

The Indian Express

Front Page

Fertiliser imports from Russia up, makeup 20% of total in Apr-June (Page no 1) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

In a development that holds diplomatic significance and brings fiscal savings, Russia has emerged as the largest supplier of fertilisers to India during April-June (Q1, FY23) this year.

India imported 7.74 lakh metric tonnes of fertilisers from Russia in the first quarter and this is more than a fifth of the total 36.4 lakh metric tonnes imported from across the globe, according to data shared by Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha.

The imports from Russia in just the first three months of FY23 is equal to almost 70 per cent of 11.02 lakh MTs of fertilisers imported from Russia in the whole of financial year 2021-22 (FY22).

In recent years, China has been the biggest source for India, with fertiliser imports from the south Asian neighbour accounting for 24 per cent in FY22.

Historically, Russia has not been among the top fertiliser suppliers to India; in FY22, India's imports from Russia were just 6 per cent of its total fertiliser imports.

According to sources, imports from Russia were "10 per cent cheaper" than the prevailing prices in the international market. "India could secure diammonium phosphate (DAP) at \$920 a tonne when global prices were hovering above \$1,000 a tonne.

The spurt in imports of fertilisers and crude oil from Russia has come at a time when western countries have imposed sanctions against Moscow following its invasion of Ukraine.

This issue may also figure during talks with USAID Administrator Samantha Power, who is scheduled to travel to India during July 25-27.

She will be in India to meet a cross section of stakeholders including climate experts, civil society, and government officials to discuss the global food security crisis, and the US-India development partnership.

WHO sounds highest alarm level for monkeypox as cases climb (Page no 1) (GS Paper 3, Health)

The World Health Organisation Saturday sounded its highest level of alarm for monkeypox, declaring it a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern'. The same declaration was used for Covid-19 in January 2020.

The threat level, however, is moderate for all regions across the world — barring Europe, where it is assessed to be high. More than 16,000 monkeypox cases have been reported from 75 countries. India has reported three cases of the viral illness from Kerala, with the Union Health Ministry issuing guidelines for its surveillance.

Earlier this week, the ministry instructed port authorities to conduct strict screening of international travellers and coordinate with agencies such as immigration departments at international ports and airports to streamline health screening processes besides ensuring linkages with hospital facilities earmarked to each port of entry.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in a press conference Saturday, said: "WHO's assessment is that the risk of monkeypox is moderate globally and in all regions, except in the European region where we assess the risk as high.

There is also a clear risk of further international spread, although the risk of interference with international traffic remains low for the moment.

So in short, we have an outbreak that has spread around the world rapidly, through new modes of transmission, about which we understand too little, and which meets the criteria in the International Health Regulations.

The Emergency Committee under International Health Regulations, which met Thursday to review the new numbers, did not, however, reach a consensus on announcing a public health emergency.

Kangaroo courts by media, agenda-driven debates weakening democracy, says CJI (Page no 1) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

Expressing concern over "media running kangaroo courts", Chief Justice of India N V Ramana said that "ill-informed and agenda-driven debates" and "biased views" are weakening democracy.

The CJI was delivering the inaugural lecture instituted in the memory of Justice Satya Brata Sinha in Ranchi. Speaking on the "life of a judge", he said: "Doing justice is not an easy responsibility.

It is becoming increasingly challenging with each passing day. At times, there are also concerted campaigns in media, particularly on social media against judges.

Another aspect which affects the fair functioning and independence of judiciary is the rising number of media trials. New media tools have enormous amplifying ability but appear to be incapable of distinguishing between the right and the wrong, the good and the bad, and the real and the fake. Media trials cannot be a guiding factor in deciding cases. Of late, we see the media running kangaroo courts, at times on issues even experienced judges find difficult to decide. Ill-informed and agenda-driven debates on issues involving justice delivery are proving to be detrimental to the health of democracy.

Biased views being propagated by media are affecting the people, weakening democracy, and harming the system. In this process, justice delivery gets adversely affected. By overstepping and breaching your responsibility, you are taking our democracy two steps backwards,” said the CJI.

Print media still has certain degree of accountability. Whereas, electronic media has zero accountability as what it shows vanishes into thin air. Still worse is social media.

Opinion

‘Process is the Punishment’ (Page no 10)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

In our criminal justice system, the process is the punishment. From hasty, indiscriminate arrests to difficulty in obtaining bail, the process leading to the prolonged incarceration of under trials needs urgent attention.

It is a grave issue that 80 per cent of the 6,10,000 prisoners across the country are undertrials, time has come to question the procedures which result in such prolonged incarceration without trial” — Chief Justice of India, Mr N V Ramana.

Wiser words have not been spoken, certainly not in recent times by the top judge of the country. Mr Justice Ramana had practised law for 17 years and has been a judge for 22 years.

He is not a stranger to what goes on in the courts in the name of ‘dispensing criminal justice’. He must have also interacted with families of accused, lawyers, civil society activists, journalists and concerned citizens and heard hundreds of tragic stories. The purpose of this essay is to share some stories with you.

In current times, there is no story more shocking than the story of the 16 accused in what is known as the Bhima Koregaon case. On January 1, 2018 — as on that day every year — there was a gathering (consisting of members of Dalit organisations) at Bhima Koregaon to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon.

There was violence and stone-pelting on the gathering by a crowd, allegedly instigated by right-wing groups. One person died and five were injured. The investigation by the state government (BJP) took a curious turn.

On June 6, 2018, five persons, all sympathetic to the Dalit and left-wing causes, were arrested by the state police. More arrests were made in the following months.

Among the arrested were a lawyer, a poet, a priest, writers, professors and human rights activists. After the elections in 2019, a coalition government (non-BJP) took office. Responding to allegations of biased investigation, the state government decided to constitute an SIT to re-visit the case.

Within two days, the Central government (BJP) intervened and transferred the case to the NIA! Despite multiple petitions, the accused were denied bail. Father Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old Jesuit priest, died in jail on July 5, 2021. Only Mr Varavara Rao, the 82-year old renowned poet, is out on interim medical bail since September 22, 2021.

Access to abortion: Where women still don’t have a say (Page no 10)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

When the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade last month, many sighed in relief that they were in India where abortion has not been ‘criminalised’.

While one hopes that was the case, the truth is that there is no “right” to abortion in India. Abortion (“causing miscarriage”) continues to be an offence under the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, was only enacted as an exception to the IPC provision. The MTP Act is centered around abortion service providers or registered medical practitioners and seeks to protect them from criminal liability for abortions performed on permissible grounds, and not women whose bodies are regulated.

India’s Supreme Court and High Courts routinely engage with the question of abortion, as women who have been denied or can’t access abortion under the MTP Act approach them for permission to terminate their pregnancies, though India has not had a case similar to Roe v. Wade.

In 2009, the Supreme Court in Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration, while deciding whether a woman with intellectual disability has the autonomy to continue her pregnancy, placed the right to reproductive choice of women within the framework of Article 21 of the Constitution.

Although the Court cited Roe v. Wade and spoke of women's "right to make reproductive choices", it found the provisions of the MTP Act to be "reasonable restrictions" on the exercise of this choice.

World

Pak, China welcome 'interested third nations' joining CPEC (Page no 12) (GS Paper 2, International Relation)

All-weather allies Pakistan and China have decided to welcome "interested" third countries joining the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), saying it was "an open and inclusive platform" for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Launched in 2013, the CPEC is a corridor linking Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea with Kashgar in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which highlights energy, transport and industrial cooperation.

The 3rd meeting of the CPEC Joint Working Group (JWG) on International Cooperation and Coordination (JWG-ICC) was held in virtual mode.

During the meeting, co-chaired by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood and China's Assistant Foreign Minister Wu Jianghao, both sides reviewed the continued implementation of the CPEC and its expansion to the jointly agreed priority areas, according to a statement by the Foreign Office here.

It was noted that as a flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the CPEC had broken new ground in strengthening international and regional connectivity, especially in the context of its extension to Afghanistan.

As an open and inclusive platform, both sides welcomed interested third parties to benefit from avenues for mutually beneficial cooperation opened up by CPEC.

India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). The CPEC is a USD 60 billion flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of the Chinese government and promoted by President Xi Jinping.