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INTERNATIONAL&BILATERAL

INDIA TO PARTICIPATE IN G-20, TRADE AND INVESTMENT MINISTERIAL MEETING IN ARGENTINA

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry will participate in the G-20, Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting, being held in Mar del Plata in Argentina.

The meeting will provide an opportunity for a dialogue on current developments in international trade and its implications for the global economy.

Trade and investment must benefit all and countries must jointly address both the opportunities and challenges of globalization, innovation and technological advancements.

India looks forward to work along with other countries to reform WTO and ensure that it continues to be an engine for global trade.

Further, the key issues that will be discussed include global value chains, the new industrial revolution and the international trade outlook.

The multilateral trading system is facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of protectionist measures by some countries, which is not compatible with the WTO.

G-20:

G-20 is made up of 19 countries and the EU.

The countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The other invited members are Chile, Netherlands, Spain and representatives of regional groups of Jamaica, Rwanda, Singapore and Senegal.

G-20 members represent 75% of international trade, half of foreign direct investment flows, half of foreign flows and 80% of global production.

NATIONAL

GOVERNMENT MOVES TO STABILISE RUPEE

The government has announced a plan to check “non-essential imports”, boost exports and initiated five measures to attract dollar inflows into the country to trim the widening current account deficit that is seen as a factor behind the rupee’s sharp slide against the dollar.

The five measures include:

- Mandatory hedging conditions for infrastructure loans through the external commercial borrowing (ECB) route will be reviewed.
- 20 percent exposure limits of foreign portfolio investors’ corporate bond portfolio to a single corporate group, company and related entities will be removed, and 50 percent of any issue of corporate bonds will be reviewed.
- Manufacturing sector entities will be permitted to avail external commercial borrowings up to \$50 million with a minimum maturity of one year instead of the earlier period of three years.
- Masala Bond issues done in the current financial year will be exempted from withholding tax.
- Restrictions on Indian banks’ market making in Masala Bonds, including restrictions on underwriting of such bonds, will be removed.

These five concrete steps announced would help increase inflows by \$8-10 billion. The measures are essentially on the capital account side where the aim is to infuse more dollars into the economy through routes like ECBs, FPI, Masala Bonds etc.

There is intent to put some curbs on imports and give a push to exports. There can be no debate that all these measures are positive for the rupee as they attack the fundamentals of demand and supply for dollars.

The pressure on rupee and the current account may not be a short-term phenomenon. That's because of rising interest rates in the US, high crude oil prices and its impact on emerging markets and the trade war between the US and China. Therefore, the government's intervention was necessary.

The measures announced by the government will work if the primary reason is weaker fundamentals. In case it is a global phenomenon, then it may not really help to correct the fall though it could cause some reversal in the first two or three sessions.

Also, it should be remembered that what the government has announced will take time to work through. There will be a review by companies on the hedging requirements for infra loans from global markets. For this to work, it will take time for companies to take such decisions.

BENGAL SCHEME TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In an attempt to combat human trafficking, the West Bengal government has rolled out a scheme, **Swayangsiddha**, in its different districts.

As the per the NCRB data West Bengal has highest recorded case of trafficking among the States. Swayangsiddha, which means self-reliance, will be executed by the West Bengal Police.

The scheme aims to empower young boys and girls to make informed choices so that they are less vulnerable to trafficking and child marriage.

Swayangsiddha Groups have been formed in schools and colleges with interested students.

These groups were formed with students between the age group of 12 to 21 years.

Particulars of the Mission-

- Raising awareness on human, gender and child rights and strengthening prevention of human trafficking and child marriage using a converging approach.

- Engaging youth from different schools and colleges to combat human trafficking and child marriage
- Strengthening response mechanism in collaboration with Police and child protection committees to build safe community
- Strengthening access to schemes and entitlements on education, training, livelihood and food security for vulnerable groups.

INMAS DEVELOPS INDIA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS ANTI-NUCLEAR MEDICAL KIT

Scientists at Institute of **Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS)** have developed India's first indigenous medical kit that may ensure protection from serious injuries and faster healing of wounds resulting from nuclear warfare or radioactive leakage. **INMAS is the medical face of DRDO.**

The drugs in the medical kit are 'Made in India', without any foreign counterpart and come with the tag of cost-effective and industrial networking.

The kit has over 25 items, including radio-protectors that provide 80-90 per cent protection against radiation and nerve gas agents, bandages that absorb radiation as well as tablets and ointments.

The kit has been developed for the armed, paramilitary and police forces only as they are the first ones likely to get exposed to radiation – be it during nuclear, chemical and biomedical (NCB) warfare or a rescue operation after a nuclear accident.

The contents include **an advanced form of Prussian blue tablets, highly effective in incorporating Radio Cesium (Cs-137) and Radio Thallium**, among the most feared radioisotopes in nuclear bombs that destroy human body cells.

The kit also has **an Ethylene-diamine-tetra-acetic acid (EDTA) injection that traps uranium in the guts and blood of victims** during a nuclear accident or warfare.

The kit also has **Ca-EDTA Respiratory Fluid, which is the inhalation formula for chelation**,

or grabbing, of heavy metals and radioactive elements deposited in lungs through inhalation at nuclear accident sites.

The medicine reduces the body burden of radioactivity by 30-40 per cent in controlled conditions and is highly useful for the rescue teams and victims after a nuclear accident.

The kit has Radioactive Blood Mopping Dressing, a special kind of bandage that absorbs radiation.

The kit also has a radioactive urine/biofluid collector which is cost-effective, easy to store and can safely dispose of the urine of a person affected by radiation.

Also part of the kit is the Amifostine injection, a US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved conventional radiopharmaceutical that limits damage from gamma radiation.

Another medicine in the form of a tablet is Indranil 150 mg introduced as a reserve emergency drug for rescue personnels where high acute exposures are expected and lives will be at stake.

Way Forward:

The kit is a potential alternative to those being procured from nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices.

Such medicines will help everyone and not just soldiers. This will also help the victims affected in terrorist attacks.

Due to a very small market, availability is a major issue.

While INMAS gets set to ramp up production of the kits for the security forces, doctors at AIIMS feel the kits can be made available to civilians at a later stage.

NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PORTAL MOBILE APP LAUNCHED BY UNION MINORITY AFFAIRS MINISTRY

Union Minority Affairs Minister launched the country's first National Scholarship Portal mobile app that would make the government welfare schemes more accessible to needy students.

This app will ensure a smooth, accessible and hassle-free scholarship system for students from poor and weaker sections.

The students will get all the information regarding various scholarships on this mobile app.

They will be able to apply for scholarships through the app.

The students can also upload necessary documents on this app; can check the status of their application and scholarship disbursement status etc.

All the scholarships are being given directly into the bank accounts of the needy students under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode through the National Scholarship Portal.

It has ensured that there is no scope for duplication and leakage.

During the last four years, about three crore students belonging to the poor and weaker sections of minorities have benefited from various scholarship programmes.

The beneficiaries include about 1.63 crore girls.

The school dropout rate among Muslim girls, which was earlier more than 70 per cent, has now been reduced to about 35-40 per cent due to awareness and educational empowerment programmes.

DAIRY PROCESSING & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND (DIDF)

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has inaugurated the Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF).

Vast opportunities exist today for dairy entrepreneurs and in order to concretize these opportunities and help double the income of dairy farmers, huge outlay is needed to operationalize the National Action Plan (Vision-2022).

Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF):

As announced in Union Budget 2017-18, the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF) started the DIDF with an outlay of Rs 10881 crore.

Under this scheme, milk cooperatives will be provided financial assistance of Rs 8004 crore in the form of a loan at 6.5% interest, which will be reimbursed over a period of 10 years.

Additional milk processing capacity of 126 lakh litre per day, milk drying capacity of 210 MT per day, milk chilling capacity of 140 lakh litre per day shall be created.

The government has also given a provision of interest subsidy on loans.

With this scheme, 95, 00,000 farmers in about 50,000 villages will be benefitted.

In addition to this, many skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers will get employment, directly and indirectly.

On the other hand, the implementation of the National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) is being done by the state's cooperative/milk federations.

Under this scheme special assistance was given for the development of cooperative milk committees, incentives to increase the number of milk producers and increase processing and refrigeration capacity.

National Action Plan Vision 2022:

The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) is working on a National Action Plan Vision 2022

Under the plan, suitable provisions are being made to build additional milk processing infrastructure for processing additional volume of milk(expected on account of higher milk production and meeting the increased demand for value-added products).

SCIENCE & TECH

ICESAT

NASA is preparing to launch its \$1 billion (about Rs. 7,210 crores) ICESat-2 mission, using advanced lasers to uncover the true depth of the melting of Earth's ice sheets. The satellite mission, called ICESat-2, should provide more precise information on how these frozen surfaces are being affected by global warming.

As the name suggests, ICESat-2 is a follow-on project. The original spacecraft flew in the 2000s and pioneered the laser measurement of the height of polar glaciers and sea-ice from space. But the mission was plagued by technical problems that limited its observations to just a couple of months in every year.

ICESat- 2 mission:

ICESat-2 will measure the average annual elevation change of land ice covering Greenland and Antarctica to within the width of a pencil, capturing 60,000 measurements every second.

ICESat-2's Advanced Topographic Laser Altimeter System (ATLAS) measures height by timing how long it takes individual light photons to travel from the spacecraft to Earth and back.

Objectives:

- Measure melting ice sheets and investigate how this effects sea level rise.
- Measure and investigate changes in the mass of ice sheets and glaciers.
- Estimate and study sea ice thickness.
- Measure the height of vegetation in forests and other ecosystems worldwide.

Antarctica and Greenland lose billions of tonnes of ice every year – the result largely of warm water being able to melt land glaciers where they meet the ocean. This wastage is slowly but surely pushing up sea-levels worldwide.

In the Arctic, the seasonal floes have also been in retreat. Sea-ice in the far north is thought to have lost two-thirds of its volume since the 1980s. And although this has no direct impact on the height of the oceans, the reduced ice-cover is working to amplify temperature rises in the region.
