

VEDHIK  
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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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# Chinese Ambassador Qi's visit to Jaffna sparks concern in Sri Lanka

Some see it as a provocation to India, which has been close to Tamil-speaking north

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

A recent visit by the Chinese Ambassador in Colombo to Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority Northern Province has sparked concern and considerable commentary on what is widely seen as a heightening geopolitical contest between India and China, now manifesting in the island nation's north.

Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong, who assumed charge in Colombo a year ago, went to the Northern Province for three days from December 15 to 17. While he held meetings with top government officials, including the Governor of the province, the Fisheries Minister, and the Mayor of Jaffna, it was his visit to key sites that drew much local media attention over the past week.

Mr. Qi visited the iconic Jaffna Public Library – rebuilt after a Sinhalese mob set fire to it in 1981 – and the Adam's Bridge (that India refers to as 'Rama Setu'), a row of limestone shoals across the narrow Palk Strait between Mannar in the Northern Province and Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu. His boat ride to Adam's Bridge was organised by the Sri Lankan Navy.

Local television channels showed the Ambassador interacting with military personnel stationed at the northern tip of the Jaffna Peninsula. Pointing to the ocean, Mr. Qi asked if he was facing the Indian continent. His team from the Embassy was also shown taking photographs using a drone camera. The Ambassador visited a seafood factory in Mannar



**Mark of respect:** Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong at Nallur Kandasamy temple in Jaffna. • TWITTER

district, built with Chinese investment, and a sea cucumber farm in Jaffna. The Embassy put out a press statement on the visit, with several images, and tweets, including in Tamil, from its official handle. Video footage of the visit also showed images of the Chinese Ambassador and his colleagues attired in *veshti* (dhoti), standing bare-chested outside the well-known Nallur Kandasamy temple.

It is not unusual for Colombo-based foreign diplomats to visit the north or any part of the country, but few visits have generated as much interest in the Sri Lankan media. Newspapers and television channels covered Mr. Qi's visit extensively, with some reading it as a provocation to India, which has traditionally held close ties with the north, owing to geographic, cultural, and linguistic proximity.

*The Sunday Times*, one of Sri Lanka's most-read weekend newspapers in English, observed in its editorial on Sunday (December 26): "That China wanted to be a provocative irritant to 'another country' was obvious. On the other hand, is

the Northern Province the fiefdom of 'another country'?", apparently referring to India.

## 'Another Arunachal'

The editorial also pointed to a "safe, silent distance" maintained by the main political formation in the north, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). It further noted: "Fears of whether the North will be turned into another Arunachal Pradesh or Assam where border disputes prevail have already emerged to worry the local populace. While no country can expect any province of Sri Lanka to be another of its Union's states, by proxy or otherwise, turning the region into a geopolitical football is fraught with danger."

Media reports placed the visit in the context of the Chinese Embassy's recent tweet about the "suspension" of a solar energy project that a Chinese firm was to execute in three islands off Jaffna Peninsula, after India raised concern with Sri Lanka. Some also mentioned the ongoing diplomatic tiff between China and Sri Lanka over a consignment of "contaminated" Chinese fertiliz-

er. A news analysis published in *The Morning* newspaper on Sunday quoted TNA's Batticaloa MP Shanakiyan Rasamanickam as saying that people of Sri Lanka's north and east did not want "China to have a footprint" in the provinces. "We will oppose them. We don't want them here. All these years, they [the Chinese] didn't see us, nor did they think of the interest of the Tamil people. They have discriminated against us, even in official name boards ... So, why the sudden interest in us now?"

Speaking to the newspaper, Jaffna Chamber of Commerce president R. Jeyasekaran asked: "Where was China all this time?", referring to the help that many other countries, including India, have provided to help the region rebuild in the 12 years since the civil war ended.

## Ethnic question

However, senior Tamil leader R. Sampanthan told popular Tamil daily *Virakesari* that the visit of the Chinese Ambassador to the north was not as important as China's position when it comes to Sri Lanka's ethnic question. China has so far maintained that it will not comment on Sri Lanka's "internal affairs".

"China is yet to articulate its position on the political aspirations of the Tamil people, or our long-pending demand for a political solution. In that context, the Ambassador's visit can only be meaningless for us," Mr. Sampanthan was quoted as saying.

# 'Sri Lanka to sign Trinco deal with India soon'

## We are close to finalising the terms of the oil tank farm project, says Minister

**MEERA SRINIVASAN**  
COLOMBO

After a year of visible strain in its ties with Colombo, New Delhi may finally have some reason for cheer. In a month's time, Sri Lanka will ink the long-dragging deal with India to jointly develop the Trincomalee oil tank farms – a coveted project that has remained controversial for decades.

"We have been negotiating this for 16 months, and we are now very close to finalising the terms of the Trincomalee project with India. We hope to sign the agreement in a month," Energy Minister Udaya Gammanpila told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

The Minister said he has instructed the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) to

form a subsidiary company, Trinco Petroleum Terminal Ltd., for the purpose. The move follows President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's nod to setting up the special purpose vehicle ahead of the next Cabinet meeting. "We don't have a Cabinet meeting this week because of the holidays. We will get the decision ratified in the next one," Mr. Gammanpila said.

During the Second World War, the British built the Trincomalee oil tank farms to serve as a refuelling station, adjacent to the Trincomalee port. The nearly century-old oil tanks need to be refurbished – at the cost of millions of dollars – if they are to be fit for use again.

If the deal is finalised and signed next month, it will not only mark the culmina-



The oil tank farms at Trincomalee.

tion of India's 16-month-long negotiation with the ruling Rajapaksa administration but will also give shape to a proposal envisaged 35 years ago, in the Indo-Lanka Accord. Despite the Accord – in its annexure – stating that "the work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee oil tank farm will be undertaken as a joint venture bet-

ween India and Sri Lanka", things barely moved until 2003, when the Indian Oil Corporation set up Lankan IOC, its Sri Lankan subsidiary. The facility, interestingly located in 'China Bay', has 99 storage tanks with a capacity of 12,000 kilolitres each, spread across the Upper Tank Farm and the Lower Tank Farm, where LIOC currently runs 15 tanks. The new agreement being negotiated pertains to the remaining tanks.

The "early modernisation" of the Trincomalee oil tank farms found mention in the official statement released by the Sri Lankan mission in New Delhi, on Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa's visit in November, indicating the priority accorded to it.

# India hands over food aid, defence equipment to Mozambique

## The African nation has been fighting terrorism in its northern region

**DINAKAR PERI**  
NEW DELHI

India handed over two Fast Interceptor Craft (FIC) and other self-defence equipment to Mozambique to assist in its capacity building as the Central African nation battles growing terror threats. Naval ship *INS Kesari* entered Port of Maputo in Mozambique to deliver 500 tonnes of food aid as well as the defence equipment, under the eight edition of Mission Sagar by the Navy to assist friendly foreign countries in the region.

These deployments were conducted in solidarity with

India's extended Maritime Neighbourhood and highlights the importance accorded by India to these special relationships, the Navy said on Sunday. As much as 500 tonnes of food aid has been shipped by *INS Kesari* to support the efforts of the Government of Mozambique to cope with ongoing drought and concurrent challenges of pandemic, it stated.

### IS threats

"India also remains committed to supporting the capacity building efforts of the armed forces of Mozam-



**Goodwill gesture:** *INS Kesari* at the Port of Maputo, Mozambique, as part of Mission SAGAR on Saturday. •PTI

bique. To this end, *INS Kesari* is carrying two Fast Interceptor Craft and self defence equipment to be handed over to the armed forces of Mozambique," the Navy said.

The equipment will be useful as Mozambique is hit by terrorism in its North, a defence official said.

The terrorist group Islamic State, also known as

Da'esh, and its affiliates have rapidly spread in Central Africa.

Of late, capacity building has been a major focus area in India's engagements with Indian Ocean littoral states, with hardware and equipment supplied to many countries. This also helps in tackling common maritime challenges in the region.

### Similar missions

*INS Kesari*, a landing ship tank (large), had undertaken a similar mission in May-June 2020 to provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, including deployment of medical assistance teams of the Navy in multiple

locations. Since May 2020, ships have been deployed to 15 friendly countries under SAGAR missions, the Navy said. These deployments, spanned over 215 days at sea, have delivered a cumulative assistance of more than 3,000 tonnes of food aid, over 300 tonnes of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO), 900 oxygen concentrators and 20 ISO containers.

Separately, *INS Sudarshini*, which is on deployment to the Gulf region as part of Navy's efforts towards familiarising friendly Navies on various facets of operations and training on board sail training platforms, visited Port Sahid Bahonar at Bandar Abbas in Iran on December 22 on a three-day visit.

# A chance to tap India's high equity in Myanmar

Though there are challenges, the momentum gained from the Indian Foreign Secretary's recent visit must not be lost



RAJIV BHATIA

The short visit to Myanmar (December 22-23) by India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla had a clearly-etched mandate: to deepen cooperation with an important neighbour. His mission succeeded to a large extent, but challenges remain.

The Indian delegation took a special flight to Naypyitaw and Yangon. It certainly eased logistics for the officials, but was fully utilised as it also carried one million India-made vaccine doses, as a gift to the people of Myanmar.

## Regional dimensions

Mr. Shringla followed India's calibrated middle-path position. Not the West's reflexive policy of condemnation, threats and sanctions against the military regime, but a position reflective of regional realities. It is no easy task.

Since the military coup on February 1, 2021, the international community has stayed divided on how to address the derailment of Myanmar's transition to democracy. For a decade, the country's 'hybrid democracy' based on power-sharing between the military and elected representatives ran well enough. But an overwhelming electoral victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in No-

vember 2020, unnerved the military leadership. It apprehended that armed with a new mandate, the NLD would move fast to clip the Army's wings. The Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) moved faster, seizing power in violation of the Constitution and putting down the Opposition with an iron hand. The results have been disastrous for democracy, economy and the people's well-being, especially as the political crisis coincided with COVID-19 ravaging the 'Golden Land'.

Global dismay was evident in the western sanctions, but others such as Russia saw the opportunity to strengthen ties with the new rulers. China regretted the loss of Daw Suu Kyi as a valuable ally but took urgent steps to stabilise and expand cooperation with the military regime. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) first showed creativity through its 'Five-Point Consensus' formula, but later its unity stood damaged once Myanmar's top leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (picture) refused to cooperate in the formula's implementation.

In this highly polarised and complex situation, Mr. Shringla has succeeded in holding substantive discussions with the top State Administrative Council (SAC) leadership and political parties including the NLD in Naypyitaw as well as Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and the representatives of civil society in Yangon. India's position, as conveyed to Myanmar, is similar to and supportive of ASEAN: release of political prisoners; resolution of issues through



REUTERS

dialogue; cessation of "all violence"; and full cooperation with ASEAN. In recent years, India has assisted Myanmar through capacity-building programmes for strengthening the transition to democracy. This assistance remains available, but it is not an offer of mediation by India in the military-NLD conflict. This burden will have to be borne by ASEAN.

That India's position carries confidence is reflected in an unusual interactive meeting Mr. Shringla held with a select group of Myanmar-based foreign Ambassadors.

## Bilateral concerns

Myanmar's military is responding as it can. India's principal concerns pertaining to border security and stability in its neighbourhood were clearly conveyed, especially the noticeable escalation of activities of anti-India insurgent groups. By handing over five cadres of the Manipur People's Liberation Army to Indian authorities before the Shringla visit, the military government demonstrated its desire for cooperation. It al-

so renewed the previous pledge that its nation's territory would not be allowed to be used for any activities inimical to India.

The second issue – the outcome of Myanmar's instability – is that of refugees. Several thousands of Myanmar people have sought shelter in Mizoram. This will only be reversed by a political settlement in Myanmar, through dialogue. This issue too was taken up seriously, despite the understandable reiteration later of known positions in the regime's formal take on discussions last week.

Economic cooperation has always been a major agenda item in all bilateral discussions with Myanmar. This visit was no exception, with the usual emphasis on "people-centric socio-economic developmental projects". Central to this is India's long-delayed commitment to "expeditious implementation" of mega initiatives such as the Trilateral Highway and Kaladan projects. Unfortunately, no revised deadlines were announced. These projects continue to be the Achilles heel of the relationship.

## Protocol departure

Still, India continues to have high equity in Myanmar, which it must now carefully leverage. It is reflected in the special gesture made by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (who is Chairman of the SAC and Prime Minister) to receive Mr. Shringla and hold detailed discussions in Yangon. This is unusual. The Myanmar establishment is highly protocol-conscious. My in-

ings as Ambassador in Yangon saw three visits by the Indian Foreign Secretary (i.e., two different office-holders), but they were not received by the regime's highest dignitary. The protocol departure for Mr. Shringla revealed current political realities which should be carefully factored in by those who wrongly argue that China is the only friend Myanmar has.

Also, though the request for the Indian Foreign Secretary's call on Daw Suu Kyi was not acceded to, as was expected, it should be underlined that New Delhi made the request. There are other ways to pursue the matter as India has done in the past. A quiet approach then resulted in a rare call by this writer on Daw Suu Kyi in January 2003 when she was still under house arrest. Projecting the request this time around may yet produce results.

## Back home, the steps to take

Both the Government and the Opposition in Myanmar seem to understand India's sober approach. India can leverage the gains of this visit and keep up the momentum by inviting Myanmar's Foreign Minister at an appropriate time as well as other important stakeholders such as leaders of political parties, civil society and think tanks to India for deliberations with their counterparts here. The single goal should be to put Myanmar back on the path of becoming "a stable, democratic and federal union".

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House and a former Ambassador to Myanmar

## EXPLAINER

# The 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives

What are the #IndiaOut protests about? Why is it gaining momentum now?

MEERA SRINIVASAN

**The story so far:** Over the last three years since Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected to office, an 'India Out'/'FIndiaOut' campaign has cropped up every now and then within the Indian Ocean island nation, mostly on social media. The campaign is led by government critics who accuse the Solih government of "allowing Indian boots on the ground", and thereby "compromising the sovereignty" of the island nation. The ruling administration has denied there is any Indian military presence in the country, or a threat to Maldives' sovereignty. More recently, the campaign has gained momentum with former President Abdulla Yameen leading it, after the Supreme Court on November 30 set him free, overturning his conviction in a case of alleged money-laundering.

## What is it in response to?

The campaign has got louder around key bilateral developments such as the signing of the Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) harbour development deal with India in February 2021. New Delhi is helping Male develop the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour. At the time



Former President Abdulla Yameen. \*AFP

of the signing, Maldivian Defence Minister Mariyam Didi said the developed dockyard and harbour would give Maldives the opportunity "to protect our maritime interests on our own thereby enhancing our sovereignty".

The recent 'India Out' campaign has renewed the opposition to the initiative, seeing it as a way of allowing Indian military presence in the island nation. Similar resistance emerged in June, when

India announced the opening of a consulate in the southern Addu Atoll.

## Why is President Yameen joining the campaign significant?

During former strongman Yameen's term as President from 2013 to 2018, New Delhi-Male relations deteriorated drastically. Mr. Yameen's ultimatum then to New Delhi to withdraw two Indian helicopters from the strategically important Laamu and Addu atolls escalated tensions. The former President is widely perceived as a friend of China, and his frequent confrontation with India, on economy and security matters, left bilateral ties rather strained at the end of his tenure.

On the other hand, the Solih administration has opted for an 'India first' foreign policy. It makes no secret of its preference for India as its first choice, be it on security partnership, development assistance or COVID response, including vaccines. India, on its part, has committed \$1.4 billion towards the Maldives' "socio-economic development needs", engaged through high-level visits, and lobbied extensively to help the Maldives clinch Presidency at the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Yameen's defeat in the 2018 polls, and the antagonistic dynamic that continues between New Delhi and him, do not bode well for India's prospects for developing bipartisan ties in an important country in the neighbourhood. Further, the next presidential election is scheduled in 2023, and Mr. Yameen is trying to make a political comeback, tapping on both the anti-incumbency, and the anti-India sentiments among sections loyal to him.

## What is the government's response?

The government has rejected the 'India Out' campaign, and issued at least two statements in recent weeks, expressing concern at attempts to spread "misguided and unsubstantiated information to propagate hatred towards India". The Solih administration holds a "small group of individuals and a few political personalities" responsible for the campaign.

In its most recent statement issued on December 19, the government said it "reaffirms that the country's long-standing ties with all its international partners are based on principles of mutual respect and understanding, and in accordance with

respective national and international law. Such interactions in the international sphere do not, and will not undermine the Maldives' independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. In fact, they are designed to enhance the Maldives' national interests, and deliver for the people of the Maldives".

## What are the challenges ahead for the incumbent Solih administration?

Although the government has repeatedly attributed the 'India Out' campaign to small, politically motivated sections, the pressure to defend its India ties appears to be growing. This, along with the mounting challenges of incumbency, that too amid the persisting impact of the pandemic, cannot be easy.

Further, the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party has been witnessing frequent tensions within, with Speaker and former President Mohamed Nasheed – who has expressed interest to run for Presidency in the next election, accusing President Solih of going soft on religious extremists and corrupt politicians. How these factors might impact India's future engagement in the Indian Ocean archipelago might unravel in the coming year.

## THE GIST

■ The recent 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives is against the opposition to the UTF harbour development deal which is being seen as a way of allowing Indian military presence on native soil.

■ Former President Abdulla Yameen has recently joined this campaign. During Mr. Yameen's term as President, New Delhi-Male relations deteriorated drastically. The former President is perceived as a friend of China.

■ The Solih government has rejected the 'India Out' campaign and has expressed concern at attempts to spread "misguided and unsubstantiated information to propagate hatred towards India".

# Troubled waters

More efforts should be made to wean away fishermen from trawlers

The arrest of 68 Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan authorities between December 18 and 20 and the impounding of 10 boats for “poaching” in territorial waters have again raised concerns about the fate of the men. It is a matter of comfort and relief that the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka is working to secure their early release. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin, in his communication to the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, on Monday, has underscored the need to get back 75 fishing boats too from Sri Lanka. Fishermen from Tamil Nadu getting arrested and released later has become a routine affair, but there have been cases of deaths. In January 2021, four fishermen from Ramanathapuram district lost their lives after their vessel collided with a Sri Lankan naval craft. There was a similar case in October in which a fisherman died. This is why the Palk Bay fishing dispute needs a resolution soon. The fact that many rounds of discussions – at the levels of the fishermen and the governments of the two countries – have not led to any tangible improvement in the situation should not deter the pursuit of sustained engagement to sort out a problem that involves humanitarian and livelihood issues.

The bone of contention between the two countries has been the use of bottom trawlers by the Tamil Nadu fishermen, a practice opposed in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province on the ground that trawling damages the marine ecosystem. This practice has been banned in Sri Lanka and there have been agitations for stringent enforcement of the law. More than anything else, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu should take into account the fact that their counterparts on the other side of the Palk Strait are still struggling to pick up the threads of their lives after a brutal civil war. Given that an ambitious ₹1,600 crore scheme of replacing in three years 2,000 bottom trawlers with deep-sea fishing boats equipped with long lines and gill nets continues to be a disappointment, both the Central and Tamil Nadu governments need to take up fresh initiatives to get the fishermen on board. The main reason for failure is the component of cost to be borne by the fishermen, accounting for 30% of the unit cost of ₹80 lakh; the two governments take care of the remaining 70%. Apart from increasing the unit cost at least to ₹1.2 crore, which will be at the same level as that of a similar scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), the Governments must increase their share of subsidy. They should also motivate the fishermen to adopt sea cage farming and sea/ocean ranching, which were all covered under the PMMSY. Such an approach is essential as the fishermen find it hard to restrict themselves to India’s territorial waters, given the limited marine wealth and area on the Indian side. But, the priority now for New Delhi should be in securing the swift release of the 68 fishermen.

# Iran nuclear talks reverberate in the Gulf

The Gulf Cooperation Council's interests directly impinge on the outcome of the discussions



TALMIZ AHMAD

While Iran is engaged in negotiations in Vienna on matters relating to the U.S.'s re-entry into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the relaxation of the sanctions, two parties absent at the talks are watching developments very closely – Israel and the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – whose interests directly impinge on the outcome of the discussions.

Israel, in public remarks, has focused on Iran's progress towards weaponisation while ignoring its own nuclear weapons' capability. Serving and retired security officials have been mobilised to urge immediate and harsh military action on Iran. Unlike Israel's theatrics, the GCC countries have been pursuing a more low-key but more constructive approach to regional challenges – diplomatic engagement with Iran. This is largely because the U.S.'s credibility as the GCC's security partner was severely dented when President Donald Trump failed to protect their interests in the face of Iranian attacks on their assets in 2019. U.S. standing in the region reached rock-bottom during its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in August this year.

## GCC engagement with Iran

The UAE had first reached out to Iran in July 2019, when its senior officials visited Tehran to discuss maritime security. Following the U.S. assassination of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in January 2020, the UAE and Saudi Arabia had called on the U.S. to reduce regional tensions, recognising that more conflict would bring the GCC states in the direct line of an Iranian retaliation. The GCC countries' estrangement from the U.S.' security partnership has been further encouraged by President Joe Biden's avowed disengagement from the region in favour of containing China in the Indo-Pacific.

Since April this year, Saudi Arabia and Iran have had five meetings in Baghdad – mainly to rebuild confidence between them, re-establish diplomatic ties, and address specific areas of conflict, Yemen and Syria.



REUTERS

Given the hostility of over a decade, no major success has been announced so far, but talks are ongoing.

The revival of the nuclear talks with Iran from November and the Israeli sabre-rattling through the Vienna negotiations have pushed the GCC states to take "their destinies in their own hands", as noted by the Abu Dhabi-based commentator, Raghida Dergham. On November 23, Iran's chief negotiator, Bagheri-Kani, visited Abu Dhabi, possibly to seek the UAE's good offices to facilitate an agreement with the U.S.

Soon thereafter, the UAE's influential national security adviser, Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed, visited Tehran on December 6. Reports say that Iran may have sought the UAE's help to facilitate financial transactions once the sanctions are eased. Trade ties are already flourishing: in 2021-22, Iran's imports from the UAE are expected to reach \$12 billion.

UAE officials have also made some significant public statements relating to Iran. Anwar Gargash, Foreign Affairs Adviser to the UAE President, said at a conference in Washington in early December that states should "avoid vacuum and escalation" with adversaries and rivals. The message from the UAE is that this is "the era of crisis management and conflict resolution" and it would pursue rapprochement among the regional states.

The UAE's ties with Israel are a part of this approach. The visit of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to Abu Dhabi on December 13 took place a week after Sheikh Tahnoun's visit to Tehran. In 10 months of 2021, UAE-Israel trade has reached \$875 million, besides the \$1 billion UAE stake in Israel's Tamar gas field. Six flights a day from Israel to Dubai are bringing in several thousand Israeli

businessmen and tourists to the UAE. The UAE is making it clear that in its regional partnerships it does not have a zero-sum approach.

From Vienna, instead of hard news, we have seen public posturing by the U.S. to camouflage its own responsibility for the present imbroglio. Iran's insistence that the U.S. return to the JCPOA, remove the sanctions it had imposed under the rubric of 'maximum pressure', and give some assurance that a future U.S. administration will not withdraw from the agreement makes complete sense. But the polarised political environment in the U.S., Mr. Biden's weak political position in Congress, and the pervasive hostility to the Islamic Republic make it impossible for the U.S. to accept Iran's demands. What we are, therefore, left with is the U.S. delegation placing on Iran the onus of possible failure of the talks by blaming it for being headline, irrational and not seriously interested in a positive outcome. In this situation, unless there is a real change in the U.S.'s approach, it seems unlikely that Vienna will deliver an agreement. What does this mean for the Gulf?

More U.S. sanctions and more Israeli aggressiveness are well past their use-by date. The harshest U.S. sanctions on Iran have failed to bring Iran back to the negotiating table or brought about regime change. In fact, as China buys more Iranian oil and the UAE pursues trade ties, the death knell of the 'maximum pressure' regime is already being sounded. U.S. and Israeli commentators are also speaking out about the operational difficulties involved in an effective strike on Iran's nuclear programme and the harmful implications this could have for Israel itself and the region, while even

providing an impetus to the weapons programme that Iran has so far rejected. To avoid the possibility of a military attack, the Iranian spokesman in Vienna has just said that Iran will not enrich uranium beyond 60%, even if the talks fail.

## Regional security architecture

In this background, there are two possible scenarios for regional security. In the absence of a nuclear deal, it is likely that Israel will push for a "normalisation" of ties with more Arab states so that it builds a coalition of regional states against Iran. However, it is difficult to see how this can be achieved. There is already widespread popular opposition to this initiative across West Asia. Again, since Iran will not be intimidated into serving the U.S./ Israeli agenda, it will only aggravate regional instability and portend conflict.

A more useful framework for the region would be an inclusive security arrangement. The first steps in bringing Iran into this architecture have already been taken through the several rounds of the Saudi-Iran dialogue, the UAE-Iran engagements, the Baghdad conference in August that brought together all the regional states, and the recent Saudi effort to build a security consensus among the GCC states at the recent Riyadh summit. This summit has accepted "strategic integration", common foreign policies, and a joint defence agreement. But given the divisions within the GCC and the positions of Qatar, Kuwait and Oman, such a consensus will only emerge if Iran is integrated into the security framework.

Israel's inclusion will be more difficult - its domestic politics has been framed for decades on the basis of hostility towards Iran. But the valuable results of a more accommodative approach to the region, already apparent in the positive results yielded by normalisation with the UAE, could over time help Israel's leaders see the benefits of deeper integration with the West Asian neighbourhood.

Perhaps, this is what former Prime Minister Ehud Barak had in mind when he wrote recently that Iran's ability to pursue its nuclear programme despite the severest U.S. sanctions is "a new reality [that] requires a sober assessment of the situation, decisions and actions and not hollow public threats".

Talmiz Ahmad is a former diplomat

# Anti-dumping duty on five Chinese goods

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

India has imposed anti-dumping duty on five Chinese products, including certain aluminium goods and some chemicals, for five years to protect local manufacturers from cheap imports from the neighbouring country.

According to separate notifications of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), the duties

have been imposed on certain flat-rolled products of aluminium – sodium hydro-sulphite used in the dye industry, silicone sealant, used in manufacturing solar photovoltaic modules and thermal power applications, and hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) component R-32 and hydro-fluorocarbon blends, both used in refrigeration.

These duties were imposed following recommendations of the Commerce Mi-

nistry's investigation arm, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR).

The DGTR, in separate investigations, has concluded that these products have been exported at a price below normal value in Indian markets, which has resulted in dumping.

The domestic industry has suffered material injury due to the dumping, the DGTR said.

The CBIC has imposed the

duty on a vehicle component – axle for trailers in CKD/SKD (complete and semi knocked down) form to protect domestic makers from cheap Chinese imports.

It has also slapped the duty on imports of calcined gypsum powder from Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE for five years. While the DGTR recommends the duty to be levied, the Finance Ministry imposes it.

# Israel plans to double settlement in Golan

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
GOLAN HEIGHTS

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Sunday the country intends to double the number of settlers living in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights with a multimillion-dollar plan meant to further consolidate Israel's hold on the territory it captured from Syria more than five decades ago.

Mr. Bennett said the new investment in the region was prompted by the Trump administration's recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the swath of land and by the Biden admi-

nistration's indication that it will not soon challenge that decision. "This is our moment. This is the moment of the Golan Heights," Mr. Bennett said at a special Cabinet meeting in the Golan Heights. "After long and static years in terms of the scope of settlement, our goal today is to double settlement in the Golan Heights."

Mr. Bennett's office said the government would invest some 1 billion shekels (over \$300 million) into developing the Golan, including the establishment of two new settlements.

# Act of faith

Karnataka should not pursue regressive legislation in the name of curbing conversion

It is unfortunate that Karnataka has joined the band of States that want to enact regressive laws aimed at policing the private lives and beliefs of citizens in the name of preventing unlawful conversions. After getting the approval of the Assembly, the Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021 has not been tabled in the Legislative Council, presumably in anticipation of the ruling party's strength in the Upper House turning favourable later. While several States have laws that criminalise conversion on the basis of force, fraud or inducement/allurement, the trend has been to include 'marriage' as an illegal means of conversion. Karnataka has now made 'a promise of marriage' a means of unlawful conversion. It is needless to say that the idea of presuming that a conversion has or is about to take place alongside an inter-faith marriage is patently unconstitutional as it interferes with the right to privacy, marital freedom and freedom of belief. What makes the Karnataka anti-conversion law quite sinister is that its introduction in the legislature is running in parallel with a series of targeted attacks on churches, Christian prayers and Christmas celebrations. Belligerent right-wing groups are out in the field with what appears to be an agenda to create an impression that religious conversion is rampant and that urgent legislative action is necessary to stop the trend. Anti-conversion laws have been upheld by the courts in the past on the ground that conversion by allurement, force or fraud poses a threat to public order and should be curbed. However, the only threat to public order seems to arise from ramaging groups out to create social discord.

It is true that the Supreme Court has held that the right to propagate religion does not include a right to convert, and that the state can frame laws to prevent conversion through fraud, force or inducement. However, in a pushback against using this legal position to enact laws to preclude inter-faith marriages and render the parties vulnerable to prosecution, the Gujarat High Court has stayed provisions of a State law that made conversion 'by marriage' an offence, pointing out that it placed in jeopardy all marriages of those between two different faiths. Regarding the prior notice requirement in the Karnataka Bill for individuals intending to convert, it must be noted that the Himachal Pradesh High Court struck down a similar provision in 2012, holding that asking someone to disclose plans to change one's faith violates the right to keep one's religious beliefs private and secret. Anti-conversion laws should target only forcible or fraudulent conversion and not be open to grave misuse; there is no place for provisions that allow family members and associates to complain to the police to interdict lawful marriages. Such laws will plunge society into regressive medievalism.

# More, and for more

Boosters for the aged and vaccines for children can help India combat the virus

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, not unlike a Santa Claus who enters homes without warning and leaves gifts, suddenly announced on Christmas night that 'precaution' or third doses of vaccine would be available from January 10 for health-care, frontline workers, and those over 60 with co-morbidities on their doctors' advice. Vaccines would also be available for those in the 15-18 age group from January 3. Since the emergence of Omicron, there has been a clamour among senior citizens for booster shots. The announcement, however, was nearly simultaneous with another significant development: of Covaxin being approved by the Drugs Controller General of India for use in those over 12 years. This would make it the second vaccine after ZyCov-D (which has still to hit the market) to be approved in the 12-plus years category. There are close to 44 crore Indians below 18, a third of whom are 12-17 years old. The experience with Covaxin has shown that despite approval on the same day as Covishield this January, it has been extremely slow to scale up, with the two-dose vaccine only accounting for about 10% of the nearly 141 crore doses that have been administered so far. Given that ZyCov-D's output is unknown, it is unclear if it will be practically available in January 2022.

However, the Prime Minister's impromptu announcement is also puzzling. For more than a month, a National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation in India committee has reportedly been weighing the pros and cons of approving vaccines for children and senior citizens. Just a day before Mr. Modi's announcement, the ICMR head had said that this matter was still under debate in India's medico-bureaucratic hierarchy. These included key questions on the extent to which antibody levels waxed or waned following immunisation, whether booster doses of the same vaccine would be effective, and whether Covaxin and Covishield were differentially protective against Omicron. On the latter point, it was said that the ICMR awaited data as the Omicron variant had not yet been artificially grown in its labs. These questions have public health consequences. While 90% of adults have got one dose and over 70% Indians have been exposed to the virus in the past 20 months, there are 40% adults who have not got a second shot. The demand for first shots is nosediving and with private hospitals claiming excess stocks, it is very likely that the economic elite of India and their adolescents will mop up available stocks. Also unusual is that the technical clearance for vaccines is for those 12 and above, but Mr. Modi announced these will be for those above 15 years. It is not clear if there is evidence that this group of sub-adults is more vulnerable. India's health administration should be transparent with the data at hand and not let itself be in thrall of political calculations.

# Why the electoral reforms Bill is a problem

The Aadhaar project is again being used for purposes far beyond the stated purpose of 'welfare'



VRINDA BHANDARI

The Government has rushed the passage of the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in Parliament, also amending the Representation of the People Act, 1950 by facilitating the linking of a person's Aadhaar number with electoral roll data.

The amendment provides that an electoral registration officer may "require" an individual to furnish their Aadhaar number in order to establish their identity. Even persons already enrolled "may" be "required" by the officer to furnish their Aadhaar numbers in order to authenticate their entries in the electoral roll. Registered voters have the option of providing their Aadhaar number to Government authorities. The amendment states that no one shall be denied inclusion in the electoral roll, nor shall their names be deleted from the electoral roll due to their inability to furnish the Aadhaar number "due to such sufficient cause as may be prescribed". Such individuals may be allowed to furnish alternate documents, as prescribed by the Central government.

There are various substantive and procedural concerns with the amendments passed. First, alth-

ough the Government has termed these measures as voluntary, the provisions of the amendment belie this. The electoral officer clearly has uncanalised discretion – since the law does not prescribe any guiding principles – to decide when an Aadhaar number may be "required". Moreover, the Central government has the final say in prescribing the conditions ("sufficient cause") under which an individual will be permitted to enter or remain on the electoral rolls, in case of her "inability" to furnish their Aadhaar.

This means that the Central government will decide what reasons are considered acceptable for a voter to remain on the electoral roll. Interestingly, the law does not even consider a situation where an individual may be opposed to linking her Aadhaar number to the electoral database – further undermining the voluntary premise of the amendments.

## Burden of proof shifts

In this manner, the burden of proof has been reversed. Instead of the Government proactively ensuring registration on the electoral rolls (such as through house-to-house verification) to achieve universal adult franchise, the burden now shifts to individuals who may be unable/unwilling to link their Aadhaar to justify their retention on the rolls. In fact, deletion from the voter rolls will happen without any procedural safeguards since at the moment, the law does not provide for a right to a hearing before such deletion.



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Such a step has real world consequences. In 2015, media reports highlighted how lakhs of voters in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were reportedly excluded from the electoral process due to the practice of linking Aadhaar numbers with electoral ID. Right to Information replies indicated that such deletion was carried out without any door-to-door verification of the identity of individuals. The Supreme Court of India had to finally intervene to stop the linking process since the constitutionality of the Aadhaar Act was under challenge then.

## Political profiling

Second, there are concerns that the amendment will result in political profiling. By linking electoral IDs with Aadhaar numbers, it is much easier for the Government to track which voter has accessed welfare subsidies and benefits using their Aadhaar. This can be used by political parties to selectively target their messages to specific voters, using information that is not publicly available.

Political profiling using Aadhaar data is not unheard of. In April 2021, the Madras High Court asked

the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to ascertain how confidential information held by it may have been leaked in light of "credible allegations" that only mobile phones linked to Aadhaar cards received bulk SMS messages to join WhatsApp groups of a particular political party during election campaigning in Puducherry. Given these concerns, it is worrying that the amendment is conspicuously silent in reiterating the secret nature of such data or prohibiting the Election Commission of India or any other agency from sharing such information.

There are also procedural concerns that relate to the manner in which the amendment was passed. The Government introduced the Bill on December 20 and passed it on the same day in the Lok Sabha, while pushing it through the Rajya Sabha on the next date (December 21). Members of Parliament were not given time to understand or debate the implications of the amendments. Despite calls for division of vote in both Houses, the law was passed on the basis of a voice vote. This undermines the fundamental premise of a parliamentary democracy – to allow elected representatives the opportunity to voice the concerns of their constituents over laws that affect them.

## Not substantiated

This is especially important since the Government has failed to provide any empirical data that demonstrates either the extent of the problem of bogus voters in the

electoral roll (justifying this extraordinary measure) or the success of Aadhaar in de-duplication. It is now well known that the Aadhaar database is beset with errors and exclusions. This is partly because there is no verification of the authenticity of the demographic information on the Aadhaar database, i.e. the UIDAI does not independently authenticate the information provided by an applicant at the time of enrolment.

In fact, both the Calcutta High Court and the Allahabad High Court have refused to rely on the authenticity of Aadhaar data, noting, "There is definitely something amiss with the Aadhaar enrolment process if important demographic information such as the name of the applicant's father, as in the case in hand, can be falsified and even go undetected."

Finally, it is worth questioning how the Aadhaar project is once again being used for purposes far beyond the stated "welfare" purpose that was upheld by the Supreme Court of India in the Aadhaar judgment as the basis for the introduction of the Aadhaar Act as a Money Bill in Parliament.

It is likely that some of these issues will be litigated before the Supreme Court. One can only hope that unlike other issues such as electoral bonds that have been pending for years, this challenge will be decided expeditiously. The success of our democracy may very well depend on it.

Vrinda Bhandari is a lawyer in Delhi

EXPLAINER

# India's vaccination programme for minors

What is the status of clinical trials on those aged below 18 years? Which other countries have approved COVID vaccinations for children?

JACOB KOSHY

**The story so far:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that beginning January 3, vaccines would be available for those who are 15 years of age. Boosters would also be available for health-care workers, frontline workers and those over 60 with co-morbidities on a doctor's prescription.

**What is the significance of Prime Minister Modi's announcement?**

Mr. Modi's announcement came minutes after an approval by the Drugs Controller General of India for Covaxin to be used by those over 12 years. This makes it the second Indian vaccine after ZyCoV-D, a DNA plasmid vaccine, to be approved for those above 12. ZyCoV-D, by Zydus Cadilla, is a three-dose combination whereas Covaxin by Bharat Biotech is a two-dose vaccine. But ZyCoV-D is a two-dose vaccine. But ZyCoV-D in spite of being cleared in late August is not available in the market.

■ Bharat Biotech tested Covaxin on 525 volunteers from 2-18 years of age. While they submitted the results of the tests in the first week of October, there has been no public information on the vaccine's performance. ZyCoV-D conducted phase 3 clinical trial involving 28,000 participants and claimed an efficacy of 66.6% against symptomatic COVID-19. However, this was also announced via a company press release.

■ WHO has advised against vaccines for children in light of the vaccine supply shortage worldwide. However countries such as the U.S. and U.K., where supply is unlimited, have started administering vaccines to adolescents and babies.

**What tests have been done on the vaccine for children?**

According to information on the clinical trials registry of the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), Bharat Biotech was testing Covaxin on 525 volunteers from 2-18 years of age. They would be segregated into three groups: 2-6 year olds, 7-12 year olds, 13-18 year olds. In each of these groups, vaccines would be administered four weeks apart and they would be evaluated on the quantum of antibodies produced, whether they manifested severe reactions, whether there were adverse events following immunisation. The trial does not set out to measure efficacy, or whether the vaccine measurably protected a vaccinated group compared to an unvaccinated group.

The participants are meant to be followed up for up to 208 days. Bharat Biotech began recruitment on May 26 and the study, on paper, was expected to be completed on January 26, 2022. However, it has been routine during the pandemic for companies to rush to the regulator with early data (based on four weeks of evaluation) in the hope of an approval. Bharat Biotech submitted data first week of October though there has been no research paper or public



**In the United States and the United Kingdom – two countries that significantly influence India's COVID response – vaccines have been approved in those over 12 and in the U.S., those 5 and above are eligible.**

information on the vaccine's performance.

ZyCoV-D conducted phase 3 clinical trial involving 28,000 participants and claimed an efficacy of 66.6% against symptomatic COVID-19 as well as 100% efficacy both against moderate disease following three doses of the vaccine and against severe disease or death after two doses. However, this was announced via a company press release and there is no public information on how effective and safe the vaccine was when broken by age groups. While Bharat Biotech ostensibly submitted data that included children over 2 years and Zydus Cadilla in

those over 12, it is unclear what rationale guided Mr. Modi's announcement to restrict vaccination in those 15-18.

**Are vaccines necessary for children?**

Few issues have stirred up as much debate. The World Health Organization's most updated position on this, as of December 22, is this: "WHO is currently not recommending the general vaccination of children and adolescents as the burden of severe disease in these age groups is low and high coverage has not yet been achieved in all countries among those groups who are at highest risk of severe disease." This however is a statement made in the context of supply. In the United States and the United Kingdom – two countries that significantly influence India's COVID response – vaccines have been approved in those over 12 and in the U.S., those 5 and above are eligible. However, these are countries with virtually unlimited supplies and because, the global

evidence is that the protective effect from vaccines across age groups outweigh potential risk from adverse events and that a small fraction of children may be vulnerable to disease, vaccines may be administered if availability is not a constraint.

However, constraints on supply are among the factors guiding decisions by expert groups in India to approve vaccines because nearly 40% of India's adults are still to be fully vaccinated and the extreme infectiousness of the Omicron variant and the continuing threat from the Delta variant mean that they are at far greater risk than those under 18.

**Which are the countries that have approved vaccines for children?**

Several countries within Europe as well as Canada, Bahrain, Israel, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and China are among those that have approved vaccines in those even younger than 12.

**Race to inoculate:** India has announced vaccinations for the age group of 15-18. • v. RAJU

# Prevention is better than cure

There are several compelling reasons for extending outpatient health care coverage



SOHAM D. BHADURI

Outpatient (OP) health care, mainly comprising doctor consultations, drugs, and tests, can be called ‘the elephant in the room’ of Indian public health care policy. Over the past two decades, initiatives announced to extend health care coverage to the indigent sections have come under criticism due to their near-exclusive focus on hospitalisation (inpatient, IP) care. This owes to the fact that OP expenses have the majority share in total out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure on health. As per the government and various representative surveys, the catastrophic impact of OP expenses on Indian households is disproportionately greater than IP expenditure.

## The need for coverage

There are, however, other compelling reasons for extending OP care coverage. First, IP care comprises high-impact and unavoidable episodes that are less prone to misuse than OP care, for which demand is considerably more sensitive to price and is thus more prone to overuse under health insurance. This logic, among other reasons, has led to IP insurance schemes being prioritised. However, while a price-sensitive demand for OP care entails that it could be misused under insurance, it also means that OP care, which includes preventive and primary health care, is the first to come under the knife when there is no insurance. In India, where there are many public IP insurance schemes but no OP coverage, this incentive is further amplified. The mantra of ‘prevention is better than cure’ thus goes for a toss.

Second, it defies economic sense to prioritise IP care over OP care for public funds. Healthcare markets are notorious for being imperfect. However, this is more so for preventive and primary care services which often come with externalities, elicit little felt need and demand, and must therefore be the primary recipients of public investment.

Third, positive feedback in health systems could mean that greater investments in IP care today translate to even greater IP care investments in future, further diminution in primary care spending, and ultimately lesser ‘health’ for the money invested. None of these are conducive to the epidemiological profile that characterises this country.

Some recent policy pronouncements by the Centre have conveyed an inclination to expand healthcare coverage with little fiscal implications for the government. A corollary

is that private commercial insurance has been proposed for extending OP care coverage nationwide. Little thought has gone into the many reasons why this could prove detrimental, if not a resounding debacle.

This has to do with the reasons why OP care insurance has not caught on in India yet: under-regulated OP practices and the lack of standards therein; the difficulty to monitor OP clinical and prescribing behaviours and the concomitant higher likelihood of malpractices; low public awareness of insurance products and a low ability to discern entitlements and exclusions; and the high frequency of OP episodes and thus a giant volume of claims all embedded in a context characterised by low incomes and a high disease burden. All these entail tremendous (and largely wasteful) costs and administrative complexity, and it would be of little help even if the government was to step in with considerable subsidies. Add to it the inexperience that a still under-developed private OP insurance sector brings.

## Back to the basics

It is important to note a few caveats at the outset. First, significant improvements in healthcare are implausible without significant fiscal and time commitments. Second, there is no ‘perfect’ model of expanding healthcare – the emphasis must be on finding the best fit. Third, implementing even such a best fit could involve adopting certain modalities with known drawbacks.

For India, wisdom immediately points to successful countries that are (or were, at one point) much closer to its socioeconomic fabric, such as Thailand, than countries like the U.S. which we currently look to emulate. The remarkable decline in OOP expenditure that Thailand recorded was achieved on the back of a universal, tax-financed, public sector-predominant model of OP care.

The focus must be on expanding public OP care facilities and services financed mainly by tax revenues. Now, the sparse number and distribution of public facilities offers various modes of rationing care, and their expansion is likely to result in a considerable spike in demand. Systematic, judicious, and tiered copayments on certain OP services that are prone to overuse may be needed, as also a standard benefit package. Contracting with private players based on objective and transparent criteria would also be called for, with just enough centralised supervision to deter corruption while preserving local autonomy. To deter supply-side malpractices, low-powered modes of provider payment, such as capitation, may be considered for private providers wherever possible.

*Dr. Soham D. Bhaduri is a physician, health policy expert, and chief editor of ‘The Indian Practitioner’*

# The elderly are assets, not dependents

Proof of a truly developed country lies in the way it not only nurtures its young but also cares for its elders, equally



KIRAN KARNIK

In the past few decades, concerns about “population explosion” have given way to joy about a “demographic dividend”. The latter is expected to give a push to economic growth due to the lower dependency ratio which results from having a larger proportion of the population in the working-age group. The “Asian Tigers” – countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore – as also China, have exemplified the benefits.

## NFHS-5 data

The larger youth population is also expected to give an impetus to innovation and entrepreneurship. Not surprisingly, then, the young are in focus, with many programmes to facilitate their education, entrepreneurship, sports training, etc., but also well-being. This is as it must be, not just from an economic viewpoint, but especially from the perspective of health. Poor health, like inadequate education, could well nullify the demographic advantage. Of concern is data from the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5, which indicates that while much progress has been made, the metrics for infant and child health continue to be dismal, with some being even lower than what they were five years ago.

Yet, even as we pay attention to the young, there is both need and benefit in also looking at the other end of the spectrum. Life expectancy in India has risen from 50 (1970-75) to 70 years (2014-18); as a result, the number of elders (those

over 60 years) is already 137 million, and expected to increase by 40% to 195 million in 2031, and 300 million by 2050. While one perspective would look at them as dependents (and, therefore, a drag on the economy), a rather different view would look at them as a potential asset: a massive resource of experienced, knowledgeable people. Converting them from dependents to productive members of society depends on two primary factors: their health and their capabilities.

## Changing health-care needs

Generally, the elderly population needs more medical attention of a diverse range. As per the first ever Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI), 11% of the elderly suffer from at least one form of impairment (locomotor, mental, visual and hearing). It is estimated that 58 lakh Indians die from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in India annually, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevalence is estimated to be 34% amongst 60-74 yearolds, rising to 37% in those above 75 years. As we move to a demographic where the growth rate of elders far exceeds that of the young, perhaps the biggest challenge that the country would face is to provide a range of quality, affordable, and accessible health and care services to the elderly. They require an array of specialised medical services at home including tele or home consultations, physiotherapy and rehabilitation services, mental health counselling and treatment, as well as pharmaceutical and diagnostic services. These needs are particularly evident now, with elders being advised to stay indoor as a precaution against the novel coronavirus epidemic.

As per the 2016 Healthcare Access and Quality Index (HAQ), India improved its HAQ score from



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24.7 in 1990 to 41.2 in 2016. However, we still are significantly below the global average of 54 points, ranking at the spot of 145 out of 195 countries. The low HAQ worsens even further in smaller cities and rural areas where basic quality health-care services are very inadequate. Factors such as familial neglect, low education levels, socio-cultural beliefs and stigma, low trust on institutionalised health-care services and affordability exacerbate the situation for the elders. Inequity in health-care access compounds the problems for the elderly, who are already, physically, financially and at times psychologically restricted in understanding, responding to, and seeking medical care for various ailments. Consequently, most of them live their years in neglect.

## Inadequate schemes

Health care of the elderly has, sadly, been greatly neglected. An overwhelming proportion of the elders are from the lower socio-economic strata (including many who are destitute). They are unable to afford the cost of health care and slip into ever poorer health. The vicious cycle of poor health and unaffordable health costs is further accelerated by their inability to earn a livelihood. As a result, not only are they economically unproductive but are

dependent on support from family or others. This, and poor physical health, adds to their mental and emotional problems. The Government does have schemes that cover the elderly and seeks to take care of these issues, but they are completely inadequate.

Despite Ayushman Bharat, the Government's health insurance scheme for the deprived, and private health insurance, a NITI Aayog report indicates that 400 million Indians do not have any financial cover for health expenses. One can be sure that a very large number of elders are among the uncovered. Both the Centre and States have pension schemes for the elders, but these provide but a pittance – as low as ₹350 to ₹400 a month in some States. Even this is not universal.

A 2007 law requires States to ensure earmarked facilities for elders in every district hospital, headed by a doctor with experience in geriatric care. Yet, a status report filed by the Government in the Supreme Court of India in 2019 stated that 16 States and Union Territories (‘of 35’) did not have a single ward/bed dedicated to elders.

## Opportunities in challenges

Given the range of diverse challenges, can India take care of its aging population? The success of the COVID-19 vaccination strategy gives hope: a seniors-first approach led to over 73% of elderly population receiving at least one dose and around 40% being doubly vaccinated by October 2021.

Considering the demographic trends, India should reimagine its entire health-care policy for the next few decades, with an elderly prioritised approach. As senior citizens require the most diverse array of health-care services, the creation of adequate services for them will benefit all other age-

groups. Apart from legislating pro-elderly health care and insurance policies, India needs to aggressively take certain measures, while finding opportunities amidst this challenge.

India needs to rapidly increase its public health-care spending, and invest heavily in the creation of well-equipped and staffed medical care facilities and home health-care and rehabilitation services.

Presently, India has a major deficit in infrastructure and skilled medical care resources, with 1.3 hospital beds, 0.65 physicians, and 1.3 nurses for every 1,000 people. Over the next decade, we have the potential to add more than 3 million beds, 1.54 million doctors and 2.4 million nurses. We need to accelerate implementation of programmes such as the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE). The Ayushman Bharat and PM-JAY ecosystems need to be further expanded and similar, special health-care coverage schemes and services need to be created for senior citizens from the lower economic strata. The National Digital Health Mission has tremendous potential to expand medical consultations into the interiors of the country. However, this requires a digital literacy campaign for senior citizens.

These essential steps will help to convert elders into a massive resource for socio-cultural and economic development, giving an altogether different perspective to “demographic dividend”. After all, the proof of a truly evolved and caring nation lies in the way it not only nurtures its young but also how it cares for its aging population.

*Kiran Karnik is Chairperson, HelpAge India and an author. His latest book is 'Decisive Decade: India 2030: Gazelle or Hippo'*

# Tutu, who fought for a 'Rainbow Nation', dies at 90

A tireless activist, the Archbishop won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for combating white minority rule in South Africa

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
JOHANNESBURG

South African anti-apartheid icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu, described as the country's moral compass, died on Sunday aged 90, sparking an outpouring of tributes for the outspoken Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Tutu, who had largely faded from public life in recent years, was remembered for his easy humour and characteristic smile – and above all his tireless fight against injustices of all colours.

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa called him a man of "extraordinary intellect, integrity and invincibility against the forces of apartheid".

## 'Liberated South Africa'

Mr. Ramaphosa said Tutu's death was "another chapter of bereavement in our nation's farewell to a generation of outstanding South Africans who have bequeathed us a liberated South Africa", after the coun-



**Strong bond:** Desmond Tutu with former South African President Nelson Mandela, and, right, with the Dalai Lama. • AFP, REUTERS

try's last apartheid-era President F.W. de Klerk died in November.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama, the country's first black leader, hailed Tutu as a "moral compass".

"A universal spirit, Archbishop Tutu was grounded in the struggle for liberation and justice in his own country, but also concerned with injustice everywhere," Mr. Obama said in a statement.

Kenyan President Uhuru

Kenyatta said Tutu had "inspired a generation of African leaders who embraced his non-violent approaches in the liberation struggle".

European leaders joined the chorus, with U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling him a "critical figure" in the struggle to create a new South Africa and French President Emmanuel Macron saying Tutu had "dedicated his life to human rights and equality".



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II said Tutu's death "deeply saddened" her, while the Vatican said Pope Francis offered "heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones".

The Dalai Lama called Tutu his "respected elder spiritual brother and good friend".

## Fight against injustice

A tireless activist, Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984

for combating white-minority rule in his country.

He coined the term "Rainbow Nation" to describe South Africa when Nelson Mandela became the country's first black President in 1994.

And he retired in 1996 to lead a harrowing journey into South Africa's brutal past as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which revealed the horrors of apartheid.

However, Tutu has also criticised the ruling African National Congress (ANC) – the vanguard of the fight against white-minority rule. He challenged Mandela over generous salaries for Cabinet ministers and stridently criticised the corruption that mushroomed under ex-President Jacob Zuma.

Ordained at the age of 30 and appointed archbishop in 1986, he used his position to advocate for international sanctions against apartheid, and later to lobby for rights globally.

Tutu was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 and repeatedly underwent treatment. His public appearances became rarer. In one of his last this year, he emerged from hospital in a wheelchair to get a COVID-19 vaccine, waving but not offering comment.

The archbishop had been in a weakened state for several months and died peacefully at 7 a.m. on Sunday, his relatives said.

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-drawing 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.
<b>General Studies Paper IV</b>	
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.