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DAILY NEWS

28th FEBRUARY 2022



FOREWORD

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

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

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

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The anatomy of India's Ukraine dilemma

New Delhi has taken a subtle pro-Moscow position on the question of Russian attacks against Ukraine



HAPPYMON JACOB

New Delhi's response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine appears to have been shaped by harsh geopolitical circumstances, that it is in the middle of, than its normative beliefs or preferences. Late last week, India abstained from a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution which called for condemning the Russian military action against Ukraine, but it went on to note its uneasiness of the Russian action in writing (a first).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin as the war broke out, called for an "immediate cessation of violence" and has so far refused to pay heed to Ukrainian Ambassador to India Igor Polikha's impassioned pleas urging Mr. Modi to mediate with Mr. Putin to halt Russian military advances. With the UNSC deadlocked, friends with both the United States/West and Russia, and passionately urged by Ukraine, New Delhi is uniquely placed to undertake some much-needed mediation between the rival sides. But it has chosen to stay on the margins and do no more than the unavoidable minimum. New Delhi just wants this to be over with.

Let us call it what it really is: New Delhi has taken a subtle pro-Moscow position on the question of Russian attacks against Ukraine. This pro-Russia tilt is not just the position of the Indian government, but is something, somewhat surprisingly, shared by much of the Indian strategic community as well. More notably, one is increasingly hearing subtle, though indirect, justifications of the Russian military actions from the doyens of the Indian strategic community. India's Russia tilt should be seen

not just as a product of its time-tested friendship with Moscow but also as a geopolitical necessity.

The Russia tilt

There are four potential options India can/could choose from: Condemn Russian aggression, support Russian aggression, stay silent on Russian aggression, or express displeasure (short of condemning) and call for diplomacy. The first option will pit India against Russia, the second will pit it against the U.S. and its allies, the third option will be read as pro-Russia, and the fourth option – which it has taken – is the least harmful. And yet, a position that does not condemn Russian aggression and one that abstains from voting on a UNSC resolution calling for "condemning Russian aggression and withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine" is indeed a pro-Russia position.

There are understandable reasons for India's (subtle) pro-Russia position. Let me put it this way: an aggressive Russia is a problem for the U.S. and the West, not for India. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion is Russia's problem, not India's. India's problem is China, and it needs both the U.S./the West and Russia to deal with the "China problem". I would view India's response to the crisis in Ukraine in the light of this rather simple logic.

Let us look at the big picture first. There is today a sobering recognition in New Delhi about the weakening of the U.S.-led global order and the rise of China as a counter-pole, geographically located right next to India. U.S. withdrawal from the region and its decline as the principal system shaper has complicated India's place in regional geopolitics. Neighbouring China as the rising superpower and Russia as its strategic ally challenging the U.S.-led global order at a time when China has time and again acted on its aggressive intentions *vis-à-vis* India, and when India is closest to the U.S. than ever before in its history,



throws up a unique and unprecedented challenge for India. Therefore, having Russia on its side is crucial for India, more than ever. Moscow may or may not be able to moderate Chinese antagonism towards New Delhi, but an India-Russia strategic partnership may be able to temper New Delhi's growing isolation in a rather friendless region.

Second, there is an emerging dualism in contemporary Indian strategic Weltanschauung: the predicament of a continental space that is reeling under immense pressure from China, Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan adding to its strategic claustrophobia; and, the emergence of a maritime sphere which presents an opportunity to break out of the same.

Herein lies the dilemma for India. New Delhi needs Moscow's assistance to manage its continental difficulties be it through defence supplies, helping it 'return' to central Asia, working together at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or exploring opportunities for collaboration in Afghanistan. Russia, to put it rather bluntly, is perhaps India's only partner of consequence in the entire Asian continental stretch.

On the other hand, when it comes to the vast maritime sphere, the Indo-Pacific to be precise, Russia is not of great consequence to India. That is where its American and western partners come into play. India is simply not in a position to address the China challenge in the maritime space without the active support of American and western navies and, of course, the Quad. This unavoid-

able dualism in the contemporary Indian strategic landscape necessitates that India balances the two sides, but doing so without a subtle Russia tilt may not be feasible at this point of time.

That said, the war on Ukraine could have major implications for India's strategic calculus. For one, Russian action in Ukraine dismissing the concerns of the rest of the international community including the U.S. will no doubt embolden China and its territorial ambitions. Second, the new sanctions regime may have implications for India's defence cooperation with Moscow. Third, the longer the standoff lasts, the closer China and Russia could become, which certainly does not help India. Finally, the more severe the U.S.-Russia rivalry becomes, the less focus there would be on the Indo-Pacific and China, which is where India's interests lie.

Impact on foreign policy

India's responses to the Russian aggression on Ukraine underline the fact that India is operating from a position of geopolitical vulnerability. While the Indian stand does reek of realpolitik, it reeks more of strategic weakness. Here is a country located in a hostile neighbourhood trying to make the best of a terrible situation it finds itself in. This then means that, going forward, India's ability to be a "swing state", "major power" or a "leading power" stands diminished. So we must expect more middle-of-the-road behaviour from New Delhi rather than resolute positions on global strategic developments.

India's position also shows the unmistakable indication that when it comes to geopolitics, New Delhi will choose interests over principles. This is nothing new: New Delhi has chosen interests over principles even in the past – for instance, India has violated the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of neighbours. The difference this time may be that India is choosing interests ov-

er principles even though the issue at hand is not directly pertaining to India. And yet, a careful reading of India's statements and positions taken over the past few days also demonstrates a certain amount of discomfort in having to choose interests over principles. There is perhaps a realisation in New Delhi that a dog-eat-dog world, where rules and good behaviour do not matter, does not help India in the long run either.

Going forward, if tensions between Russia and the West persist, balancing extremes will be a key feature of Indian diplomacy. India is perhaps already mastering the art. Consider India's "explanation of vote" during the recent vote on Russia's aggression against Ukraine: even though New Delhi abstained from voting on it (thereby siding with Moscow), it made its unhappiness about the Russian action clear in the written note.

On strategic autonomy

Finally, what does this mean for India's 'strategic autonomy'? For sure, India's strategic autonomy has been under a lot of stress for some time now. However, New Delhi's response to the recent crisis, especially its "explanation of vote" at the UNSC indicates a careful recourse to the principle of strategic autonomy: India will make caveated statements and will not be pressured by either party. In that sense, India's indirect support to the Russian position is not a product of Russian pressure but the result of a desire to safeguard its own interests. Therefore, while we may witness a steady erosion of India's strategic autonomy in the longer term – primarily as a function of the need to balance against China – we will continue to witness instances where Indian diplomacy will take recourse to the principle of strategic autonomy.

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UN flags Colombo's efforts on rights

New report comes ahead of the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council

MEERA SRINIVASAN

The UN Human Rights chief, in a new report on Sri Lanka, has pointed to “setbacks to accountability for past human rights violations and the recognition of victims’ rights”, despite the Rajapaksa government’s recent steps aimed at reforms.

The latest report on Sri Lanka comes ahead of the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva beginning on Monday. While there will be no resolution on Sri Lanka this session, an interactive dialogue on the progress made by Sri Lanka in promoting reconciliation, accountability, and human rights is expected to be held during the week.

As part of her observations in the report, High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said transitional justice mechanisms have “struggled to achieve the confidence of victims”, while pointing to the “continuing precarious” situation of families of disappeared persons, the lack of progress and “even steps backward” in several emblematic human rights cases before Sri Lankan courts, and the culture of impunity.



Awaiting due: The UN report says there have been setbacks to accountability for past human rights violations. ■FILE PHOTO

The report highlighted “continuing trends towards militarisation and ethno-religious nationalism that undermine democratic institutions, increase the anxiety of minorities, and impede reconciliation.”

Lack of progress

“The High Commissioner is deeply disturbed by the general lack of progress over the past years in most cases, and the active reversal of others, which continue to indicate the inability and unwillingness of the Government to prosecute and punish perpetrators of crimes when State agents are the alleged perpetrators,” the report said, referring to developments in high-profile cases, such as

the controversial appointment of an ex-Navy chief, previously accused of abduction and conspiracy to murder 11 men in 2008 and 2009, as the Governor of the North Western Province in December 2021.

The “practical measures of reparation and development” that the Rajapaksa government emphasises will not ensure reconciliation, without a “comprehensive approach to ensure truth, justice, redress for victims and institutional reforms that guarantee non-recurrence”, the High Commissioner stressed, reiterating her earlier call to member states to explore possible “targeted sanctions against credibly alleged perpetra-

tors of grave human rights violations and abuses”.

Further, the report also drew attention to the “multi-dimensional human rights impact on public health and economic and social rights” since the pandemic; the pending full investigation of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings and the need for making the findings of a Presidential panel public.

It urged the government to undertake “more fundamental reforms” to the country’s Prevention of Terrorism Act, considered draconian by rights advocates.

High Commissioner Bachelet’s observations follow her strongly worded report in January 2021, that noted that Sri Lanka was “on alarming path towards recurrence of grave human rights violations”.

Subsequently, in its 46th session last March, the Council adopted a resolution on Sri Lanka, expressing “serious concern” at the “deteriorating situation” of human rights in Sri Lanka. India abstained from voting. Following up in September 2021, Ms. Bachelet called for the Council’s “close attention” on Sri Lanka.

Eight fishermen held by the Sri Lankan Navy

Their mechanised boat was seized

L. SRIKRISHNA
MEERA SRINIVASAN
MADURAI

Eight fishermen from Thangachimadam near Rameswaram were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy near Katchatheevu island in the early hours of Sunday, on charges of poaching in international waters. Their mechanised boat was seized by the authorities.

On Saturday, around 540 fishermen from Rameswaram ventured into the sea. As they were about to return on Sunday evening, eight of them were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy for crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).

The arrested persons were Ramesh, 40, Rodick, 19, Ajit, 19, Columbus, 52, Iman, 22, Linson, 23, Paavoothi, 19, and Israel, 20. The boat was said to be owned by Ramesh.

Fishermen’s associations in the coastal district strongly condemned the incident



In the last 26 days, 81 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Karaikal have been arrested by Sri Lankan Navy. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and demanded the immediate release of the arrested fishermen. In the last 26 days, 81 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Karaikal have been arrested for poaching. “This is unacceptable and an anti-fishermen act by the Sri Lankan Navy,” said Sesu Raja, a fishermen leader in Rameswaram.

The seized boats have not been released by the Sri Lankan government. Bose, another fishermen leader, said Sri Lanka had no right to auction them.

EXPLAINER

Exclusion from SWIFT: what it entails

What is SWIFT? Why is Russia being threatened with a ban on using its services?

SAPTAPARNO GHOSH

The story so far: The U.S., Europe and several other western nations are moving to exclude Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), an international network for banks to facilitate smooth money transactions globally. This could be the strongest economic sanction against Russia over its military moves in Ukraine, as it will potentially cut off the country from receiving international payments.

What is SWIFT?

SWIFT is a messaging network used by banks and financial institutions globally for quick and faultless exchange of information pertaining to financial transactions. The Belgium-headquartered SWIFT connects more than 11,000 banking and securities organisations in over 200 countries and territories.

Each participant on the platform is assigned a unique eight-digit SWIFT code or a bank identification code (BIC). If a person, say, in New York with a Citibank account, wants to send money to someone with an HSBC account in London, the payee would have to submit



■REUTERS

to his bank, the London-based beneficiary’s account number along with the eight-digit SWIFT code of the latter’s bank. Cit would then send a SWIFT message to HSBC. Once that is received and approved, the money would be credited to the required account.

SWIFT is merely a platform that sends

messages and does not hold any securities or money. It provides standardised and reliable communication to facilitate the transaction.

What happens if one is excluded from SWIFT?

If a country is excluded from the most

participatory financial facilitating platform, its foreign funding would take a hit, making it entirely reliant on domestic investors. This is particularly troublesome when institutional investors are constantly seeking new markets in newer territories.

An alternative system would be cumbersome to build and even more difficult to integrate with an already expansive system. SWIFT, first used in 1973, went live in 1977 with 518 institutions from 22 countries, its website states. SWIFT itself had replaced the much slower and far less dynamic Telex.

Are any countries excluded from SWIFT?

Certain Iranian banks were ousted from the system in 2018 despite resistance from several countries in Europe. “This step, while regrettable, was taken in the interest of the stability and integrity of the wider global financial system, and based on an assessment of the economic situation,” SWIFT states on its website.

How is the organisation governed?

SWIFT aims to be neutral. Its shareholders, consisting of 3,500 firms across the globe, elect the 25-member

board, which is responsible for oversight and management of the company. It is regulated by G-10 central banks of Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, and Sweden, alongside the European Central Bank. Its lead overseer is the National Bank of Belgium.

The SWIFT oversight forum was established in 2012.

The G-10 participants were joined by the central banks of India, Australia, Russia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, the Republic of Turkey, and the People’s Republic of China.

In 2021, the SWIFT financial messaging platform had recorded an average of 42 million FIN messages per day, as per the data on its website.

The full-year figure was an 11.4% growth on a year-over-year basis. Europe, West Asia, and Africa, combined sent approximately 4.66 billion messages.

The Americas and the United Kingdom stood second with 4.42 billion interactions, with the Asia Pacific on third with an approximate 1.50 billion messages.

THE GIST

■ The U.S., Europe and several other western nations are moving to exclude Russia from SWIFT, an international network for banks to facilitate smooth money transactions globally.

■ If a country is excluded from SWIFT, the most participatory financial facilitating platform, its foreign funding would take a hit, making it entirely reliant on domestic investors.

■ In 2018, certain Iranian banks were ousted from the system despite resistance from several countries in Europe.

Iran's nuclear negotiator returns to Vienna for talks

End sanctions on oil, banking; Tehran

REUTERS
DUBAI

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani will return to Vienna on Sunday evening for talks on resolving the remaining issues in indirect negotiations with the United States to revive a 2015 deal, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Bagheri Kani, who flew to Tehran last week for consultations with Iranian officials, will "pursue the negotiations with a clear agenda aimed at resolving" the remaining issues, IRNA said.

Nournews, which is affiliated to Iran's Supreme National Security Council that is in charge of the nuclear talks dossier, said a council meeting stressed "the need to quickly resolve the remaining issues that border between agreement and dead end".

It did not name the sticking points, but the main remaining disputes appear to include the extent of sanctions rollback and questions about uranium traces found at several old but undeclared sites.

"No restriction on time can prevent the continuation of the talks for a good



Ali Bagheri Kani

agreement," *Nournews* added.

Iran has made clear it wants an end to the oil and banking sanctions that are hurting its economy, while insisting also on the lifting of human rights and terrorism-related curbs.

On Saturday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said Tehran was ready to "immediately conclude" a deal in talks to revive its 2015 nuclear accord with world powers if Western powers show real will.

On Friday, a senior U.S. State Department official said negotiators had made significant progress in the past week or so on reviving the deal but very tough issues remained.

A testing vote

India had good reasons to abstain, but might have to revisit its stance if the conflict worsens

Thwarted at the UN Security Council in their resolution to condemn Russian aggression on Ukraine, the U.S. and European allies now plan to ensure a censure of Moscow's actions at the UN General Assembly, where they already have the support of more than 80 countries. The Russian veto of resolution 8979 was a predetermined outcome: as a permanent UNSC member, Russia has vetoed UNSC resolutions earlier that were critical of its decision to send troops into Georgia (2008), and Crimea (2014), and could hardly have done otherwise. What was perhaps more disappointing for the western coalition was that it was unable to move India from its consistent position of abstention. China shifted from its support for Russia in the previous vote to abstention after the U.S. and Albania, the two "penholders" of the resolution, agreed to drop the reference to Chapter VII (the authorisation of the use of force against Russian troops). The coalition against Russia is making a political statement at the UN, but not setting much store on the global body's effectiveness. Instead, the U.S. and the EU have adopted unilateral sanctions which they hope will cripple Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to sustain a longer assault on Ukraine, and also excised the Russian economy from the international SWIFT transaction system. In addition, the U.S., Germany and other countries have announced weapon supplies for Ukrainian forces. However, in the absence of direct air power assistance and foreign troops, it is unlikely that Ukraine will be able to change the balance of power in the equation with Russia easily.

India's abstention from the UNSC resolution too was perhaps a foregone conclusion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to take a call from Mr. Putin before the vote indicated that India would not take any stand against Russia. Apart from the India-Russia defence and strategic partnership, Russia is India's most trusted P-5 ally when it comes to blocking intrusive resolutions on Kashmir. In contrast, Mr. Modi only accepted the call from the Ukrainian President after the vote, and rather than offering support, requested assistance for the safe exit of Indian students. While India's hesitation to take a stand against Russia is understood, New Delhi must now consider whether its aspirations to be a "leading power" can be achieved without having a clear position on a conflict that threatens global security, even as the Modi government focuses solely on the well-being of Indians amidst the peril faced by others. This will be especially true if the Russian military operation in Ukraine is prolonged, and the Government's ambivalence is read as active support for aggressive transgressions by a more powerful neighbour over a weaker one, something India has protested in its own neighbourhood.

India to face tough choices at UNGA

Pressure on from the U.S., European countries seeking to 'isolate' Russia

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

After abstaining from the UN Security Council Resolution 8979 condemning Russian action in Ukraine on Saturday, India faces more difficult choices with the U.S. and European-led coalition now pushing for a vote at the UN General Assembly aimed at "isolating Russia".

The UNGA vote, which could take place as early as Monday, will follow a discussion of the UNSC late on Sunday night on an "emergency special session" to examine the text of Resolution 8979 which Russia had vetoed. The U.S. and European countries leading the diplomatic charge against Russia are hopeful of gaining a large majority in the 193-member UNGA, given that more than 80 countries co-sponsored Resolution 8979, and have been working the phones to convince others to vote along with them.

"We are presenting our position to the [India's] Mi-



Indian representative voting to abstain from a resolution during the UNSC meeting on the Russian invasion. • AP

nistry of External Affairs on why it must support Ukraine against Russia's attacks," a European diplomat said. "It is up to India to decide whether to stand with the aggressor or the victim," he added, saying that despite the earlier abstention, diplomats feel India could "potentially" change its position.

"If a UNGA vote happens, India will have to choose where it stands in the much larger global arena: with us, or with countries like China, Syria and Venezuela on the

issue," another Western diplomat told *The Hindu*.

India has thus far refrained from supporting any resolution criticising Russia but officials said India's growing concerns over the "humanitarian crisis" and Indian students caught in the crossfire in Ukraine could find a mention in the new resolution, which could invite a rethink in New Delhi.

On Saturday night, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock spoke to External Affairs Minister

Jaishankar to make another attempt to bring the Modi government on board.

"It is important to speak up in one voice around the world: Russia's President Putin is an aggressor and has violated international law & the European peace order," said a particularly strong statement from the German Foreign Ministry.

Russia thanks India

The Russian Embassy in India tweeted that it "highly appreciated India's independent and balanced position at the voting in the UNSC on February 25".

MEA officials declined to comment on how India will vote on the resolutions.

The wording of the agenda for the meeting indicates that Western countries could ask the UNGA to summon a "Uniting for Peace" resolution, and agree to strong measures against Russia unless it announces a ceasefire and withdrawal of troops from Ukraine.

India is engaged with all parties on Ukraine: Foreign Secretary

Shringla says nation has direct interest in the region, dialogue only way forward

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

India has "every reason" to contribute in resolving the Ukrainian conflict, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said on Sunday.

Addressing a special briefing on the crisis and its humanitarian dimensions, Mr. Shringla said India believed dialogue between the warring sides was the only way ahead.

"We have been engaged with all parties. Our Prime Minister has spoken with the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine. The External Affairs Minister has been in touch with a very wide range of interlocutors who are involved in the situation. We are essentially a country that has direct interest in the region. We have friends and equities in the area," Mr. Shringla said in response to a question from *The Hindu*.

Later in the evening, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a high-level meeting, which was attended by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and top officials.



Burning periphery: Smoke rising from Russian shelling on the outskirts of Kyiv. • REUTERS

'India is engaged with all parties on Ukraine'

Mr. Shringla's response was part of several similar comments from a number of global capitals that sought ceasefire in the conflict that erupted on February 23 with the Russian invasion.

An early initiative for dialogue arose on Sunday with Belarus providing a venue for a meeting between Russian and Ukrainian representatives. Ukraine's envoy to India had sought an intervention by Mr. Modi in resolving the crisis on February 24, which was followed by the Prime Minister's calls to President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Zelensky of Ukraine. In his

phone call with Mr. Zelensky, Mr. Modi had conveyed "anguish" at the tragic loss of lives in the fighting and "expressed India's willingness to contribute in any way towards peace efforts".

"We have every reason to be in touch with all concerned and if we can play – if there is any way that anyone can contribute; it's not just us but anyone – in alleviating what is a difficult situation, I am sure they would do what it takes," Mr. Shringla said. The Foreign Secretary continued to engage officials on both sides and met Russian and Ukrainian envoys on Sunday.

Ukraine agrees to meet Russia for talks on Belarusian border

Zelensky accedes after Lukashenko vows to ground planes, missiles in country

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KYIV

Ukraine said on Sunday it would hold talks with Russia at its border with Belarus – near the Chernobyl exclusion zone – after a call between President Volodymyr Zelensky and Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko.

"The politicians agreed that the Ukrainian delegation would meet the Russian one without preconditions at the Ukraine-Belarus border, near the Pripyat River," Mr. Zelensky's office said.

Mr. Zelensky has said he will not hold talks with Russia on the territory of Belarus, where some Russian troops were stationed before invading on Ukraine's northern border.

But Kyiv said Mr. Lukashenko assured Mr. Zelensky that "all planes, helicopters and missiles stationed on Belarus territory will remain on the ground during the travel, negotiations and return of the Ukrainian delegation".

Moscow has wanted to hold the talks in Kremlin-aligned Belarus.

Mr. Zelensky, refusing to travel to Minsk, said Kyiv had proposed "Warsaw, Bratislava, Budapest, Istanbul, Ba-



An Ukrainian fighter taking a grenade launcher from a destroyed Russian infantry vehicle in Kharkiv on Sunday. • AFP

ku" as options to Russia.

He said he was willing to "try" talks with Russia but was sceptical. He added that if there was a "chance" to end war, he should take part in the talks.

ICJ **plaint**

Ukraine has lodged a complaint against Russia at the International Court of Justice in The Hague to get it to halt its invasion, Mr. Zelensky said.

"Russia must be held accountable for manipulating the notion of genocide to justify aggression," Mr. Zelensky declared in a tweet.

"We request an urgent decision ordering Russia to cease military activity now

and expect trials to start next week," he added.

Ukrainian forces earlier said they had fought off a Russian incursion into Ukraine's second biggest city, Kharkiv, on day four of Russia's invasion.

"Kharkiv is fully under our control," the head of the regional administration, Oleg Sinegubov, said on Telegram, adding that the army was expelling Russian forces during a "clean-up" operation.

Meanwhile, the Russian Army on Sunday admitted that there were "killed and injured" soldiers among its troops in Ukraine without specifying how many Russians had died there.

Ukrainian refugees in Poland speak of intent to fight, conflicted loyalties

They say there is news from back home of wounded Russian soldiers confiding in their doctors that they were taken by surprise when asked to cross the border

PRAVEEN MARTIS
BIELSKO BIALA, POLAND

Russian is going to be an even more familiar language on the streets of Polish cities in the coming months. Most Ukrainians can speak perfect Russian in addition to their mother tongue; in fact, many speak it as their first language. With the onset of the war with Russia, the UN anticipates more than one million Ukrainians will travel to Poland, a country that already hosts two million Ukrainians as a legacy of the previous war.

"We would like to thank the Polish people and government for their generosity, they have made us feel welcome," says Aleks, a young man who works in the southern Polish city of Bielsko-Biala, which is a four hours' drive from the Ukrainian border. Inter-city trains are providing free transport for refugees and many Polish citizens have volun-

teered their time and resources and are sharing their homes during this difficult moment.

Getting to the Polish border in Ukraine carries the obvious risks of being caught in the crossfire or being held up by damaged roads from the shelling. Able-bodied menfolk between the ages of 18-60 are also banned by decree from leaving the country, which leaves only women and children free to cross. However, many of the women do not drive and some have embarked on long border crossings on foot, and it is still winter.

News from back home
Many Ukrainians already have family in Poland. Twenty-five-year-old Alex has a brother working in Tychy, a city, a few hours' drive to the north of Bielsko-Biala. The rest of his family live in Khersun, a city near

the Black Sea in the south of Ukraine. "My family are fine but have not slept properly, with the sounds of shells exploding through the night. The city is still in Ukrainian hands, he says, but there is a curfew at night, and it is better to stay indoors to avoid being mistaken for Russians or sympathisers. He shares news from his town that young Russian soldiers who have been wounded are being treated in Ukrainian hospitals. They apparently confided with their doctors that they were on routine field training near the borders prior to the invasion and were taken by surprise when they were asked to cross the lines.

Alex longs for the time before the first war in 2014 when he worked in Crimea in the tourist sector. "Things have become much worse," he says. Inflation, lack of jobs, and constant insecurity have led people to leave



Survival games: A woman sifting through donated clothes after entering Poland, on Sunday. +REUTERS

the country, primarily to Poland, which is made attractive by proximity, language similarities, general acceptance, and better job prospects. "I have friends in Donetsk and Lugansk. It's calmer there with the Russian control but the other cities on the frontline are now suffering," he says. He has no intention of going back but worries constantly

about his family. Eighteen-year-old Igor says he is depressed. He used to live near Kyiv with his family before the first war. His brother, who is in the Army, got injured in the war and has developed a mental illness. Igor wants to go back to defend his country. He says the war is raging in his neighbourhood back home and the youngsters and volun-

teers are putting up stiff resistance. He claims that some have commandeered tanks and the Russians have taken casualties and are desperate for reinforcements and provisions. "The current President is popular," they say. "He has constructed roads and infrastructure and reduced the power of the oligarchs." They are not perturbed when I mention his proximity to oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky. There is no doubt in their mind on who is to blame for this situation.

Teenaged Natalia is from the southeast of Ukraine, close to in the Donbas with its strong Russian influence. She cannot bring herself to blame the Russians. She counts them among her friends who she still stays in touch with. "They are not to blame," she says, revealing the conflicting loyalties of those from eastern Ukraine as a result of a culturally and

socially intertwined past. "I cannot choose, I just want peace," she says.

Deep wounds
Historic grievances have left deep wounds and the Russian leader's statements carry no credibility in most neighbouring ex-Warsaw pact countries like Poland. "Don't you know he is a liar? You can't believe a word he says. All they want is to subjugate their neighbours and control them like during the Communist times," says Anna, a 40-year-old Polish lady who remembers having to compulsorily learn Russian in school. "We have a right to choose to join the EU," she adds.

There are, however, less discussed facets such as the presence of extreme right-wing elements in the Ukrainian army and shelling of the rebel-held Donbas region. Despite uneasiness regarding the invasion, there

is some support for the Russian presence in the eastern provinces. "The Russians have not been targeting civilians, rather transport, military and infrastructure links and we have learnt to live with the shelling," say Ekaterina and her boyfriend, who are from Kharkiv, north of the Donbas in eastern Ukraine.

For the moment, Ukrainian expatriates in Poland are filled with concern at the unfolding events in their homeland, and about how best to help the newcomers. There have been gatherings in town squares, rallies for peace, and condemnation of the invasion. Many are asking why Ukraine has to face the Russians alone, and NATO is not intervening. Others foresee apocalyptic possibilities far beyond the geography of Ukraine.

(Praveen Martis is a freelance consultant based in southern Poland)

A day to embody the true spirit of science

India needs an intellectual ambience that is unfettered, which National Science Day, being observed today, must foster



C.P. RAJENDRAN

The Government is organising a Science Week, 'Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate', as a prelude to National Science Day on February 28 that commemorates Sir C.V. Raman's discovery on light scattering. The programme appears to have been designed to make youth be proud about India's scientific achievements. Using this opportunity as nationalistic mission is rather unfortunate. On the contrary, this event should be used to celebrate the true spirit of science that defies all types of intellectual curtailments, thus promoting critical thinking in our academic centres.

The essence

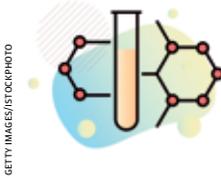
A prominent physicist of our times, Freeman Dyson in his book, *The Scientist as Rebel*, makes a clear argument about why dissent is the soul of science: "There is no such thing as a unique scientific vision, any more than there is a unique poetic vision. Science is a mosaic of partial and conflicting visions. But there is one common element in these visions. The common element is rebellion against the restrictions imposed by the locally prevailing culture, Western or Eastern as the case may be. The vision of science is not specifically Western. It is no more Western than it is Arab or Indian or Japanese or Chinese. Arabs and Indians and Japanese and Chinese

had a big share in the development of modern science. And what is true of science is also true of poetry. Poetry was not invented by Westerners. India has poetry older than Homer... Poetry and science are gifts given to all of humanity. For the Arab mathematician and astronomer Omar Khayyam, science was a rebellion against the intellectual constraints of Islam, a rebellion which he expressed more directly in his incomparable verses..."

The main takeaways from Dyson are: one, science is universal, like music, dance or poetry... There is nothing like Indian, American or Chinese science. Science was initially nurtured through exchanges of ideas that moved like merchandise between distant places over the ancient trade routes. Two, Dyson considered evidence-based modern science as an intellectual rebellion or as a form of dissent against social constraints, as exemplified by the Islamic and the European renaissance of science of the Middle Ages, or the reawakening in India around the 19th century that formed the background for the independence struggle.

Then and now

For Indian scientists of those days, science was a double rebellion, against English domination as well as the fatalistic ethos of Hinduism. This rebellious spirit led to a resurgence of science in India in the pre-independence days and Sir C.V. Raman's discovery cannot be seen independent of the social reformism of those days. With the ideological shift toward the right in recent times, the spectre of conformism that was lying low in our



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collective consciousness has now returned with a vengeance. And, academic freedom is now under greater pressure to tow the official line than ever before.

If science must excel it needs to promote free spirit, and, as Dyson argues, science is an inherently subversive act – a threat to establishment of all kinds, whether it upends a long-standing scientific idea, or it questions the received political wisdom or irrationality. He writes: "Science is an alliance of free spirits in all cultures rebelling against the local tyranny that each culture imposes on its children."

Such ideas must have played in the minds of great physicists like Einstein and others when they turned the scientific theories of the day upside down. Much earlier, Galileo Galilei and Nicolaus Copernicus also took a firm stand against the prevalent wisdom despite their religiosity. As Dyson quotes the British scientist, J.B.S. Haldane: "Let him beware of him in whom reason has become the greatest and most terrible of the passions". Haldane migrated to India in 1957 and was eternally dissatisfied with the Indian scientific enterprise and its organisational values, centred on hierarchy. He soon began to refer to the Council

of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as the 'Council for the Suppression of Independent Research'.

The ecology of dominant conformist traits is intertwined with group identity that determines the attitude towards our superiors and subordinates. Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar in their book, *The Indians: Portrait of A People*, trace this culture of conformism to our childhood – as a reflection of our obsession with hierarchy that spills over to institutional setups. The word they use for Indians is Homo hierarchicus – a term originally employed by Louis Dumont in his treatise on the Indian caste system.

A setting for pseudoscience

The Indian family landscape is authoritarian and patriarchal, though benevolent to the obedient, in its dealings. Early on, children are sensitised to a collective self. We grow with a loss of self and learn to subsume our worth as an individual. An Indian is thus culturally tuned to uphold the family's integrity, religion, caste and/or regional identity rather than her individual strengths. So, when the party in power in India criticises the Opposition parties for being led by dynasts, what is being sidelined is the irony of the dynastic blood relation as a prop for personal advancement is a fundamental part of Indian cultural ethos. Such societies with patriarchal moorings automatically generate conditions for authoritarian rule, generating an ambience of fear that may not be conducive for path-breaking enquiries. Rather, it tends to feed the conceit of the rulers by inventing make-belief

science or pseudoscience.

Need for a shift

In a guest editorial in *Science* in 2010, R.A. Mashelkar, the former Director-General of the CSIR, discusses why India is unable to break the mediocrity barrier. He concludes that tradition-bound countries such as India need to free themselves from the cultural chains of the past to foster original thinking. In an editorial in the 2010 *Current Science*, P. Balaram, the former Director of the Indian Institute of Science, explains why a "good humoured disdain for perceived wisdom and disregard for authority", which is called 'irreverence' is important in science.

The cultural shifts are not easy to accomplish, particularly in a tradition bound society. And, scientists have a special duty to foster a free and unfettered intellectual ambience by actively engaging in the transformation of values both within and outside workplaces. A fundamental challenge, of course, is how to strengthen the social democratic norms within the institutes, representative of Indian diversity and plurality. Only then will academic centres become a marketplace of ideas. National Science Day should offer forums where freewheeling discussion of such themes are organised, epitomising the true spirit of science, thus unleashing its tremendous transformative power.

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DRDO, Safran to develop engine for aircraft

India, France to ink deal to develop 125KN engine for indigenous fighter soon

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

India and France are close to concluding a deal, likely in the next couple of months, for the joint development of a 125KN engine for the indigenous fifth generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) under development, according to defence officials.

The collaboration is between the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and French engine maker Safran.

“External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar discussed this issue with French Defence Minister Florence Parly during his visit to Paris [last week]. We expect to have an agreement in a month or two,” a defence official said.



New beginning: S. Jaishankar with French Defence Minister Florence Parly in Paris to discuss the engine deal. ■PTI

In December 2021, speaking at an event after Ms. Parly’s visit to India, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had said a major French company will come to India and “make the engine in strategic partnership with an

Indian company”.

Last year, the government had informed Parliament that it is proposed to develop indigenous engines for powering aircraft such as the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) variants and AMCA in asso-

ciation with an international engine house.

Parallel progress

The initial design of the AMCA started way back in 2009 and is envisaged as a twin engine stealth aircraft with internal weapons bay, which has been developed for the first time and for which the design is complete, as reported by *The Hindu* earlier.

Once the agreement is concluded with France, development of the aircraft as well as the engine will progress parallelly to meet the timelines, officials said.

The manufacturing and production of the aircraft is planned through a Special Purpose Vehicle, which will also involve private industry.

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.