T.N. underlines ban on online games at GST Council meet

Thangam Thennarasu urges Council to keep the ban in view while taking any decision, opposes pruning of the list of services eligible for exemption as it will mean more expenditure for States

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu, left, attending the GST Council meeting called by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, right, in New Delhi on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Tamil Nadu on Tuesday told the GST Council that any decision on online games should conform to the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Online Gambling Act, 2022.

During the 50th meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Delhi on Tuesday, State Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu urged the Council to take into consideration the ban on online gambling by the State.

Tamil Nadu also opposed a recent notification of the Union government to include Goods and Services Tax network under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002, contending that it was against the interests of taxpayers and against the basic objective of de-criminalising offences under the GST law. "As this [including Goods and Services Tax network under the 2002 Act] would affect the dealers across the country, especially small dealers, Tamil Nadu opposes the move," an official release said.

Tamil Nadu reiterated its opposition to the proposal to prune the list of services eligible for exemption. "This would lead to additional expenditure on local authorities and State government," it said.

It also reiterated the stand that the State committee, formed for selecting technical member, should be empowered to select the judicial and technical members of the State benches of the GST Appellate Tribunal.

Tamil Nadu supported the proposal to grant exemption from payment of Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on import of expensive medicines used to treat cancer patients.

It supported the proposal to grant exemption on IGST payable on import of medicines and Food for Special Medical Purposes (FSMP) used in the treatment of certain rare diseases.

Centre's view on Kashmir situation has no bearing on Article 370 case: SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on Tuesday said a fresh affidavit submitted by the Union government saying Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing an "unprecedented era of peace, progress and prosperity" after its special status under Article 370 was abrogated on August 4, 2019, has "no bearing on the constitutional challenge" to the repeal of the provision.

The Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and including four of the senior-most judges, said it would start hearing the case from August 2.

The court observed that the affidavit, filed on Monday, only sets out the "perspective of the Union government regarding the post abrogation of Article 370 developments and has no bearing on the issues raised in the petitions and shall not hence be relied upon for that purpose". "This case concerns a pure constitutional challenge," Chief Justice Chandrachud observed.

> The perspective of the Union government has no bearing on the issues raised in the petitions and shall not hence be relied upon for that purpose. This case concerns a pure constitutional challenge
>
> **D.Y. CHANDRACHUD**
> Chief Justice of India

The various petitions have questioned the Centre's sudden move to "unilaterally unravel the unique federal scheme, under cover of President's Rule, while undermining crucial elements of due process and the rule of law".

The Bench deleted the names of IAS official Shah Faesal and activist Shehla Rasheed from the list of petitioners. With the deletion of Mr. Faesal's name, which was part of the cause title, the case would now be called "In re: Article 370 of the Constitution".

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Centre's view has no bearing on case: SC

The petitioners, represented by senior advocates including Rajeev Dhavan, Dushyant Dave, Raju Ramachandran, Gopal Sankaranarayanan, C.U. Singh and Nitya Ramakrishnan and advocates Kamini Jaiswal, Vrinda Grover, Prasanna S. and others, said the "legal challenge remains" despite what the Centre's views about life in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation.

In its 20-page affidavit, the Centre said that post dilution of Article 370 which deprived Jammu and Kashmir of its special privileges, "life has returned to normalcy in the region after over three decades of turmoil".

The Article 370 case has been pending in the Supreme Court for over two years. The case had not come up after a five-judge Bench refused to refer the petitions to a larger Bench in March 2020. The petitions have challenged a Presidential Order of August 5, 2019, which diluted Article 370.

They argue that the Presidential Order of August 5 substituted the concurrence of the Governor of the State government to change the very character of a federal unit.

The Centre has countered that the Presidential Order of August 5 has become *fait accompli*.

GST Council to impose 28% tax on online gaming firms

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

New measures: The council meeting examined the States' proposals to set up GST Appellate Tribunals in the country. PTI

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, at its 50th meeting on Tuesday, reduced or clarified the tax rate on some items ranging from uncooked or unfried snack pellets to special utility vehicles (SUVs), exempted imported drugs to treat cancer and rare diseases, and brought an end to a years-long debate on tax treatment of online gaming, casinos and horse racing.

Whether they involve skill or chance, or both or neither, bets and wagers made on all three activities, will attract a 28% levy and the GST laws will be amended to include online gaming, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The council also examined States' proposals to set up 50 Benches of the GST Appellate Tribunals in the country.

The government has said that the statutory bodies to resolve mounting GST disputes shall become operational within four to six months, with Benches coming up in the State capitals and places where the High Courts have Benches.

The Council cleared the appointment and service conditions for tribunal members and president.

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28% tax to be imposed on online gaming firms

The appointment and service conditions will apply from August 1.

The first meeting of the Council since February got off to a stormy start. Representatives of States not ruled by the BJP criticised the Union government's recent decision to bring the GST Network under the purview of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), administered by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The arguments were led by the Finance Ministers of Delhi and Punjab.

Ms. Sitharaman, who chaired the meeting, said many States had raised concerns about the issue and it was discussed after the listed agenda was concluded. Tamil Nadu, for instance, said that the inclusion of GSTN under the PMLA provisions is against the interests of taxpayers and against the basic objective of decriminalising the offences under the GST law.

Dispelling doubts that the GSTN is now going to share information about private businesses with other law enforcement agencies, including the ED, Mr. Malhotra said the ED will neither be receiving nor providing information.

Chandrayaan: ISRO gears up with launch rehearsal

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Tuesday completed the launch rehearsal of the Chandrayaan-3 mission.

"Chandrayaan-3 mission: The 'Launch Rehearsal' simulating the entire launch preparation and process lasting 24 hours has been concluded," the space agency tweeted.

India's third moon mission, Chandrayaan-3, is scheduled to be launched at 2.35 p.m. on July 14 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The spacecraft will be launched by the Launch Vehicle Mark-III (LVM3). Last week, ISRO Chairman S. Somanath said that if the launch takes place as scheduled, the landing on the lunar surface would most likely take place on August 23 or 24. Chandrayaan-3 is aimed at developing and demonstrating new technologies required for interplanetary missions.

Monitor those making vicious remarks on caste, religion on social media: CM to officials

Stalin also asks officials to take steps to curb the movement of illegal drugs; he says the brewing and sale of illicit liquor have reduced considerably due to concerted efforts of the government

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Tuesday chaired a meeting at the Secretariat to review the law and order situation. He instructed officers to monitor miscreants on social media who spread vicious remarks on caste and religion.

Pointing to an increase in the number of people deliberately spreading hatred on social media, Mr. Stalin instructed officials to monitor such elements who, he said, were chiefly to blame for disturbing social peace. "Innocent people would be affected because of these miscreants. These elements would sit comfortably somewhere and make such poisonous remarks and escape. These elements should be monitored and action should be taken against them."

Referring to deaths due to certain "undesirable" incidents (illicit liquor tragedies) in Villupuram and Chengalpattu districts, the Chief Minister said that on his instructions and due to coordinated efforts and strong action by the district administration and the police, "the brewing of illicit liquor and its sale have reduced considerably".

Taking stock: Chief Minister M.K. Stalin addressing officials during a review meeting at the Secretariat on Tuesday.

The movement of illegal drugs was a serious issue which should be brought to an end, he said. He pointed out that it was the instigating factor for murders, robberies and sexual assaults, among other crimes. "A majority of those involved in these offences would be those who use illegal drugs," he said.

Review meetings

To put an end to the menace, Mr. Stalin instructed the authorities to make coordinated efforts and hold weekly review meetings. He advised them to maintain neutrality while initiating action on complaints from the public. "Register FIR on receipt of complaints and take action without any bias. Avoid advocating compromises and take legal action," he said.

During the meeting, the status of criminal cases reported during the past six months and the general law and order situation were discussed. "The functioning of the police is quite satisfactory. However, the upcoming year is quite crucial for us," Mr. Stalin was quoted as saying by an official press release.

The Chief Minister instructed the authorities to nip law and order issues in the bud. "As the parliamentary election is approaching, all police officers should function with caution," he said.

When the accused are interrogated at the police station, they should be treated with dignity. Custodial deaths should be prevented, he said.

Stating that Tamil Nadu had the highest number of girl students in schools and colleges and office-going women in the country, he instructed the police to ensure their safety.

Rain toll points to man-made disaster in Himachal Pradesh

Anthropogenic factors such as deforestation, unsustainable construction have intensified damage caused by rain-related events even as unprecedented downpour has caught the State off guard

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

In less than a month since the onset of the monsoon, from June 24 to July 10, over 41 incidents of landslips, 29 flash floods and one cloudburst have occurred so far in Himachal Pradesh, with relentless rain pounding the hill State and leaving behind a trail of destruction.

At least 80 people have lost their lives in rain-related incidents. This has yet again triggered a debate over whether the ongoing "fury of nature" is a man-made disaster inevitably visited upon the Himalayan region.

Manshi Asher, an environmentalist associated with the Himdhara Environment Research and Action Collective, said the flash floods in Himachal Pradesh had been evidently triggered by excess rainfall but they had also been "intensified" by muck and debris dumped along streams and rivers.

Gone in a jiffy: A section of the Manikaran-Chandigarh highway washed away in the flash floods in Kullu on Tuesday. PTI

"These are directly or indirectly caused due to land-use change, erosion caused by deforestation, and slopes destabilised by construction. Building along the river bed in floodplains blocks the path of the river in spate and is harmful. But it is the excavation, tree felling and digging of slopes for roads, highways, buildings and dams that causes landslips which, in turn, lead to flash floods, causing damage downstream," Ms. Asher said.

'Highly vulnerable'

Himachal Pradesh's State of the Environment Report, released in 2022 by the Department of Environment, Science and Technology, points out that mountain areas are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, and development over the years has compounded the problem by upsetting the natural balance of various physical processes. The report added that the increased pressure on the mountain environment has contributed in some measure to environmental problems such as landslips, land subsidence, removal of vegetation and soil erosion.

Naresh Chauhan, Principal Adviser to the Chief Minister, said while the current spell of rain was unprecedented, there is a need to ensure that debris and muck are not thrown into rivers or rivulets during the construction of roads, projects or dwellings. Also, construction near rivers needs to be regulated, he added.

Chandrayaan-3 will aim for the moon but look beyond to the future

ISRO is planning Chandrayaan 3 to demonstrate end-to-end capability for safe landing and roving on the lunar surface. Launch is scheduled for July 14 at 2.35 pm. It will be on board the Launch Vehicle Mark III. The vehicle will carry a lander attached to a propulsion module. The latter will carry the former to a circular orbit around the Moon

S. Sivakumar
Vikash Pandey

The Chandrayaan-3 propulsion module (top) attached to the lander (bottom) containing the rover, while undergoing a test. ISRO

Who doesn't enjoy the sight of the Moon? Whether its phase is gibbous, crescent, or complete, the Moon mesmerises children, poets, and anyone who identifies with nature for its serene beauty, its sense of calm, and the sensations it kindles.

Scientists are interested in the moon to understand its origin and characteristics, and, if possible, to explore the possibility of inhabiting it – and these studies require going to the Moon. Not many countries have undertaken such studies, but India is well-positioned with its industrial and technological support base and trained human resources to venture into studying the moon at close quarters. This feat is yet another feather in the cap of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). No wonder it attracts talented youth from the best institutions in the country.

Chandrayaan-1

ISRO's first attempt was the Chandrayaan 1 ("Lunar Vehicle 1") mission, which began in October 2008 with a launch of the very successful Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The rocket carried a lunar orbiter meant to go around the moon, like a satellite and an impact probe. The orbiter relieved the impact probe to hit the surface of the south polar region of the moon, to generate data relevant to designing a lunar rover that would be a part of the payload in a subsequent mission.

While descending to the moon, the impactor probe collected information on the chemical composition of the lunar atmosphere. Notably, this mission established the availability of water molecules on the moon, a discovery that may be crucial for future crewed missions. The probe also carved the national flag of India on the Moon, announcing the country's arrival.

The mission did not last two years as planned, possibly due to overheating issues in the orbiter, but it achieved most of its scientific objectives. In a testament to its success, it received many accolades from the international community.

Chandrayaan 2

The next such mission was Chandrayaan 2 in July 2019, which was launched by a Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV). Its payload included a moon lander that carried a rover to release on the moon. The lander, unfortunately, crashed on the lunar surface due to a software glitch, and the rover did not detach from the lander, so further studies of the moon's surface were impossible.

A Chennai-based amateur space enthusiast named Shanmuga Subramanian, skilled in image analysis, identified the location of the lander's debris, and NASA later confirmed it. Participation by citizens in big science projects is a welcome trend and researchers should strive to create such opportunities.

Currently, ISRO is planning Chandrayaan-3 to demonstrate end-to-end capability for safe landing and roving on the lunar surface. The launch is scheduled for July 14 at 2.35 pm. The mission will be launched on board the Launch Vehicle Mark III (LVM 3, a.k.a. GSLV Mk III). The vehicle will carry a lander attached to a propulsion module. The latter will carry the former to a circular orbit around the moon, after which the lander will descend to the surface. The lander module will carry a rover that it will deploy on the moon, and a few other pieces of scientific equipment. The lander and the rover are expected to be operational for about two weeks.

As in previous missions, the scientific mission will study the chemical composition of the lunar surface, local seismic activity, and plasma concentration, among other features. The propulsion module will have a payload called 'Spectro-polarimetry of Habitable Planet Earth' (SHAPE), which will track radiation from the earth to help identify the signatures of life, which future missions can use in turn to look for signs of life on habitable exoplanets. So Chandrayaan-3 is also to look beyond the Moon.

> This feat is yet another feather in the cap of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). No wonder it attracts talented youth from the best institutions in the country

Lessons learned from Chandrayaan-2 will help avoid design deficiencies that are likely to contribute to failures. Some such 'upgrades' already include strengthened legs on the lander and software updated to include failure scenarios.

Importance of the missions

Missions like Chandrayaan are important because many countries participate in them. These missions are collaborative global efforts that strengthen scientific exchange and camaraderie between countries.

There is scope for international collaboration in future missions to explore the south-polar region of the Moon. The craters here have locations that don't receive sunlight. These shadowed sites are cold and hold hydrogen, water, and ice. They could also host primordial material that could help us understand the origins of the Solar System. The biggest lunar crater is also in the south polar region. The origin of this crater, which formed about 4 billion years ago, is still unclear. So understanding our cosmic neighbour will go a long way towards gaining insights about the cosmos.

Why should India spend on these high-tech areas instead of investing in available technologies that can be used more readily for the public good? It is because they can be used for the public good, too. Developing countries need knowledge of such concepts to improve their citizens' quality of life. Space technologies have also become essential for weather prediction, assessment of marine resources, estimation of forest cover, communication, defence – to just name a few. Every country needs technologies of both futuristic and immediately relevant varieties, together with a well-thought-out apportionment of resources between these two areas.

Indeed, R. Chidambaram, a former Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, once remarked that participating in an emerging technology makes a nation a leader in that field, giving it bargaining power when dealing with other countries. This in turn will enable a country to enhance its science and technology base to improve its citizens' and its prestige.

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North India's monsoon mayhem

Why was rainfall this pre-monsoon season above normal? Is global warming the only factor influencing the unpredictable monsoon? How did the warming of the Atlantic Ocean and the Himalayas affect the patchy distribution of rainfall this monsoon?

EXPLAINER

Raghu Murtugudde

The story so far:

Every year, the entire country awaits the onset and evolution of monsoon with baited breath. Each year tends to be different, and this year has managed to produce a rather unique onset and evolution thus far. The onset this season was delayed by unforeseen interactions between typhoons and cyclones. Cyclone Biparjoy was born after the onset and lingered for longer than normal to delay the arrival of monsoon over Mumbai by nearly two weeks. For the first time in over half a century, the city saw monsoon arrive together with Delhi. The monsoon trough thus ended up with an exaggerated curvature over northwest India.

How was the monsoon distributed?

The deficit due to the delayed onset has been all but wiped out but the distribution of rainfall remains as patchy as ever, with excess rainfall over the northern Western Ghats into northwest India and deficits extending in a horseshoe pattern from Uttar Pradesh into Odisha and back to the east into Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Extreme heat has also been reported in parts of Himachal Pradesh, even as some areas of the State received heavy rainfall.

Did climate change influence this monsoon?

The impact of climate change has always been of great interest, but it is worth remembering that everything today happens in a warmer world that is also more humid. With global warming, a warm and humid atmosphere acts like a steroid for the weather. Every weather event now has some contribution from global warming. At the same time, one must also pay close attention to weather patterns that emerge due to other factors.

Climate woes: A man walks through a flooded alley in New Delhi on July 11. REUTERS

While the El Niño has been grabbing many headlines this year, it is not yet clear how much the current monsoon mayhem has had to do with the El Niño.

Additionally, wildfires thus far this year have burned over three-times the normal area and have also emitted about three times as much carbon dioxide. This has also had a contribution to the warming.

What are the other factors?

The Indian subcontinent is like a popcorn kettle that gets heated up as the Sun crosses over into the northern hemisphere in March. Rainfall is like the kernels of corn popping randomly around the kettle. That is, monsoon rainfall distribution always tends to be patchy.

Excess rainfall over northwest India is consistent with the Arabian Sea having warmed by about 1.5 degrees Celsius since January. This was expected, according to a study last year that the author was part of.

June contributes only about 15% of the rainfall to the seasonal total. The instabilities in the atmosphere that drive convection are not strong enough to drive large-scale rainfall during the pre-monsoon season. Rainfall this pre-monsoon was above normal due to a combination of the warm Arabian Sea and an unusually high number of western disturbances. As a result, soils were left moister than normal, which in turn affected the evolution of the monsoon. However, the mystery is that, despite averaging rainfall over a month, a season or even multiple seasons, rainfall distribution remains uneven. Disuniform terrain and heterogeneous land-use patterns are the likely culprits.

The Atlantic Ocean and the upper atmospheric circulation also tinker with the monsoon. The entire Atlantic Ocean has been warmer than normal since March. While the so-called Atlantic Niño, with a warm tropical Atlantic, generally tends to suppress monsoon rainfall, it is not clear what the impacts are when the entire Atlantic is as warm as it has been this year.

The strongest winds that occur in the upper atmosphere can spontaneously break into clockwise and anticlockwise patterns, especially when they run into mountainous terrain, such as the Himalaya. Strong clockwise winds, with air flowing out from the centre, in the upper atmosphere demand an anticlockwise circulation near the surface, in order to feed the upper-level outflow. Such a convergence near the surface can drive excess rainfall.

Finally, the warming over the Himalaya has not been uniform either. Some parts of the mountain chain are amplifying global warming, leading to rapid local warming. Irregular weather patterns during the monsoon superpose on these local features as a result of the winds expanding or compressing as they race up and down the narrow valleys. The results can be cloudbursts, heavy rains or even heatwaves – depending on the local flow patterns.

Such disparate weather patterns can occur side by side as well.

What next?

The conclusion is that the Indian subcontinent is a veritable popcorn kettle that can throw up many surprises. Everything is not directly attributable to global warming – even as every little weather event is happening in a warmer and wetter world. Only improved forecasts with sufficient granularity in space and time can reduce the element of surprise resulting from these weather monsters.

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