

# IMPORTANT NEWS

## Factors Behind the Surge in Onion Prices

### Inside Story of the News:

Following a prolonged decline, onion costs are once more climbing, which is prompting worry for the central government. Consequently, the Ministry of Finance has enforced a **40 percent export tax** on onions. This action has resulted in traders indefinitely suspending onion auctions in Nashik district, Maharashtra.

- India is the **world's second-largest onion-producing nation**.
- Indian onions are renowned for their pungency and are accessible throughout the year.
- Indian onions undergo three distinct crop cycles, with the choice of season determined by the region's climate and the specific onion variety under cultivation.
- Onions are most commonly associated with the Rabi season.
- At the wholesale market in Lasalgaon, located in the Niphad taluka of Nashik, the average price of onions has surged from Rs 1,370 per quintal on August 1 to Rs 2,050 per quintal on August 19.
- In contrast, between March and May, onion farmers grappled with financial challenges as their produce was fetching prices ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 700 per quintal.
- The current price surge can be attributed to two factors:
  - A scarcity of stored onions and lower-than-anticipated onion acreage.
  - Unlike certain vegetables such as okra or beans, onions are not cultivated year-round.
- The downturn began last year when India experienced a reduction in onion acreage.
- The Crop and Weather Watch Group reported that onion sowing amounted to over 3.29 lakh hectares, falling short of the target of 3.76 lakh hectares.
- The situation worsened due to damage to the Rabi crop in March and April, when many onion-growing states, including Maharashtra, were impacted by unseasonal rainfall and hailstorms.
- Furthermore, farmers, who typically wait until after June to sell their Rabi onions, were compelled to do so in May due to concerns about the quality of stored produce.
- Despite the Maharashtra government's announcement in March of a special scheme offering onion growers a subsidy of Rs 300 per quintal, many farmers have yet to benefit from the scheme.
- Consequently, the discrepancy between supply and demand has contributed to the current price increase.
- This domestic price increase coincides with heightened demand for Indian onions in the international market, particularly from countries such as Bangladesh and West Asia.
- The imposition of a 40 percent export duty is expected to disrupt trade price parity.

- Many traders had already entered export contracts at lower prices, and they will now bear the burden of this duty.
- Approximately 4,500 tons of onions are in transit, and exporters will incur losses as a result.
- The government believes that the increased export duty will keep onions within the country and enhance availability in the local market.
- This measure is anticipated to ensure smoother supply and lower prices.

## Ragging Laws in India: Preventing Campus Harassment

### Inside Story of the News:

A tragic incident occurred last week at Kolkata's Jadavpur University campus, where an 18-year-old undergraduate student lost his life due to a fall from the second floor of his hostel. Considering the family's allegations that the student was a victim of campus ragging, the article explores the manner in which Indian laws and policies address the issue of ragging.

- In a 2001 case (Vishwa Jagriti Mission), the court defined ragging as any disruptive behavior, whether through spoken or written words or actions, that leads to annoyance, hardship, or psychological harm, causing shame or embarrassment to a fresher or junior student, and adversely affecting their physical or mental well-being.
- Supreme Court guidelines stressed the importance of establishing proctorial committees within educational institutions to prevent and address ragging.
- Furthermore, the guidelines emphasized the possibility of reporting ragging incidents to the police if they become unmanageable or constitute cognizable offenses.
- **In 2009, the Supreme Court revisited the issue of ragging** and appointed a committee led by **former CBI Director RK Raghavan** to comprehensively address the problem.
- The committee's recommendations were **later adopted by the University Grants Commission (UGC)**.
- The UGC issued detailed guidelines that universities must adhere to in order to effectively combat ragging.
- These UGC guidelines, titled "**Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions**," outlined various forms of ragging, including teasing, causing physical or psychological harm, generating a sense of shame, and engaging in financial extortion.
- The guidelines also mandated universities to publicly declare their commitment to preventing ragging and required students to sign undertakings stating they would not engage in such activities.
- The UGC placed responsibility on educational institutions to take proactive measures against ragging.
- Universities were required to establish committees composed of course-in charge, student advisors, wardens, and senior students.
- These committees were tasked with monitoring and regulating interactions between freshers and seniors, ensuring a healthy and safe environment.

- At an institutional level, the **UGC mandates universities to publicly declare their intent to prevent ragging and requires students to sign an undertaking that they will not engage in ragging activities.**
- If found guilty by the anti-ragging committee, the UGC guidelines require any committee member to file a First Information Report (FIR) within 24 hours of receiving such information.

### Legislation to Prevent Ragging in India: A Comprehensive Overview:

- While ragging itself is not a distinct offense, it can be subject to penalties under various other sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- For instance, the act of wrongful restraint is covered by Section 339 of the IPC, and it can result in simple imprisonment for up to one month, a fine of up to Rs 500, or both.
- Wrongful restraint occurs when a person is prevented from moving in a direction, they have a legal right to go.
- Section 340 of the IPC deals with wrongful confinement, defined as the wrongful restraint of a person in a manner that limits their movement within certain boundaries.
- Several Indian states have implemented specific laws aimed at addressing ragging.
- For instance, The Kerala Prohibition of Ragging Act 1998 lays out provisions for suspending or expelling students accused of ragging.
- Importantly, this law mandates that educational institutions must promptly inform the nearest police station of any such incidents.
- Failure to do so by the institution is considered "deemed abetment" of the offense.

## Understanding Hurricane- Hilary: Nature's Powerful Cyclones

### Inside Story of the News:

**Hurricane Hilary** is on track to be the initial tropical storm to make landfall in Southern California in over eight decades. According to the National Weather Service (NWS), typically, around five hurricanes hit the US coastline in an average three-year span, but this phenomenon has never occurred on the West Coast. Therefore, Hurricane Hilary, presently heading towards Southern California and Mexico, is an exceptionally unusual event.

- A hurricane is a formidable and destructive tropical storm characterized by robust winds, substantial rainfall, and reduced atmospheric pressure.
- These storms are alternatively referred to as cyclones or typhoons in various regions around the world, with the terminology depending on the geographic area.
- In the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern North Pacific, they go by the name hurricanes.
- In the northwestern Pacific, they are known as typhoons, while in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean, they are designated as cyclones.
- Hurricane Hilary stands as a significant Category 4 hurricane, originating in the eastern Pacific Ocean on August 16, 2023.
- Hurricanes are categorized using the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, which classifies them on a scale of 1 to 5 based on their wind speeds.

- Hurricanes achieving category three or higher are classified as major hurricanes.
- Remarkably, it marks the first occurrence of a tropical storm impacting Southern California since 1939.
- Hurricane Hilary is approaching California due to a combination of factors, including a high-pressure system over the western U.S., a low-pressure system in the eastern Pacific, and the presence of an El Niño event that elevates ocean temperatures near the equator.
- These elements create favorable conditions for tropical cyclones to form and move northward along the coasts of Mexico and Central America.
- Nevertheless, most of these storms typically weaken or shift westward before reaching California. This is attributed to factors such as cold water, chilly ocean currents, and unfavorable winds along the U.S. West Coast.
- Hilary, however, deviates from this pattern as it has maintained its intensity and followed a more northerly trajectory than usual.

## Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Programme: Boosting Manufacturing in India

### Inside Story of the News:

Over the last few months, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan and the Minister of State for Electronics Rajeev Chandrasekhar have sparred over how well a Central government scheme to boost electronics manufacturing has been faring.

- Alongside two other economists, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan recently published a concise discussion paper asserting that the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) program is not effectively propelling India towards becoming a self-reliant manufacturing powerhouse.
- They contended that the government is utilizing taxpayers' funds to establish an ecosystem primarily focused on low-level assembly jobs, which would still rely heavily on imports.
- Approximately five years ago, the Government of India expressed its desire to encourage more companies to engage in manufacturing within the country.
- Manufacturing is a critical driver of economic growth and is associated with what economists refer to as a multiplier effect.
- Each job created and every rupee invested in manufacturing has a positive and cascading impact on other sectors within the economy.
- To stimulate manufacturing activities in India, the government introduced the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) program.
- Under PLI, the government provides financial incentives to both foreign and domestic companies engaged in manufacturing within India.
- The annual incentive payment is determined based on a percentage of the revenue generated and is applicable for up to five years.

### PLI Programme for Smartphone Manufacturing: Driving Innovation and Growth:

- The industry that has displayed the most enthusiasm for this program is smartphone manufacturing.

- Companies such as Micromax, Samsung, and Foxconn (a producer for Apple) have the potential to receive up to 6% of their incremental sales income through the PLI initiative.
- Mobile phone exports have witnessed a remarkable surge, increasing from \$300 million in FY2018 to an astounding \$11 billion in FY23.
- Meanwhile, imports, which stood at \$3.6 billion for mobile phones in FY2018, have declined to \$1.6 billion in FY23.
- Central government Ministers, including Mr. Chandrasekhar, have consistently cited these statistics as evidence of the PLI scheme's effectiveness.

### Raghuram Rajan's Perspective, Union Government's Response, and Conclusion:

- In his paper, the former Central bank governor contended that while the imports of fully assembled mobile phones have decreased, imports of mobile phone components, including items such as display screens, cameras, batteries, and printed circuit boards, surged between FY21 and FY23.
- Interestingly, these are the same two years when mobile phone exports experienced the most significant growth.
- He argued that manufacturers aren't genuinely engaged in conventional mobile phone production in India, which would involve relocating their supply chains to India and manufacturing most components domestically.
- Instead, companies are importing all the necessary parts and assembling them in India to create products labeled as 'Made in India.'
- Another criticism revolves around the fact that low-level assembly work doesn't generate well-paying jobs and doesn't yield anywhere near the same multiplier effect that genuine manufacturing might offer.
- Mr. Rajan assumed that all imports of screens, batteries, etc., are solely used for making mobile phones. However, these items may also be used for other products like computer monitors, DSLR cameras, electric vehicles, and more.
- He also pointed out that not all mobile phone production in India benefits from the PLI scheme; only approximately 22% has been covered so far.
- The Minister's primary argument centers on the belief that import dependency isn't as severe as Mr. Rajan suggests.
- The former RBI Governor argued that even if only 60% of imports are utilized for production, India's net exports would still be negative. In other words, even if only 60% of screens, batteries, etc., are used for making mobile phones, the final import tally would still surpass the final export tally.
- The central debate revolves around whether the PLI program will ultimately lead to the creation of sustainable jobs and firmly establish India as a manufacturing and supply hub that adds value to the production process.
- The Union Government maintains that it will take time for the results of the PLI Scheme to become evident.

## BRICS Summit in South Africa: Fostering Collaboration and Cooperation

### Inside Story of the News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has arrived in South Africa to participate in the three-day BRICS summit, commencing on August 22. South Africa is hosting the 15th BRICS Summit. Notably, this marks the first in-person BRICS summit since 2019, with the previous three having been conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- BRICS brings together **5 major emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.**
- As a platform, BRICS represents a substantial share of global demographics, accounting for
  - 42% of the world's population,
  - 30% of its landmass,
  - 23% of global GDP, and
  - approximately 18% of global trade.
- The New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) are the flagship achievements of BRICS.
- BRICS has played a pivotal role in **advocating for the reform of multilateralism and global governance institutions.**

### The 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit: India's Significance and Role:

- **Theme - BRICS in Africa:** Collaboration for Mutually Accelerated Progress, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism.
- A prominent item on the agenda pertains to the expansion of BRICS.
- Over 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, with around 23 countries submitting formal membership applications.
- Of these, consensus seems to be forming around four nations: **Argentina, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran.**
- BRICS leaders are also expected to advance previous discussions on intra-BRICS trade conducted in their respective national currencies.
- However, the much-debated plan to introduce a BRICS currency as a challenger to the dollar does not seem to be currently on the agenda.
- This summit marks the first in-person gathering since the military standoff with China at the Line of Actual Control began in 2020.
- **Slightly over two weeks after the BRICS summit, India is set to host the G20 summit.**
- In this context, Prime Minister Modi aims to ensure the attendance of all BRICS member leaders.
- Additionally, India seeks increased cooperation from China and Russia, both of which have been impeding discussions on a common language for the Leader's declaration to be issued at the G20 summit.
- India may utilize the BRICS forum to engage in discussions regarding issues such as Ukraine, climate change, debt financing, and others, which have been subject to objections by China and Russia, leading to delays in their resolution.

## Chandrayaan-3 Triumphantly Touches Down on the Moon's South Pole

### Inside Story of the News:

The **Chandrayaan-3 lander, known as Vikram**, has achieved a flawless and gentle touchdown on the Moon's surface, marking a historic milestone for India. It positions India as **the first nation to reach the vicinity of the lunar south pole** and the **fourth in the world to achieve a lunar landing**. This mission's primary objectives **were to showcase secure and smooth lunar landing, rover movement, and on-site scientific experiments**. India now stands alongside **the United States, Russia, and China** as one of the select few countries **to have achieved a successful Moon landing**.

- During its descent, Chandrayaan-2 experienced a loss of control at approximately 7.2 km from the Moon's surface.
- Data from its communication system indicated the loss of control, and this information was transmitted until it was around 400 meters above the lunar surface.
- At the time of the crash, the Lander had decelerated to approximately 580 km/hr.
- The successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 follows the setback of the Chandrayaan-2 mission in 2019.
- Chandrayaan-3 had **the objective of exploring the "permanently shadowed regions" near the Moon's South Pole to investigate potential water-ice and resources**.
- The controlled descent of the **Vikram lander achieved one of the closest approaches to the Moon's South Pole**.
- While a significant accomplishment, Vikram's landing occurred on the near side of the Moon, in contrast to China's Change 4, which successfully landed on the Moon's far side.
- Previous lunar missions have predominantly targeted the region near the Moon's equator due to its ease and safety.
- This area offers more favorable terrain and temperatures for sustained instrument operation.
- Additionally, **the presence of sunlight ensures a consistent energy supply for solar-powered instruments**.
- However, the polar regions of the Moon present distinct challenges.
- Many areas are situated in complete darkness without sunlight, and temperatures can plummet to below -230 degrees Celsius.
- These conditions make it challenging to operate instruments, and the presence of large craters further complicates exploration efforts.

### Why the Moon's South Pole Holds Astronomical Significance?

- Compelling **evidence suggests the presence of water ice in the perpetually shadowed craters located at the Moon's southern pole**.
- This water ice holds significant potential as a resource for future human lunar exploration, serving purposes such as drinking, agriculture, and the production of rocket fuel.
- Beyond water ice, the Moon's southern polar region may also harbour other volatile substances, including methane and ammonia, which could become valuable resources for forthcoming human missions.

- The Moon's southern pole stands out as a region of considerable geological interest, notably featuring the South Pole-Aitken basin, the largest impact basin on the lunar surface.
- Delving into the study of the South Pole-Aitken basin has the potential to yield profound insights into the Moon's origin and evolution.
- Furthermore, the Moon's southern pole offers an advantageous location for astronomical observations.
- The permanently shadowed craters in this area are shielded from the Sun's radiation, making them an ideal site for observing radio waves and other forms of radiation that are obstructed by Earth's atmosphere.

### Post-Landing Adventures: What Follows After Chandrayaan-3's Successful Moon Landing?

- Spacecraft typically carry specific instruments and experiments, collectively referred to as payloads, which are responsible for observing and recording events in space.
- The data gathered by these instruments is then transmitted back to Earth, where scientists can analyze and study it.
- The six payloads on the Vikram lander and rover Pragyan for this mission are consistent with those utilized in the previous mission.
- The lander will host four scientific payloads with the aim of investigating lunar quakes, assessing the thermal properties of the lunar surface, monitoring changes in the plasma near the lunar surface, and conducting a passive experiment to precisely measure the distance between Earth and the Moon.
- Notably, the fourth payload originates from NASA.
- Meanwhile, the rover is equipped with two payloads designed to examine the chemical and mineral composition of the lunar surface and ascertain the presence of elements such as magnesium, aluminum, and iron in lunar soil and rocks.

## National Curriculum Framework (NCF): Shaping India's Education Landscape

### Inside Story of the News:

**The Union Minister of Education has recently unveiled the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).** The preliminary proposals for the NCF were made available for public input in April 2023. The updated NCF now stipulates the inclusion of three languages, including two Indian languages, in classes 9-10, and two languages, including one Indian language, in classes 11-12.

- The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) outlines **the objective of creating four National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs)**, and a comprehensive strategy for this endeavor has been collaboratively developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and NCERT.
- To oversee the development of these NCFs, the MoE established the National Steering Committee, with K. Kasturirangan, former ISRO chief, serving as its chairman.
- These four NCFs encompass the following areas:
  - National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE)
  - National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCFECE)



- National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE)
- National Curriculum Framework for Adult Education (NCFAE)
- The NCFs are designed to usher in a significant shift in education, emphasizing the holistic development of children, skill-building, the pivotal role of educators, instruction in the mother tongue, and cultural rootedness.
- The NCF has undergone revisions on four prior occasions (in 1975, 1988, 2000, and 2005).
- If these proposed modifications are implemented, it would mark the fifth revision.
- It's important to note that **both NEP 2020 and the NCFs, which are aligned with the education policy, are not legally binding on individual states.**
- The overarching goal of the NCFs is to contribute to the positive transformation of India's school education system in line with the vision outlined in NEP 2020, including corresponding improvements in curriculum and pedagogy.

### Exploring the Pre-Draft of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE):

- The document outlines the curriculum framework spanning the **age groups from 3 to 18 years.**
- A significant aspect of the document emphasizes the integration of values, deeply rooted in Indian culture.
- This integration is evident in the content and language instruction, pedagogical methods, educational tools and resources, and the underlying philosophical foundation.
- It advocates the teaching of three languages, referred to as R1, R2, and R3, during classes 6, 7, and 8, and two languages in classes 9 and 10 (R1 and R2).
- However, it does not provide specific guidelines for language learning in classes 11 and 12.
- Here, R1 represents the mother tongue or the home language, R2 can be any other language (including English), and R3 encompasses any language other than R1 or R2.
- In the context of **Grade 10 certification**, students are required to complete two mandatory courses chosen from humanities, mathematics and computing, vocational education, physical education, arts education, social science, science, and interdisciplinary fields.
- For **Grade 11 and 12**, students will be offered a selection of courses in the same disciplines for a more in-depth engagement.
- The system will transition from annual exams to modular board exams, with the final result based on the cumulative outcome of each exam.
- Additionally, there will be an immediate shift from the annual system to a semester system in Class 12.

### The Final Iteration of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE):

- **Introducing biannual Class 12 board exams:**
  - This change is aimed at providing students with ample time and opportunities to perform at their best.
  - It allows students to take the board exam in subjects they have completed and feel prepared for, and they will have the option to retain the highest score achieved.
- **Mandatory and elective subjects:**
  - Previously, students in Classes 9 to 12 were required to study five mandatory subjects, with the option to add one more.

- Now, the number of mandatory subjects is seven for Classes 9 and 10, and six for Classes 11 and 12.
- Optional subjects have been categorized into three groups in the NCF.
- The first group includes art education (both visual and performing arts), physical education, and vocational education.
- The second group encompasses Social Science, the Humanities, and interdisciplinary fields.
- The third group consists of Science, Mathematics, and computational thinking.
- **Focus on Indian languages:**
  - The NCF mandates the compulsory teaching of three languages, denoted as R1, R2, and R3, up to Class 10.
  - At least two out of these three languages must be of Indian origin.
  - In classes 11 and 12, students will need to study two languages, and one of them must be an Indian language.
  - The final NCF makes the study of Indian languages obligatory across all schools and boards, in contrast to their optional status in the current curriculum.
- **For Classes 6 to 8:**
  - The NCF specifies that 20% of the Social Science curriculum content should be sourced from the local level, 30% from the regional level, 30% from the national level, and 20% from the global level.
- **Provides flexibility:**
  - The NCF grants students the flexibility to pursue a combination of science and humanities, reducing the rigid distinctions between arts, commerce, and science in Classes 11 and 12 across various school boards.
  - It also allows all boards the option to transition to semester or term-based systems for Class 12 in the long term.