

20th June – 26th June Weekly Compilation

(The Hindu+ Indian Express + PIB + Other World-Wide News)

Black Swan Event

(Source: Financial Express)

A study by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has spoken about the possibility of capital outflows to the tune of \$100 billion from India in case of a major global risk scenario or a “black swan” event. The RBI has said that in this ‘black swan’ event comprising a combination of shocks, potential portfolio outflows can rise to 7.7% of GDP. So, there is a need for maintaining liquid reserves to quell such potential bouts of instability.

- A ‘black swan’ event is a rare, unpredictable event that comes as a surprise and has a significant impact on society or the world.
- These events are said to have 3 distinguishing characteristics
 1. They are extremely **rare** and outside the realm of regular expectations;
 2. They have a **severe impact** after they hit; and
 3. They **seem probable in hindsight** when plausible explanations appear.

Reliance on standard forecasting tools can both fail to predict and potentially increase vulnerability to black swans by propagating risk and offering false security.

- **Origin** - The black swan theory was popularised by author Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his 2007 book ‘The Black Swan’.
- In his book, Taleb does not try to lay out a method to predict such events, but instead stresses on building “robustness” in systems and strategies to deal with black swan occurrences and withstand their impact.
- **Link** - The term itself is linked to the discovery of black swans.
- The Europeans believed all swans to be white until 1697, when a Dutch explorer spotted the first black swan in Australia.
- The metaphor ‘black swan event’ is derived from this unprecedented spotting from the 17th century, and how it upended the West’s understanding of swans.
- **Black Swan Events in the past** - The 2008 global financial crisis is a black swan event triggered by a sudden crash in the booming housing market in the US.
- The fall of the Soviet Union, the terrorist attack in the US in 2001, also fall in the same category.
- **Covid-19 pandemic is not a black swan event.** In fact, it is a ‘white swan’ event, as it was predictable.

Project NIPUN

(Source: PIB)

Recently, the National Initiative for Promoting Upskilling of Nirman workers (NIPUN) - a project for skill training of construction workers - was launched.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed to reduce poverty and vulnerability of urban poor households in the country.

- The project NIPUN is an initiative of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) under its flagship scheme of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM).
- It aims to train over 1 lakh construction workers, through fresh skilling and upskilling programmes and provides them with work opportunities in foreign countries also.
- This initiative will enable Nirman workers to be more proficient and skilled while making them adopt future trends in the construction industry by increasing their capabilities and diversifying their skill sets.
- This initiative is expected to **expand horizontally** across the industry.
- The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) will be the Implementation Partner for the project NIPUN.
- NSDC will be responsible for the overall execution of training, monitoring and candidate tracking.

Three Parts of Project Implementation	Number of Candidates
Onsite Skill Training at construction sites through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	80,000
Training through Fresh Skilling by Plumbing and Infrastructure Sector Skill Council (SSC) in trades having promising placement potentials	14,000
International Placement through industries/ builders/ contractors	12,000

- The courses are aligned with National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and will be imparted at accredited and affiliated training centres.
- Under NIPUN, NSDC will provide trainees with 'Kaushal Bima', three-year accidental insurance with coverage of Rs 2 lakhs, digital skills such as cashless transactions and the BHIM app, etc.
- The National Real Estate Development Council (NAREDCO) and the Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) have joined Project NIPUN as industry partners.
- They will identify training job roles of aspirational value in the construction sector in collaboration with the SSC.

Swachh Survekshan 2023

(Source: The Hindu)

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched the Swachh Survekshan 2023 under the Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBMU) 2.0

The first phase of the SBMU 1.0 (2014-2019) aimed at making urban India **Open Defecation Free (ODF)** and achieving 100% scientific management of municipal solid waste.

- Swachh Survekshan was introduced by MoHUA in 2016 as a competitive framework to encourage cities to improve the status of urban sanitation while encouraging large scale citizen participation.
- It is the largest Urban sanitation survey in the world.
- The Swachh Survekshan (SS) 2023 will be the 8th edition of the **national-level annual sanitation survey of cleanliness** in cities.
- Designed with the theme of 'Waste to Wealth' as its driving philosophy, the SS 2023 is aimed at achieving **circularity in waste management** - one of key objectives under the SBMU 2.0.
- The survey will give priority to the **principle of 3Rs** - Reduce, Recycle and Reuse.
- **Changes in SS 2023** - The evaluation will be conducted in **4 phases**, instead of 3 phases in earlier editions.
- citizen validation and field assessment of processing facilities is being introduced in phase 3 also, in addition to phase 4.
- In SS 2023, additional weightage has been given to
 1. Source segregation of waste,
 2. Enhancement of waste processing capacity of cities to match the waste generation and
 3. Reduction of waste going to the dumpsites.
- Also, indicators have been introduced with additional weightage on emphasizing the need for phased reduction of plastic, plastic waste processing, encourage waste to wonder parks and zero waste events.
- Ranking of Wards within the cities is being promoted through SS 2023.
- The cities would also be assessed on dedicated indicators on the issues of 'Open Urination' (Yellow Spots) and 'Open Spitting' (Red Spots), being faced by the cities.

India's emerging twin deficit problem

(Source: Indian Express)

The Monthly Economic Review highlights two key areas of concern for the Indian economy: the fiscal deficit and the current account deficit (or CAD)

Fiscal deficit

- As government revenues take a hit following cuts in excise duties on diesel and petrol, an upside risk to the budgeted level of gross fiscal deficit has emerged

- The fiscal deficit is essentially the amount of money that the government has to borrow in any year to fill the gap between its expenditures and revenues.
- Higher levels of fiscal deficit typically imply more borrowing by the government in the market which leads to crowding out effect.
- At a time when the government is trying its best to kick-start and sustain a private sector investment cycle, borrowing more than what it budgeted will be counter-productive.

Current account deficit

The current account essentially **refers to two specific sub-parts**:

- **Import and Export of goods** — this is the “trade account”.
- **Import and export of services** — this is called the “invisibles account”.
- **The net effect of a trade account and the invisibles account is a deficit, then it is called a current account deficit or CAD.**
- **A widening CAD tends to weaken the domestic currency** because a CAD implies more dollars (or foreign currencies) are being demanded than rupees.
- Costlier imports such as crude oil and other commodities will not only widen the CAD but also put downward pressure on the rupee. A weaker rupee will, in turn, make future imports costlier.
- The report underscores the **need to trim revenue expenditure.**
- **Rationalizing non-capex expenditure** has thus become critical, not only for **protecting growth supportive capex but also for avoiding fiscal slippages**
- Capex or capital expenditure essentially refers to money spent towards creating productive assets such as roads, buildings, ports etc.
- Capex has a much bigger multiplier effect on the overall GDP growth than revenue expenditure.

Reform in India’s higher judiciary

(Source: The Hindu)

Problems

Retirement age of judges

- **Disparity between the retirement ages of High Court and Supreme Court judges**; High Court judges now retire at 62 and Supreme Court judges at 65.
- Doing away with this disparity and **increasing the age of retirement for both High Court and Supreme Court judges** will reduce the burden of pending cases in higher judiciary

Lack of a culture of service

- **Most of Supreme Court judges after their tenure focus on arbitrations and amass** considerable fortunes with high fees and multiple sittings.
- **A minority of judges devote themselves to public service**

- Another lot are appointed to various constitutional posts and tribunals and commissions.
- It would be worthwhile reform to **create a cadre of public service for retired judges and from this pool make appointments to the constitutional and statutory posts and special assignments.**

Selection of Chief Justice of India

- It is generally assumed that the **senior most judge of the Supreme Court should be the Chief Justice of India** is not mentioned in the constitution
- **Article 124** merely states that the President will appoint every judge of the Supreme Court, and this includes the Chief Justice
- Public purpose is **better served by ensuring that the judges of the Supreme Court during their entire tenure are not swayed by their expectations or aspirations to the higher office of CJI**

So who should be the CJI?

- CJI should be the best **reputed Chief Justice of a High Court who has proved himself worthy both in judicial office as well as administrative leadership** and has those qualities of heart and head which mark a good leader.
- The appointee should have a **clear three-year term** — not the truncated weeks and months that some CJIs now get.
- He/she should work in a strict manner especially in regard to the roster of allotment of cases, especially the sensitive ones, and appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts and other important matters of judicial and administrative importance.

The above-mentioned reforms will increase the productivity of the higher judiciary and make it accountable to the people of India

A new global standard for AI ethics

(Source: The Hindu)

UNESCO's global agreement on the ethics of AI can guide governments and companies alike

- Artificial intelligence (AI) is more present in our lives than ever.

Issues in AI

- The **data used to feed into AI often aren't representative of the diversity** of our societies, producing outcomes that can be said to be biased or discriminatory.
- For instance, while India and China together constitute approximately a third of the world's population, Google Brain estimated that they form just 3% of images used in ImageNet, a widely used dataset.

- There are problems emerging in **facial recognition technologies**, which are used to access our phones, bank accounts and apartments, and are increasingly employed by law-enforcement authorities, in identifying women and darker-skinned people.
- For three such programs released by major technology companies, **the error rate was 1% for light-skinned men, but 19% for dark-skinned men, and up to 35% for dark-skinned women.**
- These **issues are of particular importance to India, which is one of the world's largest markets for AI-related technologies, valued at over \$7.8 billion in 2021.**
- To ensure that the full potential of these technologies is reached, the **right incentives for ethical AI governance need to be established in national and sub-national policy.**

A common rulebook

- Until recently, there was **no common global strategy to take forward this importance agenda.**
- This changed when **193 countries reached a ground-breaking agreement at UNESCO** on how AI should be designed and used by governments and tech companies.
- It aims to **fundamentally shift the balance of power between people, and the businesses and governments developing AI**
- Countries which are members of UNESCO have agreed to implement this recommendation by enacting actions to regulate the entire AI system life cycle, ranging from research, design and development to deployment and use

Recommendations

- It underscores the importance of **the proper management of data, privacy and access to information.**
- It also **calls on member states to ensure that appropriate safeguards schemes are devised for the processing of sensitive data and effective accountability,** and redress mechanisms are provided in the event of harm.
- Recommendation taking a strong stance that
- **AI systems should not be used for social scoring or mass surveillance purposes;**
- that **particular attention must be paid to the psychological and cognitive impact** that these systems can have on children and young people;
- and that member states **should invest in and promote not only digital, media and information literacy skills,** but also socio-emotional and AI ethics skills to strengthen critical thinking and competencies in the digital era.

Significance

- The **new agreement is broad and ambitious.**
- It is a **recognition that AI-related technologies cannot continue to operate without a common rulebook.**

- Governments will themselves use the recommendation as a **framework to establish and update legislation, regulatory frameworks, and policy to embed humanistic principles in enforceable accountability mechanisms.**

Keibul Lamjao National Park

(Source: The Hindu)

People protested against move to shift proposed heritage park site in Manipur

Background

- The State govt. had announced that a **heritage park would come up near the Keibul Lamjao National Park in Bishnupur district.**
- It was expected that the **museum of the Indian National Army where the first Indian flag of Independence was hoisted near the Loktak lake** and the heritage park will attract tourists from the country and abroad.
- Villagers complained that the government had taken up steps to shift the site to a place six km away from the KLNP.
- And they contend that the people of the proposed site are not associated with steps for the protection of the endangered brow-antlered deer (Sangai) in the KNLP.

Keibul Lamjao National Park

- The Keibul Lamjao National Park is a **national park in the Bishnupur district of the state of Manipur in India.**
- It is the **only floating park in the world**, located in North East India, and an **integral part of Loktak Lake.**
- The **national park is characterized by floating decomposed plant material locally called phumdi.**
- It was created in **1966 as a wildlife sanctuary to preserve the natural habitat of the endangered Sangai/Brow antlered deer/Dancing Deer.**
- **In 1977, it was gazetted as national park**

Sangai

- Sangai, Brow antlered deer, Dancing Deer



- It is an **endemic species**, found only in Manipur
- Sangai is a medium-sized deer, with uniquely distinctive antlers, with extremely long brow tine, which form the main beam.
- **State animal of Manipur**

Protection Status

- WPA, 1972: Schedule-1
- IUCN: **Endangered**



Governor's Power to call for a floor test (Source: Indian Express)

As the Maharashtra political crisis continues to play out, the **Governor's powers under the Constitution to call for a floor test takes centrestage.**

Constitutional provisions related to floor test

Article 174(2)(b)

- Article 174(2) (b) of the Constitution **gives powers to the Governor to dissolve the Assembly on the aid and advice of the cabinet.**
- However, the **Governor can apply his mind when the advice comes from a Chief Minister whose majority could be in doubt.**

Article 175(2)

- Under Article 175(2), the **Governor can summon the House and call for a floor test to prove whether the government has the numbers.**

Power of the Speaker

- In 2020, the **Supreme Court, in Shivraj Singh Chouhan & Ors versus Speaker**, upheld the powers of the **Speaker to call for a floor test if there is a prima facie view that the government has lost its majority.**
- When the **House is in session, it is the Speaker who can call for a floor test.**
- But **when the Assembly is not in session, the Governor's residuary powers under Article 163 allow him to call for a floor test.**

Article 163

Council of Ministers to aid and advice Governor

- There shall be a council of Ministers with the chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions, except in so far as he is by or under this constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion.
- If any question arises whether any matter is or is not a matter as respects which the Governor is by or under this Constitution required to act in his discretion, the decision of the Governor in his discretion shall be final, and the validity of anything done by the Governor shall not be called in question on the ground that he ought or ought not to have acted in his discretion.
- The question whether any, and if so what, advice was tendered by Ministers to the Governor shall not be inquired into in any court.

A turning point for Ukraine and its women's rights

(Source: The Hindu)

The Ukrainian Parliament — the Verkhovna Rada — passed a Bill on June 20 ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

- It is a huge step forward for the protection of women and girls from all forms of violence, whether in Ukraine or abroad, and could not be more timely for a number of reasons.
- **The Istanbul Convention:** The most far-reaching international treaty designed to set legally binding standards for governments in Europe for the **prevention, protection, and prosecution** of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence in Ukraine

The risk of women becoming victims of gender-based violence in Ukraine has increased immensely over the course of Russia's eight-year war.

- Since the beginning of Russia's invasion in late February 2022: Suggests that the Russian troops have been using rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war and instrument of terror to control civilians.
- Although, the Russian authorities have denied alleged sexual abuse by their troops, the truth is that women in Ukraine have been disproportionately affected by the war. And as the tensions continue to rise, the risk of gender-based violence will also be heightened, with survivors suffering more severe levels of abuse.
- The prompt implementation of the convention could thus equip the Ukrainian authorities to deal with these atrocities and serve to reassure the survivors and provide them with the confidence to seek justice.

Women's rights activists in Ukraine have long been calling for changes.

- Domestic violence has been an administrative offence in Ukraine since 2003, which is punishable by a fine, community work of up to 60 hours or by imprisonment of up to 15 days. Then in 2019, systematic domestic violence was criminalised, which in practice meant that criminal charges will only be imposed if the abuser commits three offences in a year'.
- However, these pieces of legislation and forms of punishment often fell short of what the victims anticipated as being fair prosecution, discouraging them and others to go through the process of seeking justice.
- The convention's ratification will not only expand 'the list of abuse against women punishable by law in Ukraine — including but not limited to psychological abuse, stalking, forced marriage, physical and sexual abuse, forced abortion, sterilisation' — but also provide the authorities with the opportunity to bring about changes in its legislation and institutional procedures.
- It will also mean that Ukraine will be responsible for financing more shelters for women, training social workers to adequately handle cases of sexual violence, and increase resources of assistance available for victims.

Aiding EU integration

- Help in Ukraine's European integration: Guaranteeing human rights is the most important aspect that is considered when European Union (EU) membership is being extended to a country. It has thus been crucial for Ukraine to demonstrate actions that will bring the country closer to European legislations and values.
- The decision is of particular significance for the Netherlands and Sweden, two 'sceptical' countries that were initially blocking Ukraine's candidate seat but have now eventually agreed to back EU member status for Ukraine.

The Challenge: Proper implementation of the convention will require financial resources, which seems like a challenging goal for a country already facing economic downfall due to the Russian invasion.

Building resilience against recurring floods (Source: The Indian Express)

People in the Northeastern state are facing the fury of the Brahmaputra, Barak, and their tributaries.

- Nearly 100 people have lost their lives in the rain-induced landslides and floods that have engulfed 30 of Assam's 35 districts
- The Centre and state government have commenced relief operations but the raging rivers have hobbled these activities.

Promises have rarely been matched by action in Assam

For more than half a century, Assam has relied on embankments to stave off the swelling rivers during the monsoons. A growing body of literature shows that these walled structures — most of them have not been repaired for decades — are ill-equipped to tackle floods, especially at a time when climate change is complicating the state's hydrology. Assam's flood management data shows that it needs to take such studies seriously.

- Close to 1,300 cases of embankment breaches have been recorded since 2000.
- Floods ripped apart nearly 200 embankments in 2020. This year, they have destroyed nearly 300 such structures.
- A report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources last year advised the state government to strengthen flood protection structures, address soil erosion and de-silt rivers. But these measures continue to be on the to-do list of the Assam government. In fact, the state's flood management outlay has come down in the past two years.

The Way Forward

- The state government would do well to **build people's resistance** to the elements in cities, towns and villages. Such measures include putting flood warning systems in place and shifting people and livestock to safer locations.
- **Forming a de-siltation plan:** The river is one of the important ingredients when it comes to drainage. The de-siltation plan is very expensive but it is needed.
- **Sustainable usage of land:** Low-lying areas in cities have to be reserved for parks and other low-impact human activities, restrict encroachments in natural drainage areas; clearance of river beds, and proper implementation of Coastal Regulation Zone rules. Planting drought-resistant and flood-resistant sturdy trees in vulnerable areas also helps.

- **Utilising International best practices:** Implementing 'Mobile Walls' like in Germany, and 'sponge' cities in line with cities in China which involves replacing concrete pavements with porous pavements to ensure better filtration.
- **Policy making and city planning:** Each city should have their Flood mitigation plans strongly embedded within the master plan of the city. There should be prompt, well-coordinated and effective response in case of urban floods to minimize casualties and loss of property and also facilitate early recovery.
- **Wetlands protection:** Urban flooding may increase if wetlands not protected. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has recommended strong laws to protect urban lakes, their catchment and feeder channels
- Idea is that a holistic plan should **engage all the development partners**. It should try to address all the issues and modify it as per local needs.

Tree Pruning

(Source: The Print)

A drive has been launched by the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) for pruning old trees in the city's Connaught Place area.

Tree Pruning

- A common maintenance procedure to maintain structural integrity and aesthetics
- **Goal:** To remove unwanted branches, improve the tree's structure, and direct new, healthy growth.
- **Benefits:**
 - When you remove old branches, you let trees put out healthy, new growth.
 - A clean, polished look that elevates the whole landscape.
 - Set the tree up with a good foundation for long-term health.

Soil Conservation for Food Security

(Source: The Indian Express)

Context: Food security is one of the core indicators of economic development. The modernisation of agriculture has brought huge dividends in terms of ensuring food security to large swathes of people, apart from improving crop production.

A key element of sustainable food production is healthy soil because nearly 95 percent of global food production depends on soil. The current status of soil health is worrisome.

Soil degradation on an unprecedented scale is a significant challenge to sustainable food production:

- About one-third of the earth's soils is already degraded and alarmingly, about 90 per cent could be degraded by 2050 if no corrective action is taken.

- While soil degradation is believed to be occurring in 145 million hectares in India, it is estimated that 96.40 million hectares — about 30 per cent of the total geographical area — is affected by land degradation.
- Globally, the biophysical status of 5,670 million hectares of land is declining, of which 1,660 million hectares (29 per cent) is attributed to human-induced land degradation, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's 'State of Land, Soil and Water' report.

The Way Forward

- The time has come for collective global action involving governments and civil society to reverse this alarming trend.
- With the threat to food security looming large globally, compounded by the attendant hazard of serious damage to the environment, the need of the hour is to **adopt innovative policies and agro-ecological practices that create healthy and sustainable food production**
- **Reduce dependence on pesticides worldwide:** Extensive use of fertilisers and pesticides led to the deterioration of soil health and contamination of water bodies and the food chain, which pose serious health risks to people and livestock.
- As soil is a fragile and finite resource, **sustainable land management practices** are essential to ensure healthy soil. They are critical not only to **preventing degradation** but also to **ensuring food security**. Every effort must also be made to prevent soil erosion as it not only affects fertility but also increases the risk of floods and landslides.
- To address soil salinization (Salinity is the presence of salts (such as sodium chloride, magnesium, and calcium sulfates) and bicarbonates, in soil and water.):
 - Soil washing- Stagnate water and flush it out, but if the water table is affected this might not yield result.
 - Chemical treatment- Use of Gypsum to counter salinity
 - Isolating the canal water by building side walls.
 - Proper choice of agricultural practices and crops.
 - Discourage borewell instead do rain water harvesting using pits.
- Natural farming and organic farming are not only cost-effective but also lead to improvement in soil health and the farmland ecosystem.

Note:

Soil health card scheme

- Soil health cards have been distributed to about 23 crore farmers – Improved the health of the soil + benefited innumerable farmers by increasing crop production and their incomes.
- India is well on course to achieving the restoration of 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 – A decrease in the use of chemical fertilisers in the range of 8-10 per cent as a result of the application of fertilisers and micro-nutrients as per the recommendations on the soil health cards. Overall, an increase in crop yields to the tune of 5-6 per cent was reported as a result.

Save Soil Campaign

- By Sadhguru, Isha Foundation

IQRA IAS