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The New Learning Mantra

FOREWORD

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

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

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

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‘Japan still hopes India will join RCEP’

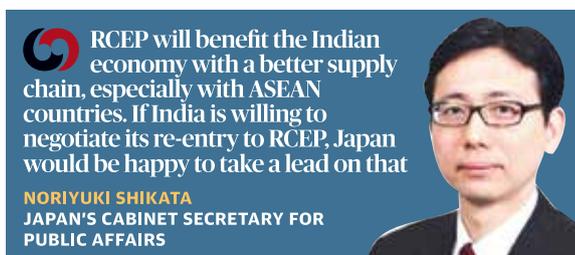
Collaborations between the two countries may suffer if it stays out, says Kishida Cabinet official

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Japan has still not given up hope that India might reconsider joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) from which it opted out in 2019, a senior Japanese official said, indicating that India-Japan collaborations in other countries may be impacted if India continues to stay out.

In particular, the official said that the RCEP “Rules of Origin” clause could also make it more difficult for products that have an Indian component to be sold easily among the 15-member grouping countries in future.

“RCEP will benefit the Indian economy with a better supply chain, especially with ASEAN countries,” Japan’s Cabinet Secretary for Public Affairs Noriyuki Shikata said



in an interaction with journalists during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

“India will be treated exceptionally as a founder member and if India is willing to negotiate its re-entry to RCEP, Japan would be happy to take a lead on that,” Mr. Shikata said, acknowledging, however, that the Modi government has not shown any interest in the process.

India and Japan signed a

number of economic agreements and focused in particular on projects in India’s northeast region during the annual summit meeting.

The two leaders also set a target of five trillion yen in Japanese investment, including loans, foreign direct investment (FDI) and assistance for the next five years.

However, plans for joint collaborations in third countries, including using Indian-made components in pro-

ducts, could run into higher tariffs and barriers, Mr. Shikata explained. In particular, the RCEP includes a “Rule of Origin” certification requirement that would give free trade access only to goods made in RCEP countries, which have pledged to eliminate tariffs on 91% of goods.

Largest trade deal

The 15-nation RCEP, which is the world’s largest trade deal and includes China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand and 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and represents about 30% of global GDP and population, came into force on January 1 this year.

India was a founding member at the negotiations that began in 2012, but Prime Minister Narendra

Modi announced his government was walking out of the agreement in 2019, after being unable to resolve issues, mainly over concerns on dumping from China and allowing Indian services free access in the region.

Since then, Japan and Australia, two countries that continue to convene the trilateral trade dialogue they started during RCEP negotiations with India, have said that they would welcome India back to the agreement if it decides to re-join, which was accepted by the RCEP grouping as well.

According to Mr. Shikata, plans to review the India-Japan FTA signed in 2011, have not yet made any headway, nor has the government given any indications that it could review the 2019 decision to leave RCEP.

‘Quad has accepted Indian stand’

Modi has used his contacts to call for an end of the conflict, Australian envoy says

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

There is no reason to be unhappy with the Indian position regarding the Ukraine crisis, the Australian envoy to India said here on Sunday.

Addressing the media here, High Commissioner Barry O’Farrel appreciated India’s efforts in this regard and said Canberra is hopeful of concluding the early harvest trade deal by the end of the March.

“[The] Quad countries have accepted India’s position, each country has bilateral relationship and it’s clear from the comments of the Ministry of External Affairs and the Prime Minister that he has used his contacts to call for an end of the conflict and no country will be unhappy with that,” said Mr. O’Farrel.

The comments from the Australian diplomat set the stage ahead of the virtual summit between Prime Mi-



Barry O’Farrel

nister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison, who is expected to highlight Australian concerns about the ongoing Russian attacks against Ukraine.

Australia has imposed an array of sanctions against senior Russian officials involved in the execution of the military campaign against Ukraine. Canberra has also pledged to punish those who amplify media narratives that support Rus-

sia’s claims regarding “de-nazification of Ukraine”.

India, in comparison to the aggressive Australian position, has taken the moment to strengthen energy ties with Russia. Indian energy companies have ordered large supplies of crude that Moscow is making available at a ‘discount’.

This move to secure energy from Russia has made India an exception in the Quadrilateral alliance of the Indo-Pacific where the other partners – the U.S., Japan and Australia – have hit Russia with sanctions.

Continued support

Despite the divergence in the Indian approach, the Modi-Morrison dialogue will provide Canberra an opportunity to press India to increase coordination with other members of the Quad regarding Ukraine.

Australia, however, it was learnt, will continue to sup-

port India’s quest for sustainable energy security and there is a possibility of both sides exploring joint projects to source precious minerals like lithium from Australian mines.

Mr. O’Farrel also indicated that the dialogue between Indian and Australian officials has been proceeding on the trade front since it was launched by the Trade Ministers – Piyush Goyal and Dan Tehan – in February.

“We are hopeful of signing the phase-1 – early harvest – trade deal by the end of this month,” said Mr. O’Farrel. The early harvest trade deal is expected to focus on commodities trade and will be followed by the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, CECA.

India and Australia have been in dialogue regarding CECA since 2011, but this is the first time that they have agreed on an early harvest trade deal.

India's stand on the Ukraine war is tragic

New Delhi cannot crawl for the goodwill of Russia but must at least condemn Moscow's aggression and illegal invasion



SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY

It is just under a month since Russia declared a unilaterally-waged war on Ukraine on land and by air. What the world has witnessed is the unbridled destruction of a democratic nation, Ukraine, by a heavily armed, nuclear weapons power and veto-holding Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, viz., Russia.

This UN status was obtained by Russia as an uncontested residual legatee of the Soviet Union of which Russia and Ukraine were large parts; the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) unravelled into 15 nations in 1988-91 – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Much resistance

The Ukrainians are resisting the Russian advance to capture the capital, Kyiv, by demonstrating sheer nationalism and courage, and with welcome support of the developed western nations.

Despite this status today, Russia is not near its announced goal of conquering a largely unarmed Ukraine.

What must be painful to the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, is that his military, despite the carpet bombing and disruption of civil facilities and over four weeks of battering Ukraine and causing widespread destruction, has not managed to capture any major city

in Ukraine. Such is the valiant fighting spirit of the people of Ukraine.

The bare fact is that Ukraine, a recognised nation and United Nations member-state, has been invaded by a Permanent Member of the apex Security Council, violating the UN Charter. India cannot crawl for the goodwill of Russia. But at the very least, India must condemn Russia for its aggression and illegal invasion.

Mr. Putin's constant refrain, that he wants the "de-Nazification" of Ukraine and that the Ukrainians are pro-Nazi, is incredible since Ukraine embraced Nazi Germany in the 1940s to escape the genocide in Ukraine carried out by Joseph Stalin's Russia during the decade of 1930-40. Moreover, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a Jew and his father suffered much during Hitler's occupation of Ukraine.

The ICJ's wrap

Another blow to the prestige of Russia has come from the International Court of Justice. After hearings held recently, the Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) directed Russia to halt the war immediately, stating that the ICJ "is profoundly concerned by Moscow's use of force in violation of international law". The ICJ judges voted 13-2 in favour of the ruling.

The Indian judge on the ICJ and a former Supreme Court of India judge, Justice Dalveer Bhandari, also voted against Russia despite the Narendra Modi government's votes of abstention on other international forums on the same issue. The Ministry of External Affairs promptly disowned Justice Bhandari's vote, with a spokesperson saying that judges at the ICJ "vote in their individual capacity". This



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is silly! A judge cannot be a representative of a government when sitting in court.

A damaging stance

The most deplorable examples of human rights atrocities in the 21st century – which is being carried out by the Russian military – have also exposed the UN and the Security Council for their ineffectiveness. Obviously, the UN needs a restructuring after its past of almost 80 years of existence – and one of mostly helplessness.

What is more tragic today is India's stand. India, despite its large geographical size and population, has refused to criticise, leave alone denounce, Russia's 19th century type of warfare in Ukraine, especially since the Russian military is disrupting civil society and killing the innocent.

Combined with its abstention votes at the UN, India, by its reticence to take a stand for democracy, has not only affected its relations with the democratic nations of the West but also caused consternation among its Quad partners (i.e., the United States, Australia and Japan).

India has become vulnerable to a possible massive military adventure by China and risks isolation by traditionally democratic nations, and their help and their sup-

port.

The non-democratic nations, besides Russia, such as China, North Korea and Venezuela, are either already hostile towards India for other reasons, or are unlikely to stand with India on other international issues of (India's) public concern.

Part of the problem for India arises from the attempt to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds in foreign policy. Thus, the flip flops on Afghanistan, Nepal, BRICS, the Quad, Iran, and now on the Ukraine war launched by Russia, have devalued India's reputation to levels well below its 'military strike hard power' and 'huge population soft power'.

The BRICS resolution

As already brought out by this writer in an article in this daily, titled "Ukraine's situation, India's national interest", in the BRICS meet in 2021 in New Delhi with leaders of five nations present, viz., India, China, Russia, South Africa and Brazil, India had moved a resolution that was passed unanimously in its New Delhi Declaration (paragraph 22 in the XIII BRICS Summit, September 9, 2021). The core demand in this resolution was that the five BRICS nations were opposed to the unilateral use of force against any state, wanted all disputes resolved by peaceful means, and categorically ruled out the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. But India remained unflappable despite the political hypocrisy of Russia and China.

Another blatant violation of an agreement between Russia and Ukraine has been brought out in *The Hindu*, February 27, 2022, in an explainer, "When and how did Ukraine give up its nuclear arsenal?". When Ukraine won its inde-

pendence from the then unravelling USSR in 1991, it had the world's third largest stock of nuclear weapons. Statistics made public showed that Ukraine had about 1,900 strategic nuclear warheads, 176 ICBMs, and 44 long distance strategic bombers.

In 1994, Ukraine signed the Budapest Memorandum with Russia, the U.S., and the United Kingdom. According to the Memorandum, these three veto-holding permanent members of the UNSC agreed to respect the "independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and existing borders of Ukraine". But Russia has now welched on this treaty commitment since March 2014 when it annexed a part of Ukraine, viz., Crimea.

If India has to play a role in international affairs, leave alone hopes of being a *Vishwa Guru*, the Narendra Modi government at the very least has a moral duty of restoring India's international credibility; it must raise this Hitler-like tearing up of written agreements, not to mention the disregard for the 2021 BRICS Resolution, by Russia directly and China indirectly of an India-proposed resolution.

In fact, India's reputation on this issue is now being seen very adversely, internationally. The Prime Minister's much touted labels pinned on him by his admirers in India have dimmed.

In the context of the U.S. President, Joe Biden, calling Mr. Putin a war criminal, India is ending up looking pitiable as if the Government is under some extra-political compulsions. The Indian nation, however, needs to know the truth.

Subramanian Swamy, a PhD in Economics from Harvard, has been in Parliament for six terms. He was also a Union Cabinet Minister of Commerce and Law & Justice

Mounting pressure

India must retain the ability to judge and shift its position on Ukraine as the war progresses

It is certainly no coincidence that a string of foreign leaders, Ministers and officials are descending on New Delhi this month, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues for its fourth week, and without a clear end in sight. There are summits with the Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia (virtual), and one soon with the Israeli Prime Minister, and visits by the U.S. Under Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, as well as European Foreign Ministers and delegations. What the visits by NATO and Quad allies of the U.S. all have in common is their planning at short notice, and putting discussions on India's stand on Ukraine at the top of their talks. Even Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, who had a full bilateral agenda to discuss with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at their much-delayed annual summit meeting, arrived in Delhi on a very short visit, and made it clear that finding a common position on Ukraine and telling India that it must not "condone" Russia's actions was a "priority". The message from the West is clear: that India must shift its position on three counts: to do more at the UN, where New Delhi has consistently abstained from resolutions criticising Moscow; to join the sanctions regime; and to avoid contracting for more Russian oil, or sending civil or military supplies to the Putin regime until the war ends. The flurry of visits, comments by officials, and press statements by diplomats indicate that tensions between Russia and the West have reached a point of no return, and New Delhi is being asked to make a very pointed choice between them.

While there are several reasons why New Delhi has declined the attempts to steer it from its course on Russia that are linked to its strong partnership with Russia, there are some global interests that the Modi government must consider more closely. The civilian toll in Ukraine is mounting, and while Russia has denied reports of targeted attacks on schools and theatres, it is necessary for New Delhi to acknowledge any Russian violation of human rights, especially as the Kremlin has not yet fully clarified its endgame. Second, while India has expressed concerns over nuclear safety, it must be willing to make this an issue with Moscow, if necessary. Another area is the threat of chemical and biological warfare, and while the Indian representative spoke strongly at the UN Security Council about the importance of fully implementing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Government must be prepared to vote on the issue and call out any side that violates these. As the war progresses, more such debates will arise, and New Delhi must retain its ability to judge and shift its position from "being neutral" and "abstentionist" to one more wholly seized of the issues, and as a leading nation that is able to exercise its "strategic autonomy" on matters of principle, when required.

Two freedoms and the hijab in our midst

The discourse of the essential religious practice needs to be re-thought in a largely pagan context



LAKSHMI ARYA THATHACHAR

Upon hearing the petitions of Muslim students seeking permission to wear the hijab inside educational institutions, the Karnataka High Court recently ruled that wearing the hijab is not an essential practice in Islam. The judges also held that neither the prescription of a uniform in schools nor the Karnataka government's order of February 5 disallowing the wearing of the hijab in schools where there was a uniform were violative of Article 25 of the Constitution.

Two concepts of freedom

In the debates around the hijab issue, two concepts of freedom emerge. One is whether Muslim women 'freely' choose to wear the hijab or do so because they are socially conditioned to believe that *al haya* (modesty) is a womanly virtue. However, this question can be asked of any of the choices we make, as women, men or transgender people. For instance, one can also ask whether women freely choose to wear high heels or are brainwashed by societal discourses about feminine beauty.

The other is the question of the freedom of the individual or of a community vis-à-vis the state. Consider the following set of questions that help explicate this: Am I free to eat whatever I choose or have I given up this freedom to the state? (Think of the ban on beef in parts of India.) Am I free to have sexual relations with whomsoever I choose or can the state interfere and tell me whom I can or cannot have such relations with? (Laws prohibiting homosexuality come to mind.) Am I free to have as many children as I want or can the state impose a one-child policy, as China did?

Each of these freedoms is also a right: My right to eat whatever I want, my sexual rights, my reproductive rights. At the heart of 'liberalism' is the question of liberty or freedom posed as the freedom of the individual (the 'I') vis-à-vis the state/social contract (the 'we'). How much of my freedom do I give up to the



File photo of students leaving after they were not allowed to attend class with their hijabs at a college in Udupi. •PTI

state when I enter the social contract, and how much do I keep for myself? In social contract theory, this maps on to the distinction between the public and the private spheres. The freedom that I keep for myself, I exercise in the private sphere. When I enter the public sphere, I am a citizen, not a private person. I cannot do as I will.

And hence we have the distinction between a liberal state and an illiberal state. In a liberal state, the sphere of individual freedom is at a maximum. The state is minimalist. In an illiberal state, the private sphere is kept to a minimum. Citizens have given up most their freedom to the state and have few rights.

In a secular state, religion is in the private sphere. This means two things. One, I am free to practise my religion; I have not given up this freedom to the state. The state cannot interfere in my practice of religion. Two, the state itself does not profess any religion. The juxtaposition of A and B, as defined above, can create logical contradictions. Let me illustrate this with an example: Namaz is an Islamic practice. A Muslim must offer namaz five times a day. What if a Muslim happens to be at a public place, such as a railway platform, at the time when namaz needs to be offered? Should there be spaces for namaz in all public spaces such as schools, airports and train stations? But then, public spaces are supposed to be free of religion in a secular

state. Where does the private sphere end and the public begin? Likewise, if a Muslim student is made to remove the hijab at the school, does this uphold the secular nature of the school or trample on her religious right to wear the hijab?

A further criticism is that the public sphere in India is implicitly Hindu. Sikhs are allowed to wear turbans, Hindu girls are allowed to wear the bindi or bangles, and these don't stand out as aberrations; the hijab does. I would like to counter this argument in two ways: First, the hijab is not banned in the public sphere in India, as it is in some Western liberal democracies such as France. The issue at hand pertains to the uniform of schools. As discussed above, when a citizen enters the social contract, she/he gives up some freedom in the process. Something similar happens when one voluntarily enters into a contract with an institution, such as a school or a club. For instance, a school can have an attendance policy for students and require them to attend at least 80% of the classes. If a student voluntarily takes admission in the school, she/he gives up her freedom to attend classes as per her will. She must attend 80% of the classes. The uniform issue is similar.

Essential religious practice

Second, it may still be argued that schools allow turbans, bindis and bangles. Why not the hijab? The debate here meanders into the ques-

tion of which of these is an essential religious practice. Is wearing the turban an essential practice of the Sikhs? Harjot Oberoi's historiographical work on Punjab in the 18th-19th centuries reveals something curious: The *doli* (palanquin) bearers in Dalhousie, though Sikh, smoked tobacco during their months of hard labour away from home. During these summer months, they also cut their hair and kept it short. When they returned home for the winter, they paid a few annas and were 'reinitiated' into 'Sikhism'. This is but one example. Oberoi gives several such instances of the amorphous nature of religious practices in 19th century Punjab.

From this apparent amorphous fluidity, how did we reach a point where the keeping of body hair (*keshh*) has become one of the 'essential practices' of Sikhism? Clearly, something happened between the 19th century and now: The Khalsa movement rose, and so did the Singh Sabha. The Singh Sabha identified a pure, authentic Sikhism, which was based on the texts/scripture, i.e. the Adi Granth. All those practices that were not in keeping with the Adi Granth were seen as corrupt accretions. Hence, Sikhism needed to be 'reformed' to remove these corruptions and bring it back in line with the texts/scriptures. Hindu reform movements like the Arya Samaj did something similar: They identified a pure Hinduism, as specified in the Vedas.

This equation of a religious community with a scripture or text is a feature of the Abrahamic religions. To ask whether there are essential religious practices in Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism is to ask the wrong question, and to do harm to these non-Abrahamic traditions. I would go a step further and assert that the practice of Islam and Christianity in the Indian context too is characterised by a fluidity that defies essence. Mother Mary wears a saree in churches in Bengaluru. Diwali is celebrated in the Nizamuddin Dargah. Hence, the discourse of the essential religious practice needs to be re-thought in a largely pagan context such as the Indian.

Lakshmi Arya Thathachar is Associate Professor and Associate Dean-Research at RV University, Bengaluru

Get these wrinkles out of the South Asian textile story

Ensuring government support for financial incentives, upgrading technologies and reskilling labour are key challenges



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

South Asia became a major player in the global textiles and clothing market with the onset of the third wave of global production. Bangladesh joined the league in the 1980s, owing to the outbreak of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Supportive industrial policy was an instrumental factor in the 1990s, with zero duty on raw material and capital machinery, as access to global markets led to the industry's boom. Bangladesh overtook India in exports in the past decade as Indian labour costs resulted in products becoming 20% more expensive.

Standing of countries

Lower production costs and free trade agreements with western buyers are what favour Bangladesh, which falls third in the line as a global exporter. The progress of India and Pakistan in ready-made garments is recent when compared to their established presence in textiles. India holds a 4% share of the U.S.\$840 billion global textile and apparel market, and is in fifth position. India's exports later witnessed a larger volume of business, following a 0.8% dip in 2019. Pakistan saw a 24.73% rise in textile exports (2021-22), bagging an amount of U.S.\$10.933 billion.

India has been successful in developing backward links, with the aid of the Technical Upgradation Fund Scheme (TUFs), in the cotton and technical textiles industry. However, India is yet to move into man-made fibres as factories still

operate in a seasonal fashion. Pakistan remains very focused on cotton products; it falls behind due to skilling and policy implementation issues. Bangladesh has been ahead of time in adopting technology. Bangladesh also concentrates on cotton products, specialising in the low-value and mid-market price segment. The country faces the challenge of high attrition and skilling which results in higher costs. Sri Lanka attained the most progress in ascending the value chain. Progress in training, quality control, product development and merchandising are attracting international brands to Sri Lanka.

In leap ahead, the hurdles

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has been shifting focus from production machinery to integrating technology in the entire production life cycle. The production cycle incorporates all digital information and automation including robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality, 3D printing, etc. Robotic automation exemplifies production efficiency, especially in areas such as cutting and colour accuracy. In the days ahead, comprehensive restructuring can be expected in systems' adaptation to human and market needs. With change comes opportunities as well as challenges. The Asian Development Bank anticipates the challenges of job losses and disruption, inequality and political instability, concentration of market power by global giants and more vulnerability to cyberattacks.

India's production centres are operational at near full capacity, with companies contemplating business and production capacity expansions. With a 7% unemployment rate, India faces the chal-



FILE PHOTO/REUTERS

lenge of job creation in the wake of increased automation. The World Bank expects this trend to accelerate in the post-COVID-19 market. The 4IR may result in unemployment or poor employment generation, primarily affecting a low skill workforce. The integration of skill and technological investments will play a vital role in phasing out obsolete jobs, and adapting to new ones. It is imperative to ensure living wages and ease of access to education. The market switched from 'seasonal fashion' to 'fast fashion', and later to 'accurate fashion', reducing lead time. Digitalisation and automation in areas such as design, prototyping, and production are key in order to stay abreast, and in controlling production quality and timely delivery. Quick transportation becomes important in costing control, as reshoring and near-shoring gain currency. While a transition may be easier for large factories, medium and small-scale entities may suffer. Adoption of new technology and automation is closely linked to in-product basket diversity creation too.

On sustainability

Sustainability is also an important consideration for foreign buyers. Bangladesh's readymade garments initiated 'green manufacturing' practices to help conserve energy, water, and resources. Tex-

tile and apparel effluents account for 17%-20% of all water pollution. Many Indian players are focusing on input management over tailpipe management. Sustainable practices such as regenerative organic farming (that focuses on soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness), sustainable manufacturing energy (renewable sources of energy are used) and circularity are being adopted. The Indian government is also committed to promoting sustainability through project sustainable resolution.

Tax exemptions or reductions in imported technology, accessibility to financial incentives, maintaining political stability and establishing good trade relations are some of the fundamental forms of support the industry needs from governments.

The labour lead

Access to affordable labour continues to be an advantage for the region. In addition, a country such as India with a very high number of scientists and engineers could lead, as is evident in the areas of drones, AI and blockchain. India's potential lies in its resources, infrastructure, technology, demographic dividend and policy framework. The creation of a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution is indicative of India's intent. The U.S. trade war on China owing to human rights violations along with its economic bottlenecks, opens doors for India and Pakistan as they have strong production bases. Similar to China, India has a big supply – from raw material to garments. Bangladesh has also risen as a top exporter in a cost competitive global market.

Bangladesh's investments in technology in the past decades are an added advantage. On gaining significant knowledge and ad-

vanced technologies over the last 30 years, it is in prime position. Bangladesh has envisioned the year 2041 for technological advancement, especially in ICT. Pakistan imported machinery (+77.5%) worth U.S.\$504 million by the first half of 2019-2020. India's proposed investments of US\$1.4 billion and the establishment of all-in-one textile parks are expected to increase employment and ease of trade. India extended tax rebates in apparel export till 2024, with the twin goals of competitiveness and policy stability. Labour law reforms, additional incentives, income tax relaxations, duty reductions for man-made fibre, etc. are other notable moves.

A map out

Cotton product dependency and a focus on only major export destinations may diminish the market scope for South Asia. Diversification with respect to technology, the product basket and the client base are to be noted. Adaptability in meeting the demands of man-made textiles, other complex products and services are also important. Newer approaches in the areas of compliance, transparency, occupational safety, sustainable production, etc. are inevitable changes in store for South Asia to sustain and grow business. Reskilling and upskilling of the labour force should also be a priority for the region to stay aloft in the market. Finally, there is a need for governments' proactive support in infrastructure, capital, liquidity and incentivisation.

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The spring blues

A fresh guard is needed to nurture India's fledgling economic recovery

This week, India will complete two years since the Government embarked on what is now considered the harshest and quickest lockdowns in the world in a bid to block entry points for the infectious COVID-19 virus. The efficacy of that lockdown, both in terms of curbing infection rates (and mortality rates) and the accompanying hardships imposed on the population at large, can be debated at length. There is, however, little argument over the massive economic costs for the country. The RBI has underlined that some of that damage to India's GDP is permanent. This can be linked to businesses shutting shop for good, labourers migrating home (with many choosing not to return) and consumers turning increasingly reluctant. The rebuilding effort remains a work in progress, although record tax collections would suggest that all is well. Personal consumption and employment-driving contact-intensive sectors remain below pre-pandemic levels, even as other macro metrics have surpassed pre-COVID performance. Just as the virus appeared to be ebbing, triggering hopes of a revival in consumer confidence, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has thrown up fresh challenges, including high commodity and crude oil prices.

Health-care costs are considered a key factor for pushing several middle- and lower-income households below the poverty line, while high inflation affects all economic actors. The Russia-Ukraine situation has not only catapulted gas, oil and coal prices higher but also fertilizers, wheat, corn, and seed oil. A section of farmers growing crops such as wheat may gain, but inflation in essential items such as food and transport, will impact the poor the most. For now, India's oil marketing companies, who the Government has argued determine the retail prices of fuel, have shown extreme benevolence in holding rates at November 2021 levels and this may persist till Parliament's current session ends. This is, however, not fiscally sustainable, just as the Finance Ministry has argued that high global commodity prices are not. A prolonged conflict in Europe could tip the global economy into recession, even as monetary policy missteps and social risks associated with high inflation, could dampen growth, Moody's Investors Service warned last week. On the other hand, the Government's robust direct tax collections that have surpassed even revised estimates by ₹1.13 lakh crore, give it room to not just push forward the LIC share sale till market volatility subsides but also slash fuel taxes further, curb other inflationary pressures and expand the COVID-19 booster shots coverage. Unless people get more certainty about the pandemic's end-game, and have some money in their hands, it would be difficult to spur consumption enough to reach the necessary next stage of the recovery – a revival in private investments.

Diesel price for bulk users raised by nearly ₹25 a litre

However, retail rates at petrol pumps remain unchanged

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The price of diesel sold to bulk users has been hiked by about ₹25 a litre in line with a near 40% rise in international oil prices, but retail rates at petrol pumps remain unchanged, sources said.

Petrol pump sales have jumped by a fifth this month after bulk users such as bus fleet operators and malls queued up at bunks to buy fuel rather than the usual practice of ordering directly from oil companies, widening the losses of retailers.

Worst hit are private retailers such as Nayara Energy, Jio-bp and Shell, which have so far refused to curtail any volume despite a surge in sales. But now closure of pumps is a more viable solution than continuing to sell more fuel at rates that have been on freeze for a record 136 days, three sources with direct knowledge of the development said.

In 2008, Reliance Industries shut all of its 1,432 petrol pumps in the country after sales dropped to almost



Diesel for bulk users costs ₹122.05 per litre in Mumbai.

nil as it could not match the subsidised price offered by the public sector competition.

Wide variation

A similar scenario may unfold again as retailers' losses widen from bulk users being diverted to petrol pumps, they said. Price of diesel sold to bulk users has been hiked to ₹122.05 a litre in Mumbai from ₹94.14 a litre sold at petrol pumps. In Delhi, diesel costs ₹86.67 a litre at the petrol pump, but for bulk or industrial users, it is priced at about ₹115.

PSU oil companies have not raised retail prices of petrol and diesel since November 4, 2021 despite a surge in global oil and fuel prices.

Prices were supposed to start aligning with cost after the counting of votes on March 10 for the recent Assembly elections.

Private fuel retailers like Nayara Energy, Jio-bp and Shell were forced to hold petrol and diesel prices as they would have lost customers, if rates at their petrol pumps were higher than those of the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) and the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL).

But now, the PSU retailers have hiked rates for bulk users such as State bus fleets and malls and airports which use diesel for generating back up electricity, the sources said. The wide difference of about ₹25 per litre between the bulk user rate and petrol pump price has prompted bulk users to refuel at petrol pumps rather than book tankers directly from the oil companies, they said. This has led to widening losses of oil companies, already bleeding from selling petrol and diesel at way below the cost.

The complexities of introducing African cheetahs to India

Why are environmentalists upset with the plan to bring vulnerable big cats from the African savanna to Kuno national park in M.P.?

THE GIST

RAVI CHELLAM

The story so far: The cheetah, which became extinct in India after Independence, is all set to return with the Union Government launching an action plan. According to the plan, about 50 of these big cats will be introduced in the next five years, from the Africa savannas, home to cheetahs, an endangered species.

What was the distribution of cheetahs in India? What were the habitats? Historically, Asiatic cheetahs had a very wide distribution in India. There are authentic reports of their occurrence from as far north as Punjab to Tirunelveli district in southern Tamil Nadu, from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west to Bengal in the east. Most of the records are from a belt extending from Gujarat passing through Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha. There is also a cluster of reports from southern Maharashtra extending to parts of Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The distribution range of the cheetah was wide and spread all over the subcontinent. They occurred in substantial numbers.

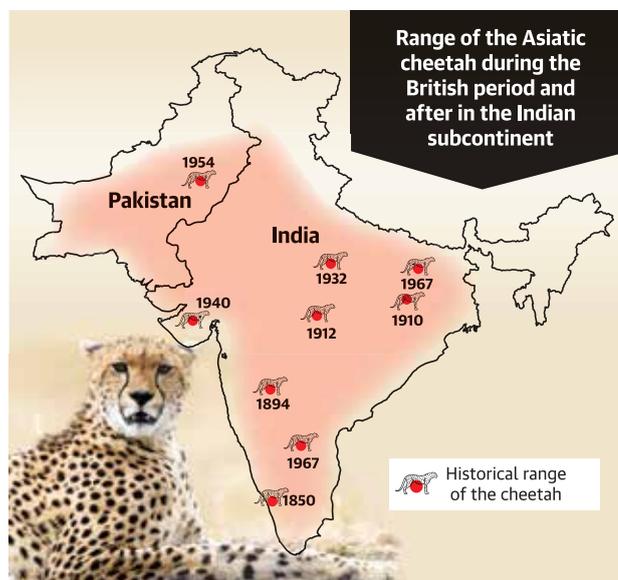
The cheetah's habitat was also diverse, favouring the more open habitats: scrub forests, dry grasslands, savannas and other arid and semi-arid open habitats. Some of the last reports of cheetahs in India prior to their local extinction are from edge habitats of sal forests in east-central India, not necessarily their preferred habitat.

In Iran, the last surviving population of wild Asiatic cheetahs are found in hilly terrain, foothills and rocky valleys within a desert ecosystem, spread across seven provinces of Yazd, Semnan, Esfahan, North Khorasan, South Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi and Kerman. The current estimate of the population of wild Asiatic cheetahs is about 40 with 12 identified adult animals. They occur in very low density spread over vast areas extending to thousands of square kilometres.

What caused the extinction of cheetahs in India? When did they disappear?

The cheetah in India has been recorded in history from before the Common Era. It was taken from the wild for coursing blackbuck for centuries, which is a major contributor to the depletion of its numbers through the ages. Records of cheetahs being captured go back to 1550s. From the 16th century onwards, detailed accounts of its interaction with human beings are available as it was recorded by the Mughals and other kingdoms in the Deccan. However, the final phase of its extinction coincided with British colonial rule. The British added to the woes of the species by declaring a bounty for killing it in 1871.

The consistent and widespread capture of cheetahs from the wild (both male and female) over centuries, its reduced levels of genetic heterogeneity due to a historical genetic bottleneck resulting in reduced fecundity and high infant mortality in the wild, its inability to breed in captivity, 'sport' hunting and finally the bounty killings are



The decision to introduce African cheetahs sidelines conservation priorities, an order of the Supreme Court, socio-economic constraints and academic rigour

the major reasons for the extinction of the Asiatic cheetah in India.

It is reported that the Mughal Emperor Akbar had kept 1,000 cheetahs in his menagerie and collected as many as 9,000 cats during his half century reign from 1556 to 1605. As late as 1799, Tipu Sultan of Mysore is reported to have had 16 cheetahs as part of his menagerie.

The cheetah numbers were fast depleting by the end of the 18th century even though their prey base and habitat survived till much later. It is recorded that the last cheetahs were shot in India in 1947, but there are credible reports of sightings of the cat till about 1967.

What are the conservation objectives of introducing African cheetahs in India? Is it a priority for India? Is it cost effective?

Based on the available evidence it is difficult to conclude that the decision to introduce the African cheetah in India is based on science. Science is being used as a legitimising tool for what seems to be a politically influenced conservation goal. This also in turn sidelines conservation priorities, an order of the Supreme Court, socio-economic constraints and academic rigour. The issue calls for an open and informed debate.

Eminent biologist and administrator T.N. Khoshoo, first secretary of the Department of Environment, spoke out strongly against

the cheetah project in 1995. "The reintroduction project was discussed threadbare during Indira Gandhi's tenure and found to be an exercise in futility," he said, pointing out that it was more important to conserve species that were still extant such as the lion and tiger, rather than trying to re-establish an extinct species that had little chance of surviving in a greatly transformed country.

Mr. Khoshoo's views are in sync with the 2013 order of the Supreme Court which quashed plans to introduce African cheetahs in India and more specifically at Kuno national park in Madhya Pradesh.

The officially stated goal is: Establish viable cheetah metapopulation in India that allows the cheetah to perform its functional role as a top predator and to provide space for the expansion of the cheetah within its historical range thereby contributing to its global conservation efforts.

African cheetahs are not required to perform the role of the top predator in these habitats when the site (Kuno) that they have identified already has a resident population of leopards, transient tigers and is also the site for the translocation of Asiatic lions as ordered by the Supreme Court of India in 2013. In other open dry habitats in India there are species performing this role, e.g., wolf and caracal, both of which are highly endangered and need urgent conservation attention. Even the Government's official estimate is expecting, at best only a few dozen cheetahs at a couple of sites (that too only after 15 years) which will require continuous and intensive management. Such a small number of cats at very few sites cannot meet the stated goal of performing its ecological function at any significant scale to have real on ground impact. Clearly, there are far more cost-effective, efficient,

speedier and more inclusive ways to conserve grasslands and other open ecosystems of India.

Apart from establishing a cheetah population in India, the stated objectives include: To use the cheetah as a charismatic flagship and umbrella species to garner resources for restoring open forest and savanna systems that will benefit biodiversity and ecosystem services from these ecosystems.

Asiatic lions and a variety of species already found in these ecosystems can very well perform this role and more. If the government is serious about restoration and protection of these habitats, it first needs to remove grasslands from the category of wastelands and prevent further degradation, fragmentation and destruction of these habitats. Investing directly in science-based restoration and inclusive protection of these ecosystems will yield results much more quickly and sustainably than the introduction of African cheetahs.

Another goal is to enhance India's capacity to sequester carbon through ecosystem restoration activities in cheetah conservation areas and thereby contribute towards the global climate change mitigation goals. Experts contend that this objective does not require the introduction of African cheetahs, at a cost of ₹40 crore, with the attendant risks of diseases which haven't really been dealt with.

What is the current status of this project? What are the chances of it succeeding?

According to the Government, Kuno is ready to receive the cheetahs. About a month ago a team of government officials visited Namibia to inspect the cheetahs that would be sent to India, review the arrangements and to reach an agreement for the transfer of the cats. It is being reported that Namibia wants India's support for lifting the CITES ban on commercial trade of wildlife products, including ivory. The draft memorandum of understanding shared by Namibia reportedly contains a condition requiring India to support Namibia for "sustainable utilisation of wildlife". Negotiations are currently underway to finalise the MoU and it is expected to be signed by the end of March.

The cheetahs are to be provided by the Cheetah Conservation Fund, an NGO, and not the Namibian government. Three to five cheetahs are expected to be part of the first group of cats and these are expected to arrive as early as May 2022 and released in the wild by August 15.

Given all the challenges, especially the lack of extensive areas extending in hundreds if not thousands of square kilometres with sufficient density of suitable prey, it is very unlikely that African cheetahs would ever establish themselves in India as a truly wild and self-perpetuating population. A likely unfortunate consequence of this initiative will be the diversion of scarce conservation resources, distraction from the real conservation priorities and a further delay in the translocation of lions to Kuno.

Ravi Chellam is CEO, Metastrang Foundation, and member, Biodiversity Collaborative

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
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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.
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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.