

The Indian Express

Front Page

To stem Rupee slide, boost forex inflows, RBI eases FPI, NRI deposit norms (Page no: 1) **(GS Paper 3, Economy)**

To prevent the slide in the rupee and shore up foreign exchange reserves, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a series of measures, including relaxation in foreign investment in debt, external commercial borrowings, and Non-Resident Indian (NRI) deposits.

With the rupee depreciating 4.1 per cent to 79.30 against the US dollar in the current financial year till July 5, FPIs (foreign portfolio investors) pulling out Rs 2.32 lakh crore in six months, and \$50 billion being shaved off forex reserves over the last nine months, the measures are expected to further diversify and expand the sources of forex funding, mitigate volatility, and dampen global spillovers.

The RBI said it has been closely and continuously monitoring the liquidity conditions in the forex market and has stepped in as needed in all segments to alleviate dollar tightness with the objective of ensuring orderly market functioning.

While India's foreign exchange reserves stood at US\$ 593.3 billion on June 24, 2022, the new measures are expected to boost inflows as nearly a third of India's external debt of \$ 621 billion will be due for maturity in the coming months.

In a significant move, RBI has allowed banks temporarily to raise fresh Foreign Currency Non-Resident Bank i.e., FCNR(B) and Non-Resident External (NRE) deposits without reference to the current regulations on interest rates, with effect from July 7. This relaxation too will be available till October 31, 2022.

Currently, interest rates on FCNR(B) deposits are subject to ceilings of overnight Alternative Reference Rate (ARR) for the respective currency/ swap plus 250 basis points for deposits of 1-3 years maturity and overnight ARR plus 350 basis points for deposits of 3-5 years maturity.

In the case of NRE deposits, interest rates should not be higher than those offered by the banks on comparable domestic rupee term deposits.

The central bank said investments by FPIs in government securities and corporate debt made till October 31, 2022, will be exempted from this short-term limit. These will not be reckoned for the short-term limit of one year till maturity or sale of such investments.

Currently, not more than 30 per cent of investments each in government securities and corporate bonds can have a residual maturity of less than one year.

Ilaiyaraaja and P T Usha among four new RS nominations ,all from south (Page no: 1) **(GS Paper 2, Indian Constitution)**

Music maestro Ilaiyaraaja, sports icon P T Usha, acclaimed screenwriter V Vijayendra Prasad and philanthropist and spiritual leader Veerendra Heggade were nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

The nominations came on a day when Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi of BJP and RCP Singh of JD (U) resigned from the Union Cabinet with their Rajya Sabha terms ending on Thursday.

The new nominated members have had illustrious careers, receiving national and global recognition. At the same time, the nominations send a political signal, too, with the ruling BJP new RS nominations, all from south identifying southern states for its next phase of growth.

While Ilaiyaraaja hails from Tamil Nadu and Usha from Kerala, Prasad is from Telangana and Heggade from Karnataka. In a career spanning nearly five decades, Ilaiyaraaja has composed songs in several Indian languages and won numerous awards, including the national award five times. In 2010, the maestro was awarded the Padma Bhushan and in 2018 the Padma Vibhushan.

The creative genius of Ilaiyaraaja has enthralled people across generations. His works beautifully reflect many emotions. What is equally inspiring is his life journey – he rose from a humble background and achieved so much.

In Chennai, Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi, and actors Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, congratulated Ilaiyaraaja for the nomination.

Sub-categorisation of OBCs: Govt extends term again without panel asking for it (Page no: 2) **(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave the 13th extension to the Justice Rohini Commission, giving it time until January 31, 2023 to submit its report.

With the move coming even without the commission seeking an extension, it betrays the ruling BJP's fears that the report could politically boomerang and affect its efforts to **keep its OBC support base intact**.

The commission was set up on October 2, 2017 under Article 340 of the Constitution. It was tasked with sub-categorisation of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and equitable distribution of benefits reserved for them. Its initial deadline to submit its report was 12 weeks — by January 2, 2018.

The development comes a month after Social Justice and Empowerment Secretary R Subramanyam told the media that the commission had not sought any more extension. It would submit its report by July-end, when its current term ends. The move to give it another extension assumes significance also because it comes amid growing demands for a caste census — from opposition parties as well as BJP's allies in the NDA.

A senior BJP leader, who comes from an OBC community, said the government announced the commission in 2017 as a “knee-jerk reaction”.

According to the leader, this is because BJP had seen that only “a few castes enjoyed benefits of reservation”, and these were castes from which leaders of several opposition parties came from —Yadavs, for instance, led by Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and RJD in Bihar; or Jats, led primarily by the RLD and INLD.

But now that BJP has managed to transcend the caste lines and claim a solid OBC support base, it would not be a good idea to sub-categorise them.

It is not just Yadavs or Jats (who will come in for further categorisation), but also Kurmis, Kushwahas (among other castes) who are voting for BJP. You cannot limit categorisation to a few castes.

Express Network

Assam Cabinet approves ‘indigenous’ status for five Muslim communities (Page no: 8)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The Assam Cabinet Tuesday approved the identification of five Assamese Muslim sub-groups — Goriyas, Moriyas, Julhas, Deshis, and Syeds — as “indigenous” Assamese Muslim communities.

A note from the cabinet said that the move will “ensure their development in health, cultural identity, education, financial inclusion, skill development and women empowerment.”

Considered distinct from Bengali-speaking Muslims, who have a history of migration from present-day Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) to Assam over centuries, this group has often expressed the need for a separate identity.

The decision came following the recommendations of a panel constituted by the Assam government last year to discuss socio-economic issues concerning the Assamese Muslim community of the state.

The panel was set up in July last year after Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's meeting with Assamese Muslims from various fields — writers, doctors, cultural workers, lecturers, historians, and musicians, among others — to discuss socio-economic challenges faced by the community. The stated aim of Sarma's outreach was the community's welfare. In the meeting, he emphasised that the “uniqueness of the indigenous Assamese Muslims should be protected and preserved.

Under the umbrella of the indigenous Assamese Muslim community fall three main groups: the Goriyas, the Moriyas (from Upper Assam), and the Deshis (from Lower Assam).

While the Deshis are 13th-century converts from indigenous communities such as Koch Rajbongshi and Mech, the Goriyas and Moriyas trace their lineage to converts as well as soldiers, artisans, etc. who came to the region during the Ahom rule. Smaller groups such as Julha Muslims also fall under this category.

The move first made news when the Assam Minorities Development Board had proposed a “census” for Assamese Muslims in February 2020

Editorial Page

Takedown the transparency (Page no: 10)

(GS Paper 2, Governance)

As the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MEITY) conducts a week-long celebration to mark eight years of the Digital India programme, Twitter has filed a writ petition in the Karnataka High Court against it.

Far from souring a moment of national pride, it is representative of a Faustian bargain of digitisation that promises financial and social benefits when we give up our civil and political rights.

This becomes clear from the inauguration speech of the prime minister, where he launched several online platforms for global adoption and to facilitate the electronic delivery of governance services.

The speech text available in Hindi contains several accomplishments and data points that would instill hope in the use of technology — India having the largest share of digital transactions in the world, building successful online platforms for vaccination, even bridging the digital divide.

There is some truth to the prime minister's statements. For instance, over the last decade there has been a ten-fold increase in broadband connectivity to 600 million broadband subscribers in India.

The Karnataka HC may soon get an opportunity to answer this question when it responds to Twitter's legal challenge to the directions to block tweets and even handles issued by MEITY under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

As I have written before, Twitter is a foreign, Silicon Valley platform that trades in data to sustain its commercial operations. Further, there are issues with its own transparency mechanisms in content moderation decisions.

However, it has been prompted to go to court to protect the integrity of its platform rather than in arrogant defiance against the laws of India.

Beyond mere numbers, a comprehensive qualitative assessment of such orders is prevented by official secrecy. The need for disclosure emerges directly from a joint reading of the Shreya Singhal and Anuradha Bhasin judgments.

The first concerned the constitutionality of Section 66A under which the Supreme Court, while upholding the blocking powers of the government, reasoned that the writ remedies would always be available to an aggrieved person.

Hence, to approach a high court in a writ, the petitioner would require the availability of the legal order. This need for transparency prior to placing any restriction on internet access (of any scope or nature) has been expressly directed when the Supreme Court examined the scope of the telecommunications shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir.

Explained Page

Section 69 (A) of the IT Act: when social ,media content is blocked and twitter lawsuit (Page no: 13) (GS Paper 2, Governance)

In its latest faceoff with the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), **Twitter has initiated legal action** against some of the government missives ordering it to take down certain content posted on the microblogging site, according to sources in know of the matter.

Alleging disproportionate use of power by officials, the social media company moved the Karnataka High Court Tuesday against the Ministry's content-blocking orders issued under Section 69 (A) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Last month, the IT Ministry had written to Twitter, asking it to comply with its orders by July 4 or lose its safe harbour protection under the intermediary rules.

Section 69 (A) of the IT Act, 2000 allows the Centre to issue blocking orders to social media intermediaries "in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence relating to above".

As per rules that govern these blocking orders, any request made by the government is sent to a review committee, which then issues these directions. Blocking orders issued under Section 69 (A) of the IT Act are typically confidential in nature.

It is learnt that in its filing, Twitter has claimed that many of the blocking orders are procedurally and substantively deficient under Section 69 (A) of the Act.

This includes aspects such as not giving prior notice to users before taking down content posted by them. According to another source, the company alleged that MeitY has failed to demonstrate how some of the content it wants taken down falls under the purview of Section 69 (A).

Less wheat on states plates (Page no: 13) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh — both BJP-ruled states — have demanded more wheat in place of rice and asked the Centre to restore their original allocations under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, or change the wheat-rice allocation ratio that was revised by the Union Food Ministry in May.

On May 14, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey announced that "after consulting with the states", the Centre has reallocated some quantities by changing ratios of wheat and rice under the NFSA.

For example, states getting wheat and rice at a 60:40 ratio will now get it at 40:60, while those getting allocations at 75:25 would now get these at 60:40. States where rice allocation has been zero will continue to get wheat.

For small states, NE states and special category states, allocation has not been changed. According to the Food Ministry, the move would save about 61 lakh tonnes of wheat over the remaining 10 months (June-March) of the current financial year.

On May 4, the Centre had also announced a cut in wheat allocation under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for the remaining five months until September.

That cut is estimated to save 55 lakh tonnes of wheat. An equal quantity of rice has been allocated to compensate for the wheat.

Wheat allocation under NFSA was revised downward for 10 states: Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These states account for about 55.14 crore (67%) of the 81.35 crore beneficiaries under the NFSA.

When shark bites are fatal, and which species kill the most (Page no: 13)
(GS Paper 3, Species In News)

A study in Nature Scientific Data describes the Australian Shark-Incident Database, with comprehensive reports of 1,196 shark bites in Australia over 231 years (1791–2022).

Collated by the Taronga Conservation Society Australia, the dataset will be publicly available. It will aid scientists, conservationists, authorities, and members of the public to make informed decisions when implementing or selecting mitigation measures, the authors wrote.

The study categorised injury locations into four body areas (head, arm, torso, and leg) to assess how injury location affects recovery status (fatal or injured).

Deaths most often occurred following shark bites to the torso, the analysis found. “This is likely due to the injuries to organs and major arteries resulting in blood loss, which is a leading cause of shark-bite fatalities,” the study said.

Tiger sharks were found proportionally responsible for the most fatalities of all shark species in Australia (38% of all tiger shark bites result in fatality), followed by bull sharks (32% of bites fatal), and white sharks (25% of bites fatal).

White sharks are responsible for the largest number of bites on humans (361 total) compared to tiger (229 total) and bull sharks (197 total). At the time of publication, white and tiger sharks were each responsible for 91 and 86 total fatalities on humans in Australia, respectively.

Electments at centre of India -Australia deal (Page no: 13)
(GS Paper 3, International Relations)

India and Australia Monday decided to strengthen their partnership in the field of projects and supply chains for critical minerals.

As part of his six-day tour of Australia, Union Coal and Mines Minister Pralhad Joshi met his counterpart, Resources and Northern Australia Minister Madeleine King, after which Australia confirmed that it would “commit A\$5.8 million to the three-year India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership”.

Critical minerals are elements that are the building blocks of essential modern-day technologies, and are at risk of supply chain disruptions.

These minerals are now used everywhere from making mobile phones, computers to batteries, electric vehicles and green technologies like solar panels and wind turbines. Based on their individual needs and strategic considerations, different countries create their own lists.

However, such lists mostly include graphite, lithium and cobalt, which are used for making EV batteries; rare earths that are used for making magnets and silicon which is a key mineral for making computer chips and solar panels.

Aerospace, communications and defence industries also rely on several such minerals as they are used in manufacturing fighter jets, drones, radio sets and other critical equipment.

As countries around the world scale up their transition towards clean energy and digital economy, these critical resources are key to the ecosystem that fuels this change. Any supply shock can severely imperil the economy and strategic autonomy of a country over-dependent on others to procure critical minerals.

EV fires: Govt sets up panel to suggest certification, testing SOPs for batteries (Page no: 13)
(GS Paper 3, Environment)

Amid increasing instances of fires in electric vehicles (EVs) being reported from parts of the country, the government has stepped in with a plan to formulate procedures on battery certification and quality control.

The move is a bid to deter such incidents from reoccurring, which could put off potential EV buyers. The Centre has formed a panel of experts that has representations from the Visakhapatnam-based Naval Science & Technological Laboratory; the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras; the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru; and an expert of advanced chemistry.

“The committee will suggest ways to ensure the right quality of the product. They have to come up with a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for testing and validation of key components and formulate a certification standard for the

battery used in EVs,” said a top government official. The committee has to submit its report by the middle of this month, added the official.

The electric two-wheeler segment has seen many incidents of vehicles catching fire in the recent past. Electric two-wheeler makers such as Ola Electric, Okinawa Autotech and PureEV had recalled their scooters in the wake of separate fire incidents.

The reasons for fire may include manufacturing defects, external damage, or faults in the deployment in the battery management system, which could result in these batteries becoming a fire risk. In some cases, faulty charging could also have been a reason behind the fire.

A Tata Nexon EV caught fire in Maharashtra last month, which is being seen as the first major instance of a passenger vehicle catching fire in India. Nexon is the country’s largest-selling EV.

There are 30,000 Nexon EVs on the road, which have cumulatively covered over 100 million km across the country in nearly 4 years.