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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 07 July 2026

E20 PETROL: WHY ETHANOL BLENDING IS REDUCING MILEAGE AND RAISING CONCERNS

- The idea of ethanol blending in India isn't new. The first **National Policy on Biofuels** in 2009 had set an indicative target of **20% ethanol** blending by 2017. This target got delayed for various reasons over the years.
- More recently, the blending level jumped rapidly. Ethanol content in petrol doubled from 10% (E10) to 20% (E20) within just three years.
- This was originally planned to happen gradually over eight years. This fast transition, especially for older vehicles certified only for E10 fuel, came without adequate consumer warnings, leaving many motorists feeling short-changed.

Why Do Indians Care So Much About Mileage?

- Fuel efficiency has always been central to Indian car buying decisions. Popular advertising taglines like "fill it, shut it, forget it" captured this obsession for decades.
- Even as India's car market shifts toward premium vehicles, mileage remains a key consideration, especially since growth in disposable incomes remains uneven across the country.

Three Key Problems With Higher Ethanol Blends

- **Drop in Fuel Economy:** There is a genuine and measurable drop in mileage when using higher ethanol blends, particularly in vehicles not originally designed for them.
- **Risk of Vehicle Part Damage: Ethanol is hygroscopic** — meaning it attracts and holds water molecules from its surroundings. This property raises concerns about corrosion in older vehicle parts.
 - Ethanol also burns at a higher temperature than petrol, making cars harder to start on cold winter mornings.
- **No Fuel Choice for Consumers:** Unlike in Brazil, where consumers can choose between different ethanol blends at different price points, Indian motorists currently have no such choice at the pump.

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The Chemistry Behind Ethanol Blending

- Ethanol (C_2H_5OH) has a much simpler carbon chain compared to petrol (which ranges between C_8 and C_{12}).
- This means burning ethanol produces less carbon dioxide compared to burning an equivalent amount of petrol — making it more environment-friendly.

The Road Ahead: E25 and E85

- The government now plans to move beyond E20, towards E25, alongside promoting E85 fuel for flex-fuel vehicles (vehicles designed to run on multiple fuel blends).
- Interestingly, even in flex-fuel vehicles, running standard E20 fuel currently works out cheaper than E85, since E85's fuel efficiency loss (over 25%) isn't sufficiently offset by its lower price.
- E85 is expected to cost around Rs 20 per litre less than E20. For comparison, in Brazil, a similar fuel switch only becomes economically viable when the higher ethanol blend is at least 30% cheaper.

Lessons From Brazil's Ethanol Model

- Brazil offers a useful comparison. Its ethanol programme began in the 1970s in response to global oil market uncertainties. Over five decades, Brazil built a genuine alternative fuel ecosystem using sugarcane-based ethanol.
- Brazil also successfully promoted flex-fuel cars, allowing consumers to fill up with whichever fuel option is cheaper on a given day. E100 is often 25-35% cheaper than lower blended petrol, thanks to strong government price support.
- This price incentive made flex-fuel cars hugely popular in Brazil. By the late 1980s, nine out of every ten new cars sold there could run entirely on ethanol.
- In India, by contrast, consumers currently have no such choice or price differential at the pump — a key structural difference that experts believe India could learn from as it moves toward higher ethanol blends.

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NATIONAL HIGHWAYS LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT LIMITED (NHLML)



- NHLML, (formerly known as Cochin Port Road Company Limited), is a **100% owned company of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** formed under the guidance of the

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).

NHLML is responsible for spearheading pivotal initiatives aimed at **improving transport logistics, infrastructure, and asset monetization.**

It is at the forefront of **transformative projects across the country in various domains.** These include

- The **development of Multimodal Logistics Parks (MMLPs)**
- Construction of **ropeways**
- Deployment of **Optical Fibre Cable networks**
- Establishment of **Wayside Amenities**
- **Facilitation of port connectivity roads**
- Creation of **warehousing zones**
- **Enhancement of passenger transport terminal infrastructure**
- Deployment of **solarization on highways**
- Development of other allied infrastructure facilities.

CHIEF LABOUR COMMISSIONER (CENTRAL)



- The organization of the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), also known as the **Central Industrial Relations Machinery**, is an **apex organization** in the country responsible for **maintaining harmonious industrial relations** mainly in the **sphere of central Government.**

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- It is under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India.
- Headquarters: New Delhi

Formation:

- In pursuance of the **recommendation of the Royal Commission on Labour** in India, the organization was **set up in April 1945** by combining the former organizations of the conciliation Officer (Railways), Supervisor of Railway Labour and the Labour Welfare Advisor.
- It was **then charged mainly with duties of prevention and settlement of industrial disputes, enforcement of labour laws, and to promote welfare of workers** in the industrial establishments falling within the sphere of the **Central Government**.
- It **started** with a **small complement of staff** comprising a **Chief Labour Commissioner (C)** at New Delhi, 3 **Regional Labour Commissioners** at Bombay, Kolkata & Lahore, 8 Conciliation Officers, and 18 Labour Inspectors.
- The **Conciliation Officers** and **Labour Inspectors** were **redesignated as Assistant Labour Commissioner (C) and Labour Enforcement Officer (C)**.
- The organization was further augmented gradually by **establishing regional offices at various places** across India.

The Organisation of Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) is entrusted with the following **functions**.

- **Prevention and settlement of industrial disputes through conciliation/mediation.**
- **Enforcement of labour laws and rules made there under the Central Sphere.**
- **Quasi-Judicial functions**
- **Verification of trade union membership**
- **Miscellaneous functions.**

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WHAT IS INDIAHANDMADE?



- It is a government-backed dedicated digital marketplace that brings India's handloom and handicraft traditions into the online economy.
- Developed by the Digital India Corporation for the Ministry of Textiles and launched in 2023, it showcases some of the world's oldest and most traditional crafts of India.
- The main motive behind this online eCommerce portal is to provide a platform for Indian handloom weavers and handicraft artisans to sell their traditional products online, paving the way for their financial and social empowerment.
- **Salient Features:**
 - The platform enables artisans and weavers to sell their products directly to consumers, reducing dependence on intermediaries and improving opportunities for fair compensation.
 - It also equips sellers with digital tools and greater online visibility, allowing them to participate more effectively in e-commerce.
 - The marketplace showcases an extensive range of handmade products spanning apparel, home décor, furnishings, paintings, furniture, religious items, stationery, musical instruments, jewellery, bags, and footwear.
 - Alongside everyday handmade products, the platform gives prominence to region-specific crafts through dedicated sections for GI-tagged and ODOP products.
 - Buyers benefit from free shipping, secure payment systems, purchase protection, and buyer support mechanisms.
 - For artisans and weavers, the platform offers a guided onboarding process to simplify participation in digital commerce.

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- In a move aimed at making online selling more inclusive, **artisans who do not have GST registration can register using an Enrolment ID**, although they are **permitted to sell only within their own state**.
- This provision enables smaller artisans and first-time digital sellers to access online markets with fewer barriers.
- The platform also **highlights the stories of artisan enterprises** that continue to preserve India's traditional crafts through digital commerce.

GLOBAL PASSPORT INDEX



- It ranks **passports not only on the ease of international travel** but also on the benefits they offer for living, working and investing in other countries.
- It is a **comprehensive passport** ranking that goes beyond measuring the number of countries passport holders can travel to without a visa.
- **Published by:** It is published by residency and citizenship advisory **firm Global Citizen Solutions (GCS)**.
- It **measures passports across three key categories:** Enhanced Mobility (50 per cent), Investment (25 per cent) and Quality of Living (25 per cent). These are based on 14 separate indicators.
- It **draws on quantitative data from various international institutions** and multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and the Sustainable Development Report

Key Highlights of Global Passport Index 2026:

- The strongest passports of this year's index are: Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, Denmark (joint) and Netherlands (joint).

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WEAK MONSOON AND EL NINO - IMPACT ON INDIA'S ECONOMY

- The India Meteorological Department has forecast below-normal rainfall in July after a 40% deficit in June, raising concerns about the impact of a weak monsoon and a potential "super" El Nino on India's economy.

Understanding the Monsoon and El Nino Connection

- El Nino is a climate phenomenon marked by the warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, off the north-western coast of South America.
- It has a tendency to suppress rainfall over the Indian region, though the impact usually comes with a lag of over a month.
- A "super" El Nino refers to a particularly strong phase of this phenomenon, which can cause more severe rainfall deficits and prolonged droughts.
- Historically, several of India's worst droughts have coincided with El Nino years, including 1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015.

How a Poor Monsoon Damages the Economy?

- **Impact on Agricultural Output**
 - Agriculture accounts for about one-fifth of India's Gross Value Added (GVA) but employs 46% of the workforce.
 - Nearly 55% of the population depends on agriculture directly or indirectly.
- **Impact on Rural Incomes and Demand**
 - A weak monsoon hits rural income, denting aggregate demand across the economy.
 - Industries dependent on rural demand, including two-wheelers, tractors, and real estate in smaller towns, are among the first to feel the squeeze.
- **Food Inflation Pressures**
 - A weak monsoon threatens to push up food prices, fuelling inflation.
 - The RBI has warned in its June bulletin that an adverse southwest monsoon may weigh on the domestic growth-inflation outlook.

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India's Preparedness

- **Reservoir Storage Status**
 - As of July 2, Storage levels across the 166 reservoirs monitored by the Central Water Commission stood at 47.725 BCM.
 - This is lower than 78.077 BCM during the corresponding period last year.
- **Structural Preparedness**
 - Experts have raised concerns about India's disaster preparedness:
 - Irrigation is crucial for adapting to climate change-induced water stress.
 - India needs to move from crop insurance to ex-ante risk reduction.
 - Investment in drought-resistant, high-yielding crops remains inadequate.
 - A second successive bad weather year would be significantly more damaging.

Way Forward

- **Short-Term Measures**
 - Strengthen buffer stocks to manage food supply.
 - Monitor food inflation and take proactive measures.
 - Support farmers in vulnerable districts with contingency plans.
 - Manage fertiliser supply through diversified imports.
- **Medium-Term Reforms**
 - Expand irrigation coverage, especially in rain-fed regions.
 - Promote water-efficient crops and precision agriculture.
 - Strengthen crop insurance with quicker settlements.
 - Enhance weather forecasting and early warning systems.
- **Long-Term Strategy**
 - Drought-proof the economy through structural reforms.
 - Move from crop insurance to ex-ante risk reduction.
 - Invest in drought-resistant, high-yielding crop varieties and ensure farmer access.
 - Modernise water storage and management infrastructure.

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INS MAHENDRAGIRI



- It is the ship of Nilgiri Class (Project 17A).
- It was designed by Warship Design Bureau (WDB).
- It was built at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL) Mumbai.
- **Features of INS Mahendragiri:**
 - **Propulsion:** These ships are configured with Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) propulsion plants that drive a Controllable Pitch Propeller (CPP) on each shaft, and state-of-the-art Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS)
 - **Armaments:** It is capable of undertaking anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine operations, supported by a potent weapon and sensor suite.
 - It is equally suited for maritime security, power projection, **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**, **Search and Rescue (SAR)**, and sustained presence missions.

What are Project 17A frigates?

- These are **versatile multi-mission platforms** designed to address current and emerging challenges in the maritime domain.
- The five already delivered to the Navy are **INS Nilgiri, INS Himgiri, INS Udaygiri, INS Taragiri and INS Vindhyagiri.**
- **Armaments:** P17A ships are fitted with an advanced weapon and sensor suite like MF-STAR active phased array radar, BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, and Barak-8 long-range surface-to-air missiles, designed for superior anti-air, anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare.