

VEDHIK DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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The New Learning Mantra

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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China slams Quad, AUKUS ‘cliques’

The U.S. strategy seeks ‘to resurrect the Cold War mentality and bloc politics’

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

China has equated the India, U.S., Australia, Japan Quad grouping with the AUKUS (Australia, the U.K., the U.S.) defence pact, calling both “exclusive cliques” part of the Biden administration’s “ill-intentioned” Indo-Pacific strategy.

The comments from Beijing this week are the first time that it has explicitly equated the Quad – whose members stress that it is not a military alliance – with the AUKUS defence pact, and reflect recently stepped up criticism from Beijing targeting the four countries.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in Melbourne last week for the Quad Foreign Ministers meet, rejected that criticism, saying on Friday, “Our record, actions and stance are fairly clear and by criticising them repeatedly, it doesn’t make us less credible.”



Wang Wenbin

This week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, took aim at the new Indo-Pacific strategy released by the Biden administration, saying “ill intentions underlie the so-called ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’ devised under the pretext of ‘the China threat’”.

“What the U.S. says in its ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’ is different from what it is actually doing. The U.S. claims to advance ‘freedom and openness’ in the region, but is in

fact forming an exclusive clique through AUKUS and Quad,” he said, according to a transcript of his remarks at a press briefing published on Tuesday.

‘Grave risks’

“It asserts to strengthen regional security, but is generating grave nuclear proliferation risks that would undermine regional peace and stability,” he added. “It professes to promote regional prosperity, but is stoking opposition and confrontation between regional countries which undercuts the ASEAN-centred regional cooperation architecture that has formed over the years, and poses a serious threat to regional cooperation outcomes and development prospects.

This ‘strategy’ that resurrects the Cold War mentality and bloc politics has nothing new and no future, but will only bring division and tur-

bulence to the Asia-Pacific. It will surely be greeted with nothing but vigilance and rejection from regional countries.”

China initially dismissed the Quad as “sea foam” that would fade away, but with growing closeness and widening scope that has seen the four countries begin to work together on a range of initiatives from vaccines to critical technology, Beijing has stepped up its criticism.

That has taken on a sharper tone of late, including naming the four countries in official statements, in a shift from the past where the criticism was broadly reserved for the U.S. On Friday, following the meet in Melbourne, the Foreign Ministry said “China believes that the so-called Quad group cobbled together by the U.S., Japan, India and Australia is essentially a tool for containing and besieging China to maintain U.S. hegemony.”

NATO looks to bolster its defences

Ministers are examining ways to strengthen defences on the alliance's eastern flank closest to Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRUSSELS

NATO member-countries on Wednesday examined new ways to bolster the defences of nations on the organisation's eastern flank as Russia's military build-up around Ukraine fuels one of Europe's biggest security crises in decades.

Over two days at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Defence Ministers were to discuss how and when to rapidly dispatch troops and equipment to countries closest to Russia and the Black Sea region should Moscow order an invasion of Ukraine.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his counterparts also plan to weigh the possibility of stationing troops longer-term in south-east Europe, possibly starting later this year. The troops would mirror the presence of some 5,000 service members that have been stationed in allies Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland on a rotating basis in recent years.

Additional troops

The U.S. has started to deploy 5,000 troops to Poland and Romania. Britain is sending hundreds of soldiers to Poland and offering more warships and planes. Germany, the Netherlands and Norway are sending additional troops to Lithuania. Denmark and Spain are providing jets for air policing.



Middle ground: Jens Stoltenberg and Lloyd Austin at the Defence Ministers' meeting in Brussels on Wednesday. • AFP

"The fact that we have deployed more NATO troops on the ground, more naval assets, more aircraft, all of that sends a very clear message," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said. "I think there is no room for any miscalculation in Moscow about our commitment to defending allies."

The deployment has come in response to a formidable challenge.

Over the last four months, Russia is estimated to have amassed around 60% of its entire land forces and a significant portion of its air force to the north and east of Ukraine, as well as in neighbouring Belarus. Moscow has appeared ready to repeat its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, but on a grander scale.

Russian President Vladimir Putin wants NATO, the

world's biggest security organisation, to stop expanding. He demands that the U.S.-led alliance pull its troops and equipment out of countries that joined after 1997 - almost half of NATO's 30-strong ranks.

'Open door policy

NATO's founding treaty commits to an "open door" policy for European countries that want to join, and a mutual defence clause guarantees that all members will come to the defence of an ally under threat.

Ukraine, though, is not a member and NATO, as an organisation, is not willing to come to its defence.

"We have to understand that Ukraine is a partner. We support Ukraine. But for all NATO allies, we provide 100% security guarantees,"

Mr. Stoltenberg told reporters ahead of Wednesday's meeting.

That said, some member countries are helping Ukraine more directly, such as the U.S., Britain and Canada.

"We will be providing both lethal and non-lethal aid to Ukraine. This is a very significant issue for us all," Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand said.

But the "massive costs" promised to Mr. Putin should he order an invasion would be economic and political, mostly in the form of sanctions, which are not part of NATO's remit. The alliance has offered Russia a series of security talks, including on arms control.

Over the last two days, Russia has said it was returning some troops and weapons to bases, but Mr. Stoltenberg said the allies saw no concrete sign of a drawdown and concern that that Russia might invade Ukraine persists.

"They have always moved forces back and forth, so just that we see movement of forces, that doesn't confirm a real withdrawal," Mr. Stoltenberg said.

Russia poses no direct security threat to any NATO country, but the alliance is concerned about the fallout from any conflict in Ukraine, like a surge of people fleeing fighting across European borders, or possible cyber and disinformation attacks.

Signs of peace

Russia's pulling back some troops suggests it sees potential in Macron, Scholz proposals

Russia's announcement that it is pulling back some troops from Ukraine's borders is the strongest signal of de-escalation from Moscow. Russia has always maintained that it had no plans to attack Ukraine. But the massive troop mobilisation on the three flanks of Ukraine, which included combat aircraft, warships and S400 missile defence systems, had raised fears of war. Besides, the U.S.'s warning that a Russian invasion could come "any day" and its decision to shut the American embassy in Kiev added to the frenzy. The Russian approach appeared to have been rooted in building military pressure around Ukraine to gain diplomatic leverage in talks with the West. In the last few weeks, European leaders, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, France's Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Olaf Scholz, have visited Moscow. Of these, the diplomatic interventions by Mr. Macron, who called for respecting Russian security concerns and sought to revive the Minsk agreement on Ukraine's civil strife, and Mr. Scholz, who said in Kiev that Ukraine's entry into NATO was "not on the agenda right now", were significant. Their talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin opened a diplomatic path towards de-escalation.

It is too early to say that the crisis is over. The complex issue is rooted in Russia's security concerns and NATO's expansionary open-door policy with no quick solutions. But the suggestions from the talks Russia and the West have had point to a formula for peace. Russia's three concerns are: one, it does not want neighbours Georgia and Ukraine to be members of NATO. Two, it wants NATO (read the U.S.) to roll back its military presence and drills from Eastern Europe and the Black Sea. Three, it wants the Ukraine crisis – the civil conflict between Kiev and the Russia-backed separatists in Donbas – to be resolved through the Minsk process. In talks with Mr. Putin, U.S. President Joe Biden has already said the U.S. does not have any plan to deploy offensive weapons or permanent combat troops to Ukraine and that Washington was open to reducing drills and missiles in Eastern Europe on a reciprocal basis. Mr. Macron has taken steps to revive the Minsk II deal to address Ukraine's internal crisis. And then Mr. Scholz practically ruled out Ukraine joining NATO in the "foreseeable future". Put together, this is a comprehensive package that could accommodate Russia's security concerns and the West's fears of Russian aggression. Moscow's decision to pull back troops partially suggests that it sees potential in these proposals. Russia might keep some troops on the border to retain the pressure. But the obvious next step is to take these proposals to solid agreements through diplomacy. The West and Russia should take that road aimed at finding a lasting solution to Europe's most dangerous security crisis.

MEA sets up control room to help Indians based in Ukraine

European Ambassadors in India attend solidarity event against 'aggressive acts'

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

European Union will respond in a 'united' manner if Ukraine is subjected to aggression, said an official here on Wednesday. The comments came soon after a group of European Ambassadors attended an event in solidarity with Ukraine as India set up emergency helpline to assist and evacuate nationals based in Ukraine.

"We stand by the basic principles that underpin European security, and if there is an aggressive act, we are prepared to respond. We have prepared a package of measures. Any action we take – which will be united action – will be severe and commensurate," said the official ahead of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's scheduled visit to Munich Security Conference where the tension between Russia and Ukraine is expected to domi-



Standing together: Ukrainian Army soldiers raise flags on the 'Day of Unity' in Odessa on Wednesday. ■ AP

nate. Diplomats, however, emphasised that all efforts are being made to resolve the tension peacefully.

Peaceful resolution

"The military tension with Russia will be resolved peacefully. Diplomacy will prevail," said Ambassador Igor Polikha of Ukraine addressing an event to mark the Day of Unity of Ukraine as per an announcement by President Volodymyr Zelensky.

A number of India-based European diplomats attended the event expressing solidarity with Ukraine.

The military tension appeared to reduce a bit on Wednesday amid reports that Russia had begun to withdraw troops from Crimea following President Putin's speech on Tuesday where he explained the Russian position.

"Some of our troops are retreating after completing the military exercises. Con-

frontation is in the interests of those who want to limit the Russian-European cooperation, first of all in energy security, and divert attention from other problems," said charge d'affaires of Russian Embassy Roman Babushkin.

In view of the simmering tension, India on Wednesday set up control rooms and emergency phone numbers for students and professionals based in Ukraine. Informed sources also said negotiations are under way to increase the number of flights to help in evacuating the Indian citizens.

Official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs Arindam Bagchi said the Indians and their relatives can reach out to the following numbers in case of requirement.

Phone: 1800118797 (Toll free)/+91-11-23012113/+91-11-23014104/+91-11-23017905. Fax: +91-11-23088124. Email: situationroom@mea.gov.in

NATO, U.S. sceptical of Russian troop pull-out

'Military build-up seems to be continuing around Ukraine'

REUTERS
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW/KIEV

Russia said on Wednesday more of its forces surrounding Ukraine were withdrawing but NATO joined the U.S. in saying it had yet to be convinced the pull-out was real.

In Ukraine, the Defence Ministry said its web portal had been hit by an unprecedented cyber attack that was into its second day.

The Russian Defence Ministry published video that it said showed tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery units leaving the Crimean peninsula, which Moscow annexed in 2014.

"Units of the Southern Military District, having completed their participation in tactical exercises, are moving to their permanent deployment points," the Ministry said.

It comes a day after Moscow said it was pulling back some of the troops deployed on its neighbour's borders.

But U.S. President Joe Biden said on Tuesday more than 1,50,000 Russian troops were still amassed near Ukraine's borders. He said Washington had not yet verified any pull-out. "Our analysts indicate that they remain very much in a threatening position," he said.

NATO chief Jens Stolten-



Tensions ease: Russian Army tanks moving back to their permanent base after drills on the border. •AP

berg on Wednesday said Russia's military build-up seemed to be continuing around Ukraine. "We have heard the signs from Moscow about readiness to continue diplomatic efforts, but so far we have not seen any de-escalation on the ground," Mr. Stoltenberg said ahead of a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers. "On the contrary, it appears

that Russia continues their military build-up."

President Vladimir Putin said after meeting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday the West was ignoring Russia's main demands but Moscow was ready to continue dialogue on security issues.

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Pause delimitation exercise: NC

Associate members submit a 12-point objection note to the J&K panel

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The National Conference (NC), which made its response submitted to the J&K Delimitation Commission public on Wednesday, has asked the panel "to stop the delimitation exercise forthwith pending final adjudication and disposal of the batch of writ petitions questioning the constitutional validity of the Jammu and Kashmir Re-organisation Act 2019".

"We have all along taken the consistent stand from the very first date that the exercise violates the fundamental canons of ethics of the Constitution, its values and morality and above all the constitutional propriety," reads the note submitted by the NC's Members of Parliament (MPs).

Farooq Abdullah, Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi are among the five associate members of the Commission, besides two MPs of the BJP.



Farooq Abdullah

The NC has also submitted a 12-point note of objections to the draft proposal shared by the panel with the associate members this month.

Equal representation

"The Working Papers 2-6 have given a complete go by to the fundamental principles of universal application that govern a delimitation exercise. It has not at all adhered to the fundamental principle [of equal representation]," the NC note said.

It said the Commission

has, in the first place, arbitrarily devised "some unknown criteria while apportioning and identifying the increased seven seats". "The arbitrary allocation of increased seats for reasons other than contemplated under law and logic have made now huge violation of fundamental principles of a delimitation exercise unavoidable. The increased seats have been arbitrarily allotted even in violation of -10% and +10 % of the average criteria fixed and notified earlier," the note said.

"There are seven Assembly segments with less than 1,00,000 population [Paddar, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi, Bani Mughal Madaan, Basohli, Ramgarh and Kishtwar] in Jammu province while the number of such constituencies is only three [Gurez, Karnah and Kunzer] in the Kashmir province. Likewise, there are 18 Assembly segments with population of more 1,50,000 in the Kashmir province while the num-

ber of such Assembly segments is seven in case of the Jammu province," it said.

It underlined that the population of the Dooru constituency in Kashmir almost equals the population of three constituencies - Paddar, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi and Bani constituencies.

It claimed that the constituencies have been demarcated, areas joined and annexed under "reasons other than permissible under settled norms".

Lok Sabha seats

The NC has also objected to reconfiguring the Lok Sabha seats, especially the Anantnag-Rajouri seat.

"The Commission has joined Anantnag, Kulgam and Zainapora from Shopian district with Poonch and Rajouri districts without any regard for the terrain, geography, connectivity, accessibility and overall convenience. The draft proposal makes no sense looking from any," it said.

A case for a more federal judiciary

There is an imbalance now which the Supreme Court of India needs to address by empowering High Courts again



SRINATH SRIDEVAN &
ANANYA PATTABHIRAMAN

Nearly 150 years ago, A.V. Dicey, the foremost constitutional lawyer of his day, wrote, "The essential characteristic of federalism is the distribution of limited executive, legislative and judicial authority among bodies which are coordinate with and independent of each other". Much has been written about the federal structure in relation to the legislature and the executive. We now examine the Indian judiciary and the need to strengthen the federal nature of our judiciary.

India is a union of States. The Supreme Court of India has held that the federalist nature of our country is part and parcel of the basic structure of the Constitution.

Integrated system

Federalism is a midpoint between unitarism which has a supreme centre, to which the States are subordinate, and confederalism wherein the States are supreme, and are merely coordinated by a weak centre. The idea which lies at the bottom of federalism is that each of the separate States should have approximately equal political rights and thereby be able to maintain their non-dependent (for want of a better word) characteristics within the larger union.

An integral requirement of a federal state is that there be a robust federal judicial system which interprets this constitution, and therefore adjudicates upon the rights of the federal units and the central unit, and between the citizen and these units.

The federal judicial system comprises the Supreme Court and the High Court in the sense that it is only these two courts which can adjudicate the above rights. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stated in the Constituent Assembly: "The Indian Federation though a dual polity has no dual judiciary at all. The High Courts and the Supreme

Court form one single integrated judiciary having jurisdiction and providing remedies in all cases arising under the constitutional law, the civil law or the criminal law."

The Supreme Court was created under the Constitution, and is a relatively new court. On the other hand, some of the High Courts in our country have been in existence since the 1860s (and some existed even before that, in their earlier avatars as supreme courts of the Presidencies).

An equality of power

The Indian Constitution envisaged the equality of power of High Court judges and Supreme Court judges, with a High Court judge not being a subordinate of a Supreme Court judge. Famously, the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, Justice M.C. Chagla and the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, Justice P.V. Rajamannar, when offered seats in the newly formed Supreme Court, rejected the offer, preferring to be Chief Justices of prestigious High Courts than being ordinary judges in a newly formed court.

The Supreme Court has, on many occasions, reiterated the position that the Supreme Court is superior to the High Court only in the appellate sense. Therefore, the theoretical position has always been that High Court judges and Supreme Court judges are equals. A delicate balance is required to be maintained between the Supreme Court and the High Courts in order for the constitutional structure dreamt of by B.R. Ambedkar to work.

This balance existed from Independence onwards, until the 1990s. Since then, however, it has been tilting in favour of the central court. The need for this balance was underscored during the Emergency, when the High Courts (a significant number, at least) stood out as beacons of freedom, even as the Supreme Court failed in this duty.

In recent years, three specific trends have greatly eroded the standing of the High Court, leading to an imbalance in the federal structure of the judiciary. First, the Supreme Court (or rather, a



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

section of its judges, called "the Collegium") has the power to appoint judges and chief justices to the High Courts and the Supreme Court. This Collegium also has the power to transfer judges and chief justices from one High Court to another. Second, successive governments have passed laws that create parallel judicial systems of courts and tribunals which provide for direct appeals to the Supreme Court, bypassing the High Courts. Third, the Supreme Court has been liberal in entertaining cases pertaining to trifling matters.

A centralisation and effects

This has inevitably led to the balance tipping in favour of a centralisation of the judiciary. The greater the degree of centralisation of the judiciary, the weaker the federal structure.

In the United States, empirical research by the legal researcher, Ilya Somin, shows that the U.S. Supreme Court is far more likely to strike down a state statute as unconstitutional than a federal statute. This research leads to the conclusion that judicial review by a centralised judiciary tends toward unitarism (the opposite of federalism), and the author says, "Courts face much weaker constraints when they strike down state legislation, especially state laws that are disapproved of by national political majorities... The federal government and sympathetic state governments elsewhere in the country may even support such judicial intervention." In Nigeria, a similar federal country, research has shown that the Supreme Court favours the jurisdiction of the central government over the State units, and this has manifested itself in recent liti-

gations over mineral rights and subsoil rights, where the Supreme Court has favoured interpretations which support the rights of the centre over the States.

The Supreme Court of India today, by playing the role of a collegium, effectively wields the power to appoint a person as a judge to a High Court or to transfer him or her to another High Court, or to appoint (or delay the appointment) of a sufficiently senior High Court judge as a chief justice or as a judge of the Supreme Court. The practical impact of this in the power dynamic between a High Court judge and a Supreme Court judge, leaves little to be said or imagined.

Moving to the second factor, an aggressively interventionist Supreme Court leads many to approach it directly as a panacea for all ills befalling the nation. In 2018, some individuals from Delhi directly filed a petition in the Supreme Court to curtail Deepavali celebrations. The Court promptly entertained the writ petition and issued directions that Deepavali could be celebrated for only one or two hours in the evening. This led to an uproar because people in South India celebrate Deepavali in the morning. Earlier, in another example, the Supreme Court had spent days deciding the height of the *dahi handi* during Gokulashtami celebrations.

We see the Supreme Court interfering in matters which are clearly of local importance, having no constitutional ramifications. The Court itself observed recently, "Frivolous matters are making the institution dysfunctional... These matters waste important time of the court, which could have been spent on serious matters, pan-India matters."

These are very wise words, but the reality is that the Supreme Court does entertain these frivolous matters.

Every time the Supreme Court entertains an appeal against a High Court decision, it second guesses the High Court. It sends out the message to the litigant: 'It does not matter that the High Court ruled against you, you can take one more chance with this appeal.'

Every time the Supreme Court

entertains a public interest litigation on some matter which could just as effectively have been dealt with by the High Court, what the litigant hears is: 'You do not need to approach the High Court, you can directly file your claim here, and you will not only get your hearing, you will get publicity too.'

Parallel judicial hierarchies

The third of the factors identified by us is the creation of parallel hierarchies of courts and tribunals, whether it be the Competition Commission, or the company law tribunals, or the consumer courts. In all these cases, the High Courts are bypassed. Laws have been drafted such that the High Court has no role to play and the Supreme Court directly acts as an appellate court.

The effect of this can be easily imagined, whether it be the weakening of the authority of the High Courts or the possibility of a tendency towards subservience or apathy of the judges of the High Courts.

Political scientist and historian Tocqueville writes that in the decades immediately preceding the French Revolution there was a gradual erosion in the powers of the nobles living in the rural parts of France, and a gradual aggrandisement of powers in the hands of the aristocracy in Paris. The conclusion that this very learned author arrives at is that all central units have a natural tendency to aggrandise power to themselves from the state units, believing that centralisation enables them to discharge their duties more effectively in relation to the entire state. But in reality, the weakening of the state units sets off a weakening of the entire body of the state, which gradually ossifies into irreversible decay.

We conclude by hoping that the Supreme Court itself recognises the importance of self-abnegation and restores the federal balance by re-empowering the High Courts. This will be in the best interest of the nation.

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Tribunal appointments being taken lightly: SC

Court schedules hearing in two weeks

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said its judicial intervention saw the government make abrupt efforts to fill vacancies in tribunals some time back and nothing after that. "We are getting [requests for] extension of time for NCLT (Nation Company Law Tribunal) matters, etc. Some knee-jerk appointments took place and nothing after that. We do not know the fate of members and many are retiring. Bureaucracy is taking it light-

ly," a Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana remarked orally.

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal offered to provide the court with a list of vacancies in tribunals. However, the court scheduled a hearing in two weeks.

In September last, a Special Bench led by the CJI accused the Centre of "cherry-picking" names for appointments to tribunals, left almost defunct by long-pending vacancies.

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Tribunal appointments being taken lightly: SC

The Bench, also comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and L. Nageswara Rao, had then "held its hand" on initiating contempt proceedings against the government and allowed the latter two weeks to make appointments to "all the tribunals". "If the government does not act we will pass orders," the CJI said.



bers available to hear their cases.

The Bench had addressed the Attorney General about how the government pulled the rug from underneath the hard work of the search-selection committees headed by sitting Supreme Court judges tasked with interviewing and shortlisting suitable candidates for the tribunals.

'Pitiable' state

Chief Justice Ramana had termed the state of tribunals and the thousands of litigants waiting for justice "pitiable". Cases were adjourned for months. There is no manpower to form Benches. Litigants are made to travel to other faraway States where there are at least some tribunal mem-

'Consumption rising, but seeing stress'

Ministry cites growth in personal loans as demand uptick marker; surge in gold loans reflects strain

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry asserted on Wednesday that consumption indicators pointed to a steady growth trajectory, with passenger vehicle sales returning to pre-pandemic levels in January and even two- and three-wheelers reporting month-on-month improvements in sales.

While the ministry cited a robust 14.3% growth in personal loans in December to posit a consumption demand uptick, it noted that an increase in loans against gold within this surge 'may indicate a strain on individual incomes and cash flows', adding that currency with the public had also increased.

'Precautionary demand'

"Private consumption will grow cautiously as precau-



Demand inches back: Passenger vehicle sales returned to pre-pandemic levels in January, the ministry said. ►PTI

tionary demand for money will rise at every hint of a new infection," the ministry said. "Private investment, helped by the complementary support of public investment in infrastructure, will

continue to gain traction from the ethos of Atmanirbhar Bharat," it added.

"Currency in circulation serves as indicator of holding cash for precautionary purposes. A similar pattern

Once uncertainty caused by the virus recedes, consumption will pick up

(observed amid the second COVID-19 wave) during April to June 2021 is observed at the end of 2021 when Omicron concerns began to arise. However, as the third wave recedes, currency with the public is expected to reduce following an uptick in consumption," the ministry said in its monthly report on the economy.

"Once the uncertainty and anxiety caused by the virus recedes from people's minds, consumption will pick up and the demand revival will then facilitate the private sector stepping in with investments to augment production to meet the ris-

ing demand. Barring external shocks – geopolitical and economic – this scenario should play out for the Indian economy in 2022-23," the ministry concluded.

'High base skews IIP'

Although consumer durables and non-durables output fell year-on-year in December as per the Index of Industrial Production, the ministry said they grew by 13.9% and 6.6%, respectively, from November. Overall consumer durables output was up 20.4% during 2021-22, and non-durables production had risen 5.4%, it noted.

"The year-on-year contraction in December 2021 can be attributed to relatively high base during last year when both the indices had crossed their pre-pandemic levels," it reasoned.

Tenuous tack

The RBI must be ready to recalibrate its inflation projections and shift policy stance

India's inflation based on the consumer price index quickened to 6.01% in January, breaching the central bank's upper tolerance limit of 6%. While the headline number was no surprise given that the RBI had forecast the acceleration, the official data merit scrutiny. Provisional estimates show the hinterland, with its greater proportion of the country's poor, bore the brunt of rising food prices with rural food price inflation sprinting to 5.18% from December's 3.39%. Oils and fats quickened the fastest at 18.7%. Though the RBI had been expected to start normalising its pandemic-era policy stance in February's monetary policy meeting and reaffirm its resolve to contain inflation, the central bank retained the status quo in order to support economic growth. Governor Shaktikanta Das has defended the RBI's projection for inflation to slow to 4.5% in FY23 by citing the base effect as the cause for higher headline inflation this fiscal, and predicted that a similar base effect would help enable a downtrend in the coming months. The RBI's assumptions, however, could unravel if storm clouds on the horizon intensify. Uncertainty over the Ukraine-Russia tensions pushed global crude prices to a seven-year high earlier this week.

January's inflation in transport and communications, which reflects retail fuel prices, slowed a mite from December but was still at 9.36%. Pump prices have stayed static for a while, a likely effect of the poll season. The Centre may soon have to allow oil marketers to pass on the global price increase to consumers, which could spur inflation further, or cut excise duties, resulting in lower revenue for the exchequer. Add to this mix, the uneven economic recovery from the pandemic and the outlook gets even more cloudy. IHS Markit's monthly survey of purchasing managers shows that though manufacturing output and new orders expanded last month, growth rates eased. Uncertainty around growth prospects stemmed from concerns about inflationary pressures. The RBI's January survey shows households expect inflation at 10.7% a year ahead. Though this is a comforting decline from the 12.6% seen in November, the significant gap between the RBI's projections and households' views suggests consumers' perceptions of price gains are markedly higher and could likely constrain their spending. This is undesirable as the NSO's advance estimates of GDP growth for the current fiscal show private consumption expenditure still lagging behind the pre-pandemic level of FY20. Any worsening on this front could challenge the RBI's objective of holding down interest rates to support growth. With Governor Das asserting that price stability remains the prime focus, the RBI must be ready to rapidly recalibrate its inflation projections and shift policy stance to match its mandate, or risk hurting its credibility.

Centre presented much rosier picture on OROP: SC

The hearing will continue on February 23

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the Centre's hyperbole on the One Rank One Pension (OROP) policy presented a much "rosier picture" than what is actually given to the pensioners of the armed forces.

It asked the Centre to place before it details on how many persons in the armed forces have received the modified assured career progression (MACP), how

many are in assured career progression (ACP), and what would be the financial outlay, if the court directs that the MACP also be factored in for the OROP.

A Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, Surya Kant, and Vikram Nath posed some searching questions to Additional Solicitor-General N. Venkatraman, appearing for the Centre.

"We have to deal with the fact that there is no statutory definition of OROP. Their (petitioners) contention is that there is a discrepancy between what was said in Parliament and the policy which ultimately came. The

Their [petitioners] contention is that there is a discrepancy between what was said in Parliament and the policy which ultimately came

SUPREME COURT BENCH

question is whether that amounts to a violation of Article 14. Your (Centre) hyperbole on the OROP policy presented a much rosier picture than what is actually given to the pensioners," the Bench said.

Justice Surya Kant told Mr. Venkatraman that OROP be-

nefits come after the service period while MACP comes during the service period.

"We want to know how many people have got the MACP. You are saying persons who have got the MACP are a different specific class. If 80% of sepoy get MACP, then will they get OROP? It seems MACP is a barrier to OROP," Justice Kant said.

Mr. Venkatraman said petitioners were trying to compare two different matters and sepoy who have qualified for and who have not qualified for MACP is not the subject matter of the petition. The Bench then asked Mr. Venkatraman as to under

the rules of the business, who is the competent authority, who has taken the decision concerning OROP.

The ASG replied that it is a decision taken by the Union Cabinet which has resulted in the notification. The Bench said that it would like to see the note, which culminated into the policy decision. Justice Kant said that the Centre was fully aware the MACP existed when it had issued the notification and had full knowledge that it is only a fraction of ex-servicemen, who will actually benefit from OROP.

The hearing will continue on February 23.

Retail inflation easing sequentially: FinMin

‘Need to monitor imported inflation’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India’s retail inflation may have crossed 6% for the first time in six months this January, but the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has moderated sequentially over the past two months indicating a slowing momentum to price rise trends, the Finance Ministry said in a monthly report on Wednesday.

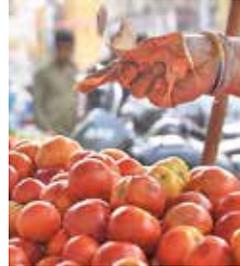
Easing vegetable prices on account of the fresh winter crop, and better prospects for food grains output lead to an ‘optimistic view on inflation’, the ministry said, though it also emphasised the need to keep a close watch on imported inflation through edible oils and crude oil and the multi-round effects they may have on the value chain.

January’s 6.01% retail inflation rate is primarily attributable to ‘food and beverages’, ‘clothing and footwear’, as well as an unfavourable base effect, said the economic division of the Department of Economic Affairs in its report.

The average CPI inflation between April 2021 and January 2022, it pointed out, is 5.30% – well within the 6% upper limit for inflation tolerance set for the RBI’s monetary policy committee. “Should retail inflation remain range-bound at 4.5% as projected by the MPC in 2022-23, liquidity levels in the economy will remain high and interface with low interest rates to provide easier financing options to industry and individuals.

‘Energy prices seen key’

“Global inflation and energy prices are likely to be influential in determining India’s rate of inflation and Government expects it to decline to eventually obtain a GDP deflator of 3.0-3.5% assumed in the Budget,” the



department projected.

“Combined with the expectation of WPI inflation declining significantly in 2022-23, on the back of lower global inflation and a large base effect, the GDP deflator obtains at 3.0-3.5%, as implicit in nominal GDP projection of 11.1% in Budget 2022-23,” the ministry said.

“CPI core inflation, after declining from 6.2% in November, 2021, to 6.12% in December, further moderated to 5.98% in January, mainly due to decrease in inflation of all major groups except ‘clothing and footwear’,” the ministry noted.

Inflation at the wholesale level has also been moderating for two months but remains high at almost 13% in January, ‘primarily owing to high prices for imported commodities including and especially crude oil,’ it said.

‘Weak transmission’

The large gap between inflation in wholesale and consumer prices, indicating weak transmission of input cost pressures to retail prices, is another aspect that will need to be monitored in the coming months.

Noting that the third COVID-19 wave was now subsiding in the country, the ministry said India was well poised for growth that would be ‘inclusive and large enough as well, to provide for growing levels of direct income and in-kind support to the vulnerable groups of the society’.

After the Budget's 'crypto signal', India awaits reforms

It is high time that crypto made a splash in the country, and it needs to be carefully managed with systemic changes

SALEM DHARANIDHARAN,
BRIAN WONG &
BETHANAVEL KUPPUSAMY

In the Union Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a 30% flat tax rate levied on any gains made from the transfer of virtual assets including cryptocurrencies and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs).

But first some background. Cryptocurrency (crypto) consists of a digital denomination designed to work as a medium of exchange through a distributed computer network (a blockchain) that is not reliant on any central authority such as a government or a bank for its upholding and maintenance. This announcement by the Finance Minister now leads to the assumption that crypto is legal in India.

Sign of optimism

This prescient move amounts to effectively being a de facto affirmation of the role that cryptocurrency and related technologies could play in India's financial-cum-economic system. Foreseeable are changes that would, down the road, legitimise and formally legalise the activities of crypto start-ups and enable them to access the necessary support system which might not have been available previously. Such a statement also heralds reforms aimed at removing ambiguity among the relevant stakeholders.

It is high time that crypto made a splash in the country, but this splash must, as with all innovation, be carefully managed to prevent rushed creative destruction and systemic liabilities. While critics are right in observing that the

30% flat tax rate is a harsh rate, this is a premium and price well-worth paying in exchange for what is effectively a ruling-out of prospects for a total ban on crypto by the central government.

Additionally, while the high tax rate would inevitably hamper the willingness of investors to convert cryptocurrencies into the national fiat, this may, in turn, open up more doors for technologically savvy and innovation-minded investors. The extremely high tax rate and the fact that the losses cannot be offset would invariably propel investors to turn to alternative means of storing and undertaking transactions in cryptocurrencies, without foregoing the significant losses involved as they "switch" back into the rupee. An inadvertent upside of this, then, is the prospective conversion and reallocation of crypto-funds from one form to another.

Will aid innovation

Such transformations would involve DeFi (Decentralised Finance) activities such as staking, lending, and providing liquidity, among others. DeFi (or "decentralized finance") is "an umbrella term for financial services on public blockchains. With DeFi, one can do most of the things that banks support – earn interest, borrow, lend, buy insurance, trade derivatives, trade assets, and more – but it is faster and does not require paperwork or a third party. As with crypto generally, DeFi is global, peer-to-peer (meaning directly between two people, and not routed through a centralised system), pseudonymous, and open to all". The processes highlighted above would drive innova-



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tion in the field of Indian DeFi; they would go a long way in assisting the building up of our crypto-financial ecosystem in the long run.

More generally, the adoption of crypto currencies and virtual assets would enable quicker and cheaper transactions compared to banks and new forms of wealth creation without centralised intermediaries – which are subject to accidental or intentional capture by vested interests. While crypto is yet to become completely mainstream, one can easily see that we are in the transition phase, as investors and innovators new to the crypto ecosystem dabble their feet to test the waters.

Potential concerns

The community of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and lower-end high net-worth individuals – the very community that has the most to gain from decentralised finance – is going to find it most difficult to access the ecosystem given the substantial barriers posed by the tax rates. Unless radical reforms are undertaken to liberalise the system – through positive incentives and infrastructural installation – it is unlikely that the community we speak of here is likely to reap the gains from the system (in light of the burdens

they would confront). Participation would remain unlikely for at least a few more years to come.

Additionally, when it comes to India's crypto policy at large, there is a fundamental lack of clarity in aspects other than taxation. While the finer details can only be seen once the Cryptocurrency Bill is passed, there appears to be a push to treat crypto as purely an asset class than a currency. The consolation offered by the Government in the form of the Reserve Bank of India's CBDC, or Central Bank Digital Currency, will definitely help in pushing for the adoption of digital currencies, but, equally, defeats the fundamental purpose of cryptocurrency, which is decentralisation. As a flourishing and dynamic democracy, India deserves an empowered and mobilised middle class of consumers, investors, and crypto-minded citizens who can imbue their civic engagement and economic activities with cryptocurrency in contributing toward a brighter and better political future for all in India.

Reforms are an answer

The solution rests with systemic, real reforms. The obvious candidate for such reforms would be to reduce tax rates in the future, though this must be weighed against considerations concerning government revenue and the need to curb speculative bubbles surfacing in relation to the currency. While these are by no means short-term risks, they could pose medium- to longer-term threats, though arguably, the solution here lies not with taxing crypto altogether, but in introducing more rigorous regulations where appropriate without which crypto has

the potential to become a source of illegitimate political funding or black money.

Tapping other insights

The second reform constitutes the incorporation of insights from seasoned partners from international communities; the key should rest with engaging these individuals for their insights and advice on the best practices associated with cryptocurrency policymaking. How can we push forward transformations to financial structures without rocking the socio-political boat? How can we navigate the potential security quagmires and challenges presented by crypto? How can we ensure that our infrastructure remains intact and capable of addressing the needs and the demands connected with crypto consumers? These are questions that only a synthesis of domestic and foreign talents (through organic dialogue and collaboration) could answer.

Systemic reforms are by no means easy, but they are critical as an amplifier of the successes that India has already accrued in the field, and as an accelerator of India's advancement in the sphere of crypto-finance and blockchain social policymaking. Here is to a better and brighter future for all the parties involved.

Salem Dharanidharan is an executive coordinator at the Davidian Professionals Forum and co-founder of the Oxford Policy Advisory Group. Brian Wong, a Rhodes Scholar and D.Phil in Politics candidate at Balliol College, Oxford, is also a co-founder of the Oxford Policy Advisory Group. Bethanavel Kuppusamy is a technology entrepreneur building Fantico, a celebrity NFT platform

1,000 firms expected at DefExpo in Gujarat

Spread over 1 lakh sq.m, the March edition will be the largest since the start of exhibition in 1996

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Defexpo 2022, to be held in Gujarat for the first time, is expected to see the participation of more than 1,000 companies, including over 100 foreign companies from 55 plus countries that have sent confirmations so far, defence officials said on Wednesday.

The 12th edition of DefExpo is scheduled from March 10 to 13 in Gandhinagar.

“Spread over 1 lakh sq.m, this year’s DefExpo will be the largest since its inception in 1996. Over 900 exhibitors have so far confirmed participation, including over 100 foreign companies,” a defence official said. “Confir-



Aiming high: At the expo held near Chennai in 2018. Fifty high-level teams are expected this time. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

mations and registrations have gone up since relaxation of the restrictions following the decline in COVID-19 cases.”

Over 50 Defence Ministers or service chief-led delega-

tions are expected at the show and officials said they expected confirmations to pick up in the next couple of weeks.

Along with initiatives such as IDEX meant to boost start-

ups, venture capitalists were being invited to the expo to identify prospective projects for investment, the official stated. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) have been offered 50% discount and 63 companies from Gujarat were participating under the Gujarat pavilion.

Interest from Africa

At DefExpo 2020 in Lucknow, an India-Africa Defence Ministers’ dialogue was held for the first time. It would continue this year and there was greater interest from African countries, officials said.

Invitations have been extended to 52 African coun-

tries, and so far 27 African countries have confirmed their participation.

A drone show with 1,000 small drones is planned at the Defence Ministers’ dinner by start-up ‘Botlab Dynamics’, which is supported by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, and the Department of Science & Technology. The same start-up had conducted the drone show with 1,000 drones at Beating Retreat ceremony this year on January 29.

In terms of presence, so far the United States is the largest in terms of foreign exhibitors while from India, Adani and Tata Groups have the largest display space, another official said.

India lacks solar waste handling policy

IRENA has estimated that global photovoltaic waste will touch 78 million tonnes by 2050

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

While India ramps up its solar power capacity, the nation does not yet have a firm policy on managing waste that results from used solar panels or from the manufacturing process.

The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) last December estimated that the global photovoltaic waste will touch 78 million tonnes by 2050, with India expected to be one of the top five generators of such waste.

India currently considers solar waste a part of electronic waste and does not account for it separately, according to a response to a question in the Rajya Sabha. Minister for New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) R.K. Singh said a committee had



Not a sunny prospect: Photovoltaic modules had so far generated a waste of nearly 2.85 lakh tonnes. ■ G.N. RAO

been constituted under the chairmanship of the Ministry’s Secretary to propose an action plan to evolve a “circular economy” in solar panel, through reuse/recycling of waste generated.

There was no commercial

raw material recovery facility for solar e-waste operational in India, but a pilot facility for solar panel recycling and material recovery had been set up by a private company in Gummidipoondi in Tamil Nadu. India

has set a target of producing 100 GW of solar energy by 2022.

The cumulative capacity of grid-connected solar photovoltaic (PV) installations is around 40 GW and of the current capacity, about 35.6 GW, is generated from ground-mounted plants and 4.4 GW from rooftop solar. A gigawatt is 1,000 megawatt.

Solar panel’s life

Solar panels have an estimated life of 25 years, and given that India’s solar manufacturing industry took off around 2010, most of the installed systems were new and early in their calendar lifecycle and therefore unlikely to generate a large quantity of solar waste.

That, however, is only partially accurate, according to the Council for Energy, Envi-

ronment and Water (CEEW), a Delhi based think-tank. End-of-life was only one of the possible waste streams for PV modules and there were several other stages where modules could get damaged.

Additionally, modules could develop defects during the plant operations and be discarded even before their scheduled life span.

In the CEEW’s reckoning, PV modules had so far likely generated a cumulative waste of nearly 2,85,000 tonnes, as of FY21, from the early-life loss of the installed 40 GW grid-connected solar capacity.

Despite its ambitious expansion plans, much of India’s solar PV manufacturing uses imported components with parts mostly sourced from China.

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-drawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
General Studies Paper II	
A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;
K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health
General Studies Paper III	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

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