

VEDHIK
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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.

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Ousted from power: A protester holds a poster of detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a candlelight vigil to honour those who have died during demonstrations against the military coup in Yangon on March 13, 2021. *AFP*

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Booting out partial democracy: on Myanmar military coup

In Myanmar, the break-up between the NLD and the military was inevitable

THE GIST

■ The National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi shared power with the military between March 2016 and January 2021. However, on February 1, the Myanmar army seized power, turning a partial democracy into a full-fledged military rule, yet again.

■ Three main reasons have been attributed to the fallout between the NLD and the army. First, ideologically the two segments of the political elite have been at war with each other. Second is the fight for power. The army has been used to exercising power for long which they do not like sharing with another entity. Third, is the presidential ambition of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's which was opposed by Ms. Suu Kyi.

■ Committed to the policy of non-interference, India will astutely balance its principles, values, interests and geopolitical realities while managing relations with Myanmar.

RAJIV BHATTIA

On December 6, Aung San Suu Kyi, ousted leader of Myanmar was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of incitement and for violating coronavirus restrictions. The army, with which Ms. Suu Kyi shared a Government till February this year, have used these trials to prevent her from running in the next elections. In this piece published on February 3, 2021, Rajiv Bhattia explains how and why the experimental government between the National League for Democracy and the army failed in Myanmar resulting in a coup by the latter. Edited excerpts:

On February 1, the Myanmar army seized power, turning a partial democracy into a full-fledged military rule, yet again. This creates a perception of déjà vu as one recalls 1962, 1988 and 1990, the milestone years when the generals took similar drastic actions to overthrow a democratic government or derail people's expressed preferences.

Between March 2016 and January 2021, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi shared power with the military. This was a bold experiment to govern an intensely complex nation in Southeast Asia. Myanmar thus became a car driven by two drivers. On Monday, one driver ejected the other to take charge fully, with implications that will become clearer only with time.

Emergency or coup?

To explain the military's actions, its spokesman pointed out that there was "terrible fraud in the voter list" in the parliamentary elections held in November 2020, and that the Election Commission "failed to settle the matter." Claiming that this development would "obstruct the path to democracy", the army declared an emergency, transferring all powers to Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing.

The decision seems questionable on legal and constitutional grounds. First, electoral issues need to be addressed and resolved by relevant authorities, not the military leadership. Second, Article 417 of the Constitution empowers the President to proclaim emergency, in consultation with the National Defence and Security Council. It

does not seem that the Council met or presidential consent was obtained. In fact, President Win Myint and the de facto head of the government, Ms. Suu Kyi, have been detained. Therefore, the conclusion is inescapable: it is a coup d'état staged by the army in a fashion familiar to the people. But it is a coup with a difference: the party wielding half of the power decided to help itself with the other half too, regardless of the law or consequences.

Deeper reflection raises a fundamental question: what troubled the NLD-military equation in the past five years, making it an uneasy relationship which collapsed completely this week? The fact that the generals swung into action hours before the newly elected Parliament was due to hold its first session shows that discussions to resolve differences may have continued until the last minute. As they failed, the break-up became inevitable.

In this context, three fault lines may be pinpointed. First, ideologically the two segments of the political elite have been at war with each other. The army has a sense of entitlement to power on the grounds that it secured independence, defended the country against secession, and ensured stability and development. It views itself as the guardian of the state. NLD leader Ms. Suu Kyi, the other protagonist, has always expressed admiration for the army (especially because it was established and nurtured by her father), but she has been a staunch advocate of democracy, a system in which the army should be completely apolitical. Specifically, the two sides have had modest to serious differences over ethnic reconciliation, constitutional reform, the Rohingya issue, and the China policy.

Second, in political terms the fight is for power. The army has been used to exercising power for long, which yields it immense economic dividends too. Playing second fiddle to democratically elected leaders was a difficult role for it.

Third, presidential ambitions and the future of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's career constitute a relevant issue. Back in 2016, and even now, argue well-informed sources, he nurtured the dream to be Myanmar's President. Ms. Suu Kyi

was opposed to it. Besides, she was perhaps unwilling even to extend his tenure. He is due to retire from the army in July. Presumably the coup guarantees an indefinite extension.

The military leadership understands the people's psyche well. The divide between the Burmans, the majority group, and the ethnic minorities remains wide. The latter are generally opposed to a strong Central government. As to the former, they are no doubt supportive of 'Mother Suu', but only up to a point. They are largely Buddhists and peace-loving. Hence, they might accept the grabbing of a half loaf of power from elected representatives, by the army. In areas where palpable discontent arises, the army possesses enough tools to manage situations. And Burmese jails are not short of space.

Externally, calls for an early restoration of democracy were issued predictably. This is unlikely to impress the Commander-in-Chief. The diminished international halo of Ms. Suu Kyi is an open secret. Besides, he banks on the support of only one constituency: his fellow ranking generals.

Policy of non-interference

Many worry how India, the world's largest democracy, should cope with the forcible overthrow of democracy in a neighbouring country. This is unnecessary. Our Mandarins know how to navigate the tricky path. Institutional memories and experiences are helpful.

Whenever democracy suffers, India feels concerned, even anguished. But the Government is committed to the policy of non-interference in another state's internal affairs. It is also guided by the national interest.

Therefore, in managing relations with Myanmar, India will astutely balance its principles, values, interests and geopolitical realities. The visit to Myanmar last October by Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Chief of Army Staff M.M. Naravane was an unmistakable sign that New Delhi fully understood where power lay in Naypyidaw. Those takeaways will be invaluable now.

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Russia, a legacy relationship with limitations

The India-Russia relationship stands deeply strained by larger geopolitical realities, but there is scope for improved ties



HAPPYMON JACOB

The Russian President Vladimir Putin's short visit to New Delhi and the inaugural 2+2 meeting between India and Russia – which is India's fourth such engagement with another country – will help improve Moscow-New Delhi ties, currently fraying under the pressure of larger global power shifts. Of all the diplomatic balancing acts India has to play in this milieu of geopolitical uncertainty, the one with Russia is the most significant. And yet, let the ongoing flurry of activity between Moscow and New Delhi not blind us to the global forces that will pose formidable challenges for the partnership.

There are constraints

Russia, no doubt, is a friend in need to India; but Moscow's friendship comes with limitations. Not only would the realities of the global balance of power shrink the robustness of the relationship over time, but, more crucially perhaps, a legacy relationship based on limited interaction might eventually lose the warmth given that there is little organic, people-to-people content to the relationship.

To put it bluntly, unless the bilateral ties can move beyond arms sale/purchase, the phase of stasis will kick in sooner rather than later in India-Russia relations. Consider for instance, the India-Russia bilateral trade is around U.S.\$10 billion, far lower than India's trade with China and the United States, China's trade with the U.S. and Russia, and even the U.S.'s trade with Russia. The Soviet-era cultural and people-to-people contacts have almost entirely evaporated. Arms sales alone won't a relationship make.

Today, the India-Russia relationship stands deeply strained by the

larger geopolitical realities which neither of them is completely in control of. The quadrilateral dynamics among India, China, the U.S. and Russia have different implications of varying degrees for all four states in this relationship, in particular for India.

The dynamics

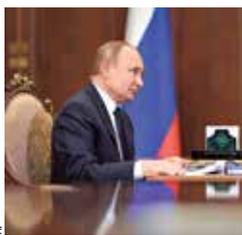
Let us use the concept of primary and secondary antagonisms to understand the dynamics of this quad better. To a great extent, if not entirely, the dynamics of this six-way relationship, at the apex, is a function of the U.S.-China rivalry. In this six-way matrix, China-U.S. antagonism is the first order relationship and the U.S.-Russia, China-Russia and Russia-India are the second order relationships. While the second order relationships in this quad are, to a great extent, a product of the primary antagonism, the second tier relationships also have their own unique dynamics and implications.

For instance, India-China, a second order relationship in this quad, is both a product of the primary antagonism between the U.S. and China as well as a result of the regional geopolitical rivalry between India and China.

Even though China remains its primary antagonism, Washington has not yet succeeded in divorcing its less challenging second order antagonism (rivalry with Moscow) from it. Washington's parallel rivalries with China and Russia (albeit to a lesser extent) have complicated matters for New Delhi.

What appears to be a near certainty in the medium to longer term is that the dynamics of the quadrilateral relationship, in particular India's tense relations with China, will go on to complicate India's time-tested partnership with Russia, a process that has already started.

Even though Beijing has not aggressively attempted to damage India-Russia relations, there is little doubt that China will attempt to drive a wedge between New Delhi and Moscow since isolating India in the larger Asian region suits



Beijing's larger game plan.

A few scenarios

It gets more complicated if we were to examine the various potential scenarios in this quadrilateral relationship. For instance, the extent of Chinese aggression towards India will play a role in determining India's relationship with Russia. Consider this. An aggressive China will push India towards the U.S., and even though Russia would be understanding towards India's rationale behind such a pro-U.S. tilt in the medium term, India's relationship with the U.S. will invariably create hurdles in India-Russia relations in the longer term. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's warning to India should be read in that context: "We expressed our serious concern to our Indian friends over the U.S. activity there (Asia-Pacific region) under the slogan of so-called Indo-Pacific strategies and the creation of closed bloc-type structures".

Put differently, the more aggressive Beijing gets towards New Delhi, the more India would grow closer to Washington and Moscow. However, while Moscow would appreciate a close partnership with New Delhi, it may not be when it comes to a growing India-U.S. partnership. More so, if Moscow has to choose between Beijing and New Delhi, it would choose Beijing just as New Delhi would choose Washington over Moscow if it comes to that.

This also implies that an aggressive China may also help increase India-Russia relations in the short to medium term, something we may already be witnessing. Recall

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's visit to Moscow in June 2020 soon after the stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops on the Line of Actual Control to procure more weapons systems, among other things.

In the meantime, the seemingly unresolvable first order antagonism (the U.S. versus China) also provides space for geopolitical hedges in the second order partnerships/antagonisms, i.e., India-Russia and even Russia-U.S. For instance, Russia's dormant concerns about China's rising influence in its traditional periphery, and Moscow's relations with India in the broader context of Central and West Asia and the western Indian Ocean could prompt Moscow to maintain a certain degree of, albeit limited, geopolitical hedge vis-à-vis Beijing. India's desire for a robust relationship with Russia will be more appreciated by the U.S. due to the Chinese aggression against India and the U.S.'s systemic and first order rivalry with Beijing. More so, once the reality of the rise of China becomes a concern for Moscow, it could potentially open conversations with Washington to create a balance vis-à-vis Beijing which suits Indian interests.

At the same time, however, if there is a rapprochement between the U.S. and Russia or a reduction in the war of words between the U.S. and China, this may or may not have a direct and substantive impact on Sino-Indian relations since the strains in Sino-Indian relations are not just a product of global balance of power but, more fundamentally, a result of India-China dynamics in the Southern Asian region. Put differently, no matter what the state of global geopolitics is, the essential (adversarial) nature of India-China relations is unlikely to undergo a fundamental transformation. For New Delhi, the principal antagonism is China. Therefore, New Delhi must exploit strategies and partnerships that can help address the China challenge more effectively. This means that India has to carefully balance its growing partner-

ship with the U.S. with its somewhat delicate relationship with Russia.

Potential for cooperation

Let us return to the India-Russia ties and examine the potential for cooperation between the two sides. In a sense, the U.S. withdrawal from Kabul and India's relationship with Moscow have helped New Delhi to adopt more flexible strategies vis-à-vis Afghanistan as well as the broader region. Given the close relationship that New Delhi enjoyed with Washington, American presence in Kabul had, in a way, limited India's options as New Delhi was broadly encouraged to follow U.S. policy in the region. With the Americans gone, India can openly cooperate with Moscow and even Tehran, especially if the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) renegotiations succeed, and engage Afghanistan and the Central Asian region with their help.

If New Delhi plays its cards well, it can use Moscow to gain more geopolitical heft in the region – while the U.S. provided New Delhi *status quo* in the region, Moscow could provide India with more direct opportunities. Of course, New Delhi would need to be prepared for adverse reactions from Beijing and Islamabad.

Yet another area of cooperation between Moscow and New Delhi is the Indian Ocean Region, especially the western Indian Ocean where Russia has been expanding its influence and India has significant interests.

For New Delhi, located in an unstable and virtually friendless neighbourhood, friendship with Russia is important notwithstanding the structural limits to such a friendship. It will, therefore, take a great deal of diplomatic agility from New Delhi to stay the course and improve the relationship with Moscow amidst high-stakes geopolitical contestations.

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Diplomatic games

The U.S. and China have added a clash over values to ties already under strain over trade

The U.S. government said on December 6 it will stage what it called a “diplomatic boycott” of the Winter Olympics, set to begin in Beijing on February 4. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the decision was taken because “U.S. diplomatic or official representation would treat these games as business as usual”. These games, she argued, could not be treated as such because of China’s “human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang”. The announcement came days ahead of U.S. President Joe Biden’s “Summit of Democracy”, with leaders and representatives from more than 100 countries; China and Russia were not invited. China’s Foreign Ministry has described the boycott as an “outright political provocation”, warning that China would take “firm countermeasures”. Sharp statements aside, the U.S. move is largely symbolic and is unlikely to have a major impact. A diplomatic boycott, which means no official representation, holds far less weight than a complete boycott which would have meant the absence of American athletes. While Australia and New Zealand have also announced that their officials will not be present in China, it remains to be seen how much traction the U.S. campaign will receive beyond its allies. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was in India earlier this week, has announced he will be present at the games, underlining the continuing closeness between China and Russia amid their divergences with the West.

China has seized upon both the U.S. boycott and the democracy summit to launch a counter campaign. This week, China’s government released a white paper on democracy, saying there was “no fixed model” and criticising the U.S. system for its “money politics”, a message that Beijing’s officials hope will find sympathetic audiences in Asia, Africa and Latin America, particularly among those countries left out of the summit (including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh). India, meanwhile, has found itself treading the middle ground in this clash of values despite the downturn in ties with China. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi is among the leaders attending the democracy summit, New Delhi last month signed off on a statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China expressing support for the games. The G20 summit in October had stopped short of doing so, merely saying it looked ahead to the games after the U.S. reportedly opposed a stronger declaration of support. The exchanges this week are a reminder of the current state of ties between the world’s two biggest powers, which have clashed over trade, Taiwan and the South China Sea among other issues, even though their two leaders, in a virtual summit last month, agreed to “responsibly” manage an increasingly competitive relationship. What has complicated that task is a growing clash of values, with ideological differences adding another element to a relationship already in trouble over trade and geopolitical leverage.

Bills on ART and surrogacy passed

Provisions include monetary penalty and jail terms for violations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha passed two Bills to regulate and supervise assisted reproductive technology clinics and surrogacy on Wednesday.

The Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill (ART), 2021 was passed by the Lok Sabha on December 1. It was passed by a voice vote in the Upper House.

Amid sloganeering by the Opposition members who are protesting against the suspension of 12 members, the House also passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020 with amendments. The proposed Bill was earlier



Parliamentarians in the Rajya Sabha during the winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■PTI

passed by the Lok Sabha but the Rajya Sabha had referred it to a Select Committee. It will now go back to the Lok Sabha for approval.

Replying to a discussion on both the Bills taken up to-

gether, Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said most of the recommendations of the Select Committee have been included in the surrogacy Bill. Both the Bills seek to curb unethical practices re-

lated to issues like sex selection and exploitation of surrogate mothers. The provisions include both monetary penalty and jail terms for violations.

The Bill related to surrogacy aims to constitute a National Surrogacy Board, State Surrogacy Boards and appointment of appropriate authorities for regulation of the practice and process of surrogacy. The Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2021 is for the regulation and supervision of the assisted reproductive technology clinics and the assisted reproductive technology banks, and prevention of misuse.

A measured response

Omicron should not set off panic; while more infectious, data show it as less virulent

The threat posed by Omicron is tenuous and it will still be a few weeks before a comprehensive understanding of it emerges, but what is known unambiguously is that this latest variant of the coronavirus is extremely infectious. Nearly 50 countries now have reported its presence within their borders but insight into its effects is available only from South Africa. A preliminary analysis of patients in Tshwane district, in Gauteng Province of South Africa, which has been the global epicentre of the Omicron-led fourth wave, suggests that despite its infectiousness, Omicron is less deadly than other variants that have led the country's previous three waves. When 166 new admissions were analysed, there were 10 deaths in the past two weeks, making up 6.6% of the 166 admissions. By comparison, the death rates in previous waves ranged from 17%-23%. The major caveat, as scientists who are part of the South African Medical Research Council point out, is that patterns could rapidly change in the next two weeks as it takes nearly a month for infection to reveal its worst-case outcome of death, and so the current data of two weeks are insufficient. Trends in hospitalisation too are encouraging, the scientists say.

Finally, the third piece is that an overwhelmingly large number of those needing intensive care were unvaccinated. Of 38 adults in the COVID wards, six were vaccinated, 24 were unvaccinated and eight had unknown vaccination status. Of nine patients with COVID pneumonia, eight are unvaccinated. Therefore, the prevalent wisdom that despite being highly infectious, vaccination – it is not clear if those in the wards were fully or partially vaccinated – significantly protected against disease and death. But vaccination trends in South Africa are not encouraging. Only about 30% of the country has had one dose and only 25% fully vaccinated. Reports have suggested that the South African government has actually had to delay vaccination because it claimed it had “too much stock”, underlining that problems of vaccine hesitancy or easy access for the greater part of the population was a challenge. As observed in previous waves, the first line of defence – or neutralising antibodies produced as a result of a prior infection or vaccination – was significantly reduced when confronted with the Beta or Delta variants. The same appears to be the case with Omicron, but the second line of defence, or cellular immunity, continues to be effective from the extant evidence. Hence, the lesson for the world continues to be that rather than focus on the novelty of Omicron, it is wiser to double up on efforts to completely vaccinate people and then, based on the evidence, consider booster or subsequent doses.

Low tobacco tax, poor health

The absence of an increase in tax on tobacco products post-GST has impacted revenue and could worsen public health



RIJO M. JOHN

In India, 28.6% of adults above 15 years and 8.5% of students aged 13-15 years use tobacco in some form or the other. This makes the country the second largest consumer of tobacco in the world. Tobacco use is known to be a major risk factor for several non-communicable diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic lung diseases. India also bears an annual economic burden of over ₹1,77,340 crore on account of tobacco use. Yet, there has been no major increase in taxation of tobacco products to discourage the consumption of tobacco in the past four years since the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 except for a small increase in the national calamity contingent duty (NCCD) in the 2020-21 Union Budget which only had the effect of increasing the average price of cigarettes by about 5%.

A worrying trend

The absence of an increase in tax means more profits for the tobacco industry and more tax revenue foregone for the government – revenue that could have easily been utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a 3% real decline in GST revenues from tobacco products in each of the past two financial years. The average annual tax revenue collection from all tobacco products (based on the past three years), including excise duty, NCCD, GST, and compensation cess, is about ₹53,750 crore.

Excise taxes on many tobacco products used to be regularly raised in the annual Union Budgets before the GST. Similarly, several State governments used to regularly raise value-added tax (VAT) on tobacco products. During the five years before the introduction of the GST, most State governments had moved from having a low VAT regime on tobacco products to having a high VAT regime. The 17.3% relative reduction in the prevalence of tobacco use among adults that India experienced between 2009-10 and 2016-17, as shown by the Global Adult Tobacco Survey, could be partly attributed to this as well. International literature recognises tax increase as one of the most cost-effective ways of regulating the consumption of tobacco.

The lack of tax increases in post-GST years

might mean that some current smokers smoke more now and some non-smokers have started smoking. This could potentially lead to a reversal of the declining trend in prevalence. This might jeopardise India's commitment to achieving 30% tobacco use prevalence reduction by 2025 as envisaged in the National Health Policy of 2017 by the Government of India. The lack of tax increase means that the tax burden on tobacco products (tax as a percentage of the retail price) decreases. The tax burden on bidis, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco, on average, stands at 22%, 53%, and 64% in 2021, while the World Health Organization has been recommending a uniform tax burden of at least 75% for each tobacco product.



Given that the vast majority of tobacco taxation today is in the form of GST and compensation cess and their revision requires consensus within the GST Council, tobacco taxation has not seen any increase whatsoever under the GST since 2017. In other words, the tobacco industry has been virtually enjoying four years without extended tax on tobacco products, since the introduction of the GST. This has made tobacco products more affordable post-GST as shown in recent literature from India. This is highly detrimental to public health.

Meanwhile, the share of central excise duties including NCCD in the total tobacco taxes decreased from 54% to 8% for cigarettes, 17% to 1% for bidis, and 59% to 11% for smokeless tobacco products, on average, from 2017 (pre-GST) to 2021 (post-GST). Several countries in the world have high excise taxes along with GST or sales tax and they are continuously being revised. Yet, the excise duty on tobacco in India continues to remain extremely low.

A considerate view of public health

The Union government should take a considerate view of public health and significantly increase excise taxes – either basic excise duty or NCCD – on all tobacco products. The upcoming Union Budget gives a perfect opportunity for this. The Budget should fix an excise tax of at least ₹1 per stick of bidis while aiming for a significant increase in the excise tax of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products. Taxation should achieve a significant reduction in the affordability of tobacco products to reduce tobacco use prevalence and facilitate India's march towards sustainable development goals.

Rijo M. John, a health economist, is an adjunct professor at Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kochi

Nod for Ken-Betwa link project

Water-starved districts of U.P., M.P. to benefit from scheme: Govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the funding and implementation of the Ken-Betwa river inter-linking project at a cost of ₹44,605 crore at the 2020-21 price level. The Centre would fund ₹39,317 crore for the project, with ₹36,290 crore as a grant and ₹3,027 crore as a loan.

The project involves transferring of water from the Ken river to the Betwa river through the construction of Daudhan dam and a canal linking the two rivers, the Lower Orr Project, Kotha Barrage and the Bina Complex Multipurpose Project.

The project is slated to irrigate 10.62 lakh hectares annually, provide drinking water supply to 62 lakh people and generate 103 MW of hydropower and 27 MW of so-



The Betwa river flowing through Orchha in Madhya Pradesh. • FILE PHOTO

lar power. The project is proposed to be completed in eight years.

"The project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved Bundelkhand region, spread across Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. This project will provide enormous benefits to the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh, and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of Uttar Pra-

desh," a statement noted.

"The project is expected to boost socio-economic prosperity in the backward Bundelkhand region on account of increased agricultural activities and employment generation. It would also help in arresting distress migration from this region," it said.

Many hurdles

Several obstacles have dogged the project. For one, the project will partly submerge the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and affect the habitat of vultures and jackals. After years of protests, it was finally cleared by the apex wildlife regulator, the National Board for Wildlife, in 2016.

Then Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh reached an agreement on how water would be shared in March.

High LPG prices are scorching the air pollution fight

Reinstating subsidies on LPG refills for low-income households can help reverse families going back to polluting fuels



SHALU AGRAWAL & SUNIL MANI

The sustained rise in the price of LPG cylinders has been burning a hole in many a household budget for more than a year now. The price of LPG refills has risen by more than 50% to over ₹900 per cylinder in November this year compared to around ₹600 over the past year. With no refill subsidies in place since May 2020, there is genuine concern about many households now slipping back to using polluting solid fuels for cooking, such as firewood and dung cakes.

A start

Solid fuel use for cooking is the leading contributor to air pollution and related premature deaths in India, estimated to be around over 600,000 every year, as per the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. To tackle this issue head-on, the Government of India has taken several measures to improve access to clean cooking energy. For instance, under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana scheme, the Government distributed more than 80 million subsidised LPG connections. But how far have we managed to dissuade households from biomass? What more do we need to do as a country to move the needle further?

Sizing up India's LPG revolution. Good news first. As per the

India Residential Energy Survey (IRES) 2020, conducted by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and the Initiative for Sustainable Energy Policy, LPG has now replaced biomass as the most common cooking fuel in India. Nearly 85% of Indian homes have an LPG connection and 71% use it as their primary cooking fuel, compared to only 30% a decade back. This reversal of trends could be attributed to the success of the Ujjwala, consumption-linked subsidies and gradual strengthening of the LPG distributorship. Needless to say, this would have significantly influenced the sector's contribution to air pollution.

However, the battle is only half won. Around 30% of Indian households continue to rely on biomass as their primary cooking fuel, mainly due to high LPG prices. Another 24% stick LPG with biomass. The practice of biomass usage is predominantly concentrated in rural areas, particularly among States such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. Urban slums are also critical hotspots where the use of biomass for cooking is widely prevalent. Easy availability of free biomass and lack of home delivery of LPG refills further reduce the efficacy of LPG as a reliable and affordable proposition.

Reinstate subsidies

To sustain the country's momentum on clean cooking energy access and thereby, cleaner air for all, we propose three key steps.

First, reinstate the subsidies on



BITU RAJANWAR

LPG refill for low-income households. At the current refill prices, an average Indian household would have to spend around 10% of its monthly expense on LPG to meet all its cooking energy needs.

According to a CEEW study, this is just double the actual share of reported expenses on cooking energy (as of March 2020). In fact, nearly half of all Indian households will have to at least double their cooking energy expense to completely switch to LPG at current prices. Given the loss of incomes and livelihoods during the novel coronavirus pandemic, the ability of households to afford LPG on a regular basis has taken a further hit. Thus, resuming subsidies would be critical to support LPG use in many households. Our estimates suggest that an effective price of ₹450 per LPG refill could ensure that the average share of actual household expenditure on cooking energy matches the pre-pandemic levels. The Government could take this into account as it reconsiders resuming LPG subsidy.

The Government can also explore diverse approaches to identify beneficiaries. This may include

limiting the subsidy provision to seven to eight LPG refills annually and excluding well-to-do households using robust indicators. For instance, lowering the income-based exclusion limit for LPG subsidy to ₹2,50,000 a year from ₹10 lakh a year or excluding families owning a non-commercial four-wheeler vehicle can significantly reduce the number of eligible beneficiaries. At the bare minimum, subsidy must be resumed for the households granted LPG connections under the Ujjwala scheme.

Availability and biomass

Second, boost timely availability of LPG for all consumers. Only half the rural LPG users receive home delivery of LPG refills, while the rest have to travel about five kilometres one way to procure a cylinder. Gaps in the doorstep delivery of LPG cylinders are also present in urban pockets, particularly in slum areas. This is a major factor behind the use of biomass among urban slum households. There is a need to strengthen the LPG supply chain and enforce timely service delivery, particularly in States with a large number of Ujjwala connections and slum population. This must be complemented by higher incentives for rural distributors, who have to otherwise service a low but distributed demand at similar commissions. Looping in self-help groups could also help aggregate demand and create jobs in distant areas.

Third, create a new market for locally available biomass. The Government needs to pilot initiatives focused on promoting the use of locally available biomass in decen-

tralised processing units that manufacture briquettes and pellets for industrial and commercial establishments. For instance, the National Thermal Power Corporation recently invited applications to supply biomass pellets to fire their power stations. The Government can incentivise entrepreneurs to participate in such activities. Similarly, households can be incentivised to supply locally available biomass (including crop stubble or dung cakes) to Compressed Biogas (CBG) production plants being set up under the Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) scheme. Such measures would help enhance local income and livelihood opportunities, in turn encouraging rural families to use LPG on a regular basis.

In August, the Prime Minister launched the Ujjwala 2.0 scheme to distribute 10 million additional free LPG connections to poorer households. It shows the Government's commitment towards promoting clean cooking energy access. But ensuring affordability and timely availability of LPG cylinders for refills would be a must to wean households away from polluting biomass and reap the benefits of the investments made in the Ujjwala scheme over the past five years. Such efforts would go a long way in improving the health and well-being of our citizens.

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Smog tower's current efficiency 'half' of Delhi Government claim

Authorities say if needed they will enhance the entire system to achieve set goals

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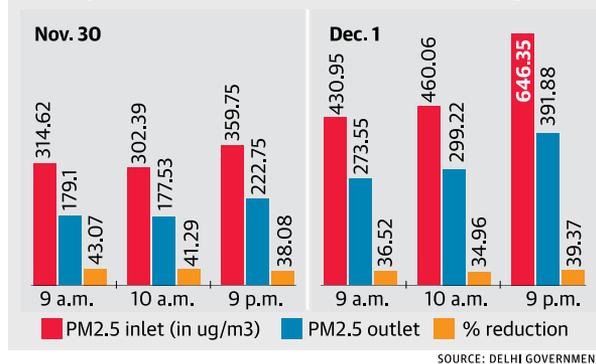
On October 1 this year, the Delhi Government said that a smog tower can clean up to 80% of polluted air, citing a preliminary report on the project. However, two months later, the percentage of pollution being reduced is only 34%-43%, according to six readings between November 30 and December 1 accessed by *The Hindu*.

The smog tower at Connaught Place, a pilot project installed at a cost of ₹20 crore, was inaugurated on August 23 by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who had said similar towers will be built in other parts of the city if the results are satisfactory.

A few weeks later, Environment Minister Gopal Rai's office released a statement that read: "The preliminary report of the smog tower installed by the Kejriwal Government was released today (October 1). The report has revealed that the smog tower is cleaning up to 80% of the air."

Tall claims?

Readings between Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 at the CP smog tower



This statement has been challenged by the readings at the same tower on December 1, where at 10 a.m., the level of PM2.5 – a chief pollutant – at the inlet of the tower was 460.06 ug/m3 and the value at outlet after purification was 299.22 ug/m3 – a reduction of only 34.9%. The reduction in the level of pollutants at a distance from the tower will be even lesser.

At 9 a.m. on November 30, the level of PM2.5 at the inlet of the tower was 314.62 ug/

m3 and at the outlet of the tower was 179.1 ug/m3, a reduction of 43.07%. This is the highest reduction in pollution levels among the six readings between November 30 and December 1.

IIT studying project

When contacted, a Delhi Government spokesperson said, "Studies are being done by IIT-Bombay at all levels. This is a pilot project and final conclusion of efficiency is yet to be arrived at. If needed we

will enhance the entire system to achieve our goals."

The smog tower is a 24 metre-high structure fitted with fans and air filters which draw in polluted air from the top and release purified air near the ground through fans fitted on the sides. The tower has 40 big fans and 5,000 filters to clean the air.

When asked about the efficiency of the tower being "only half" of what the Government had announced in October, Karthik Ganesan, a fellow at Council on Energy, Environment and Water, a think-tank, said, "It may be because filters of the tower have been clogged with pollutants and need to be changed. Also, now the tower is operating at a higher pollution load compared to October."

"Smog tower is a terrible idea. You cannot vacuum clean air. You just cannot do it. It has to be addressed at the source of pollution appropriate technologies," he added. The Government has not made these reading public till now.

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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 th 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
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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.