Monthly Policy Review
September 2023

Highlights of this Issue

Special Session of Parliament held from September 18 to September 21, 2023 (p. 2)
Five Bills were listed for consideration and passing; none were passed. The Women's Reservation Bill was introduced and passed.

Parliament passes Bill to provide reservation to women in legislatures (p. 2)
The Bill reserves one third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

Current account deficit at 1.1% of GDP in the first quarter of 2023-24 (p. 2)
India recorded a current account deficit of USD 9.2 billion (1.1% of GDP) in the first quarter (April-June) of 2023-24, significantly lower than USD 17.9 billion (2.1% of GDP) in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23.

Law Commission Report on age of consent under POCSO Act (p. 3)
The Commission recommended against reducing the age of consent under the POCSO Act to 16 years. It recommended amendments to provide relief for sexual activities with tacit approval of a child 16 years or above.

Central government constitutes Committee to review simultaneous elections (p. 2)
The Committee will review and suggest changes to laws and regulations related to holding simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies.

Standing Committees submit reports on various subjects and policies
Reports submitted include: (i) prison conditions, infrastructure and reforms, (ii) the Employees State Insurance Corporation, (iii) implementation of NEP and (iv) the working of the Archaeological Survey of India.

Cabinet approves Phase III of e-Courts scheme (p. 5)
Phase-III of the scheme aims to create a unified technology platform for the judiciary, facilitating paperless interface between the courts and litigants. It will span for four years with a financial outlay of Rs 7,210 crore.

TRAI releases several recommendations (p. 5)
TRAI has released several recommendations across various sectors, such as: (i) promoting network and telecom equipment manufacturing, (ii) issues related to FM Radio Broadcasting, and (iii) connectivity in the north-east.

Bharat New Car Assessment Programme for assessing crash safety notified (p. 7)
The Programme rates cars based on their performance in crash tests. Cars up to 3.5 tonnes will be eligible for the tests and based on performance will be awarded star ratings corresponding to their safety.

Comments invited on guidelines regulating dark patterns in e-commerce (p. 6)
The draft guidelines seek to prohibit the use of dark patterns in e-commerce. Dark patterns are deceptive design patterns in user interfaces designed to mislead or trick users into performing unintended actions.

Framework for promoting energy storage systems released (p. 9)
Energy storage systems are used to store energy generated, especially from renewable sources. They are crucial for implementation of renewable energy. The framework promotes the development of such energy storage.

Extended Producer Responsibility Rules for used oil notified (p. 10)
The Rules outline responsibilities of used oil stakeholders such as responsibility of Central Pollution Control Board for integrating all stakeholders with a central digital system and conduct awareness programmes.

October 3, 2023

Parliament

Special Session 2023 held; Women's Reservation Bill passed

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The Special Session of Parliament was held from September 18, 2023 to September 21, 2023, with four sittings. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023 (Women's Reservation Bill), was introduced and passed during this session. The Bill reserves one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of Delhi.

For more details on legislative business transacted during the Special Session 2023, see here.

Standing Committees identify subjects for examination during 2023-24

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14 of the 24 Departmentally Related Standing Committees of Parliament have identified subjects for detailed examination during the year 2023-24. These are listed in the Annexure.

Macroeconomic Development

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Current account deficit at 1.1% of GDP in the first quarter of 2023-24

India recorded a current account deficit of USD 9.2 billion (1.1% of GDP) in the first quarter (April-June) of 2023-24, significantly lower than the deficit of USD 17.9 billion (2.1% of GDP) in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23.[1] In the same period, merchandise trade deficit narrowed from USD 63.1 billion to USD 56.6 billion. Current account deficit was USD 1.3 billion (0.2% of GDP) in the fourth quarter (January-March) of 2022-23.

The capital account registered a net inflow of USD 34.4 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24 as compared to a net inflow of USD 22.1 billion in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23. Foreign portfolio investments registered a net inflow of USD 15.7 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24 as compared to a net outflow of USD 14.6 billion in the first quarter of 2022-23. In the fourth quarter of 2022-23, the capital account had registered a net inflow of USD 6.5 billion.

Foreign exchange reserves increased by USD 24.4 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24, significantly higher than an increase of USD 4.6 billion in the same quarter last year.

Table 1: Balance of payments, Q1 2023-24 (USD billion)

	Q1 2022-23	Q4 2022-23	Q1 2023-24
Imports	185.9	168.4	161.6
Exports	122.8	115.8	105.0
Net Services	31.1	39.1	35.1
Other transfers	14.0	12.2	12.3
Current account*	-17.9	-1.4	-9.2
Capital account*	22.1	6.5	34.4
Errors and omissions	0.5	0.4	-0.7
Change in reserves	4.6	5.6	24.4

Note: *Negative figures indicate a deficit.
Sources: RBI; PRS.

Law and Justice

Bill to provide reservation to women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies passed

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The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023 was passed in Parliament.[2] The Bill reserves one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Additionally, this reservation will also extend to the seats reserved for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. Key features are:

- **Commencement of reservation:** The reservation will be effective after a delimitation following the next census. It will be provided for a period of 15 years. However, it shall continue till such date as determined by a law made by Parliament.

- **Rotation of seats:** Seats reserved for women will be rotated after each delimitation.

For a PRS analysis of the Bill, see here.

Central government constitutes Committee on simultaneous elections

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The central government constituted a High-Level Committee to examine and make recommendations on holding simultaneous elections.[3] Simultaneous elections refer to the elections of Lok Sabha, state legislatures, and local bodies being conducted at the same time. The Committee shall comprise former President, Mr. Ram Nath Kovind as Chairman and has seven members. The members of the Committee include: (i) Mr. Amit Shah (Minister of Home Affairs), (ii) Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad (former Leader of

Opposition of Rajya Sabha), and (iii) Mr. N.K. Singh (former Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission).

The Committee will review and suggest changes to laws and regulations related to holding simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies. These changes may include amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The Committee will also examine whether the Constitutional amendments will require ratification by states. Further, the Committee will: (i) suggest a framework for synchronising elections, (ii) recommend safeguards to ensure the continuity of the cycle of simultaneous elections, (iii) examine the logistical and manpower requirements, and (iv) recommend the modalities for the use of a single electoral roll and identity cards for voters in different elections.

The Committee is expected to make recommendations at the earliest.

Cabinet approves eCourts Phase-III

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The Union Cabinet approved Phase III of the eCourts Project as a central sector scheme from 2023 to 2027.[4] The project will receive a financial outlay of Rs 7,210 crore. The eCourts project was initiated in 2007 to digitally enable the Indian judiciary. Phase-II of the scheme concluded in 2023. Phase-I of the scheme led to the computerization of a large number of district courts.[5] Further, Phase-II of the scheme aimed to provide service delivery to citizens, such as accessible websites in local languages.

Phase-III aims to create a unified technology platform for the judiciary along with facilitating a paperless interface between the courts, litigants, and other stakeholders. The objective of Phase-III is to digitise entire courts records. Approximately 28% of the budgetary outlay is estimated to be spent on scanning, digitisation, and digital preservation of case records, while about 17% is estimated to be spent on cloud infrastructure. The expected outcomes of the scheme include: (i) providing judicial services to citizens without technology access via eSewa Kendras, (ii) enabling payment of courts fees and fines from anywhere, and (iii) minimising reliance on paper-based court filings.

Law Commission submits report on age of consent under POCSO Act

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The Law Commission (Chair: Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi) submitted its report on 'Age of Consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012'.[6] Under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, a child is defined as anyone under 18 years old.[7] The Act criminalises sexual

relations with a child irrespective of his or her consent. Key observations and recommendations of the Commission include:

- **Age of consent:** The Commission noted that in most cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrators are someone close to the child, or may belong to the same family. In such cases, consent can be manufactured. The Commission recommended against reducing the age of consent under the POCSO Act to 16 years.

- **Child above 16 years:** The Commission noted that sexual activities with tacit approval of a child between 16 and 18 years being prosecuted under the 2012 Act is a cause of concern. It recommended amendments to the sections related to punishment for penetrative sexual assault and sexual assault under the POCSO Act. The amendments states that a lower sentence may be imposed on the accused if the child was 16 years or above at the time of the offence. This would require certain criteria to be satisfied. These include: (i) the Special Court being satisfied that the relationship between the accused and child was intimate, (ii) presence of tacit approval from the child, (iii) an age difference of not more than three years between the accused and the child, (iv) no criminal history of the accused, (v) no element of undue influence, force, or violence being present, and (vi) the accused not being in a dominating position to intimidate the child and the parents.

- **The Indian Penal Code (IPC):** Currently, under the IPC, consensual sex between a husband and his wife (who is below 18 years) will amount to rape.[8] The Commission noted that solely amending the POCSO Act to provide relief for adolescent romantic relationships would be meaningless without amending the IPC. Therefore, the Commission recommended carrying out suitable amendments to the IPC.

Law Commission report on enabling online registration of FIR under CrPC

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The Law Commission (Chair: Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi) submitted its report on "Amendment in Section 154 of The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 for Enabling Online Registration of FIR". Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 pertains to information provided to the police regarding the commission of a cognisable offence. First Information Reports (FIRs) are covered under this section.

The Bureau of Police Research and Development informed the Commission that states have been requested to download the relevant software and implement the e-FIR module. The Commission noted that eight states, including Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, have implemented the registration of e-FIRs.

Further, citizens can lodge online complaints regarding cyber-crime. As of July 1, 2023, approximately 25 lakh cyber-crime complaints have been lodged and forwarded to the relevant states. The Commission recommended a phased implementation of e-FIRs. It recommended enabling e-FIRs for all cognisable offences where the accused is not known and cognisable offences punishable with imprisonment up to three years, where the accused is known. The Commission also highlighted that the data provided while registering e-FIRs should not be compromised.

Finance

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RBI releases directions on investment portfolio of commercial banks

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the RBI (Classification, Valuation and Operation of Investment Portfolio of Commercial Banks) Directions, 2023.[9] The framework will be applicable for all commercial banks, excluding regional rural banks, from April 1, 2024. Key features include:

- **Investment policy framework:** Banks must adopt an investment policy approved by their boards. The policy must include: (i) investment criteria and objectives to be achieved through investment transactions, (ii) securities in which banks can invest, and (iii) derivatives in which the banks can deal. The policy will provide for prudential limits for investment in securities, such as limits for investing in bonds issued by public sector undertakings and corporates. Banks must establish an equity research department to ensure expertise in the field.

- **Categorisation of investments:** Investment portfolio of banks must be categorised into: (i) held to maturity (securities acquired with the intention of holding them to maturity), (ii) available for sale (securities acquired for collecting cash flows as well as sale), and (iii) fair value through profit and loss (securities that do not fall in the above two categories). Reclassification of securities will require approval from the bank's board as well as RBI.

- **Internal control system:** Banks must have a robust internal control mechanism for investment transactions. This includes: (i) periodic reconciliation of the investment book, (ii) valuation of portfolios, and (iii) monitoring of prudential and risk limits.

RBI issues directions on release of property documents on repayment of personal loans

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued directions for the release of movable/immovable property documents by regulated entities (such as banks) upon the repayment of personal loans.[10] Personal loans include education loans, housing loans, and loans for investments in financial assets. Under the fair practices code (issued by RBI), regulated entities must release all property documents on receiving full repayment and closure of a loan account. However, RBI has observed divergent practices in the release of such documents. The directions require regulated entities to release the original property documents within 30 days after the full repayment/settlement of loan account. In case of any delay caused by the regulated entity, a compensation of Rs 5,000 will be paid for each day of delay to the borrower.

These directions will be applicable from December 1, 2023.

RBI issues draft directions for treatment of wilful and large defaulters

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued the draft RBI (Treatment of Wilful Defaulters and Large Defaulters) Directions, 2023 for public feedback.[11] The draft directions seek to provide a procedure for classification of a borrower as wilful defaulter by lenders. Key features include:

- **Wilful defaulter:** A wilful defaulter refers to: (i) a borrower or guarantor who has committed wilful default of at least Rs 25 lakh or as notified by RBI, (ii) promoters and directors associated at the time of default if the defaulter is a company, and (iii) persons in charge of and responsible for management of the affairs of an entity (other than companies). Large defaulter refers to a defaulter with an outstanding amount of at least one crore rupees and whose account has been categorised as a doubtful or loss account.

- Wilful default by a borrower will be deemed to have occurred when he defaults in meeting payment/repayment obligations to the lender. In addition, at least one of specified conditions need to be fulfilled. These include: (i) default despite having the capacity to honour the obligations, (ii) diversion or siphoning off of funds availed from the lender, or (iii) disposal of assets given for securing the credit without the lender's knowledge. Wilful default by a guarantor will be deemed to have occurred if he does not honour the guarantee invoked by the lender despite having the ability to do so.

- **Identification of wilful defaulters:** The evidence of wilful default will be examined by an identification committee (comprising of whole-time director as chairperson and two senior

officials) set up by the lender. If the committee is satisfied that wilful default has occurred, it will issue a show-cause notice to the borrower. The borrower will be given an opportunity to submit a representation to a review committee setup by the lender (comprising of the chief executive officer as chairperson and two independent directors). The review committee will provide the borrower an opportunity of a personal hearing. It will subsequently pass an order and communicate the same to the wilful defaulter.

▪ **Measures against wilful defaulters:** Lenders may initiate criminal proceedings against wilful defaulters, if warranted. Wilful defaulters will not be eligible for restructuring of credit facility. No additional credit facility will be granted by any lender to a wilful defaulter or any entity associated with a wilful defaulter.

Comments are invited by October 31, 2023.

Home Affairs

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Standing Committee report on prison conditions, infrastructure, and reforms

The Standing Committee on Home Affairs (Chair: Mr. Brijlal) submitted its report on "Prison- Conditions, Infrastructure and Reforms".[12] Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

▪ **Overcrowding:** The Committee observed that overcrowded prisons have serious consequences for both prisoners and the criminal justice system. The national average occupancy rate in prisons across India is 130%. Six states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh account for more than half of the total prisoner population. Four out of these six states have an occupancy rate higher than the national average. The Committee recommended transferring prisoners from overcrowded jails to other jails within the same state or in other states by signing a Memorandum of Understanding.

▪ The Committee noted that bail is typically denied as the undertrial prisoner may: (i) influence or intimidate witnesses, (ii) try to flee the country, or (iii) commit another crime. It observed that the bracelet/anklet tracker technology, as implemented in Odisha, could be a cost-effective method for monitoring prisoners who are out on bail. However, as it may raise human rights concerns, the Committee suggested using the method after securing consent from the inmates.

▪ **Young offenders:** The Committee noted that there is a lack of clarity on who is a young offender across states. It recommended that the Ministry of

Home Affairs should provide a clear definition of young offenders along with a common guideline to all states/UTs. Further, while examining the availability of borstal schools (youth detention centre), the Committee noted that not all states/UTs have such schools. Only eight states including Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand have borstal schools. It recommended opening at least one to two such schools in states.

▪ **Women prisoners:** The Committee recommended giving special attention to pregnant women, including the ability to give birth outside prison and proper prenatal and postnatal care. To ensure a nurturing environment for the children, the Committee recommended allowing babies born in prison to stay with their mothers till the age of 12 years. Currently, children born in prison can stay with their mothers till the age of six years.

For a PRS summary, see here.

Communications

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TRAI releases recommendations on several subjects

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) released its recommendations on: (i) promoting networking and telecom equipment manufacturing, (ii) issues related to FM radio broadcasting sector, (iii) augmenting telecom infrastructure in the north-eastern region, and (iv) rationalisation of entry fees and bank guarantees for telecom licensees.[13,14,15,16] Key observations and recommendations are:

▪ **Manufacturing:** TRAI recommended that domestic value addition in the manufacturing of networking and telecom equipment should be a key objective. To promote domestic manufacturing, its key recommendations include: (i) extending PLI scheme for component manufacturing, (ii) incentivising telecom service providers to buy domestically made equipment, (iii) providing capital subsidy for manufacturing facilities and interest subvention to MSMEs, (iv) establishing a dedicated venture capital fund for startups in telecom manufacturing, (v) introducing tax incentives for investment in R&D, and (vi) treating telecom software as independent deliverables and extending incentives for export and domestic manufacturing for their development.

▪ **FM Radio broadcasting:** For FM radio broadcasting sector, it recommended: (i) charging license fee as 4% of gross revenue (after excluding GST), (ii) allowing private radio channels to run their own news bulletins, (currently, they are

allowed to only air bulletin from All India Radio), and (iii) mandating that FM radio-receivers are enabled and activated on mobile phones equipped with necessary hardware.

- **Infrastructure in the north-eastern region:** TRAI observed that the north-eastern region suffers from poor digital connectivity. To improve this scenario, it made several recommendations. These include: (i) harmonising local right of way rules with the rules framed by the central government, (ii) providing electricity to telecom sites on a priority basis, (iii) utilising Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) to fund infrastructure development projects, and (iv) identifying uncovered villages regardless of population for providing 4G connectivity. The USOF allows for setting up digital infrastructure in remote areas for access to digital services.

- **Entry fees and bank guarantees:** Currently, unified license is issued to the telecom operators, under which service-wise authorisations are given. Licensees need to pay an entry fee (one-time non-refundable fee) and provide bank guarantees (a financial instrument to ensure the licensee pays its dues to the government) for various authorisations. TRAI recommended to bring down these levies. Key recommendations include: (i) reducing the entry fees for authorisations, (ii) eliminating entry fees for renewal of license, and (iii) using e-bank guarantees for ease of doing business.

TRAI seeks public feedback on several subjects

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) issued consultation papers on: (i) encouraging R&D in telecom, broadcasting and IT, (ii) digital inclusion in the era of emerging technologies, (iii) inputs for drafting of the National Broadcasting Policy, and (iv) use of 5G for augmenting digital ecosystems.[17,18,19,20] Subjects on which inputs have been sought include:

- **Research and development:** Spending on R&D in India is lower than the world average. India spent 0.7% of its GDP on R&D in 2017-18, which is lower than the world average of 1.8% of GDP It invited comments on following key issues: (i) adequacy of the education system at all levels for promoting R&D, (ii) whether the current network of public and private institutions involved in R&D is adequate, (iii) issues with the current regulatory framework for R&D, especially in the field of intellectual property rights, and (iv) changes required in existing laws/policies to align with global leaders.

- **Digital inclusion:** TRAI observed that India has seen growth in the adoption of digital services. However, there is wide variation in the usage of internet and broadband services across different sections of society. Key issues on which comments are invited include: (i) need for

addressing factors affecting digital inclusion such as digital connectivity, digital affordability and digital literacy, (ii) additional measures or the expansion of current schemes to achieve universal connectivity, (iii) methods to ensure affordability of digital services and digital literacy, and (iv) ensuring connectivity for MSMEs.

- **Formulating National Broadcasting Policy:** TRAI has sought views on broad issues in the broadcasting sector for developing a new National Broadcasting Policy. Key areas for consultation include: (i) the requirement, relevance and review of public service broadcasting, (ii) simplification of the policy and regulatory framework for different types of broadcasting systems, (iii) a framework for systematic and legal redressal of piracy and copyright, and (iv) the need for a separate regulator for broadcasting.

- **5G Ecosystem:** 5G has enabled extremely fast data transfer speeds. Thus, it has the potential to become a platform of its own, supporting emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI). The consultation paper has sought inputs on enabling such an ecosystem. Key issues for consultation include: (i) need for any additional measures to strengthen the development and adoption of 5G, (ii) policy measures needed to promote the use of 5G, (iii) creation of policies to promote VR, AI, and drones, and (iv) measures needed for promoting startups and R&D in such technologies.

Last dates for consultations are mentioned below:

- Encouraging R&D in telecom, broadcasting and IT: October 23, 2023,
- Digital inclusion in the era of emerging technologies: October 16, 2023,
- Inputs for formulation of National Broadcasting Policy: October 10, 2023,
- Digital transformation through 5G ecosystem: October 30, 2023.

Consumer Affairs

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Comments invited on guidelines for regulating dark patterns in e-commerce

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs invited comments on the Draft Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023.[21] Dark patterns refer to practices or deceptive design patterns in user interfaces (UI) of platforms, designed to mislead or trick users into performing unintended actions. These patterns impair consumer autonomy, decision making or choice, and amount to misleading or unfair trade practices. Key features of the draft guidelines include:

- **Engaging in dark patterns prohibited:** The guidelines prohibit engaging in any dark patterns. These will apply to: (i) all platforms offering goods or services in India, (ii) advertisers, and (iii) sellers. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), established under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 will be responsible for settling ambiguities or disputes related to the interpretation of dark patterns.[22] Under the Act, failure to comply with the direction of the CCPA is punishable with imprisonment up to six months, a fine of up to Rs 20 lakh, or both.[22]

- **Types of dark patterns:** The draft guidelines define various dark patterns. Certain key patterns are listed in the table below.

Table 2: Certain Dark Patterns

Pattern	Description	Examples
False Urgency	Falsely stating or implying the sense of urgency or scarcity of a product/service	Falsely describing a sale as 'exclusive' for a limited set of users
Basket Sneaking	Inclusion of additional items such as products or services at the time of checkout without the consent of the user	A user orders food online, and the food delivery platform automatically includes a subscription at checkout.
Confirm Shaming	Using a phrase, video, audio or any other means to create a sense of fear, shame, guilt, or ridicule in the mind of the consumer	A platform for booking flight tickets uses the phrase 'I will stay unsecured' if the user does not add insurance to the cart

Source: Draft guidelines on Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns; PRS

Comments are invited until October 5, 2023.

Transport

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Standing Committee submits its report on the National Inland Waterways

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. V.Vijayasai Reddy) submitted its report on 'Development and Expansion of Existing and New National Inland Waterways'.[23] An Inland waterway is a navigable river and canal system. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) regulates and develops national waterways for inland shipping and navigation. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Operationalisation of national waterways:** There are 111 notified national waterways, out of which 23 have been made operational. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways stated that the development of 63 national waterways has not taken up due to financial and staffing constraints. The Committee also recommended against taking up development of these 63 waterways at present, as they are unviable.

- The Committee noted that five national waterways contribute to 80% of the total cargo movement. It observed that the following key factors discourage companies from shifting to inland waterways: (i) slow pace of development of waterways, (ii) poor hinterland connectivity, and (iii) high vessel and equipment costs. The Committee recommended the following key measures to facilitate a modal shift: (i) financial incentives to shippers, and (ii) the development of loading and unloading facilities at terminals.

- **Intermodal connectivity for cargo movement:** The Committee noted that connectivity of waterways with major ports, rails and roads would lessen the burden on these modes and reduce the logistics costs. It recommended that in the case of newly notified waterways, connectivity with rail, road, and ports should be dealt with in the project planning stage itself.

- **Low modal share of waterways:** The modal share of waterways in India's freight movement is about 2%, whereas the corresponding figure is 4% for USA, 14% for China, 48% for Vietnam, and 49% for Netherlands. India aims to increase the modal share to 5% by 2030. The Committee recommended the Ministry to come up with an action plan to harness the potential of waterways as a sustainable transit option and tourism product.

For a PRS summary see here.

Bharat New Car Assessment Programme for assessing crash safety of cars notified

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highway notified amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.[24,25] The Rules have been framed under the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.[26]

- The amendments introduce the Bharat New Car Assessment Program (BNCAP) for assessing the safety rating of vehicles under the M1 category. The M1 category consists of cars weighing up to 3.5 tonnes and can carry up to eight passengers (excluding the driver).[27] The vehicles will be examined and assessed for star rating in accordance with Automotive Industry Standard (AIS) 197. As per draft AIS 197 (yet to be notified), the overall vehicle safety assessment will be based on: (i) adult occupant protection, (ii) child occupant protection, and (iii) safety assist technologies.[28] The program will be applicable for vehicles from October 1, 2023.

Rules to increase the validity of fitness certificates for transport vehicles notified

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highway notified amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.[29,30] The Rules have been framed under the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.[31] The 1988 Act empowers the central government to prescribe rules for issuing fitness certificates to transport vehicles. A transport vehicle is a light motor vehicle, a public service vehicle, a goods carriage, an educational institution bus or a private service vehicle.[31] A fitness certificate is proof that the vehicle is safe and fit for use on the road

Under the 1989 Rules, the validity of the fitness certificate for old transport vehicles was one year. The Amendments increase the validity period to two years for vehicles up to eight years old. Only automated testing stations should issue fitness certificates for: (i) heavy goods vehicles, (ii) heavy passenger motor vehicles, (iii) medium goods vehicles, and (iv) light motor. The new rules will apply from October 1, 2024.

Tourism

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Standing Committee submits report on functioning of Archaeological Survey of India

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. V.Vijayasai Reddy) submitted its report on 'Functioning of Archaeological Survey of India".[32] The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is a body set up by the central government for maintenance of ancient monuments of national importance. It also regulates archaeological activities in the country. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

▪ **Rationalisation of the list of centrally protected monuments:** The Committee observed that at least a quarter of the 3,691 centrally protected monuments are minor monuments with no architectural or historical significance. Centrally protected monuments are notified under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.[33] The Committee recommended that the list of these monuments be rationalised based on national significance, unique architectural value, and specific heritage content. It also observed that 50 centrally protected monuments remain untraceable or are affected by rapid urbanisation. It recommended the ASI to ensure the physical security of all monuments maintained by it. It identified lack of personnel to be a key gap in ensuring security.

▪ **Restricted areas around monuments:** Within the radius of 300 metres of archaeological sites, various activities including construction and mining are restricted under law. The Committee observed that this invites public criticism and inconvenience, as in some cases, an entire village is covered within such radius. It recommended that these restrictions should be rationalised.

For a PRS summary, see here.

Standing Committee report on development of niche tourism and potential tourist spots

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. V.Vijayasai Reddy) released its report on "Development of Niche Tourism (including Spiritual Tourism), Theme-based Tourist Circuits and Potential Tourist Spots".[34] Niche tourism caters to small groups of people sharing similar interests. It includes: (i) rural tourism, (ii) adventure tourism, (iii) eco-tourism, and (iv) medical tourism.

▪ **Rural tourism:** The Committee observed that no Indian village features in the list of the best tourism villages prepared by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation. It further observed that rural tourism has immense potential for boosting employment and income for villagers. It recommended that the website on rural tourism must provide details of rural homestays, travel connectivity, and tourist spots in villages.

▪ **Adventure tourism:** The Committee observed that there has been an increase in the number of accidents in adventure sports. It noted the presence of unlicensed adventure tour operators. The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Tourism should enact a law so that only licensed operators provide adventure tourism services.

▪ **Medical tourism:** The Committee observed that lack of regulations in the medical travel sector affects monitoring of the quality of services offered. They recommended all medical tourism facilitators to mandatorily register with the government. It also recommended the Ministry to encourage hospitals to obtain the Joint Commission International accreditation as it is recognised on an international level.

▪ **Swadesh Darshan scheme:** Under the scheme, 15 thematic circuits have been identified. 76 projects have been sanctioned in 31 states/UTs for the development of tourism infrastructure. The Committee noted that several projects are delayed due to lack of approvals from temple or forest authorities. It recommended monitoring the real time progress of the projects.

Power

Framework for promoting energy storage systems released

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The Ministry of Power released the National Framework for Promoting Energy Storage Systems.[35] As electricity generation from renewable sources varies significantly, energy storage systems are used to store any surplus generation for ensuring reliable supply. India targets to have 50% cumulative installed capacity from non-fossil energy sources by 2030. Energy storage systems will be crucial for integration of renewable energy capacity at this scale. The framework recommends following key measures:

- **Regulatory measures:** To ensure the financial and commercial viability of energy storage systems, certain regulatory measures have been proposed. These include: (i) framing power purchase guidelines to incentivise energy storage systems, and (ii) providing energy storage systems with carbon credits where they utilise renewable energy for charging. New renewable energy projects over 5 megawatts should be required to install energy storage systems for at least 5% of their renewable energy capacity.

- **Financial incentives:** Viability gap funding up to 40% of the capital cost for the battery energy storage systems should be provided (provided that the project is commissioned within 18-24 months). PLI scheme should be formulated for incentivising domestic manufacturing of energy storage systems and ancillary components. The framework also proposes waiver of stamp duty and registration fees for land used to set up energy storage systems.

- **Technology-agnostic bidding:** The competitive bidding guidelines for projects should not give preferential treatment to certain technologies.

- **Recycling and sustainability:** All bidding documents should have an end-of-life management plan. These plans should promote repurposing or reusing old batteries.

Rules on captive power generators and users amended

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The Ministry of Power notified amendments to the Electricity Rules, 2005.[36,37] The Rules have been framed under the Electricity Act, 2003, which regulates licences and tariffs for power.[38] A captive generation plant is a power plant set up for one's own use. The amendments require the verification of certain captive generation plants and alter the definition of captive users. Key features of the amended Rules include:

- **Change in definition of captive users:** The amendment broadens the scope of entities considered to be captive users. Previously, the Rules specified that affiliate companies (in which the captive user held at least 51% ownership) would be considered as captive users. The amended Rules have replaced the term affiliate company with holding company which is defined in the Companies Act, 2013.[39] A holding company owns subsidiary companies in which: (i) it controls the composition of the board of directors or (ii) it controls more than half of the voting power.[39]

- **Verification of certain captive generation plants:** The amendment requires that the captive status of certain generating plants shall be verified by the Central Electricity Authority. This only applies to generating plants in which the captive user(s) and its captive generating plant are located in more than one state.

Draft amendments to tariff regulations released for public feedback

Priyadarshini Jain (priyadarshini@prsindia.org)

The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) released draft amendments to the CERC (Terms and Conditions of Tariff) Regulations, 2019.[40,41] These Regulations have been framed under the Electricity Act, 2003.[42] The 2019 Regulations govern tariffs for central generators, generators having composite schemes of sale to more than one state, and inter-state transmission systems.

Commercial exchange between a generation company and a distribution company is governed through long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs). PPAs are typically up to 25 years long, which is also the specified useful life of thermal generating stations under the Regulations. CERC observed that plants may continue to function after their specified useful life. Hence, the 2019 Regulations provide that the generation company and the distribution company may re-enter an agreement after the completion of the useful life. The distribution company has the first right of refusal to such an arrangement.

The draft Regulations propose to remove the provision for mutual arrangement after the useful life of a thermal power plant. CERC observed that such mandates through regulations may not be desirable, as it may violate contractual sanctity and could be inequitable.[43]

Mining

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Rules for auction of mining lease and composite license amended

The Ministry of Mines notified amendments to the Mineral (Auction) Rules, 2015.[44,45] The Rules have been framed under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.[46] The Act regulates the mining sector in India. The 2015 Rules prescribe the procedure of conducting auction of mines. Key features of the amended Rules include:

- **Concessions for critical and strategic minerals:** The amended Rules introduce certain requirements for the state government with regard to concessions for critical and strategic minerals. These minerals are specified in the First Schedule of the Act, and include lithium- bearing minerals and graphite. The state government must intimate the central government about: (i) the details of areas available for grant of composite license or mining lease within 45 days of the notification of the Rules, (ii) the receipt of geological survey reports for auction of composite license within 45 days of the receipt of report, and (iii) termination or lapse of mining lease/composite license, within 15 days of such an event.

- **Classification of land:** Under the 2015 Rules, the state government may hold an auction for granting a mining lease in an area with established mineral contents.[47] Before the auction, the state government must identify and mark the area using surveying equipment. The area should be categorised as: (i) forest land, (ii) land owned by the state government, and (iii) land not owned by the state government. The amended Rules provide that for this purpose, state governments may use land details available in: (i) portal of the Prime Minister Gati Shakti, (ii) land record portal of the state government, or (iii) records of any other government authority.

Environment

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Extended Producer Responsibility Rules for used oil notified

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified amendments to the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016.[48,49] The Rules have been framed under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.[50] The Rules were enacted to reduce hazardous waste generation and set up measures for recycling such waste. The amendment adds extended producer responsibility (EPR) to manage used oil, which requires producers to recycle such used oil. Used oil refers to oil derived from crude oil or mixtures containing synthetic oil, and oils suitable for reprocessing. The EPR applies to producers who manufacture and/or sell base oil/ lubrication oil. Key features of the amendments include:

- **Management of used oil:** As per the amended Rules, used oil will be managed through: (i) producing re-refined base oil/lubrication oil (ii) energy recovery, i.e., utilising used oil as fuel. Re-refining refers to removing impurities from used oil to produce base oil/ lubrication oil.

- **EPR targets:** It is now the responsibility of the producer to recycle used oil through registered recyclers to ensure environmentally sound management of used oil. The Rules specify targets based on yearly sales/imports of base oil/lubrication oil to fulfil these obligations. Producers may take help of third-party organisations, such as dealers to meet the targets. The import of used oil is permitted for re-refining only. Used oil importers will be required to fulfil these obligations for100% of the used oil imported in the previous year.

- **Producer responsibility certificates:** Producers may fulfil their EPR by purchasing certificates from registered recyclers of used oil. Recycling refers to re-refining used oil or energy recovery from used oil. Certificates can also be purchased based on the producer's current and previous years' liability.

- **Registration:** The amendments mandate producers, collection agents, recyclers, and used oil importers to register themselves with the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

- **Non-compliance:** In case of non-fulfilment of obligations, environmental compensation can be imposed by CPCB. Entities can be prosecuted for furnishing false information. The Rules also establish a Steering Committee, headed by the CPCB Chairperson, to oversee implementation.

Education

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Standing Committee submits report on implementation of NEP in Higher Education

The Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth Affairs and Sports (Chair: Mr. Vivek Thakur) submitted its report on the 'Implementation of the National Education Policy, 2020 in Higher Education'.[51] The National Education Policy (NEP),

2020 outlines revisions in the structure and objectives of India's education system. These include introducing a five-stage design for the school system and encouraging multidisciplinary education. Observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Interdisciplinary and personalised learning:** The Committee appreciated the steps taken by Jammu and Kashmir in implementing the NEP. It noted the 'Design your Degree' programme launched by Jammu University, which is based on the Choice-Based Credit System outlined in the NEP. The programme offers students the choice to pursue interdisciplinary and personalised learning. The Committee recommended introducing this programme in other institutions.

- **Digital libraries:** The Committee observed that digital libraries can provide students and educators convenient access to a vast range of learning resources. It recommended the Department of Higher Education to ensure the availability of content in regional languages for better reach and learning outcomes.

- **Marginalised students:** The Committee noted a gap between the GER of students from SC and ST communities and the overall GER, between 2016-17 to 2020-21. For instance, in 2020-21, the overall GER stood at 27.3% whereas the GER for SC students was 23.1% and for ST students, it was at 18.9%. The Committee recommended specific measures to further improve higher educational access for students hailing from these marginalised communities. These include: (i) conducting targeted awareness campaigns, (ii) developing infrastructure in remote areas and urban slums, (iii) providing specialised training for teachers working in marginalised communities, and (iv) offering scholarships suited to the needs of marginalised communities. It also recommended putting in place a transparent and efficient hiring process for teachers that prioritises diversity.

Labour and Employment

Priyadarshini Jain (priyadarshini@prsindia.org)

Standing Committee submits report on the Employees State Insurance Corporation

The Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles and Skill Development (Chair: Mr. Bhartruhari Mahtab) submitted its report on 'The Employees State Insurance Corporation - Applicability and Benefits under ESI Scheme, Functioning of ESI Hospitals and Management of Corpus Fund'.[52] The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 mandates employers to contribute towards medical care to employees.[53] It applies to factories employing at least 10 persons. The central

and state governments have also included shops, hotels, cinemas, newspaper establishments, and port trusts under their purview. The Act establishes the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) and Employees State Insurance Scheme (ESI Scheme). Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:

- **Revision of wage limit for coverage under the ESI scheme:** Employees earning up to Rs 176 per day are exempted from paying contributions. The Committee noted that this ceiling has remained unchanged for about seven years. The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Labour and Employment should revise provisions related to coverage and contribution of wages.

- **Expansion of coverage of scheme:** The ESI Act, 1948 has been subsumed in the Code on Social Security, 2020. The Code is yet to be enforced and final rules are yet to be notified. The Committee noted that with the implementation of the Code, ESI will expand to include: (i) voluntary coverage for establishments with less than 10 persons, (ii) mandatory coverage for establishments engaged in a hazardous occupation, and (iii) provisions for formulating special schemes for unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers. The Committee noted the lack of readiness of the Ministry and ESIC in providing the extended coverage. It recommended carrying out comprehensive surveys, data collection, and use of Aadhaar to identify eligible insured persons.

For a PRS summary, see here.

Electronics & IT

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Comments invited on the Draft National Strategy on Robotics

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology released the draft of 'National Strategy for Robotics' for public feedback.[54] It seeks to promote adoption of robotic technology in India. It has identified following as key challenges in leveraging robotics for India: (i) heavy reliance on imports, (ii) lack of skilled human resources, (iii) high costs, and (iv) limited governance mechanisms. The strategy identifies manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, and national security as priority sectors for adoption of robotics for India. Key recommendations include:

- **Steps to improve domestic capabilities**: The draft strategy recommends a four-pillar approach to improve India's domestic capabilities in the robotics innovation lifecycle.

Table 3: Key recommended interventions

Pillar	Interventions
Research and development	▪ Setting up centres of excellence for research, funding exploratory research to establish leadership
Demonstration and testing	▪ establishing robotics innovation testbeds to assess technology readiness
Commercialisation of innovation and supply chain development	▪ fiscal incentives for domestic production and exports, policies to encourage startups, skilling programs
Adoption and awareness	▪ demand-side interventions including public procurement, formulation of technology adoption plans, and robot utilisation strategies

Source: Draft on National Strategy for Robotics; PRS

▪ **Institutional framework:** A National Robotics Mission should be established which will work towards encouraging collaboration between industry, academia, and start-ups. Robotics Innovation Unit should be set up within the Ministry of Electronics and IT. The unit is envisioned as a pivotal entity responsible for nurturing innovation, facilitating technology development, and driving adoption. Its functions encompass identifying viable use cases for robotics, advancing R&D in robotics, supporting startup ventures, strengthening the supply chain, and simplifying market access. A network of centres of excellence may be established to undertake research.

Comments are invited until October 31, 2023.

Annexure

The subjects identified by various Parliamentary Standing Committees for examination are given below in the table below.

Table 4: Subjects identified by the Standing Committees for examination during 2023-24

Rural Development and Panchayati Raj

Ministry of Rural Development:

Department of Rural Development

1. Impact of National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) on the poor and destitute in the villages.
2. Realization of the vision 'Make in India' under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY).
3. Empowering rural women through Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).
4. Rural Employment through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) – An insight into wage rates and other matters relating thereto.
5. Housing for All – Status of PMAY-G.
6. Review of the progress made under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).

7. Creation of Adarsh Grams under Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY).
8. Review of functioning of National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR).
9. Role of Banks in the financial inclusion of rural population.
10. Active participation of Members of Parliament in monitoring through DISHA Committees.
11. Holistic approach to Sustainable Rural Development.

Department of Land Resources

1. Implementation of Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP).

Ministry of Panchayati Raj

1. SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages Abadi and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas Scheme).
2. Implementation of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).
3. Status of Digitization of Gram Panchayats.

Transport, Tourism and Culture

1. Operation and Maintenance of National Highways and Management of Toll Plazas.
2. (Review of Progress of e-Mobility Infrastructure and Growth of e-Vehicles.
3. Encroachment on Right of Way (RoW) and Unauthorised Access on National Highways.
4. Review of Implementation of UDAN Scheme and Advanced Landing Grounds.
5. New International Airports: Concerns of Economic Viability and Prospects.
6. National Mission on Cultural Mapping and Roadmap, and welfare of local artistes.
7. Status of Ship building, Ship Repair and Ship breaking industries in the Country.
8. Improvement of Maritime Education and Training Facilities.
9. Examination of Draft National Tourism Policy.

Labour, Textiles and Skill Development

Ministry of Labour and Employment

1. Implementation of the Labour Codes.
2. Working Conditions and Welfare Measures for Mine Workers, including Unauthorised Mines and assessment of working of Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS).
3. Contractual Appointments/Deployments and Implementation of Labour Laws concerning the welfare of Contract/Casual Workers in Government Organisations/Public Sector Undertakings/Public Sector Banks/Establishments.
4. Implementation of Welfare measures for Plantation Workers.
5. Functioning of the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) with special reference to operation of the EPF Pension Scheme and Management of Corpus Fund.
6. Functioning of Central Board for Workers Education.
7. Implementation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
8. National Policy on Child Labour – An assessment.
9. Identification and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour.
10. Implementation of prescribed minimum Wages in various Employment Sectors.
11. Social Security and Welfare Measures to provide old age protection to Unorganised/ Informal Sector Workers including Gig/Scheme Workers, Street Vendors, Stone Crushers, Fishermen and Workers in IT and Telecommunication Sectors

12. Safeguards and measures for protecting the interest of overseas contract workers and the Returnees, particularly in the Middle East Region.
13. Employment Generation Programmes - A Review.

Ministry of Textiles

1. Development and Promotion of Jute Industry.
2. Skill Development vis-à-vis Manufacturing and Upgradation in Textiles Sector.
3. Challenges/Opportunities in Indian Textile Industry.
4. Development of Cotton Sector.
5. Schemes/Programmes of Central Silk Board for Development and Promotion of Silk Industry.
6. Status/Performance of Handloom Sector.
7. Status and Reforming of Powerloom Sector.
8. Performance of Marketing Agencies of Handlooms and Handicrafts.
9. Functioning of National Textile Corporation (NTC).

Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

1. National Skills Qualifications Framework – An Assessment.
2. Functioning of National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).
3. Implementation of Skill Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) Project.
4. Skill Training in Food Processing, Agriculture and Allied Sectors.

<center>Energy</center>

Ministry of Power

1. Energy Security in India – Emerging Scenario.
2. Energy Transition and Sustainability.
3. Electrification of Rural India – Targets and Achievements.
4. Energy Efficiency and Conservation.
5. Prospects of Thermal Power Plants in the light of enhanced Renewable Energy Target.
6. Performance Review of Major Hydro Projects.
7. Evaluation of Power Transmission Sector – Development of Transmission Network and its Management.
8. Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme.
9. Role of Power Sector Statutory Bodies, PSUs and Institutions in Development of Power Sector.
10. Promotion of Electric Vehicles in India.

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy

1. Roadmap for achievement of 50% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030.
2. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha Evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) – An Evaluation.
3. Evaluation of Roof-top Solar Programme.
4. Bio-Energy and Waste to Energy - Recovery of Energy from Urban, Industrial and Agricultural Wastes/Residues and role of Urban Local Bodies in Energy Management.
5. Production Linked Incentive Scheme: National Programme on High Efficiency Solar PV Modules.
6. Greening of Indian Islands – Carbon Free Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
7. Research, Design and Development in Renewable Energy Sector.
8. Efficacy of Priority Sector Lending in financing Renewable Energy Sector.

<center>Chemicals and Fertilizers</center>

Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers:

Department of Fertilizers

1. Matters pertaining to disinvestment of fertilizer PSUs -A review.
2. Initiatives for ensuring growth of domestic fertilizer industry.
3. Fertilizer Projects and joint ventures for ensuring availability of fertilizers and raw materials.
4. Evaluation of performance of fertilizer producing PSUs.
5. Availability and distribution of Fertilizers.

Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals

1. Vision 2024 - To establish India as a leading manufacturer of chemicals and petrochemicals by initiating measures including, inter-alia, revival of sick units.
2. Insecticides & Pesticides – promotion and development including safe usage - licensing regime for insecticides.
3. Contribution of CIPET for growth of Plastic Industry in the country.
4. Factors impacting Dye-stuffs and dye intermediates industry.
5. Disposal of toxic waste from Bhopal Gas Leak site.
6. Setting up of Plastic Waste Management Centres.

Department of Pharmaceuticals

1. Promotion of Medical Device Industry.
2. Establishing uninterrupted growth of the Pharmaceutical Industry while ensuring quality control and safety standards.
3. Self-sufficiency in production and availability of Active Pharmaceutical ingredients (API) through various initiatives including Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI).
4. Construction of Campuses for National Institute of Pharmaceuticals Education and Research (NIPER).

<center>Defence</center>

1. Review of strategic operational preparedness of Defence Forces in view of current security scenario including Border Security.
2. A review of working of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
3. A review of functioning of Zila Sainik Boards in the Country.
4. Role of Indian Army in ensuring defence of the Country.
5. Role of Indian Navy in ensuring Maritime Security of the Country.
6. Review of working of Indian Coast Guard in ensuring Coastal Security in the Country.
7. Role of Armed Forces Medical Services in providing healthcare facilities to soldiers deployed in difficult and far-flung border areas.
8. Modernization of Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).
9. Preparedness/Restructuring of the Armed Forces in view of Hybrid Warfare including cyber threat and Anti-Drone capabilities.
10. Assessment of Indigenous Defence Production both by way of Public and Private Sector including major Research Initiatives.
11. Consolidation of defence lands by Defence Estates Organisation and working of Cantonment Boards.
12. Review of working of Border Roads Organization (BRO) in creating infrastructure in strategic locations and border areas.
13. Status of upgradation of various programmes and projects of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

14. A review of resettlement policies, healthcare facilities and pensionary avenues for Ex-Servicemen (ESM).
15. Review of Sainik Schools, Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC) and Rashtriya Military Schools.
16. Restructuring of Military commands for optimal utilization of resources such as procurement, training and staffing for the Services.
17. A review of Agnipath Scheme in the Armed Forces.

Petroleum and Natural Gas

1. Pricing, Marketing and Supply of Petroleum Products and Natural Gas.
2. Contract Management and Transparency in Procurement Procedures in Oil PSUs.
3. Litigations involving Oil PSUs.
4. Oil Refineries - A Review.
5. Review of Human Resource Policy of Oil PSUs;
6. CSR activities of oil PSUs.
7. Review of Policy on Import of Crude Oil.
8. Initiatives undertaken by Oil PSUs in Petroleum Sector under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.
9. Steps taken to reduce Import Dependence of Crude Oil.
10. Review of on-going projects in Oil PSUs including CGD Projects.
11. Review of Exploration & Production Activities of Oil PSUs.
12. R&D activities by Oil PSUs.
13. Net - Zero initiatives by Oil PSUs.
14. Safety, Security and Environmental issues in Petroleum Sector.
15. Exploration for, and exploitation of petroleum resources, including natural gas and Coal Bed Methane, gas hydrates and shale Gas.

Coal, Mines and Steel

Ministry of Coal

1. Land Acquisition and issues of Rehabilitation & Resettlement in Coal/Lignite Mining Areas.
2. Research and Development in Coal Sector.
3. Future of Coal in India's Energy Mix.
4. Review of Coal Mines Workers Welfare Programme;
5. Safety in Coal Mines.
6. Production of Coal and Lignite - Projection and Planning.
7. Skill development in Coal/Lignite Sector.
8. Performance of Coal Controller's Office.
9. Implementation of Information Technology and vigilance activities to curb illegal Coal Mining and theft of coal in the country.
10. Compliance of Environmental Norms by Coal/Lignite Companies.
11. Performance of Coal Mines Provident Fund Organisation (CMPFO).
12. Coal Distribution and Marketing – A Review.
13. CSR activities in PSUs under the purview of Ministry of Coal.

Ministry of Mines

1. Mineral Exploration Activities in North Eastern States and its overall impact on development of the region.
2. Measures to curb Illegal Mining of Iron Ore, Manganese and Bauxite in the Country.
3. Organizational Structure and Performance of Geological Survey of India (GSI)– A Review.
4. Organizational Structure and Performance of Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) – A Review.
5. Expediting and Simplifying the Environment and Forest Clearance Process for Mining Projects.

6. Measures for Abatement of Pollution due to Mining Activities and Environmental Protection - Chittorgarh Fort, a case study.
7. Self-reliance in Minerals and Metals.
8. Science and Technology Programme and Autonomous Bodies.
9. CSR activities in PSUs under the purview of Ministry of Mines.
10. Implementation of District Mineral Foundation(DMF) and Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) - A Review.

Ministry of Steel

1. Review of Steel Policy and its Impact on Development of Steel Sector.
2. Major Policy changes assisting Secondary Steel Sector.
3. Management of Energy efficiency by Steel Plants and Environmental Issues related to Iron Ore Mining.
4. Development of Manganese Ore Industry in India.
5. Promotion of Steel Usage.
6. Status of Greenfield and Brownfield Projects of Steel PSUs.
7. Iron Ore Handling Infrastructure at Ports.
8. CSR activities in PSUs under the purview of Ministry of Steel.

Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare:

Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

1. Production and Availability of Certified Seeds in the Country.
2. Functioning of Agricultural Credit System in the Country.
3. Production and Availability of Oil seeds and Pulses in the Country.
4. National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology.
5. Promotion of Climate Resilient Farming.

Department of Agricultural Research and Education

1. Contribution of ICAR in Agricultural Research for Tribal and Hilly Regions.
2. Research and Development in Post-Harvest Management.
3. Central Island Agricultural Research Institute, Port Blair - A Performance Review.
4. Role and Performance Appraisal of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) in the Country.

Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying:

Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying

1. Evaluation of Livestock Insurance Schemes.
2. National Livestock Mission – An Appraisal.
3. Role of National Dairy Development Board for Protection and Development of Indigenous Cattle Breeds.
4. Spread of Lumpy Skin Disease in Cattle in the Country and issues related therewith.
5. Scope for Nutrition and Livelihood in the Dairy Sector - An Analysis.

Department of Fisheries

1. Employment Generation and Revenue Earning Potential of Fisheries Sector.
2. Role of National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) in Training and Extension Facilities to Fishermen under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.
3. Development of Deep Sea Fishing.

4.   Infrastructure and Post-Harvest Management in Fisheries Sector - An Overview.
5.   Promotion and Development of Sea Weed Cultivation.
6.   Development and Modernization of Fishing Harbours.

Ministry of Food Processing Industries

1.   Scheme for Creation / Expansion of Food Processing and Preservation Capacities – An Evaluation.
2.   Initiatives taken in the Food Processing Sector under "Make in India" Program.
3.   Scope for development of Food Processing Industries in the North Eastern Region.
4.   Research and Development (R&D) in the Food Processing Sector.

Ministry of Cooperation

1.   Formulation of New Schemes and Programmes for the Development of Cooperative Societies in the Country.
2.   Progress in Establishment of National Cooperative Database.

Commerce

1.   Comprehensive Strategy to Map Major Products and Countries to Maximise Exports and Minimise Imports.
2.   Review of Progress of National Industrial Corridors Development Programme.
3.   Implementation of PM Gati Shakti: Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity.
4.   Performance Evaluation and Review of Commodity Boards.

External Affairs

1.   Countering Global Terrorism at Regional and International Levels.
2.   India's Position in the Ongoing Climate Change Negotiations.
3.   QUAD in Indo-Pacific Region: Impact thereof and India's Role and Strategies for Engagement and Cooperation.
4.   India's Role in Different Bodies of United Nations including Security Council: Imperatives and Challenges for India's Permanent Membership in UNSC.
5.   Opportunities in African countries and India's Engagement.
6.   Functioning of Indian Missions Abroad including Evaluation of Political/Economic/Cultural and Consular Responsibilities and Promotion of Trade, Tourism and Technology.
7.   Performance of Passport Issuance System including Issuance of e-Passports and Review of Indian Passport Act and Rules.
8.   India's Engagement with Small Island Countries.
9.   Facilitating External Economic Engagement of States and Union Territories.
10. India's Engagement with G20 Countries.
11. India's Look East Policy: Review of India - ASEAN Partnership.
12. India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - Contours of Cooperation.
13. India's Role and Strategies for Cooperation in I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and USA) Group.
14. Russia - Ukraine Conflict, its Global Impact and India's Response thereto.
15. Concerns and Issues Pertaining to Indian Students Studying Abroad.

Communications and Information Technology

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

1.   Review of functioning of Prasar Bharati Organization.
2.   Review of functioning and outreach of Doordarshan Channels.
3.   Community Radio Stations: Growth, Opportunities and Challenges.
4.   Review of working of PSUs under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
5.   Working of All India Radio (AIR).
6.   Emergence of OTT Platforms and related issues.
7.   Overview of Film Industry.
8.   Norms and Guidelines for Media Coverage.
9.   Review of functioning of Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC).
10. Review of functioning of Press Information Bureau (PIB).
11. Review of functioning of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI).
12. Evaluation of Target Rating Point (TRP) mechanism and its related agencies in India.
13. Regulation of Cable Television in India.

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology

1.   Digital Payment and Online Security measures for data protection.
2.   Review of functioning of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).
3.   Safeguarding citizens' rights and prevention of misuse of social/online news media platforms including special emphasis on women security in the digital space.
4.   Promotion of Electronics/IT Hardware/telecom equipment manufacturing sector under Make in India and measures for reduction of imports.
5.   Review of cyber security scenario in India.
6.   Review of functioning of Common Service Centre – Special Purpose Vehicle (CSC-SPV).
7.   Issues related to social media domain.
8.   Emergence of Artificial Intelligence and related issues.
9.   Issues related to monopolistic practices by social and digital platforms, their regulation and services provided by them.
10. Safeguarding rights of independent content creators on social and digital media.

Ministry of Communications:

Department of Posts

1.   Real Estate Management in the Department of Posts.
2.   Department of Posts – Initiatives and Challenges.
3.   Review of services provided by Post Offices.

Department of Telecommunications

1.   Review of functioning of BSNL and MTNL and plan for enhancing their performance.
2.   Review of the performance of schemes/projects under Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) implemented by Private Sector.
3.   Review of the performance of schemes/projects under Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) implemented by Public Sector.
4.   Review of the functioning of the National Institute of Communication Finance (NICF).
5.   Implementation of Prime Minister's Wi-fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) initiative.
6.   Issues confronting Telecom Sector in India.
7.   Review of Indian Telecom Industries (ITI) and its modernization.

8. Inter-sectoral review of challenges of emerging and converging technologies, entities and practices.

Water Resources

Ministry of Jal Shakti:

Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation

1. Conservation, Development, Management and Abatement of pollution in river Ganga and its Tributaries under Namami Gange programme with particular reference to project deliverables and timelines as well as performance of State Governments.
2. Review of Upper Yamuna River Cleaning Project up to Delhi and River bed management in Delhi.
3. Conservation and Abatement of Pollution in river Cauvery and other major rivers of South India.
4. Water resource management in North Eastern States.
5. Flood scenario and effectiveness of measures taken to combat excessive floods in the country.
6. Interlinking of rivers to improve water availability in water scarce regions.
7. Water Use Efficiency in India.
8. Measures Taken for Safety of Dams.
9. Review of the role and working of WAPCOS and NPCC.
10. Implementation of Atal Bhujal Yojana and Ground Water Management in the Country.

Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation

1. Review of performance of Swachh Bharat Mission - Quality and sustainability of sanitation infrastructure created under Swachh Bharat Mission and Preparedness for ODF 2.0.
2. Review of performance of Jal Jeevan Mission.
3. Drinking Water Supply in Coastal Areas - Setting up of Desalination Plants.

Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports

Ministry of Education:

Department of Higher Education

1. Internationalization of Higher Education in light of NEP 2020 Vision.

2. Review of initiatives by UGC, AICTE, NAAC, NBA, NTA etc. in pursuance of NEP 2020.
3. Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA)-- roadmap for effective implementation.
4. Review of Management, Sports and Social Work Education in the country.
5. Issues afflicting availability of quality faculty/ teaching resources in the Higher Education Sector- Public/Private Universities.
6. Anusandhan scenario in Sciences and related fields---IITs, IISc, CUs.

Department of School Education and Literacy

1. Review of NIPUN BHARAT Scheme.
2. Implementation of the National Education Policy, 2020 in School Education sector.
3. Review of Samagra Shiksha Scheme--Special emphasis on PM POSHAN.
4. Review of National Council for Teacher Education in light of NEP 2020 thrust on Capacity Building of Teachers.

Ministry of Women and Child Development

1. Evaluation of Mission Shakti and Mission Vatsalya.
2. Review of Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 Scheme.
3. Review of Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports:

Department of Youth Affairs

1. National Youth Policy-status and vision.

Department of Sports

1. Review of Preparation for 2024 Paris Olympic Games – with focus on relationship between National Sports federations and Department of Sports.
2. Review of Sports/Physical Education in the country and involvement of private sector therein.
3. PPP model for Indian sports—Sports Promotion Schemes and methods of talent scouting and association of corporate sector through CSR activities.

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