

THE  HINDU  
ANALYSIS

29th MARCH, 2024

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## The countdown to a pandemic treaty

In March 2021, an extraordinary call for a pandemic treaty was issued by 25 heads of government and international agencies, marking a pivotal moment in global health governance. The ninth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB), the final leg of negotiations for the 30-page World Health Organization (WHO) Pandemic Agreement, commenced last week (March 18). This is the most momentous time in global health since 1948. As we approach the World Health Assembly in late May, where the final draft will be presented for approval, the fate of the Pandemic Agreement hangs in the balance, with the risk of collapse looming large amidst contentious debates.

### The key features

The WHO Pandemic Agreement aims to address the systemic failures revealed by the COVID-19 crisis, with the goal of strengthening global defences and averting future pandemics from spiralling into catastrophic human crisis. The world's first pandemic treaty aims to "strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response" with "equity as the goal and outcome". It addresses the searing inequity witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic including a lack of preparedness in countries and the lack of coordination at international levels.

The draft negotiating text covers several issues, that includes pathogen surveillance, health-care workforce capacity, supply chain and logistics, and tech transfer to support the production of vaccines, diagnostic tests and treatments, and the waivers of intellectual property (IP) rights. It seeks to strengthen surveillance for pathogens with "pandemic potential". The Agreement requires countries to also commit to better managing antimicrobial resistance, strengthening their health systems and sanitation, and making progress toward universal health coverage. Separate talks at WHO aim to amend the International Health Regulations, which compel countries to report health emergencies within their borders.

There is a significant emphasis throughout the text on equitable access to medical products. This theme shows up across provisions from language on principles, articles on preparedness, production, technology transfer, access and benefit sharing, supply and procurement.

The current negotiating texts have also proposed an establishment of the Conference of Parties (COP) to oversee the implementation of the Pandemic Agreement. The proposed establishment of a COP suggests that the Agreement could be a classic international treaty adopted under Article 19 of the WHO



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Constitution as opposed to the alternative Article 21 opt-out regulations.

At the ongoing negotiations, the developing countries have largely embraced the revised negotiating text (perhaps for the first time in two years of negotiations), while the developed countries uniformly criticised it, stating that the text now contains elements that are 'redlines' for them including on financing and matters related to IP. Countries including Australia, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States went to the extent of referring to the text as a 'step backwards'. Other than the few major substantive disagreements, there is also a general disagreement on the modalities for the conduct of these negotiations in this final stretch.

India, representing the South-East Asia region, has emphasised the importance of clarity on obligations *vis-à-vis* responsibilities, especially between developed and developing countries, to effectively operationalise equity within the Agreement.

### The concerns

The most contentious aspect of the Agreement, essentially between developing countries, and others, mostly developed countries and some stakeholders, lies in the establishment of a global system for sharing pathogens and their genetic codes, while ensuring equitable access to the 'benefits' derived from research, including vaccines. Developing countries are hesitant to share information on pathogen spread and evolution if they perceive little in return, a situation exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic by "vaccine nationalism".

To address this issue, the current draft of the Agreement proposes a quid pro quo mechanism, formally titled the WHO Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) System that compels countries to share genome sequence information and samples with WHO-coordinated networks and databases. In return for access to these data, manufacturers of diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines will be required to provide 10% of their products free of charge and 10% at not-for-profit prices. The current text of the provision aims to establish legal obligations on benefits-sharing for all users of biological materials and genetic sequence data under PABS.

A robust PABS system, particularly for low- and middle-income countries, including some African nations, seems non-negotiable for promoting equity in access to medical countermeasures. On the other hand, many developed countries and the pharmaceutical industry are not satisfied with the language on access and benefit sharing in the current negotiating text, including the perceived

trade-offs. The challenge of global governance, enforcement, and accountability is the second major sticking point of the Agreement negotiations. Without adequate accountability and enforcement mechanisms built into the Agreement, the whole endeavour is merely an exercise in symbolism. The absence of adequate enforcement capabilities also hampers coordination efforts for pandemic countermeasure stockpiles, the deployment of international medical response teams, as well as monitoring and data sharing.

The Agreement risks being rendered ineffective even if the Global North was to reach a consensus on key issues such as technology transfer, the PABS System, and intellectual property waivers, without robust enforcement mechanisms.

The existing International Health Regulations are already legally binding. However, they failed to prevent unjust travel or trade restrictions, and hoarding of vaccines and other medical countermeasures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proposals for a decision-making body, comprising the COP along with a secretariat, have been included in the negotiating text. However, it remains uncertain whether negotiators will reach consensus on this structure. This model mirrors the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) summits, where all nations receive equal voting rights.

One of the thorniest issues within the Agreement negotiating text is the proposed requirement for firms that received public financing to waive or reduce their intellectual property royalties.

### What next?

The current round of negotiations in Geneva ends this week, with the goal of reaching a consensus decision by the World Health Assembly at the end of May. The risk of a watered-down Agreement, driven by the imperative to secure consensus, remains palpable. Although the draft Agreement touches upon most of the relevant concerns that unfolded during the recent pandemic, much of the language around contentious issues such as IP waivers is arguably watered down by referring to national circumstances and using best endeavour language.

To be sure, this is a mammoth task. One of the potential outcomes of not reaching an Agreement is not ruled out. Failing to reach an agreement would, however, be a serious blow. The Pandemic Agreement represents a critical step towards rebuilding trust and coordination between nations, acknowledging that no single government or institution can confront the threat of future pandemics in isolation.

The World Health Organization Pandemic Agreement represents a critical step towards rebuilding trust and coordination between nations, but there are indications that it runs the risk of collapse

# Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord

## **Article 2. Objective and scope**

1. The objective of the WHO Pandemic Agreement, guided by equity, the right to health and the principles and approaches set forth herein, is to prevent, prepare for and respond to pandemics, with the aim of comprehensively and effectively addressing the systemic gaps and challenges that exist in these areas, at national, regional and international levels.

# Article Highlights

- A pandemic treaty was proposed in March 2021 by global leaders to improve pandemic response and prevent future crises.
- The WHO Pandemic Agreement aims to strengthen global defenses against pandemics, focusing on equity and international coordination.
- It addresses issues like pathogen surveillance, healthcare capacity, supply chains, technology transfer, and IP waivers.
- Equitable access to medical resources is a central goal, aiming to correct disparities seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Developing countries have supported the revised text, while developed countries have raised concerns about financing and IP issues.

# Article Highlights

- Contentious aspects include sharing pathogens and genetic codes and equitable access to benefits from research.
- A proposed system (PABS) requires sharing data for access to affordable medical products, aiming at equity for low- and middle-income countries.
- Challenges in negotiations include global governance, enforcement, accountability, and disagreements over intellectual property rights.
- The risk of a diluted agreement looms, with the aim of reaching consensus by the World Health Assembly in May.
- Failing to reach an agreement could significantly impact global trust and coordination against future pandemics.

EDITORIAL | VOLUME 403, ISSUE 10429, P781, MARCH 02, 2024

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# The Pandemic Treaty: shameful and unjust

The Lancet

## Households across the world waste 1 billion meals a day, says UN report

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Households across the globe wasted over one billion meals a day in 2022, even as 783 million people struggled with hunger and a third of humanity faced food insecurity, according to the Food Waste Index Report 2024, a study jointly authored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), a U.K.-based non-profit.

The report, released ahead of the International Day of Zero Waste (March 30), noted that in 2022, there were 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste generated (including inedible parts), amounting to 132 kilograms per capita and almost one-fifth of all food available to consumers. “Out of the total food wast-



Rural areas generally wasted less food, the report said.

ed in 2022, 60% happened at the household level, with food services responsible for 28%, and retail 12%,” the report observed.

The report stressed the importance of expanding and strengthening data infrastructure to enable the tracking and monitoring of food waste, pointing out that “many low- and middle-income countries continue to lack adequate systems for tracking progress

to meet Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 of halving food waste by 2030, particularly in retail and food services”. At present, only four G-20 countries (Australia, Japan, U.K., U.S.) and the European Union have food waste estimates suitable for tracking progress to 2030.

Contrary to popular perception, food waste was not a “rich country problem”, the report stated, with observed average levels of household food waste for high-income, upper-middle, and lower-middle-income countries differing by just 7 kg per capita. “Hotter countries appear to generate more food waste per capita in households, potentially due to higher consumption of fresh foods with substantial inedible parts and a lack of robust cold chains,” the report noted.

Detailing the link between food waste and climate change, the report found that food loss and waste generated “8%-10% of annual global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – almost five times that of the aviation sector – and significant biodiversity loss by taking up the equivalent of almost a third of the world’s agricultural land”. It estimated the toll of both food loss and waste on the global economy at \$1 trillion.

Another trend revealed by the data was that compared to urban areas, rural ones generally wasted less food, due to “greater diversion of food scraps to pets, livestock, and home composting”. The report urged governments to “raise climate ambition by integrating food loss and waste” into their Nationally Determined Contributions.



## Think Eat Save

Tracking Progress to Halve  
Global Food Waste

# Key Points of the Report

- In 2022, the world wasted 1.05 billion tonnes of food, equating to 19% of food available to consumers, in addition to 13% lost in the supply chain.
- Households are the largest contributors to food waste, responsible for 631 million tonnes (60%), followed by the food service sector (290 million tonnes) and the retail sector (131 million tonnes).
- Food loss and waste generate 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, while 783 million people are hungry, and a third of humanity faces food insecurity.
- Each person wastes approximately 79kg of food annually, resulting in over one billion wasted meals daily.

# Key Points of the Report

- Food waste is a global issue with minimal variation in household food waste among high-income, upper-middle-income, and lower-middle-income countries (7 kg/capita/year difference).
- Hotter countries tend to waste more food per capita, attributed to consumption of fresh foods and challenges in food storage and transportation.
- Urban areas, especially in middle-income countries, waste more food than rural areas, where food scraps are often repurposed.
- Among G20 countries, only four (Australia, Japan, UK, and USA) plus the European Union have food waste estimates suitable for tracking progress towards halving food waste by 2030.

# Key Points of the Report

- Successful reductions in food waste have been observed in Japan and the UK, highlighting the effectiveness of collaboration among governments, cities, and food businesses.
- Public Private Partnerships are increasingly adopted to tackle food waste and its impacts on climate and water stress, focusing on a Target-Measure-Act approach.

## THE STUDY FOUND THE FOLLOWING:



Food waste was **62% by mass** of total household waste, significantly more than the fractions for packaging and residual waste fractions.



**No correlation** was found between income group and per capita food waste generation.



Median per capita food waste generation was **77 kg/capita/year**

### FOOD WASTE CATEGORIES (% BY MASS) WERE:

Fruit and vegetables:  
**62%**



Meat:  
**11%**



Dairy:  
**11%**



Bakery:  
**16%**



### EDIBLE AND INEDIBLE FRACTIONS WERE:

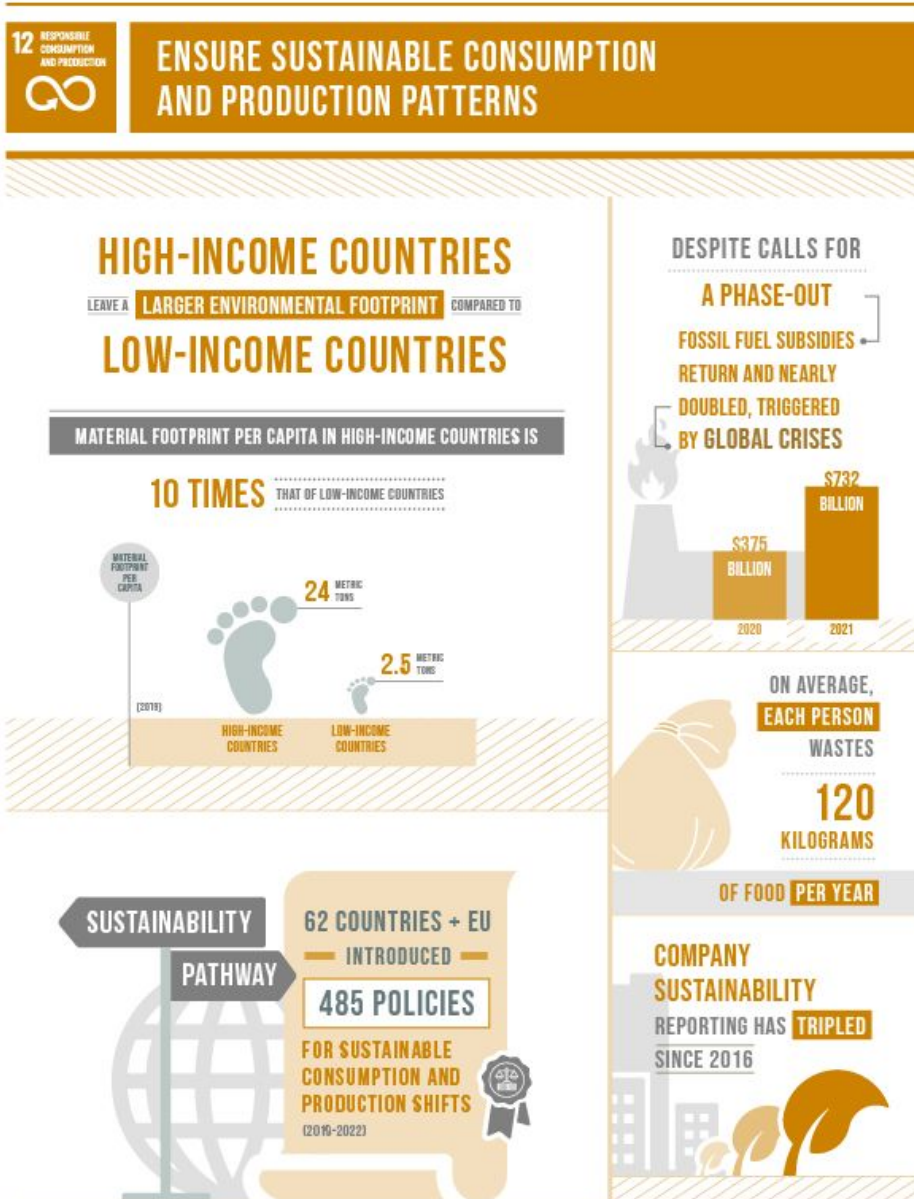
Edible  
**39%**



Inedible  
**61%**



Inedible fruit and vegetables were the largest fraction, at **81%** of all fruit and vegetable waste generated or **73%** of all inedible food waste.



## Target 12.3

- By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses

# Prelims Bytes

## Skyroot Aerospace successfully test-fires stage-2 of Vikram-1 launch vehicle in A.P.'s Sriharikota

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

Leading space-tech company Skyroot Aerospace on Wednesday successfully test-fired stage-2 of its Vikram-1 launch vehicle at the propulsion testbed of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

Launch vehicles comprise multiple stages. Stage-2, called Kalam-250, is critical during the ascent of the launch vehicle since



Kalam-250, the second stage of Vikram-1 launch vehicle, being test fired by Skyroot Aerospace at Sriharikota in A.P. on Wednesday.

it will propel the rocket through the earth's atmosphere and into the va-

cuum of space.

The Vikram-1 launch will be a landmark event

for the Indian space sector as it will be the country's first private orbital rocket launch.

It follows the suborbital launch of India's first private rocket – the Vikram-S by Skyroot in November 2022, said an official press release.

The test, which lasted 85 seconds, recorded a peak sea-level thrust of 186 kilonewtons (kN), which will translate to a fully expanded vacuum thrust of around 235kN in flight.

The Kalam-250 is a high-strength carbon composite

rocket motor, which uses solid fuel and a high-performance Ethylene-Propylene-Diene terpolymers Thermal Protection System.

Stage-2 of the launch vehicle houses a carbon ablative flex nozzle along with high-precision electro-mechanical actuators for thrust vector control of the vehicle, which helps the rocket achieve the desired trajectory.

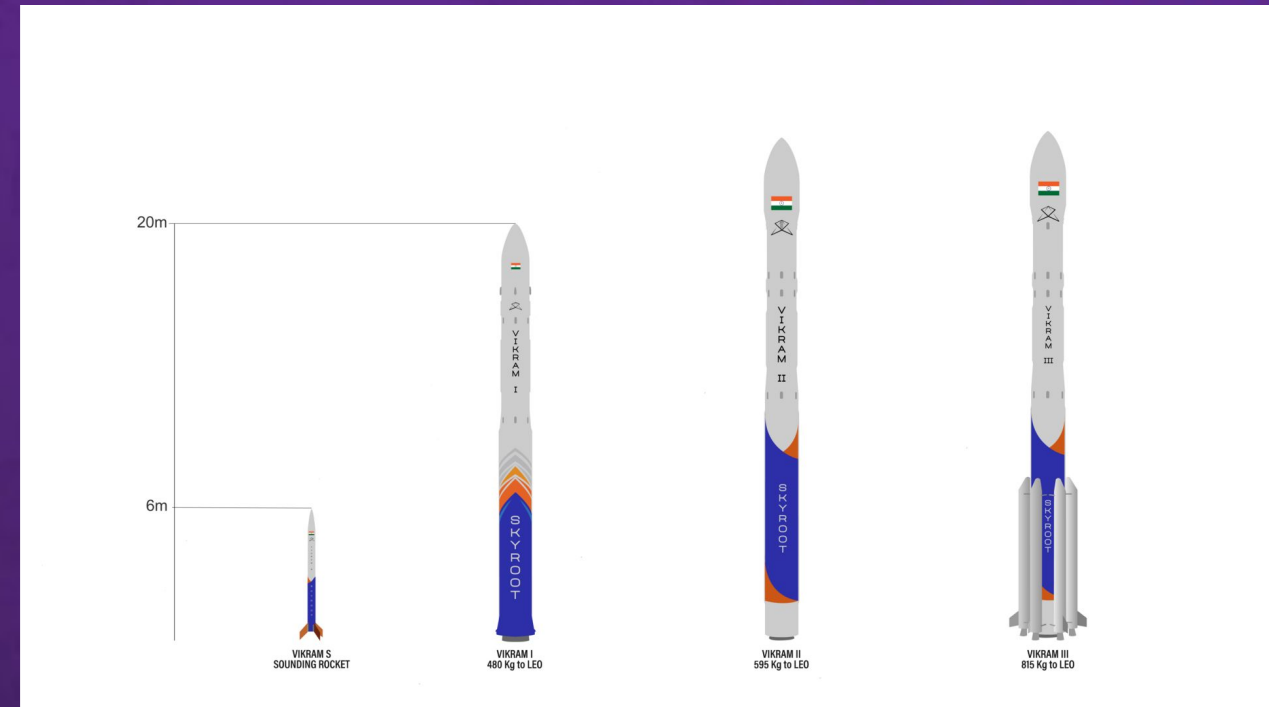
The solid propellant in Kalam-250 was processed by Solar Industries at their Nagpur facility.

# Important Points

- Skyroot Aerospace tested stage-2 (Kalam-250) of Vikram-1 launch vehicle at ISRO's centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.
- Kalam-250 is essential for moving the rocket from Earth's atmosphere into space.
- Vikram-1's launch will be India's first private orbital rocket launch.
- Follows Vikram-S, India's first private suborbital rocket, launched in November 2022.
- The test lasted 85 seconds, achieving a peak thrust of 186kN, expected to reach 235kN in space.
- Kalam-250 uses solid fuel and includes a high-strength carbon composite structure.
- Features include a carbon ablative flex nozzle and actuators for thrust vector control.

# Vikram I

- The Vikram I, first rocket in the series, has three solid fuel-powered stages and the final stage is Raman engine.
- The Raman engine is powered by MMH and NTO liquid fuels.
- These Raman Engines will be used to do final adjustments in the orbit of the stage.
- Vikram I is designed to lift 290 kg to a 500 km Sun synchronous polar orbit (SSPO) and 480 kg in a 500 km low Earth orbit (LEO).





# Ethylene-Propylene-Diene Monomer (EPDM)

- Automotive weather-stripping and seals
- Roofing membranes
- Electrical insulation
- Radiator hoses
- Pond liners



## Core sector output growth spurts to 6.7% in February

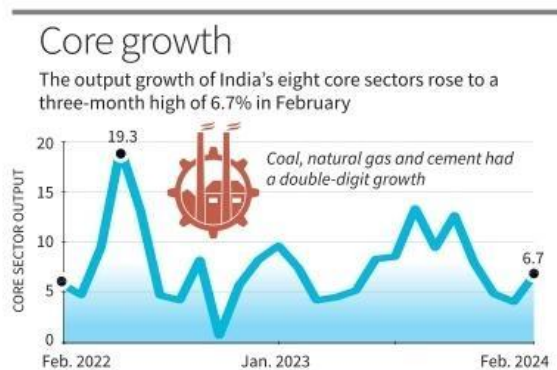
Double-digit upticks in coal, natural gas and cement industries lead to three-month high levels; however, production of fertilizers fell 9.5% to record the sharpest contraction since May 2021

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

India's eight core sectors' output growth spurts to a three-month high of 6.7% in February, led by double-digit upticks in coal, natural gas and cement even as fertilizers' production fell 9.5% to record the sharpest contraction since May 2021.

January's Index of Core Industries (ICI) was revised to reflect a 4.1% rise, compared with the previous estimate of 3.6%, but that remained the slowest growth in 15 months. This is the second month in a row that fertilizers' output dipped year-on-year, and marks the first such streak in two years.

In absolute terms, overall output levels were at a three-month low and 4.9%



below January's levels, which had marked a ten-month high. In sequential terms, the only segment to record an uptick over January's production level was cement (up 1.74%).

In year-on-year terms, crude oil production grew at an all-time high pace of 7.9% in February, although that was aided by base effects as output had

dropped 4.9% in the same month last year. Natural gas output grew 11.3%, which was the highest in two years. The upticks in February also marked a four-month peak for cement (10.2%), electricity (6.3%), and coal (11.6%).

While steel production growth eased slightly to 8.4% in February, refinery products recovered from a

### Pre-poll splurge lifts fiscal deficit

NEW DELHI

Signalling a sharp rise in spending ahead of the fiscal year-end, the Centre's fiscal deficit soared from 64% of the revised estimates in January to 86.5% by the end of February. The deficit hit ₹15 lakh crore in the first eleven months of 2023-24 » **PAGE 15**

4.3% contraction in January to rise 2.6%.

As the ICI has a weightage of slightly over 40% in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), economists expect industrial output growth to recover from the 3.8% uptick recorded in January.

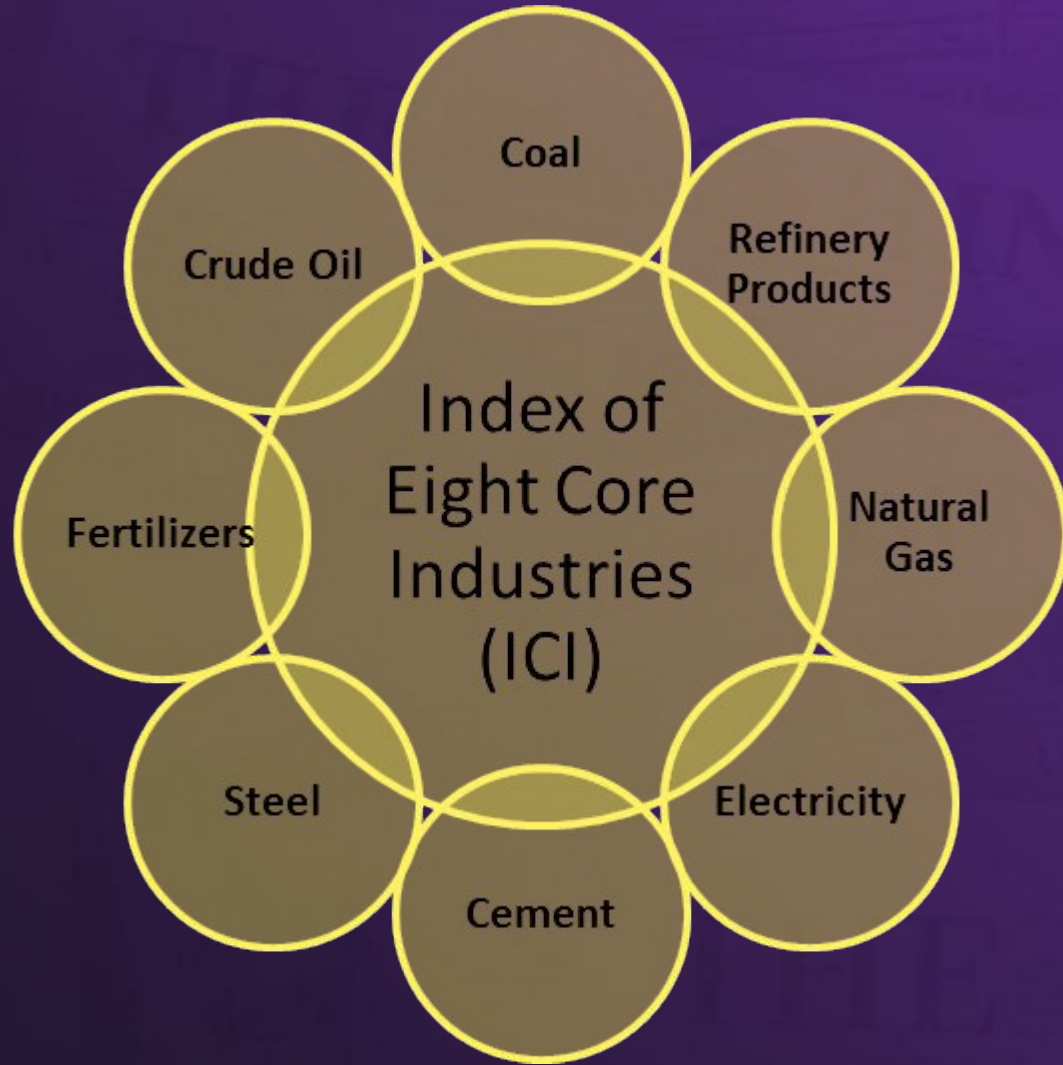
**CONTINUED ON**  
» **PAGE 12**

# Important Points

- India's eight core sectors saw a growth of 6.7% in February, the highest in three months, led by coal, natural gas, and cement sectors.
- Fertilizer production fell by 9.5%, marking the most significant contraction since May 2021.
- The Index of Core Industries for January was revised up to a 4.1% increase from the initial 3.6% estimate.
- Sector Highlights:
  - Crude oil production hit an all-time high growth of 7.9% year-on-year.
  - Natural gas output increased by 11.3%, the highest in two years.
  - Cement, electricity, and coal also saw substantial growth.

# Important Points

- Steel production growth slightly decreased to 8.4%, while refinery products grew by 2.6% after a previous contraction.
- With the core sectors' significant weight in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), industrial output growth is expected to recover, with estimates ranging from 4% to 6.5% for February.
- Continued robust growth expected in March, around 6%, driven by government efforts to meet capital expenditure targets.



## Pre-poll splurge lifts fiscal deficit

The Centre's fiscal deficit jumped to ₹15 lakh crore in the first eleven months of 2023-24, from just ₹11 lakh crore at the end of January; economists still expect the Centre to meet its revised fiscal deficit target of ₹17.3 lakh crore set in the Budget

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**S**ignalling a sharp rise in spending ahead of the fiscal year-end, the Centre's fiscal deficit soared from 64% of the revised estimates in January to 86.5% by the end of February, with capex recording a sequential bounce to ₹84,400 crore last month.

In absolute value, the deficit hit ₹15 lakh crore in the first eleven months of 2023-24, from just ₹11 lakh crore at the end of January, and was almost 3.5% over

### Poll-ready

Centre's fiscal deficit soared from 64% of the revised estimates in January to 86.5% by the end of February



- Centre still has headroom left for ₹6 lakh crore of revenue spending in March

- On the capex front, Centre still needs to spend ₹1.4 lakh crore in March to meet target

- Capex goal likely to be missed due to kicking in of Model Code of Conduct

the ₹14.5 lakh crore over the same period in the earlier financial year.

Economists believe the

final numbers for this year, to be released at the end of April, will be well within the ₹17.3 lakh crore revised

target set in last month's Union Budget, with a good chance it may undershoot the goal that is equivalent to 5.8% of GDP.

The Centre still has headroom left for ₹6 lakh crore of revenue spending in March, 9% over the ₹5.5 lakh crore spent in the last month of 2022-23, Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA pointed out.

On the capex front, the government still needs to spend ₹1.4 lakh crore in March to meet its target, which is a tad lower than the ₹1.5 lakh crore spent in

March 2023. However, the capex goal is likely to be missed thanks to the Model Code of Conduct for the upcoming General Elections kicking in, Ms. Nayar reckoned.

"The government accounts show the Centre's spending is still short of its target by about ₹7.4 lakh crore with major shortfalls," said Bank of Baroda chief economist Madan Sabnavis. If these amounts are not exhausted in March, it could result in savings of ₹50,000-₹60,000 crore, he added.

# Important Points

- The Centre's fiscal deficit increased from 64% to 86.5% of the revised estimates between January and February.
- The deficit reached ₹15 lakh crore in the first 11 months of 2023-24, up from ₹11 lakh crore at the end of January, and 3.5% higher than the same period last year.
- Economists expect the year-end fiscal figures to stay within the ₹17.3 lakh crore revised target, potentially even lower, equivalent to 5.8% of GDP.
- The government has ₹6 lakh crore for revenue spending in March, 9% more than the previous year's March spending.
- To meet its capex target, the government needs to spend ₹1.4 lakh crore in March, slightly less than the ₹1.5 lakh crore spent in March 2023.
- The capex target may be missed due to the Model Code of Conduct for the General Elections.
- There's a potential saving of ₹50,000-₹60,000 crore if the ₹7.4 lakh crore spending target is not fully utilized in March.

# Fiscal Deficit

- A fiscal deficit occurs when a government's total expenditures surpass the revenue it generates, excluding money from borrowings.

## China sends glacier water from Tibet to climate-hit Maldives

**Agence France-Presse**

MALE

China has sent more than a million bottles of water from melting Tibetan glaciers to the Maldives, officials said on Thursday, a gift from the world's highest mountains to a low-lying archipelago threatened by rising seas.

### **Seeping salt**

The Indian Ocean nation of 1,192 tiny coral islands is on the frontlines of the climate crisis, with salt levels seeping into the land and corrupting potable water, leaving it dependent on desalination plants.

Scientists say glaciers in the Himalayas are melting faster than ever due to climate change.

The Maldives Foreign Ministry said the water was a gift from Yan Jinhai, the chairman of the Xizang Autonomous Region, or Tibet. The consignment of mineral water packed into 90 sea containers arrived last week and had been unloaded in the capital Male, a port authority official said.

The Ministry rejected allegations on social media that the imported water was for the consumption of pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned in 2007 that rises of 18 cm-59 cm would make the Maldives virtually uninhabitable by the end of the century.

# Important Points

- China donated over a million bottles of glacier water to the Maldives.
- The water comes from melting Tibetan glaciers, addressing the Maldives' fresh water scarcity.
- The Maldives faces threats from rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion, making it dependent on desalination.
- The water was shipped in 90 sea containers to Male, the capital of the Maldives.
- The UN's IPCC warned that the Maldives could become uninhabitable by the century's end due to rising sea levels.

# Sea-level Rise and drinking water salinization



More than two million hectares of farmland in Australia is damaged by salt, including in the Murray-Darling basin, the nation's breadbasket.

Salty drinking water in coastal Bangladesh causes up to 10,000 deaths a year, according to a 2015 study.

# Revisited Headlines

## Philippines leader warns of countermeasures as China steps up aggression in sea

**Associated Press**  
MANILA

The Philippine President said on Thursday that his government would take action against what he called dangerous attacks by the Chinese Coast Guard and suspected militia ships in the disputed South China Sea, saying "Filipinos do not yield."

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. did not provide details of the actions his government would take in the succeeding weeks but said these would be "proportionate, deliberate and reasonable in the face of the open, unabating, and illegal, coercive, aggressive and dangerous attacks by agents of the China coast guard and Chinese maritime militia."



Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

"We seek no conflict with any nation," Mr. Marcos wrote on X, formerly Twitter, but said the Philippines would not be "cowed into silence."

Mr. Marcos's warning is the latest sign of the escalating disputes between China and the Philippines in the contested waters.

China and the Philippines, as well as Vietnam,

Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei, have overlapping claims in the resource-rich and busy waterway, where a bulk of the world's commerce and oil transits.

Chinese officials in Manila or Beijing did not immediately respond to Mr. Marcos's public warning, which he issued during Holy Week – one of the most sacred religious periods in the largely Roman Catholic nation.

### **Saturday's incident**

In the latest hostilities on Saturday, the Chinese coast guard used water cannons that injured several Philippine navy crewmen and heavily damaged their wooden supply boat near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal.

- Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced measures against aggressive actions by the Chinese Coast Guard and suspected militia in the South China Sea.
- Marcos stated actions would be proportionate and reasonable, without detailing specifics.
- The Philippines seeks no conflict but will not be silenced, according to Marcos.
- A recent incident involved the Chinese coast guard using water cannons on Philippine navy crewmen near Second Thomas Shoal, causing injuries and damage.

# Mains Questions

Q1) Examine the key features and challenges of the WHO Pandemic Agreement. Critically analyze the implications of the proposed provisions on global health governance and equity.

Q2) Discuss the impacts of food waste on global hunger, environmental sustainability, and economic systems.