

# Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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**Week: III, May 2018**

**Abhimanu's IAS Study Group**  
Chandigarh

## NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

### What the rupee's fall means

- The rupee has fallen 5.2% in the current financial year, from close to 65 on March 28 to an 18-month low of 68.42 against the dollar.
- As worries for importers, travellers and even students rise steadily, analysts are watching the currency's steady march towards the 70-mark as international crude oil prices continue to rally and foreign funds flow out.

#### Analysis:

- There are three major reasons behind rupee's fall. The rise in crude prices, portfolio outflows from India due to the selling of stocks, especially by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), and a growing anticipation of interest rates rising in the US.
- Brent crude prices have increased from \$70.30 to over \$80 per barrel since the beginning of the new financial year in April. This is mainly due to concerns over supply disruptions after the rise in US tensions with Iran, which contributes 11-12% of OPEC production. As oil prices rise, India's trade deficit — excess of imports over exports — will worsen, which can in turn impact the current account deficit.
- Expecting US interest rates to go up, FPIs have taken out Rs 27,000 crore from India in April and May so far, which is over \$4 billion in less than two months. As the US Federal Reserve raises rates further — which is bound to happen — FPIs will prefer to invest in their home country as the arbitrage gain while investing in India and emerging markets will decline. A weakening rupee will also lower returns, which will in turn impact future inflows.
- Importers will be hit as the cost of getting goods or equipment into India will increase. When the rupee weakens, importers, especially oil companies and other import-intensive companies, have to shell out more rupees to buy an equivalent amount of dollars. In this sense, a weak rupee can act as a kind of import tax. For the oil sector, it is a double whammy, as the rise in crude prices and the decline in rupee value add to retail fuel prices. Margins of oil companies will come under pressure.
- On the other side, Exporters, especially software exporters, stand to benefit, as they get more rupees while converting dollar export earnings into Indian currency. This is expected to boost exports, which have been showing single-digit growth. In FY18, exports grew 9.78%, and given exports in April 2018 showed only 5.17% growth, it appears that the issues with GST implementation are yet to be overcome. The twin impact of FII outflows and worsening trade balance can hit the rupee further; to keep external metrics stable, therefore, exports of both services and merchandise need a further push.

## Foreign investors cold to Permanent Residency Status scheme

- Recent report by the government shows that even after two years after it was launched, the Permanent Residency Status (PRS) scheme providing a host of facilities for foreigners who invest at least ₹10 crore under the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) route has not found a single applicant.

### Features of the PRS scheme:

- The scheme is expected to encourage foreign investment in India and facilitate Make in India Programme.
- Under the Scheme, suitable provisions will be incorporated in the Visa Manual to provide for the grant of PRS to foreign investors.
- The PRS will be granted for a period of 10 years with multiple entry. This can be reviewed for another 10 years if the PRS holder has not come to adverse notice.
- The scheme will be applicable only to foreign investors fulfilling the prescribed eligibility conditions, his/her spouse and dependents.
- In order to avail this scheme, the foreign investor will have to invest a minimum of Rs. 10 crores to be brought within 18 months or Rs.25 crores to be brought within 36 months. Further, the foreign investment should result in generating employment to at least 20 resident Indians every financial year.
- Permanent Residency Status will be granted for a period of 10 years initially with multiple entry facility, which can be renewed for another 10 years.
- PRS will serve as a multiple entry visa without any stay stipulation and PRS holders will be exempted from the registration requirements.
- PRS holders will be allowed to purchase one residential property for dwelling purpose.
- The spouse/ dependents of the PRS holder will be allowed to take up employment in private sector (in relaxation to salary stipulations for Employment Visa) and undertake studies in India.

## Common Service Centres (CSCs)

- The network of Common Service Centres (CSCs), which act as access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, are set to be expanded to 2.50 lakh gram panchayats by the year end.

### About Common Services Centres

- The CSC is a strategic cornerstone of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), approved by the Government in May 2006, as part of its commitment in the National Common Minimum Programme to introduce e-governance on a massive scale.
- The CSCs would provide high quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services, in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment as well as other private services. A highlight of the CSCs is that it will offer web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills.

### In addition to the universe of G2C services, the CSC Guidelines envisage a wide variety of content and services that could be offered as listed below:

- Agriculture Services (Agriculture, Horticulture, Sericulture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries, Veterinary)
- Education & Training Services (School, College, Vocational Education, Employment, etc.)
- Health Services (Telemedicine, Health Check-ups, Medicines)
- Rural Banking & Insurance Services (Micro-credit, Loans, Insurance)
- Entertainment Services (Movies, Television)
- Utility Services (Bill Payments, Online bookings)
- Commercial Services (DTP, Printing, Internet Browsing, Village level BPO).

- The Scheme creates a conducive environment for the private sector and NGOs to play an active role in implementation of the CSC Scheme, thereby becoming a partner of the government in development of rural India. The PPP model of the CSC scheme envisages a 3-tier structure consisting of the CSC operator (called Village Level Entrepreneur or VLE); the Service Centre Agency (SCA), that will be responsible for a division of 500-1000 CSCs; and a State Designated Agency (SDA) identified by the State Government responsible for managing the implementation in the entire State.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Mission Innovation Ministerial

- The third Mission Innovation Ministerial meeting was organized in Malmo Sweden for from 22-23 May, 2018. Ministers and high level delegates from 23 countries participated in this meeting. Indian delegation was lead by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Science, Technology and Earth Sciences.

### About Mission Innovation:

- Mission Innovation (MI) is a global initiative of 22 countries and the European Union to dramatically accelerate global clean energy innovation.
- As part of the initiative, participating countries have committed to seek to double their governments' clean energy research and development (R&D) investments over five years, while encouraging greater levels of private sector investment in transformative clean energy technologies.
- These additional resources will dramatically accelerate the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix that is clean, affordable, and reliable.
- Mission Innovation was announced on November 30, 2015, as world leaders came together in Paris to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change.

### Subgroups of mission innovation:

- **Government Leadership:** Each of the 22 participating countries and the European Union—which represent more than 80 percent of global clean energy R&D budgets—plans to seek to double its governmental and/or state-directed clean energy R&D investment over five years, reaching around a combined USD \$30 billion per year in 2021. New investments are focused on transformational clean energy technology innovations that can be scaled to varying economic and energy market conditions that exist in participating countries and in the broader world.
- **Private Sector and Business Leadership:** The private sector plays a vital role in the commercialization and cost-effectiveness of clean energy breakthroughs. Entrepreneurs, investors, and businesses drive innovation from the laboratory into the marketplace. Participating MI countries commit to work closely with the private sector as it increases its investment in the earlier-stage clean energy companies that emerge from government research and development programs.
- **Organization:** High-level leadership is provided by member governments' Ministers with responsibility for clean energy innovation. The MI Steering Committee, comprised of member government representatives, provides strategic guidance to foster implementation of the Enabling Framework. Core administrative functions are carried out by the MI Secretariat, a small, flexible team supporting the Steering Committee.

### US embassy In Jerusalem

- The US embassy was shifted to Jerusalem on May 14, the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding. This decision leads to clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians.

#### Significance of Jerusalem:

- The Temple Mount, the Jewish religion's holiest site, is in Jerusalem, and Jews from across the world come to pray at the Western Wall of the Biblical temple.
- On this same plateau is the Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third holiest site after Mecca and Medina. Not far is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, thought to be the site of Jesus Christ's Resurrection.

#### Background:

- When the UN approved the division of British-ruled Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states in 1947, the city, given its unique importance to three religions, was left to be governed by a "special international regime". The Arabs rejected the UN plan, attacked Israel the day after it was created in 1948, and were defeated.
- Israel took control of West Jerusalem, and Israel's founder David Ben-Gurion described "Jewish Jerusalem" as "an organic, inseparable part of the State of Israel".
- Even so, East Jerusalem, which includes the Old City and the holy sites, passed under Jordanian occupation.
- The Arab-Israeli War of 1967 fanned and shaped the fierce contest over Jerusalem. After Gamal Abdel Nasser announced he would close the Strait of Tiran (which joins the Gulf of Aqaba between Egypt's Sinai peninsula and Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea), Israel attacked Egypt.
- Syria and Jordan joined in on Egypt's side, and the entire Arab world backed them. But it took Israel just six days to humiliate them, and snatch the Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt, West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and Golan Heights from Syria.

### World Health Assembly

- 71st meeting of World Health Assembly was held at Geneva. In addition to its three main themes of celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Organization, the 40th Anniversary of Alma-Ata and WHO's top priority, universal health coverage, it will cover many topics on health throughout the life-course including sexual and reproductive health; early childhood development; maternal, infant and young child nutrition; poliomyelitis and the Global Vaccine Action Plan.

#### World Health Assembly (WHA):

- The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the forum through which the World Health Organization (WHO) is governed by its 194 member states. It is the world's highest health policy setting body and is composed of health ministers from member states.
- The members of the World Health Assembly generally meet every year in May in Geneva, the location of WHO Headquarters.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- **About WHO:**
- World Health Organization (WHO) is the United Nations' specialized agency for Health.
- It is an inter-governmental organization and works in collaboration with its member states usually through the Ministries of Health.
- The World Health Organization is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.
- India became a party to the WHO Constitution on 12 January 1948. The first session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia was held on 4-5 October 1948 in the office of the Indian Minister of Health.

- It was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India and was addressed by the WHO Director-General, Dr Brock Chisholm. India is a Member State of the WHO South East Asia Region.
- The WHO Country Office for India is headquartered in Delhi with country-wide presence. The WHO Country Office for India's areas of work are enshrined in its new Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) 2012-2017.
- WHO is staffed by health professionals, other experts and support staff working at headquarters in Geneva, six regional offices and country offices. In carrying out its activities and fulfilling its objectives

#### **WHO's secretariat focuses its work on the following six core functions:**

- providing leadership on matters critical to health and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed;
- shaping the research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge;
- setting norms and standards and promoting and monitoring their implementation;
- articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options;
- providing technical support, catalysing change, and building sustainable institutional capacity; and
- monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### **IISER develops device to detect and remove arsenic from water**

- The Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) in collaboration with a private company has developed a new device which can be used to detect and remove arsenic content from water and make it safe and usable by households.
- The device - 'Arsenic Sensor and Removal Media' - is an effective system with low production cost, IISER Director Sourav Pal told a press meet here on Wednesday.

#### **Analysis:**

- Arsenic in ground water is a geogenic contaminant i.e. caused by natural geologic processes. Arsenic-containing groundwater in Ganga River basin is hosted by the sediments deposited by the rivers during the late Quaternary or Holocene age (<12 thousand years).
- Incidence of high arsenic in groundwater reported from various parts of the country, particularly in the Ganga-plains is a serious threat to the health of human being.
- Over the last three decades numerous measures have been initiated which includes alternate arrangement for supply of arsenic free water to the affected populace and providing arsenic removal plants.
- Arsenic occurrences in ground water in these areas is highly sporadic in nature and all the sources in these areas are not necessarily contaminated.
- High value of arsenic in groundwater is geogenic in nature, but as a large population is dependent on groundwater resources for drinking purposes in Ganga basin and is under the risk of health hazards, it becomes emergent to go for mitigation measures as well as alternate sources of water so that locals can be protected from negative impact of arsenic in groundwater.
- Technological options to combat arsenic menace, in groundwater, to ensure supply of arsenic free water, in the affected areas can be in-situ remediation of arsenic from aquifer system, ex-situ remediation of arsenic from tapped groundwater by arsenic removal technologies, use of surface water source as an alternative to

the contaminated groundwater source, tapping alternate safe aquifers for supply of arsenic free groundwater or combination of above techniques.

- Out of the above options, arsenic removal technologies and ex-situ treatment technique are being practiced widely to provide potable water to the people in the arsenic affected areas after treatment of contaminated groundwater. Their large scale use in West Bengal, based on different operating principles, with various degrees of success and failure, has been reported.

## **INSV Tarini**

- INSV Tarini has completed a historic global Circumnavigation. This is the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women crew. It's a first for India where an all-women crew set sails for circumnavigation of the globe.

### **About INSV Tarini and expedition:**

- The indigenously-built INSV Tarini is a 56-foot sailing vessel, which was inducted in the Indian Navy in February 2017, and has showcased the 'Make in India' initiative on the International forum.
- The expedition titled 'Navika Sagar Parikrama' is in consonance with the National policy to empower women to attain their full potential. It has showcased 'Nari Shakti' on the world platform and helped change societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.
- During her 254 day long voyage, the vessel has covered over 22,000 Nautical miles, visiting five countries – Australia, New Zealand, Falkland Islands (UK), South Africa and Mauritius.
- At each of these countries the crew received a rousing welcome both from the Indian diaspora as also from the local community.
- During the course of her voyage, the vessel has met all criteria of circumnavigation, viz. crossing the Equator twice, crossing all Longitudes, as also the three great capes (Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and Cape of Good Hope).
- The expedition was covered in six legs, with halts at 5 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), Cape Town (South Africa) and Port Louis (Mauritius).
- The crew and the vessel encountered rough seas on numerous occasions during the voyage. The extremely cold climate coupled with stormy weather conditions especially in the Southern Ocean made the task of circumnavigating the globe highly daunting and challenging. The vessel also witnessed winds in excess of 60 knots and waves up to 7 meters high, whilst crossing the Pacific Ocean.

## **WHO list of essential diagnostic tests**

- WHO has published its first Essential Diagnostics List, a catalogue of the tests needed to diagnose the most common conditions as well as a number of global priority diseases.
- The aim is to provide a tool that can be useful to all countries, to test and treat better, but also to use health funds more efficiently by concentrating on the truly essential tests.

### **Main highlights:**

- The list concentrates on in vitro tests – i.e. tests of human specimens like blood and urine. It contains 113 products.
- 58 tests are listed for detection and diagnosis of a wide range of common conditions, providing an essential package that can form the basis for screening and management of patients.
- 55 tests are designed for the detection, diagnosis and monitoring of "priority" diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis B and C, human papillomavirus and syphilis.
- Some of the tests are particularly suitable for primary health care facilities, where laboratory services are often poorly resourced and sometimes non-existent. These tests do not require electricity or trained personnel. Other tests are more sophisticated and therefore intended for larger medical facilities.



- For each category of test, the Essential Diagnostics List specifies the type of test and intended use, format, and if appropriate for primary health care or for health facilities with laboratories. The list also provides links to WHO Guidelines or publications and, when available, to prequalified products.

## Analysis:

- Many people are unable to get tested for diseases because of lack of access to diagnostic services.
- Several are incorrectly diagnosed and, hence, do not receive the treatment they need. For instance, an estimated 46 per cent of adults worldwide with Type 2 diabetes are undiagnosed, risking serious health complications.

Late diagnosis of infectious diseases such as HIV and TB increases the risk of spreading and makes the conditions more difficult to treat. To address the gap, the WHO published this list

## Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala

- As the death toll in the virus-induced fever in north Kerala rises to nine, the National Virology Institute in Pune has confirmed that the deceased were infected with Nipah virus (NiV).
- This is the first time the virus, which has high fatality rate and spreads mainly through bats, pigs and other animals, has been detected in the state.

## About the virus:

- Nipah virus (NiV) infection is a newly-emerging zoonosis (a disease which can be transmitted to humans from animals) that causes severe disease in both animals and humans. The natural host of the virus are fruit bats of the Pteropodidae Family, Pteropus genus.
- NiV was first identified during an outbreak of disease that took place in Kampung Sungai Nipah, Malaysia in 1998.
- On this occasion, pigs were the intermediate hosts. However, in subsequent NiV outbreaks, there were no intermediate hosts.
- In Bangladesh in 2004, humans became infected with NiV as a result of consuming date palm sap that had been contaminated by infected fruit bats. Human-to-human transmission has also been documented, including in a hospital setting in India.
- The viruses jump the species barrier and infect a secondary animal host, transmission takes place through direct contact with infected bats, pigs, or from other NiV-infected people and people have been also cautioned that they should not consume fruits that have fallen on to the ground.

## Symptoms

- NiV infection in humans has a range of clinical presentations, from asymptomatic infection to acute respiratory syndrome and fatal encephalitis.
- NiV is also capable of causing disease in pigs and other domestic animals.
- Nipah virus primarily causes an encephalitic syndrome with a high mortality rate.
- The characteristic MRI abnormalities are multiple, small (less than 5 mm), asymmetric focal lesions in the subcortical and deep white matter without surrounding edema.
- There is no vaccine for either humans or animals. The primary treatment for human cases is intensive supportive care

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## QUICK FACTS

- 4th BRICS Ministerial Meeting was held in: **Durban**
- World's first floating nuclear power station: **Russia**
- International Bio-diversity Day is observed on: **22 May**
- India's first solar powered railway station: **Guwahati**
- Youngest Indian woman to scale Mount Everest: **Shivangi Pathak**
- Anti Terrorism Day is observed on: **May 21st**
- Regional Conference on "Clean and Renewable Energy" held in: **Bhopal**