

1. **Prime Minister asks states to ramp up economic activity. Five chief ministers have asked for an extension of the lockdown.**
2. **4213 cases reported in India yesterday, the highest single day rise. State government data shows that the overall infection has crossed the 70,000 mark.**
3. **Supreme Court will set up a panel to look into the 4G Internet curbs in Jammu and Kashmir**
4. **TN sees a record spike of 798 cases.**
5. **TN Industry body wants relaxation in labour laws akin to UP and MP.**
6. **GI tag for Thanjavur Netti Works, Arumbavur Wood Carvings**

Thanjavur Netti Works (Thanjavur Pith Work) is made from pith. The pith is obtained from netti, a hydrophyte plant called as Aeschynomene aspera. The artisans are skilled in this particular craft and this art is traditionally transferred from their forefathers.



Arumbavur Wood Carving is done at Arumbavur and around the Veppanthattai taluk of Perambalur district. The wood carvings are primarily made out of wooden logs of Indian siris (Poo Vaagai, Albizia lebeck), mango (Mangifera indica), lingam tree (Mavilagam), Indian ash tree (Othiyam - Odinawodier), rosewood, neem tree (Vembu - Azadirachta indica). The carvings in Arumbavur Wood Carvings are often inspired by architectural details on temple sculptures and carvings.



7. **Karnataka reports it's first case of COVID relapse.**
8. **Andhra Pradesh has decided to send 13,000 tonnes of Styrene to South Korea in light of the gas leak that took place in Vizag a few days ago.**
9. **Vazhachal forests in Kerala.**
10. **Fresh cases of COVID break out in South Korea that has been attributed to the night clubs and bars in Seoul.**
11. **With oil price crash and COVID 19 Saudi Arabia has decided to bring in harsh austerity measures and even tone down its intervention in Yemen. For India the news is a bitter sweet fruit as low oil prices means less current account deficit and more tax collection through excise duty; low oil prices also means more Indians will lose their job which will lead to less remittances and increase the unemployment burden in the country.**
12. **COVID 19 has done what many state governments have failed to do - linking mandis with e - NAM. There has been a 65% rise in mandis linked to e - NAM post COVID lockdown.**

What is GI status?

GI status is an indication that identifies goods as produced from a particular area, which has special quality or reputation attributable to its geographical origin.

GI-branded goods possess a recall value amongst consumers who essentially attribute these characteristics, qualities or reputation to such geographical origin.

Importance of GI Tag:

GI tag helps the producers to differentiate their products from competing products in the market.

It enables the producers to build a reputation and goodwill around their products, which often fetch a premium price.

The products help in export earning, promotion of tourism, cultural heritage and national identity.

For example Kanjeevaram silk sarees and Pochampally Ikat contribute to exports and popularity.

GIs have great potential to play a major role in trade between countries.

Legal protection to GIs protect livelihoods and encourage employment

Owing to the premium prices that many GIs command today, there is a possibility of preserving many traditional skills.

Benefit to the rural economy by improving the incomes of farmers or nonfarmers.

GI allows genuine producers to capture the market and creates entry barriers for fakes.

Key Facts:

Under Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, GIs are covered as an element of IPRs.

GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

In India, GI tag is governed by Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999.

This Act is administered by Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, who is also Registrar of Geographical Indications.

Quantitative Easing

QE refers to an unconventional monetary policy in which a central bank purchases government securities or other securities from the market in order to lower interest rates and increase the money supply. Quantitative easing increases the money supply by flooding financial institutions with capital in an effort to promote increased lending and liquidity. Quantitative easing is considered when short-term interest rates are at or approaching zero, and does not involve the printing of new banknotes.

Reasons:

Like lowering interest rates, QE is supposed to stimulate the economy by encouraging banks to make more loans. Raises stock prices and lowers interest rates, which in turn boosts investment. can also boost economic activity by raising confidence.

QE by USA: Several rounds of QE in America have increased the size of the Federal Reserve's balance sheet—the value of the assets it holds—from less than \$1 trillion in 2007 to more than \$4 trillion now.

QE by EU: European Central Bank (ECB) launched QE in March, 2015 → Its monthly purchases will rise from around €13 billion (\$14 billion) to €60 billion until at least September 2016.

The use of quantitative easing is a last resort when interest rates are already set near zero percent. It is why quantitative easing is an unorthodox monetary policy since central banks will only perform quantitative easing when all other options are not helping the economy. Concerns for the CIS, BRIC, and other emerging economies is related to how the globalized nature of the international economy and actions by the United States or the European Union impact the emerging economies. The effects of such QE would be :

In general, financial firms that are now free to lend will rush their investments into the emerging economies. This is because there is a higher rate of return on investments in emerging countries compared to highly developed countries like the United States.

An increase of local inflation. As more foreign currency enters into a country, like a CIS or BRIC country, the local economy reacts with inflation since more money, foreign or domestic, is available in the local market.

Local currencies could be devalued. With the quantitative easing cheaper, other countries react by devaluing their currencies so their exchange rates are lower. This can cause a global currency war, resulting in large scale, impaired economic growth since citizens will be unable to purchase many goods or services.

GI Tags products (2019):

14 products that got a GI tag this year:

Odisha – Kandhamal Haldi
Himachal Pradesh – Kala Zeera
Chhattisgarh – Jeeraphool Rice
Karnataka – Coorg Arabica Coffee
Andhra Pradesh – Araku Valley Arabica
Kerala – Wayanad Robusta Coffee
Karnataka- Sirsi Supari

Challenges:

The special treatment to wines and spirits in TRIPS Agreement appears to be developed country centric.

Developing countries, including India, seek the same higher level of protection for all GIs as was given under TRIPS for wines and spirits.

The battle for GI tag between states.

False use of geographical indications by unauthorized parties is detrimental to consumers and legitimate producers.

Cheap Power loom saris are sold as reputed Banarsi handloom saris, harming both the producers and consumers.

Such unfair business practices result in loss of revenue for the genuine right-holders of the GI and also misleads consumers.

Protection of GI has, over the years, emerged as one of the most contentious IPR issues.

Way Forward:

The benefits of GI tag is realised only when these products are effectively marketed and protected against illegal copying.

Effective marketing and protection requires quality assurance, brand creation, post-sale consumer feedback and support, prosecuting unauthorised copiers, etc.

For internationally recognised products like Darjeeling tea, international protection is of crucial importance

Legal protection to GIs also extends to protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expression contained in the products.

Hence Intellectual Property is a power tool for economic development and wealth creation particularly in the developing world.

GIs have the potential to be our growth engine. Policy-makers must pay a heed to this and give Indian GI products their true reward.

Moreover, the money that will come in will be “hot money“ and such investments are very volatile and short term. Hence their later withdrawal from the economy will lead to spiraling down of the local currency. Due to the unfavorable and fluctuating market, investors will be skeptical to invest in the stock markets. The EU is India’s largest trading partner and this will hit the Indian exports to the EU badly. If the nations of the European Union are not careful with the amount of quantitative easing they perform, it will have dire consequences around the world. The European Union and others need to solve their economic problems, but if they are not careful, their solutions will seriously harm other nations and plunge the world deeper into economic turmoil.

Introduction

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development, taking into account inter-related socio-economic, cultural and human-health impacts, both beneficial and adverse.

UNEP defines Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a tool used to identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to decision-making. It aims to predict environmental impacts at an early stage in project planning and design, find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, shape projects to suit the local environment and present the predictions and options to decision-makers.

Environment Impact Assessment in India is statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act, 1986 which contains various provisions on EIA methodology and process.

History of EIA in India

The Indian experience with Environmental Impact Assessment began over 20 years back. It started in 1976-77 when the Planning Commission asked the Department of Science and Technology to examine the river-valley projects from an environmental angle.

Till 1994, environmental clearance from the Central Government was an administrative decision and lacked legislative support.

On 27 January 1994, the then Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, under the Environmental (Protection) Act 1986, promulgated an EIA notification making Environmental Clearance (EC) mandatory for expansion or modernisation of any activity or for setting up new projects listed in Schedule 1 of the notification.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notified new EIA legislation in September 2006.

The notification makes it mandatory for various projects such as mining, thermal power plants, river valley, infrastructure (road, highway, ports, harbours and airports) and industries including very small electroplating or foundry units to get environment clearance.

However, unlike the EIA Notification of 1994, the new legislation has put the onus of clearing projects on the state government depending on the size/capacity of the project.

The EIA Process

EIA involves the steps mentioned below. However, the EIA process is cyclical with interaction between the various steps.

Screening: The project plan is screened for scale of investment, location and type of development and if the project needs statutory clearance.

Scoping: The project’s potential impacts, zone of impacts, mitigation possibilities and need for monitoring.

Collection of baseline data: Baseline data is the environmental status of study area

Impact prediction: Positive and negative, reversible and irreversible and temporary and permanent impacts need to be predicted which presupposes a good understanding of the project by the assessment agency.
Mitigation measures and EIA report: The EIA report should include the actions and steps for preventing, minimizing or by passing the impacts or else the level of compensation for probable environmental damage or loss.

Public hearing: On completion of the EIA report, public and environmental groups living close to project site may be informed and consulted.

Decision making: Impact Assessment Authority along with the experts consult the project-in-charge along with consultant to take the final decision, keeping in mind EIA and EMP (Environment Management Plan).

Monitoring and implementation of environmental management plan: The various phases of implementation of the project are monitored.

Assessment of Alternatives, Delineation of Mitigation Measures and Environmental Impact Assessment

Report: For every project, possible alternatives should be identified, and environmental attributes compared. Alternatives should cover both project location and process technologies.

Once alternatives have been reviewed, a mitigation plan should be drawn up for the selected option and is supplemented with an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) to guide the proponent towards environmental improvements.

Risk assessment: Inventory analysis and hazard probability and index also form part of EIA procedures.

Stakeholders in the EIA Process

Those who propose the project

The environmental consultant who prepare EIA on behalf of project proponent

Pollution Control Board (State or National)

Public has the right to express their opinion

The Impact Assessment Agency

Regional centre of the MoEFCC

Salient Features of 2006 Amendments to EIA Notification

Environment Impact Assessment Notification of 2006 has decentralized the environmental clearance projects by categorizing the developmental projects in two categories, i.e., Category A (national level appraisal) and Category B (state level appraisal).

Category A projects are appraised at national level by Impact Assessment Agency (IAA) and the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) and Category B projects are appraised at state level.

State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) are constituted to provide clearance to Category B process.

After 2006 Amendment the EIA cycle comprises of four stages:

Screening

Scoping

Public hearing

Appraisal

Category A projects require mandatory environmental clearance and thus they do not undergo the screening process.

Category B projects undergoes screening process and they are classified into two types.

Category B1 projects (Mandatorily requires EIA).

Category B2 projects (Do not require EIA).

Thus, Category A projects and Category B, projects undergo the complete EIA process whereas Category B2 projects are excluded from complete EIA process.

Importance of EIA

EIA links environment with development for environmentally safe and sustainable development.

EIA provides a cost effective method to eliminate or minimize the adverse impact of developmental projects.

EIA enables the decision makers to analyse the effect of developmental activities on the environment well before the developmental project is implemented.

EIA encourages the adaptation of mitigation strategies in the developmental plan.

EIA makes sure that the developmental plan is environmentally sound and within the limits of the capacity of assimilation and regeneration of the ecosystem.

Shortcomings of EIA Process

Applicability: There are several projects with significant environmental impacts that are exempted from the notification either because they are not listed in schedule I, or their investments are less than what is provided for in the notification.

Composition of expert committees and standards: It has been found that the team formed for conducting EIA studies is lacking the expertise in various fields such as environmentalists, wildlife experts, Anthropologists and Social Scientists.

Public hearing:

Public comments are not considered at an early stage, which often leads to conflict at a later stage of project clearance.

A number of projects with significant environmental and social impacts have been excluded from the mandatory public hearing process.

The data collectors do not pay respect to the indigenous knowledge of local people.

Quality of EIA: One of the biggest concerns with the environmental clearance process is related to the quality of EIA report that are being carried out.

Lack of Credibility: There are so many cases of fraudulent EIA studies where erroneous data has been used, same facts used for two totally different places etc.

Often, and more so for strategic industries such as nuclear energy projects, the EMPs are kept confidential for political and administrative reasons.

Details regarding the effectiveness and implementation of mitigation measures are often not provided.

Emergency preparedness plans are not discussed in sufficient details and the information not disseminated to the communities.

Way Forward

Independent EIA Authority.

Sector wide EIAs needed.

Creation of a centralized baseline data bank.

Dissemination of all information related to projects from notification to clearance to local communities and the general public.

Applicability: All those projects where there is likely to be a significant alteration of ecosystems need to go through the process of environmental clearance, without exception.

No industrial developmental activity should be permitted in ecologically sensitive areas.

Public hearing: Public hearings should be applicable to all hitherto exempt categories of projects which have environmental impacts.

The focus of EIA needs to shift from utilization and exploitation of natural resources to conservation of natural resources.

It is critical that the preparation of an EIA is completely independent of the project proponent.

Grant of clearance: The notification needs to make it clear that the provision for site clearance does not imply any commitment on the part of the impact Assessment agency to grant full environmental clearance.

Composition of expert committees: The present executive committees should be replaced by expert people from various stakeholder groups, who are reputed in environmental and other relevant fields.

Monitoring, compliance and institutional arrangements:

The EIA notification needs to build within it an automatic withdrawal of clearance if the conditions of clearance are being violated and introduce more stringent punishment for noncompliance. At present the EIA notification limits itself to the stage when environmental clearance is granted.

The composition of the NGT needs to be changed to include more judicial persons from the field of environment.

Citizen should be able to access the authority for redressal of all violation of the EIA notification as well as issues relating to non-compliance.

Capacity building: NGOs, civil society groups and local communities need to build their capacities to use the EIA notification towards better decision making on projects.

The global economy continues to be hit as one big economy after another falters on economic growth. This increases the likelihood of a global recession in the coming future.

As talk of a recession has started, Bond yields curve have also featured in the news both globally and within India as it most accurately reflects what investors think about current and future economic growth prospects.

A bond is an instrument to borrow money. A bond could be floated/issued by a country's government or by a company to raise funds.

Since government bonds which are referred to as G-secs in India come with the sovereign guarantee, they are considered one of the safest investments. As a result, they also give the lowest returns on investment or yield.

On the other hand, investments in corporate bonds tend to be riskier because the chances of failure and the chances of the company not repaying the loan are higher.

The Bond yield is the effective rate of return that it earns. But the rate of return is not fixed as it changes with the price of the bond.

Bond Yield curve is a graphical representation of yields for bonds with an equal credit rating over different time horizons.

If bond investors expect the economy to grow normally, then they would expect to get more yield when they lend for a longer period. This gives rise to a normal upward sloping yield curve.

The steepness of the yield curve is determined by how fast an economy is expected to grow. When the economy is expected to grow only marginally, the yield curve is "flat".

However, yield inversion happens when the yield on a longer tenure bond becomes less than the yield for a shorter tenure bond. A yield inversion typically portends a recession. An inverted yield curve shows that investors expect the future growth to fall sharply.

The National Agricultural Market (eNAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal which networks the almost 7,000 existing mandis run by Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities, with a promise to promote real-time price discovery based on actual supply and demand.

It was launched in April 2016 but progress was slow, especially as many States did not amend their APMC Acts; most farmers were not part of the cooperatives that would help aggregate the bulk quantity of produce needed to interest online buyers and most mandis did not possess the infrastructure to make the most of the platform. By January 2019, when the first inter-State trade took place, there were only 585 mandis connected to the platform, although the Agriculture Ministry promised to integrate 415 more mandis by March 2020. At the end of March 2020, however, the number of markets connected to eNAM still remained stagnant at 585, even as the nation went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and hundreds of mandis shut their physical gates. The Centre recognised the potential of eNAM in overcoming some of the hurdles of the lockdown, and introduced some important new features in April: a trading module allowing Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to trade produce directly from their collection centres without bringing it to mandis, a warehouse-based trading module and a logistics module offering users trackable transport facilities through aggregators with access to 11 lakh trucks.

