is a major step towards implementation of the National Offshore Wind Energy Policy notified in 2015 with an aim to exploit the vast offshore wind energy potential that exists within the exclusive economic zone of India. The VGF support from the Government will reduce the cost of power from offshore wind projects and make them viable for purchase by DISCOMs