

NEWSPAPER HIGHLIGHT

The prolonged closure of primary and upper primary schools since the onset of the pandemic has led to “catastrophic consequences” for school students, particularly in rural India, says an emergency report. Based on the School Children’s Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) survey conducted by researchers, who worked in coordination with eminent economist Jean Dreze, the ‘Emergency Report on School Education’ says that only 8% of school students in rural India have been able to access online education, while at least 37% have stopped studying altogether. “The SCHOOL survey makes it clear that the reach of online education is very limited: the proportion of schoolchildren who were studying online “regularly” was just 24% and 8% in urban and rural areas respectively.

The private sector must come forward and contribute to increasing the quality of education in government schools, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, while launching a portal to coordinate private contributions for school development. A teacher training programme for early childhood education, a standards setting authority for the Central Board of Secondary Education and the Vidyanjali 2.0 portal to facilitate private donors, corporate social responsibility contributions and volunteering activities are part of the initiatives.

China’s President Xi Jinping promoted a new General to head the military’s Western Theater Command, which borders India, state media reported, unusually marking a third change in the command’s leadership in nine months amid the continuing standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India.

The Taliban announced the top members of their government, in a move that will cement their power over Afghanistan and set the tone of their new rule, nearly a month after they took control of Kabul. Chief spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told that the new government would be an interim one, and that Taliban veteran and head of the Shura council Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund would serve as its acting Prime Minister. Mullah Akhund had

EASTERN ECONOMIC FORUM 2021

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a video-address during the plenary session of the 6th Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) held in Vladivostok, Russia recently. It may be recalled that the PM was the Chief Guest for the 5th EEF in 2019.

2. About the ‘EEF’-**The Eastern Economic Forum was established by decree of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin in 2015.** It supports the economic development of Russia’s Far East and to expand international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. It takes place each year in Vladivostok, a city in Russia.

3. It serves as a platform for the discussion of key issues in the world economy, regional integration, and the development of new industrial and technological sectors, as well as of the global challenges facing Russia and other nations. Over the years, it has emerged as an international platform for discussing the strategy for developing political, economic and cultural ties between Russia and Asia Pacific.

4. Participants-**The Forum business programme includes a number of business dialogues with leading partner countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and with ASEAN, a key integration organization of dynamically developing nations in Southeast Asia.**

5. **India’s interest in the EEF**-Going beyond the bonhomie and historical ties, India is also a key customer of the Russian arms industry. In March, India entered into a joint venture with Russia to manufacture the legendary Kalashnikov assault rifles in India. In 2018, Russia sold the S-400 advanced air defence system to India. India is interested in expanding the level of trade between the two countries. An area of special interest for India is the exploration of hydrocarbon reserves along the coast of Russia’s Far East.

INSPIRATION 4: SPACEX’S FIRST ALL-CIVILIAN SPACE MISSION

1. Entrepreneur Elon Musk’s SpaceX recently announced that ‘**Inspiration4**’, its **first all-civilian, non-governmental spaceflight**, is on track for launch on September 15. The Crew Dragon spacecraft is set to be launched from NASA’s Kennedy Space Centre in Florida in the US. It will take a group of four private citizens into space for three days.

2. Who will travel-All four seats on the spacecraft have been purchased by US billionaire Jared Isaacman, founder of the fintech company Shift4 Payments. This is a part of an effort to raise millions for the Tennessee-based St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, a paediatric treatment and research facility that focuses on children’s catastrophic diseases, particularly leukaemia and other cancers.

3. **Inspiration4**-The mission involves circling the Earth for three days, and then splashing down into the Atlantic Ocean. Inspiration4 will orbit the Earth at 575km, higher than the International Space Station (408km) and the Hubble space telescope (547km). This will be the farthest distance travelled by a crewed mission since 2009, when astronauts last went to repair the Hubble. The Dragon module that the group will be using has also been modified for the mission.

4. Why is the journey significant-According to the reports, **the journey will present an opportunity for collecting large amounts of health data that will aid in planning future crewed space missions.** This will also help in assessing behavioural and cognitive changes over the journey.

SPIRIT OF FEDERALISM

1. Recently, various State governments raised concerns about Central unilateralism in the enactment of laws on subjects in the Concurrent List.

2. What are the recent contentions-Parliament passed the farm laws without consulting the States. They were passed by Parliament even as it does not have legislative competence to deal with agriculture. The laws are related to Entry 14 (agriculture clause) belonging to the State List. But were passed by Parliament citing Entry 33 (trade and commerce clause) in the

served as Deputy Foreign Minister under the earlier Taliban regime, and is on a UN blacklist.

The Supreme Court agreed to the Central government's request to adjourn the hearing of petitions for an independent probe into allegations of the government using Israeli based Pegasus spyware to snoop on citizens.

The U.K.-based Cairn Energy is working with the Government of India to expedite "documentation and payment of refund" of \$1.06 billion of retrospective taxes at the centre of its high stake dispute with India that it expects to be resolved in the "near term". In its half yearly report released on Tuesday, Cairn said it plans to return \$700 million to the shareholders through special dividends and buybacks, out of the expected tax refund.

The current minimum support price (MSP) system is a sham which benefits farmers only in the two States of Punjab and Haryana, said Bharatiya Kisan Sangh. Farmer union announced that it will hold a symbolic dharna in 500 district headquarter towns, to demand that a law be enacted to guarantee remunerative prices to all farmers, with such prices set according to different agro-climatic zones.

Almost six months after the Supreme Court appointed committee on the farm reform laws submitted its report to the top court in a sealed cover, two of the panel's members are asking why it has not yet been made public. "The report has addressed all apprehensions of the farmers. The committee was confident that the recommendations will pave the way for resolving the ongoing farmers' agitation," said one of the members, Anil Ghanwat.

India is in "close contact" with both Moscow and Washington over developments in Afghanistan, official sources said, with two high level intelligence delegations to Delhi this week. An American delegation of intelligence and security officials, led by the chief of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), William Burns, is visiting the region including India and Pakistan, and held consultations with National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval to discuss a number of issues arising from the Afghanistan evacuation effort and Taliban government formation. The Russian Secretary of the Security Council, General Nikolay Patrushev, will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Concurrent List.

3. Field for legislation of non-major ports is in Entry 31 of the Concurrent List. According to the Indian Ports Act, 1908, which presently governs the non-major ports, the power to regulate and control the minor ports remained with the State governments. However, the new draft Indian Ports Bill, 2021, proposes to transfer the powers to the Maritime State Development Council, which is controlled by the Union. Electricity is traceable to Entry 38 of the Concurrent List.

4. What has been the reaction-The lack of consultation in a matter that deals with millions of farmers also led to massive protests. Kerala Assembly unanimously passed a resolution against the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020. TN Assembly passed a resolution against the farm laws.

5. What should be done-Sarkaria Commission Report - There should be a "coordination of policy and action in all areas of concurrent or overlapping jurisdiction through a process of mutual consultation and cooperation. **Venkatachaliah Commission**-Individual and collective consultation with the States should be undertaken through the Inter-State Council established under Article 263 of the Constitution. **S.R. Bommai vs Union of India** - States are not mere appendages of the Union. The essence of cooperative federalism lies in consultation and dialogue.

FOOD EMERGENCY IN SRI LANKA

1. Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has declared Emergency regulations pertaining to the distribution of essential food items. As per the regulations: Authorities are empowered to provide essential food items at a "concessionary rate" to the public by purchasing stocks of essential food items, including paddy, rice and sugar, at government-guaranteed prices, and prevent market irregularities and hoarding.

2. Issue-There is a possibility of food shortage in the Country, with the government's drastic measures against hoarding.

Fuelling the speculation are different factors, including the country's known reliance on imports for essentials — such as petroleum, sugar, dairy products, wheat, medical supplies — its fast-dwindling foreign reserves, from \$7.5 billion in November 2019 to \$2.8 billion in July 2021, and the daunting foreign debt repayment schedule in the coming years.

3. Current situation: Many, especially daily-wage earners, and low-income families, are complaining about being unable to afford, and in many cases access, essentials such as milk, sugar, and rice during the current lockdown, imposed on August 20 following a rapid surge in daily Covid-19 cases and fatalities, and extended twice since.

4. Criticism of the latest move? Criticism of the Emergency regulations has largely been over the government's legal choices, and their political implications. There is also concern that emergency regulations would be used to curb protests and other democratic action.

5. Challenges ahead-Sri Lanka does not have a universal public distribution system or ration cards that can ensure essential goods reach all consumers. The current regulations do not address fundamental economic problems, and instead pose the risk of creating black markets.

AYUSH PROPHYLACTIC MEDICINES

1. Ayush Ministry kickstarts campaign to distribute prophylactic medicines. The kit of Ayurveda prophylactic medicines for Covid-19 contains Sanshamani Vati, which is also known as Guduchi or Giloy Ghan Vati and Ashwagandha Ghan Vati. The kit and the guidelines have been prepared by the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Medicines (CCRAS).

2. Targets: In the next one year, the immunity booster medicines and the guidelines to combat Covid-19 will be distributed to 75 lakh people across the country. Special focus will be on geriatric (people of 60 years and above age) population and the front-line workers. Benefits and Significance: Distribution of Ayush prophylactic medicines will help citizens to boost immunity against the coronavirus.

3. What are the Prophylactic Medicines? Prophylactic means a preventive measure. The word comes from the Greek for "an advance guard," an apt term for a measure taken to fend off a disease or another unwanted consequence. A prophylactic is a medication or a treatment designed and used to prevent a disease from occurring. For example, prophylactic antibiotics may be used after a bout of rheumatic fever to prevent the

Since its launch on August 26, the government's eShram portal registered 21 lakh unorganised sector workers, according to data on the Labour and Employment Ministry's portal.

subsequent development of Sydenham's chorea.