

VEDHIK

# DAILY NEWS

## ANALYSIS

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## **FOREWORD**

We, at Team Vedhik is happy to introduce a new initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" compilations to help you with UPSC Civil Services Examination preparation. We believe this initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" would help students, especially beginners save time and streamline their preparations with regard to Current Affairs. A content page and an Appendix has been added segregating and mapping the content to the syllabus.

It is an appreciable efforts by Vedhik IAS Academy helping aspirants of UPSC Civil Services Examinations. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Babu Sebastian, former VC - MG University in extending all support to this endeavour. Finally I also extend my thanks to thank Ms. Shilpa Sasidharan and Mr. Shahul Hameed for their assistance in the preparing the compilations.

We welcome your valuable comments so that further improvement may be made in the forthcoming material. We look forward to feedback, comments and suggestions on how to improve and add value for students. Every care has been taken to avoid typing errors and if any reader comes across any such error, the authors shall feel obliged if they are informed at their Email ID.

## **CONTENTS**

- News - No time-bound pacts on climate change at G-20 Part 1  
GSP 02 B
- News - No time-bound pacts on climate change at G-20 Part 2  
GSP 02 B
- News - China grapples with challenges of slowing economy,  
outbreaks  
GSP 02 C
- News - EU, U.S. end dispute over steel, aluminum tariff  
GSP 02 C
- News - HC seeks school's reply  
GSP 02 E
- Editorial - Getting nutrition back on the school high table  
GSP 02 Q
- Editorial - A reminder from SARS-CoV-2  
GSP 02 T
- News - Informal Sector shrank sharply in 2020-21  
GSP 03 A
- News - Navy takes delivery of warship  
GSP 03 L
- News - Punjab does a deep dive for Indus dolphins  
GSP 03 P
- Editorial - The Court's order on Pegasus still falls short  
GSP 03 R

# No time-bound pacts on climate change at G-20

No commitments to ending domestic coal consumption

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

India pushed for “safeguarding the interests of the developing world” as Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the G-20 summit at sessions on climate change and sustainable development on Sunday, said G-20 Sherpa and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal.

No time-bound agreements were reached as leaders of the world’s top economies ended the summit in Rome, recommitting to providing \$100 billion a year to counter climate change, and pushing for greater vaccine equality to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. G-20 countries also committed to ending international financing for all new coal plants by the end of 2021, but made no mention of domestic commitments on ending coal power generation.

The final communique, agreed upon after negotiations overnight, spoke only of the “key relevance of achieving global net zero” on carbon emissions “by or around mid-century”.

Amongst the other highlights of the statement was a decision to pursue the recognition of more vaccines by the World Health Organization under a “One Health approach” for the world,



**Wishing well:** PM Narendra Modi and other G-20 leaders tossing coins into the Trevi fountain in Rome. Legend says if people throw a coin here, they will return to Rome. ■ AFP

and providing finances and technology for vaccine production at “mRNA Hubs” in South Africa, Brazil and Argentina, and to mobilise more international public private financing for “green” projects.

Mr. Modi later described

the summit as “fruitful”.

Addressing the media, G-20 Sherpa and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal hailed the communique for acknowledging India’s concerns on climate justice.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

## No time-bound pacts on climate change at G-20

“We have also been able to push the commitment of the developed world to provide \$100 billion every year through from now until 2025. And the commitment of all the countries to mobilise greater levels of capital for the less developed countries and the emerging economies,” he said, referring to the previous commitments made at the Paris agreement, which have not yet been fulfilled.

Climate negotiators from the U.S., EU and U.K. had made a number of visits to Delhi over the past few months, pressing for India to update its commitments (NDCs) to include its target of 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030, and to set a date for ending the use of coal in power plants.

However, Mr. Goyal said it would be necessary for developed countries to

achieve much quicker emission cuts so that there is more “carbon space for the developing countries to pursue their development agenda”.

“There are no adequate technologies to be able to absorb large amounts of clean energy into the grids and to maintain grid stability. And therefore, we will have to look at more technology before we can identify a year for Net Zero,” Mr. Goyal said.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the failure of the G-20 summit to set a specific date for countries to achieve “Net Zero” carbon emissions had left his hopes “unfulfilled” but “not buried”, as the joint communique set the stage for tough negotiations at the COP26 Climate Change summit in Glasgow that begins on Monday.

# China grapples with challenges of slowing economy, outbreaks

Amid these concerns, coupled with upcoming party summit, Xi skips G20, COP26

ANANTH KRISHNAN

HONG KONG

China's government is grappling with twin challenges of weaker-than-expected economic growth and fresh COVID-19 outbreaks, just as the country's leadership prepares for a key Communist Party conclave next week.

After months of a strong recovery, China's factory activity in October slowed, the second straight monthly contraction, as the economy reels from a power crisis, the fallout from troubles plaguing a highly leveraged real sector, and increasing costs of raw materials.

Meanwhile, the country, which has followed a stringent "zero Covid" strategy and continued to maintain strict curbs on international travel while the rest of the world opens up, is now reeling from the biggest outbreak in months. Close to 400 cases have been reported in the last two weeks – a small number compared with the rest of the world, but the spread of the outbreak in multiple provinces has led to stringent lockdowns, further squeezing the economy.

The twin challenges confront the Communist Party ahead of a key leadership meeting next week. The Communist Party's Central Committee will gather in Beijing – which has also reported new COVID-19 cases – on November 8 for an annual gathering called a plenum.

The sixth plenum assumes particular significance as one of the last major meetings before next October's once-in-five-year



**Worrying signs:** Steam billowing out of the cooling towers of a coal-fired power station in Nanjing, in this file photo • AP

leadership congress, when General Secretary and President Xi Jinping is expected to begin his third five-year term.

The plenum will serve as a platform for Mr. Xi, who scrapped the previously in place ten-year term limit, to ensure support before the congress and ensure the appointment of his acolytes. Many senior officials, including second-ranked Premier Li Keqiang, are expected to retire next year.

The holding of the plenum next week, coupled with likely concerns over COVID-19, prompted Mr. Xi to skip the G20 in Rome and the COP-26 climate summit in the United Kingdom, which is being attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, U.S. President Joe Biden and other world leaders. Mr. Xi has not left China since a visit to Myanmar in mid-January 2020, a few days before he ordered the lockdown in Wuhan where the COVID-19 outbreak first began.

While the Communist Party will bank on its now tried-and-tested approach of strin-

gent lockdowns and mass testing to stamp out the current outbreak, the economic costs of China's "zero-COVID" approach are adding to economic pressures.

## Power crisis

China's official National Bureau of Statistics said on Sunday the contraction in manufacturing activity in October was on account of a power shortage affecting large parts of China and rising raw material prices. Supply constraints in China's coal mines coupled with surging coal prices have led to blackouts and forced rationing of power supply in industrial belts.

A commentary in the official Xinhua news agency that was widely circulated in the official Chinese press last week highlighted ten pressing challenges facing the Chinese economy, which grew 4.9% in the third quarter of this year, down from 7.9% in the second quarter. The commentary said the government "would wean the economy off its dependence on the property sector and debt", and it highlighted power cuts and the real es-

tate crisis as short-term challenges and the need to ensure "common prosperity" as a longer term challenge, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

## 'Common prosperity'

Mr. Xi faces a balancing act of pressing ahead with his avowed plans to restructure the Chinese economy through what he is calling a push for "common prosperity", including moves to curb the growing sway of major private sector firms especially in the tech sector and to reduce debt in the real estate sector. Among the measures his administration has taken in the past year includes anti-monopoly investigations into Alibaba, curbs on the highly lucrative private education sector, and warnings to real estate firms such as the Evergrande group that they cannot expect bailouts even as they face defaults. The moves have wiped out close to \$1 trillion in market value of major Chinese private sector firms.

At the same time, Mr. Xi needs to keep the economy ticking ahead of next year's congress and to control the COVID-19 spread, which the Party's official media in the past year has trumpeted as a major triumph of the China model compared to the West. The Party media has also been hitting out at calls for more open investigations into COVID-19's origins and has even suggested the coronavirus outbreak came from the U.S., all to protect the Party's image and push back against criticism from overseas.

## EU, U.S. end dispute over steel, aluminium tariff

They will combat ‘dirty’ production

**REUTERS**  
ROME

The United States and the European Union on Sunday ended a dispute over steel and aluminium tariffs and said they would work on a global arrangement to combat “dirty” production and overcapacity in the industry.

“The United States and the European Union have reached a major breakthrough that will address the existential threat of climate change while also protecting American jobs and American industry,” U.S. President Joe Biden said.

Speaking at a joint news event with European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen on the sidelines of a G20 leaders’ meeting in Rome, Mr. Biden said the deal with the EU immediately removed tariffs on EU steel and aluminium that were imposed by the Donald Trump administration in 2018.

In response, the EU removed tariffs on U.S. products like whiskey, power

boats and Harley-Davidson motorcycles, imposed in retaliation for the steel and aluminium tariffs.

Rather than just a simple return to the status quo from 2018, the United States and the European Union plan to also address the existential threat of climate change and production overcapacity in the steel industry, one of the biggest CO2 emitters in the world.

“The global arrangement will add a powerful new tool in our quest for sustainability, achieving climate neutrality, and ensuring a level playing field for our steel and aluminium industries,” the European Commission head said.

The global deal is to be worked out over the next two years to promote “green” steel and aluminium production and will be open to all countries that want to join, including China, whom the EU and the United States blame for excess global steel production capacity and “dirty” production technology.

## HC seeks school’s reply on ‘forced temple charity’

Headmistress alleges harassment for refusing to donate

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has issued a notice to a school in the Capital on the plea of a headmistress who alleged that she was being harassed by the school management for refusing to pay ₹70,000 as donation towards the Ram Mandir construction in Ayodhya.

Justice Kameswar Rao issued notices to Rao Mehar Chand Saraswati Vidya Mandir School in Bhalswa and Samarth Shiksha Samiti, the society that runs the school, on the plea by headmistress Hema Bajaj. The HC will hear the case again on December 17.

In her petition, Ms. Bajaj claimed that the target to collect or contribute ₹70,000 to ₹1,00,000 for the purpose of construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya



had been set by the school management in February this year.

The petition, filed through advocate Khagesh B. Jha, stated that the employees had been asked to convince students or their parents to contribute or to visit market places to raise donations from shopkeepers or the general public.

Ms. Bajaj said that she being not the class teacher, and also because of the poor financial condition of her family, had expressed her in-

ability to contribute the amount of ₹70,000. This amount was over and above the yearly donation in the name of ‘Samarpān’ collected from employees, which too, was raised from ₹5,000 to ₹15,000, she said.

Ms. Bajaj said despite financial constraints, she had donated ₹2,100 for the Ram Mandir collection on March 3, 2021, but refused to pay any amount for ‘Samarpān’ this year. The petition stated that Ms. Bajaj had sent a complaint to Delhi’s Education Minister regarding the harassment caused to her over the forced charity. The office of the Deputy Chief Minister then directed the Department of Education to initiate an inquiry.

Following this, Ms. Bajaj said the school management and the society had been vindictive towards her.

# Getting nutrition back on the school high table

COVID-19 or otherwise, educational institutions need to ensure that schoolchildren are nurtured and nourished



SUBBARAO M. GAVARAVARAPU & HEMALATHA R.

With COVID-19 cases reducing in the country, several establishments, including schools, are opening again. While the reopening of all schools is on the anvil, the festive season ahead and the fact that children are not yet in the ambit of the vaccination drive are causing apprehension. We, as a society, must focus on the nutrition of children to ensure they are armed with good immunity as they get ready to take on new challenges especially after emerging from the confines of their homes. However, it is important to remember that even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, India was facing significant nutritional challenges. Hence, there is a need to pivot on children's nutrition, using the novel coronavirus pandemic to better understand current nutrition and nutritional requirements for a healthy body and mind.

**Tackling India's triple burden**  
India faces multiple problems of under-nutrition and overweight/obesity coexisting with deficiencies of micronutrients such as iron, zinc, calcium and several vitamins. This triple burden of malnutrition has to be identified, understood and addressed. It is

much more important especially in the case of children and adolescents as it is during these phases of life that we see rapid growth of the body and development of food habits. Childhood and adolescence are two conjoined periods of continuous growth and development – a seamless duration. For instance, between two and 10 years of age, children tend to grow at an average of 6.7 cm in height and 1.5 to 3 kg in weight every year. But specifically, when the growth spurt happens at about 10-12 years in girls and two years later in boys during adolescence, their nutritional needs are vastly increased. In the case of girls, their nutritional status impacts not only their health but that of generations to come. Malnutrition in any form can put children and adolescents at risk of compromised immune function, thus making them vulnerable to infections.

#### Social factors

To understand and foster their immunity, one also needs to understand disruptive social environment factors that affect diet quality. In urban as well as among middle class and affluent communities, restricted movement, constrained socialisation and even dwindling physical contact have become the new normal. COVID-19 isolation and fatigue have led to generalised stress, adding to the immunity challenge for children. These challenges coupled with a lack of diet diversity leading to imbalanced micronutrient intake or consumption of high carbohydrate and high sugar foods, endanger the child's health by



FILE PHOTO/BISWANATH ROUTH

compromising their immunity and making them vulnerable to infections. Hence, the way we approach nutrition needs to change.

#### Need for a balanced diet

It is essential to look beyond minimum calorie requirements and ensure children consume a balanced diet with adequate diversity in order to ensure the required balance of all necessary nutrients. Providing children with a balanced diet packed with all the necessary nutrients provides them with a solid foundation for an active and healthy life. Often overlooked, micronutrients are essential for production of enzymes, hormones and other substances for good immune function, healthy growth and development. Each stage of the body's immune response relies on the presence of many micronutrients. To combat hidden hunger, affordable, accessible and diverse food sources must be made available across India. Micronutrients that are primarily available in fruits, vegetables, greens, nuts, legumes and whole grains play a crucial role in enhancing the native and adaptive

immune function and also aid 'immune memory' formation. A substantial serving of fresh fruits and vegetables, as much as about 300-500 gm per day per child is recommended depending on the age group. These, along with curd and nuts, can increase beneficial probiotic bacteria in the intestine. But it is better to help them choose fresh fruits rather than fruit juices. Thoroughly cooked meat/poultry and sea fish are very good for protein; sea fish also provide essential fats. About 300ml-400 ml of milk or curd can provide the required calcium, good quality protein and other nutrients.

Among urban and affluent groups, indulgence in frequent munching of high-calorie snacks and sweetened beverages that are devoid of beneficial nutrients should be discouraged. However, fats need not be seen as a villain – children and adolescents need about 25g-50g a day, which should ideally be derived from more than two varieties of oils. Maintaining ideal body weight, regular physical activity, adequate water intake along with adequate sleep and low screen time can go a long way in building and regulating their immunity.

#### Noon meal scheme

The Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Yojana (PM POSHAN) – the mid-day meal programme in its new avatar – is all set to broad base itself even to students of pre-primary levels or Bal Vatikas of government and government-aided primary schools along with primary and upper primary schoolchil-

dren who are already within the ambit of the mid-day meal programme. The PM POSHAN envisages providing 450 Kcal energy and 12g of protein for primary; 700 Kcal and 20g protein for upper primary children through diet diversity. In addition, monitoring haemoglobin levels of schoolchildren, appointment of nutritional experts to ensure the haemoglobin and growth status are continuously monitored; focus on nutrigardens are all welcome steps as we prepare to reopen schools. Moreover, special provisions for nutritional items for children in districts with high prevalence of anaemia and the involvement of farmer producer organisations and self-help group women will strengthen linkages and convergence for promoting children's nutrition.

COVID-19 or no COVID-19, good immunity will lay the foundation for long-term well-being. After all, good nutrition, safe food, and positive lifestyles are the cornerstones of great immune function. To ensure this, schools, when they reopen, should be avenues for teaching nutrition as a life skill than rhetorical pedagogy. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that our children are nurtured and nourished.

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# A reminder from SARS-CoV-2

Provoking nature beyond a point can lead to unimagined and irreversible consequences for human beings



PRANAY LAL

*Viruses are one of the most persistent and potent forces of evolution, writes Pranay Lal in his new book, Invisible Empire: The Natural History of Viruses. As SARS-CoV-2 has shown, a virus is a force to be feared. "Everything about viruses is extreme, including perhaps, the reactions they evoke," says Lal as he profiles this abundant life form with the help of photographs, illustrations, anecdotes and paintings. An excerpt from the book:*

Much as we baulk at the idea, we are not unique. The human species, like all other living things, is an amalgam of creatures pieced together, gene by gene, and passed down by different life forms over deep time. Our genes were handed down to us from our ancestral ape, monkey, pig, shrew, gecko, fish, worm, grass, moss and bacterium, with several other creatures in between. Without genetic mutations, there would be no humans or, for that matter, any other life form that we see around us. These mutations – tiny errors in replicating the genetic code – occur randomly each time a cell (or virus) makes copies of itself, thereby becoming the starting point for an unexpected evolutionary journey. A very tiny number of mutations successfully create variation in a population. Natural selection then amplifies traits and creates variants which eventually can evolve into distinct species. These changes could be anything that confers an ability to thrive better in an evolving environment – blending a chameleon more effectively into a forest that is drying up; extending the necks of okapis and gerenuks so they can more easily nibble on the overhanging foliage of tall trees; or simply helping microbes evade a strong immune response and allowing them to attach themselves to a cell.

## Genetic monsters

Viruses together with other microbes speed up the gene exchange between similar and often unrelated life forms. From a virus's perspective, all

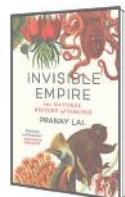


GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO

living creatures are genetic Frankenstein's monsters that they have stitched together. Nearly 8% of our genes, for instance, are uniquely viral in origin, and despite thousands and millions of years of adding, editing and deleting genes, we remain genetically similar in many ways. A virus is capable of crossing over into us to cause infection because some of our shared genes, proteins and common cellular components enable it to establish itself.

Take SARS-CoV-2, one of our most recent chance encounters. A few generations ago, a population of viruses acquired changes in their genes (and proteins) from an animal host which provided them with the ability to infect humans. The virus binds to a protein receptor, ACE2 (or Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2; angiotensin is a protein hormone that causes blood vessels to become narrower and is vital for maintaining blood pressure and fluid balance in the body), which it recognises in us. ACE2 is found in several mammals, and in us they are primarily present in our lungs and guts. When virologists teased open the RNA of SARS-CoV-2, they found that it carried genes that are found in a variety of animals – in other viruses, bacteria, slugs, small mammals, and perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, nearly 94% of its genes are found in humans too. But a handful of its genes are completely unique to it and their functions are yet unknown. This makes it difficult to predict how SARS-CoV-2 will behave once it enters our bodies.

Our technological progress, our



■ **Invisible Empire: The Natural History of Viruses**  
Pranay Lal  
Penguin/Viking  
₹799

ability to acquire instant (albeit often ephemeral) gratification, has lulled us into believing that we possess enough power to subdue and manipulate nature. We choose which relationships we want to foster and which we will cult and sever, and try to make nature serve us selectively and indefinitely. This kind of brinkmanship makes us feel that we can control nature, but as we have been slow to realise, this control is delusional. It is time we stopped looking at nature as a pliable variable or as an entity that impedes 'progress', or a tool of one-upmanship. I say this now because there are controversies about the origin of SARS-CoV-2 – did the virus jump from an animal to unsuspecting buyers in a wet market or did it leak from a lab? Was it designed as a bioweapon? For me, these questions are relevant only if we have the courage to take corrective action and hold institutions or governments accountable. Otherwise this is a futile blame game best left to politicians and diplomats. The origin of the virus could be significant for science if it helps us determine the virus's lineage and identify its potential hosts which will help us plan future strate-

gies.

Regardless of how it originated, SARS-CoV-2 reminds us that provoking nature beyond a point can lead to unimagined and irreversible consequences. Anyone who understands nature's processes knows that soils, mud, detritus, mulch, sand, gravel, grit and rock are crucial pieces in the climate change story, as are the ocean currents, wind circulation, the shapes and size of land masses and, of course, life forms – especially microbes, the principal primary energy producers on Earth that regulate the bulk of Earth's carbon-oxygen cycle. When all these small pieces come together, they power Earth's engines. This engine is an enormous, planetary scale, biogeochemical reactor – but it starts from small things. Viruses cause a billion infections a second. They tinker and shuffle genes at great speed, creating possibilities of making new varieties of life. Like geological processes which create and shape diverse landscapes, viruses and microbes enable speciation and find ways to fit new entities within ecosystems that their predecessors have shaped. Each ecosystem – a tropical forest, a vast grassland, a small pool or even microbiomes within every individual creature – has been thousands and even millions of years in the making, and is constantly evolving.

## Here to stay

Like any other pathogen that established itself as a persistent disease, SARS-CoV-2, too, was a chance occurrence. We enabled its crossover through destruction of habitats and trade in wildlife. And once the outbreak occurred, mass movements of people, weak and bigoted science, the fragmented response by agencies, a blunderbuss of regulations and distrust between states sustained the spread and evolution of the novel virus. For SARS-CoV-2, the pandemic is not just a one-off chance but an evolutionary moment. The effects of the pandemic will not wear off any time soon. The virus has triggered massive changes starting with our bodies and embracing the body politic and these will probably stay with us for a very long time. Perhaps forever.

*Excerpted with permission from Penguin Random House India*

# Navy takes delivery of warship

Stealth guided missile destroyer equipped with BrahMos cruise missiles

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The first ship of the four Project-15B state-of-the-art stealth guided missile destroyers, Visakhapatnam, being built at the Mazgaon Docks Limited (MDL), was delivered to the Navy last Friday. Delayed by three years, the ships will be commissioned very soon.

"The 163-metre-long warship has a full load displacement of 7,400 tonnes and a maximum speed of 30 knots. The overall indigenous content of the project is approximately 75%," the Navy said on Sunday.

The contract for the construction of the ships was signed in January 2011 at a project cost of about ₹29,643.74 crore.

## In-house design

The design of the ships has been developed in-house by the Directorate of Naval Design and are a follow-on of



**Battle ready:** The first of the four Project-15B ships was delivered to the Navy last Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the Kolkata class (Project 15A) destroyers.

The four ships are named after major cities from all four corners of the country – Visakhapatnam, Mormugao, Imphal and Surat, the Navy said.

The keel of Visakhapatnam was laid in October 2013 and the ship was launched in April 2015. These ships are equipped with BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and long-

range Surface-to-Air missiles (SAM).

The ship has several indigenous weapons systems like medium range SAMs, indigenous torpedo tube launchers, anti-submarine indigenous rocket launchers and 76-mm super rapid gun mount, the Navy said.

"The induction of the destroyer, despite the COVID challenges, is a tribute to the collaborative efforts of a large number of stake-hol-

ders and would enhance the maritime prowess in the Indian Ocean Region."

## Series production

The design of Project 15B has largely maintained the hull form, propulsion machinery, many platform equipment and major weapons and sensors as the Kolkata class to benefit from series production.

However, these ships feature enhanced stealth features over the earlier class through shaping of hull and use of radar transparent deck fittings which make them difficult to detect and also feature significant advances in automation and networking.

These ships are propelled by four gas turbines in Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) configuration and have maximum endurance of 4000 nm at economical speed of 14 knots, the Navy had said earlier.

# The Court's order on Pegasus still falls short

Far too many cases have been diluted with the appointment of external panels, in turn compromising civil liberties



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY

spyware is sold only to governments, chiefly for the purposes of fighting terrorism. The petitioners said that forensic analysis had confirmed the presence of Pegasus on the devices of at least 10 Indians, including some of those before the Court.

#### Time-tested strategy

But the cases presented a set of familiar challenges. In response to the allegations made against it, the Government invoked its most-beloved bogey: national security. It effectively claimed that the interests of the country's safety meant that it was under no obligation to tell the Court whether it in fact used the software or not. What is more, according to it, the very adoption of this argument virtually forbade the Court from probing further. This is a strategy that has worked well in the past. In matters purportedly involving national security, the Court has shown an extraordinary level of deference to the executive.

The cases also posed another hurdle: a contest over facts. The petitioners were asserting the occurrence of illegal surveillance. The Government was offering no explicit response to their claims. How then was the Court to unravel the truth? Again, in recent times, the Court has invariably veered towards rejecting claims made against the state on the basis that it cannot decide the veracity of a pleading without conducting a full-fledged trial, the conduct of which is beyond the bailiwick of constitutional courts.

Now, to some degree, in its order appointing a committee, the Court has bucked the trend of absolute deference. The Court has held that there is no magic formula to the Government's incantation of national security, that its power



of judicial review is not denied merely because the state asserts that the country's safety is at stake.

#### A clear path of accountability

The order recognises, correctly, that spying on an individual, whether by the state or by an outside agency, amounts to an infraction of privacy. This is not to suggest that all surveillance is illegal. But, as the order concludes, any limitation on a fundamental right must be proportional and based on evidence. "In a democratic country governed by the rule of law," the judges hold, "indiscriminate spying on individuals cannot be allowed except with sufficient statutory safeguards, by following the procedure established by law under the Constitution."

In holding thus, the Court has effectively recognised that an act of surveillance must be tested on four grounds: first, the action must be supported by legislation; second, the state must show the Court that the restriction made is aimed at a legitimate governmental end; third, the state must demonstrate that there are no less intrusive means available to it to achieve the same objective; and, finally, the state must establish that there is a rational nexus between the limitation imposed and the aims underlying the measure.

The test provides a clear path to holding the Government accountable. But for a coherent applica-

tion of these standards the Court must arrive at a conclusion on facts. Ordinarily, in prerogative proceedings, evidence is taken on affidavit. In other words, the parties before the Court present their version of the facts through a sworn, written statement. The Court then appreciates the evidence to arrive at a deduction.

In the cases concerning Pegasus, each of the petitioners affirmed a set of facts, claiming that mobile phones of Indian citizens – from journalists and activists to politicians – had been subject to intrusion. In response, the Government refused to file anything more than what it described as a "limited affidavit". Apart from a general denial of the petitioners' case, this affidavit, the Court found, did not "provide any clarity as to the facts of the matter at hand."

#### For the Court

The absence of a categorical denial from the Government, the order holds, ought to lead to a *prima facie* belief, if nothing else, that there is truth in the petitioners' claims. Having held thus, one might have expected the Court to frame a set of specific questions demanding answers from the state. These might have included the following: did the Government purchase Pegasus? Did it use the software on the phones of Indian citizens? If so, was such use backed by law? What were the reasons for which the use was authorised?

If answers to these questions were still not forthcoming, elementary principles of evidence law allow the Court to draw what is known as an "adverse inference". A party that fails to answer questions put to it will only risk the Court drawing a conclusion of fact

against it. If, on this basis, the petitioners' case is taken as true, there can be little doubt that there has been an illegitimate violation of a fundamental right. The Court then can grant any number of remedies: it can make a declaration that the Government was in the wrong; and it can issue a writ compelling the Government to disclose all materials relevant to the purchase and use of Pegasus.

It is, therefore, unclear why we need a committee at all. Surely, the Court possesses the power to gather evidence on its own, to even allow, in exceptional cases, for cross-examination of important witnesses. A committee might well be necessary where the task of collecting evidence is somehow beyond the Court's remit. But that is not the case here.

Ultimately, in the future, the Court must think more carefully about questions of proof and rules of evidence. Ad hoc committees – sterile as their members might be – cannot be the solution. Far too many cases are consigned to the back burner on the appointment of external panels, and, in the process, civil liberties are compromised.

For now, it is encouraging that the Court has kept these cases on its docket. If it finds in eight weeks' time, when the cases are next scheduled to be listed, that the Government has been delaying or obstructing the committee, it must proceed to use its prerogative powers to both provide a declaration of illegality and issue a mandatory order to the state compelling it to perform its constitutional duties. Only then will the Court's various eulogies to the values of privacy have any true meaning.

*Suhrit Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court*

# 'Informal sector shrank sharply in 2020-21'

Workers in the sector continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic's adverse effects, says SBI report

VIKAS DHOOT  
NEW DELHI

Signalling a greater shift towards formalisation of the economy, the share of the large informal sector in overall economic activity dipped sharply in 2020-21 even as informal workers continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic's adverse effects, the SBI said in a research report.

Concluding that the share of the informal economy may have shrunk to no more than 20% of the economic output from about 52% in 2017-18, SBI group chief economic adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh termed this "a positive development" amid the pandemic.

There are wide variations in the formalisation levels in

## Still in the red

An SBI report claims the share of the informal economy in India may have shrunk to 20% of the country's economic output from about 52% in 2017-18



Sector	2017-18	2020-21
Agriculture	97.1	-
Mining	22.5	15-17
Manufacturing	22.7	19-21
Utilities	5.3	0
Construction	74.5	35-40
Services	86.6	-
Transport	47.7	-
Financial services	11.9	-
Real estate	52.8	-
Public admin.	0	0
Total	52.4	15-20

different sectors but the SBI estimated that the informal economy is possibly at a maximum of 15% to 20% of formal GDP in 2020-21.

An IMF policy paper earlier this year estimated that the share of India's informal economy in the Gross Value

Added (GVA) was at 53.9% in 2011-12 and improved only marginally to 52.4% in 2017-18.

As per a National Sample Survey (NSS) of 2014, around 93% of the workforce earned their livelihoods as informal workers.

The informal sector consists of "own-account" or unorganised enterprises employing hired workers, with the highest share of such unorganised activity being in agriculture where holdings are small and fragmented.

### Agriculture takes a hit

The SBI projections suggest that the informal agriculture sector has shrunk from 97.1% of the sector's GVA in 2017-18 to just 70%-75% in 2020-21, driven by the increased penetration of credit through Kisan credit cards. Real estate has also seen a significant dip in informal activity from 52.8% in 2017-18 to 20%-25% last year.

The report estimated that about ₹1.2 lakh crore of cash

usage has been formalised since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Formal agriculture credit flows have grown ₹4.6 lakh crore between 2017-18 and 2020-21, with digital payments for petrol and diesel rising around ₹1 lakh crore in the same period.

Mooting a rethink of high fuel taxes, the SBI's top economist said: "We believe that the Government should ensure that the existing tax structure is favourable to this tax paying population that constitutes 8.5% but cross subsidises 91.5% of the population. To that extent, the existing tax structure particularly of indirect taxes on fuel should not be consumption negative."

# Living on death row with illness

A report on the mental health conditions of death row prisoners explores a neglected aspect of sentencing



SOUMITRA PATHARE

Last month, 'Deathworthy: A Mental Health Perspective of the Death Penalty', an important report by Project 39A, based at the National Law University, Delhi, was published. It explores the mental health concerns of death row prisoners, the intellectual disabilities they have, and the psychological impact of being on death row.

India remains among the 55 retentionist countries where the death penalty is still handed down for certain crimes. Data on how many death row prisoners have mental health conditions and/or intellectual disabilities are hard to come by (because the prisoners are not specifically assessed for it) and so this report helps to improve our understanding of this much-neglected topic.

## No right to fair trial

The report presents the detailed histories of 88 death row prisoners in India. Of them, 30 were found with a depressive illness, 19 with anxiety disorder, and three prisoners reported having psychotic episodes. Of particular concern is the fact that eight had attempted suicide and close to 50% said they had considered it. Worryingly, nearly 11% of these death row prisoners were diagnosed with intellectual disabilities and most of them had deficits in intellectual functioning.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights calls upon countries "not to impose the death penalty on a person suffering from any form of mental disorder or to execute any such person". Yet, the laws of most countries don't explicitly prohibit this. Mental illness and intellectual disabilities complicate the death penalty. Persons with mental illness and intellectual disabilities may not be able to instruct their lawyers to mount a robust defence, thus jeopardising the right to a fair trial enshrined in our Constitution. The 'insanity defence' in the Indian Penal Code sets such a high barrier that it can't be met in most cases. Even when there is an obvious history of mental illness, courts in India are usually unwilling to consider the plea of insanity by defence lawyers. In *State of Maharashtra v. Santosh Maruti Mane* (2014), the Bombay High Court, while confirming the death penalty for a man who had gone on a bus rampage that claimed nine lives, and rejecting his insanity plea, had stated, "Mere prior incidence of treatment is

not sufficient. It has to be established that at the time of commission of an offence, the accused was of unsound mind and incapable of understanding the consequences of his action". It is impossible for any psychiatrist, days or weeks after the offence was committed, to certify that the above conditions existed at the precise moment the offence was committed. In *Shatrughan Chauhan v. Union of India* (2014), the Supreme Court had said that mental illness should warrant the commutation of death sentence to life imprisonment. Despite this, courts do not consider mental illness as a mitigating factor when imposing punishment.

The report also highlights another important and neglected aspect of mental illness: the social determinants of mental illness. Mental illness is more common among the poor and those with mental illness are more likely to end up in poverty. Those who have experienced childhood abuse are significantly more likely to experience mental illness in adulthood than those who did not. The report provides an insight into the poverty, abuse, neglect and violence that mark the overwhelming majority of death row prisoners with mental illness. It sheds light on the stigma, social ostracisation and grief of families of those sentenced to death.

## Adopting a psycho-social approach

The authors argue that courts should take a psycho-social approach towards sentence mitigation using the framework recommended by the Supreme Court in *Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab* (1980). The apex court had laid down guidelines that courts should take into consideration before imposing the death penalty. These include mental health issues such as "extreme mental or emotional disturbance" at the time of the incident and acting under "duress". A psycho-social approach will allow courts to take into account the life history of an individual and relate this to the mental state of the individual.

The report says, "We have sentenced to death people, who, due to the nature of their disability, might very well be exempt from the death penalty altogether." Society, especially those in the criminal justice system, including legal and medical professionals, should mull over this. Mental illness is not a crime. Those with mental illness are vulnerable to violation of their rights. We need to ask ourselves what purpose is served by executing people who have a mental illness or an intellectual disability. This report, one hopes, will trigger these discussions.

*Soumitra Pathare is a Consultant Psychiatrist and Director of the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy at the Indian Law Society*

# Punjab does a deep dive for Indus dolphins

Alongside research on the aquatic mammal, efforts are on to protect its habitat

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

The census of one of the world's most threatened cetaceans, the Indus river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica minor*) – a freshwater dolphin that is found in river Beas, is all set to commence in the winter as part of a project by the Centre. However, Punjab's wildlife preservation wing has gone a step ahead to not only protect the dolphins but also their natural habitat.

The Indus river dolphin is classified as endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and, until recently, it was believed that these dolphins were endemic to Pakistan. But in 2007, a remnant but viable population of Indus dolphins was discovered in Punjab's Harike wildlife



**Small population:** The Indus river dolphin is classified as endangered by the IUCN. ■ AFP

sanctuary and in the lower Beas river. Since its discovery, research is being done by Punjab's Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation in partnership with WWF-India on the current distribution, habitat use and population abundance of the mammal. The Indus river dolphin was declared the State aquatic animal of

Punjab in 2019.

“Enumeration of freshwater dolphins is being undertaken as a nationwide project of the Central Government. At the State level, the Punjab Government has taken the initiative for conservation of dolphins and its habitat,” Gitanjali Kanwar, coordinator – rivers, wetlands and water policy,

WWF-India, told *The Hindu*. The project is to be implemented over five years.

“Alongside research, importance will be on engaging the riparian communities by encouraging community-led biological monitoring. Villages around the hot spot sites of dolphin occurrence will be developed as models for community-led conservation. Extension programmes will be held to develop a group of dedicated individuals, called ‘Beas-Dolphin Mitras’ [friends and protectors] of the river Beas. The project also will embark on dolphin eco-tourism. We will adopt a participatory process to address various water conservation-related issues, including protection of freshwater habitats,” said Ms. Kanwar.

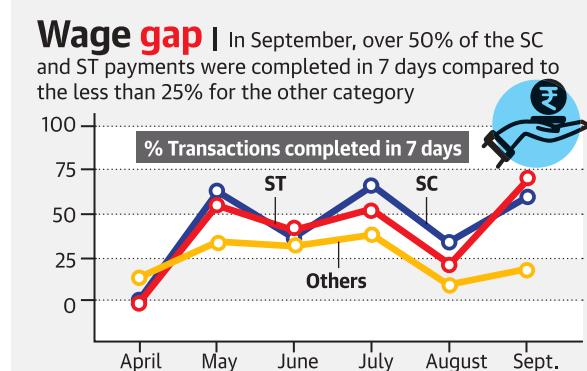
# Row over caste split of MGNREGA wage

Central order sees tensions rise in villages as some groups are paid earlier

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI

For poor villagers in Rajasthan's Ajmer district, a good Deepavali depends on their wages from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme. So tensions ran high when some got paid faster than others for work done over the last six months.

"These are people who did the work together, at the same worksite, for the same number of days. They were all on the same muster roll. But those from SC/ST [Scheduled Castes and Tribes] got paid within 15-20 days. Those from other communi-



ties had to wait two months," said Karthik Singh, a coordinator with the Rajasthan Asanghatit Mazdoor Union.

"This caused a lot of worry that there was some *gadbad* (mess-up), and created

suspicion and tensions among the villagers. Panchayat officials say they have submitted the details for everyone but the order to split the payments by caste has come from higher up, so

they cannot do anything."

Similar concerns have been raised by grassroots activists and union leaders in several States, including Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, after a Central directive on March 2 this year to split MGNREGA budget for wage payments along caste lines.

At a meeting with the Finance Secretary and Rural Development Ministry officials on October 11, the Social Justice Ministry and several States warned of "dissension", "backlash" and threats to harmony in villages after the directive.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## The big push

Biden will have to negotiate to promote his vision for social security and climate change

In what appears to be a rush to the finish line but is in fact the intention to fulfil long-standing policy promises of the Democratic Party, U.S. President Joe Biden sought to push through Congress an omnibus mega-bill seeking \$1.85 trillion for social security and climate change. While the initiative seemed to be thrust forward on a shorter timeline so that Mr. Biden could speak of his domestic agenda achievements at the G20 meeting in Rome and COP26 in Scotland, the once-in-a-generation bill speaks to issues such as providing universal pre-kindergarten, extending an expanded tax credit for parents, further reducing health-care premiums for those covered under the Obama-era Affordable Care Act, reducing a waiting list for in-home care, building a million units of low-income housing, and worker training and higher education. To balance the implied considerable hike in federal public expenditure, the bill proposes to raise revenue via a 15% minimum tax on the reported profits of large corporations, clamping down on profit-shifting by multinationals, tighter enforcement for large corporations and ultra-high net worth individuals, a 1% tax on corporate tax buybacks, an additional 5% tax on incomes exceeding \$10 million a year and another 3% tax on incomes above \$25 million, and policies to limit business losses for the very wealthy and a 3.8% Medicare tax on people earning more than \$400,000 a year who did not previously pay that tax.

Although Democrats have 50 Senators in the Upper House of Congress and Vice-President Kamala Harris could cast a tie breaking vote should the need arise, the passage of this bill which will be remembered as a major component of Mr. Biden's legacy, hangs on the razor's edge. This is in part because at least two Senators, from Arizona and West Virginia, are potential holdouts. The conundrum that Mr. Biden is facing is a paradox of omnibus bills – different constituents view only some parts of the bill as desirable. For example, House Democrats appear unwilling to pass a version of the bill that the Senate has already cleared, sanctioning a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package. Lawmakers such as Pramila Jayapal have opined that the Congressional Progressive Caucus would only support the broader vision of the Build Back Better Act, which includes the ambitious climate change programme, federal paid leave for families, a substantial expansion of Medicare policy and two free years of community college. To succeed, Mr. Biden will have to negotiate with all stakeholders to find a compromise formula. At stake is the U.S.'s prospect of climbing out of the recessionary economic trough it was pushed into by the pandemic, not only by directly spurring commercial activity through public expenditure but also by investing in education and social security to keep America's workforce competitive.

## Underestimated utility

Lowered outlay for rural guarantee scheme has led to used up allocation and wage delays

That as many as 21 of 35 States/UTs have utilised, by October 29, over 100% of their allocated funds under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for FY2021-22 is not a surprise. In the previous year, the allocations for MGNREGS were increased by ₹50,000 crore to meet the demand for work, with the Revised Estimates for spending for the scheme going up to ₹1,11,500 crore. MGNREGS was a life-saver for the poor, especially migrant labourers, following the sudden lockdown announced by the Union government. In this year's Budget, the Finance Minister allocated ₹73,000 crore for the scheme, which was higher than the previous year's absolute number in Budget allocations, but this amounted only to 2.1% of the Budget expenditure, the lowest outlay in those terms in the last six years. By October-end, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh had utilised more than 130% of their respective allocations for the scheme, indicating the extent to which rural workers depend on the scheme even in relatively better-off States. Clearly, the Union government has underestimated the demand for work under the scheme, which even if it involves arduous and menial labour has accounted for a large chunk of rural employment at a time when the economy suffered a steep contraction due to the effects of the pandemic.

In response to a report, officials in the Rural Development Ministry accused States of "artificially" creating demand, but this has not been borne out from ground reports which continue to indicate rising demand for work and wages in rural India; civil society activists claim that some workers have been turned away by officials despite the demand for work because of the paucity of funds. The Union Government must ensure that the allocation is adequate for wage payments to be done and for demand to be met in the remaining months of this financial year. The utility of MGNREGS as a scheme that alleviates distress has never been in question. From acting as an effective substitute in the absence of crop and weather insurance in aiding poor farm households and helping to provide wages during agrarian crises, to being an avenue for employment during the economic crisis induced by the pandemic and the response, MGNREGS has turned out to be a salve for farm workers and labourers. Delays in wage payments could also result in a decline in rural consumption, which plays a vital role in stimulating the economy. Besides the scheme's utility in distress, it also has the potential, if works are upgraded suitably, to continue to improve rural development and infrastructure. The Union Government must consider this during allocations and not be conservative in its outlay or remain unmindful of the overall potential of the scheme.

# Zydus Cadila likely to reduce price of vaccine

Negotiations with Govt. still on

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Pharma major Zydus Cadila has agreed to bring down the price of its COVID-19 vaccine to ₹265 a dose following negotiations with the Government but a final deal is yet to be reached, sources said on Sunday.

Zydus Cadila's ZyCov-D is the first vaccine cleared by India's drug regulator for inoculation of those aged 12 years and above. To administer the needle-free vaccine, a disposable painless jet applicator costing ₹93 is required for each dose, which would take the price to ₹358 per dose. The Ahmedabad-based pharma company earlier had proposed a price of ₹1,900 for its three-dose regimen, sources said.

"The company has brought down the price to ₹358 for each dose which includes ₹93, the cost of a dis-



One dose of the three-dose vaccine could cost ₹358, including the applicator.

posable jet applicator, following repeated negotiations by the government.... A final decision in the matter is likely to be taken this week," a source in the know of developments said. The three doses are to be administered 28 days apart. The indigenously developed world's first DNA-based, needle-free COVID-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D received emergency use authorisation from the drug regulator on August 20.

General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 <sup>th</sup> century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies

### General Studies Paper II

A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;
K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health

### General Studies Paper III

A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
V	Linkages of organized crime with terrorism;
W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.

#### General Studies Paper IV

A	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
B	Dimensions of ethics;
C	Ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
D	Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
E	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour;
F	Moral and political attitudes;
G	Social influence and persuasion.
H	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service , integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
I	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
J	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
K	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems;
L	Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions;
M	Laws, rules, regulations and conscience as
N	sources of ethical guidance;
O	Accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding;
P	Corporate governance.
Q	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service;
R	Philosophical basis of governance and probity;
S	Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
T	Case Studies on above issues.