

VEDHIK
DAJLY NEWS
ANALYSIS

07 - JANUARY - 2022

FOREWORD

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

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

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

CONTENTS

- News - Digitisation of manuscripts picks up
GSP 01 A
- News - Renaming Arunachal locations
ridiculous exercise
GSP 02 A
- News - N. Korea 'tests' hypersonic missile
GSP 02 C
- Editorials - The status of the Nuclear
Non-Proliferation Treaty
GSP 02
- Editorials - Is it right to increase the age of
marriage of women to 21
GSP 02 M
- News - Govt. says ₹ 8 Lakh EWS cap derived
after the study Part I
GSP 02 M
- News - Govt. says ₹ 8 lakh EWS cap derived
after the study Part II
GSP 02 M

CONTENTS

- News - Expenditure limit for LS, Asembly candidates hiked
GSP 02 N
- Editorials - Extinguishing the tobacco industry's main narrative
GSP 02 T
- Editorials - The politics of a Minimum Support Price
GSP 03 K
- News - HAL jet trainer demonstrates its prowess
GSP 03 L
- News - Use drones more effectively Civil Aviation Ministry
GSP 03 L
- Miscellaneous - First open rock museum inaugurated

Digitisation of manuscripts picks up

Tirupati institute has diverse range of collection

A.D. RANGARAJAN
TIRUPATI

After moving at a sluggish pace for the last few years, the digitisation process has picked up pace at the Oriental Research Institute (ORI), considered a repository of ancient manuscripts in south India. Once digitised, the 20,000 manuscript titles (with approximately 70-100 folios each) will be made available to the scholastic community in the form of four lakh digital pages.

Launched by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in 1939, the institute was handed over in 1956 to

Sri Venkateswara University after its formation, as the then TTD Executive Officer C. Anna Rao and SVU founder vice-chancellor S. Govindarajulu deemed the move fit to meet academic and research needs. The institute has been engaged in procuring and preserving manuscripts, editing, publishing and reprinting rare books, conducting national and international conferences and sending its ISSN-numbered journals to universities in India and 16 other countries. The ORI has even generated nearly 100 PhDs on rare topics. The Union government's National Manuscripts Mission recognised the Tirupati ORI as a 'Manuscript Resource Centre' in 2007 and the Andhra Pradesh Higher



Manuscripts being cleaned at the Oriental Research Institute in Tirupati.

Education department acknowledged it as a 'Centre of Excellence' in 2008.

The diverse range of manuscripts preserved here includes Vedas, Vedangas, Upanishads, Vyakarana, Jyotisha, Smriti, Puranas,

philosophy, archaeology, sculpture, painting, astronomy, Ayurveda, Arthasastra (administration and statecraft) and literary plays.

COVID hits work

Though the digitisation process started in 2015, it could not sustain the momentum due to a variety of reasons. The sluggish pace came to a screeching halt due to COVID-19, but picked up after its Director T. Surendra Reddy fixed a target to get the task completed in two years.

Up to 25% of its collection has been scanned and the remaining will be completed in a couple of years. Once available in the digital format, the university management will take a call on uploading the content on the web.

Renaming Arunachal locations a ridiculous exercise, says India

Beijing should not complicate the bilateral relations further, says Ministry

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

China renaming various locations in Arunachal Pradesh is a “ridiculous exercise”, according to the official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs.

Addressing the weekly press briefing on Thursday, Arindam Bagchi addressed a number of issues related to India-China ties. He stressed that China should not complicate the bilateral relations “further”.

“Calling Tuting as “Dou-Deng” or River Siyom as “Xi-YueMu” or even Kibithu as “Daba” does not alter the fact that Arunachal Pradesh has always been and will always remain an inalienable part of India,” he said.

China’s Ministry of Civil

 **We hope that instead of engaging in such antics, China will work constructively with us to resolve the outstanding friction points in areas along the western sector of the LAC in India-China border areas**

ARINDAM BAGCHI,
Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs



Affairs last week announced “standardised” names of 15 locations in Arunachal Pradesh. This was the second time since 2017 that such an exercise was carried out by Beijing.

Mr. Bagchi said, “We hope that instead of engaging in such antics, China will work constructively with us to resolve the outstanding friction points in areas along the

western sector of the LAC in India-China border areas”.

Bridge in Ladakh

Referring to the reports of China building a bridge across the Pangong Tso (lake) in Ladakh, he observed that the government was “monitoring this activity closely”. The construction was taking place in an area that has been under China’s

“illegal occupation” for six decades. “India never accepted such illegal occupation,” he asserted.

Mr. Bagchi also took up the issue of a recent letter that the Political Counsellor of the Embassy of China sent to a group of MPs who attended a meeting of the All Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet (APIPFT), and urged the Chinese authorities to “refrain from hyping normal activities” by the Indian parliamentarians.

“The substance, tone and tenor of the letter are inappropriate. Chinese side should note that India is a vibrant democracy and Hon’ble MPs, as representatives of the people, undertake activities as per their views and beliefs,” he added.

N. Korea ‘tests’ hypersonic missile

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL

North Korea has successfully tested a hypersonic missile, state media reported on Thursday, in the first major weapons test by the nuclear-armed nation this year.

This was the second reported test of what Pyongyang claimed were hypersonic gliding missiles, as it pursues the sophisticated technology despite international sanctions and condemnation.

Hypersonic missiles move far faster and are more agile than standard ones, making them much harder for missile defence systems – on which the U.S. is spending billions – to intercept.

The missile fired on Wednesday carried a “hypersonic gliding warhead” that “precisely hit a target 700 km away”, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

The warhead also demonstrated a “new” capability,

moving 120 km laterally after it detached from the launcher to strike the target, it added. “The successive successes in the test launches in the hypersonic missile sector have strategic significance,” KCNA said.

Hypersonic missiles were listed among the “top priority” tasks for strategic weapons in North Korea’s five-year plan, and it announced its first test – of the Hwasong-8 – in September last year.

EXPLAINER

The status of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

What have world powers pledged on nuclear weapons? Has the NPT been successful to stop the arms race between countries?

RISHABH KACHROO

The story so far: On Monday (January 3), five global nuclear powers, China, Russia, U.S., U.K., and France, pledged to prevent atomic weapons from spreading and avoid nuclear conflict. The joint statement was issued after the latest review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which first came into force in 1970, was postponed from its scheduled date of January 4 to later in the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What has been the goal of the NPT? Cessation of the nuclear arms race and working towards not just more peaceful uses of nuclear energy but also towards complete nuclear disarmament. While this may seem easy on paper, it has been anything but. While the 'what' and 'why' are fairly straightforward aspects of the treaty, the 'how' is where the real challenge lies.

Nuclear competition among major powers could encourage states without nuclear weapons to acquire their own. An ideal way to solve this would be for all nuclear states to

Nuclear competition among major powers could encourage states without nuclear weapons to acquire their own.

abandon their nuclear stockpile. This certainly hasn't been the case. A more practical solution, which for the longest time did work, but now seems to be waning, is to go for nuclear deterrence among large powers and provide a nuclear umbrella to non-nuclear states.

The hegemonic rise of China and its debt trapping tactics in order to gain access to the other country's key infrastructure projects has led other countries within China's immediate sphere of geographical influence to wonder if they need to acquire or develop strategic capabilities to safeguard their security.

The current situation with regard to Ukraine and Russia doesn't seem to paint a pretty picture either.

Australia, through AUKUS, seems to be on a path to acquire nuclear capabilities for its naval fleet, in a bid to counter China. While this may seem like an effective counter to China's belligerence in the Indo-Pacific, the ramifications could be severe as it sets a terrible precedent.

What are the other treaties and agreements on nuclear bans?

The NPT is joined by the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), which had the Interim Agreement and Protocol on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Weapons, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (I and II), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) among others. There's clearly no dearth of treaties and agreements, and yet the situation hasn't improved considerably. Outside of the P5 (China, France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.), India and Pakistan are known to possess nuclear weaponry, while Israel is strongly suspected of possessing it. North Korea has a nuclear weapons programme but its actual possession of nuclear weapons is debated. It has, in recent times, conducted multiple missile tests, to showcase its supposed capabilities. It has a total of seven major types of long-range missiles (Nodong, Pukgukong-3, Pukgukong-2, Musudan, the Hwasong-12, Hwasong-14, Hwasong-15) ranging from a limit of 1,500 km to 13,000 km.

What do the numbers tell us?

The optics within P5, while looking promising on paper, paint a different picture in reality. China's current stockpile stands at around 350, France's at around 290, Russia's at around 6,257, the U.K.'s at around 225, the U.S.'s at around 5,600. While the difference between U.S.'s and Russia's may look considerable, the operational stockpile of Russia is about 1,600 and for the U.S. it is about 1,650. Outside the P5, Pakistan possesses about 165, India possesses about 160, and Israel and North Korea either possess or have enough fissile material to build approximately 90 and approximately 45 weapons respectively. The world's stockpile peaked during the 1980s and started to reduce considerably until 2005. Since then, most of the reduction has come from the dismemberment of the retired stockpile. Development in technologies also means that the world keeps seeing new ways to deploy these nuclear weapons which is another worrying trend.

What lies ahead?

With Australia already on the road to acquire



nuclear capabilities, it stands to reason that other nations would work towards developing or acquiring nuclear weapons. This could, in principle, also re-ignite another arms race. The P5's joint statement, 'Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races', affirms to non-offensive uses of nuclear weapons and committing to the NPT agreement but the wording of this statement and previous statements on arms reduction could be understood in a different light as well—to use nuclear weapons against conventional weapons if the nation feels its security to be threatened so as to merit the

use of nuclear weaponry. The chequered history of nuclear weapons gives the impression that the NPT has not been entirely successful—but it hasn't been an abject failure either.

The impetus is on the major powers to stay on the path which the NPT has paved (even if a winding one) and signal commitment through its actions towards putting an end to the arms race and hopefully complete disarmament.

Rishabh Kachroo is a Ph.D scholar at the department of International Relations and Governance Studies at Shiv Nadar University

The nuclear road: In this photo distributed by the North Korean Government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, second from right, inspects the preparation of the launch of a Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on July 4, 2017. *AP

THE GIST

■ The primary goals of the NPT have been to work towards not just more peaceful uses of nuclear energy but also towards complete nuclear disarmament.

■ However, things on ground paint a bleak picture. The hegemonic rise of China has led other countries within its immediate sphere of geographical influence to wonder if they need to develop strategic capabilities to safeguard their sovereignty. The current situation with regard to Ukraine and Russia is also very tense. On the other end Australia, through AUKUS, seems to be on a path to acquire nuclear capabilities for its naval fleet, to counter China.

■ The P5's joint statement, 'Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races', affirms to non-offensive uses of nuclear weapons and committing to the NPT agreement. The impetus is on the major powers to signal commitment through its actions towards putting an end to the nuclear arms race.

Is it right to increase the age of marriage of women to 21?

PARLEY

Empowerment of women through education should be a priority irrespective of the law

In the recent session of Parliament, the government introduced the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, to raise the age of marriage for women from 18 years to 21 years. After Opposition MPs demanded greater scrutiny of the Bill, it was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports. The government says the proposed law will ensure equal chance for women in higher education and access to jobs and help improve maternal mortality rate and nutrition levels. In a conversation moderated by Jagriti Chandra, Mary E. John and Noorjehan Safia Niaz discuss whether the Bill is welcome. Edited excerpts:

Do you welcome the move to raise the age of marriage for women to 21 years in order to make it equal to the age of marriage for men?

Mary E. John: The minimum age of marriage could well be the same as the age of majority, which is 18 years. If the question of equality is so critical, the age of marriage for boys should also be 18 years. But we really need to put focus on what should be the minimum age, not the right age. When I look at the government's pronouncements, the talk is about the right age for marriage. There has almost never been a reference to a minimum age. The law should prescribe a minimum age and I think 18 years is as good as any. It should continue to be a legal presumption, and there is no reason, therefore, to raise it to 21 years.

Noorjehan Safia Niaz: The main concern of this law is not so much about equality but to raise the age of marriage for women to 21 years. The law shows the way to society, right? When [the 18 years rule] also came in, there was some resentment to that. Whenever a law which is a little ahead of its time comes in, there will be some people who won't like it. But the job of the law is also to show where we are moving as a society. If you look at urban metro cities, where girls are getting educated, that is one section of society that has moved ahead. And that section

of society also needs certain protection by the law. But the issue here is of effective implementation of the law. Unless that improves, we are going to have problems of whether the age of marriage for girls is 18 years or 21 years.

Some Muslim MPs in Parliament have called the Bill an attack on personal laws because it proposes that it will override the personal laws of Muslims, Parsis, Hindus and Christians. It also says that some personal laws will be amended, though the Muslim Personal Law is not one of them. Do you then not see this as an attempt to encroach on religious laws?

NSN: If you have to really use the word 'encroachment' for personal laws, I would say that has been happening for the Muslim community for a long time, even before Independence. The British government brought the Shariat Application Act way back in 1937, and two years later, we had the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, which codified the divorce law and gave the right to Muslim women for divorce. Then came the 1986 Act [Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act]. Because we don't have fully codified laws, we have had piecemeal legislation. In the 1986 Act, which came after the Shah Bano case, Parliament intervened on the demand of these very religious groups who don't want parliamentary intervention now. The groups asked Parliament to override the Supreme Court judgment, which was in favour of Shah Bano. And then we have the triple talaq legislation where again Muslim women demanded an intervention by the state to end this practice. Look at the Hindu Marriage Act, which was codified in 1955. It includes the Sikhs and the Buddhists, who are religious minorities. So, the state recognises that each community is to be governed by their personal laws and if there are problems with the personal laws, then it steps in. The state has to then there to listen to grievances. The state has to play its role whether you are a majority or a minority.



So, I don't think this is encroachment. And if there's a progressive law in the country, why should I be deprived of it just because I am a Muslim woman? There are laws for the Hindu community, which includes Sikhs, Buddhists and the Jains who are otherwise a religious minority. All aspects of the personal law such as marriage, divorce and custody are already codified, i.e. passed by Parliament. Christians are governed by their own personal law, and so are the Parsis. But because of the kind of politics that played out at the time of Partition, and the communalisation and the violence that Muslims faced as a minority, the issue of family law reform always took a back seat. The process of codification of laws began in 1937 [for Muslims], and had Partition not happened, I'm sure Muslims would have had a codified law probably earlier than the Hindu community. But after India gained Independence, there was absolutely no movement towards codifying the Muslim family law till Shah Bano went to court demanding maintenance. Then, too, the legislation went against the Supreme Court judgment. So, Muslim women were again deprived of the provisions of Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Of course, later on, with the Danial Latif judgment, the damage that that law caused was averted. But the fact remains that this law [1986 Act] was an attempt to get Muslim women out of the ambit of all legislative protections and constitutional safeguards. And till date, we don't have a codified family law.

We are in the 75th year of Independence and Muslims [constitute] 15% of the population of this country. But Muslims are deprived of the legal security which everybody else has. Our tragedy is that even 18 years as the year of marriage for

Young adults will find themselves at cross purposes with this new law whereby other adults will be able to render their relationships null and void and leave them in a complete legal limbo.

MARY E. JOHN

girls is not fully implemented in the Muslim community. There have been contradictory High Court judgments: while some have held that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act applies to the Muslim community, others have held that it does not. The Shariat law, which is again not codified, says the age of marriage is puberty or age 15. So, where is the protection even for the 18 years of marriage that everybody else has had for so many years? And that is why we are insisting that within this current Bill, a special mention has to be made that the Muslim community will also come under its ambit. Even if tomorrow 21 years is not implemented and even if the law is as it exists today, it should be made applicable to Muslims. To that extent, an amendment is necessary.

MEJ: Noorjehan has raised very important points about the sharp differences post-Partition which have been the subject of considerable debate in the women's movement. Let us, therefore, take on board that it is not the same kind of question [for Muslim women]. But I just want to point out that if you look at the data on underage marriage, there is no difference between Hindus and Muslims. There are similar proportions of 26.6% in the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-2016) data. If anything, there's a slightly better picture on the part of the Muslims

compared to the Hindus. So, the popular conception that Muslims are always backward compared to Hindus is not true here. As far as our underage marriage data goes, the pattern is much the same.

NSN: The Muslim community may be better on some of the parameters that we are discussing but the question is here of legal parity. Why are Muslims not on par with the rest of the citizens? If 18 is the age of marriage for the entire country, why should Muslim women be left behind? If polygamy is not allowed and if Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code governs Christians and Parsis, why should it be not applicable to Muslims as well? How long are Muslim women going to be suffering this, because we have been told time and again that our minority status is in danger. We have the provision of codifying our personal law to bring it on par with the society we are living in, and bring the best of provisions of the Quran. But if we don't reform, the state will step in. The part of the community [that resists reform] will allow the state to step in.

The Bill says that it aims to reduce maternal mortality rates, improve nutrition indicators and ensure access to education and jobs for women. Will a law help achieve these goals?

MEJ: The claims that are being made that the nutritional status of the mother and child and maternal mortality rates will improve with the increase in the age of marriage simply do not hold up. If you look at higher ages at marriage, you will look at better data sets because higher ages at marriage correspond with better-off people with better health indicators. People who are wealthier marry at later ages. However, if you control for all these factors, and only concentrate on the factor of age, then you find that age plays the least significant role in any of these indicators. Anaemia is not affected by age at marriage and it is the cause for our terrible maternal mortality rates. Similarly, a poorly nourished woman does not become better nourished because she's being married off three years later. And sex ratio is particularly off because States with the worst sex ra-

to, such as Punjab and Haryana, have higher-than-average ages at marriage. So, there is a lot of confusion here and the so-called scientific basis that is being put out by the government does not hold up.

NSN: The law is necessary, but it's not sufficient. If the commercialisation of education continues, how are the poor, especially women and girls, going to access education? If our districts, villages and smaller towns don't have health facilities, how are women going to access various schemes and programmes? So, these need to simultaneously get addressed.

Many have concerns over the manner in which the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, is implemented and used mostly to criminalise young adults who elope to marry against the wishes of their parents, and have inter-faith or inter-caste marriages.

NSN: I understand there are issues. There are going to be problems. Any law when it comes into being does not play out equally for different sections of society. We are a huge country. We have different economic strata, different religions and caste compositions. And maybe that is where the courts come in and judges decide.

MEJ: Existing studies show that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act is not being used to stop communities from holding underage marriages. It is being used by parents of a girl who is in a so-called elopement or love marriage that they are opposed to. So, please imagine what will happen tomorrow if the age is raised to 21. These women are not children. By the laws of the land, they are young adults who will find themselves at cross purposes with this new law whereby other adults will be able to render their relationships null and void and leave them in a complete legal limbo if not in a criminalised situation. In Nepal where the age of marriage was recently raised to 20 for both men and women, there are large numbers of young women in shelter homes simply because they're in this legal limbo. Is this the kind of future we want the law to create for us?



Mary E. John is former Professor and Acting Director at the Centre for Women's Development Studies



Noorjehan Safia Niaz is co-founder of the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Govt. says ₹8 lakh EWS cap derived after study

SC probes Centre on the reasoning behind income limit

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday wondered how the Union government came up with the ₹8 lakh annual income limit within just three days of introducing 10% reservation for the economically weaker sections (EWS) of society.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Third) Amendment Act introducing EWS quota came into force on January 14, 2019. On January 17 the same year, the government released an official memorandum (OM) informing that families earning a gross annual income below ₹8 lakh would be identified as EWS for benefit of reservation.

“The amendment came on January 14. On January 17, the OM comes... So the whole process of consultation, discussion, etc, with Social Justice Ministry was completed and everything was done by January 17?” Justice D.Y. Chandrachud asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta. Mr. Mehta said the ₹8 lakh limit was de-

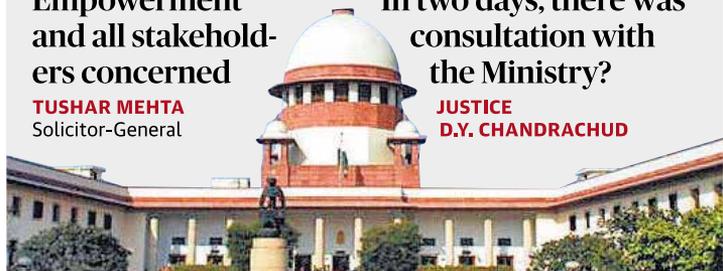
There was application of the mind. The official memorandum (OM) was after due deliberation in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and all stakeholders concerned

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor-General

The Constitution amendment for EWS came into force on Jan. 14, 2019. The OM was issued on Jan. 17 in consultation with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment?

In two days, there was consultation with the Ministry?

JUSTICE
D.Y. CHANDRACHUD



rived after study. “It was not an unstudied position,” the top law officer maintained.

The Bench, including Justice A.S. Bopanna, then pointed to an affidavit filed by the government last October, which revealed that the ₹8 lakh threshold was “largely based” on the criterion to identify the creamy layer in OBC quota.

The court said this earlier position in October was quite contrary to the later conclusions of the govern-

ment’s own expert committee, headed by former Finance Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey, in December.

The committee, formed by the government to review the ₹8 lakh limit, in its report on December 31, maintained that the ₹8 lakh threshold fixed to identify EWS was not a “mechanical adoption” of the OBC creamy layer cut-off.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Govt. says ₹8 lakh EWS cap derived after study

Justice Chandrachud remarked, “The review committee seems to be just trying to justify the ₹8 lakh limit post facto... They have done their best to justify the ₹8 lakh limit.”

Justice Chandrachud, however, moments before rising for the day, said it was in national interest that NEET counselling should continue. “In national interest, counselling has to begin,” he stated.

The court shared the concern raised by lawyers that the country needed specialist doctors to combat the prolonged public health crisis posed by the pandemic. The court has listed the case for pronouncement of orders at 10.30 a.m. on January 7.

In his arguments for the Centre, Mr. Mehta asked whether anybody with “common sense” would think ₹8 lakh was an “irrational” income limit for determining EWS.

He said EWS had “stricter

criterion” and considered the gross annual income of the family and not just that of the individual seeking reservation benefits. He referred to the Pandey committee report, which said the ₹8 lakh criterion struck a “fine balance” between over-inclusion and inclusion errors.

The report has said, “The figure ensures that most low-income people who are not required to pay income tax are not excluded and are covered in EWS and at the same time it should not be so high that it becomes over-inclusive by including many incomes tax-paying middle- and high-income families into EWS”.

Mr. Mehta said the constitutional term “economically weaker” did not mean those below the poverty line, but people in the low-income groups, who may have small savings, but not enough to reap the benefits of a good higher education in the best universities like others.

Expenditure limit for LS, Assembly candidates hiked

Revision to apply in upcoming elections, says poll panel

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ahead of Assembly polls in five States, the expenditure limit for candidates for Lok Sabha constituencies was increased to ₹75 lakh from ₹54 lakh and ₹95 lakh from ₹70 lakh, depending on the State, while the spending limit for Assembly constituencies was hiked from ₹20 lakh to ₹28 lakh and ₹28 lakh to ₹40 lakh, the Election Commission said on Thursday.

For the upcoming Assembly elections, the enhanced amount of ₹40 lakh would apply in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab and ₹28 lakh in Goa and

Manipur, according to the Law Ministry's notification on Thursday.

Apart from a 10% increase in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the last major revision in spending limits for candidates was carried out in 2014. The EC had formed a committee in 2020 to study the spending limit.

"The committee invited suggestions from political parties, chief electoral officers and election observers. The committee found that there has been increase in number of electors and Cost Inflation Index since 2014 substantially. It also factored in the changing modes of

campaigning, which is gradually shifting to virtual campaign," the EC statement said.

The committee recommended enhancing the limit after taking into account the "demand from political parties" and the "increase in electors" from 834 million in 2014 to 936 million in 2021, as well as the increase in the Cost Inflation Index by 32.08% from 2014 to 2021-22, the EC said. "The Commission has accepted the recommendations of the committee and has decided to enhance the existing election expenditure limit for candidates," the EC said.

Extinguishing the tobacco industry's main narrative

Tax is not the core driver for the illicit trade in cigarettes, as the industry would like people to believe



RIJO M. JOHN

Tobacco is a product that kills more than 13 lakh Indians every year. The annual economic burden from tobacco use is estimated to be ₹177,340 crore which is more than 1% of India's GDP. About 27 crore people above the age of 15 years and 8.5% of school-going children in the age group 13-15 years use tobacco in some form in India. There is no doubt that tobacco use is highly detrimental to public health. We have to find the ways and the means to reduce the demand for tobacco among existing as well as aspiring users.

Impact of tax

A large body of literature shows price and tax measures to be one of the most cost-effective measures to reduce demand for tobacco products. When tobacco products become more expensive, people either quit using them or use them less, and it incentivises many to not initiate the habit. Because it hurts both revenue and profits, the tobacco industry, globally, is always devising tactics and narratives that will pre-empt any

kind of tax increases on tobacco products. The narrative of "increasing illicit trade" is something the tobacco industry has historically used to pre-empt potential tax increases on tobacco products in most countries around the world. The story is no different in India. The tobacco industry, led by ITC Limited, has maintained that the illegal cigarette trade accounts for as much as 25% of the cigarette market in India. In a recent report by the Tobacco Institute of India, a representative body of the cigarette industry, it was said that the illicit cigarette volume in India has grown by 44% from 2011 to 2019 while adding that high and increasing tax rates provide a profitable opportunity for tax evasion and encourage growth in illegal trade.

Estimates by two studies

In the interest of regulating tobacco use and protecting public health, it is important to examine whether there is any truth in these industry claims. When one takes a deeper look, however, it is easy to see that neither the estimates nor the methods used to derive them are backed by any transparent studies. On the other hand, there are two studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals in recent years that estimate the percentage of illicit cigarettes in the Indian market using widely accepted best practice methodology to estimate



GETTY IMAGES

the same. The first study (<https://bit.ly/3G3mzwq>) published in 2018 which used a survey of empty cigarette packs collected from retail outlets across different cities in India estimated that illicit cigarettes constitute 2.7% of the market. The second study (<https://bit.ly/3ETV33i>) published in 2020 used tax-gap analysis to estimate that the percentage of illicit cigarettes was 5.1% in 2009-10 and 6.6% in 2016-17. Both these studies used transparent and replicable methods and their estimates of the illicit market were nowhere near the 25% figure that the tobacco industry in India has been using to influence the public discourse on tobacco taxation.

The economic burden from tobacco use in India has increased by 22% in real terms over the period 2011 to 2017. There has been a 3% real decline in Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues from tobacco products in the past two financial years. On the other hand, the annual reports of ITC show

their profits after tax in real terms have increased, on average, 3% every year for the past 10 years. One must also note that despite all the business diversification ITC has undertaken over the years, close to 85% of its profits still come from the cigarette business alone.

Exaggerating both the scale and the extent of illicit trade has been a means the tobacco industry has used historically to advocate against tobacco tax increases. However, it is to be noted that taxes and prices are not the key determinants of illicit trade. There is sufficient evidence in the literature on illicit trade in cigarettes that shows tax increases only have a minimal impact, if at all, on illicit trade. There are several countries where tobacco taxes are quite high and yet have low levels of illicit trade, while there are also countries with high levels of illicit trade despite having relatively low tax rates. Several factors such as the quality of tax administration, the strength of the regulatory framework, government commitment to control illicit trade, the strength of governance, social acceptance, and the presence of informal distribution networks are known to play a larger role in determining the scale and the extent of an illicit market.

WHO protocol

The estimated percentage of the illicit market for cigarettes in India is far lower than most countries

out there and well below the world average at 11.2% as estimated in a recent study (<https://bit.ly/32SGhwI>) on the illicit cigarette market across 36 countries. Eliminating all forms of illicit trade in tobacco products through a package of measures is one of the major objectives of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products under the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The Protocol provides the tools and the measures to eliminate or minimise illicit trade which includes strong governance, establishing an international track and trace system, and securing supply chains. India has already ratified the World Health Organization Protocol and it should now show leadership in implementing these measures to effectively address even the relatively lower levels of illicit trade.

India had no significant tax increases on any of the tobacco products for the past four years since the introduction of GST in 2017 because of which tobacco products have become more affordable as shown in recent studies. There is no scientific or public health rationale not to increase tax on tobacco products for unfounded fear of increasing illicit trade.

Rijo M. John is a health economist and Adjunct Professor at the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kochi, Kerala

The politics of a Minimum Support Price

Facilitating a bargain between wealth accumulators and welfare seekers seems to have become the key function of politics



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

A new election season is around. Five States (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Goa and Punjab) will elect new Assemblies and Chief Ministers in the coming weeks. Parties are wooing voters with dazzling new promises. The Aam Aadmi Party leader, Arvind Kejriwal, is offering ₹1,000 a month to all adult women (above age 18); the Shiromani Akali Dal's offer is ₹2,000 for poor women, which is matched by the Congress, in Punjab. The Samajwadi Party is promising 300 units of free electricity in Uttar Pradesh, and the Centre has extended its free foodgrain programme (the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, or PMGKAY), across the country, until March 2022.

More such measures and promises can be expected as campaigning picks up. Campaigns are made of pageantry around big projects and enumeration of welfare schemes. This emphasis on redistribution corresponds with a de-emphasis on job creation in political rhetoric, the promises of which still exist but only as feeble addendums. There is a synchronous celebration of 'job creators,' often juxtaposed with 'job seekers,' by governments that subtly absolve themselves. If you cannot find a job, why not create a few?

A new constituency

In fact, the current wave of competitive welfarism disconnects Indian politics from the middle class that believed in, and cheerfully ushered in, a majoritarianism-

market compact. A section of them may be frustrated over stunted material progress as they were during the last years of the United Progressive Alliance government. But politics is now being litigated lower down in the social and economic ladder by those who are desperate to get by. The slew of welfare schemes, which often includes a few hundred rupees in cash doles, creates a massive political constituency. Politics seems less about aspiration and more about desperation.

It is easy to blame individual leaders or natural disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic for this knot. The mismanagement and the incompetence of individual leaders may aggravate it, but the fundamental puzzle is the friction between the dictates of democratic politics and market-driven development. The divergence between the principles of market economy and imperatives of a democratic society is the core dilemma of liberalism. The entrenched liberal notion that market and democracy are integral to each other is being questioned by leaders of both.

For instance, in the United States, popular leader Bernie Sanders calls himself a 'democratic socialist', while Peter Thiel, one of its reigning capitalist moguls, fears that democracy will stall human progress and derail order. The trajectory of technological and economic progress is making this divergence increasingly stark.

A conflict arises

More than the question of inequality, the conflict between the political and economic orders arises out of the shrinking ability of the latter to fulfil the basic aspirations of the masses through market mechanisms. The interests of the consumer and the investor conflicts with those of the citizen and the labour, Robert Reich points out in *Super-*



GETTY IMAGES

capitalism. A politician facing the electorate has to create and protect jobs and build public amenities; incentives for job creation, if at all, are indirect and distant for the investor, who is ever looking for reducing the workforce or moving work to cheaper places and workers. Politicians are trying to restrict the mobility of capital through measures such as global minimum tax, etc. Capitalism, meanwhile, is trying to escape the planet itself, and in the interim, to free itself from state authority through technological routes such as cryptocurrencies.

'Jobless growth' is accepted

As the composition of the economy shifts in favour of activities that require little labour, the same amount of growth creates fewer jobs. More than a decade ago, 'jobless growth' had become a talking point in Indian political debates. Nobody talks about it today – not because the problem has been resolved but because everyone has accepted it as the normal. The downward trickle has become feeble. Politicians respond to this reality. For instance, Mr. Kejriwal told a gathering in Uttarakhand on Monday that he would create lakhs of jobs once in power, but it could take time. "...in the interim, we will pay ₹5,000 to every unemployed person." A universal basic income is an idea that is now being discussed globally. Barons such as Elon Musk and Bill Gates support a universal basic income for the en-

tire population in the days to come.

Welfarism, redistribution

This is turning the 'there is no free lunch' bombast (which politicians and business leaders mouthed in unison in the early 1990s) on its head. Subsidies were then rolled back, and people were asked to compete for sustenance and success. Pushed to the wall, they revolted and voted out government after government. Welfarism returned, and how. Not only that, the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act – a rural employment scheme that provides 100 days of employment/jobs a year at a minimum wage to anyone who asks for it – survived, and grew by four times between 2014 and now. It was ridiculed as a monument to the failure of the predecessor regime but today, it is the lifeline of the current regime, alongside additions such as free cooking gas and cash incentives to farmers. Welfarism is secular – all parties, from the Bharatiya Janata Party to the CPI(M); and all leaders, from Pinarayi Vijayan (Kerala) to Mamata Banerjee (West Bengal) to Prime Minister Narendra Modi are looking for new opportunities for compassion signalling. In Kerala, the free ration kit, last Onam, came with a sweet and vermicelli among its items. In other places, free laptops, bicycles and smartphones seem to be a part of the welfare mix.

Redistribution has become critical for the survival of democratic politics everywhere – the United States or India. Smarter politicians know that men do not live by bread alone. So, several State governments in India now offer free pilgrimages! Far from outraging over the Haj subsidy, voters now have a catalogue of free pilgrimages to choose from, suitable for a range of beliefs and superstitions.

A politician's success is figuring out the minimum price to be paid to garner sufficient voter support to hold on to power, and the fundamentals of the social and the economic order intact. The threshold is not very high. Two-thirds of voters voted in India and the U.S. in their latest elections; 37% voted for the current regime in India; in the U.S., the regime has the support of more than half, which is more due to the country's two-party system than its popularity. Political stability in democratic societies is contingent on the continuing confidence of the threshold population in the system.

More generosity now

Welfare schemes have created significant development outcomes in the long and short term, as experience from many Indian States over the decades shows. They were seen as the deepening of democracy. When welfare is weaponised to mute substantive political questions, its impact on democracy is less reassuring. The current generation of welfare schemes do not come as a right of citizens but as the generosity of the individual leader. Similarly, while promotion of entrepreneurship by the government is laudable, turning it into a call to the people to create jobs rather than seek them, redefines aspiration as an individual burden and responsibility.

Facilitating a bargain between wealth accumulators and welfare seekers appears to have become the primary function of politics. But it is unclear whether this will remain an infinitely sustainable lubricant that mitigates the fundamental friction, and whether the state might fall back on coercion. For now, there will be free lunches, and suppers for a song. Or a vote.

varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

HAL jet trainer demonstrates its prowess

Aircraft needs another two years of testing

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

In an important milestone, the Intermediate Jet Trainer (IJT), designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) for Stage 2 training of Indian Air Force (IAF) pilots, has successfully demonstrated the capability to carry out six turn spins, displaying an important requirement for the platform.

The aircraft will require another two years of testing after which it will be ready for induction, R. Madhavan, Chief Managing Director, HAL, said.

“The IJT needs another two years of testing. There were some major modifica-



Agile in the air: The Intermediate Jet Trainer designed and developed by HAL. •@HALHQBLR/TWITTER

tions done in the aircraft. So all the earlier tests have to be repeated and demonstrated in the new configuration,” Mr. Madhavan said. “If the requirement [from the IAF] comes within that time, we can roll out immediately,” he stated.

With this, the HAL would have the entire range of trainer aircraft – HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft (BTA), the IJT, Hawk Advanced Jet

Trainer (AJT) and the Lead-in Fighter Trainer (LIFT) being conceptualised based on the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas twin seat trainer aircraft, Mr. Madhavan noted.

The IJT, meant to replace the ageing Kirans of the IAF fleet, had earlier completed demonstration of capabilities in terms of altitude and speed envelope, load factor, satisfactory stall characteris-

tics and limited armament capability as required by the IAF.

However, the programme came to a halt in 2016 and flight testing resumed in April 2019.

Major modifications

Major modifications were undertaken such as shifting the vertical tail aft on the airframe and increasing the rudder area.

Stating that spin flight testing is inherently a high risk manoeuvre and therefore progresses incrementally turn by turn, the HAL said due to the complex interplay of aerodynamic and inertia forces, the motion of the aircraft in spin was unpredictable and flight testing was the only way to assess the acceptability or otherwise of its characteristics.

Use drones more effectively: Civil Aviation Ministry

Several Ministries receive suggestions for a range of uses, from surveillance to disaster management

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

In a nationwide programme to take the third eye to the sky, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has called for more effective utilisation of drone applications and urged the Ministry of Home Affairs to deploy unmanned aerial vehicles for surveillance, situational analysis, crime control, VVIP security, disaster management, etc.

In a note sent to at least a dozen Ministries, the Secretary, MoCA, Rajiv Bansal, said drones offered tremendous benefits to almost every sector of the economy, including but not limited to, national defence, agriculture, law enforcement, and mapping, among others.

As part of the initiatives to make India a global hub for drones under the Atmanirb-



Third eye in the sky
Ministries have been told to exploit drone applications in their domains

DEFENCE: Surveillance, combat, counter drone solutions	AGRICULTURE: Crop & soil health monitoring, anti-locust work, insurance claim survey
HOME AFFAIRS: VVIP security, crime control, raids and counter-terror operations	PANCHAYATI RAJ: Land records and property rights
HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE: Delivery of medicines, sample collection for tests	ENVIRONMENT: Forest & Climate Change: Anti-poaching operations, monitoring wildlife
	POWER: Real-time surveillance of assets and transmission lines
	ROAD TRANSPORT: Project monitoring, incident response

har Bharat Abhiyan and in the backdrop of the Union government rolling out the liberalised Drone Rules 2021, he suggested the heads of various Ministries promote effective use of the technology.

The suggestions include deployment of drones for

combat, communication in remote areas, counter-drone solutions, etc., by the Ministry of Defence; and delivery of medicines, collection of samples from remote or epidemic/pandemic-affected areas by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Acting on the recommendations that unmanned aerial vehicles could be used to undertake disaster management, incidence response, inspection/maintenance works and project monitoring, the Ministry of Railways wrote to General Managers across its network to implement the ideas, sources in the Railways said, adding that the Principal Chief Security Commissioner, Western Railway, had been nominated as the nodal officer to co-ordinate with the Aviation Ministry for guidance and support.

Real-time surveillance

The Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Power Ministries, have been asked to fly drones for real-time surveillance of assets and transmission lines, theft prevention,

visual inspection/maintenance, construction planning and management, etc. Drone operations suggested for the Environment, Forests and Climate Change Ministry include anti-poaching actions, monitoring of forests and wildlife, pollution assessment, and evidence gathering.

High-quality videography

As a complete replacement to expensive helicopter-based videography, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting could use drones for high-quality videography of events and difficult-to-reach-places at a fraction of the cost and approvals required. This move would also facilitate low altitude shooting without noise, and prevent dust pollution.

First open rock museum inaugurated

Rocks from across India displayed on CSIR-NGRI campus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Science & Technology Jitendra Singh inaugurated India's first open rock museum displaying different types of rocks gathered from different States of ages ranging from 3.3 billion years to around 55 million years on the campus of the CSIR-National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) here on Thursday.

About 46 rocks of different sizes have been displayed in a garden with descriptions giving the economic and scientific im-



Diversity in stone: The rock museum at the CSIR-NGRI in Hyderabad. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

portance of some of them located as deep as 175 km from the surface of the earth. The rocks are from Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir and others.

The Minister suggested that the museum be promot-

ed among students and enthusiasts. "It should be one of the important places to visit in this city of composite culture as these are monuments of modern India."

Pointing out that the country was celebrating 75 years of Independence and

CSIR celebrating 80 years of its formation, he said it was the right time to integrate synergies to make the country self-reliant in many sectors. About 75 science museums would be coming up in association with the Ministry of Culture, he 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 th 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.
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.