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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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9,000-year-old shrine found in Jordan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AMMAN

A team of Jordanian and French archaeologists said on Tuesday that it had found a roughly 9,000-year-old shrine at a remote Neolithic site in Jordan's eastern desert. The ritual complex was found in a Neolithic campsite near large structures known as "desert kites," or mass traps that are believed to have been used to corral wild gazelles for slaughter.

Such traps consist of two or more long stone walls converging toward an enclosure and are found scattered across the deserts of the West Asia. "The site is unique, first because of its preservation state," said Jordanian archaeologist Wael Abu-Azziza, co-director of the project. "It's 9,000 years old and everything was almost intact." Within the shrine were two carved standing stones bearing anthropomorphic figures.

China accuses U.S. of raising tensions on Ukraine issue

It slams U.S. for Russia sanctions, sending weapons to Kiev

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China on Wednesday accused the U.S. of "raising tensions" and "creating panic" over the Ukraine crisis, shortly after Washington announced sanctions against Moscow and said it would continue to supply weapons to Ukraine against a Russian invasion.

Beijing has trodden a cautious line on Ukraine as Moscow has massed thousands of troops on the borders, and criticised the West for new sanctions after Russia ordered troops into two breakaway Ukrainian regions it now recognises as independent.

U.S. President Joe Biden earlier stressed that the penalties were only a "first tranche", adding that more sanctions would come if Russian President Vladimir Putin extended his country's military grip beyond the two



Hua Chunying

territories in the eastern Donbas region.

China lashed out at Washington over the sanctions on Wednesday and said it was raising tensions by sending weapons to Ukraine.

Blame game

The U.S. actions were "raising tensions, creating panic, and even playing up the schedule of war," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said.

"If someone is adding fuel

to the fire while blaming others... then that behaviour is irresponsible and immoral," she added, turning the spotlight on the United States in response to a question on China's role in resolving the situation.

She said China had "called on all parties to respect and attach importance to each other's legitimate security concerns, strive to resolve issues through negotiation and consultation, and jointly maintain regional peace and stability."

Asked if China would impose sanctions on Russia, Ms. Hua added that Beijing believes "sanctions have never been a fundamental and effective way to solve problems".

Apart from the U.S., Britain, the EU, Japan and Australia also announced penalties following Mr. Putin's decision to send soldiers into Donetsk and Luhansk.

Turning to trade winds

India has an opportunity to reset its trade ties with others, one accord at a time

A little over two years after it turned its back at the last minute on a major multilateral trade agreement it had spent years negotiating, India last week announced the signing of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The free trade pact is a tacit acknowledgment that India needs to strengthen its trade ties with existing partners by lowering tariff walls and obtaining more favourable access for its exports in order to boost trade and economic output. With the COVID-19 pandemic having thrown into sharp relief the public health and economic vulnerabilities of an increasingly interconnected world, a reflexive urge to turn inward was evident in the last two years as nations imposed tight travel and entry restrictions in a bid to protect their populations. And ironically, even as India sought to promote atmanirbharta or self-reliance, the pandemic also depressed domestic consumption demand, dragging down overall economic output. Exports on the other hand have rebounded strongly, with growth outpacing even the pre-pandemic levels. It is in this backdrop that the Government's renewed push to negotiate its bilateral free trade agreements is a welcome change in tack and signals that India is keener to strengthen trade ties with individual partner countries on equitable terms rather than be tied into multilateral pacts that do not necessarily address its key concerns.

That the accord was finalised in less than six months' time, from the start of negotiations in September, is a testimony to the strength of the bilateral ties and the recognition that there is more to gain from a deepening of the relationship. The UAE is already India's third-largest trading partner with bilateral trade in 2019-20 valued at \$59 billion. While India's exports amounted to about \$29 billion in the pre-pandemic fiscal year ended March 2020, the UAE supplied India with \$10.9 billion worth of crude oil in that period and counts New Delhi as its second-largest trading partner. The two partners now aim to leverage the free trade deal to lift bilateral merchandise trade to \$100 billion over the next five years. While the fine print of the tariff concessions on both sides is yet to be spelt out, India has made it clear that a range of exports including textiles and jewellery are set to benefit from a zero-duty regime once the accord is formally operationalised by May. Two-way investment flows and remittances – a major source of foreign exchange earnings for India given the large Indian workforce in the UAE – are also expected to receive a fillip. With multiple other FTAs in the pipeline, India has a fresh opportunity to reset its trade ties with the international community, one accord at a time.

Indian stand 'balanced, independent', says Russia

U.S. sanctions over Ukraine won't stop S-400 delivery: envoy

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Welcoming India's "independent" stand at the UN Security Council on Moscow's moves in eastern Ukraine, Russia's Acting Ambassador to India, Roman Babushkin, said on Wednesday that the new sanctions imposed on his country would not affect the delivery of the S-400 missile system and other defence equipment that India had purchased from Russia.

He stressed that the ongoing visit by Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to Moscow would in no way affect India-Russia ties, adding that the Pakistan-Russia partnership does not envisage a defence relationship at present, and Russia stands firm on its policy that Kashmir is a bilateral dispute.

A day after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the recognition of the eastern Ukrainian enclaves of Donetsk and Luhansk, Mr. Babushkin, Charge d'Affaires at the Russian Embassy here, set out the Russian position behind the move that has sparked outrage worldwide, and at-



Mounting tension: Ukrainian soldiers moving on the border with the eastern Ukraine city of Luhansk on Wednesday. ■ AFP

tracted punitive financial sanctions and severe condemnation from the U.S., the European Union, the U.K., Japan and Australia.

Stopping short of criticism

At the Security Council, T.S. Tirumurti, Permanent Representative of India at the UN, had said India had "deep concerns" about the developments in the region, but stopped short of criticis-

ing Russian actions.

"Russia welcomes the Indian position expressed several times in this regard [Ukraine] because India is acting according to its status of a global power and takes a balanced and independent position," Mr. Babushkin said.

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Indian stand 'balanced, independent', says Russia

Mr. Babushkin said the two countries had discussed the situation at various bilateral and multilateral levels, including at the UN, and that "Indian partners are well aware and clearly understand why this [Mr. Putin's announcement] happened.

He even suggested that, in time, Russia hopes that its friends and partners "including India" would also recognise the "new republics" of Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic.

Mr. Babushkin said the U.S.'s new financial sanctions, in addition to previous sanctions such as the CAATSA law, would have no bearing on the \$5 billion S-400 missile system agreement, which is being delivered to India.

"The project is being implemented according to our agreements and timelines discussed, and sanctions

would not affect this."

Mr. Khan arrived in Moscow for a two-day visit that had been announced earlier and is due to discuss economic and energy ties along with regional developments with Mr. Putin on Thursday. When asked, Mr. Babushkin said India had not raised concerns about the visit of Mr. Khan, which is the first by a Pakistani Prime Minister after 23 years.

'Independent relations'

"We have independent relations with Pakistan – we have a bilateral and economic agenda – and share common platforms like at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). We expect there will be exchanges on Afghanistan as well," Mr. Babushkin told *The Hindu*. "But we don't expect the announcement of defence deals, and on Kashmir, our position is unchanged."

Ukraine mobilises troops amid tensions

Over 2 lakh reservists summoned to their units; Kiev urges its citizens in Russia to leave immediately

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KIEV

Ukraine mobilised its military reserves and Russia evacuated its Kiev Embassy on Wednesday over fears of a full-scale conflict breaking out in eastern Europe.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has defied an avalanche of international sanctions to put his forces on stand-by to occupy and defend two rebel-held areas of eastern Ukraine.

In response, Kiev's President Volodymyr Zelensky has put Ukraine's more than 2,00,000 reservists on notice that they will receive summons to return to their units. Ukraine also urged its approximately three million citizens living in Russia to leave immediately and prepared to declare a national state of emergency.



Geared-up: Trains loaded with Russian military tanks at a railway station not far from the Russia-Ukraine border. •AP

"We are united in believing that the future of European security is being decided right now, here in our home, in Ukraine," Mr. Zelensky said during a joint media appearance with the visiting leaders of Poland and Lithuania.

"Ukraine needs security

guarantees. Clear, specific, and immediate," Mr. Zelensky said, adding: "I believe that Russia must be among those countries giving clear security guarantees."

Russia began evacuating diplomatic staff from Ukraine, its Embassy in Kiev told AFP.

A United Nations meeting on Ukraine on Wednesday heard that a full-scale Russian invasion of the country would have a devastating global impact that would likely spark a new "refugee crisis."

Western capitals say Russia has amassed 1,50,000 troops in combat formations on Ukraine's borders with Russia, Belarus and Russian-occupied Crimea and on warships in the Black Sea.

Combat capabilities

Ukraine has around 2,00,000 military personnel and Wednesday's call up could see up to 2,50,000 reservists aged between 18 and 60 receive their mobilisation papers. Moscow's total forces are much larger – around a million active duty personnel – and have been moder-

nised and re-armed in recent years.

But Ukraine has received advanced anti-tank weapons and some drones from NATO members. More have been promised as the allies try to deter a Russian attack or at least make it costly.

Shelling has intensified in recent days between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists. A Ukrainian soldier reportedly died on Wednesday in a shelling attack.

The U.S. and Britain say Russia is poised to strike Ukraine and trigger the most serious war in Europe for decades, but Mr. Putin says he is open to talks – within limits. Russia has demanded that Ukraine be forbidden from ever joining the NATO and that U.S. troops pull out from Eastern Europe.

Drafting a new Constitution is impossible

That the Centre is suppressing the powers of the States is not reason enough for a new statute



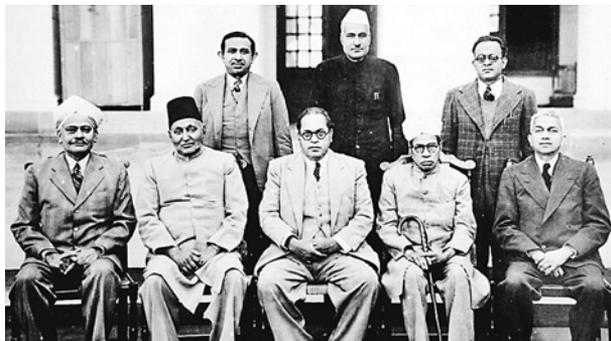
BAGLEKAR AKASH KUMAR

Recently, the Chief Minister of Telangana said India needs a new Constitution, as, according to him, governments at the Centre over the years have been suppressing the powers of the States. Being a citizen and a constitutional head of state, he was not wrong in exercising his fundamental right to express his views freely. Nor was what he said wrong: Central governments have indeed been suppressing the powers of the States in various ways. The Supreme Court, in judgments such as *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994) and *Govt. Of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India* (2018), has castigated governments at the Centre for this.

But the question is, can the people of India give themselves a new Constitution? Noted jurist Fali S. Nariman, in a lecture titled 'The Silences in Our Constitutional Law', delivered in 2005, rightly said, "We will never be able to piece together a new Constitution in the present day and age even if we tried: because innovative ideas – however brilliant, howsoever beautifully expressed in consultation papers and reports of commissions – cannot give us a better Constitution. In Constitution-making there are other forces that cannot and must never be ignored – the spirit of persuasion, of accommodation and of tolerance – all three are at a very low ebb today". We can add a few more forces which cannot be ignored today, such as casteism, nepotism and corruption.

Nation first

This article highlights a few events that took place while India's Constitution was drafted to argue how these events may never take place in the present scenario. The first is the appointment of B.R. Ambedkar as chairman of the Drafting Committee. Granville Austin, in his book *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, wrote that Ambedkar was originally elected to the Assembly as a member from Bengal, but lost his seat during Partition. He was subse-



Members of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India. (Sitting from left) N. Madhava Rao; Saiyid Muhammad Saadulla; B.R. Ambedkar; Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar and Sir B.N. Rao. (Standing from left) S.N. Mukerjee, Jugal Kishore Khanna and Kewal Krishan, in New Delhi. ■THE HINDU ARCHIVES

quently elected from the Bombay Presidency at the behest of the Congress high command. This shows that the biggest party then had an accommodative spirit, which seems lacking today. Ambedkar was fighting to ensure rights for the depressed classes and, in his own words, he came to the Assembly to "safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes". But he was trusted for his passion and talent and elected chairman of the Drafting Committee by the Constituent Assembly, which was dominated by the Congress. The result is the Constitution we see today, which safeguards the rights of majority and minority communities. Today, when caste and nepotism play a pivotal role in electing even a ward member, consensus over a new Constitution would be impossible.

It took two years, 11 months and 18 days to draft the present Constitution. During this period, the members read the constitutions of other nations, consulted constitutional experts, drafted the Constitution, debated it, redrafted it and approved it. During Constituent Assembly debates, if five minutes were wasted one day, the House would assemble five minutes earlier the next day and sit until night to complete pending work. This showed value for time, and value for work done for the nation. Now, all we see is ruckus and noise in Parliament, with little debate or discussion taking place on Bills. During Constituent Assembly debates, dissenters and hard-core

critics were tolerated and their suggestions, if found apt, were accommodated. If their suggestions were not found apt, there would be a healthy debate. Now, Bills are passed without allowing Opposition members to express their views completely, let alone accommodating their suggestions.

Third, the members of the Constituent Assembly emerged from the clutches of colonial rule. They knew the sufferings that they and the nation had undergone under foreign rule and were determined to frame a Constitution, and spelled out fundamental rights, which allow every individual a right to live their life with liberty and dignity and challenge the state's arbitrary decisions before an independent judiciary. Today's leaders seem to lack that spirit. Members of the Constituent Assembly chose the nation first; today's leaders tend to choose their party first.

Fourth, the Constitution states that India is a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic". It protects the rights of every section of society. On the other hand, today's leaders give priority to particular ideologies and castes. Given this, drafting a new Constitution will be a chaotic exercise and will shut the voices of some sections, especially the vulnerable.

Fifth, and most importantly, an unelected body was trusted by the Constitution framers to declare the law. The purpose behind choosing an unelected body was that, by its na-

ture of being not answerable to anyone except the Constitution, the judiciary can adjudicate disputes in an independent, free, fair and impartial manner. Today, leaders may choose to become judges as well as rulers. For instance, through the Constitution (Thirty-Second Amendment) Act, 1973, a proviso to clause 5 of Article 371D was inserted which gave power to the Andhra Pradesh government to modify or annul any order passed by the Administrative Tribunal, constituted to deal with service matters in which the government is a party. This Tribunal replaced the High Court. When the government is party to the litigation and when the Tribunal is exercising the powers of the High Court, how can the government be given power to override the decisions of the Tribunal? Fortunately, the Supreme Court declared this proviso as unconstitutional in *P. Sambamurthy v. State of A.P.* (1986). There are other such examples.

A strong Centre

Before independence, India comprised over 550 princely States, suffered from the problems created by Partition and faced a looming economic crisis. Thus, the Constituent Assembly's members tilted towards a strong Centre with a blend of cooperative federalism. It is true that the governments at the Centre abuse their powers to cripple Opposition-ruled States, but that does not call for creating a new Constitution. It calls for seeking mandate from the people to elect regional parties in general elections so that States can have dominance in the Union, besides approaching the Supreme Court under Article 131 whenever the need arises to resolve conflicts between the Centre and State.

The Chief Minister should remember that if he could become the Chief Minister of Telangana, it is only because of the present Constitution, as despite the Assembly of united Andhra Pradesh rejecting the resolution in 2013 to bifurcate Andhra Pradesh, it was Parliament, which by exercising powers conferred under Article 3 of the Constitution, carved out the two States.

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SC dismisses petition against offline exams for Classes 10, 12

Let students do their job and authorities theirs, says court

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea to stop authorities from holding physical examinations for Classes 10 and 12 in 2022 because of the pandemic.

A Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar termed the petition “ill-advised” and “premature”.

“Let students do their job and authorities do theirs... What kind of a petition is this? This will only create confusion,” Justice Khanwilkar addressed advocate Prashant Padmanabhan, appearing for the petitioner, Anubha Shrivastava Sahai.

Mr. Padmanabhan said the court had cancelled the physical exams last year, and directed the authorities to devise an alternative assessment mechanism. The dan-



ger of a spike in cases had not passed yet though the COVID-19 situation has improved, he said and urged the court to pass similar orders as in last year.

“The past cannot be the basis for passing orders in the present. We know we had passed orders, but that was reflective of the situation then and not now,” Justice Khanwilkar responded.

The Bench said there were rules and regulations in place to deal with the conduct of exams in the pan-

democratic situation. “They are working on it. But you have filed your PIL even before they have taken a decision...” Justice Khanwilkar said.

The court said once the authorities took a decision on the conduct of exams, it was for the students, and not others, to seek relief in case they had a grievance.

“But you cannot come here even before authorities take a decision,” Justice Khanwilkar told the petitioner side.

Mr. Padmanabhan said the classes were not conducted properly and were mostly online. He also said some States had elections.

“Do you think the authorities do not know? They are more aware than you are about all that,” Justice Khanwilkar reacted.

Supreme Court completes hearing on OROP plea

Centre's hyperbole on policy implementation presents 'rosier picture' than reality, it had said

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its judgment on a petition claiming that the government's implementation of One Rank, One Pension (OROP) for the armed forces has been faulty.

A Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud completed the hearings on the petition filed by Indian Ex-Servicemen

Movement, represented by senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi and advocate Balaji Srinivasan, that One Rank, One Pension has led to the creation of a separate class among the personnel equally situated in rank and length of service.

Uniform pension

OROP means a uniform pension would be paid to retired servicemen of the same rank

with the same length of service, regardless of their date of retirement.

The petitioners had also challenged the government's stand that equalisation of pension would happen periodically every five years. The petitioners had contended that a gap of five years would leave them at a great disadvantage.

They said periodic equalisation would “cause great in-

justice to 24 lakh ex-servicemen, 6.5 lakh war widows and veteran widows and their families by creating a situation of One Rank Different Pension”.

Oral remarks

In a hearing on February 16, the top court had orally remarked that the Centre's hyperbole on the One Rank One Pension policy presented a much “rosier picture”

than what was actually given to the pensioners of the armed forces.

In its affidavit, the government, to a query about the financial outflow likely to be incurred, said it would be, from 2014, in the range of ₹42,776.38 crore.

The government had clarified that same rank and length of service were necessary for claiming One Rank, One Pension benefits.

EXPLAINER

Understanding the Draft India Data Accessibility & Use Policy, 2022

What are the main provisions of the draft document? Is the Government going to monetise public data?

THE GIST

■ The MEITY on February 21 released a policy proposal titled as, "Draft India Data Accessibility & Use Policy, 2022". The policy objectives mentioned in this draft are primarily commercial in nature. As the generation of citizen data is slated to increase exponentially in the next decade, the Government is looking to license and sell public data to the private sector.

■ The policy will be applicable to all data and information created and collected by the Central Government. It would also allow State governments to adopt its provisions. Its operationalisation will be achieved through the establishment of an India Data Office (IDO) for overall management. An India Data Council will also be formed as a consultative body. The policy strategy is to make Government data open by default and then maintain a negative list of datasets which cannot be shared.

■ There are privacy issues which need to be addressed. Apart from that, with the adoption of the language of open data the Government strays from its core principle of providing transparency towards its citizens. Other issues include questions of how the Centre and the State are going to share the proceeds from the sales.

ANUSHKA JAIN
APAR GUPTA

The story so far: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) on February 21, 2022 released a policy proposal titled as, "Draft India Data Accessibility & Use Policy, 2022". The policy aims to, "radically transform India's ability to harness public sector data". The proposals of the Draft Data Accessibility Policy has been in the spotlight for permitting the licensing and sale of public data by the Government to the private sector.

Why has the Draft Data Accessibility Policy been proposed?

The generation of citizen data is slated to increase exponentially in the next decade and become a cornerstone of India's \$5 trillion-dollar digital economy. The policy objectives and purpose drawn from this understanding are primarily commercial in nature following the rationale of the National Economic Survey, 2019 which at Chapter 4 noted the commercial benefits of Government data exploitation, notably, "The private sector may be granted access to select databases for commercial use... Given that the private sector has the potential to reap massive dividends from this data, it is only fair to charge them for its use." It aims to harness the economic value of the generated data.

A background note that accompanies the policy outlines existing bottlenecks in data sharing and use which includes the absence of a body for policy monitoring and enforcement of data sharing efforts, absence of technical tools and standards for data sharing, identification of high value datasets and licensing and valuation frameworks. It indicates a way forward to unlock the high value of data across the economy, congruent and robust governance strategy, making Government data interoperable and instilling data skills and culture.

Beyond this, there is a lack of transparency with the absence of a

consultation paper or a disclosure of the list of stakeholders who have been consulted which as per a public notice by MEITY include, "academia, industry, and Government".

How does the Draft Data Accessibility Policy aim to achieve its goals?

The policy will be applicable to all data and information created, generated, collected and/or archived by the Central Government. It would also allow State governments to adopt its provisions. Its operationalisation will be achieved through the establishment of an India Data Office (IDO) under MEITY for overall management, with each government entity designating a Chief Data Officer. In addition to it, an India Data Council will be formed as a consultative body for tasks that include finalisation of standards. It is not indicated whether the India Data Council will have non-governmental participation from industry, civil society or technologists.

The policy strategy is to make Government data open by default and then maintain a negative list of datasets which cannot be shared. Definition of more sensitive categories which should have restricted access is left to the independent government ministries. In addition to this, existing data sets will be enriched or processed to attain greater value and termed as high-value datasets. Government datasets including high-value datasets will be shared freely within government departments and also licensed to the private sector. As a measure of privacy protection, there is a recommendation for anonymisation and privacy preservation.

What are the privacy issues with the Draft Data Accessibility Policy?

India does not have a data protection law that can provide accountability and remedy for privacy violations such as coercive and excessive data collection or data breaches. Here, inter-departmental data sharing poses concerns related to privacy since the open government data portal which contains data from all departments may result in the

creation of 360 degree profiles and enable state-sponsored mass surveillance. Even though the policy considers anonymisation as a desired goal there is a lack of legal accountability and independent regulatory oversight. There is also a failure to consider scientific analysis and the availability of automated tools for the re-identification of anonymous data. This becomes important given the existing financial incentives of licensing to the private sector, where the Government is acting as a data broker. Here the commercial value of the data increases with greater amounts of personal data. The absence of an anchoring legislation further leads to the policy not being able to fulfill the threshold of legality for state intervention into privacy which was put in place by the Supreme Court of India in its landmark right to privacy decision.

Are there any other issues with the policy?

There are three additional issues with the policy document that merit consideration. While adopting the language of open data it strays from its core principle of providing transparency of the Government towards its citizens. There is only one mention of transparency and little to no mention of how such data sharing will help ensure demands for accountability and redress.

The second issue is that the policy bypasses parliament as it contemplates large scale data sharing and enrichment that will be borne from public funds. Further, the constitution of offices, prescription of standards that may be applicable not only to the Central government, but even State governments and schemes administered by them require legislative deliberation.

This brings us to the third and final issue of federalism. The policy, even though it notes that State governments will be, "free to adopt portions of the policy," does not specify how such freedom will be achieved. It becomes relevant, if specific standards are prescribed by the Central government for data sharing, or as a precondition to financial assistance. There is also the



absence of any comment on whether data gathered from States may be sold by the Central government and whether the proceeds from it will be shared with the States.

How to participate and send in your views?

The draft data access policy accompanied by a background note is available on the website of MEITY and open for public consultation till March 18, 2022. For participation, comments can be sent by email to Ms. Kavita Bhatia, Scientist F at the email kbhatia@gov.in and pnu.etech@meity.gov.in.

Apar Gupta is the Executive Director and Anushka Jain is an Associate Counsel at Internet Freedom Foundation, New Delhi.

The Budget lacks the ‘power’ to transform services

While clean energy is a priority, providing power has not been linked with policy making in the development sector



UTTARA NARAYAN &
NAMRATA GINOYA

India's Union Budget 2022-23 demonstrates a clear intent to prioritise investments in clean energy and sustainable development, in line with the country's promises made at COP26 in Glasgow last year. The Budget is also an opportunity to turn the spotlight on policy conversations – since it sets the tone for reflecting on policies, schemes, and how they are implemented on the ground. Electricity and development sectors need a more integrated approach to achieve the vision set forth in instruments such as the Union Budget that guide policy implementation at other administrative levels.

A reduction

While the health sector witnessed a 16% increase in estimated Budget allocations from last year, medical and public health spending was reduced by 45% for 2022-23. The education sector also witnessed an 11.86% increase in allocations. Interestingly, despite the push for digital education, which now includes the e-Vidya programme (to boost online learning), last year's revised allocation saw a reduction of 35%. And despite these increases in estimates, health and education continue to share only about 2% each of budgetary allocations annually.

Budget estimates demonstrate intent, but the proof of the pudding lies in the actual expenditure which reiterates the need for greater

attention to be paid to our health and education sectors. While the health sector was allocated ₹74,602 crore in 2021-22, the Government exceeded its spending by over ₹5,000 crore more (₹80,026 crore) on health, signalling a spike in demand, likely propelled by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Given this scenario, a less than ₹1,000 crore increase in the Budget Estimate (₹86,606 crore) in 2022-23 when compared with last year's Revised Estimates (₹85,915 crore) appears incongruent with the Government's aim of providing quality public health care at scale.

Greater allocation of funds is welcome, even if marginally, but as our research (<https://bit.ly/3BHDa7l>) on health and education policy documents at the national and State levels indicate, the aim of providing better health care gets stymied, in the absence of electricity and when power provisioning is not linked to desired outcomes.

The role of reliable energy

It is widely recognised that the availability of reliable electricity supply can improve the delivery of health and education services; 74% of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals are interlinked with universal access to reliable energy. Despite this, 44% of schools and 25% of India's health sub-centres and primary health centres remain unelectrified. For the Government's proposed energy transition to succeed, these critical facilities require energy access first. These statistics only refer to the presence or absence of an electricity connection. Its reliability in terms of the number of hours that electricity is available steadily without any voltage fluctuations



GETTY IMAGES

also plays a significant role in delivering services.

The lack of integration of electrification requirements in development sector policy documents may be partly due to lack of information about electricity and development linkages, poor coordination mechanisms between the sectors and departments, and poor access to appropriate finance. Even while electricity is considered, it is to the limited extent of being a one-time civil infrastructure activity rather than a continuous feature necessary for the day-to-day operations of these services. Departmental budgetary allocations are quite telling in terms of the extent to which electricity is prioritised by these departments; many do not even have line items to account for recurring electricity connection charges and maintenance expenditure. We must remind ourselves that while electricity is invisible and taken for granted when available, its absence is felt when it is not provided.

Think multiple policies too

Our research on development and electricity policies also demonstrates that integration need not only be at the level of a single policy. Sometimes, multiple policies can complement each other to achieve the larger sectoral objectives. For example, in Assam, the Energy Vision document that lays

out the electricity and development outcomes is to be applied in tandem with the Solar Energy Policy 2017 that operationalises this vision via an action plan. To successfully integrate electricity provisioning and maintenance, policy frameworks should include innovative coordination and financing mechanisms. These mechanisms, while developing clear compliance mandates, must also allow sufficient room for flexibility to respond to local contexts. Such flexibility can be embedded in funds (such as untied funds) to provide local decision-makers with some authority to mitigate policy implementation barriers.

A successful policy outcome might be dependent on several invisible aspects that do not get the attention and the funding necessary to aid in successful policy delivery. Electricity is one of them.

This deepens exclusion

Many development policies that have objectives to improve health and education services require facilities to have access to reliable electricity as a prerequisite to qualify for benefits. This, unfairly, puts the onus of acquiring reliable electricity supply on individual facilities rather than their departments. Such requirements result in facilities and schools that are already deprived of electricity to continue to be excluded from other assistance.

Providing reliable electricity for health centres and schools should be the responsibility of centralised decision-making entities at the State or national level. Individual facilities should not be burdened with the responsibility to meet the eligibility criteria for policies or programmes.

It must also be noted that inte-

grative policies are useful but insufficient to achieve intended developmental outcomes. For policies to become transformative instruments that operationalise them must be in place. This is when budgetary allocations, institutional structures, finance, information and coordination mechanisms come into play.

Allocation of funds is a must to set up a robust data governance mechanism as it is critical for integrative action and evidence-based policymaking. However, as India has witnessed with other cross-sectoral and centralised statistical, planning, and implementation data governance, diverse contexts must support oversight mechanisms that ensure data credibility.

Systemic gaps

Finance is largely unavailable to ensure reliable electricity supply to schools and health facilities. Some directives, such as those governing the use of untied funds, need to be more flexible in allowing these facilities to prioritise providing reliable and sustainable electricity. The provisioning of reliable electricity, in turn, improves the delivery of health and educational services. Departmental silos in public administration have resulted in linkage gaps between critical “supply” departments (such as electricity and water) and “demand-generating departments” (such as health and education). This gap is accentuated when coordination mandates are not met with sustained finance to support human resources and common activities.

Uttara Narayan and Namrata Ginoya are researchers with WRI India's Energy Program working on energy governance and resilience

China asks India to ensure fair treatment of Chinese firms

Chinese statement follows ban on 54 apps, searches at premises of telco Huawei

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

China's Ministry of Commerce on Thursday asked India "to improve its business environment" and to ensure "non-discriminatory" treatment of its firms, in the wake of a new ban on Chinese apps and recent tax probes on Chinese firms.

India, which has already banned more than 200 Chinese apps citing security concerns, this week banned a further 54 apps. The past week also saw searches at offices of Chinese telecom firm Huawei, which followed similar tax investigations into mobile maker Xiaomi.

Chinese Commerce Minis-



Seeking leeway: Chinese firms are concerned about India's investment environment, says China's Gao Feng. • AP

try spokesman Gao Feng on Thursday said: "Indian authorities have taken... measures to suppress Chinese companies and their products in India, which have seriously damaged [their]

legitimate rights and interests". "China expressed serious concern about this," he was quoted as saying at a press conference in Beijing by the official China News Service. "The Ministry has

noticed that foreign investors, including Chinese companies, are also increasingly concerned about the investment environment in India," noting that "China and India are inseparable neighbours and important... trade partners for each other".

"The economic and trade cooperation between the two countries has strong resilience and great potential," he added.

Noting that bilateral trade reached a record \$125.7 billion in 2021, he said: "It is hoped [India] can take... measures to maintain the sound development momentum of bilateral economic and trade cooperation".

'India can achieve \$500 bn in green energy exports'

Energy transition to decide geopolitical transition: Ambani

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

As India shapes its energy transition to cleaner fuels, billionaire Mukesh Ambani said technological advancements would make India a global new energy leader, exporting half-a-trillion dollars worth of clean energy in two decades.

Mr. Ambani, who is helming a transition to green hydrogen production at its oil-dominant conglomerate, said India is today one of the most attractive opportunities for renewable energy investment anywhere in the world. But the transition to clean, emission-free energy cannot happen overnight



Mukesh Ambani

and India's dependence on coal and imported oil will continue for the next two to three decades, he said.

"But, we must have a plan to eliminate that in the next two-three decades," he said. "Hence, in the near and medium-term, we will have to follow low-carbon, and no-

carbon strategies of development." And technology will help lower the costs of new and clean energy.

Mr. Ambani said the climate crisis is an existential crisis and energy transition will determine geopolitical transition in the 21st century. Europe overtook India and China to emerge as the world leader when wood was replaced with coal. Similarly, with the emergence of oil, the U.S. and West Asia outgrew others.

"India's clean and green energy exports in the next 20 years, at the end of 20 years also has the potential of half a trillion dollars of export," he said.

'Inflation has peaked, focus is on growth'

RBI's Patra warns that volatility and central banks' monetary tightening could 'kill the global recovery'

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

Headline retail inflation has peaked and will ease from hereon, RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra said on Wednesday, terming criticism about the central bank being behind the curve on inflation 'unfair' as the economy was still coping with output and livelihoods lost to the pandemic.

"We have dug out of the deepest recession in the world and 2021-22 is estimated to close with a GDP growth rate of 9.2%, but most people don't focus on the fact that at this rate of growth, India is only 1% above pre-pandemic levels of GDP," he said. As the economy was already in a cyclical downturn before the COVID-19 lockdowns, he noted that India had lost at least 10-



Base effect: Inflation momentum in India is actually declining giving room to support growth, says Patra. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

15% of output 'forever'.

"Inflation is a case of statistical effects in India. And if you look at the momentum, it is actually declining, so India is in a comfortable position... we have the headroom to support growth. And we will do so because we are

dealing with lost output, lost livelihoods. So I think it is an unfair judgment," Mr. Patra asserted at a discussion with the central bank governors of the Philippines and Sri Lanka. "But RBI reserves the right to choose it's time to normalise," he added at the

Asia Economic Dialogue 2022, hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Pune International Centre.

'Recession risk'

The upswing in global inflation, Mr. Patra said, is the price of 'bounding too quickly out of the pandemic's downturn' with policy makers finding it easier to 'revive revenue spending than to bring supply capacities on stream'. He warned that the extreme volatility in markets, triggered by an increasing number of central banks tightening or indicating the intent to normalise policy, was the biggest risk to the global economic recovery and may even tip it 'into a premature recession'.

Stressing that India will take a different policy stance than the rest of the world, he

said that efforts to address immediate inflation pressures across countries, may not work as 'today's actions can at best be expected to impact inflation six to 12 months down the line' but most projections show inflation peaking in the middle of 2022 and easing thereafter.

"As demand gets stronger, finished goods inventories which are piled up with wholesalers and retailers, will be released into the market. And along with the easing of supply chain problems, there will be a supply glut. New orders will not go up at that time and activity will slow. At that time, today's monetary policy measures may bite but they will not impact inflation, which is set to ease anyway by the second half... Instead, they will kill the recovery," he concluded.

EXPLAINER

NASA's plan to decommission the International Space Station

Why is NASA planning to de-orbit the ISS? How will the space station be de-assembled?

PRIYALI PRAKASH

The story so far: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has announced plans to retire and decommission the International Space Station (ISS) by 2031. The U.S. space agency has detailed its goals for the next decade in the International Space Transition Report as it aims to hand over operations to commercial organisations. NASA has listed an elaborate outline of the plan to decommission the space station. Other international partners that operate the ISS are, however, yet to approve it.

What is the ISS?

The ISS was launched in 1998 as part of joint efforts by the U.S., Russia, Japan, Canada and Europe. The space station was assembled over many years, and it operates in low-earth orbit. Since its inception, the ISS has served as a laboratory suspended in space and has aided multiple scientific and technological developments.

The idea of a space station originated in the 1984 State of the Union address by former U.S. President Ronald Reagan. "A space station will permit quantum leaps in our research in science, communications, and in metals and lifesaving medicines which could be manufactured only in space. We want our



The International Space Station. ■ NYT

friends to help us meet these challenges and share in their benefits. NASA will invite other countries to participate so we can strengthen peace, build prosperity, and expand freedom for all who share our goals," he had said.

ISS has consistently maintained human presence for the past 21 years, providing astronauts with sophisticated technologies for scientific research.

Why is NASA planning to decommission the ISS?

The ISS was originally built to operate for 15 years. The space station has already surpassed that checkpoint by being active for 21 years, with plans to continue operations till 2030. However, the limitations on the life-cycle of the station are catching up. The ISS goes through 16 rotations of the earth per day, causing

extreme temperature changes on the exterior. The side facing the sun can get heated up to 121°C while the temperature on the opposite, darker side can fall to -157°C, causing intense expansion and contraction of the building material. This orbital thermal cycling, coupled with dynamic loading, affects the longevity of the primary structure of the space station. The technical lifetime is also limited by parts like radiators, modules and truss structures that tend to degrade over time.

NASA is planning to transition operations in low-earth orbit to private players and focus energies on its missions to explore the moon and Mars.

What is the procedure to de-orbit the ISS?

NASA plans to remove the ISS from its

orbit around the earth and eventually flung it into the ocean at a point furthest from human civilisation. The space agency will use the dual method of natural orbit decay and a re-entry manoeuvre to bring an end to the ISS as we know it.

According to the plan, the earth's natural atmospheric drag will be used in lowering the altitude of the ISS while setting up the de-orbit. The space station operators will then provide the final push to it to lower the structure to the maximum possible height and ensure safe re-entry into the earth's atmosphere, leading it to Point Nemo over the South Pacific Oceanic Uninhabited Area (SPOUA). The exterior of the modules is expected to melt when the debris re-enters the earth's atmosphere. The exposed internal hardware is also expected to burn or vaporise during the process. It is believed that denser components like the truss sections will survive the re-entry and fall into the SPOUA. Alternative options like disassembly and return to the earth, boost to a higher orbit, and random re-entry were also considered.

The ISS is a huge structure – almost the size of a football field – and it was not designed to be disassembled easily in space. This process would have posed huge logistical and financial challenges. ISS cannot be decommissioned by

boosting to a higher orbit because of its large mass and low operational altitude. The station currently operates in low-earth orbit above 400 km in altitude, at a point where it still experiences atmospheric drag and requires re-booster to continue in its orbit. The station also has a mass of over 4,30,000 kg. Existing propulsion systems do not have the capacity to raise the station's altitude to a high target and escape low-earth orbit. The random re-entry method was discarded since it carries a huge risk for the human population on the ground.

Are there any environmental hazards associated with the plan?

NASA claims that the debris of the ISS that survives the re-entry will settle on the ocean floor and not cause any substantial long-term impact.

What is the future of space stations?

As the ISS plans to end operations in space, new players are already lining up to replace it. In January 2022, China announced that its space station will be ready for operations this year. Blue Origin, the aerospace company founded by Jeff Bezos, has also announced its plans to build Orbital Reef, a commercially developed, owned, and operated space station in low-earth orbit. Blue Origin is working alongside Sierra Space on the project.

THE GIST

■ NASA plans to decommission the International Space Station (ISS) by 2031. The ISS was launched in 1998 as part of joint efforts by the U.S., Russia, Japan, Canada and Europe. It operates in low-earth orbit.

■ The limitations on the life-cycle of the station are catching up. The ISS goes through 16 rotations of the earth per day, causing extreme temperature changes on the exterior. This orbital thermal cycling, coupled with dynamic loading, affects the longevity of the primary structure of the space station.

■ NASA plans to remove the ISS from its orbit around the earth and eventually plunge it into the ocean, leading it to Point Nemo over the South Pacific Oceanic Uninhabited Area (SPOUA).

'Money laundering a global problem'

Accused run to smaller nations where they can buy citizenship, Centre tells SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that ₹18,000 crore was confiscated under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) from fugitive businessmen Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, and returned to banks.

Appearing before a Bench, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta submitted that money laundering is a "global problem". The government said the total proceeds of crime in PMLA cases pending before the court is ₹67,000 crore.

Mr. Mehta said the number of PMLA cases investigated by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has varied in five years, from 111 to 981 in 2015-16 and 2020-21,



respectively.

"Very small number of cases are being taken up for investigation under the PMLA as compared to annual registration of the cases under the Money Laundering Act in the UK (7,900), the U.S. (1,532), China (4,691), Austria (1,036), Hong Kong (1,823), Belgium (1,862) and Russia (2,764)," he submitted.

He said "corruption in high offices is a major facili-

tator of money laundering". This is especially true in the developing world. Mr. Mehta said corruption is an "insidious player which undermines democracy". Money laundering, in turn, fuels organised crime and terrorism.

UN report

The Solicitor-General quoted a United Nations report which said the proceeds of crime being laundered amount to \$2.1 trillion, which accounts for 3.67% of the global GDP. He said three "supra-national or transnational" crimes which have brought together the global community are narcotics, money laundering and terrorism.

Mr. Mehta said the legislative intent against sharing

the ECIR (Enforcement Case Information Report) with accused was to prevent them from wiping out evidence, which is anyway hard to get, with the "click of a button".

He highlighted how people accused of money laundering run to small nations with no extradition treaty with India where they can buy citizenship. He said the global tolerance to money laundering has come down. This has been evident in the increasing number of predicate offences.

The Centre was responding to a batch of petitions before the court alleging that the PMLA has evolved as the government's "hatchet" law in recent years, considering the series of raids and arrests of politicians, their relatives and activists.

MILAN to be held in Vizag from Feb. 25

Warships of 15 countries to join the naval exercise

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Amid escalating tensions between Ukraine and Russia, warships of Quad countries, France, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam and several others will come together at Visakhapatnam later this week for the largest multilateral exercise MILAN, hosted by the Indian Navy. Russia, Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia among others are

participating in the exercise without ships.

The exercise, scheduled from February 25 to March 4, will see participation of around 42 countries with ships from over 15 countries.

The U.S. will be joining the exercise for the first time.

Collaborative theme

"The theme of the MILAN 2022 exercise is 'Camaraderie - Cohesion - Collaboration', which aims to project India as a responsible maritime power to the world at large," the Navy said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The aim of the exercise is to hone operational skills, imbibe best practices and procedures, and enable doctrinal learning in the maritime domain through professional interaction between friendly navies," the statement elaborated.

The opening ceremony on February 26 will see the inauguration of the MILAN village and an International City Parade is scheduled the next day with the participation of foreign contingents, the Navy said.

Activities include an international maritime seminar, professional and subject

matter expert exchanges and deep submergence rescue vessel (DSRV) demonstration, it added.

The invitees include all Indian Ocean littoral states and countries from south-east Asia among others. The harbour phase is scheduled from February 25 to 28 and the sea phase from March 1 to 4.

Starting with the participation of four countries – Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand – in 1995, the exercise has since transitioned in terms of number of participants and complexity of exercises.

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.