

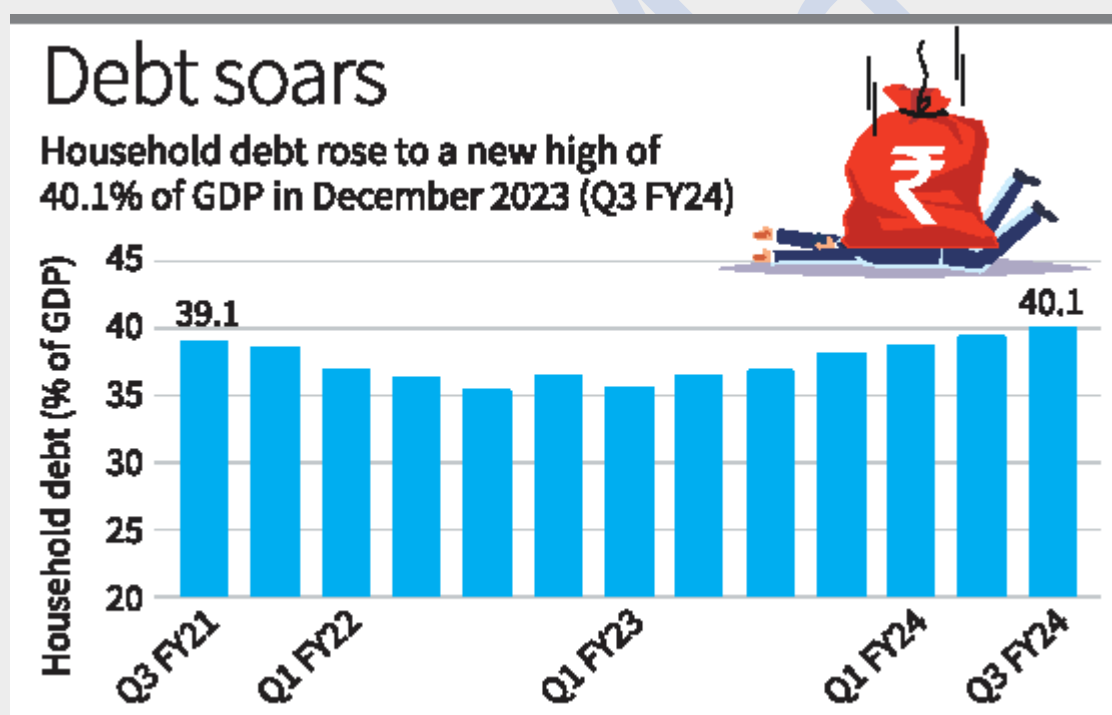
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1. Households' debt surged to new high by Dec. 2023

Overall findings

In what may be construed as a sign of rising financial distress, India's household debt levels are reckoned to have touched an all-time high of 40% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by December 2023, while net financial savings had likely dropped to their lowest level at around 5% of GDP, as per a research report from leading financial services firm Motilal Oswal.

In September 2023, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) estimated that households' net financial savings had dropped to 5.1% of GDP in 2022-23, a 47-year low, and weaker than the average of 7.6% of GDP recorded between 2011-12 and 2019-20.



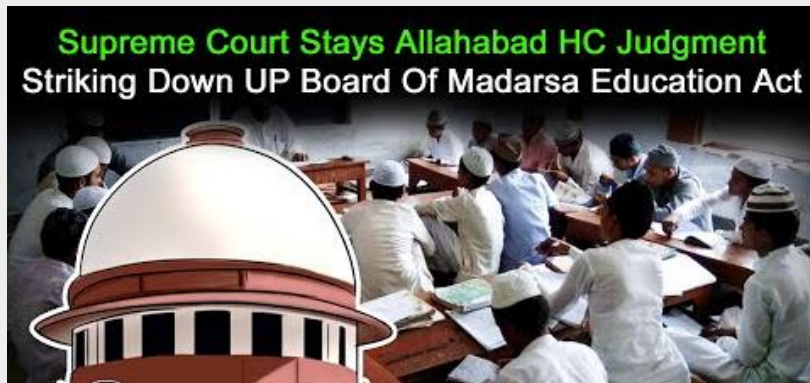
Composition of debt

Research from the financial services firm suggest that household debt has risen to approximately 40% of GDP as of December 2023, reaching a new high. Based on banks' data, it is clear that unsecured personal loans continue to grow at the fastest pace within household debt, followed by secured debt, agricultural loans, and business loans.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

2. Why did the Supreme Court stay a ruling of the Allahabad High Court on the U.P. Board of Madrasa Education Act 2004? What was the aftermath of the U.P.'s government's survey on madrasas?



Why in News?

This past week, the Supreme Court stayed a ruling of the Allahabad High Court on the U.P. Board of Madrasa Education Act 2004 calling it an infringement of the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The top court

also found the High Court's ruling to be against the principles of secularism. The decision gave massive relief to around 17 lakh students of the State's 16,000 recognised madrasas.

What happened?

Earlier, the High Court had dubbed the U.P. Board of Madrasa Education Act "unconstitutional" and asked for immediate closure of the madrasas. It called for the relocation and integration of the madrasa students with regular schools. The Supreme Court called the High Court's ruling "not warranted" and imposed a stay on the relocation.

The three-judge Supreme Court Bench, headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, scrutinised the provisions of the Act and made it clear that "the object and purpose of the statutory board which is constituted under the Act is regulatory in nature." The apex court did not agree with the High Court's ruling on educational institutions funded by the State being prohibited from imparting religious instruction. The Bench cited a 2002 judgment clarifying the term "religious instruction." The judges felt that striking down the 2004 Act was not the solution towards making a provision for secular education alongside religious instruction.

Why are madrasas in the spotlight?

Uttar Pradesh has around 25,000 madrasas of which 16,500 are recognised by the U.P. Madrasa Education Board. Only 560 madrasas receive grants from the government though there have been complaints in recent years of delayed payment and arrears in salaries. The irregular madrasas are usually strapped for resources and manage to provide only elementary learning. The latest case in the Supreme Court is in continuation of a long trail of madrasas being the focus of attention. In 2022, the U.P. Government ordered a survey of the State's madrasas to find out the number of unrecognised or illegal madrasas.

Though the findings of the complete survey were not made public, the State government caused a ripple in Muslim education circles when in October 2023, irregular madrasas operating in the western U.P. township of Muzaffarnagar were ordered to be closed within 24 hours. The Basic Education Department issued a notice to these educational institutions stating that unregistered madrasas operating in Muzaffarnagar would be subject to a daily penalty of ₹10,000 if they were not able to submit relevant documents within three days of the notice.

The move upset minority organisations, with the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind calling the move discriminatory. "These madrasas provide free education to around 10,000 students. They will not have the resources to pay the fine. The order seems targeted at a particular community," a Jamiat official had then said. Around the same time, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed to investigate the sources of the madrasas' alleged foreign funding. The SIT claimed that the madrasas had received over ₹100 crore from abroad over the past three years though evidence was not shared with the public.

What next?

Madrasas have been under the spotlight since the Yogi Adityanath government was first sworn in in 2017. At the time, the government had instructed madrasas to hoist the national flag and sing the national anthem on Independence Day. The circular issued by the U.P. Madrasa Shiksha Parishad also asked these schools to videograph and photograph the Independence Day function as evidence. The order upset many madrasas who claimed it called into question their patriotism.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court Bench on the U.P. Board Madrasa Education Act case has asked the State to file its counter affidavit before May 31. It has also given the appellants time till June 30 to respond to the State's views. It will hear the arguments in the second week of July.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. What a new 3-D map of universe hints about the nature of dark energy

Why in News?

That the universe is expanding has been known for close to a century, thanks to the observations by the American astronomer Edwin Hubble in 1929. More recently, in the late 1990s, scientists found that this expansion was happening at an accelerated rate — that is, not only was the universe expanding, it was expanding at an increasingly faster pace.

The accelerated rate of expansion meant some other ingredient — an invisible energy — was at work too. Since scientists did not have any clue about what this could be, they called it "dark energy".

Since then, scientists have not got any closer to shedding new light on the hypothesis — even though dark energy must be accounting for nearly 70% of the universe.

The DESI experiment

The results, announced recently, have come from observations of the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI), a unique piece of equipment with 5,000 robotic 'eyes', each one of which can separately capture and process light coming from a galaxy. This gives DESI, mounted on the Nicholas W Mayall 4-meter Telescope at the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona, US, the capability to observe 5,000 galaxies at the same time.

DESI has been operating for three years, and is scheduled to continue for at least another two years. Data from the first year of DESI observations — during which light from 6 million

galaxies, some of which existed as far back as 11 billion years ago, was captured — have now been used to create the most comprehensive three-dimensional evolutionary map of the universe till date.



Nicholas U Mayall 4-meter Telescope

It is considered a three-dimensional map because scientists have been able to measure the distances between these galaxies to a very high level of precision. Some of these galaxies existed billions of years ago at great distances from us. Lights originating from those galaxies are reaching us only now. These 6 million galaxies together produce a very good evolutionary picture of the universe.

This has, in turn, allowed scientists to work out the expansion rate of the universe through different times in history. Using the first year's observational data, the DESI collaboration has calculated that the speed of expansion of the universe is increasing at the rate of 68.5 km per second after every 3.26 million light years of expansion.

Dark energy intensity

More interestingly, through these precise measurements, the scientists have found that some of the calculated values are not consistent with current well-established theoretical models, which otherwise describe the universe very well.

These theoretical models suggest that the energy density of dark energy, or the amount of dark energy contained in any volume of space, remains constant even under expansion. So, while the space itself expands, the energy density in the expanded space does not go down. In these theoretical models, a change in energy density would make the universe unstable. The results of DESI, however, suggest that there are changes in energy density.

The initial hints have excited the scientific community. If change in energy density is confirmed, it could lead to a complete unravelling of our current understanding of the universe. It would be the first glimpse into the nature of dark energy, and could lead to entirely new physics. Right now, we know nothing about the nature of dark energy. Some scientists have speculated that it might be a new invisible field, like an electric, or a magnetic, or a gravitational field. There is also speculation about dark energy being a new particle.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

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