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Daily News Juice

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2. Goa approves new beach shack policy
- 3 Hoysala temples included in the UNESCO heritage list

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September rains bring major relief to Indian farmers

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Why in news?

- The southwest monsoon's revival in September has come as a major relief for Indian farmers.
- Following an extended dry spell in August, these showers have been no less than “amrit sanjeevani” (potion of life) for most of the farmers who have no tubewell or canal water irrigation access and would have otherwise simply seen their crops wilt.

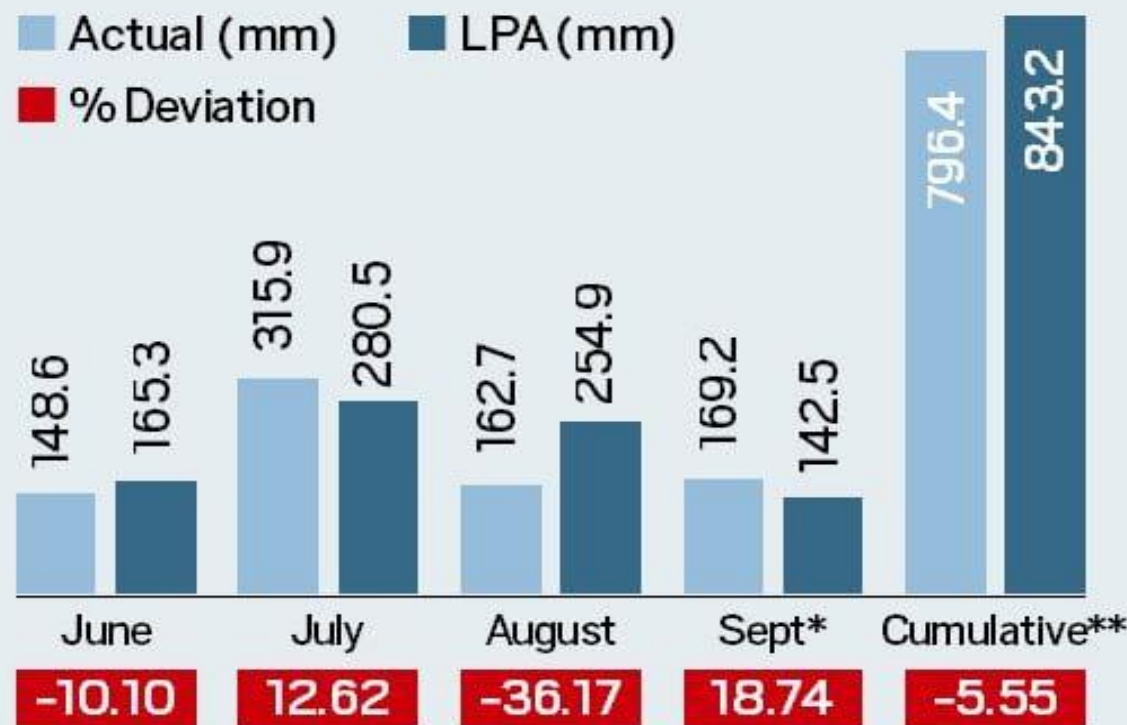


Irregular rain!

- The monsoon has been erratic, arriving a week late in June that recorded overall 10.1% rainfall deficiency. But the 12.6% above-normal rain in July helped spur plantings of most kharif crops.
- What followed, however, was the driest ever August since 1901. With an all-India 36.2% deficit, vis-à-vis the historical average precipitation for the month, the crops that were already sown experienced severe moisture stress.
- July-August are usually the peak monsoon rainfall months, not only meeting the kharif crop's requirements, but also filling up ponds and reservoirs and recharging groundwater tables.
- This time, it was the other way round: Farmers had to rely on releases from dams by irrigation departments and draw down underground water reserves to salvage their crops.
- Data shows water levels in 150 major reservoirs to have dipped to 111.7 billion cubic meters (BCM) as on Sept. 6, 25.9% down from a year ago and 13.8% below the last 10 years' average for this date.
- The 18.7% surplus rainfall in September so far (chart on the next slide) has raised the total reservoir water levels to 126.4 BCM. Although 19.5% below last year's and 7.7% lower than the 10 years' average for this time, it's an improvement from the worst.

RAINFALL CONCERN OVER RABI CROPS TOO

ALL-INDIA RAINFALL: ACTUAL VS. LONG PERIOD AVERAGE



*September 1-24; **June 1-September 24; Source: India Meteorology Department

STOCKS AT 6-YR LOWS (lakh tonnes)

	Cereals*	Sugar**
2017	482.08	39.41
2018	611.27	104.71
2019	716.38	143.33
2020	773.61	104.78
2021	904.13	83.98
2022	601.12	71.23
2023	600.97	58.23#

*Rice and wheat in govt godowns as on September 1; **Stocks with mills as on Sept 30; #Projected. Source: Food Corporation of India and National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd

Benign effects



- The September showers have been most beneficial for oilseeds, especially soyabean and groundnut, due for harvesting from this month-end.
- A reasonably good kharif harvest, along with record imports, should allay any inflation fears in vegetable oils. India's edible oil imports are set to top 16.5 million tonnes (mt) in the year ended Oct 2023, surpassing the previous all-time-high of 15.1 mt in 2016-17. Landed prices of imported crude palm oil have fallen to about \$860 per tonne (from a July average of \$945), and similarly to \$990 (from \$1,085) for soyabean and \$885 (\$1,000) for sunflower.
- Inflationary pressures have also eased in vegetables, whose consumer price index had jumped 37.4% year-on-year in July and 26.1% in August. That should come down sharply this month.
- The all-India modal (most-quoted) retail price of tomato is currently at Rs 20/kg, as against Rs 120 two months ago, and flat at Rs 20 for potato. Only onion has shown increase, from Rs 25 to Rs 30/kg. While there are concerns over the kharif onion crop – plantings have been lower and harvesting also likely to be delayed by a month from November – the Centre's imposition of a 40% export duty has put a lid on prices for now.
- Another commodity where the situation has turned comfortable is milk. In Feb-March, Maharashtra dairies were paying up to Rs 38 for a litre of cow milk, even as ex-factory prices of butter and skimmed milk powder hit Rs 430-435 and Rs 315-320 per kg respectively. Those prices have since crashed to Rs 34, Rs 350-360 and Rs 250-260 levels. A further supply boost can be expected in the coming months.

Supply worries

- These are mainly in three commodities: Cereals, sugar and pulses. The accompanying table (on Slide 4) shows stocks of both cereals (rice and wheat in govt godowns) and sugar (with mills) at six-year-lows.
- Given that over a third of India's paddy area is un-irrigated, and rainfall has been deficient in the whole of eastern UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and Gangetic West Bengal, a drop in kharif rice output cannot be ruled out this year.
- Moreover, the crop in large areas of Punjab and Haryana suffered inundation due to excess rain and water released from dams. Farmers there had to then re-transplant short-duration paddy varieties, including of basmati, yielding less than those planted earlier in June.
- In sugar, the projected 5.8 mt stocks on Sept. 30 should suffice for 2.5 months of domestic consumption. That will cover the peak Dussehra-Diwali festival season. To ensure a fine balance in supplies, the Centre has banned export of sugar and much of rice.
- As regards pulses, there's a clear shortfall – reflected in arhar (pigeon-pea), moong (green gram) and chana (chickpea) wholesaling at Rs 12,000, Rs 9,000 and Rs 6,000 per quintal respectively, above their corresponding minimum support prices of Rs 7,000, Rs 8,558 and Rs 5,335.

Road ahead



- The real challenge may be in the upcoming rabi (winter-spring) season, where the water for crops – from wheat, mustard and chana to potato, onion, garlic and jeera (cumin) – comes from underground aquifers and dams. The monsoon rain hasn't been enough to fill up reservoirs or replenish groundwater tables.
- On top of that is El Niño. As per estimates, there is a 73% chance of average sea surface temperatures in the east-central equatorial Pacific Ocean staying more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above normal during Oct-Dec and 78% probability of exceeding 1 degree in Jan.-March 2024. That's well above the 0.5 degrees El Niño threshold.
- El Niño persisting through March 2024 could translate into subpar rain during the northeast monsoon (Oct-Dec) and winter (Jan-Feb) seasons. For farmers with already depleted ponds and groundwater reserves, it might make cultivation of rabi crops that much more difficult. That can also keep food inflation elevated till the national elections.

Goa approves new beach shack policy

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- The Goa govt recently approved the 'Goa State Shack Policy 2023-2026', for the erection of temporary seasonal structures, beach shacks, deck beds and umbrellas along beach stretches for the next three tourist seasons.
- Beach shacks — typically built from eco-friendly materials such as bamboo, wooden poles and thatched palm leaves — have become a popular attraction for domestic and international tourists visiting Goa.
- The shack policy allows unemployed persons of Goan domicile to operate 'temporary' shacks on the beachfront during the peak tourist season from Sept. 1 to May 31.



Changes in the new policy

- In the draft policy, the govt inserted a contentious clause, stipulating that the age of applicants for allotment of beach shacks should be between 18 and 60, sparking outrage among traditional Goan shack holders. The previous beach shack policies had no bar on age. Notably, after objections and protests by shack owners, the govt has now decided to scrap the clause.
- In another move aimed at “encouraging newcomers” in the business, the govt has relaxed the eligibility criteria for experience, with 90% of shacks to be allotted to applicants having at least one year of experience running a shack and 10% to those with no experience.
- Citing complaints from tourists about Goan food missing from shacks, the new policy makes it mandatory for shacks to serve Goan cuisine.
- The penalty for subletting a shack has been hiked from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 25 lakh..

Hoysala temples included in the UNESCO heritage list



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper I; History & Culture

Why in news?

- Three Hoysala-era temples in Karnataka recently made it to UNESCO's World Heritage List, under the collective entry of 'Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas'.
- Hoysala temples are known for the rare beauty and finesse of their wall sculptures, and have been described as "art which applies to stone the technique of the ivory worker or the goldsmith".
- Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, these three temples - the Chennakeshava temple in Belur, the Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebidu, and the Keshava Temple in Somanathapura are important not just because they demonstrate their builders' superior skill, but also because they narrate the tale of the politics that shaped them.

Who were the Hoysalas?

- The Hoysalas held power in Karnataka from the 10th century to the 14th century. The dynasty began as provincial governors under the Western Chalukyas, but as the two dominant empires of the South, the Western Chalukyas and the Cholas, crumbled, the Hoysalas established themselves as rulers.
- Two of the temples that made it to the UNESCO list are located in cities that served as the capital of the Hoysalas — earlier Belur, and then Halebidu (or Dwarasamudra).

The Sacred Ensembles of these temples

- The Chennakeshava temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, was consecrated around 1117 AD by the mighty Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana, to mark his victories against the Cholas. It is thus also called the Vijaya Narayana temple.
- The other Vaishnava shrine, the Kesava temple, was built in Somanathapura in 1268 by Somanatha, a general of Hoysala King Narasimha III.
- The Hoysaleswara temple in Halebidu is believed to be the largest Shiva temple built by the Hoysalas, and is dated to the 12th century.



The Chennakeshava temple in Belur



The Hoysaleswara temple in Halebidu

Unique architecture

- One notable feature of Hoysala architecture is the use of soapstone, a malleable stone that is easy to carve.
- Another of its special features is the unique confluence of styles. It is an amalgamation of three distinctive styles— the mainstream Dravidian architecture as represented in the Pallava and Chola temples; the Vesara style, the variant of the Dravida style that emerged in the Chalukya and Rashtrakuta temples; and then the North Indian Nagara style.
- The temples are generally built on stellate (star-shaped) platforms, and have several structures inside the complex. The walls and pillars are covered in beautiful sculptures that have rich narrative and descriptive dimensions.
- An interesting feature of Hoysala temples is that they are 'signed' — the sculptors, and masons leave behind their names, and sometimes a few more details.
- Also, these Vaishnava and Shaivya shrines were being built at the time Jainism was prominent in the region, and thus mark a turn towards Hinduism.

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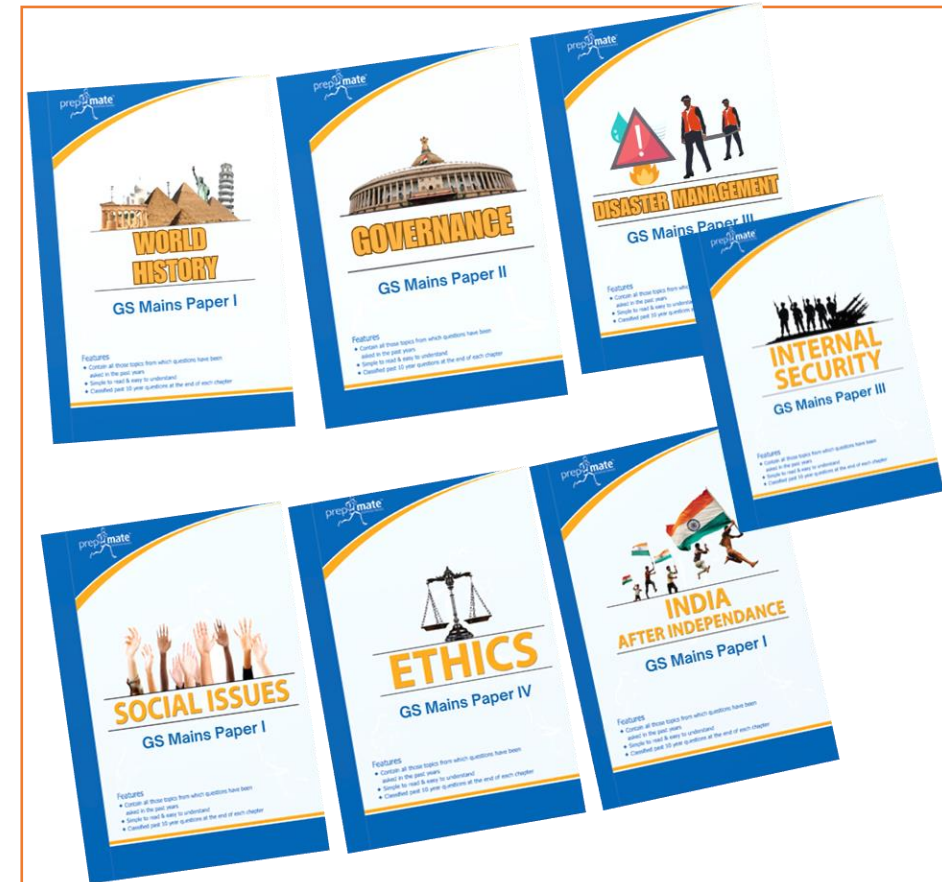
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